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Southerners and the City: Queer Archives, Backward Temporalities, and the Emergence of AIDS

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ABSTRACT

This project is a rumination on the rhetorical stylistics of queer men who performed southern culture in New York City during the first and second waves of the American HIV/AIDS crisis (1982-1992). I examine “the transplant archive,” a self-compiled assemblage of archival fragments representing the lives of three unrelated American southern transplants who lived in NYC and were in some way affected by the emergence of HIV/AIDS. Methodologically, I bend the boundary between archival and critical ethnographic research by placing myself – my own sensory experience and positionality – within the archive. I argue that collectively these texts create cultural memories of AIDS via a stylization of southernness, which illuminates the performative potential of “doing” southern culture as a way of discombobulating the predominant logics of futurity and resisting the effects of a heteronormative linear temporal order brought about by the larger United States public sphere. I infer that each of the figures I analyze illustrates a southern style that productively functions as a backward temporal regression, simultaneously a backwardness in time and a backwardness that culturally functions as a signifier of southernness. More specifically, I insist that through their southern performances, each featured transplant rhetorically constructs their own temporality against the ominous risk of HIV/AIDS.

Keywords: queer archives; AIDS; southern culture; performance; temporality
SOUTHERNERS AND THE CITY: QUEER ARCHIVES, BACKWARD TEMPORALITIES, AND THE EMERGENCE OF AIDS

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B.A. University of North Texas, 2014

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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As odd as it may seem, my favorite part of any academic book is the acknowledgements. I truly believe that one finds the heart and soul of a work within these initial pages. These notes of gratitude are like an open window into the otherwise private, even mysterious lives of a unique set of people who have spent an irregularly copious amount of time, labor, and thought into producing an intellectual advancement. Of course, my temporal relationship with this project is undoubtedly new compared to the amount of energy one might spend with a dissertation or other manuscript project of the sort. Nevertheless, I am excited to write the following words because I know the future me will look here first and grow bright red when confronted with my current immaturity. As a performance of memory production and a failed attempt to properly thank those who helped me with this project, the next paragraph marks my commitment to better understanding my own archival body and the lives who impress it.

First, I thank my patient and wise advisor Charles E. Morris III. His archival queer intuition and intellectual generosity are qualities I hope to fully develop one day. He dutifully read and commented on every word of this project. All mistakes, though, are mine to own. I also thank Erin J. Rand for assigning Lee Edelman’s work in her Queer Rhetorics course. Much of what I know now about queer theory and my priorities as an emerging queer scholar began with the syllabus she provided and the subsequent discussions we had. Many thanks to Rachel Hall who fearlessly agreed to take part in this project during a transition year. Her advice and support were critical to both my thinking and academic future. My thanks also to Roger Hallas for agreeing to participate on my committee; and thank you also to an array of professors in CRS that taught me quite a lot, namely Dana Cloud, Jeffrey Good, and Amos Kiewe. Finally, a special thank you must go to Himika Bhattacharya for careful comments on my second chapter in her
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Additionally, Rich Wandel at the LGBT Community Center National History Archive must be acknowledged. Rich provided me with all of the material I consult in chapter two and shared stories I will never forget. My thanks also to archivist Mary Brown at Marymount Manhattan College Libraries for digitizing and sending me the program for Alvin Ailey’s funeral.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my favorite queer transplant Jake Dionne. We have had quite the journey, and I cannot wait to see what else is in store! As I write these words, we are in the midst of planning for our move to Boulder for doctoral studies at the University of Colorado. I hope our time there brings more vegan food, gym sessions, publications, as well as relief (even modest relief) from Syracuse’s unforgettable winters and unfortunate lack of pop shows.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The archivization produces as much as it records the event.

Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever\(^1\)

Archives are onerous assemblages. As collected traces of the past still lingering in the present, archives are temporally confounding, frustrating, and difficult to pin down. This may be because the term “archive” itself is a rhetorical misnomer. Despite common associations with catalogues of text hidden in the basements of libraries, archives are never stable phenomena or rested compilations. To even evoke the archive is to automatically conjure its contradictions and deceptions; moreover, to accept the archive as a mere noun is to fall into its trap. As Derrida writes in Archive Fever, archives play a paradoxically dual role as both transparencies and consigners. As institutional entities, archives operate according to an “archival violence” because they are “at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional.”\(^2\) For Derrida, this violence is due in part to the archive’s primary function as a site of “consignation,” which “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.”\(^3\) Since, as Derrida explains, archives are principled as cosignatory sites, every assembled archive contains the power to homogenize, enfold, or delete aspects of the past to suit institutional agendas. In his words, “…there is no archive without consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression…”\(^4\)

I begin this project with Derrida because he introduces a dilemma inherent to the archive,

\(^2\) Ibid., 7.
\(^3\) Ibid., 3.
\(^4\) Ibid., 11.
which I believe could be best addressed according to the theoretical advancements made by critical scholars situated in the field of Communication. Derrida acutely configures the archive as a communicative device and a mechanism of power and elision. In other words, what is considered properly archived also plays a role in shaping the collective memory of a public. On the other hand, that which is excluded from the archive gets relegated to the subterranean or is withheld from the possibility of memorialization altogether. Scholars in my discipline often address the material archive as an apparatus for managing “public memory,” or what Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott refer to as a public’s tactical narration of “common identity” using memory as a resource. Thus, a public’s memory is invented rhetorically, while public memories are concurrently reproduced and reinforced through cultural production and visual-material performance.

Throughout this project, I attempt to demonstrate the efficacy of utilizing rhetorical theory, theories of performance, and critical/cultural communication perspectives to understand what it might mean to assemble an archive in the historical present. Investigating what I call the transplant archive, I will explain how contacting this particular collection of disjointed materials may offer a counterview of a public past. Not only that, it also reveals the non-essential contours of queer identity because it also holds a competing display of queer past life always already antagonized by the dominating memory of a mainstream, heteronormative public. Performing what Thomas R. Dunn calls a “queer counterpublic memory,” the transplant archive I build here signifies “a strategic use of the past by queers to contest conservative memory practices, whether

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heterosexual or homosexual.” Acting as archivist, I use this project as a space to create and simultaneously theorize about the politics of archiving and the sociopolitical nature of interacting with the relics and mementos archives contain. At the broadest level, this project is a culmination in my interests in the interplay between the archive, cultural performance, and the oscillation of activism and aesthetics.

In this introductory chapter, I begin with a historical contextualization of the subjects of my archive whom I call queer southern transplants. I analyze archival materials relating to each of the subjects in an archival accumulation I deploy throughout this project. In the subsequent section, I review the literature that conjoins two seemingly opposing areas of inquiry, queer theory and southern culture studies, for the purpose of better understanding the theoretical links that will inform my reading of the archive at hand. In the next section, I extend my literature review to better gauge how the emergence of AIDS cultivated a queer temporality and its affect on the transplant archive. My fourth section introduces the primary analytic I use to assess the impact of my subjects in a NYC atmosphere saturated by the impingements of AIDS. Toward this end, I utilize queer theories of backwardness to show how the archive and the memories it carries do not abide by a linear temporal model. I end this chapter with my methodological approach to the archive followed by an overview of each of the chapters to come.

The Transplant Archive: A Historical Overview

On April 16, 1981, “America’s leading gay magazine” at the time and perhaps still, The Advocate, released its three hundred and fifteenth issue, which included on its cover a black-and-white-image of a cowboy on top of a horse and a cowgirl next to a fence with the headline: “The

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Western Range: In Fashion, Bars, Music, and Events.” In the featured article, author Mark Thompson declares: “Country bands, gay rodeos and all the trappings are going full guns. Boots and bandannas, Stetsons and spurs are almost as visible as bomber jackets and key chains on inner city streets these days. So we’re calling it a ‘trend.’” When this issue of the magazine was published, Thompson confirmed an odd but spectacularly queer phenomenon. That being a sudden proliferation of western/southern culture in gay and lesbian city life. While Thompson certainly characterizes this new craze as a style belonging to “the Old West,” Thompson also notes that this adopted panache is most popular in southern states like Texas where “Gay people there…do more than just dress C&W [Country-Western] to go out; most live it.” Thompson further describes the infiltration of western and southern wear on the dance floors of popular queer nightclubs and bars throughout the United States, particularly in historically urban regions like San Francisco and NYC. Thompson once again conflates western and southern styles by noting, “Native New Yorkers still with a taste for the West can find fancy footwear at To Boot (100 W. 72nd St.),” while at the same time urging partiers to “show them off at the Lone Star Café (61 5th Ave.),” a place, “infamous for its real down-home crowd…(Every Arkansan in town, it’s said, hangs out there on weekends…” The Lone Star Café’s sobriquet is undoubtedly Texan in origin, and Arkansas is a bordering state that also sits beneath the Mason Dixon Line. Additionally, Thompson’s lax blending of western and southern culture ignores the long-held southern tradition of adopting stylistically western apparel into a largely pastiche southern wardrobe. Nevertheless, Thompson’s amalgamation of southern and western serves as

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., T13.
10 Ibid.
11 I make this claim while considering John A. Burrison’s assertion that, “There is no clothing style, in the past or present, that characterizes the South as a whole…” Indeed, as I will contend throughout this project, cowboy hats, spurs, and even Wrangler jeans may very well be more indicative of a more “Old Western” style. However, this
a reference point for better understanding the markers of intelligibility that render such a style disparate, strange, and Other, against the aesthetics of a place like NYC.

Importantly, it must be noted that southernness as a queer stylistic cannot be understood without proper consideration of a time period where the conflation of western and southern culture in American urban centers represented a mimetic queer expression of self. Consider, for example, that when the cowboy-clad Randy Jones rose to fame in 1978 as one-fifth of the popular disco group the Village People, Jones was undoubtedly the first high profile “gay cowboy.”\(^\text{12}\)

Although most of mainstream United States may not have known at the time, Jones’ cowboy appearance was symptomatic of a cloning trend newly developing in queer-frequented places in metropolitan areas. Collectively, the Village People represented what is known as “the gay clone,” or a “macho man,” a descriptor term for the queer reclamation of masculine archetypes (the cowboy, the construction worker, the lumberjack, the biker, etc.) in order to be perceived as appropriately manly rather than a sissy or a pervert. According to Martin P. Levine’s account, the gay clone was a classed representation of masculinity that desired to repurpose the working middle class image of the American man by bringing “a gay sensibility to gendered attire.”\(^\text{13}\)

Gay clones were predominantly located in urban areas such as the Castro in San Francisco or NYC’s Greenwich Village, and were de-familiarized variants on a thematized
does not negate the fact that historically, southerners have often adopted western styles into their clothing repertoire. So much so, in fact, that often times western and southern culture are conflated or confused. For more on the contestable terrain of the definition of “southern culture,” see: John A. Burrison, *Roots of a Region: Southern Folk Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007). For more on the merging of southern and western cultures, see: Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

\(^\text{12}\) Randy Jones, of course, was not the first gay cowboy. As Chris Packard argues, queer cowboys can be found deep in the archive of American literature dating back to the nineteenth century. See: Chris Packard, *Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Moreover, some may argue the 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy* initiated the certainly queer image of a displaced southerner in New York City. However, due to the cultural climate at the time, *Midnight Cowboy*’s Randy Buck does not participate in any semblance of gay life in the same way as the southerners I feature throughout this project.

cliché of what American masculinity was represented to be at the time. As Thompson details in *The Advocate* article, the 1980 film *Urban Cowboy* starring John Travolta, a pubic figure whose own dubious heterosexuality has always been of interest, arguably triggered the popularity of the cowboy aesthetic as an emulative style for queers – both men and women – to incorporate in their everyday attire. In tandem with the gay clone trend, western and southern wear became a way of expressing a gendered identity that did not contest but aspired to conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity. According to David Halperin, the popularity of gay cloning was perhaps a misguided attempt toward gay liberation as both lesbians and gay men attempted to prove they could be “normal” rather than reifying the stereotypical idea that all queers were fiendish gender evaders.  

Furthermore, gay cloning was also an attempt toward performing “healthy” in a period when queers were constantly battling the stigmatization of homosexuality as a pathological illness. Particularly for gay men in American cities, the queer appropriation of southern wear emerged just before the AIDS crisis in the United States. As the 1980s approached and new AIDS diagnoses spread, appearances of good health became crucial in an era where queers perceived to be sick were automatically deemed positive. The stigma surrounding those who looked as if they had AIDS served as a catalyst for continued performances of masculinity via the reproduction of the gay clone, especially in urban areas where new cases of AIDS were most abundant.  

Of course, those that chose to do so were often privileged at one of the many intersections that connected gender and/or race, since the South’s hyper-patriarchal, homophobic, and racist traditions were effectively exclusionary. The Black disco singer

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Sylvester once outwardly criticized the gay clone trend in San Francisco by calling it “‘conformist shit’” and complained that a lot of normative gay men associated with the “gay movement” were “‘all cloned out and down on people being loud, extravagant, or different.’”\textsuperscript{16}

Concurrently, while some queers living in the largest urban areas of the United States (such as NYC) were enjoying southern style as a way of fashioning their appearance, some of those native southern queers whose culture they were mimicking were desperate to escape the oppressive insularity of southern life.\textsuperscript{17} This kind of generalized and popularly (re)produced depiction of young queer southerners desiring to reach the sexual freedom guaranteed by cities, particularly northern cities, is best illustrated in terms of the epistemological urban/rural divide. John Howard describes it as a “historical collective coming-out narrative – the theoretical model on which American lesbian and gay history rests – the rural landscape functions as an analogous space.”\textsuperscript{18} Howard elaborates, “The countryside must be left behind to reach gay culture and community formation in cities. Thus, the South – rural space generally – functions as America’s closet.”\textsuperscript{19}

Indeed, the queer South may seem an unlikely if not impossible terminology. On one hand, we are told repeatedly and with conviction that the South does not like queers. At the same time, even in our present moment, we are given representation after representation of young LGBTQ-identifying southerners leaving their regional roots behind the minute they get a chance by exchanging the backward ideologies of social conservatism and church on Sundays for a more robust and free life in urban areas where gayborhoods exist and thrive. Kath Weston asserts that

\textsuperscript{16} Joshua Gamson, \textit{The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in San Francisco} (New York: Picador, 2006): 221.
\textsuperscript{17} I use “some” here carefully due to the fact that some southern queers were perfectly content with their regional positionality.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
this over-replicated scenario not only reifies a problematic dualism between urban and rural, but also sediments this dichotomy as an identity marker for gays and lesbians.\textsuperscript{20} Weston calls this phenomenon “the gay imaginary,” and describes it as, “not just a dream of freedom to be gay that requires an urban location, but a symbolic space that configures gayness itself by elaborating an opposition between urban and rural life.”\textsuperscript{21} Though not speaking about the South directly, Weston’s ideas can be directly applied to an overly rural southern United States. In the same way that urban/rural are placed in opposition through the gay imaginary, north/south aligns with this ratio as well, with the latter representing oppression and the former liberation.

It is upon Howard and Weston’s astute considerations that that this project officially begins. “Southerners and the City” (“SATC”) is invested in better understanding representations of those queer southerners who chose to journey to the city, particularly NYC, and who lived during the emergence and/or augmentation of the AIDS epidemic. This project analyzes three non-fictional gay men from the southern United States who moved to NYC and brought with them a certain southern style that happens to collide with their antithetical, northern metropolitan surroundings. My project investigates the performative dimensions of regional cultural repertoires and the paradoxical coalescing of the South and the urban North. Of course, the notion of “southern culture” is a contentious issue itself evoking authenticity claims that more-or-less seek to determine, “Where and what is the South anyway?” Tracing every etymology and originating place of various aspects of southern culture addressed in the pages to come would definitely be out of the purview of this project. Instead, I am more interested in southern culture as a performative practice of embodying customs and traditions associated with “the South,” an

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 274.
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arbitrary repetition of archetypes and quotidian rhetorical embodiments associated with what it means to be southern. As I have detailed with the historical case of the gay clone, such performances can feasibly be enacted by anyone. Non-southerners can certainly don a southern style in the same fashion as a born-and-bred southerner. However, I am focusing my attention on displaced southern natives who register as queerly Other (whether intentional or not) in NYC. In other words, I am attempting to better understand what it means for queers to leave the South, yet never truly escaping the South’s impact on their identity and everyday performance of self. As E. Patrick Johnson anecdotally explains in his introduction to *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* about the transplantation of southern queers to the city:

> Whatever our reasons for leaving the South, the South never left us. Whether it’s that alien accent that emerges when talking to our parents over the phone, those small “country ways” that we hang on to no matter how “citified” we become, or that longing for the soft-spoken gentility of elders that can take the edge off any stressful day, we are our region’s children. No amount of migration will change that. 22

Therefore, this project is more interested in southernness as signification. Aesthetics of southernness are already ruined by the impossible task of deciphering what is properly of southern origination and I try my best not to be muddled down by this dilemma. My aim, rather, is to think about the rhetorical construction of certain artifacts, ideologies, and bodily performances as signifying southern culture. Beyond the caricature of the transplanted queer southerner who has been reproduced in contemporary American media, “SATC” turns its attention toward the archival traces of once-living queer southerners who created new social worlds in NYC.

This project seeks to understand how gay performances of southern culture rhetorically respond to and are shaped by an era of AIDS with a focus on NYC as a geographic focal point.

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This is a project about queer archives, HIV/AIDS, temporalities, regional cultural production, and the shifting landscape of LGBTQ life in response to a moment of crisis. Specifically, I think through the ways in which performance produces cultural memories about what it means to embody “the South” in NYC. In so doing, I assemble the transplant archive, a diverse collection of artifacts found in the corners of queer America, from documents located in a grassroots archive and online to the more apparent texts located in the abyss of LGBTQ film, literature/memoir, theatre, and activism. All of these texts share one commonality. They all tell of southern transplants living in NYC affected directly in some way by the emergence of AIDS as a defining moment in queer America.

A segmented case study, “SATC” seeks to understand how seemingly distinct performances of southern culture in NYC are interrelated via the queerness of temporality and its correspondence to the AIDS crisis. The transplant archive is populated by three main subjects, all once-living, whose histories are assembled throughout this project via archival fragments. The first is Rodger McFarlane, a southern transplant, activist, and one of the first members of the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC). McFarlane gained prominence when he operated the first crisis counseling hotline for those newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS by taking calls from his home telephone. He eventually became director of the GMHC and led organizing efforts that transformed the group into the largest volunteer-based HIV/AIDS outreach center in the world. McFarlane was perhaps most famously characterized by Larry Kramer as Tommy Boatwright in the now classic 1987 play *The Normal Heart*. I have chosen to include McFarlane due to the inordinate amount of material that has been written about him, including Kramer’s play, other products of mass media, and the occasional blurb in a memoir. McFarlane’s life seems to be one
that is relatively well-known but under explored in terms of what it offers academic readings of LGBTQ history and performances of queer activism.

Additionally, I feature the archival ephemera once belonging to the late David Gilbert. Gilbert was the founder of the short-lived activist collective, the Southerners: Gay and Lesbian Men in New York, Inc., a group of native southerners living in NYC who gathered in the year of 1990 at the LGBT Community Center (“The Center”). In my archival research at the community center where the Southerner Records are now kept, I discovered Gilbert himself was undergoing treatments for HIV/AIDS at the time. I give special attention to these materials as performative testimony about an activist group stored away in obscurity for over two decades. This project can be read an attempt to shed light on not only Gilbert but a whole group of southern transplants longing for the comfort of home in the city.

Finally, I visit the 1989 funeral of Alvin Ailey, the famed choreographer who quietly died from HIV/AIDS after a well-publicized career that overshadowed his elusive private life. In the transplant archive, I retain Ailey’s memory via footage of his funeral where his own ballet, Relevations, was performed. In addition to this performance, I consult Ailey’s autobiography and other writings about his life and career. As the only black man in the transplant archive, I treat Ailey with a specificity that I hope not only preserves his cultural heritage but also complicates race-based assumptions about queerness and AIDS in NYC. For this reason, I believe that it is critical to include Ailey in this project.

Together, I argue that these subjects and their archival traces create cultural memories of AIDS via a stylization of southern culture, which illuminates the performative potential of “doing” southernness as a way of discombobulating the predominant temporal logics of futurity. I argue that the featured queer transplants create their own time against, in resistance to, and in
tandem with an era where the queer body was always already considered diseased or impending sickness and inevitable death. As an assemblage of diverse texts, I take the transplant archive seriously as testimony of a pivotal moment in the transformation of LGBTQ life in the United States.

Given the argument I will make throughout this project, some may pause and wonder why NYC is the best choice to set the analysis rather than examining a properly southern context. Clearly, this project is not a rhetorical assessment of the South. Perhaps counterintuitively, the transplant archive is geographically concerned with southern performances in NYC, and the southern states from which its subjects come from are only tangentially related to this analysis. Some may even argue I am perpetuating the urban/rural divide I reported from Howard and Weston earlier. My intention, however, is exactly the opposite. The downright polemical voice of Scott Herring confessing, “I hate New York,” in the first sentence of his monograph *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* seems to be a moral compass as I begin explaining why NYC is the perfect setting for this project. Indeed, many new works within the domain of queer theory have explored the matrices of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, colonialism, and more, but out of all of them, Scott Herring launches the most explicit critique of the continued reproduction of the urban/rural divide in queer analyses. On his hate for NYC, Herring explains,

It’s not simply the city’s awesome capacity to imagine itself as the be-all and end-all of modern queer life (no small feat, mind you). What I really hate is the casualness with which this move is dispatched, the taken-for-granted assumption that you want to be on that tiny island (but not some of those outer boroughs) and be there soon. That you want to be there someday, somehow, and *get out* of this godforsaken town. That the promise land awaits just a hub or two or three away. I hate that no queer in New York has ever had to apologize to other queers for wanting to live there, unlike those of us who did not wash up on its shores. And I hate that the more I hate what New York stands for, the

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more I feel like the kind of shitkicker its queer denizens have too often defined themselves against (original emphasis).  

For Herring, NYC has for too long been rhetorically constructed and idealized as the epicenter of queer American life. Herring reiterates the sentiments of other queer scholars invested in rurality and southernness, like John Howard who notes in the introduction to the first comprehensive critical anthology on the queer south, 1997’s *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, that most queer histories (especially up until that point) had maintained a “bicoastal bias – a focus on persons and events from the East and West Coasts.” James T. Sears echoes this sentiment explaining, “If you were to rely on the many books found in gay and lesbian bookstores, you would assume the south was irrelevant to the contemporary gay and lesbian movement.” As a corrective to this still prevalent problematic, Herring unapologetically destabilizes the façade of queer liberation that informs the essence of the concrete jungle. In the very same way, the transplant archive does not glorify NYC by any means. In fact, the subjects featured in the transplant archive all perform southern style against NYC as a backdrop, thus revealing 1) southern culture a stylized and mobile theatricalization of self and 2) that not all queer southerners who move to NYC are necessarily interested in disavowing their native southern roots. As a supplement to Herring’s work, the transplant archive fully illuminates the desire and even need for queer southerners to preserve their pasts through performances of southernness; therefore, debunking the notion that all queer transplants from the South undergo a complete transformation once acquainted with the hustle and bustle of the Big Apple.

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24 Ibid.
Before proceeding, it may also be fruitful to pause and ask what the exigency of turning our attention toward the transplant archive is in our present moment. First and foremost, like all queer archives, the transplant archive is one that had to be recovered, and this recovery begins with the very acknowledgment that all of the artifacts together function as a queer archive. I emphasize the point that before being compiled together into this project, the objects of the transplant archive were perhaps disparately unrelated. Also, the transplant archive is one that is always in danger of being lost, ignored, sealed away, or destroyed. Thus, in order to preserve the delicate and always fleeting evidence that yields queer cultural memory, this archivization must never end. It only begins with this writing.

**Queer Theory and the Study of Southern Culture**

First, it would be myopic not to lay a more robust foundation for better understanding the tumultuous theoretical terrain between interdisciplinary queer studies and studies of the American South. This domain of inquiry arguably began with the final essay of Howard’s 1997 anthology *Carryin’ On* wherein Donna Jo Smith overtly chastises trends in queer theory which up until that point had overwhelmingly privileged the white male urbanite who “comes out” for the first time as the assumed referent for the term “queer.” Smith declares that any attempts to queer the South must be finessed with attention to intersectionality, as she perceived queer theory up until that point to be much too focused on the lives of gay white men in cities. Smith’s challenge to both queer historians and theorists marks the first attempt toward destabilizing the trenchant divide between southern studies and queer theory. And in many ways, though not the first book ever on southern sexualities, *Carryin’ On* precipitated what would

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28 Ibid.
become a growing interest in southern queerness in a range of fields in the broader humanities, one of my fields of interest, rhetorical communication studies, being no exception.

In the introduction to a 2009 special issue of the *Southern Communication Journal* on the queer south, Charles E. Morris III beautifully highlights all of the major advances made in queer southern studies up until that particular moment. Noticeably, however, very few substantial new works had been produced since *Carryin On’* with the exception of six juggernauts: John Howard’s *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (1999), E. Patrick Johnson’s *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (2008), and James T. Sears’s *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (2001) and *Edwin and John: A Personal History of the American South* (2009), and the edited collection *Out in the South* (2001) by Carlos L. Dews and Carolyn Leste Law. Strikingly, only Johnson’s text is primarily focused on the contours of race and queer identity in the South, while none of the books are exclusively about women. Morris explains that these gaps in southern queer history and theory point us to the dilemma of doing southern studies, and that is the commitment to examining the South according to Carlos L. Dews’ “southern critique,” a call to not merely conduct a genealogy of the South that ends in an analysis of racism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, or whatever –ism one may feel best describes the situation at hand. At the same time, Dews insists that southern critique leaves room for acknowledging and condemning such social oppressions as indeed real and materially shaping the lives of those living in the region. Morris like Dews sees southern critique “as a destabilization of hegemonic gay culture,” a way of affirming Carolyn Leste Law’s observation

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that, “It seems not a little disingenuous of the United States to heap all the racism, bigotry, and ignorance of an entire nation upon one region.”

With the transplant archive, I intend to accept Dews’ challenge and resist the denigration of southern culture as always inherently an oppressive force. By insisting on a consideration of the productive possibilities of queer southernness, my aim is to understand performances of southern heritage as a symbolic doing and undoing instead of an essentialized regional identity marker. Additionally, I am interested in the portability of southern culture, especially given Elizabeth Hardwick’s claim that, “Southernness is more a decision than a fate…” I think such an assessment rings true insofar as southernness can be carried with you. In the transplant archive especially, we will see distinct examples of southern queers intentionally choosing to don a southern style in NYC. While by that same token, southern styles can also be evoked even when one is trying to rid themselves of their southern past; and in the transplant archive, we will view and attempt to better understand these kind of scenarios as well.

As the study of the American South and queer theory continue to be wrangled in by scholars from across the academy, queer southern studies will undoubtedly still grapple with how to resist the separation between urban and rural, while simultaneously preserving a southern critique not uninterested in the denigration of southern life as intrinsically oppressive. One question the transplant archive will pose, as a contribution to this proliferating area of inquiry, is how to deal with the commonplace association of southernness with backwardness. As Scott Herring explains in his article about photographs of gay men from Alabama, images of the

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South, are often thought to “recall preindustrial codes of gender segregation and white male supremacy, pastoral intimacies with a Nature that northeastern metropolitan societies in the modern United States presumably left behind, and ambiguities about the continuum of regional male friendship and male sexual exchange.” Just as Herring describes, the South has typically been described as backward because southerners often look to the past as not merely a container for memories of a time long gone but a touchstone for embodying traditions (no matter how oppressive or violent) in the here and now. In contrast to the hegemonic North, this backward stance has been reinforced when it comes to the South’s general resistance to the progress of queer social issues and LGBT rights. However, the transplant archive, I argue in the same way as E. Patrick Johnson when it comes to black gay men living in the South, “necessitates a reconsideration of the South as ‘backward’ and ‘repressive,’ when clearly gay community-building and desire emerge simultaneously within and against southern culture.” When the southerners I speak about throughout this project choose to embrace southern culture in a NYC context, backwardness emerges not as an ideological resistance to progress, but instead a queer resistance to time and space. This becomes a central aspect of my argument when it comes to the proximity of the texts I examine in relation to the AIDS crisis. Backwardness, then, is a stylized embodiment queer transplants may adopt in order to consciously or unconsciously create their own temporalities against what I name “AIDS time.” In this manner, backwardness is not an oppressive ideological predisposition inherent to southern values but instead, a queer form of opposition in a progress-centered urban context. I will further delve into my conception of backwardness in the coming sections.

34 Johnson, Sweet Tea, 3.
Temporalizing the AIDS Crisis

For each of the three subjects that I highlight in the transplant archive, the emergence of AIDS had a profound effect on their lives. For Rodger McFarlane, the arrival of AIDS became a catalyst for community-based action, and McFarlane committed his life to fighting the disease. Particularly during the early years (1982-87), McFarlane’s activism was spurred by a necessity to fulfill services for those newly diagnosed, a population the American government was largely ignoring at the time. As McFarlane told the New York Times in 1983, “We were forced to take care of ourselves because we learned that if you have certain diseases, certain lifestyles, you can’t expect the same services as other parts of society.”35 Like many other activists at the time, McFarlane’s own action was a result of government inaction regarding the epidemic.

Similarly, David Gilbert’s activist efforts through the formation of the Southerners can be read as a way of acting on behalf of a marginalized group within a larger set of marginalized people. During the rise of HIV/AIDS, places like NYC and San Francisco received an appreciable amount of media attention for the mounting number of cases within those areas. The southern region of the United States, on the other hand, was largely forgotten by the media due to a number of factors, including the general conservatism of the South and its tumultuous relationship with homosexuality.36 As a result, many southern areas did not receive the information necessary to combat the virus.37 The Southerners, formed out of Gilbert’s concern

37 Ibid.
for the ignored problem of HIV/AIDS (and homophobia in general) in the South, began efforts to educate queer southerners about the preventative measures and other forms of support. Gilbert and the Southerners used their cultural roots as a means for combatting the death toll in areas of the United States then not associated with epidemic as a whole.

In contrast to the aforementioned transplants, Alvin Ailey’s relationship with AIDS was much less publicized. In fact, it was not until after his death in 1989 that it was revealed he had died due to AIDS related complications. In his original *New York Times* obituary, Ailey’s physician “attributed his death to terminal blood dyscrasia, a rare disorder that affects the bone marrow and cells.” As I will detail later, such shame, stigma, and silence surrounding those who died of AIDS was not at all uncommon. However, via a performance of Ailey’s own ballet at his funeral, I argue that Alvin Ailey’s connection with his own AIDS cannot be understood in the same manner as the previous cases, especially when one considers the intersections that connect Ailey’s southern cultural heritage, race, and sexuality. All considered, throughout this section, I hope it is obvious why I consider the transplant archive an AIDS archive. If it is not immediately clear, I will take the time to briefly explain why the relationship between the transplants and AIDS matters for my analysis.

Much work has been done on re-conceptualizing and rethinking the scope of what may be considered an AIDS archive. Though in a queer United States context, traditional AIDS archives have historical and cultural collateral as collections that provide proof of a crisis which, upon its introduction in the U.S., was heavily ignored by governmental leaders at the cost of thousands of lives. For example, though founded over a decade after the first AIDS cases in the United States, the LGBT Community Center National Archive in NYC was founded in 1990 largely as a

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response to the first wave of HIV/AIDS. It first sought to preserve the materials of victims and activists of HIV/AIDS, and later expanded to document the lives of all LGBTQ peoples across generations. In the book *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*, Roger Hallas explains the AIDS archive in terms of the production of visual media about queer HIV/AIDS victims and activists on a transnational scale, thus diversifying how we might envision the denotative meaning of “archives” and their subsequent function.\(^{39}\) In a later article, Hallas describes the AIDS archive as a response to “an archival imperative,” which in the first twenty years of AIDS activism sought “to marshal a range of representational archives as a way for AIDS cultural activism to articulate historical consciousness as well as political immediacy.”\(^{40}\)

This immediacy, I hope to convey, manifests in the present albeit differently. Like Ann Cvetkovich, my intention with building the transplant archive is to “keep AIDS activism alive and part of the present.”\(^{41}\) I agree with and take to heart the words of Daniel C. Brouwer, who states, “Although many people in the United States no longer experience AIDS as a collective crisis, engagement with the archive remains vital not only to honor the extraordinary work and incredible accomplishments of domestic and international AIDS workers, but also to keep that work available and at the ready as sources for invention and action in the particular circumstances of our todays.”\(^{42}\) Thus, I consider it indispensable that scholars, especially those emerging that claim to specialize in anything considered “queer,” remember and continue to

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advocate on behalf of the many still suffering at the hands of HIV/AIDS around the globe, while simultaneously continuing to trace and illuminate genealogies of queer pasts consigned by homophobic ideologues at a time when homonormative politics were still violently out of vogue.

In addition to AIDS as a primary force in each of the subjects’ lives, all of the fragments in the transplant archive have another thing in common. That is, a specific correlation with temporality in AIDS-era Manhattan. If nothing else, the transplant archive offers a counterview of NYC’s queer past. Through its illumination of southern queer lives preserving their own regional identities, the transplant archive asks us to rethink the politics of memory and the ways in which time is deployed as power mechanism. Just as backwardness represents an unenlightened disposition typically mapped on to the bodies and minds of southerners, backwardness also signifies an orientation toward time. In patriarchal American culture where the expectations of what Lee Edelman has termed “heteroreproductive futurity” have historically positioned queers as against time, to engage in backwardness is to push against the linear structure of hetero-temporality by reversing one’s footing in a culturally constructed temporal order.43 That is to say, in every sense of the word, backwardness is a queer time against futurity, an opposition to the logics of progression, heteronormative productivity, and planning for the future. The transplant archive asks us to consider, “Whose future is it anyway?” It also forces us to think about how southern backwardness (the unenlightened stereotype) mirrors a queerly conceived backwardness like the one I have just described.

Queer theorists have long grappled with the topic of political futurity, and have successfully devised a major subfield of queer studies on the textures of phenomenology and the discursive and affective construction of time. Arguably beginning with Lee Edelman who called

the future “kid stuff” in his famous 1998 polemic, the politics of futurity take for granted history as a linear narrative with a beginning, middle, and unknown end.⁴⁴ The unknown end, Edelman maintains, substantiates heteroreproductivity as normal, desired, and a way of ensuring the future of history. Edelman links the signifier “the child” with a politics that enforces a heteronormative social order, and urges queer theorists to never take for granted the “vicissitudes of signification.”⁴⁵ According to Edelman, notions of future-making are bound up in heteronormative rhetorics of citizenry. Taking a page from Edelman’s book is Jack Halberstam who argues that queers can and have maintained a resistance against political futurity through “queer time,” or “those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction, and family, longevity and inheritance.”⁴⁶ Halberstam insists that queer time emerges out of the AIDS crisis and Elizabeth Freeman supports this view by citing Carolyn Dinshaw’s assessment that there remains, especially in the wake of AIDS and tragedy, “a queer desire for history” because “gays and lesbians have been figured as having no past: no childhood, no origin or precedent in nature, no family traditions or legends, and crucially, no history as a distinct people.”⁴⁷ Halberstam’s formulation of queer time proves useful in the transplant archive but only insofar as it helps us understand Elizabeth Freeman’s point that, “one of the most obvious ways that sex meets temporality is in the persistent description of queers as temporally backward, though paradoxically dislocated from any specific historical moment.”⁴⁸

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.
⁴⁸ Freeman, “Introduction,” 162.
In the transplant archive, backwardness surfaces as a dual-orientation, both a stereotypical stylization of the southern body, as well as a resistance against the heteronormative/homophobic pressures of a time structure that supported the impending risk of AIDS. Moreover, backwardness serves as a sensuous way of understanding queerness. What does it mean to feel backward? As Heather Love puts it, “Backward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress.” Much like the texts that Love examines in the book *Feeling Backward*, the texts in the transplant archive are not always utopic visions of a queer future yet to be seen. Particularly in the case of Ailey but also in many ways like the activist tactics of Gilbert, southernness could almost signify a certain disavowal of queerness. However, as I will argue, such an assessment is too hasty if one does not consider the matrices of power that link culture, race, class, and privilege at the level of heteronormativity in this particular context.

Now more than thirty years have gone by since the accelerated rise of AIDS diagnoses in the early 1980s, and it would seem that going back to the AIDS era now (as if it ever ended) might seem pointless or too nostalgic, a sad attempt to dig up the past and fetishize a melancholia now deep and buried with the remnants of queer liberation since Stonewall. What the transplant archive reveals, however, is that there is no modern understanding of queerness without AIDS. AIDS becomes the catalyst and excess of queer experience in United States, a marker of periods pre-, during, and post. To understand queer life in America is to understand that AIDS created a temporality for queers via the deployment of risk that clashed with the demands of heteroreproductive futurity. The introduction of AIDS solidified the queer body as diseased or to

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be diseased and impending early death, and as such, governed the logic of time for not only queers but also the rest of the social landscape. Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed argue, “With AIDS, the counterprogressive traits associated with homosexuality – nostalgia for times past and indulgence in the sexual nonproductivity of pleasure, which refuses a future figured as ‘our children’s children’ – were cast as threats not only to individual homosexuals or the economic structure they opposed but to the survival of humanity.” These numerous perceived threats, in turn, were together cast as a menace to normative temporal progression, and as such, anyone associated with AIDS (including all those queer bodies now deemed at risk) were cast as temporally non-linear and therefore, against the time and values of a patriarchal society. The transplant archive moves within and against this AIDS temporality, but the transplants within do not necessarily resist being backward in time. Instead, their performances of southern backwardness produce new temporalities and social worlds. Likewise, backwardness serves as a preservation of a southern style that halts the logics of progression and dizzies NYC’s queer past in the present.

Furthermore, NYC itself becomes a fertile site to better understand queer time and its relationship to AIDS. In the American popular imaginary, NYC exists as the spawning ground for AIDS – not only as the epicenter where the first majorly publicized cases originated but also the site where AIDS activism began to equate to queer life in America. Cities like NYC and San Francisco were also represented as host cities for the disease wherein it spread quickly and ravaged gay communities. As AIDS slowly became considered “the gay disease” due to media representations and cultural replications of this adage, government inaction could only mean one thing: that the United States government could care less if gays lived or died and probably

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preferred the latter.\textsuperscript{51} Writing on this topic in the famous essay “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Leo Bersani argues:

The impulse to kill gays comes out of a rage against gay killers deliberately spreading a deadly virus among ‘the general public.’ The temptation of incest has become natural obsession with child-abuse by day care workers and teachers. Among intellectuals, the penis has been sanitized and subliminated into the phallus as the originary signifier; the body is to be read as a language.\textsuperscript{52}

In the same way that the body becomes a language, as reported by Bersani, how one remembers these bodies and what these bodies signify and thus tell us, is influenced by the same crisis that precipitated the body to be read in such a way in the first place. AIDS time is an inheritance rhetorically constructed and mapped onto the bodies of queers as always prone to and at risk of, while practices of queer time and memory seeks to resist or at least rub against the temporality of AIDS. Therefore, there is no queer time without AIDS and since temporality dictates remembrance, there can be no queer memory without it also being in some way affected.

**Backwardness as a Stylized Performative**

In this section, I briefly chart how I configure queer backwardness in the transplant archive as a stylized performative. Effectively a rhetorical style, southernness materializes as a rhetorical accentuation or expression that impresses itself upon the body. Conceived in this way, southern style is – in every sense of the word – performed. Throughout my analysis of the transplant archive, I adopt an approach to style similar to Barry Brummett’s consideration that:

Style is a complex system of actions, objects, and behaviors that is used to form messages that announce who we are, who we want to be, and who want to be considered akin to. It is therefore also a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others. And as such, style is a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society (emphasis retracted).\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{52} Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October* 43 (1987): 220.

Brummett cites Bradford Vivian’s claim that rhetorical inquiry is the best tool for understanding the ways in which a “particular style is crystallized.” Vivian also mentions that, “the category of style provides a more evocative account of the nature of social transformation at a time of apparent fragmentation in previous values, relations, and institutions.” In a historical archive such as the one I analyze throughout this project, where the introduction of AIDS radically changed the social landscape of queer life in America (and arguably produced queer life as we know it today), Vivian’s claim about the evocative nature of style will be tested according to whether examining southernness as a stylistic actually speaks to the kind of socio-cultural dynamics I proffer throughout.

As a project which understands style as a mode of performing or the subsequent effect of a performance, part of the journey into the transplant archive will entail accounting for how southern style takes shape rhetorically via the compulsory effects of performativity. A performativity that accepts style as inherent is not a new concept, but I would like to delineate how I will use the performative as a conceptual outlet in the transplant archive. Of course, any mention of performativity without a reference to Judith Butler’s early understanding of gender constitution might raise some brows, so I would like us to consider Butler’s conception of gender as a “corporeal style.” For Butler, a “performance of gender” accumulates as a repetition of signified effects. This is not to say that putting on men’s clothing automatically means you are performing “man,” but instead to understand that man as an identifiable category arrives as a “stylized repetition of acts” reliant upon a theatricality of norms that reveal themselves as effects

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upon their subversion (original emphasis). Though gender performativity, Butler certainly devises a theory of performativity with style at its center, which functions as a complement to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s advancement of “queer performativity,” a stylization of self that occurs with the subsequent affects of shame beginning in childhood and lasting until the queer must face their “inner-child: the metaphor that presents one’s relation to one’s own past as a relationship, intersubjective as it is intergenerational.” Sedgwick’s affective attunement toward the effects of shame on queer bodies motions us to pay attention to the theatricalization, the literal \textit{performance}, of queerness as a style, “a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma.” Sedgwick’s queer performativity is a useful lens for understanding how southern transplants living in a time of AIDS negotiate the affective dimensions of shame produced by a broader, homophobic public sphere.

With the transplant archive, I attempt to gesture toward Sedgwick’s notion of queer performativity by focusing on the development of southernness as it is stylized by and on the queer transplant and the spaces that emerge as a consequence. In creating their own queer temporalities against AIDS time, queer spaces emerge through the deployment of southern style and the performance of a regionalism distinct from the region they inhabit. In the vein of Michel Foucault, who writes, “The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes…it constructs resistances,” performances of queer backwardness must be understood embodied enactments of power against power. The weight and affects of AIDS time can be countered via a southern

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59 Ibid., 61.
countenance distinctly intelligible because such a stylization has a legible history. Foucault
states, “We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and
most disinterested, has a history.” 61 Without question, the stylization I describe is as political as
it is a reflection on one’s regional customs. On this topic, Robert Hariman argues that our entire
political experience is “styled” (original emphasis), while Barry Brummett confirms this
assertion by observing, “The extent to which style is something we consciously choose to display
or not is complex – the question wouldn’t matter were style not a major component of identity
and therefore politics.” 62 To claim that southern stylizations are a performance will indeed evoke
connotations concerning whether or not one’s mannerisms or bodily predispositions are a matter
of choice. Much like Judith Butler, I do not mean to imply that all material performances are
matters of choosing which gender or region you would like to embody on any given day. 63 I am
more interested in is the political implications of the reification of a certain southern style that
registers as intelligibly southern on the queer body in NYC. In others words, how might it matter
that queers perform, or better yet “do,” southern culture in a city disconnected from the southern
United States? How do these performances signal the resistant nature of migrating queer bodies
in a predominantly heteronormative social economy?

I am aware that describing southerners as stylizing a performative temporality through
backwardness may raise skeptical objections by critics who may feel that such an assertion
reifies problematic constructions of the southerner as inherently backward and against time. In a
book review of John Howard’s Men Like That, Lisa Duggan concludes that southerners are often

61 Ibid., 153.
Brummett, Style, 90.
63 In the updated 1999 introduction to Gender Trouble, Butler makes this point. See also: Cristan Williams, “Judith
temporally situated as “slow,” stating, “One way of interpreting this regional difference is the familiar one of describing this mostly rural and small-town context as *premodern*, stuck in a time lag behind the faster, more progressive cities up north” (original emphasis). In the same way that queer theorists utilized the derogatory epithet “queer” in the early 1990s to describe an emergence of criticism and theory concerned with the social constructions of gender, sexuality, and normativity, my use of backwardness throughout this project is more of a reclamation rather than a necessary affirmation. Because southern culture is oft characterized as a “breeding ground of social, political, and economic conservatism,” or so says southern queer scholar Reta Whitlock, I write backwardness onto the bodies of the southern transplants to better understand why they appear so different in NYC. Backwardness is a queerness and one that makes even the queerest seem *even queerer*, and I maintain that backwardness as a southern style has a profound rhetorical effect on the bodies of the transplants whom I detail throughout this project. With that considered, I argue that the fragments I write about— which together culminate into the transplant archive itself—are metonymic representations of the once live bodies of the subjects I narrate. McFarlane’s ear against the telephone as he takes calls from people newly diagnosed with AIDS finds its way into these pages as that which is memorialized through its inclusion in the archive. The same goes for David Gilbert’s hand as it scribbles that sloppy signature on forms for gay pride events where the Southerners made appearances. Likewise, Ailey’s corpse in the casket at his church funeral in Manhattan is reanimated as we remember his southern blood, particularly the way it continues pumping through the somatic eulogy that occurs near his body. Indeed, the transplant archive is a body composed of multiple bodies, including my own. To best


recognize the various and important differences which distinguish these bodies, I prioritize treating each primary subject of the transplant archive as a still vital memory of a larger collective queer culture in the United States.

Furthermore, I intend to highlight difference by attending to the various performative embodiments of the subjects. So while it may be easy to discredit the performances of the transplants in the archive as merely coincidental or an effect of their native disposition, such remarks must be critically refuted with attention to the ways that embodied southern cultural production has a history beyond the bodies of the southerners themselves. In the following section, I explain the methodological requirements for attending to this kind of historical specificity in the archive.

**Methodology: An Ethnographic Approach to Archives**

Throughout this introduction, I have discussed in-depth three theoretical avenues that will inform my analysis of the transplant archive. My primary focus in this project remains situated at the non-discrete intersections by which these avenues merge – those being, the crossroads between southern studies and queer theory, the affect of AIDS on queer temporalities, and the stylization of backwardness as a performative. Approaching the transplant archive with all of these areas in mind will not be easy, and certainly will not be a straight traversal that begins at any pre-determined beginning and ends at any expected coda. Grappling with this quandary, I will engage in a methodological praxis informed by a cultural studies ethic described best by Rachel Hall as “letting the object of study lead.”

From experience, I agree with Hall’s observation, “It is entirely possible that the methods of one discipline will not be enough for the task at hand; and

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you never know which methods you may need until you are knee-deep in a particular study. “

At this point in my project, I have drastically re-written this particular section of my introduction three times. I have perused and experimented with a number of methods, and have even tried developing my own to no avail. Knowing well that this project straddles the boundaries between rhetoric, performance, and critical/cultural studies, my methodological lens must be well attuned to navigating this terrain, and I have found that applying any one already pre-formulated “method” from any of these fields has not sufficiently answered, and in some cases, even scratched the surface of the questions I am asking. Thus, I have calibrated my methodological presumptions to encompass the rhetorical performance of culture and its preservation within an archival collection, such as the transplant archive I create in this project. Toward this end, I am driven by a desire to encounter the surviving remnants of queer southern transplant repertoires as evidence of queer pasts, while accounting for their cemented status within the archive. In what I view as an ethnographic approach to archives, I attempt to disturb the archive/repertoire distinction in order to better gauge how materials of the past play a role in the present.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance theorist Diana Taylor makes a clear distinction between what she considers the “archive” (“supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones)”) and the “repertoire” (“ephemeral…embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)”). The binary Taylor composes is fairly simple. In other words, repertoires of performance (or the proof that such repertoires ever existed), are stored away in this place Taylor skeptically approaches as the archive. In this project, the transplant archive under Taylor’s rubric becomes the container that “exceeds the live” because it

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67 Ibid.
claims to ensure the endurance of materials related to the queer southerners I analyze.\textsuperscript{69} Whereas the reportorial, \textit{live} embodiment of temporality performed by the transplants can never be accessed except by virtue of its supposed evidence now kept within the archive’s parameters. On this topic, Taylor addresses the prevailing myth that the archive is “unmediated, that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself.”\textsuperscript{70} Taylor’s assertion helps keep me, the archivist, honest, while also making sure we remember the transplant archive is but an archive. Prior to my assemblage of the texts, they perhaps would not register as related because each of the subjects are indeed different people, once living and facing a world so unlike the one I have experienced in my own lifetime. However, I am skeptical that this aspect of the archive Taylor finds problematic is necessarily so. By approaching the archive ethnographically, I plan to show how the thematic boundaries of the archive provide a framework through which we can study the leftover evidence of embodiments as residual proof of the various cultural practices and performances that could otherwise be relegated to consigned status if in the hands of another archivist not attuned to these specific idiosyncrasies.

After all, in its totality, “SATC” is an attempt to not only establish an assemblage of archival material but to also ensure that the materials I include as part of the transplant archive are continually queered. Unfortunately, the resolutely violent act of disavowing the relationship between archival objects and their queerness can be and often is a problematic side effect of the archival process itself. In constructing the transplant archive, I am similarly interested in how the archive can help us to undo our forgetting, especially as I am driven by a need to resist the closeting force of homophobia and the balking power of hetero-sexist silencing regimes. Consequently, I am inspired by the words of Charles E. Morris III who describes Derridean

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
consignation as, “Inherently an enactment of archontic power and its ongoing struggle, consignation should be central to our understanding of the archive as manifestly and in manifold implication rhetorical” (original emphasis).71 Morris reminds us that archives are persuasive impositions of power, and that scholars should take seriously the performance of “queer critical labor” when it comes time “to consign for ourselves archives robustly constitutive of queer presents and futures.”72

Heeding Morris’ advice, I take seriously the promise of the transplant archive as an “inventional wellspring…inextricably linked to queer movement: traversal of time and space, mobilization and circulation of meaning that trouble sexual normalcy and its discriminations” (original emphasis).73 Morris’ formulation of queer movement points us to consider the embodiment of queerness, and throughout this project, I try my best to emphasize these migratory performances both literal and sensual. Queer movement as a conceptual model also begs for an increased awareness of the remediation of archival materials into a new archive, such as the transplant archive I build here. Motivated by an “archival queer” ethos and a desire to legitimate a queerness yet to be fully addressed, I build the transplant archive as a performance of queer critical labor invested in queer movements with a particular focus on the rhetorical implications of each text I analyze. When thinking rhetorically about each queer southerner, my goal is to create a new archival event that gives proper consideration to the queerness of the transplant while preserving a material historicity at the intersection of time, space, and privilege.

Therefore, in the event of this archive, I want to posit a few simple inquiries as heuristics for better attending to our bodily responses to archival remnants and our historiographic

72 Ibid., 142
impositions that inevitably follow. How is it that we, participant observers in archival collections, co-participate in the production of knowledge with the materials we contact? How do we imagine the historical bodies signified by archives, and what is our relationship to them? How does contacting history and our writing of said history function as a performance induced by the archive and its contents? The answers to these questions, I argue, are best addressed in consultation with methods provided by performance ethnographers.

Neither a cleanly rhetorical look at the effects of discourse or the performativity of those effects, my project borrows from both rhetoric and performance in an attempt to not only converge the fields in productive conversation but also to prod at what Mindy Fenske and Dustin Bradley Goltz have recently named “disciplinary dedications.”74 This is a project about rhetorical performances and performance rhetorics. As such, it demands an approach that gives neither field any special precedence, thus leaving room for both to simultaneously co-constitute one another as necessary coequals throughout the duration of this project. Surely it is more than coincidence that when performance studies first began to burgeon as a serious mode of cultural inquiry, Dwight Conquergood was already thinking about its relationship to rhetoric when in a review essay for the Quarterly Journal of Speech he wrote, “Performance studies is the new frontier for staking joint claims to politics and persuasion, pleasure and power, in the interests of community and critique, solidarity and resistance.”75 In the spirit of Conquergood, our weaving through the transplant archive will involve a look at the performatic qualities of highly rhetorical scenes. As we slip in and out of moments in time, queer temporalities that confound us, and memory performances that startle our senses, we will find room to stand alongside our subjects

outside of normative time in a state of backwardness. A queer orientation indeed, our archival traversal will rest “in the nexus between the playful and political,” in the words of Conquergood, a way of preserving a queer past now felt on our bodies and moving us toward an impure politics of southernness in the present. Conquergood’s assessment that ethnography “privileges the body as a site of knowing” allows me to account for my own body and its relationality to the queer transplants I describe. Conquergood further states, “Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the process of communication and constitutes the ‘doing’ of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together.” In this project, I am interested in fully relishing in the temporal simultaneity that results upon the present encounter with materials considered bygone. In performing in tandem with the archive through the writing of history, I am interested in deconstructing the past/present/future linear order in a fashion similar to the transplants themselves.

Perhaps most importantly, relying on performance ethnography as a critical instrument in the archive allows for an undercurrent of self-reflexivity throughout this project. Charles E. Morris III views the historically self-reflexive principles of performance studies as a fitting corrective for a rhetorical studies too often falsely objective “about the power and particularities of consignation, disposition, re/iteration, representation, and embodiment in our own work.” Morris’ desire for a more self-reflexive critical ethos leads me to further celebrate my methodological prescription as a self-aware excavation technique, a guiding compass whereby I can uncover the layers of performance resting in the archive. Moreover, it enables me to engage

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76 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 181.
in what Della Pollock has described as a performative writing that is “nervous,” as “It anxiously crosses various stories, theories, texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice, unable to settle into a clear, linear course, neither willing nor able to stop moving, restless transient and transitive, traversing spatial and temporal borders…”\(^{80}\) Pollock further compares such a nervous writing to the body itself, “it operates by synaptic relay, drawing one charged moment into another, constituting knowledge in an ongoing process of transmission and transferal, finding in the wide-ranging play of textuality an urgency that keeps what amount of textual travel from lapsing into tourism, and that binds the traveler into his/her surging course like an electrical charge to its conduit. “\(^{81}\) The transplant archive begs for the scholarly commitment Pollock describes. As my southern queer body explores the archive’s body and the bodies contained within the archive, temporalities and repertoires will collide trans-historically, thus rebounding off one another and disintegrating as they dissolve into the present through my writing of this project.

Finally, my building of this archive and my journey within it hopefully serves as a way of un-doing the steadfast application of a methodology common to the usual evaluation of rhetorical texts. In the transplant archive, I want us to become enfolded. Yes, you too. As we move through time and space, flirting with southern transplants while enjoying the cacophony of honking traffic in Manhattan, our goal is to become entangled with the queerness of time and the affective vibration of memory. We will use performance as our map and rhetoric as our compass. Together they aid us in finding our way. We will wonder and wander, cruise and accentuate our own stylizations of self alongside our southern comrades. The goal is not to find out but to get lost in our own temporal bewilderment and honor those transplants that resisted the impinging

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 91.
thrust of AIDS time. We remember them – and in so doing – we forget that we are who they were. We are but performances of styles and time ontologically archived at the moment of our existence.

**Overview of Chapters**

As an interdisciplinary project, “Southerners and the City” engages with several fields in the broader humanities, including rhetorical studies, performance studies, southern culture studies, and the expansive and ever-growing discipline of queer studies generally. In terms of its theoretical contributions, “SATC” is most interested in considering constructions of southern culture, temporality, and memory as performative stylizations. Utilizing rhetorical and performative theories, one aim of this project is to deconstruct common-sense ideas about what it means to be southern, to be in time, or to remember.

In addition to describing the aforementioned qualities of the archive, I also understand this project as a critical history of a specific moment in United States public culture. But like all histories, this one is incomplete. The transplant archive is still in its incipient phase. As such, the archive does not include many critical voices – such as those of lesbian women (and women in general), transgender individuals, or those of other races than the ones mentioned here, as well as many other countless other southern transplant identities I have yet to discover. I am certain that a more diverse archive would add necessary nuance and a complexity that would make my findings more complete. Unfortunately, due to many limitations, including the fact that this is supposed to be a narrowly encompassing Master’s thesis, I have chosen to focus on the lives of gay men. While I do acknowledge that I am reifying longer historical trends in queer theory to only include the voices of men, I contend that the voices I spotlight are still important and need to be heard.
Overall, this project aims to understand how transplanted queers once stylized a performance of southern culture in NYC, and how these performances designed a queer archetype embedded in queer cultural memory. Always transient and walking the tightrope above hegemonic notions of time and space, the transplants in NYC are perplexing in that they exist in a time we sometimes would like to forget in American queer history. The transplant archive will arouse malignant connotations, including the AIDS crisis, images of queer southerners who finally escaped their hometowns at risk of being tormented for life or worse, and gay cloning as a way of necessary passing. The transplant archive desires to preserve these associations, but at the same time, add complications to our assumptions about queer performances of southern style by the transplants. In this respect, this project desires to give a new account of what it means to be transplanted, regionally, temporally, and rhetorically.

Chapter one further lays the theoretical foundation for attending to temporality and AIDS by addressing Rodger McFarlane and his relationship to a broader American public sphere through his cultivation of a queer counterpublic. Throughout this chapter, I analyze archival materials relevant to McFarlane’s life, and argue that traces of his activist persona are replete with references to his origins as a southerner. In so doing, I examine the character based off McFarlane from Larry Kramer’s now classic 1987 play *The Normal Heart*, fragmented testimony from memoirs from those who knew McFarlane, leftover video footage of McFarlane taking calls for GMHC which still lingers online, as well as other assorted ephemera I have located in other various nooks and crannies. Ultimately, I argue that McFarlane’s archive illustrates a southern style that resists the thrust of AIDS time, and illuminates the productivity of “doing” southernness in NYC as a mode of queer worldmaking in an overwhelmingly heteronormative public sphere. I assert that McFarlane created new social world(s) via his
dedication to the GMHC and contend that in doing so, performed backward which ultimately resulted in temporal survival.

Chapter two extends the first chapter by examining The Southerner Records, ephemera leftover from a short-lived activist organization now kept in the archive at the LGBT Community Center National Archive in NYC. Through these materials, I detail how the appropriation of southern style emerges not only as a way worldmaking but also a backwardness that resists stereotypes and reifications of LGBTQ oppression typically associated with southern culture. In the duration of this chapter, I view personal letters from the founder of the organization (David Gilbert), as well flyers and other preserved documents from The Southerners activist efforts. I delineate how these archival materials collectively perform a temporality that disrupts normative notions of queer cultural memory. By the chapter’s end, I offer commentary on how The Southerners’ temporal fight against AIDS is inscribed in the objects in the archive, and detail how the act of queer remembrance can be conceived of as a backward orientation in and of itself.

The final chapter problematizes the previous two. I begin with the seemingly simplistic question: How does the body of a black southern transplant disrupt or confirm the inferences I have made so far throughout this project? In this chapter, I analyze the 1989 funeral of choreographer Alvin Ailey. Particularly, I view performances from his ballet Revelations, which was performed by dancers at NYC’s Cathedral of the St. Divine as part of his eulogy. I utilize E. Patrick Johnson’s conception of a “quare” theoretical lens to better account for the ways in which a different sort of southern backwardness surfaces throughout the performance. I infer that Ailey’s funeral represents a model of quare cultural production that cannot be fully understood without proper consideration of the intersection that connects race, class, region, and sexuality. With a specific focus on the 1989 American context of the performance, I illustrate that this
particular memorialization of Ailey does not turn attention away from the fact that his deceased body was overtaken by AIDS nor does it inherently deny him of his queerness that goes unstated. Rather, I contend that Ailey’s funeral produces a cultural memory of southern queerness against the grain of AIDS time that actually serves as a memorialization of Ailey’s blood, in all of its southern queerness.
CHAPTER TWO

A SOUTHERNER IN PUBLIC: RODGER MCFARLANE’S BACKWARD WORLDMAKING

Let us begin at the end. On May 15, 2009, Rodger McFarlane committed suicide due to an unbearable pain in his back. He shot himself in the head. That is all I know because that is all the archive tells me. I am frightened by the idea of killing myself but I believe that everyone should have the autonomy to do so without shame, so I try my best not to judge him from the outset. But I am also a southerner, and self-righteous judgment comes as naturally as the twang in my voice.

Like this chapter, McFarlane’s New York Times obituary also starts at the end of his life. Dennis Hevesi wastes no time in describing the broken back McFarlane suffered in 2002, which ultimately led to the writing of his suicide note. David France, writer for New York Magazine, does the same by beginning his tribute with an appraisal of McFarlane’s suicide site, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, as “enigmatic.” The casual eulogistic interest in McFarlane’s own self-destruction resonates rather ironically as a reflection of McFarlane’s strange relationship with the thrust of time. He was never one to settle for the inherited order of things, and it seems that this preference inadvertently carried on even after his final breath.

Though, I want to make sure that I am making myself as clear as possible. I actually know nothing more about McFarlane than the archive tells me. From what I have gathered and read, I honestly find his personality somewhat annoying. Apparently at one point he was quoted as calling himself “a legend” because he was nearly seven feet tall, and his intimidating stature

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82 Hevesi, “Dies at 54.”
84 Ibid.
afforded him the ability to jump rope with his childhood girlfriends without trouble from others who might wish to discipline his evasion of gender normativity. I want to roll my eyes, but I remind myself he grew up in another time where passing as heterosexual meant survival. Still, I am interested in his own phrasing. The adjectival use of the word “legend” – though boastful and, in my opinion, regrettable haughty – fits him well. Like all legends associated with those first years of HIV/AIDS activism, the tale of Rodger McFarlane is a little queer. His story is rife with eccentric characters, a mythic landscape, and competing narratives that circulate through mediated histories by those nostalgic for a bygone memory of disheveled communitas. Only fragments of his legendary life remain, and I give myself in this chapter the task of reassembling bits and pieces of a time no longer in order to better understand the historical, past, present, and if we are lucky, the ever-manifesting future.

Let us switch gears, then, and settle in at the beginning of these events. As the story goes and as his Wikipedia page makes clear, “In the early 1980s, McFarlane walked into the offices of Gay Men's Health Crisis, offering to serve as a volunteer.” By many reports, this is the defining moment of McFarlane’s life and career as the first person to offer a telephone hotline for persons with HIV/AIDS during the debut of the virus in the United States. The context here, though certainly vague, is the oft traded synopsis of McFarlane and the generalized extent of his story.

However, the exact date McFarlane walked into the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) was May of 1982. This was five months after Nathan Fain, Larry Kramer, Lawrence Mass, Paul Popham, and Edmund White founded the GMHC in Kramer’s living room after hearing Dr.

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86 This quote appears in Hevesi’s obituary. See: Hevesi, “Dies at 54.”
Alvin Friedman-Kein discuss the “gay cancer” that was affecting a disproportionate amount of gay men in the NYC area. The first meeting of the GMHC occurred seven months before the Center for Disease Control and Prevention had a coined the name “AIDS” for a contagion that was evidently spread through blood contact and was on its way to becoming an epidemic. During this meeting, Kramer was furious about the nearly three hundred cases of severe immune deficiency found in gay men, which had resulted in the deaths of nearly half of all reported. The discourses about a gay “cancer” had evolved into a full-on media blitz, which produced the descriptor “gay plague” for the nascent outbreak. According to Dennis K. Altman, 1982 was the same year that “The homosexual character of the disease was firmly established by the media, and the discovery of other affected groups, such as African-Americans and heterosexual-identifying women, did little to change this stereotype.” With the growing perception that HIV/AIDS was a side effect of homosexual immorality, the GMHC sought to provide support to gay men either directly suffering or who knew someone affected. Using his apartment telephone and answering machine, McFarlane received over one hundred calls his first night as a GMHC volunteer. In this moment McFarlane established himself as a major force in the fight against AIDS and the public’s opinion of its impact and consequences.

In accounts of his involvement with the GMHC, always noted is McFarlane’s unavoidable regional demeanor, his affable “Southern charm,” which only enhanced his folkloric magnetism and prowess as an activist in the metropolitan banality of early 1980s NYC.

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89 Ibid.
91 Altman, AIDS in the Mind of America, 17.
92 Ibid.
southern style, as we will see in the unfolding pages of this chapter, made a lasting impression on the people he worked alongside. Using these observations as a heuristic for analysis, I approach McFarlane with questions that he and I answer together. Namely, what is it about McFarlane’s southernness in NYC that renders itself disparate, and thus makes legible McFarlane’s own status as a queer transplant separated from his native roots? Furthermore, what difference does this southern identity make in terms of his activism, and why is it continually highlighted in all the remaining archival materials of his life? In what follows, I preview the argument I make throughout this chapter toward answering these questions.

Indeed, few would argue that in the history of the United States there exists any other moment that shaped the queer social landscape like the onset of HIV/AIDS in 1981. More than a decade following the Stonewall Riots, gay and lesbian politics immediately responded to the incurable ailment that was enveloping queer communities at morbid rates. With little-to-no response from government officials during the initial years of AIDS, particularly from the morally stoic Reagan administration, queer activism grew out of a necessity to raise awareness for a crisis that was largely ignored by both the United States government and the general populous. As Deborah B. Gould aptly declares, the pain and social annihilation felt by queers in the first years of AIDS were prevalent emotive responses to American society’s passivity to the virus, and these states of affection led people like McFarlane to provide a social service response to the epidemic that would eventually lead the way for more militant forms of action like ACT UP in the later half of the 1980s.

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96 In *Moving Politics*, Gould describes this kind of description of the AIDS epidemic (1981-1986) as a “heroic narrative.” Though mostly accurate, the heroic narrative is problematic because it disregards the tensions between gay and lesbian activism and the gay respectability politics that are intrinsically tied to the notion of gay heroes in the first wave of the epidemic. See: Gould, *Moving Politics*, 57.

Additionally, since the first wave of the epidemic, attempts to memorialize AIDS have sensationalized it as the origin of a gay political consciousness in the United States, while alternative histories of LGBT life pre and post-Stonewall have largely taken a backseat in the canon of American queer memory. In turn, these queer memory making efforts cultivate a dominant temporality for American LGBTQ life by punctuating periods pre-, during, and post-crisis that serve to clash against the oppressive forces of a homophobic public sphere that largely ignored AIDS upon its arrival. One might call this timing a *counterpublic temporality* because it is the rhetorical creation of a time for queer subjects by queer subjects through the deployment of HIV/AIDS activism and discourse. Its effects, however liberatory or counterproductive, sought to counter the demands of a *public temporality*, or the national time table of a dominant public sphere that excluded subjects unable to conform to the heteronormative rites of passage that constitutes intelligible and productive citizens. For example, the public’s temporality is marked by futuristic and seemingly private events actually sanctioned by the state, including marriages and the reproduction of a bloodline (occasions not governmentally allocated to queers at the time). This kind of timing collaborates with what I call *AIDS time*, or the ominous risk of transmission and the inevitability of the death of gay men perpetuated by dominant narratives circulating within the public sphere. In the following pages, I theorize these distinctions further.

McFarlane’s activism, I explain, resists the impingements of AIDS time by its reinforcement of a counterpublic temporality via his own time-based relationship with the public sphere. This timing, *the southerner’s temporality*, is accentuated because of how it is framed in the archive as a necessary component of McFarlane’s corporeal existence and embodied effort

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98 Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed theorize this phenomenon in-depth in the chapter “Battles Over the Gay Past: De-generation and the Queerness of Memory” in their monograph *If Memory Serves*. See: Castiglia and Reed, *If Memory Serves*, 39-71.
toward fighting AIDS. In other words, through his activism with the GMHC and his dedication to action during the first wave of the American epidemic, McFarlane created a new social world against the predominant logics of heteronormative, bourgeois temporality. I contend that in order to accomplish this endeavor, he performed a backward mode of worldmaking, simultaneously a productive temporal regression and a signification of his southern identity against a NYC backdrop. His southernness, in addition to marking a backwardness typically mapped onto people from the U.S. South, also correlates to a slowness, a way of living that does not mesh with the rapid temporal sequencing of the predominant U.S. public sphere. Although Halberstam’s notion of “queer time” is primarily focused around the development of queer subcultures and postmodern geographies, I aim to extend Halberstam’s concept further by explaining its rhetorical utility in an activist realm where the public sphere itself functions as a site where temporalities may be produced, performed, and utilized as modalities of resistance. In this way, McFarlane and others perform queer time and thus create “queer space,” or “place-making practices…enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.”

In order to better understand McFarlane’s role in combating the momentum of AIDS time and the homophobic priorities of the public sphere during the years in which he worked, the rest of this chapter unfolds in the following manner. First, I situate McFarlane and the archive I reference throughout this chapter in relation to current literatures on the public sphere, temporality, and queer activism. Second, I further contextualize McFarlane’s activism within the scenery of NYC during the emergence of AIDS, and analyze excerpts from memoir and obituaries detailing McFarlane as a leader and southerner. Next, I view footage of McFarlane taking calls for the GMHC and account for his development of a GMHC hotline as a form of

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counterpublicity and fight against AIDS as queer worldmaking. Finally, I make Larry Kramer’s dramatization of his involvement with the GMHC in the initial years of AIDS in *The Normal Heart* a principal site of analysis whereby I can better understand McFarlane through the character based on him in the play.

**The Temporal Public Sphere**

Scholars of rhetoric have long expounded upon the rhetorical and performative dimensions of the public sphere. Though this project as a whole does not engage public sphere theory, this chapter provides a theoretical foundation to a public sphere in a time of AIDS that I will make reference to in other chapters. I do not intend to provide a traditional literature review of these theoretical advances or rehash ongoing debates. Rather, I am more interested in delineating the opportunities afforded by public sphere theory for examining the embodiment of temporality construction. In this regard, I provide the theoretical impetus and methodological presumptions of this chapter, particularly in terms of public sphere theory’s relationship to queer activism. I also seek to better understand “temporality as a key rhetorical figure of AIDS.”¹⁰⁰ In the same vein as Kyra Pearson’s historical analysis of the AIDS Quilt, I agree that the rhetorical co-constitution of time and AIDS deserves more attention since this dimension is “evident in its classification as an ‘epidemic,’ a term describing the rapid progression of a disease through a population (original emphasis).”¹⁰¹

In the case of the McFarlane materials I consult for this chapter, the term “public sphere” serves as an abstraction with material consequences. Similar to Jürgen Habermas’ first conceptualization of the public sphere as “the sphere of private people [who] come together as a

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¹⁰¹ Ibid.
public” after the demise of “representative publicity” in eighteenth century Europe, my understanding of the public sphere rests on a notion of a space – literal and metaphoric – wherein private social actors come together and make rational-critical decisions about public life.\textsuperscript{102} A definition of a public configured in this way allows room for the establishment of norms that govern the everyday life of the public. Failure to adopt these normative rules, in turn, potentially excludes members from the public, as their legibility rests on their conformity to publically confirmed social conventions. Kendall Phillips argues, “Any deviance from the prescribed rationality of the public sphere is explained away as a failure to meet the ‘appropriate’ standards of communication or a systemic distortion.”\textsuperscript{103} Phillips admonishes scholars of rhetoric for the general privileging of “consensus” in the public sphere, and advises rhetoricians to consider the utility of dissensus in public deliberation. Taking this advice, I consider the ways in which the futuristic temporality of the public sphere is propelled by an emphasis on deliberation upheld by citizen performances of consensus and normatization. On the converse, I also analyze the way in which a queer counterpublic can create dissensus through the deployment of a queer time in opposition to the public sphere’s systemic temporality. In this way, “the public” materializes as a “counterfactual norm,” which “[establishes] the possibility of democratic processes and practices.”\textsuperscript{104} On par with Kirt H. Wilson and Rosa Eberly’s observation, the public serves as a methodological standard I use to locate rhetorically constructed norms and publicly mandated instances of power. The public sphere is a locus for better gauging public performances of

normativity affiliated with what we might ascribe to the public, and it functions as a reference point for identifying performances of counterpublicity that seek to resist the status quo.

However, the public sphere may or may not manifest as a locatable “sphere” at all. According to Nancy Fraser, Habermas’ public sphere “designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk.”\footnote{Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” in \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992): 110.} I like Fraser’s phrasing because in her words, the public sphere is a theatrical space wherein social actors perform for one another within the constraints of their own staged reality directed by the rules of public life they themselves have written. Fraser famously critiques Habermas’ idealization of the bourgeois public sphere with its inherently exclusionary principles because he chooses to discount other competing public spheres. From a feminist perspective, Fraser shifts public sphere discourse to account for a “plurality of competing publics,” and devises a useful theory of counterpublics.\footnote{Ibid. 116.} Fraser also proffers a point of view that better attunes us to the myriad ways the norms of the public transform into the hegemon, while counterpublics are relegated to a minority status.

As configured in this chapter, the hegemonic public holds the power and means necessary to produce bodily, behavioral, interactional, and societal norms that simultaneously constitute and are constituted by constructions of temporality that legislate the aforementioned everyday displays of publicness. This public temporality unfolds in alignment with the public’s rules and offers itself as a performative modality subjects can use as a signifier of their own “utopian self-abstraction” into the public sphere at varying degrees.\footnote{Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” in \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992): 384.} Like Michael Warner suggests, with little options available for resistance, minoritized subjects can “carry their unrecuperated position
What becomes particularly important with the case of McFarlane is how he uses his minority status as resistance against the consumption Warner forewarns.

Discovering temporal enactments within queer activism is no easy task considering that queer counterpublics engaged in political action may or may not actually be involved in shape-shifting the logics of time. On the experience of the proletariat public sphere, social theorists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argue that productivity, labor, and the cyclical nature of political economy orient subjects toward a “‘timetable’ that corresponds to…[one’s] own needs and to his [or her] stage of development as a person.”\footnote{Ibid., 21.} The demands of this timetable are reinforced by the bolstering of heterosexual relations in an economic system where “linear progress” denotes an “organization structure” where subjects come to see themselves as participating within and productively contributing to a capitalist public sphere.\footnote{Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, \textit{Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere}, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 20.} Thus, time is bound up with and dependent on other norms of the public sphere. There will inevitably be an intrinsic meddling with temporal structures when one evades the public’s schedule of (re)production. Halberstam writes, “Queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.”\footnote{Halberstam, \textit{In a Queer Time}, 2.} Therefore, it is no stretch to imply that by virtue of living as a queer subject, one is tampering with the public’s futurity and the “timetables” Negt and Kluge describe. Living one’s life queerly resists the public’s conceit to the future wherein populations continuously repopulate based on heteronormative/patriarchal standards of family and commodity.
Furthermore, McFarlane’s performance as a southerner in NYC commands a better understanding of the ways southern regionalism clashes with the futurity of the hegemonic North. The American North with its ability to render other cultures disparate and strange can be said to represent the public’s infatuation with modernity; meanwhile, southerners, queers, and those who identify as both simultaneously, are excluded from the public’s social and temporal fold. My writing of this chapter is an attempt to parse out the specific ways publicness, time, queerness, and southern culture affect and are affected by one another in McFarlane’s performance of activism during the introduction of HIV/AIDS into the U.S. public consciousness. As a performative history, I also see McFarlane’s archive as a unique event rather than a universalizing model for all queer activism during the period.

McFarlane in Manhattan

Nearly seven years since his death and more than twenty-five years since his initial involvement with the GMHC, I meet McFarlane in Randy Shilts’ iconic And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic. He and I sit in a NYC hospital waiting room. The walls are white, the floors are white, and the chairs are a light green. In typical hospital fashion, there is a sense of urgency permeating the room despite the tedium of waiting. Although Shilts’ book jettisons much narrative detail in exchange for short, rather simply-stated journalistic descriptions of events under small chapters arranged chronologically by date of occurrence, my mind still pieces everything together visually. Sitting with McFarlane is uncomfortable. You can see the uneasiness in his eyes. He is about to hit a breaking point. Shilts writes about him in this way, “Rodger has never felt discriminated against as a homosexual in all his twenty-seven years, and he never understood the radical politics the activist types always spouted. Now, however, he could see something was wrong. People were suffering and the city wouldn’t do anything about
This moment summons the images of the intensive care unit in St. Vincent’s, which by 1983, had become occupied by mostly gay men with dark purple lesions on their skin, swollen eyes, and pneumonia. David France recalls that during his time as a reporter in this period, he was inundated with calls from early HIV/AIDS patients who complained “that staff members fearing the disease was airborne refused to bring them food, instead piling their trays outside their doors, or that terrified nurses wouldn’t bandage their wounds or change their soiled linens.” Reconstructing this retold memory horrifies my imagination. McFarlane, though, lived this terror, and at this point, had yet to have seen the worst to come.

I can do nothing but piece together McFarlane’s presumed southerness at this point. Does he walk like an Alabaman (whatever that might mean)? Does he have a noticeable accent? What is it about his quotidian habits that make him a southerner in the eyes of others? Unlike other sources, Shilts makes no mention of McFarlane’s regional heritage and whether his gentility mattered in the fight against the disease. However, Shilts’ portraiture of McFarlane’s time in NYC supplies a broader picture of the city as a site of public spherical temporality.

Take into consideration the very title of Shilts’ book. And the Band Played On, in my mind, is a perfect metaphor for the temporal operation of the public sphere as I have described it so far. As Shilts once stated himself, the title is simply a snappier way of saying ‘business as usual.’ Evidenced by the government’s inaction and an all around passivity by mainstream society in the early days of AIDS, a predominantly heteronormative public sphere does not suspend its

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113 See also: “St. Vincent’s Hospital: Why is this Site Important to the Ongoing History of the AIDS Crisis?” New York City AIDS Memorial, accessed 15 Mar. 2016 http://nycaidsmemorial.org/st-vingents-hospital
temporal activity for those it considers outside the linear progression of public culture. The image of a band playing on as queer bodies are further put at risk by the pure uncertainty of a spreading disease seems all the more eerie in the wake of a recent 2015 Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage in the United States. I shudder. Am I part of the band now? I continue pondering my privilege as it intersects with my generational positionality, race, class, and gender. I am embarrassed and almost ashamed to admit that sometimes I hate the fact that I have almost no relationship to AIDS. I have never lost anyone, and given my partnered status, I am unlikely to develop AIDS anytime soon. Even if I was to diagnosed positive, I hear there are medications for that now. But I actually have never taken the time to fully research anything about contemporary AIDS treatments. Overall, this book makes me feel like a bad queer; this project seems like a supplement to an identity I claim but have never known. This archive strikes me in a personal way, and I wonder what right I have to be immersed within its arbitrary boundaries. Better yet, who am I to include it here?

I return to reading and the waiting room where I find McFarlane standing handsome and tall. Though I have no physical attraction to him whatsoever from the photographs I have seen, I choose to alter his image according to my imaginative desires. McFarlane converses with a doctor (an older man, white hair, and a green tie under his white coat) who insists, “‘We’re getting too many of these patients.’” I can hear McFarlane’s inner-thoughts and the conclusion he draws from the doctor’s comments, “No hospital in New York City wanted to become known as specializing in this homosexual disease.” In this fictional account, Shilts

\[\text{116} \text{ Ibid.}\]
\[\text{117} \text{ Ibid.}\]
narrates McFarlane as serendipitously involved with AIDS activism. According to Shilts,

McFarlane found himself mixed up in a “mess” he felt obligated to clean up.\textsuperscript{118} Shilts writes:

Rodger McFarlane opened the GMHC hotline on his personal answering service shortly after the Garage dance benefit. He received 100 calls the first day. The gay men of Manhattan were panic-stricken and there was nowhere else to turn…Half the GRID cases in the country were in New York City, and you barely heard a whisper about it from the mayor or health officials. Gays were going to have to establish their own services or be left to die in fear, shame, and isolation. As he cabbed home, Rodger began mapping the service plans in his mind.\textsuperscript{119}

Shilts paints a rather vivid portrait of McFarlane as a do-gooder compelled to aide fellow gay men suffering at the hands of governmental neglect. NYC, in turn, is both a backdrop and material scene in which McFarlane and others live. It is also a synecdoche for the public’s will to ignore those suffering from HIV/AIDS at the time. Specifically, NYC amalgamates with the public sphere representing both a hegemonic environment where normative social actors benefit from the standing health system, while patients suffering from non-normative ailments are willfully cast aide as less desirables who are undeserving of treatment because of their aversion to meeting public expectations.

In this case, NYC functions as a site of steadfast normalization and a model of public timing insofar as it broadcasts a temporal pace that American subjects are expected to follow. Tamar W. Carroll describes NYC as “at once both the core of the nation and on the periphery of the heartland” because of its correlation with economic development post-WWII and the subsequent creation of a unique American identity.\textsuperscript{120} Similarly, NYC’s normative pull is supported by its status as a center of metronormativity. I deploy metronormativity here to account for the idealization of metropolitan culture, while other cultures, rural ones particularly,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
are cast as deviant and non-public.\textsuperscript{121} Publicity is bound up in the rhetorical character of what Scott Herring defines as the “temporal axis” of metronormativity, and Herring even goes so far as to say that there exists a “hierarchized assumption that a metropolitan-identified queer will always be more dynamic, more cutting-edge, more progressive, and more forward-thinking than a rural-identified queer…”\textsuperscript{122} NYC temporalizes and sediments progress as a way of life even for queers within its boundaries, and to be part of the public means to also center one’s life around this bourgeois effect of American modernity. In these terms, NYC enforces what Judith Butler calls a “social temporality,” a frame in which subjects exert their agency through a cultural intelligibility “that renders the…self culturally ‘coherent.’”\textsuperscript{123} Temporal enactments are best understood as performances because any subject can feasibly “pass” temporally if their performance of self aligns with the demands of any given social time structure.

Of course, problems abound from this trend. The public’s temporality within a NYC setting as I have described it thus far privileges the futurity of a heteronormative life cycle and is hyper-realized in a space of accelerated urbanism.\textsuperscript{124} In a patriarchal American culture where the expectations of heteroreproductive futurity have derogated queers into a position against the timing of the public, a queer can never truly be in tempo with the public’s emphasis on futurism because the queer’s legacy is not regenerated through the practice of reproduction.\textsuperscript{125} Considering Shilts’ narration, McFarlane and those for whom he acts as caretaker for live outside the parameters of the public’s temporality. As such, McFarlane and fellow queers are left to their

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\textsuperscript{121} Halberstam, \textit{In a Queer Time}, 36. \\
\textsuperscript{122} Herring, \textit{Another Country}, 16. \\
\textsuperscript{123} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 179. \\
\textsuperscript{124} Jeffrey A. Bennett argues that this temporal forwardness is created rhetorically, stating: “Unlike many societies, Americans are predisposed to a discourse that pushes us forward at all costs. Progress remains our most values ‘God-term’…” See: Jeffrey A. Bennett, “A Stitch in Time: Public Emotionality and the Repertoire of Citizenship” in \textit{Remembering the AIDS Quilt}, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011): 148. \\
\textsuperscript{125} Edelman, \textit{No Future}, 2.
\end{flushleft}
own devices when it comes to the impact of AIDS, which also does not fit within the temporal structure of NYC society at the time.

Exerting its force in correspondence with the public’s temporal life span is the prominence of a new temporality enacted via the introduction of HIV/AIDS into the public sphere. AIDS time, as I will call it throughout this chapter, develops in tandem with the metronormative standards of NYC where queer subjects were subjected by the media and everyday public discourse as always vulnerable and at risk of eventual diagnosis. In temporal terms, AIDS times dictates the life span of queers as always already dead subjects with no productive contributions to the heteronormativity of public futurism. Queers performed an AIDS temporality in their everyday avoidance of the disease, and to some degree, still do so to this day. Thus, the legacy of AIDS time is enduring and trans-temporal. It writes itself on the most vulnerable of bodies, and compresses them into a culture of risk preceded by a lineage of feared inevitability. On the topic of AIDS prevention programs and the cultural collateral of a negative status after the first wave, David Román writes, “The cultural logic of inevitability, in other words, begins to define what it means to be HIV-negative. Within this system, HIV-negativity is considered a tentative status or a temporal condition located on a trajectory leading to eventual seroconversion.”126 AIDS time operates like a death drive. It marks the turn toward unavoidable death in a public sphere where queers, particularly gay men in the early to mid 1980s, were subjected to the timing of AIDS because they could never perform the timing of the public.

Moreover, metropolitan queers in NYC at the time evolved as prime suspects for carrying and spreading the virus through careless promiscuity. During the AIDS crisis, NYC’s sphere of

urbanism also became mythologized as, amongst other things, the original site of AIDS and its emergence. As Cindy Patton describes, NYC, along with San Francisco and Los Angeles, was one of the first three U.S. “epicenters” where gay men were largely affected by its spread.\textsuperscript{127} In Shilts’ illustration of McFarlane, McFarlane can be seen as beginning a race against AIDS time since it is enlarged and perpetuated by the temporal priorities of the homophobic public that primarily ignored the crisis during its first years. Patton observes that media representation of AIDS tended to individuate the crisis as a personal dilemma by inscribing “a rigid role structure which constructed ‘victims,’ ‘experts,’ and ‘volunteers,’ as the dramatis personae in its story of AIDS.”\textsuperscript{128} Clearly, in this narratological description, Patton pinpoints the ways in which people like McFarlane are depicted as volunteers in a heroic tale where victims are always those AIDS positive. This description also highlights the ways that this narrative is juxtaposed as exclusive from the inner-working of the public sphere because it is always dictated by an AIDS temporality differentiated from the public’s timing.

Again, Shilts’ version, unlike most others, is peculiar in that it fails to include the fact that McFarlane was a southerner who happened to find himself in NYC at the very moment AIDS made its first appearance in the city. This version of the story is important because it sets McFarlane even further apart from a public sphere he already did not belong. In every obituary printed after his 2009 suicide, McFarlane is painted as the man best known for his “sweet southern…drawl” and/or as the “tough-talking Southerner who laced his sentences with profanity.”\textsuperscript{129} Similarly, in a statement released by his family after his death, those who knew

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 20.
McFarlane best agreed, “To know Rodger was to love an irreverent, wise-cracking Southerner who hardly completed a sentence that didn’t include some kind of four-letter expletive.” In his recently released memoir, Kevin Sessums writes, “Rodger was a Southern sissy like me…He was six feet seven inches tall and took up more space in the world with his larger-than-life humor and social activism.” These illustrations of McFarlane emphasize his southern identity as a integral and noticeable component of his corporeal and embodied existence. As I explained in the introduction of this project, the image of a young queer southerner who migrated from his homeland to NYC in the early 1980s amid a climate of rapid spread is romantic in its evocation of an epistemological coming out story that works spatially. That is, his queer identity is not intelligible until it is predicated on both its differentiation from both the homophobic public sphere and the metronormative culture of NYC inhospitable to the likes of southern folk. In this way, McFarlane’s southerness is unveiled as a queerness against the grain of NYC culture. The distinctions between the American North/South, straight/queer, and public temporality/AIDS time render themselves as foundational demarcations upon which MacFarlane (and many others like him at the time) was forced to traverse in his everyday staging of self. With each of these dichotomous oppositions, McFarlane finds himself in the latter position against the privilege of the public sphere’s social and cultural priorities. In the following sections, I attempt to demonstrate the ways McFarlane’s activism counters these binaries through a queer worldmaking unique to his southern identity.

The GMHC Hotline as a Counterpublic Performance

“Hi, Bill? – Hi, this is Rodger McFarlane from the Gay Men’s Health Crisis…Hi, what can I do for you?” McFarlane’s tone is soft. His demeanor is not crass like the narratives told in his obituary. I notice he does not seem as outwardly determined like Shilts’ characterization would lead some to believe. Instead McFarlane is calm, cool, collected, and seemingly comfortable in his position as the first ever hotline operator for any HIV/AIDS organization. If there anything bothering McFarlane about the crisis at hand, he certainly does not make this apparent. Using archival footage still viewable on YouTube today, I watch McFarlane as he performs the task – telephone to ear – that would make him a vanguard in the realm of gay activism. While I sit at my computer, almost thirty years separated from McFarlane in temporal terms and nearly two hundred and fifty miles from NYC where this all originally took place, I remove my archival lens for a moment. I find that I am too immersed in the process to even make sense of what is happening anymore. I begin pondering if McFarlane is the right choice to include in this project, and whether I should remove him altogether. Is McFarlane really backward or am I shackling him to my own theoretical priorities? How do I reconcile this tension between his historical body and my present liveness? Can I consume his repertoire without cannibalizing him in the process? Nothing feels certain and I am troubled.

I think back to my time in a Rhetorical Criticism seminar wherein my advisor taught us the value of self-reflexivity in a discipline traditionally too lax about the role of positionality in critique. I begin to doubt that my very typing of these words, my own admittance (my own guilt) of never knowing McFarlane, can ever truly capture the responsibility I have in tending to him in

134 Ibid.
this project. Feeling selfish and grossly self-centered, I look back at my computer screen. The 
clip is paused and so is time. McFarlane is unreachable. Our bodies are disengaged as the 
moments pass. The clock ticks. My heart beats in front of the frozen image on the screen. 
Knowing I have only a few months before this project is due, I hold onto my uncertainty like a 
small child reaching for a warm hand and hit play. “Write...keep writing. Let the archive speak. 
Acknowledge the exigency of temporal disconnect and just keep moving.”

By taking calls and insisting on survival, McFarlane enacts a resistance against the ignorance 
of the public sphere. This resistance penetrates socially, culturally, affectively, at the 
institutional, and as I will continue to discuss, at the temporal level. McFarlane’s performance at 
the hotline works to form an enclave and later, a counterpublic, of gay men fighting against the 
impingements of AIDS time via the counter-performance that conflicts with the social 
preferences of the public sphere. This section aims to outline the various ways McFarlane’s 
embodiment of leadership lends itself to a specific type of queer worldmaking against the 
normativity of the public sphere. Moreover, this section identifies and explicates the third 
temporality of this chapter, the counterpublic’s temporality, and how it was cultivated despite the 
dominance of the public sphere’s manifestation in NYC.

In the clip I have described, McFarlane is seen in the incipient days of the GMHC. He uses 
his own home telephone in his personal NYC apartment to provide counseling and support to 
gay men newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Through these activist efforts, McFarlane 
undoubtedly cultivated a social group who worked with very specific interests in mind, 
specifically the desire to provide marginalized subjects newly infected with a mysterious disease 
means of support via the hotline. Using their voices, the GMHC collective connected other gay 
men into their network. In the clip I am referencing, McFarlane offers advice on appropriate
hospitals, doctors, and other medical issues to an unknown man named Bill. McFarlane’s activist work evidently entailed delivering information to those newly affected so that, “People with AIDS can use the information provided by these activists and decide on a personal level whether a given clinical trial, or treatment for that matter, is appropriate for them.”

While the GMHC certainly did not form on a mass scale and though McFarlane’s actions were not necessarily always visible in public, he did offer a service to individuals who were presumably excluded from a broader heteronormative social economy. Perhaps the GMHC developed under McFarlane as a “weak public,” per Fraser’s definition, because their “deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not encompass decision making.” In other words, the GMHC was “weak” because it did not necessarily seek to change laws or public policy. Rather, the GMHC initially functioned as an activist public cultivated with the intention to provide resources for survival. For the GMHC at the time, becoming a “strong public” that did influence decision making would not have necessarily been a foreseeable option when people were dying from a disease that was ravaging LGBTQ peoples faster than any one law could have remedied at the time.

Of course, later groups like ACT UP would demand this kind of action.

For the GMHC, their main priority was the development of a public network that could guarantee support for a community ravaged by the horrors of a never-before-seen virus. At its

136 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 134.
134.
137 Ibid.
138 This is exemplified by Larry Mass’ statement, “…the GMHC became all about people doing what they could in the absence of certainty as to what was exactly needed.” For more on the first days of the GMHC, see: Lawrence D. Mass, “Pioneers who Began as Volunteers in the AIDS Epidemic,” Gay Men’s Health Crisis, 2 June 2011, accessed on 15 Mar. 2016 http://www.gmhc.org/news-and-events/press-releases/pioneers-who-began-as-volunteers-in-the-aids-epidemic-by-larry-mass-md
surface, the GMHC may appear to not only be a weak public but also an enclave. As Fraser contends, groups modeled according to identity politics actually encourage separatism because they prioritize notions of “authenticity” and group identification while also decentralizing the group’s power to represent their cause for change. As a result, enclaves form in total opposition to other publics with heightened emphasis on the identity of the enclave’s members. Particularly with the intimacy provided by McFarlane through the activist act of a phone call, the GMHC could certainly be viewed as merely an enclave with no public influence. And of course, like all publics, the GMHC was exclusionary and its queerness did not guarantee complete liberation since its very name implies a service created for men therefore affirming the patriarchal structure of the group. As years went on, however, the GMHC did set its priorities on making policy change guaranteeing its transformation into a strong public that was inclusive of all gender identities.

For this reason, it should be made clear that enclaves – particularly queer ones – are ripe with the potential to transform into stronger publics. However, one must consider the constraints that each enclave faces on a case-by-case basis. The GMHC, for example, simply was not equipped to begin making policy demands, especially when considering the fact that little was known about HIV/AIDS at the time and that the development of a “strong” LGBTQ-identifying public at the time had yet to be seen. In addition to the fact that the group’s potential for networking was limited to one man’s idea to begin a hotline out of his own home, it becomes

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140 It should be noted that women were also involved as telephone operators in the GMHC initial days.
141 As I will mention in the next few pages of this essay, the GMHC currently services a diverse population of genders and racial minorities. This is due to the fact that white gay men are no longer the main demographic for HIV/AIDS-positive people.
abundantly clear that the group’s own queerness emerged as a result of their disavowal of current social conditions as agents desiring to cultivate a collective.

Furthermore, the queerness of the GMHC and its leadership by McFarlane is a question of rhetorical agency. All considered, the GMHC works as an example of a queer counterpublic because it does not refuse its own queerness through the exertion of rhetorical agency to provide support and solidarity for those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the first years. The GMHC used its queerness as a point of commonality to cultivate a public network of activists and marginalized subjects in dire need of counsel. According to Erin J. Rand’s queer theory of rhetorical agency, “Queerness appears as the general economy of undecidability from which agency emerges; as one modality of agency…” and that, “rhetorical agency has queerness as its very possibility” as that which is deferred to avoid the risk of unpredictability. If rhetoric is the discursive or even material consequence of the enactment of rhetorical agency, then the potentiality that compels a rhetoric to existence is the queerness that Rand conceptualizes. It only just so happens that the organization was founded as a resource for those who claimed a queer sexual identity. The queerness I am identifying here is one that only appears due to an enactment of rhetorical agency that defies the predictability that governs all rhetorical action. In this manner, the queerness of the GMHC emerges against the grain of an enormously heteronormative politic engrained in the ideology of American social life because, as a worldmaking project, the GMHC must “contend with civilizing practices in whose name struggles for political recognition and dignity are…waged.”

The counterpublic’s temporality thus appears as a timing against this heteronormativity of the public sphere with McFarlane as its primary agent. The main challenge for McFarlane at this point was convincing gay men facing a double stigma – both the shame associated with exhibitions of same-sex desire and the scarlet letter of testing positive for HIV/AIDS – to call into the hotline given the fact that the temporality of the public sphere did not allow for these subjects to fully express their subjectivity publically without scrutiny. McFarlane found a way to “navigate an additional web of stigmatizing discourses that frame the infected body as morally polluted, haunted by impending death, and either exiled from the realm of the sexual or cast as sexually lethal.” In the footage of McFarlane taking calls for GMHC, Bill (the caller) is surprised by McFarlane’s generosity in giving information and advice. McFarlane tells Bill that “there are a lot of sick guys out there” and that he is only doing his part to help. The southern eloquence and natural hospitality are present in McFarlane’s role as activist and caretaker. In this moment, the semblances of a counterpublic are made apparent insofar as the survival of Bill clashes with the political goals of the homophobic public sphere. McFarlane uses his southernness as a contact point by which those needing information about HIV/AIDS can join him in a collective queer temporal performance of resistance.

Furthermore, Bill’s survival and connection to a network of other survivors helped by activists like McFarlane culminates in a performance of counterpublicity. Because their efforts afforded those with AIDS at the time to survive and thus enabled them more opportunities to quite literally live in public, the counterpublic performance of the GMHC resisted the death drive of AIDS time and the way it was supported by the temporality of the public sphere. The performance in its totality, according to Dustin Bradley Goltz’s reading of queer time’s

capability as a mechanism for survival, exposed “the underlying substance that problematizes the heteronormative tragedy – an exposure that refuses the perfection of straight lives, straight relations, and straight futures.”145 With each phone call and every connection made, McFarlane revealed the contradictions of a straight future by demonstrating that a queer future does indeed exist and that it is entirely possible through the evocation of a fight against AIDS rather than a surrender to its unyielding force. The counterpublic performance of the GMHC led to a reimagining of the public sphere as a site where even queer populations have a say in their own future by the very virtue of their survival and living to partake in it. As I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, McFarlane’s southern identity made this temporal clash possible according to a regionalism present in his leadership as it is portrayed in The Normal Heart.

**Backward Traversals in The Normal Heart**

I feel no shame in admitting that I love The Normal Heart. I remember the tears swelling in my eyes as I watched the for-television movie in my dorm room the summer before I left for graduate school. At the time, I had no idea it based on an iconic play. I sure as hell could not tell you who Larry Kramer was or that the story was autobiographical. Nonetheless, this section of the chapter if my own selfish attempt at archiving an object I consider quite pleasurable. It is something I like. I have no basis for this claim, but I could almost bet that many archivists favor the objects they find most interesting or desirable.

As someone interested in queer politics, though, I cannot help but express my appreciation for the play with a healthy dose of apprehension. The cantankerous opinions voiced by Kramer could certainly divide a room. In addition, the GMHC itself is not everyone’s cup of tea. Indeed, like all activist organizations, the GMHC is not without its troublesome tendencies.

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The politics of the GMHC even since its initial conception were always narrowly focused and left little room for diversity. As stated by an anonymous former board member, the first members of the GMHC, including Kramer, were “professional white gay men” who sought to serve mainly “wealthy white gay men suffering from AIDS.” While this is one unnamed opinion, it is certainly telling that in a recent Advocate profile of the current GMHC housed in a cushy building next to the Associate Press, the author highlights that the majority of people for whom the organization serves today are racial minorities and/or women, peoples who were left behind by a white gay elite who focused their attention on new political frontiers in the 2000s, such as gay marriage.

During its first years particularly after the departure of Larry Kramer, the GMHC was unapologetically exclusionary and inhospitable to the radical politics of other queer groups at the time. According to Maxine Wolfe, one of the founders of ACT UP, the GMHC would not have ever come to existence if not for the work of the mainly white and professional male Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), a group that worked to pass a basic gay rights bill in NYC throughout the 1970s. Wolfe further explains:

Basically they became part of the Democratic Party organization, whether formally or informally, and attempted to orchestrate passage of bills behind the scenes. At the same time, in the gay male mainstream, "the community," certain professional, business, and religious groups formed. While those organizations and networks were totally reformist,

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147 Ibid. As early as 1999, members and supporters of the GMHC were showing signs of frustration with the fact that white gay men were no longer the face of the HIV/AIDS. Marty Rosen writes, "The idea of embracing women and minorities does not sit well with some gay white clients, who want the organization to chase off the drug addicts and newly released prison inmates who make them uneasy and scare off well-heeled donors. 'They don't have the manners, and they're uncouth,' said one HIV-positive client. His solution: 'Put the 'gay' back in GMHC.'” See: Marty Rosen, “Gay Mutiny in AIDS Group, Leader Makes Early Missteps,” New York Daily News, 6 June 1999, accessed 15 Mar. 2016, http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/gays-mutiny-aids-group-leader-early-missteps-article-1.829067

if political at all, they enabled the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) to form in the early 1980s. There was a new basis to get money, to know where people were, to create an infrastructure. That was not there before. But for a lot of that period, from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, that is what gay men were doing.\footnote{Wolfe, “This is About People Dying,” 427. Sarah Schulman reiterates this version of the story in her collection of essays My American History. See: Sarah Schulman, My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years (New York: Routledge, 1994): 94.}

Wolfe goes on to detail the fact that members of the GMHC began to become frustrated by the fact that the GMHC sought to humanize and thus de-politicize the plight of American gay men in lieu of dismantling the system that excluded them in the first place.\footnote{Wolfe, “This is About People Dying,” 427.} Writing almost a decade after the GMHC’s first years, Michael Warner bemoans, “There is no Queer Men’s Health Crisis… and for good reason. The differences between these political strategies are not simply strategic, because each posture toward the state and the public sphere has strong links with a different rhetoric of identity and sexuality.”\footnote{Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2005): 212.} For Warner, and for many others engaged in queer politics at the time, the GMHC simply was not queer enough because of its inability to demand more revolutionary changes for all queer people being disenfranchised by AIDS. Activist and reporter Sarah Schulman, for example, notes that the GMHC even five years into the epidemic was “not yet fully perceived as a major representative [organization] for the lesbian and gay community.”\footnote{Schulman, My American History, 94.} Larry Kramer was also famously frustrated by the first years of the GMHC and very early on saw the group he originally founded out of his own anger slowly diminishing into a wasteland of gay apologetics for the state. In his 1985 play The Normal Heart, Kramer details his dis-allegiance with the group he started, and audiences glean a view of McFarlane that adds to the surplus of narrative accounts of his life as a GMHC trailblazer.
McFarlane finds his way in Kramer’s drama as the character Tommy Boatwright. In scene 5, audiences are introduced to Boatwright as a “Southerner in his late twenties.” He, Mickey, Bruce, and Ned (all of the characters are based off real GMHC activists; Kramer is represented by Ned) converse freely and colloquially describe the discriminations of their group. Mickey reminds the group that Stonewall “was won by transvestites,” and Bruce retorts that he has “nothing in common with those guys, girls, whatever you call them.” Mickey later scoffs back, and the next exchange is quite telling of the politics of the GMHC at the time:

MICKEY. I'm worried this organization might only attract white bread and middle-class. We need blacks . . .
TOMMY. Right on!
MICKEY. …and…how do you feel about Lesbians?
BRUCE. I don’t believe in Lesbians.
MICKEY. I wonder what they're going to think about all this? If past history is any guide, there’s never been much support by either half of us for the other…

In this short exchange, audiences bear witness to an enclave of fictionalized gay men self-reflexively commenting upon the contradictory nature of the queer counterpublic they seek to establish. The GMHC as it is represented here makes no excuse for its primary investment in white gay male subjects. One might feel skeptical about even entertaining the possibility of counter-politics in a group so admittedly normative in their priorities. But as Michael Warner notes, “Publics are queer creatures.” To automatically dismiss Kramer’s description of the GMHC would be to diminish the worldmaking potential contained within the collective during its first years, especially when one considers the enormous burden of AIDS and the public sphere’s antipathy to even white queer bodies. As a queer creature itself, in a Warner-ian sense, the GMHC was born out of the wildness of uncertainty that existed in the time period.

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154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., 7
before his writings on publics and counterpublics, Warner also stated, “Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer.”\textsuperscript{156} In more ways than one, this scene can be read situated within its historical circumstance given the public sphere’s intersectional homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism. These constraints are reflected even within this scene of the play, and each of the characters must perform a queer identity with these problematics at play. A hasty denial of this scene’s queer potential because of its reliance on racism and misogyny would be a rash refusal to consider the way the public sphere shapes even the everyday ideology of the subaltern.

Alleviating this tension, the characterization of Boatwright seems to provide the right amount of comedic relief for this scene. Not only does Boatwright outwardly support Mickey’s critique of the whiteness of the GMHC but Boatwright also staunchly keeps the goals of the group in focus. Upon meeting Bruce for the first time, Boatwright introduces himself as a “Southern bitch.” Boatwright has little time for Bruce’s pessimism stating, “There are going to be a lot of scared people out there needing someplace to call for information. I’d be interested in setting up some kind of telephone hotline.”\textsuperscript{157} Boatwright’s abrupt and perhaps even impatient performance can be understood best as a tactical repertoire. Defined by Jeffrey Bennett and Isaac West, a tactical repertoire, is “the intentional reworking of signs and symbols, including bodies, to publicly address and thus to constitute a collective identity to motivate them to action.”\textsuperscript{158} The “them” here is the fictionalized version of the GMHC, and Boatwright thus utilizes his own southern performance as a tactical repertoire toward the development of the counterpublic. In


\textsuperscript{157} Kramer, \textit{Normal Heart}, 40.

\textsuperscript{158} Jeffrey Bennett and Isaac West, “‘United We Stand, Divided We Fall’: AIDS, Armorettes, and the Tactical Repertoires of Drag” \textit{Southern Communication Journal} 74, no. 3 (2009): 305.
tandem with the counter-temporality of the public itself, Boatwright’s southern identity marks the individuated performance of a body where the resistant efforts of the GMHC are centered. In this way, the performance of Boatwright in the play serves to “rework dominant and individuating narratives of HIV/AIDS to encourage communal responses in an otherwise unresponsive environment.”[159] Indeed, as each of the characters come together with collective goals in mind, the enclave in this scene is strengthened into the counterpublic we find by the end of the play.

Additionally, the individual performance of Boatwright demonstrates the way singular resistances can forge new worlds in a public sphere otherwise inhospitable to a person’s queerness. In a public sphere where “the fatality of AIDS is imagined as inevitable, just a matter of time,” the temporality of the southerner resists the myth of inevitability by moving backward against it.[160] Indeed, the narrative structure of the play itself reflects the inclinations of representations of AIDS positive bodies that circulated within NYC in the early 1980s, which “[created] a temporalization of loss—a chronology—that establishes the discursive space for the formula ‘HIV-positive = AIDS = Death,’” in the words of Gust A. Yep.[161] The character Boatwright is shown to struggle against this tendency when he appears in a meeting with a representative with the mayor of NYC and asserts, “We’re now fielding over five hundred calls a week on our emergency hot line, people everywhere are desperate for information, which, quite frankly, the city should be providing but isn’t.”[162] To take matters into his own hands despite an apathetic public sphere and an even more careless state, Boatwright embodies a performance of

[159] Ibid.
activism that regresses backward against the thrust of AIDS time toward a new counterpublic temporality instated by his efforts with the group.

Though strong and forthright in this particular scene, Boatwright’s southernness is portrayed in a different light in the 2014 HBO cinematic remake of the film. Soon after his establishment of the hotline, Boatwright encounters a distraught woman named Estelle (one of the two women with speaking roles featured in the film, I might add). In between sobs, she declares, “Dammit, I wanna do something. Even though all my lesbian friends say, ‘What have you guys ever done for us?’ But I don’t care.”\(^{163}\) Immediately in Estelle’s vocal register, she reaffirms that the political priorities of gay men and lesbians at the time were in tension if not completely disconnected in most cases. And although a fictional portrayal, she supports the cultural memorialization of the GMHC as a group centered on the welfare of gay men.

Boatwright, in contrast to Estelle’s hysterical outpour of emotion, remains calm and collected much like the video of McFarlane taking calls that I viewed earlier. Boatwright reaches out for Estelle’s hands and they embrace. His southern disposition is not brash; he is gentle. It is as if he is an expert in the art of comforting the anguished. For the rest of the film, we watch as Boatwright and Estelle together take on responsibilities as members of the GMHC. A coalitional moment to be sure, Boatwright embraces Estelle – like other members of the GMHC counterpublic – as integral moving components of a backward temporal style that seeks to resist AIDS time and its cyclical force within a homophobic public sphere.

But what does it mean to do backwardness in public? What does backwardness indicate, and how does it relate to McFarlane’s vis-à-vis Boatwright’s queerness? When examining Boatwright as he is written and played out on stage in *The Normal Heart*, his regional identity is

\(^{163}\) *The Normal Heart*, directed by Ryan Murphy (2014; HBO Home Video, 2014), Amazon Video Instant Stream.
unnecessary. In the made-for-television movie mentioned earlier, Jim Parsons, a native Texan, plays Boatwright in a richly southern portrayal. His vocal accent is pronounced emblematizing a swagger that is as bitchy as it is raw as it is compassionate by the film’s denouement.

Boatwright’s performance, “ties to a temporal ‘backwardness,’ most prominently expressed in the caricature of the U.S. South as a frozen region outdated by supposedly more progressive spaces across the nation…”\textsuperscript{164} As Herring further remarks, “Likewise, such southern ‘backwardness’ also links to temporal norms that structure queer metronormativity in the form of trendy fashions or being in the know.”\textsuperscript{165} Boatwright’s performance in the play operates as a backwardness, too. This backwardness is a resistant temporal regression against the temporality of the public sphere and AIDS time. It is also a signifier of Boatwright’s southern identity in a metronormative NYC. McFarlane’s southernness thus is mythologized through the character of Boatwright as unique contributor to the cultivation of the GMHC in its initial years. As I have explained throughout this section of the chapter, his backwardness is a worldmaking against the oppressions of public progress. Instead it is a queering of progression which takes shape as a regressive resistance. Backwardness collides with the public’s temporality, and adds up to in the creation of a new counterpublic. The GMHC, riddled with problems of its own, emerges imperfectly yet tactically as a product of the southerner’s backward traversal in the city.

Afterthoughts

In 1998 Rodger McFarlane published his first and final book. The lengthy \textit{The Complete Bedside Companion: A No-Nonsense Guide to Caring for the Seriously Ill} drew on McFarlane’s experiences as a caretaker and covered a range of topics including how to give an ailing loved

\textsuperscript{164} Herring, \textit{Another Country}, 114.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
one a “bed bath” and planning a funeral for a terminally ill patient.\textsuperscript{166} The book attests to McFarlane’s unwavering desire to help others. The chapter on “Caring for Someone with AIDS/HIV” lasts only fifteen pages, and as the book’s title implies, it is a no-nonsense guide. McFarlane does not rely on his own personal opinions or investments. His advice is straightforward and pointed with the exception of a small anecdote that finds itself in the form of a paragraph mid-way through the third page. He writes plainly about the spring of 1981 and the \textit{New York Times} article on “gay cancer.”\textsuperscript{167} He briefly mentions his bewilderment about the death of gay men he knew during the first year, his desire to help, and his first acclimation to Larry Kramer and later the GMHC.\textsuperscript{168} What is clear from this passage is that McFarlane himself could care less about “the story” of his involvement with AIDS activism. He downplays his legendary status in exchange for offering humble, experienced advice. McFarlane acknowledges the inevitability of AIDS but does not bother to over analyze it or lament the loss of a utopic gay cultural heritage that Larry Kramer has famously longed. McFarlane’s activism underwrites these pages, but he does not reveal it. His bereavement is hidden as well.

Yet in narratives and portrayals of his life, McFarlane is transformed into a fanatical and passionate caricature. So what is it about the legends that revolve around McFarlane’s public activism that conjure such emotive responses to his life? Why do McFarlane’s efforts during the first wave of the AIDS crisis get forecasted as an unabashedly resistant? Is this our way of mourning the loss of McFarlane? Yep writes that “mourning and activism are more intertwined than opposed. Just as mourning takes on many forms-individual and collective, public and private-so does activism-social, cultural, political, and academic, to name a few. Together they

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 414.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 414-15.
can generate energy for continuing political work.”

Perhaps in our mourning of McFarlane, we reignite an activist legacy that he himself emblazoned made upon a U.S. public sphere which has changed drastically since his founding of the GMHC hotline. Maybe this is the legacy of McFarlane himself. The reinvigoration of a public activism that was radical at its time may be activated upon our evocation of McFarlane’s mythos.

However, we must be careful in how we invite McFarlane back into the here and now. For, indeed, there is a risk that through our longing for McFarlane’s southern hospitality and his opposition to the timing of a now distant formation of the public sphere might invite the “resuscitation” a subject position we would rather not reproduce. Rand argues that divulging in narratives like those of McFarlane’s contains the potential of re-inscribing a vexed history in the present. More specifically, Rand infers that the production of a gay male subject position through the spectacle of mourning AIDS only re-instates this subjectivity within our contemporary moment. Rand claims, “It is this resuscitation of the mourned subject position – a position that confers social recognition and acceptance, perhaps, but has not in the past and will not in the future lead to progressive shifts in national discourses about AIDS or sexuality…”

This subject is an ever-reproducible articulation of the gay man corporealized by a public sphere with whom he never made full contact with until the emergence of AIDS. Mourning McFarlane thus risks this re-inscription and fetishization of an oppressed subject whose agency is dependent upon a precarious relationship to the public sphere. This taxing subject is one in dire need of evolution rather than regurgitation.

171 Ibid., 240-41.
172 Ibid., 253.
Even in the writing and distribution of this chapter there remains a risk of re-inviting a period where the “traumatic effect of American culture” had and continues to have a lasting impression on the queer body’s relationality to AIDS. Marita Sturken tells us, “Indeed, the cultural memory of AIDS is being produced through a clash of meanings,” and Sturken’s assessment compels us to consider the myriad of ways in which circulating memories of AIDS within the public sphere perpetuates harmful myths invented by those who profited from AIDS before it was the all but curable pandemic we know today. Indeed, in a moment when HIV/AIDS cases in the U.S. are on the rise and at morbid rates in the South, the mythos of McFarlane serves as a stark reminder that not much has changed since AIDS’ initial development. LGBTQ people are still routinely derogated in innumerable ways in a public sphere supposedly well-acclimated to these non-normative bodies and divergent ways of life. Anti-bullying laws, same-sex parenting, Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools, and RuPaul’s Drag Race have not thwarted the risk of HIV/AIDS and the temporality that came with it. There is still no cure. It is still a site of violent risk management for the most vulnerable of populations, including queers, African-Americans, women, and low-income communities. In a public sphere where consensus now allows for gays and lesbians to marry one another, the expectation to (re)produce commodities and children alike has absorbed the normative queer into the homonormative fold of neoliberal subject production. Therefore, the temporality of the public and AIDS time are still prevalent rhetorical constructions we all face in one way or another. As the story of McFarlane hopefully proves, resistances are always possible and necessary. In a culture where timing is everything, there is no better time for performances of counterpublicity than in our accelerated present.

CHAPTER THREE
HOW TO BE BACKWARD IN AN EPIDEMIC: THE SOUTHERNERS’ FIGHT AGAINST AIDS AND HOMOPHOBIA

In the book that inspired the title of this chapter, Paula A. Treichler’s foundational *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*, the author rigorously details how AIDS and its epistemological uptake in various public cultures manifests according to surrounding discourses – cultural, medical, scientific, and always social – that produce a wide range of meanings attached to the signifier “AIDS.” According to Treichler, the “truth” of AIDS arrives on the condition of its semantic proliferation as an “epidemic of signification,” an innately rhetorical spread of denotations and connotations that parallel the proliferation of the virus itself (original emphasis). Nearly twenty years since its publication, this critical intervention still resonates with a United States public sphere wherein AIDS and its subsequent meanings flourish within disparate cultural groupings at varying rates and with different magnitudes and consequences.

For example, in affluent white LGBTQ communities at present, especially those in cities where access to health centers and premiere medical institutions is easily obtained, the HIV/AIDS epidemic might seem like a distant threat of the past. In personal conversations with people of my own age (early 20s), race (white), and class status (working; lower-to-middle), I have found that many if not most of these individuals do not actively think about HIV/AIDS when engaging in sexual acts. This could be due to the proliferation of curatives, which have advanced and simultaneously reduced the stigma around the disease. Or, more plausibly, it could be our generational distance from the epidemic. While in other LGBTQ cultural groups, say

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those in the southern United States where HIV/AIDS continues to affect non-heterosexuals and African-Americans at high and steady rates, the risk of AIDS might still seem to be a very material concern. I can also personally attest to this assumption given my upbringing in lower-class southern areas. In both cases, the language and thus meanings around AIDS circulate differently and this variance comes to matter in many important ways. Throughout this chapter, I continue to explore the cultural production of southernness during the first decade of AIDS in NYC and inquire about the productive possibilities of AIDS activism centered around the performance of a region.

This chapter also endeavors to understand the temporal circulation of these meanings of AIDS, as they skip, hop, and jump across time and traverse the territory of generation. As an intergenerational phenomenon, this chapter asks how AIDS is written on queer time itself, by detailing, in the continued vein of Treichler, the “structural and cultural characteristics that promote the generation of meanings,” and how such a timing comes to dictate the lifespan of those who could test positive today.¹⁷⁵ In an increasingly globalized society where everyone is told they are at risk, this chapter returns to the queerness of AIDS in the United States, and considers the epistemic – as well as temporal – contrasts that separate the North and the South and how these differences are rendered intelligible around discourses of AIDS.

Focusing on my lived experience as a phenomenological case study, this chapter details my encounter with queer archival materials at the LGBT Community Center (“The Center”) National Archive in NYC. Blurring the boundary between ethnographic and archival research, I narrate my embodied involvement with The Southerner Records, ephemera leftover from a short-lived organization that met at the The Center between the years of 1990-1992 and who used their

¹⁷⁵ Treichler, Epidemic, 316.
southern heritage as a common bond for community building and AIDS activism. Simultaneously, I make reference to my own positionality and memory as a person who identifies as a southerner in order to link my own felt experiences in the present with the archive as a testimonial assemblage of the past. In doing so, I reveal a temporal simultaneity that I contend indicates the backwardness of the archive as an inventional resource for marginalized communities in an era of neoliberal modernity. Toward this end, I delineate how these archival materials and myself collectively perform a temporality that disrupts normative notions of queer cultural memory. Backwardness, here, comes to represent both a marker of southern regional culture and a location in time.

As I will report in the pages to come, The Southerners Records – as an articulated account of AIDS activism in the past – cannot necessarily be easily recovered and celebrated as a sign of the good gay past. The archive is irretrievably backward, evoking the words of Heather Love, and cannot be used to fulfill “the need to turn the difficulties of gay, lesbian, and transgender history to good political use in the present,” a desire otherwise reserved for queer historians eager to recover and celebrate the consigned secrets of LGBTQ life no matter how negative. Feeling backward, for Love, results after contacting the bad affects of queer history, those moments in time that cannot be placed on a linear time continuum of gay progress. Demonstrating Love’s argument, I use my own backward feelings as a point of contact for gauging the way southerners are often described as backward against time in a United States culture obsessed with the future, or what Rebecca Schneider has called “a nation of futurity.”

For queer southerners especially, backwardness writes itself onto bodies regionally and sexually,

176 Love, Feeling Backward, 104.
and becomes a useful analytic for gauging the anti-futuristic compulsions of queer southern performances.

Continuing the thematic trajectory of this project as a whole, in this chapter I account for this so-called backwardness on three planes, 1) the backwardness of the archive itself, 2) my own backwardness, and 3) the backwardness that unfolds in the present in my immersion in the archive. Thus, I argue that The Southerners Records is a “backward archive,” or a troublesome historical collection that resists the homonormative impulse for progress, and instead, generates a backward temporal performance on the part of the archivists who come into contact with it in the present vexed by its presentation of a difficult queerness. In the section to come, I describe my method for approaching the archive by stressing that accounting for temporality in an archival space demands an ethnographic approach to historical documents and materials.

**Performing Archives**

In this chapter, my methodological priorities align with the field of performance studies where the boundary between theory and method is often blurred through the production of performative scholarship. In other words, when theory is practiced through performance, it often becomes homogenized within the method one is applying to a particular situation or artifact of study. D. Soyini Madison writes on the theory/method nexus in the practice of “critical ethnography,” and explains, “Critical ethnography becomes the ‘doing’ or the ‘performance’ of critical theory. It is critical theory in action.” Although I claim not to be using critical ethnography as a method (or a theory) for critically evaluating, and if necessary, intervening in an ethnographic scene, I do find Madison’s comments to have enormous implications for my overall orientation to the archive I analyze. In my encounter with the Southerners Records, my lens is trained and focused

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on discovering moments of queer temporality with attention to the strangeness of historicity’s pull on the present. I must accept that my theoretical priorities may overshadow and even conceal other just as interesting if not more exciting moments in the archive. In attempting to embody my theory, or in other words, do backwardness or do queer temporality, I am committing myself to performing within the archive and among the reportorial traces of bodies once animated or live. Therefore, my method is an ethnographic, sensory-based, and phenomenological excursion into the pastness of the present. Arbitrary boundaries between archives and repertoires are complicated, and my own body (the archivist; the performer) becomes enmeshed within the residues of historical dialogues and embodiments that overflow into the here and now.¹⁷⁹

As I hope to show, the Southerners Records oriented me in ways I never could have anticipated. I became personally attached to the documents and the once-belongings of people, including those I knew were now dead who haunted the box of ephemera. In many ways, my narration of my time with the archive resembles what Sara Ahmed has called a “queer phenomenology” or an emotional encounter with objects and things that may leave one feeling oriented and/or affected and thus spatially reinvigorated.¹⁸⁰ Ahmed describes her theory accessibly: “The point can be made quite simply: orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others. Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy or attention toward.”¹⁸¹ Using Ahmed’s assertions as a starting point, I detail how my time with the mementos and tangibles of an ephemeral activist collective left me

¹⁷⁹ See my introduction (pages 31-32) for a brief overview of the archive/repertoire distinction laid out by Diana Taylor in The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.
¹⁸¹ Ibid., 3.
oriented in particularly queer ways. On a meta-level, I also demonstrate how these orientations themselves are ephemeral, fleeting, and unsteady. What might it look like to describe ephemera in action?

A brief perusing of scholarship on queer archives throughout various disciplines in the wider humanities might leave one feeling a bit confounded since the ephemeral queer archive is seemingly everywhere yet nowhere all at once. As such, locating the ephemeral becomes a trap for queer theorists and archivists alike because once the ephemeral is preserved and recorded its transient quality is seemingly vanquished. As noted by Sara Edenheim, the ephemeral queer archive is an “oxymoron” because “archives are supposed to outlive us all, while we are supposed to outlive the ephemeral.”¹⁸² When a community-based or institutional archive captures the ephemeral, as is the case with the Southerners Records, questions regarding how to preserve the artifact’s ephemerality must be raised. As designated by José Esteban Muñoz, the ephemeral “is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself.”¹⁸³ Ephemeral artifacts are often physical remnants, leftovers, and/or traces of evidence of a prior performance, but never what actually took place. In the vein of Muñoz, ephemera located within the archive should be understood as remnants of a prior performance once a component of that performance as a whole. However, by being displaced from its original performative context and therefore being resignified within the archive, the ephemeral takes on a new performative role in tandem with the space it resides, as well as with the performers and researchers it comes into contact.

When I enter the archive as researcher, I soon become performer by virtue of my performance with the materials I engage. This performance does not end once I leave the archive. It continues even in my writing of this archival assemblage, including this chapter, and this project as a whole. The residuals of this performance may be continually re-animated and/or re-performed again upon the entering of a new body into the archive. The performance is ongoing and never complete; it is trans-temporal and it binds the bodies of those who participate, including upon you, the presumed reader. Performing with the subjects of the archive and their ephemera, I create an experimental historiography guided by the principles of ethnography and the anti-paradigms of queer studies. Switching gears between narrations of “I” and descriptions of “them” and “those,” I disturb a strict demarcation that separates past and present in a linear temporal order. This chapter imagines my body at the very sites the archive evidences, and it plays with form, genre, and method. As I will detail, being backwards in an epidemic is a resistance even if unconsciously enacted. Della Pollock writes about the resistant qualities of performance in space, “Insofar as performance is thus aligned with historicity against history, it is especially capable of disseminating cultural knowledge – of dispersing meaning in time and across difference. In this capacity, performance is increasingly understood as important site of – even a paradigmatic trope for – cultural resistance.”\(^{184}\) Indeed, the migrations of queer transplants are not merely physical. Migratory movements and disturbances also occur on the temporal, affective, and emotive levels. This chapter, like the other parts of this project, strives to resist what might otherwise have been a traditionally written history of an archival collection that refuses tradition from the outset.

Southern Bodies, Then and Now

The year is 1990. Jesse Helms, then a third-term senator of North Carolina and notorious homophobe/racist/sexist/all around bigot, makes his first speech in a re-election campaign that he would go on to eventually win. During his oratory, Helms states, “Seldom a day passes by when there's not another lawmaker coming up with some new idea which would further destroy parental authority in our land...Just think about it: homosexuals, lesbians, disgusting people marching in our streets demanding all sorts of things, including the right to marry each other and the right to adopt children. How do you like them apples?”185 This statement is one of many nefariously crafted rhetorics expounded by Helms against civil rights for non-heterosexual-identifying people in the United States during the reign of Reagan-era conservatism. Of course, just three years earlier, Helms made his mark as a leader of the Republican party with his callous response to the rising numbers of persons with HIV/AIDS across the country. He famously called people diagnosed with AIDS “perverts” and was applauded by the right wing for repeatedly voting against efforts sponsored by the Federal Centers for Disease Control to potentially reduce the spread of the epidemic.186 A true southern gentleman who also regularly opposed civil rights legislation for African-Americans and women in his home state, Helms’ legacy in the South can still be felt by the people he victimized and made vulnerable.187

The year is 1990. David Gilbert, a native of Martinsville, Virginia, walks the streets of NYC. Seven years before, he escaped what he describes as “Jerry Falwell country,” and he wants

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to form a group for people like himself, people he knows exist in the city and who desperately want to somehow serve the queer folk left behind in their pursuit of a freer life up North.\textsuperscript{188}

Gilbert posts a flyer. He wants to start an activist organization. He pastes a simple poster to a bulletin board with the title: “Southern Lesbians and Gay Men…In Exile.” The rest of the paper goes on to state:

\textit{The South is the most viciously homophobic region of America…}A new group is forming for gay and lesbian former Southerners living in the New York area. Remembering Home. Remember growing up gay in the South? Ouch. For most of us, this was painful. Gay Southerners either usually lock themselves in the closet or move away. As a result, the attitudes of people in these communities about gay men and lesbians don’t change. Gay people – especially gay kids – continue to be abused there year after year, and these areas elect politicians whose actions affects lesbians and gay men everywhere…Help us make the South a better place for gay people to live (original emphasis).\textsuperscript{189}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{southern_lesbians_and_gay_men_in_exile.png}
\caption{“Southern Lesbians and Gay Men…in Exile,” photo by author.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{188} Southern Lesbians and Gay Men…in Exile, date unknown (aprx. April-May 1990), Collection 16, Folder 9, Southerners Records, The LGBT Community Center National History Archive, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, New York City.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
In an interview with the *New York Native* published December 31, 1990, approximately seven months after the formation of the group he called “The Southerners,” Gilbert, then only twenty-nine years old, poignantly addresses the plight that people like himself faced in the southern United States at the time, a region he calls “viciously homophobic.” In this passage, Gilbert speaks about the original flyer posted advertising the group:

> Many people have moved here for business reasons or because of their lover. However, many times when we’re running to something, we’re running from something as well. Again, as I said in my flyer, many of us are here because the south is the most homophobic region in the country, and I’ll stand by that. Anyway, I had the flyer posted all over the city and began getting lots of telephone calls from people who were survivors of the south. Many people who called had horrible experiences in the south. I wanted to use the energy of those people to pull the group together.190

At this point, the group had swelled to include more than seven hundred members in its mailing list representing every southern state. Though relatively young and despite his own disdain for the traumatic homophobia he experienced in the South, Gilbert is sure to make clear that the group’s main priorities were 1) cultivating a sense of southern belonging amongst queers in NYC who may miss the comforts of a region they once called home, as well as 2) organizing in hopes of creating progressive change for queer populations still remaining in the South. Of course, the group took no time targeting enemy number one at the time, Jesse Helms.191

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The year is 2015. I walk. I concentrate my eyes on the screen of my phone. Embarrassed at the thought of someone catching sight of me using my GPS to find my way around Manhattan, I force my feet to take faster strides. I try to shield my face from blows of frigid March air, but to no avail my body stiffens with every gust. As I stroll through Greenwich Village, my phone is my only companion for these few hours on a spring break getaway. While my partner and his grandmother are off on some other adventure, I have previously-made plans to split away from our itinerary of shameless tourist-oriented activities to visit the historic LGBT Community Center located on the lower West Side.
At twenty years old, I am proud of and simultaneously startled by the fact that I am alone in NYC for the first time in my life. I grew up in the rural South, and as a kid without much experience in a city except for the occasional once-or-twice-a-year visit to the metropolitan mecca that is Dallas, my childhood fantasies revolved around my eventual move to a concrete refuge up North. I daydreamed about the image of a refined life surrounded by people more interested in coffee shops and museums than ranches and agriculture. In every sense of the word, I longed to be un-southern…citified…and definitely not backward. The traffic waits while I take my turn at the crosswalk. I continue my journey toward thirteenth street, and allow myself to blend into the blur of people walking amongst skyscrapers and hot dog stands.

I soon reach my northern star: the large rainbow flag hanging above the Center’s doorway. The historic building where Larry Kramer once formed the legendary ACT UP with a raging passion in his throat looms modestly. Its iconicity hides itself well. I face its red brick exterior and make my way inside. I reach the fourth floor archive, and take my seat at the table designed for visitors to sift through ephemeral material and random paraphernalia. The resident archivist, the same one who has been at the Center’s archive since its founding in 1990, hands me the box I requested a few weeks before for this very project. On its battered and musty face, the box bears “The Southerners Records #16” written sloppily in permanent marker. The box was donated anonymously in 1992, so I know it is relatively old, older than me anyway. I feel nervous without reason. “All in the name of research,” I think to myself as I begin rummaging.

Slowly. Carefully. I take out each manila envelope from the box. Slowly. Carefully. This seems to be the kind of performance the archive demands. I attempt to mimic the cautious behavior of a skinny white boy across from me. I do not know him but I assume he is a volunteer. I was a volunteer archivist once, too. A few years back at my undergraduate
institution, I enjoyed the rhythmic banality of dusting and carefully sorting antique papers, and found immense pleasure in scanning them into a digital repository where they will assumedly be available now and forever. Archives command temporal performances of slowness. The risk of damaging irreplaceable artifacts is too real and enough to rearrange the behaviors of researchers, workers, and everyday patrons alike.

In the archive, I feel history all around me. It suffocates. My southern body against the evidence of fellow southerners in the city. Their existence in my hands. I flip through files and attempt to understand them. I find two flyers for parties hosted by the “Southerners: Lesbians and Gay Men of New York.” One is for a “Southern Gala” for those who attended school in the South. The mission of the event is to raise money for LGBT student groups in southern schools. The other flyer boasts “Mardi Gras: Masquerade Madness,” a part hosted on February 9, 1991 for no apparent reason whatsoever. Both flyers illuminate the richness of southern culture. What is southern for those born and bred in Louisiana will inevitably by different than what is southern for those who grew up in Alabama.

I come across the initial flyer distributed by Gilbert where he describes the spatial “exile” southerners exist within. The paper describes the South as the most aggressively homophobic region in the United States, and I must admit, I am first a little offended by this write up. I know that the South, with all of its problems, is not intrinsically homophobic. I survived, after all. And while my memories of the South are not always positive, my experience was certainly not “painful.” I am nervous that this flyer strays too far from my own lived experience, and I consider ignoring it altogether. How can I possibly make sense of this in my own project?

The archive transports me temporally by unsettling my selfish reading of the document. I step back and carefully consider the time in which the page was written. Of course, in contrast to
an early 1990s-era NYC, the South may have seemed largely and irreparably repressive. Furthermore, the migration of gays and lesbians to the North then, may reflect my own experience even more than I initially thought. This might be especially true when I consider my own commonality with the piece of paper I hold. My southern hands caress the paper once crafted by other southern hands. In tactile unison, we touch across generations bonded together by our positionality in NYC, our refuge and our escape from life back home. Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young describe queer bonds as “what come into view through the isometric tension between queer world-making and world-shattering, naming a togetherness in failures to properly intersect, the social hailing named by recognition as well as radical occlusion.”192 Inseparably fragile and delicately intertwined, the archive and I attempt to connect. Together, the archive and I create a trans-temporal knowledge of migrated southern life. Held together by our difference, our inherent Otherness, I attempt “dialogue” with the document as I examine it.193 Impossible. The bodies of those who made the paper cannot speak back in the present. The archive is not enough.

However, I am determined. What good is touching the past if I cannot truly touch the past? I want to feel it. I want history to nourish me and tell me everything I need to know about myself and the future. The dizzying effects of the archive are apparent and taking over my body at rapid rates. My southernness and the southernness of The Southerner Records amalgamate and dissolve. I retreat into my backwardness and feel as if I am defeating my own purpose as a nascent rhetorical historiographer. Faltering yet unnerved, I embrace my natural disposition and I let the archive move me. I am moved. The Southerner Records are not dead objects forever

193 Madison, Critical Ethnography, 10.
frozen in time. To the contrary, I reanimate the archive, and in exchange, it reorients me into a liminal space between past and present. It allows for my submersion into a historical moment, while simultaneously ensuring I have a balanced awareness of the present moments unfolding around me. The archive and I are one. At this point, there is no turning back. The archive beckons me; and in a backward state, I surrender to its call.

The Backward Archive

The Southerners Records, like southern culture in general, are as perplexing as they are playful. I laugh aloud at an advertisement for “Gay and Lesbian Square Dancing.” These classes were apparently held on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 10:00, and featured “the only square dance club in Manhattan,” “the TIMES SQUARES.” As if the flyer noticed its own irony, the capitalization of the “Times Squares” hits like a corny joke. I unashamedly love the play of camp in the archive so far. “NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY. JUST SHOW UP,” the flyer promises. In addition, a similar event was held by the Southerners at the Community Center on October 29, 1990. “Ye-Hahh! Come dance your boots off at the Southerners’ first harvest moon kicker dance party.” I place myself in the scene evidenced by the archive. Surrounded by fellow native southerners, the dance seems like a ritual made strange by its carnivalesque celebration of southern cultural heritage in NYC. The autumn equinox has fully begun as the harvest moon manages to shimmer through the smog of Manhattan. The queerness of southern culture is in full force as folks celebrate comradery and the joys of same-sex desire in a space guarded from the homophobia lingering outside its walls. My imagination runs wild in this “silly

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195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
archive,” a term I adopt from Lauren Berlant who theorizes such an assemblage as made up of the seemingly inconsequential aspects of day-to-day communication that can be read as critiques of a nation-state’s strangle hold on citizenship. While in a similar fashion, Jack Halberstam understands the silly archive in terms of “low theory,” or an archive constructed of “texts” (interpreted broadly) that “…offer strange and anticapitalist logics of being and acting and knowing, and they will harbor covert and overt queer worlds.” The backwardness, the sheer ironic hilarity of dancing in boots and spurs under the harvest moon, disrupts the logics normative queerness in early 1990s-era Manhattan. Reveling in the very culture that denied some of them their identity from birth, the queers of the square dance are revived in the archive as testaments to eccentric communitas. They critique the notion of southern citizenship as a privilege allotted only to heterosexuals, and I join with them in this jubilant rebellion. This archive is pleasurable, and my desire to somehow undo my southernness leaves me. The Southerners are magnetic and make being backward seem too fun to resist.

In addition to the events held in celebration of their southern roots, multiple southern repertoires are tucked away in the Southerner Records, including those intentionally utilized as a resource for AIDS activism in a homophobic United States public sphere. In newsletters sporadically issued by the group aptly titled Southerners News, the header of each issue bears a “masthead design…of the New York City skyline bleeding into the Southern map.” The 1990 copyright attributes the illustration to Keith Cooper, and its visual presence resembles what Jeffrey Bennett and Isaac West have named a “tactical repertoire,” or “the intentional negotiation

of sign and symbols to forge politicized connections between individuals in the service of addressing wider publics.\textsuperscript{201} By amalgamating NYC into the American South, the southerners visually construct an emblem for not just their activist collective but all southerners yearning to enter the industrial North. The re-appropriated symbol in the newsletter affirms the presence of a still prevalent division between the North and South, especially when it came to the issues of homosexuality, LGBT rights, and HIV/AIDS. At the same time, the image infers that this ideological gap can be at least somewhat closed when gay and lesbian southerners practice their cultural habitudes in northern cities.

Figure 3. “Southerners News,” photo by author.

\textsuperscript{201} Bennett and West, “‘United We Stand, Divided We Fall,’” 302.
The group also pinpoints specific southern cultural formations through a recurring section of the newsletter called “Southwatch.” The column spotlights each state in the southern United States, and briefly comments on new, mostly policy developments affecting LGBT life in the region. For example, in the same January 1991 issue, the newsletter highlights North Carolina with a brief paragraph stating, “The North Carolina Medical Society has backed a policy that would allow doctors to test patients for HIV antibodies without permission. Activist expressed concern that such a law would discourage those at risk for seeking medical attention. The state General Assembly had just passed legislation in 1989 requiring doctors to obtain consent.”

Furthermore, the section on North Carolina ends with the following sentence in bolded typeface: “The University of North Carolina has officially banned anti-gay bias against its students, faculty, and staff.”

As my body continues to touch the bodies of other southerners, I realize more than ever that southernness is simply impure. Southernness can be and often is problematic. In the case of this archive, its problems amount to a backwardness often ascribed to the body of the southerner because of the South’s stereotypical resistance to ideological and material progress typically attributed to spaces up North. On this topic, E. Patrick Johnson mentions that southerners, particularly black gay men who choose to stay in the South, are often seen as “backward, closeted, uninformed, and apolitical.” Where there is smoke, there is usually fire. Southern culture, despite my celebration of it thus far, has a violent past that can seep into the present. This is certainly true for the Southerners Records, which contained several confederate flags on some of its material. The first is a small advertisement for a “Confederate Cocktail” from

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
“Mammy’s Shanty Restaurant” in Atlanta, Georgia. This relic speaks to the ubiquity of the confederate legacy in the South through its unapologetic display of the rebel flag, a symbol with connotations that are racist, pro-slavery, and white supremacist. The very name of the restaurant also has racist effects because of its use of the “mammy trope,” which Patricia G. Davis identifies as “the representative icon of black womanhood” engrained into the American national imaginary throughout the nineteenth century. Davis further explains that the racist connotations associated with this figure stem from, “Her brash, overbearing countenance [which] was often presented as a contrast to the delicate femininity constructed for her white mistresses, as the contours of ideal white womanhood were constructed in relation to the discursive production of black womanhood as unfeminine and unwomanly.”

The founder of the Southerners activist collective, David Gilbert, also finds himself tightly bound to the confederacy. In a certificate marking his induction into the “Confederate Air Force,” Gilbert is named a “Colonel” who “will continue to praise the glories of the Deep South, pay respectful homage to the lovely Southern belles, never wear a union suit, consume a true gentlemen’s share of white lightning and branch water served in a Dixie cup, save [his] Confederate money, harass the carpet baggers, never take off from the north end runaway and always remember that damnyankee is one word.” Gilbert’s name next to the surreptitious rhetorics of racism, celebration of patriarchal rule, and bombastically stated exclusions of the South in general, associates Gilbert with the politics of southern culture that have historically rendered the South

208 Ibid.
backward in the first place. Finding these nettlesome artifacts in the archive disturbs me, though I am honestly not too surprised. Having grown up in the South, the ever-presence of the confederate flag was a commonplace occurrence of my childhood experience. I look to my partner who sits patiently in the archive with me as I sort through file after file. “This is so fucking backward,” I mutter.

Figure 4. “The Confederate Air Force,” photo by author.

The tension between the performance of queer southern culture in the archive and its confederate underpinnings is one that cannot be reconciled. Hegemonic whiteness and its violent force seep into the celebrations, fanfare, and Dixie-inspired cultural production. I do not know how to save Gilbert, and again, I wonder if it might be simpler to overlook these few documents in the archive. I am not one to denigrate the South as a whole, after all. I am here to demonstrate
that the South can be productively queer! Toward this end, the writing of Heather Love guides me. For Love, queer histories are often much too centered on affects of pride that neatly compartmentalize LGBT historical figures within neoliberal frames of progress and gay rights. Love asks queer historians to broaden what she calls the “recognized or allowed styles of political subjectivity,” and specifically orients her analyses to shameful queer subjects defined by their negative affects. In the case of the Southerners, the primary stylized sense of subjectivity I am interested in is the production of southernness with all its faults and baggage. I admit that I would be remiss not to disclose my discovery of even subtle racisms or other violences. In fact, I would be partaking in the kind of normative historiography Love finds disingenuous to the goals of queer theory. Instead, I include these startling and even painful facts because they testify to the ongoing negotiation the South has with its racist past (not unlike the North). Therefore, in light of this inclusion, I wonder how the Southerners “make a future backward enough that even the most reluctant among us might want to live there” and whether their relationship to time can be apprehended by recognizing and denouncing violent histories in the archive?

Temporal (dis)Continuities

The Southerners were an ephemeral activist collective. Rich Wandel, longtime director of the LGBT Community Center National History Archive housed in the very location the Southerners met over twenty years ago, told me the Southerners “sort of ended before they even began.” Although they were officially formed in 1990, Gilbert’s untimely death in 1992 effectively halted the incipient operations of the organization. Thus, the Southerners’ impact was short-lived because the group was only in the beginning stages of its activist work.

210 Love, Feeling Backward, 162.
211 Ibid., 163.
212 I wrote this quote down in my phone during a conversation with Wandel during a visit to the archive.
As I previously mentioned, the group had two main priorities and they are made abundantly apparent throughout the archive. The first was to gather a collective of southerners to celebrate their cultural heritage in a region disconnected from their homeland. In an assorted compilation of surveys wherein members were asked what they would like to see the group do, one member simply stated: “Sorry I can’t be of more help with ideas. The organization sounds like a wonderful idea. I miss my southern kinfolks --- just to talk with. Hope to meet with ya’ll.” This statement implies that at least one member of the group was not as necessarily interested in activism as she or he was in the chance for partaking in southern comradery in NYC. Other members of the group may or may not have been so enamored by the idea of celebrating the South as a whole. This is evidenced by one member who replied, “To encourage southern expatriates to NOT forget that the South is STILL the South – and we can love it AND hate it at the same time – (original emphasis).” For this member, the South was obviously still a contested memory.

Additionally, the Southerners’ other priority, and its main one, was the development of an activist group that could raise awareness and unleash political action upon a largely homophobic South that had ignored the AIDS crisis up until this point. Of course, the group planned to do so from afar. As one member writes:

My predominant interest is political. I would like to see some organized, aggressive work against the southern sodomy laws. My time is limited. In addition to a full- and a part-time job, I am also involved with ACT UP, Queer Nation, and SAGE. However, I love and grieve for Louisiana and the “state” of affairs vis-à-vis the sodomy laws. An advantage I have is that I am “out” everywhere, and am willing to put my name anything consistent to the goal of eradicating the sodomy laws. My schedule does not permit

214 Ibid.
spontaneity, but I can plan for some small amounts of ‘quality time.’ The only thing I love more than Louisiana is Jean Elizabeth Glass, formerly of Rosedale, Queens.\textsuperscript{215}

The above statement compliments the one included below that imagines an “open” and “free” gay South unchained from homophobic demagogues and oppressors:

To help political and social change for peoples in the south. To attempt to unseat elected governmental officials who are homophobic or who stand in the way of progressive change regarding gay rights. This may involve becoming involved in peaceful demonstrations and support of our gay brothers & sisters who still reside in the south to organize and act for political change. Also I see a need for education among straight southerners who generally perceive homosexuals as perverted misfits of society. We need to show them that we are productive contributing members of society. Not only the society in general but in their own particular communities. This could be greatly enhanced by media coverage of organizations such as ours.

Hope some of these ideas help! I remain committed to an “Open” and “Free” gay south.\textsuperscript{216}

For these particular members, the South is a place that must be socially transformed and politically upheaved if there is any hope that queers may be able to live freely in a southern society. This kind of response is made more adamantly by a member who writes in all capital letters that they would like to see the group “ACT TO CHANGE THE INHUMAN LAWS STILL EXISTING DOWN THERE….HELP CLOSETED BROS./SISTERS COME OUT/BE FREE. BIBLE BELT STRANGLES GAYS N’ LESBIANS…WAY TIME FOR CHANGE!”\textsuperscript{217}

Interestingly, this member chooses to declare that it is “WAY TIME” for a change in the South.\textsuperscript{218} The member’s rhetorical proclamation that timing is of the essence in the Southerners’ activism indicates the importance of temporality as an obstacle in their overall pursuit for

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
liberation. Moreover, this member, like the members before, has positioned the South as in someway resistant to time. The South, for this member and others, is backward in opposition to an elsewhere (in this case, the North) that is somehow moving with a singular, normative time. As I discussed with the case of Roger McFarlane in the previous chapter, the Southerners’ strategic placement of themselves within a certain temporal node proves their ability to utilize time as a deployable, performative technique for advancing their goals. Because the Southerners (now in NYC) are with the speed of time because of their location, they are able to reach out and set themselves apart from Other southerners still closeted, backward, and against time in the South. Further, the Southerners’ activism is influenced by an inhabited performance of enlightenment that allows them to progressively influence the perceived backward temporality that threatens the lives of queers still in the South. What is lost, however, is the fact that the Southerners – at least in my assessment of what is apparent in the archive – do not account for the oppressions of an AIDS time supported by homophobia of the public sphere that always already positions the queer body as backward. Thus, the progressively theatrical southern style worn by the Southerners has little effect considering their bodies are entangled and undifferentiated with the South by an indifferent public. However, someone who did seem to realize this state of affairs was David Gilbert, as he was dying due to complications with AIDS. Based on his papers in the archive, I contend that Gilbert knew that time, in fact, was running out for his own backward body.

I continue pilfering through papers. There are so many. My accelerated and careless sorting results in a small paper cut on the tip of my finger. A small droplet of blood smears on one of the yellow pages torn from a notepad with scribbled handwriting I can barely read. I do the best I can to make legible the words of David Gilbert in an undated letter written to someone
unknown to me. In the transcribed passage below, I have omitted the words Gilbert himself ran black lines though. Most of these deleted phrases and sentences are simply spelling errors or other types of mistakes that do not change the meaning of the letter. In addition, I have typed all grammar and punctuation in exactly the same way as Gilbert.

As you requested, I am writing to describe the kinds of treatments I am undergoing for ARC.

Although I only tested positive for HIV in December 1989, I had assumed that I had been positive for some time prior to that. I have had symptoms of immune problems since 1982.

Since testing positive I have had quarterly blood work. One blood marked used to determine HIV’s progress is the T-4 helper cell count. A count of 500 is considered low, but normal, but the count really should be above 1000. Last year my count was in the 1300 range, with higher counts in summer and fall. This year my low count in the spring was 260 and my August count was 290. There is a definite downward trend, but serious problems don’t usually begin until the count goes below 200. When my count reaches that level I plan to begin pneumocystis pneumonia prophylaxis with aerosolized pentamadine.

I am taking no formal HIV treatment right now. I took AZT last spring for one week but I felt that it was making me more sick rather than more healthy. I continue to have reservations about taking AZT. The drug can have many side effects. Some people can’t take it. Others who do may get anemia and need blood transfusions. There are other drugs under investigation right now which show promise in being effective with fewer side effects. (DDI, LEM, Lentinen, CD4, and Compound Q are a few.) Taking AZT would disqualify me from getting into some of these studies.

I tried to get into a CD4 study at NYU last year, but the study was cancelled. The only other experimental drug I have tried has been mucomyst (Acytkysteine), which I took briefly on my own initiative last year. Acytkysteine provides the body with a large dose of Glutathiove, a protein which HIV positive people are deficent in and there are positive stories coming from people who have taken it. I discontinued using it after trying it only briefly. It is expensive and experimental. I was afraid DC-37’s drug insurance program would refuse to cover it and bill me.”

This page is the last document in the Southerners Records. Although its tone is somewhat resigned, I am taken aback by its perseverant weight. I watch as the smeared line of my blood slowly dries into a brown hue. To anyone else, it would be unnoticeable. I am reminded of

\[219\] “‘Although I only tested positive…’,” exact date unknown (probably sometime in 1991), Collection 16, Folder 44, Southerners Records, The LGBT Community Center National History Archive, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, New York City.
Gilbert’s blood ravaged with HIV, and how the leftover molecules of his DNA might somehow have co-mingled with my own. Temporally, I am transplanted via Gilbert’s memory in the archive. My mind is tunneled into an accelerated spiral of a pastness in the present. Even as I transcribe the perhaps inconsequential letter now, I am startled by its affective pull and its emotional intensity. One man’s desire to live and breathe within a homophobic public sphere that foreclosed his opportunity for uninhibited existence congeals with my supposedly academic encounter with an archive I can never truly know. Like Gilbert himself, I am rallied by a will to survive, as well as a motivation for counterpublicity, in a temporally accelerated culture that would rather rid me of my backwardness. I want to be a southerner again.

Coupled with my own sensory tilt toward Gilbert’s struggle to survive in a time of AIDS, the ephemerality of the Southerners as an organization makes itself crystal clear leaving me to wonder about what could have been if Gilbert had lived. Indeed, the utopic visions of the group, though short-lived, manifest in the present. José Esteban Muñoz claims that, “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”220 Such a statement resonates with the Southerners’ temporal worldmaking and its impression on my body now. In the archive, the Southerners’ relationship to temporality fractures the steadfast temporal rhythm of neoliberal modernity. Indeed, the ever-present thumping of American temporal destiny demands I conform to the parameters of this time and its quickened pace, but the archive relinquishes its grasp. I am made anew by its power. My southernness links to the Southerners, to Gilbert, and to the space. I am re-stylized and introduced to fellow Southerners who want more but are not quite sure how to get it. These discontinuities rhetorically fashion my performance in the archive and my performance with the

documents around me. Paying homage to their force now, I can only begin to interpret the ineffable.

**Afterthoughts**

Although this particular chapter details an ephemeral activist collective that participated in AIDS activism a decade after the beginning of Rodger McFarlane’s work with the GMHC, I do not think that this gap in time necessarily alters my conceptualization of southernness as a performative style or its backward discontents. I would, however, like to note that by the early 1990s, queer communities, organizations, and activists had more-or-less adjusted to the gruesome, banal reality of AIDS in LGBTQ life and had aimed their action at illuminating the impact of AIDS on other communities as well as their own. For example, on May 21, 1990, ACT UP protested at the National Institutes of Health in NYC and demanded further research on the impacts of HIV on women and communities of color.\(^{221}\) The demonstration coincided with the death of eighteen-year-old Ryan White, the first high-profile case of accidentally transmitted AIDS in a person not identified as LGBTQ.\(^{222}\) Shortly after, the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act of 1990 was passed, which allocated over two hundred million dollars to HIV-community based care and treatment.\(^{223}\) It was the first federal act of its kind. In 1991, Freddy Mercury of Queen fame died of complications from AIDS and Magic Johnson announced his own HIV-positive status. By the time David Gilbert died, AIDS was the number one cause of death for men aged 25-44 in the United States.\(^{224}\) Therefore, HIV/AIDS became a rapidly normalized reality in the public sphere and the potential for blood contact with


\(^{222}\) Ibid.

\(^{223}\) Ibid.

\(^{224}\) Ibid.
a AIDS positive person was a risk nearly everyone faced in one way or another. AIDS time, as I have called it so far, was no longer seen as a temporal threat exclusively for only men who had sex with men. This shift is important to note because it affirms Treichler’s commentary I posited at the beginning of this chapter on the cultural force of AIDS as a terminology that carries with it a myriad of meanings that flourish and change as rapidly as the epidemic itself.

Taking Treichler’s theoretical cue, this chapter has attempted to utilize her observations toward reimagining cultural meaning of AIDS and how they are signified within a public sphere marked by temporal forms. My methodological orientation engaged theories of performance ethnography and rhetorical theory. Both critical premises allowed me to showcase my own phenomenological experience in the archive, and explore the trans-historical movement of backwardness as it connected my body to the objects I examined. I argued that this backwardness surfaced on three levels, including the southern backwardness of the archive itself, my own regional disposition, and the backward affects that penetrate the archival space via my immersion in its surround. The temporal residues of the past and their binding to my body in the present, I hope to have conveyed, moved me and altered my bodily presence. Like the chapter before it, this chapter was dedicated to determining the relationship between queer southerner(s) who lived in NYC who were in some way affected by the emergence of HIV/AIDS, my body within the archival zone, and the temporal incongruities that mediate the past in the historical present.

As I attempt to conclude this chapter, I am struck by an over-arching sense of inconclusiveness. It is as if I do not know where to end, as if the idea of ending itself is a façade or an empty promise. The Southerners archive, for me, induces a sense of temporal unending and forever-ness. Past in present in future. Past made present by way of future’s guarantee. David Gilbert is resurrected momentarily and put back to death the moment the box shuts or at the point
in which this chapter ends. I read and re-read in hopes of escaping the permanence of final words. I try my best to reclaim my southernness and honor those transplants who wanted more than anything to be an uninhibited southern queer. I laugh and enjoy the artifacts one more time. The archive releases me. Slowly. Carefully. Relishing in the moment, the liminal transience of in-between-ness, I reach for the lid and inhale. Chapter over. Exhale. Time undone.
CHAPTER FOUR

STAGING SOUTHERN DIASPORA: ALVIN AILEY’S BLOOD AND THE BACKWARD TEMPORALITY OF QUARE MEMORIALIZATION

In accordance with our twisted temporal journey thus far, let us move backward from where we last left off with the Southerners Records. Half a year before David Gilbert’s posting of the “Southern Lesbians and Gay Men…In Exile” flyer, the year 1989 was on the verge of its final days. According to Jennie Jacobs Kronenfeld, by this time, “more than 115,000 cases of AIDS had been reported in the United States, [with deaths having risen] by one-third over the previous year to become the nation’s 11th-leading cause of death overall.” Kronenfeld further divulges, “Of all AIDS deaths, 64% are white males, 25% are black males, and 6% and 4% are black females and white females, respectively.” In mid-July of 1989, Marlon Riggs’ monumental Tongues Untied premiered at OutFest in Los Angeles. The film, a semi-autobiographical documentary, revealed the intersectional oppressions of black gay men suffering from HIV/AIDS, as well as the revolutionary potential of black men loving black men in the face of racist societal norms upheld by the whiteness of heteronormativity. As could be expected, Tongues Untied caused national outcry upon its 1991 premiere on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) when it aired across television screens around the United States. Symptomatic of a largely racist, homophobic, and AIDS-panicked public sphere, the cultural criticism present in the film struck a cord with then 1992 presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, who used clips of Riggs’ creation as part of a smear campaign against what he perceived to be the liberal tendencies of George H. W. Bush. Buchanan argued that Bush was funneling tax payer dollars

226 Ibid.
into “blasphemous art,” and despite Buchanan’s ignorance to this fact at the time, Riggs was not the first black gay man AIDS-related demise was coincidentally tied to the early Bush administration.227

Unbeknownst to Bush (and just about everyone else at the time), the death of American dance icon Alvin Ailey was a result of a short-lived battle with HIV/AIDS. Had he known, perhaps the forty-first president would not have sent a statement of praise to be read by Stanley Plesent at Ailey’s public funeral. Maybe instead he would have given the audience at Ailey’s funeral the same blame-infused advice he gave nearly two thousand ACT UP protestors who confronted his family at their summer mansion in southern Maine in 1991. After witnessing the social activists, many of whom were of color, smash a piñata of his likeness, Bush told reporters “Here’s a disease where you can control its spread by your own personal behavior.”228 True to a southern style indicative of a life of supposed modesty and just retribution, Bush’s comment reflects his own dedication to carrying on the deathly brand of Reagan conservatism he supported as vice-president in years earlier.

Nonetheless, Bush’s written public address was wedged in the middle of the nearly two-hour service, which also featured the poem “For Alvin Ailey” written and orally interpreted by his close friend Maya Angelou, as well as a eulogy recited by the former mayor of NYC, David Dinkins. On this unusual Friday, December 9, 1989, more than four thousand people flooded into the pews of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in NYC to view Ailey’s body one last time. The cathedral, located at the apex of Manhattan beside the arbitrary Harlem border, opened its

doors at approximately ten o’clock in the morning. The modest funeral program, printed plainly in black ink on white paper, boasted the cathedral’s insignia and the doleful yet uplifting title “The Celebration of Alvin Ailey, Jr. Going Home.” As if the fanfare surrounding this spectacle was not enough, full excerpts of his signature choreographic work, *Revelations*, was performed by members of his dance company on a makeshift stage constructed behind the casket.

This chapter officially begins and ends at the scene of these performances, particularly with the triad “The Day is Past and Gone,” “You May Run On,” and “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham,” which consecutively occurred moments before the completion of the service. In a strange juxtaposition, these performances transpired next to Ailey’s deceased body, forever frozen at fifty-eight years of age, inside one of the world’s largest cathedrals against a NYC cityscape. These dances showcased Ailey’s capacity to transplant his own experiences and memories onto the stage through highly aesthetic representations of African-American southern life in the United States during the mid-twentieth century.

Unlike previous chapters, my archival/ethnographic lens throughout this chapter must be well-attuned to the contours of race, class, sexuality, and regionalism if I am to properly describe this performance event in its totality given the fact that space, place, time, and memory are requisite components of the funeral as a whole. Therefore, I do not intend to make my own presence a central aspect of this chapter. Instead, I acknowledge now that my interpretation and writing of the funeral is based on a “situated knowledge,” one that comes into being through my

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229 “Funeral Program,” 1989, Collection 4, Alvin Ailey Folder, Box 3, George and Ethel Martin Papers, Marymount Manhattan College Archives, Marymount Manhattan College, New York City.
own standpoint or positional understanding of the world.\textsuperscript{230} That is, I do not take for granted my own limitations in encountering the funeral, especially considering that I am a white male-identifying subject who did not live during the period. With this stated, I now intend to use theoretical perspectives from a bibliography that includes a majority of scholars of color toward answering questions that I myself can never fully know. Rather than intentionally make my embodied experience with this archival object a major point of reference throughout this chapter, I proceed by disclaiming that I understand that my centrality is always already present and that my decision to jettison my personal narration is one that seeks to elevate the voices of crucial Others in a project that has focused mainly on white gay men.

**Between Transplant and Archive**

Although *Revelations* is a modern American dance classic, very little scholarly attention has been dedicated to examining its larger engagement with the socio-political American landscape.\textsuperscript{231} Even despite Thomas F. DeFrantz’s claim that, “Ailey’s choreography offers vibrant examples of black subjectivity on public stages,” there still remains a glaring dearth of published analyses on Ailey’s performances and their commentary on racialized experience.\textsuperscript{232}

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\textsuperscript{231} This is not to suggest that no work has explored Ailey in the past. Performance theorist Thomas F. DeFrantz’s 1997 dissertation turned 2004 monograph, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey’s Embodiment of African American Culture*, is the most comprehensive case study to date. DeFrantz is a prolific Ailey scholar with several published articles and book chapters exploring Ailey and the politics of African American dance in the United States. There have also been several theses/dissertations written on Ailey, including most notably, Jacqueline Quinn Moore’s “A Biographical Study of the Lives and Contributions of Two Selected Contemporary Black Male Dance Artists—Arthur Mitchell and Alvin Ailey—In the Idioms Of Ballet And Modern Dance, Respectively” (1973, Texas Women’s University), Stephanie Turnham’s “Alvin Ailey and the Southern Black Experience as Portrayed in ‘Blues Suite’ and ‘Revelations’” (2002, Baylor University), and Raynix D. Freeman’s “The Revelation of *Revelations*” (2009, University of Tennessee). None of these works address Ailey in terms of diaspora, temporality, or his living with HIV/AIDS. This chapter seeks to address these missing themes in the small milieu of Ailey scholarship.

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As the only black transplant featured in the archive, my goal with this chapter is to build on pre-existing Ailey scholarship, while also utilizing Ailey’s death and his dance to theorize the funeral as his final dis/embodied presence in black American cultural production. I recuperate elusive undercurrents of Ailey’s persona, including his unpublicized private life, dubious sexuality, and an untimely death due to AIDS as integral to his own backward temporal project as a choreographer. I argue that the performance of Revelations at Ailey’s funeral memorializes his southern past, and the cultural properties of these memories are salient in a NYC context. I also centralize Ailey’s identity as a black southerner dislocated from the South, and I claim that the memory performance is the site where his queer sexuality is retrievable and paradoxically manifest. Like the previous two chapters, Ailey’s southernness materializes as a backward orientation to time and his northern surroundings.

Departing from previous chapters, I contend that Revelations depicts a black southern diaspora within American borders emblematized by an embodiment of southern culture in a region disparate from Ailey’s native land.233 The funeral’s presence in the North accentuates Ailey as an uprooted southerner with memories of a past life. As Ailey mentions in the film Four by Ailey and later in his posthumous autobiography, “I had lots of what I call ‘blood memories,’ blood memories about Texas, blues, spirituals, gospel music, ragtime music…folk songs, work songs…I had very intense feelings about all those things. The first ballets I made when I came to

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233 As I will explain, there is evidence that Ailey’s migration from the South to the North was a coerced move brought about by the permeating violence of racism in his native Texas homeland. Therefore, because this specific system of oppression aligns with the theoretical contributions to contemporary African diaspora studies, I have chosen to frame Ailey’s migratory pattern as a diasporic upheaval. While you could certainly say that some of the subjects featured in the Southerners Records were forced out of the South due to violence in the region, there is no proof that Rodger McFarlane left the South because he felt threatened (and as we discovered, most narrations of McFarlane depict him as having never had a problem with homophobia). I contend that in the specific case of Ailey, contextual evidence demands a diasporic understanding of his subjectivity. Meanwhile, I also suggest that this thesis as a whole could not be considered a study of diasporic longing by virtue of my inclusion of the first chapter, which sought to primarily introduce an understanding of the North/South divide in the United States within the framework of public sphere theory.
New York were about those themes.”\textsuperscript{234} Though not obviously global in scope, the diaspora that
Ailey stages with his choreography functions as a commentary about the travels of black bodies
from Africa to the southern United States, and in his case, a movement of bodies from the
American South to the North. In the vein of Jafari S. Allen, who formulates
“black/queer/diaspora” as “at once about particular locations…roots/uprooting…and routes that
bodies, ideas, and texts travel,” this chapter highlights how Ailey’s blackness and southernness
coalesce in a migratory performance that pumps somatically to a rhythm akin to his own “blood
memories” as they are presented on stage.\textsuperscript{235}

Ultimately, I argue Ailey’s choreography cannot be isolated from his own identity as a
queer, black southerner. Moreover, I insist that the performed selections from \textit{Revelations} during
Ailey’s eulogy pulse like the blood once in his very veins, and cannot be untied from his cause of
death, AIDS, which ravaged both his body and the bodies of other queers in NYC at the time.
Because Ailey certainly kept his personal life private, one could interpret the apparent omission
of AIDS from the service as a disavowal or closeting of Ailey’s queerness. I seek to challenge
this presumption. As I will explain throughout this analysis, the performances from the funeral
are best apprehended according to a “quare” lens, one that is articulated, according to E. Patrick
Johnson, as a “way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized
and class knowledges.”\textsuperscript{236} In my quare reading of both Ailey and the performances of
\textit{Revelations} at his funeral, I acknowledge that his queerness intersects with a race, class, and
regional identity that exist simultaneously. Directly opposed to a stabilized category of “queer”

See also: \textit{Four by Ailey: An Evening with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater}, directed by Thomas Grimm (1986;
Danmarks Radio/ZDF/RM Arts with ORF, 1986), VHS.
\textsuperscript{236} E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My
that often presumes a monolithic American subject (i.e. white, male, and gay…Dare I say “northern?”), deploying the term quare throughout this chapter concedes that a multiplicity of identities and positionalities converge in the process of subject formation.

Admittedly, I was not present at Ailey’s funeral, so I cannot attest to the emotive reaction I or other audience members would have had at the epideictic ceremony. This does not mean that the funeral itself is dead, however, or that it cannot be accessed emotionally. Today one may find leftover traces of Alvin Ailey’s funeral as archival ephemera. For example, I retrieved a video clip posted by a YouTube user containing the full performances of the selections from *Revelations* at the funeral. Additionally, I recovered a copy of the funeral program in a box of assorted personal papers kept in the archive at Marymount Manhattan College. I also gathered news reports and biographical accounts published soon after the funeral. By preserving and narrating them here, each of these fragments becomes slightly less transitory, and they collectively perform anew through their remediation in the archival accumulation I consult for the duration of this chapter.

For this reason, my critical orientation and approach to the archive continues to be well-attuned to the politics of ephemerality and the polyvalence of queerness within vestiges of the historical past. Following my prior borrowing of José Esteban Muñoz’s notion of “ephemera as evidence,” in this chapter, I seek out ephemera, allow it to perform, and thus perform alongside it via the production of theory. In doing so, I “[follow] traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of

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things,” simultaneously destabilizing epistemological assumptions regarding what can and cannot be an intellectual object of inquiry.\(^{239}\) Grounded in a performance studies tradition with an emphasis on how ephemera itself performs, Muñoz’s observations point critics to consider alternative, subterranean archival materials that covertly resist the suppressive nature of a normatively inclined social economy. As Jennifer Tyburczy has shown with David Wojnarowicz’s \textit{A Fire in My Belly}, utilizing Muñoz’s conception of ephemera concurrently with acts of recovery and uncovering is a way of unsettling hegemonic forces like whiteness and heteronormativity, while also “radically transforming the parameters of the archive as a concept and an actual space.”\(^{240}\)

In allowing the archival ephemera leftover from Ailey’s funeral to perform and reveal an elucidation of race, sexuality, and embodiment of southern culture, I detail the performance of \textit{Revelations} at Ailey’s funeral as a rhetorical production of a southern cultural memory. Initially, I analyze the choreography and its presentation of a southern diaspora inextricably linked to Ailey’s own memories of a childhood in the American South. Next, I expand the analysis outward to account for the ways in which the broadcast of such a memory in public affects time and space, and metaphorically generates a bloodline that moves backward and makes legible Ailey’s own queerness. Finally, I explain the ways in which the performance resists the logics of “the closet,” and produces a new memory of southern culture that collides against the homophobic tendencies of a heteronormative public sphere during the second wave of HIV/AIDS in NYC. Specifically, I assert that Ailey’s own queer blood, a blood infused with AIDS and presumably no longer contained within his body at the time of the funeral, throbs as a

metaphorical device whereby audiences can understand Ailey’s identity outside the homonormative parameters of the traditional closet. Much like Gayatri Gopinath’s theorization of a “queer desire” within queer diaspora, the performances of *Revelations* do not “glance backward” because they seek to “[evoke] an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history.” In turn, the dance renders itself as backward in a completely different way, as it signifies southernness against the unyielding temporal progression of the hegemonic American North. The dance enables Ailey to choreograph a resistant temporal regression against the bourgeois models of time present in an urban center disconnected from his southern roots.

**Dancing Southern Diaspora**

![Figure 5](image)

“Lone Dancer,” screenshot by author.

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242 Ibid., 4.
243 sutherland9, “ALVIN AILEY JR. FAREWELL.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5khXS9nIo4U
The dance begins modestly. A lone black woman stands near the center of the stage in her “Sunday best,” a yellow gown and a matching oversized hat. In one hand, she holds a stool and in the other she slowly waves a fan to the slow tempo of the piano melody that begins “The Day is Past and Gone.” The voice of Brother John Sellars, a gospel singer from Mississippi who moved to Manhattan to collaborate with Ailey on numerous projects, singing the title of the folk spiritual infilrates the space. A woman’s voice echoes the tonal euphony of Sellars by repeating each of his words, while another black woman dancer enters the stage in the same yellow dress, matching hat, corresponding stool, and mimetic waving of a fan. Three more dancers then appear in identical attire, and each of the women nods and shakes their heads to the refrain of the piano and the voices that sing the gospel, undoubtedly referencing the cultural habitudes associated with worship in black churches in the South. Each of the women bow their heads as if welcoming one another to the stage, and after placing their stools on the ground, proceed to engage in what seems to be a non-verbal representation of church gossip. Fans waving synchronously, the song ends with the dancers coming to a frozen seated position above their stools as if expecting a Sunday service to begin.
At Ailey’s funeral, the stained glass windows and otherwise grandiose décor of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine illuminated the performance of “The Day is Past and Gone.” As taxi cabs undoubtedly sped past outside the church and the daily hubbub of life in NYC moved onward at an accelerated pace, within the cathedral’s walls, a staging of southern culture memorialized Ailey’s lifetime through a work he himself produced out of his own memory. As Ailey stated in his autobiography, “Revelations began with the music.” He recalled, “As early as I can remember I was enthralled by the music played and sung in the small black churches in every small Texas town my mother and I lived in.” As exemplars of what Ailey called “black rhythm,” the songs in Revelations are affective in nature because in Ailey’s words, they “reflect my own feelings about being pressed into the ground of Texas; they re-create the music I heard from the ladies in Texas who sold apples while singing spirituals, memories of songs my mother

244 sutherland9, “ALVIN AILEY JR. FAREWELL.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5khXS9nIo4U
245 Ailey and Bailey, Revelations, 97.
246 Ibid.
would hum around the house, and the songs I sang in junior high school.” As a memory performance, one cannot accurately comprehend the significance of *Revelations* at Ailey’s funeral without a thorough contextualization of Ailey’s experiences as a black child in Texas and later, a displaced Texan in Los Angeles and NYC.

On January 5, 1931, in the home of his grandfather in the Brazos Valley region, Ailey was born into poverty like most African Americans living in Central Texas at the time. As a child, Ailey grew up without a father and his mother earned money by picking cotton, a job he would also take up by the age of five. Around the same time, four white men (for whom Ailey’s mother most likely worked) raped her, and Ailey himself was acutely aware of the racism that permeated the area that they lived. In his memoir, Ailey described seeing members of the Ku Klux Klan in white robes and newspaper headlines about gruesome lynchings occurring throughout Texas. Ailey also mentions the quotidian forms of oppression he and his mother faced daily, including sitting in the balcony of movie theaters and being prohibited from trying on clothing in stores. Despite the hardships of growing up in Depression-era Texas during a period of outward normalized racism, Ailey recollected the refuge black communities sought within the church. *Revelations* stands as his tribute to this time. As an affectively charged testimony about his own experience, Ailey remarked that he “tried to put all of that feeling into *Revelations.*”

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247 Ibid., 101.
248 Ibid., 26.
249 Ibid., 18.
250 Ibid., 19.
251 Ibid., 19-24.
252 Ibid.
253 Ibid., 23.
254 Ibid., 97.
By the time Ailey turned twelve, he and his mother moved to Los Angeles. Ailey’s mother was in search of a job with “the aircraft industry,” but ended up working for an affluent family as a housecleaner in an unnamed “predominantly white area.” Such a scene in Ailey’s autobiography resembles what James N. Gregory has called “the southern diaspora,” or “the relocation of black and white Americans from the farms and towns of the South to the cities and suburbs of the North and West” which occurred between the years of 1900 and 1970. Gregory describes this trend as linked to what has become known as The Great Migration of eight-million African Americans from the south to urban industrial centers in the United States throughout the twentieth century, primarily in pursuit of jobs with better wages and communities less constrained by the South’s unique brand of racism. Of course, by Ailey’s own account of living during the 1940s, Los Angeles certainly proved not to be nearly as inhospitable to blacks as his Texas homeland, but nevertheless, still had racial inequities of its own, such as segregated schools and areas in the city where black people were not permitted to buy property.

Withstanding any prejudices and hardships of the time, Ailey persevered and began training as a dancer shortly after his high school graduation. Ailey would migrate again, this time from Los Angeles to NYC in 1954 for the Truman Capote-penned Broadway production of *House of Flowers*. In 1958, frustrated with the lack of support for black dancers living in the city, Ailey began his own dance troupe that would eventually evolve into the renowned, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Ailey choreographed *Blues Suite* the same year and *Revelations* two years later in 1960 by drawing on his memories of growing up black in Texas during the

255 Ibid., 31.
256 Ibid.
258 Ailey and Bailey, *Revelations*, 33-34.
259 Ibid., 67.
1930s. Ailey imposed and performed southern culture in a northern context and created spaces for black dancers to gain access to both work and black community, and his efforts resisted and destabilized the hegemonic currents of white supremacism in one of the supposedly most progressive places in the United States at the time. In doing so, Ailey shifted the normative labor practices of the dance scene. *Revelations* culminated as Ailey’s “southernization” of northern life, particularly as he used his own diasporic relationality to transform cultural conventions and institutions. Ailey’s contributions, like many other African American migrants to the North in the years following the Harlem Renaissance, helped to produce a distinct black community where black cultural production could thrive as it gained popularity even amongst white populations. 

Ailey’s creation of *Revelations* also worked in a similar manner as Lisa A. Flores’ formulation of a “rhetoric of difference,” a way for marginalized peoples to discursively re-define themselves by celebrating the “uniqueness of their identity” and thus opening spaces for group autonomy and solidarity. Ailey’s insistence that *Revelations* was a counter-discourse against prevailing racist attitudes against blacks in NYC and all other areas of the United States at the time proves this point; in his words, the dance reflects “his concern about projecting the

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261 There are a number of debates about whether The Great Migration had a positive impact for African American communities and the development of a black culture and economy. While out of the purview of this chapter to address them at length, I would like to acknowledge that despite the cultural advances made by black southerners who migrated North during the period between the years of 1890-1960, their social mobility was still largely limited by still prevalent racist structures that prevented them from securing employment, housing, healthcare, or gaining access to other necessities within a capitalist society. In this sentence specifically, I am primarily speaking to the ways in which black migrants from the South were able to make strides in the arts in the years following the Harlem Renaissance. One may find an extended discussion of this phenomenon as it unfolded in Chicago in Davarian L. Baldwin’s 2007 book, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, & Black Urban Life*. See: Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

black image properly.”263 Ailey’s assessment that there is such a thing as a “proper” black image risks a respectability politics that actually deviates from a “rhetoric of difference.” But Ailey’s blatant admission that Revelations is an attempt to cultivate a black audience and collectivity in the world of dance, “wrenched from the hands of the elite,” further proves his dedication to “bringing more black people into the theater.”264 This effort, in turn, actualized a definite shift in the whitewashed status quo.265

When viewed now as a portion of his funeral, the inclusion of “The Day is Past and Gone,” resonates on an affective level because it represents a culmination of Ailey’s southern memories before diaspora and his commitment to using dance as a mode of black empowerment. The performance as eulogy correspondingly operates as a theorization of black diaspora that takes Ailey’s memories as a case study. The dance opposes totally macabre and purely traumatic representations of black life, even when performed next to Ailey’s corpse, because it “honors the subaltern, rhetorical roots of black symbolism that survive and break through the timeworn death wish cast against black expression.”266 While each of the dancers on stage wave their fans and model a highly aestheticized version of the southern African American church, they literally perform those “feelings” and “blood memories” that inspired and haunted Ailey. Literary and cultural critic, Nadia Ellis characterizes these kinds of displays as expressions of “queered diasporic belonging,” a utopian desire performed by diasporic subjects that penetrates as intimate affects, like “feeling” and “belonging” entrenched in a tension between loss and a longing for elsewhere.267 Ellis names a “structure of belonging and metaphorical space of multiplicity and

263 Ailey and Bailey, Revelations, 101.
264 Ibid., 101-102.
265 Ibid.
suspension” such as the choreography Ailey designs a “territory of the soul.”\textsuperscript{268} As a territory of the soul, Ailey’s work commemorates black diaspora beyond the literal routes of migration by probing the roots – in terms of land, ancestry, and heritage – of a cultural loss so profound and beyond verbalization.

**Backward Bloodlines**

On December 2, 1989, the day after Ailey died, the *New York Times* printed an obituary in his honor. Prolific dance critic Jennifer Dunning wrote rather dryly and without much lament about Alvin Ailey’s “humanist vision” in his founding of the dance company that bore his name followed by a brief biographical synopsis of Ailey’s achievements as a choreographer.\textsuperscript{269} Dunning wrote that Ailey’s physician “attributed his death to terminal blood dyscrasia, a rare disorder that affects the bone marrow and red blood cells,” and she vaguely repeated this cause of death, “a rare blood disorder,” in an article about Ailey’s funeral published a week later.\textsuperscript{270} Like many obituaries published in memoriam of people who died at the hands of HIV/AIDS, particularly those included in *The New York Times* during this period, the precise cause of death was often either watered down or ignored altogether due to the stigma associated with the virus and subsequent disease. Writing about this erasure, David Sanford notes that during the height of the first wave of the epidemic in 1985, only four obituaries in the *New York Times* explicitly printed the word “AIDS.”\textsuperscript{271} Other memorials in the paper named “pneumonia, leukemia, meningitis and lymphoma, or ‘after a long illness,’” as the causes of death for “young unmarried men.”\textsuperscript{272}

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{269} Jennifer Dunning, “Alvin Ailey, a Leading Figure.”
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid. See also: Dunning, “4,500 People Attend.”
\textsuperscript{271} Sanford, David, “Last Year, This Editor Wrote His Own Obituary: Now He Writes About Surviving When Disease Was Called ‘GRID,’” *Wall Street Journal* (New York) 8 Nov. 1996, accessed 10 Nov. 2015.
http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB847406633862990500
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.
According to Dunning’s account, the decision to leave Ailey’s AIDS unacknowledged was his own. In her rigorously researched biography, *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance*, Dunning interviewed Dr. Albert Knapp, the doctor who treated Ailey during his last stay in the hospital.\textsuperscript{273} Knapp claimed that Ailey chose not to make his illness public because of his own generationally “‘prudish’” desire to keep certain aspects of his life private, in addition to fearing that his still living mother could have potentially been “‘embarrassed by the social stigma of the disease.’”\textsuperscript{274} DeFrantz affirms that even those who were closest to Ailey knew very little about his private life, and calls his battle with HIV/AIDS a “jealously guarded secret” that was not fully disclosed until years after his death out of fear that a largely heterosexual audience would no longer attend his dance company’s performances.\textsuperscript{275} Ailey’s sexual relationships with men were not made public during his lifetime either, and like many others diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in this period, he kept both the stigma associated with exhibitions of homosexuality and the shame of undergoing treatments for what was being widely publicized as a gay disease guarded as personal matters.

Moreover, Ailey’s status as a black man also cannot be ignored when one considers his decision not to publicly divulge the details of living with AIDS. In a comprehensive study of black communities living in NYC during the emergence of AIDS in the years 1982-86, Cathy J. Cohen explains that black gays and lesbians represented a marginalized group within a marginalized group, and that the stigma of HIV/AIDS was not commiserate with the goals of “black politics,” particularly under the hegemonic constraints of racist systemic oppression at the


\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{275} DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations*, 231.
time.²⁷⁶ Cohen associates the year in which Ailey died with what she calls “the second stage” of African American responses to the epidemic, and ascribes partial blame to the religious priorities of “the Black church” as one of the reasons for the continued neglect of black queers living with HIV/AIDS by black officials and community members.²⁷⁷ It would be no wonder then that Ailey would keep his sexual orientation and illness classified, even as his own black queer blood battled the impact of AIDS directly, despite news accounts contrary upon his death.

Undoubtedly, funerals for those victimized by HIV/AIDS during this time were challenging events. Explained in a rather disturbing 1987 New York Times write-up by Jane Gross, the “tangle of fear and secrecy surrounding AIDS” and the more than five thousand lives it had taken in the city alone at that point led to a number of problems.²⁷⁸ Examples include some funeral directors using the ignominious disease as an opportunity for exploitation, such as charging extra for handling those infected and/or downright refusing to touch a body, or awkward first-time meetings between family members of the deceased and a lover of the same sex at a wake or funeral.²⁷⁹ In some ways, Ailey’s privilege as a celebrity probably curtailed these specific problems, although one can never know for sure. What can be stated for certain is that at no point during his funeral did anyone publicly announce his true cause of death. However, this does not mean that his blood was not present, nor does it necessarily erase his queerness. Rather, by deploying a quare lens when viewing the performance of “You May Run On” at the ceremony, once can better gauge the ways in which all of Ailey’s identities emerge together through the staging of his choreography behind his body.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 101.
²⁷⁹ Ibid.
As a memory performance, “You May Run On” functions like the blood once in Ailey’s veins, a necessary component of his own corporeal existence, one that embodies the movement of diaspora and brings with it a backward temporal regression that mirrors his experiences as a black southerner. Indeed, when “A Day is Past and Gone” transitions into “You May Run On,” the shift is obvious and with only a brief pause. The tempo changes and a faster, more upbeat waving of fans commences on the part of the five dancers on stage. Still seated on their stools, their bodies tilt and writhe to the rhythm as the daring lyrics command, “You may run on – for a long time!” Similar to the previous performance, “You May Run On” features a primary man’s voice echoed by a chorus of men’s voices in each of the verses. In sync, each of the women showcase their fan as an important prop for the performance as a whole; in a spirited burst of energy influenced by the soulful beat, the women move from sitting in their stool, to dancing atop it. With the arrival of five men dancers – each black and wearing a yellow vest the same color as the dresses already on stage – it seems that a celebration has begun. In a striking moment, the women stand on top of their stools as the men dance below their elevation. The women point at the men as if to exert their agency in the church setting. They proceed to wave their fans furiously and hop off their stools but never proceed to engage any of the men individually. The performance ends like the first with a beautiful stage picture. Each of the women sit while the men kneel next to them. The dance is marvelously southern, and whether a
believer or not, one cannot help but feel the spirit of the gospel run through their bones during the spectacle.

Figure 7. “Woman Pointing #1,” screenshot by author.  

Figure 8. “Woman Pointing #2,” screenshot by author.

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280 sutherland9, “ALVIN AILEY JR. FAREWELL,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5khXS9nIo4U

281 Ibid.
Opposed to the somber production of “The Day is Past and Gone” moments earlier, the abrupt jubilance of “You May Run On” at Ailey’s funeral might seem discordant with the already established melancholy. This dissonance owes itself to an incongruent temporal relationship made apparent by the dance, its presentation of southern diaspora, and its proximity to Ailey’s black, queer body. Affirming Ailey’s own “blood memories” that he himself stages with the dance as well as Benigo Sánchez Eppler and Cindy Patton’s observation that diasporic “bodies pack and carry tropes and logics from their homelands,” the dance articulates a southern temporality that is rendered distinctly disparate in a NYC context.283 This contrast is made apparent by the dancers moving their bodies to the rhythm, an embodiment of southern culture that is “temporal as well as spatial,” in the words of Steven Bruhm.284 Bruhm suggests that

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282 Ibid.
choreography meant to evoke HIV/AIDS as its subject matter inevitably toys with temporal phenomenologies in the same way as HIV/AIDS ruptured the linearity of time and the boundaries of space for those it affected. While I am in no way suggesting that this particular performance was intentionally written to commemorate HIV/AIDS, I am gesturing toward the ways that the dance rhetorically fashions itself as a memory embedded within Ailey’s own blood and the ways in which his blood becomes the site at which both his memories, his illness, and his queerness converge at the public funeral.

The temporality of the South finds itself mediated and manifested where the dance occurs, and it is made visible by its own backward relationality to the North’s linear temporal progression, a succession that is hyper-realized in NYC. In her assessment of the United States as a “nation of futurity,” Rebecca Schneider notes the ways in which American culture’s relationship to time can be located in its theatricality of history as a “doing,” a performance of the past in the present that reifies normative notions of past, present, and future. In the wake of American modernity and increased industrialization in the twentieth century, Schneider’s point is affirmed by the future-oriented standards of a dominant public sphere where certain heteronormative institutions – both social and political – govern even everyday interactions. The performances at Ailey’s funeral noticeably contrast with NYC’s heightened version of American futurism because the performances resist any sense of productivity or moving forward in time. This backwardness penetrates as a rhetorical refusal of the supposedly progressive economic, political, and social structures of life the North.

Furthermore, when examining the performance in this contemporary moment from a quare perspective, it becomes clear that Ailey’s multiple identities perform a backward resistance

285 Ibid.
286 Rebecca Schneider, Performing Remains, 19-26.
against the forward timing of NYC, as well as the tick-tocking of AIDS time in the city. This backward temporality punctuates the dance. It is both a backwardness that functions as a signifier of southernness and a resistant regression that attempts to preserve the past in the present. This backwardness finds itself enacted at the very moment that time is suspended through the performativity of southern culture on stage. In what Homi K. Bhabha calls a “time-lag,” “a contingent moment – in the signification of closure,” Ailey’s backward temporal relation is articulated via southern culture’s performativity within the “indeterminate” moment that occurs in the operations of signification, between signifier/signified.\textsuperscript{287} It is from this point, Bhabha argues, that cultural difference announces itself while subjects oppressed due to this difference are allotted the agency to subvert the contradictions of modernity and imperialism.

The dances at Ailey’s funeral bring “the dialectic of modernity…to a standstill,” thus revealing that “the temporal action of modernity – it’s progressive future drive – is staged, revealing ‘everything that is involved in the act of staging per se’” (original emphasis).\textsuperscript{288} As a performative discourse and a staging of southern diaspora, the performances resist the modern pre-disposition to colonize that which appears to be “past,” and instead uses the past-ness of southern culture as a temporal resistance that accentuates Ailey’s own diasporic subjectivity.\textsuperscript{289}

In metaphorical terms, it is Ailey’s blood that “que(e)ries” the psychic and performative processes that create temporal slippages, thus opening “a space for alternative conceptions of sexual orientation, race, and gender identity to exist within our historicized imaginations and imagined histories.”\textsuperscript{290} Ergo, Ailey’s bloodline, his heritage as a southerner, pulsates to the

\textsuperscript{287} Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1994): 263.
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 364.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{290} Faedra C. Carpenter, “Robert O’Hara’s Insurrection: ‘Que(e)rying’ History” \textit{Text and Performance Quarterly} 23, no. 2 (2003): 188.
cadence of the spiritual and the pirouettes of the dancers, while it also queerly orients spectators to observe the backwardness of southern culture in its cultivation of a past memory in the present. And although the day of the funeral might be “past and gone,” it remains always potentially present because of its existence in the archive.

**Memory Beyond the Closet**

When the performance transitions into its final section, “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham” (hereafter “Rocka My Soul”), the momentary pause is followed by a tempo matching the already established upbeats from the prior performance. Each of the previous dances lasted approximately two minutes, and this one lasts a little longer, totaling almost seven minutes for the three performances combined. Similar to the others, “Rocka My Soul” features all ten of the dancers moving effortlessly in syncopated motion to the beat. The minimalist lyrics of the chorus, a repetitive “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham” by the bass voices of the choir-meets-barber shop quartet inspires a state of hypnotized transcendence. The women dancers are always spread across the front of the stage all while the men remain secondary characters useful in their ability to move the stools when needed so that the women can freely kick, jump, and twirl. Still cheerful, a new singular man’s voice enters the conversation with the choir, bellowing, “My soul is fed!...My soul is free!...I’m going home, I’m going home, I’m going home, to live with you!” At this point it is clear why “Rocka My Soul” is a perfect paean for the setting. Ailey’s dedication to preserving his childhood memories of southern black churches comes full circle when the performers at his funeral take the opportunity to memorialize his life work through dance. His connection to the church is amplified in the cathedral, and what might seem to be an expunging of his queerness is actually the very scene where one recognizes the quare presence of Ailey and his choreography. The remainder of this chapter endeavors to
finesse the contours of Ailey’s queer identity beyond an easily decipherable “coming out” narrative in “Rocka My Soul” at the funeral.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 10. “Last Scene,” screenshot by author.291

Initially, Ailey’s queerness is locatable at the very moment his choreography disidentifies with southern culture in order to 1) illustrate a non-essentialized version of the South and to 2) point to the banality of straight temporality as it dictates the everyday conditions of livelihood in the North. Without a quare awareness of the dance, the intersection of race, sexuality, and region remains clandestine and covert. Obviously, the trimmed down performance of Revelations at the funeral relies on archetypical, and perhaps even stereotypical, representations of southern life. Certainly, one finds the most glaring of Ailey’s identities, his blackness and southernness, because they are staged without reservation. His sexuality, though, lingers unstated. Perhaps it resides within the “soul” of the performance, the embodied staging of a vital and lively blackness that exposes the irrationality of white supremacy.292 Or, more plausibly, it exists in Ailey’s own

291 sutherland9, “ALVIN AILEY JR. FAREWELL,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5khXS9nIo4U
disidentification with southern culture’s performativity. In practicing disidentification through the aesthetic re-purposing of southern culture via modern dance, Ailey cultivated new social worlds by using the conditions and materials of the present, rather than dismantling dominant ideologies or attempting to escape his circumstanced reality and past life.\textsuperscript{293} In this way, the performance undoes common sense notions of the South as necessarily inhospitable or undesirable for black and/or queer bodies, and also highlights the mundane temporal experience of the North in an excessively urban area. Disidentifaction, according to José Esteban Muñoz, “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, empower, and include minority identities and identifications.”\textsuperscript{294} The dance celebrates the backwardness of the South, while never featuring a single identifiable queer sexual moment.

In the disidentificatory process, the performance crystallizes what Jeffrey McCune calls the “queerness of blackness,” as it unfolds and desegregates conventional ideas about how one can occupy all identity categories – queer and black and southern – at the same time.\textsuperscript{295} Utilizing Ailey’s blood as a metaphorical device whereby one can pinpoint his memorialized subjectivity within the performance, the southern diaspora staged behind his casket quares the term “queer” insofar as it never resembles anything necessarily queer at all. Ailey’s blackness and queerness culminate together discretely and without a desire to announce their intelligibility.

\textsuperscript{293} José Esteban Muñoz, \textit{Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 11-12.
\textsuperscript{294} Ibid., 31.
But how does this happen? And where in this performance, precisely? It can be quite frustrating to attempt to unearth a distinguishable “quareness” because the cultural practices of queers of color often do not neatly fit within normative conceptions of American LGBTQ life as it has been constructed in mainstream discourse. One might still be entirely unconvinced that the dances at Ailey’s funeral brought him out of the closet even momentarily. Such an opinion, however, must be quared at its root, as the predominant logics of the closet do not accurately encapsulate Ailey’s queerness as it converges with his race. In a study of “the down low” as an alternative space for sexual exploration for black men, Jeffrey McCune claims that “…the closet has become a universal apparatus that describes an oppressive space where individuals dwell, [and] the given solution for finding freedom is located within the process of ‘coming out.”  

For those who already occupy an “apriori marginal position within society” (i.e. raced bodies), the closet as a space before the claiming of a non-normative identity typically collapses because racialized subjects inhabit an already precariously queer position in society due to their material existence as Other.  

In a similar study, C. Riley Snorton agrees with McCune’s take on the closet as problematic for subjects experiencing multiple forms of marginalization. Particularly with the case of black men, Snorton revises Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “the glass closet” to function as “an analytic to work through multiple axes of oppression, which…demonstrate how blackness transforms the closet as a site of concealment – however partial or contingent – to a site of confinement and display.” In other words, Ailey’s body, encased in a glass closet like the one

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297 Ibid., 13.  
298 C. Riley Snorton, Nobody is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 23.
Snorton describes, is hyper-surveilled at the level of his material blackness, while his queerness is actively yet arguably unsuccessfully concealed. For those who knew about Ailey’s sex with other men or his battle with AIDS but chose not to memorialize these aspects of his identity at the funeral, these people can be said to have performed an intentional “ignorance,” or what Snorton describes as “one tactic in negating stigma in representations in black sexuality.”

By leaving Ailey’s queerness unstated, especially at the time in which he died when both blacks and those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS were routinely derogated (not unlike today, to be clear), the utility of ignorance at the funeral did not necessarily mean his sexuality was unacknowledged or unknown. On the contrary, the vibrations of the dances at Ailey’s funeral shatter his glass closet because his death marks the moment in which the expectation to one day “come out” also died. The performances serve to memorialize all of his identities beyond the constraints of a universal closet and outside the confines of a transparent container.

Accordingly, one will not find points in the performance where Ailey is “out” of the closet per se, but it is in these very moments of what some might see as a form of suppression that Ailey’s queer identity may be found. On that note, Ailey’s queerness will always render itself visible as a quareness, an expression of black sexuality untethered to predominately white standards for communicating one’s non-normative sexual tendencies. Specifically, the performance of “Rocka My Soul” at Ailey’s funeral operates as a staging of his “blood memories” beyond his corporeal existence. Like Frantz Fanon’s estimation that, “There are times when the black man is locked into his body,” the performances of the memories once embedded within Ailey’s blood surpass the logics of a queerness manifest at only the site of the body.

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299 Ibid., 72.
Ailey lies within the invisible barriers of a glass closet, the dance rhetorically exerts a momentary transplantation of memory that is without regulation by a culture where the black body is regularly monitored. Rather, the memories are set free to exist in all of their excitability through the somatic enunciation of the dance. Further, by memorializing the quotidian joys before southern diaspora, the dance interrupts the futurism of American culture manufactured at the site of the NYC cathedral. As Kara Keeling claims, “From within the logics of reproductive futurity and colonial reality, a black future looks like no future at all.”\textsuperscript{301} Keeling’s statement compels us to consider the myriad ways of black resistance against temporal gravitas of a racist American public sphere. It would be no stretch then to imply that the dance memorializes the intersection at which all of Ailey’s identities meet – the pronunciation a black, queer, and southern diasporic subject – through the staged theatricalization of Ailey’s blood. More so, the dance registers as a memento of the struggle for survival where all of these identities converge without the fragmenting force of an obvious queer performance.

By the time the dance reaches its end, it decrescendos into a faster tempo, the sheer speed of the lyrics and the bodies of the dancers accelerate with each repetitive refrain, “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham!” Whatever somber tone was achieved at the beginning of the dance has been obliterated by the increased momentum of the performance. Like a child spinning around faster and faster until they are out of breath, the dancers move with the thrust of the beat as spectators fear for their balance and stability. Disorienting and even startling given its eulogized setting, the temporality of the dance refuses the amalgamation of blackness into the futuristic swirl of national timing. Ailey’s engagement with and lived embodiment of the

backward temporality of southern culture resists the impingements of the everyday speed of life in NYC and the United States near the dance’s end. By speeding up, rather than lagging behind, the dance moves at “a momentum that spins the body into and out of the symbolic order, a performance that becomes a mirror in which seeing and being seen convene without ever quite converging.”302 Like Tavia Nyongo’s formulation of “the amalgamation waltz,” the dance attempts to preserve a memory unique to Ailey’s own lived experience as a black, queer, and southern diasporic subject. Indeed, the dance resists a hybridization of difference, as it calls into question the very exacting epistemologies, those of time, space, race, class, region, migration, and sexuality that conflict with and thus oppress the lives of those who do not fit within the constructed parameters that guarantee privilege. For this reason, the dance preserves and displays Ailey’s identity as it highlights the contradictions of modernity by working against the increased threat of black cultural erasure. A memorialization of Ailey’s southern heritage as it intersects with his black and queer positions in the world, the dance ends abruptly at its fastest pace, signaling the end of Ailey’s memories as they ran through his blood. In Ailey’s death his memories of southern diaspora are embodied and lived continually, as long as the dance finds its way on stage or viewed within the archive.

Afterthoughts

I conclude this chapter after having watched the footage from Ailey’s funeral more times than I care to recall at the moment. With each view, I find something new and curious prompting me to re-watch the clip just in case I had missed whatever it was I had not noticed before in other parts of the film. In my latest viewing, I became fascinated by the fleeting reactions of mourners, since

every once in a while the camera will briefly pan and capture various audience member reactions. For example, the late Maya Angelou is shown singing along to “You May Run On,” and so is the officiating Reverend for the service, Dr. Robert Polk. However, no one is featured more than Ailey’s mother, Lula Elizabeth, who claps excitedly and without reserve along to the beat of “Rocka My Soul.” If she was not dressed in all black one might not even realize she was at a funeral at all. Her delighted disposition is telling of the deeply loving relationship she had with her son and the past she was able to live once again as his memories unfolded on the temporary stage near his body.

If nothing else, his mother’s reaction also mirrors the non-normative life Ailey himself lived; in fact, Ailey’s death does not mean that he is now gone but as the funeral program implies, he has returned “home.” Once more, Ailey breaks from the regimes of a temporality with beginnings, middles, and ends. He instead completes a cyclical life journey where “home,” another name for heaven rooted in the southern black church, represents a space without time. With his memories in ever-circulation via the dance, Ailey’s lived experiences arguably never die. Despite the demise of his bodily presence, Ailey’s “blood memories” are a metaphor whereby we can discover Ailey’s many identities coinciding within his choreography.

This chapter accomplished three primary goals. First, I demonstrated how “The Day is Past and Gone” served to memorialize Ailey’s memory as a southerner in addition to his experience as a southern diasporic subject. Next, I analyzed the specific ways in which “You May Run On” shape-shifted normative conceptions of modern temporality by expressing the backwardness of southern culture in the North through the aesthetic embodiment of Ailey’s own memories. I emphasized the ways Ailey’s own backward blood was fully present at the funeral at the time of the performance. In the end section of the chapter, I argued that Ailey’s queerness
could be found in “Rocka My Soul” if understood outside the normative logics of the “closet.”
Throughout this chapter, and in the last section in particular, I have sought to prove the utility of
a quare critical lens, since all of Ailey’s identities emerge together and are best understood in
tandem. Likewise, despite never being verbally mentioned by anyone at the funeral, I have
attempted to delineate the ways in which Ailey’s AIDS is fully present at the funeral within the
“blood memories” that are performed beside his body. Denying the presence of Ailey’s AIDS
counterproductively refutes Ailey’s claim that his choreography stages the memories embedded
within his blood. Hence, I have tried to recuperate his illness within the parameters of a
quareness that acknowledges all of Ailey’s identity categories, while preserving room for a
lingering sense of doubt that the funeral was as liberatory as I have attempted to portray it.

My analysis, in turn, ventured to show how the dance at Ailey’s funeral memorialized his
AIDS in a performance of resistance against those “metaphorized illnesses that haunt the
collective imagination,” or what Susan Sontag calls “a hard death.” The performed selections
from Revelations at the funeral, I have argued, are best understood according the tenants of a
quare critical eye because the performance as a whole, quares our understandings of AIDS
memorials at the time. Aligned with what Roderick A. Ferguson has coined a “queer of color
critique,” my critical aim with this chapter was to enlighten readers on Ailey’s own exposure of
“the universality of the citizen” through his choreography of the memory of southern diaspora.
He accomplished this, in part, by constructing a backward temporality of the South in the North
thereby articulating his own “intersecting particularities that account for material existence,”
specifically his race, sexuality, and regional nativity. Ultimately, utilizing the theories of black

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304 Roderick A. Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique (Minneapolis: University of
305 Ibid.
queer studies, I extended David Gere’s very limiting criteria for what qualifies, in his terms, as an “AIDS dance” in *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*. If one was to accept Gere’s requirements, an “AIDS dance,” would have to feature “gayness,” “homosexual desire,” and “mourning.” I contend that an “AIDS dance,” in order to be inclusive of black choreographies such as Ailey’s, must seek out and find those dances that memorialize AIDS in spite of whiteness and its heteronormative grain. The dances at Ailey’s funeral prove that AIDS performances in general might be overlooked as illegible if one is not attuned to the contours of ethnicity and cultural difference.

Such a consideration is important today when the homonormative politics and the mainly white priorities of the modern LGBT movement absorb AIDS activism, even as new cases of HIV appear everyday and at morbidly high rates across the southern United States. Without re-configuring our understandings of what AIDS was, is, and can be, particularly through past and present cultural production and performance, we risk relegating the threat of HIV/AIDS to bygone times. I agree with David Román’s astute claim that “Remembering AIDS sets out to revisit the past so that we might generate both new understandings of what has transpired and what still yet needs to be done.” To this end, I emphasize that Ailey’s funeral does not exist in a vacuum. There remains a continued urgency to address, study, and theorize HIV/AIDS as it continues to disproportionally affect queer and non-queer African Americans.

Finally, witnessing Ailey’s funeral in the present is, as Della Pollock so fitting puts it, “like a handshake with history,” because, for those that were not there (or in my case, were not born yet), the funeral exists only through its remediation in the archive, which requires archivists

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like myself to perform “an act of remembering and awakening.”308 (103). The writing of this chapter, moreover, allows me to know through “not knowing” since I perform my own version of queer historiography by literally re-writing the narrative of Ailey’s death. I add to an ever-growing archival accumulation on the life of Ailey, and hope in doing so, have provided a new way of remembering a man so interested in making sure his memories were always preserved. The dance is far from over. New revelations await.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

While reading something, often about people I had never met, I suddenly would start weeping uncontrollably, thoroughly undone. Or I would find myself astonished, in jaw-dropping disbelief about the sheer number and unrelenting reiteration of deaths within the movement. I would sit in an affect-flooded stupor, transported to a temporally disjunctive state, experiencing, in a way for the first time, the horrors of a recent past that I had lived through but on some affective level had refused (my emphasis).309

– Deborah B. Gould, Moving Politics

The above excerpt comes from Deborah B. Gould’s cutting-edge historiographical revision of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in the book Moving Politics. Amongst the other critical interventions present in this study, Gould primarily attempts to (re)situate affects, and distinguish between emotion and feelings, in the social movement. As this particular quote makes clear, the temporal/affective line between researcher and object of study can disintegrate upon the very moment the researcher is moved by their archive. This movement may be emotional and/or physical. In my experience, it was both. The movement Gould identifies is precisely the boundary breaking tie that can leave one feeling connected and relationally submerged with objects of the distant (or not so far away) past. In temporal terms, this movement might very well be the thing that eradicates those arbitrary terms “past” and “present,” and displaces bodies into a liminal space of fully immersive historicity. In the first chapter of this project, I encountered an archive I was vexed and pleasured by. My bodily response flowed into the second chapter where I embraced ephemerality and was oriented by the temporal residues of AIDS activism. By the time I began the third chapter, I attempted to temper my personal experiences in the archive, while also acknowledging the ever-presence of my subjective positionality and its bearing on my interpretive ability. Thus, like Gould, my archival experience

was informed by an affective excursion into the taken-for-granted construction of temporality and its contradictions. My body against and within the archive exhibited the “temporally disjunctive state” Gould details in length, and compelled me to adjust my methodological prescriptions to account for this important condition that ultimately affected my reading of the rhetorical artifacts throughout.

Throughout this project, I borrowed, applied, and extended concepts theorized by scholars in the field of Communication, particularly the areas of rhetoric, performance, and critical/cultural studies. I hope to have made a slight (and honest) intervention in the current conjecture of this dynamic discipline, particularly when it comes to archival research. I aimed to reconsider and expand the archive as an inventionial resource for queer communities, while at the same time adjusting traditional approaches to archival collections to account for embodied epistemologies. As a public memory project, this project was an effort to expose the queer southern transplant as a consigned figure in both a broader archive of American history and LGBTQ historical narratives. In doing so, I sought to prove the necessity for critical Communication scholars to critically interrogate temporalities, regional cultural production, and the queerness of bodily/affective method.

Summary

The body of this project consisted of three main chapters. Each chapter focused on either one or multiple queer southern transplants in order to theorize about the backwardness of their bodies in a NYC context circa the emergence of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the United States (1982-1992). Although each chapter offered a different view of a diverse set of transplants, all of the chapters featured in this project contributed a similar, theoretically relevant, commentary about the ways in which regional migrations cultivate temporal disruptions.
In the first chapter, my primary goal was to lay a robust foundation for understanding NYC as a scene that epitomized the operations of the United States public sphere in an age of modernity. By focusing on its hyper-temporal pace, I demonstrated how NYC cultivated a public temporality that supported structural heteronormativity and homophobia. This public temporality, I contend, upheld the ominous presence of AIDS time, which I asserted was the ominous temporal risk that invaded queer communities upon the epidemic’s introduction into the public sphere. By examining the archival/aesthetic traces of the activist efforts of Rodger McFarlane – a queer southern transplant – and his work with the GMHC, I demonstrated his deployment of a southern temporality (a backwardness) that coincided with the counterpublic temporality of the GMHC. Both temporal resistances collided with the impacts of AIDS time in the initial days of HIV/AIDS, and functioned as modes of survival on both the individual and collective level. In various moments, I placed myself in the archive and attempted to answer questions about the relevance of McFarlane’s southernness with the traces of McFarlane still present. In the end, I highlighted the ways McFarlane’s backward body finds its way in the here and now as a remnant of early HIV/AIDS activist efforts.

In the second chapter, I extended my arguments from the first chapter using archival ephemera leftover from a short-lived activist collective called The Southerners who met at the LGBT Community Center in NYC in the first two years of the 1990s. Detailing my meta-observations of the materials and objects associated with the Southerners, I attempted to reconstruct their efforts to end HIV/AIDS and homophobia in the South while living in NYC. I argued that the Southerners, in a similar fashion as McFarlane from the first chapter, performed a backwardness that marked their regional heritage and their relationship to the temporality of HIV/AIDS. When viewing their materiality in the historical present, I described my own bodily
enfoldment into the archival space, as well as my own subjectivity as a native southerner. I asserted that these temporal discontinuities created an immersive experience for myself as archivist to experience the pain and pleasures of the Southerners’ activism. However, I left room for a healthy amount of doubt when it came to the liberatory potential of the Southerners community as a whole. Upon my discovery of racist paraphernalia in the archive, I was able to determine that southern cultural production, especially given its confederate legacy, is simply impure and cannot be wholly celebrated without acknowledging and critiquing its entrenchment in prejudice and violence. Overall, I contended that this particular collection’s temporal residues in the present were still a vital and orienting backward force.

In the final chapter, I departed from the previous chapter in two primary ways. First, I examined a ballet performance (not a performance of advocacy) that occurred at the funeral of famed choreographer Alvin Ailey (a black, queer, southern transplant). Second, by letting the object of study lead, I adjusted my methodological lens so that I could properly attend to Ailey’s intersectional positionality at the interlocking matrices of race, class, sexuality, and region. I decided to jettison my personal narration and affects in my analysis, instead opting for a “quare” reading that elevated the life of Ailey as a critical component of this project. Toward this end, I recycled Muñoz’s notion of “ephemera” from the previous chapter, and claimed that Ailey’s “blood” is the metaphorical site in which all of his identities – as a black, queer, southern, and HIV/AIDS-positive – person converge. I argued that the performance of Revelations at his funeral, in turn, broadcasted an aesthetic memorialization of his southern diasporic subjectivity, which disrupted the normative flows of temporality in a NYC context. Thus, the backwardness of the performance resists the impingements of AIDS time and the public’s temporality by breaking the closet metaphor that denies Ailey of a black, queer subjectivity from the outset.
**Implications**

This project focused on three specific cases concerning people whom I have called the “queer southern transplant” who migrated from the American South to NYC and were in some way affected by the first decade of the presence of HIV/AIDS in the United States. As it stands now, this project is severely limited by its narrow reach. Nonetheless, I still contend that the project has implications for the study of Communication despite its limited scope.

The first is my mixed-method approach, which combined rhetorical and performance approaches to archives that pushed against the traditional boundary between archival and ethnographic research. Unlike already established archival methods, my scholarly lens privileged my body as a site of knowing, a standard established by performance studies scholars in field work (known as performance ethnography). Because of the fluid nature of this technique, I was able to combine personal narration and embodied description when necessary and appropriate throughout this project. I was able to revive past materials in the present, thus destabilizing the rhetorically instituted temporal compartmentalization of experience spurred by a modern public sphere. Consequently, this method experiments with rhetoric and performance studies in interesting ways that I believe could inform new scholarship on archives that dares to go beyond traditional historiography.

This method also kept me as honest and aware of my position in the world as possible. My writing of myself into this project reminds me of Lucas Hildebrand’s critical self-reflexivity in his forum piece, “Retroactivism,” wherein he admits, “Whereas most AIDS scholars personally experienced the epidemic’s traumatic effects on the gay community, I did not, and the disparity of our experiences surely shapes our perspectives on what will be remembered.”

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Therefore, as an exercise in public and cultural memory, this project highlighted my own perspective as an aspiring queer scholar far removed from the first years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, and for better-or-worse revealed an ignorance that cannot be remedied no matter the amount of context I build. As part of a generation of inevitable “up-and-coming” scholars who never experienced the trauma, joys, and/or sorrows of the 1980s or even 1990s queer community building that came out of that first decade of HIV/AIDS, I hope to have shown how this impossibility of knowing made a difference for the history I have assembled here. It has yet to be seen how this gap in access will affect new queer histories in humanistic fields, but time will surely tell.

Further, joining a conversation initiated by critical/cultural communication theorist Sarah Sharma in the pages of *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, I bravely centered temporality throughout this project. As this project obviously proved, time is not the easiest object of critique. Time is fleeting. Time is felt. Time is anti-textual, yet writes itself onto the material fibers of our life span, and as I hope to have shown, determines the behavioral patterns of people in the everyday and in moments of crisis. In her call for a better understanding of differential timing in the public sphere, Sharma writes the following: “Recognition of the interdependency of differential lived time tends to be ignored in almost any discussion about time, temporality, speed-up, time-management, work life balance, tempo, and *life getting faster* in general. Time is far more tangled, far more common and bound, than has been accounted for. And it is from here, from a sense of being tied together in time, that a politics of critical time hinges (original emphasis).”\(^{311}\) As a M.A. candidate still undergoing an acclimation to all avenues of critical theory, I hope to have at least scratched the surface of Sharma’s demand for temporal

critique, and I hope that this project serves as a starting point for my continued inquiry into the critical politics of time and its affect on publics of all kinds.

This project also offered a new strand of inquiry that could broaden the horizon of queer southern culture studies. That is, I have linked queer theory and the study of the American South through the thematics of migration and diaspora (the latter theme appearing only in the third chapter). According to my review of current literatures, there exists no other comprehensive study on the migration of gay men from the South to NYC (or any other urban area), particularly during the first decade of HIV/AIDS in the United States. While other books like John Howard’s *Men Like That* certainly reference the historical regional transport of southern queer bodies to the industrial North, there still remains a dearth of analyses dedicated primarily to understanding how and to what rhetorical effect these bodies affected the cultural climates they found themselves inhabiting. This project endeavored to make at least a small dent in this deficit, while also considering the rhetorical, performative, and temporal aspects of this under-studied phenomenon.

Lastly, I write this project with a deeply personal investment in the ways academics, activists, and those we might consider “everyday people” might resist the logics of consignment inherent to any archive, subsequently creating their own versions of public and/or cultural memory for new generations who might otherwise never have been exposed to those lost traces of the past. For me, this project was an attempt to offer a public memorialization of the southern queer transplant a figure who has been lost in both the archive of referential Americana and queer memory in the United States generally. Though we must ask: “For whom does the queer southern transplant and the transplant archive serve as a rhetorical memory-maker?” Perhaps it functions as a site of connection for the young southern gay man like me who finds himself
precariously enamored by his surroundings in central NYC. Maybe this project is an amateur’s attempt at hopelessly identifying a thing that simply is not there. Or, giving myself the benefit of doubt, perhaps this project’s memorializing function and affective reach serves everyone in some way or another. No matter, the mere thought that it might – that it might spark new conversation, that it might inspire, that it might induce collective memory, that it might spark a personal memory, that it might serve as the first major stepping stone of my developing research program – is enough for me…and just might be the greatest implication I can list.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This project is incomplete and is in need of future analysis and critical interrogation. For this project to ever be considered “complete,” there are a number of important Others that must be included (or at least addressed) in the transplant archive. The most obvious omission might be that of women. Indeed, there are no lesbian, bisexual, or transgender-identifying individuals in the current transplant archive. Surely there were also more queer southern people of color who migrated North and were affected by the America HIV/AIDS. People with disabilities, older people, younger people, non-binary-identified, and others who I have regrettably forgotten to list here must be sought out, archived, and rhetorically analyzed in the same way as the three main transplants featured throughout this project if its queerness is to remain in tact. In its current condition, this project is weakened without these diverse voices, and I suggest that myself and others interested in future research on the queer migration of bodies from the South to the North, expand our methodologies toward inclusion beyond the ones I have utilized here.

Theoretically, I also suspect this project could use further revision and expansion. Now that I have honed in on the temporal aspects of the transplant archive, there is room for further theoretical interventions in the affective, emotional, and/or purely discursive ways queer
southern transplants construct their identity in a time of HIV/AIDS. Methodologically, scholars might also utilize the same techniques I have used here but with adjustment (such as jettisoning archival research and focusing on the ethnographic or vice versa). Or depending on the project, scholars might also extend the methodological approach I have included here, or otherwise completely overhaul it in exchange for a less critical stance. There is also room for exploring the locale of queer southern transplants and/or the transplant archive. One place we might find transplants is online or as representations in other digital media. All considered, I insist that this project still has plenty of room to grow theoretically, methodologically, and conceptually.

**Final Thoughts**

The importance of history to gay men and lesbians goes beyond the lessons to be learned from the events of the past to include the meanings generated through retellings of those events and the agency those meanings carry in the present. Lesbian and gay historical self-representations—queer fictions of the past—help construct, maintain, and contest identities—queer fictions of the present. 312

> – Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past*

If the present is not at first an object but a mediated affect, it is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now whose very parameters (when did the “present” begin?) are always there for debate. 313

> – Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*

The arbitrary lines that demarcate past, present, and future are soluble and performative. For queer communities and LGBTQ people in general, these very lines might be the difference between resistance or derogation, survival or death. Backwardness, I have argued, defies temporal structures in search of an impure style of anti-futurism against the modernist impulse of the United States public sphere. In the transplant archive, present conditions were never enough,

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nor was the past (or the future for that matter) a desired endpoint. Instead, the southern transplants engaged a backward performance in a fight against the ominous temporal impingements of HIV/AIDS, and made new worlds of their own that were neither here nor there and that defied temporal/spatial normativity. I have explained that these past worlds are accessible and can be reanimated in the present. By performing a backwardness myself – a marker of my regional nativity and my relationship to time – I strived to create a project wherein the queer southern transplant could be continually activated despite his consignation in the depths of queer cultural memory. Now that the project is over, the transplant rests once more and waits for the (re)discovery and inclusion of more subjects in the transplant archive. Until next time.
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