Rooms Without Walls Are Time Capsules of the Soul(s)

A physical space devoid of devoted inhabitants is merely a shapeless room. Indeed, physical spaces are shaped by the people who breathe life and memories into them; their sentiment is ingrained within the structural integrity of the building itself. These are not just fleeting moments: the feelings embedded within these spaces last forever, as the physical spaces act as a microcosm of collective memory for the people who have, are, and will inhabit them. As Gaston Bachelard relays in *The Poetics of Space*, physical spaces are not only shaped by the memories created within them, but these spaces also provoke and bring forth memories themselves. Further, this idea that space(s) hold a sense of weightlessness and timelessness that provokes and holds memories and sentiment is, and always has been, ever present in queer communities. Reconfiguring Bachelard's ideas about space and memory through a queer lens can provide a useful analysis of past and present queer spaces and the collective memories they emit for their inhabitants. Nevertheless, while the safety and acceptance granted by queer spaces are pertinent for queer communities, it is important to recognize that the work here is nowhere near done, as queer individuals still face the threat of violence. The goal, then, is to create a space that all queer individuals can call home. Particularly, this space will both cater to the needs of all queer individuals and will ring true in all of their collective memories. To that end, this essay will use Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* both as a framework to analyze queer spaces of the past and present through the memories they evoke and as a foundation to propose a metaphorical "home" of indefinite spaces, those of which will cater to the needs of all queer communities.

For Bachelard, there is no place like home. In his first chapter of *The Poetics of Space* entitled "The House. From Cellar to Garret. The Significance of the Hut", Bachelard illustrates

how different sections of the home all hold different memories and spirits that, in effect, form or alter people's experiences within these certain spaces. Bachelard believes that the home is the cornerstone of human life— the place people always return to (Bachelard 4). However, when speaking of the home in this way, he does not directly refer to the house itself. Rather, he believes that "... all really inhabited spaces bears the essence of the notion of home" and that people find home in any of the places they derive shelter and comfort from (Bachelard 4). Nevertheless, the true, unadulterated significance of these homes does not lie in their physical qualities and components but in the memories and human sentiments that form them (Bachelard 4,5). Specifically, the several houses in people's lives, through the indestructible power of daydreaming that the human does within them, act as a lightbox for all of the memories that have ever existed within them (Bachelard 5,6).

Evidently, the memories held inside these spaces are vital for the spaces' integrity. Indeed, Bachelard claims that "the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind" (Bachelard 6). It can be soundly concluded that the "home" spaces and the memories within them are in a harmonious, reciprocal relationship. Precisely, the memories of space grant it an unshifting magnitude of meaning, while the space is a secure shelter for the memories themselves. Furthermore, these memories, in turn, provide a shelter for the humans feeling them within these spaces. This shelter, as painted by Bachelard, provides stability through the memories within them that allow the inhabitant to forget about everything else outside the house, as:

> "Our houses are no longer aware of the storms of the outside universe. Occasionally the wind blows a tile from a roof and kills a passer-by in the street. But this roof crime is only aimed at the belated passer-by. Or lightning may for an instant set fire to the

> window-panes. The house does not tremble, however, when thunder rolls. It trembles neither with nor through us. In our houses set close one up against the other, we are less afraid" (Bachelard 27)

Therefore, these spaces that people breathe life into breathe life back into them by evoking and reminding them of the memories they have created within them— memories that provide comfort, peace, and solace.

Undoubtedly, these spaces of comfort and protection provide their inhabitants with a sense of belonging. In Kelly Baker's text "Identity, Memory, and Place," she discusses the profound impact that spaces and places have on an individual's feelings of belonging, community, and identity formation. Simply put, if one feels safe and secure within a certain space or place, they ultimately feel that they belong there. These feelings of belonging are rooted in the ability to be themselves in these spaces without fear of repercussion. Thus, there is a "Heightened importance of place for the construction of self and identity," as the person who feels they belong within a place will ultimately make that place a part of themselves (Baker 24). It is important to note that this relationship between identity and space is not just some arbitrary social tie. Rather, "the experience of being rooted, by blood, within a place" links that place within the fabric of the individual's identity. The experiences and memories created within that place both form the structure of the place and help to complete the individual and collective identities of those that inhabit it.

The specific places that provide individuals with feelings of belonging and identity are, ultimately, shaped by the people who inhabit them. The individuals who gather inside and construct themselves and their communities within these places mark them as timeless, historical landmarks constructed by memory and activity (Baker 24). The nature of this attachment works

cyclically, too, as individuals not only construct the significance of a place, but this significance is also mirrored back to them through the experiences and memories they hold within this space, ultimately constructing both the social and personal significance of the place for itself and for the inhabitant (Baker 26). The memories formed within these spaces are also continually in flux as they are created and unfold directly from active individual and collective identity (Baker 26). However, while one's personal memory of a place may mark that place as significant for them, a collective or shared memory of a place marks it as a symbolic location, one that not only contributes to the history of that place but also to collective feelings of belonging for the communities that inhabit them (Baker 26). This grander sense of belonging —one that extends throughout entire communities and demographics— is born out of "personal and larger historical narratives, whereby people's shared sense of or attachment to a place is being continually remade" (Baker 27). As individuals and communities that occupy a space make and remake memories and experiences within it, they are simultaneously rewriting the history of that space. This history, in turn, provides them with feelings of comfort and belonging, a place they can call home.

The significance of spaces and places, both in terms of feelings of belonging and in the creation of (collective) identities, is unquestionable within queer communities. Throughout history, queer individuals have found refuge in the spaces that allow them to gather safely and authentically. Particularly, modern queer spaces such as bars, cafes, and neighborhoods allowed queer people places to form and come together as a community, forming a united front against those who try to oppress them (Baker 28). Additionally, these spaces allow for political unity through activism and "public recognition" (Baker 28). Specifically, the "urban city" has allowed queer individuals to form powerfully and collectively throughout history, allowing them the

"capacities to create visibility, consolidate capital, and foster political power among spatially bound groups" (Baker 28). To that end, spaces like the urban city have not only allowed queer individuals the ability to safely come together as their genuine selves but have also allowed them to come together as a stronger political front.

The sheer importance of all queer spaces, both large and small, cannot be ignored or belittled. From the beginning of time, queer people have created spaces where they can safely come together and prosper in all aspects of their lives, and often, they have to create these spaces within places that actively persecute them for their queerness (Furman et al. VIII). These spaces are not a luxury, but a requirement and necessity, as "The idea that queerness requires an ecosystem to flourish helps clarify the fundamental importance of queer space. It's not just a building in which to hook up or hang out. Instead, it's an alternate universe, a secret network that runs right round the world" (Furman, et al. VIII). These queer spaces, like all those that form socially and historically by way of their inhabitants, are continually being made and remade: any place that exists or has yet to exist can be queer (Furman, et al. IX). It is required that these spaces allow queer individuals the room to be their true selves without fear of ridicule from others: the space must be harmoniously free of judgment. On the same accord, these spaces must allow those who have grown up under the suffocating weight of historical erasure the ability to form their own identities.

The formation and reformation of queer spaces not only allow these spaces to act as sanctuaries for queer people to come together and form memory and identity, but they also act as spaces that actively reject normativity and heteronormativity (Pavka). Both the physical and figurative essence of queer spaces are defined by their rejection of all that is deemed "normal" by oppressive entities and systems of power (Pavka). Differently from (hetero)normative spaces,

which all follow specific rules of conduct and ways of acting, queer spaces allow individuals the chance to behave differently than society expects them to act— allowing them the space to reject this normative expectation (Pavka). In this way, then, queer spaces eventually transform into much more than a physical "place." Namely, the physical space becomes a movable, unfixed means by which queer individuals "challenge the behaviors, rules, expectations and situations framed by the built environment…queerness is not so much a place, but an expanded strategy of interrogating place" (Pavka). Therefore, it may ultimately be impossible to identify a "permanent, stable and material queer space" that is materially stagnant throughout history (Pavka). Nevertheless, that is where the power of queer spaces comes in: they exist and bloom as queer individuals come together within them, sharing and identifying with the collective memories that ultimately shape and ground the space itself.

While queer spaces are constantly being made and remade by those who inhabit them, there are a slew of spaces—both general and specific— that repeatedly act as sanctuaries for queer communities. First, on a more general level, there are queer bars and neighborhoods. Queer bars and clubs act as a "breath" for queer individuals, allowing them to come together to experience joy, community, and freedom of expression (Wortham). Under the dimmed lights of the nightclub, expression is illuminated. While queer bars and clubs doubtlessly leave a strong physical impression in queer collective memory by allowing individuals the space to live, breathe, dance, and sing without fear of shame, the clubs themselves operate as movable entities as well. In the age where foundational queer clubs and bars are starting to close up more and more, the "club energy" transforms and takes form in other ways like "parties, on apps, and through spontaneous encounters" (Wortham). Additionally, the erasure of marginalized groups within queer communities has rendered the "movable" club a necessity. Specifically, many of

these queer spaces are still “dominated by white-bodied cisgendered men and cater to their experiences and comfort levels” (Wortham). Therefore, when queer clubs and bars won’t or resist to comply with marginalized groups within the queer community, like queer POC, the club must move. This is precisely why it is so important that queer spaces are formed by those who inhabit them: when a space no longer fits the requirements, it can be remade again. The physical clubs that have existed and will exist may act as an archive for queer communities, but the idea of the club itself “is not bound to a specific place. It can’t be. Time, gentrification and predatory business practices have kept the club on the move…Spaces are queered by the bodies that congregate there and the politics that they bring en masse” (Wortham). The mobile capabilities of the queer club energy are not only characteristic of power and strength but also timelessness and futurity.

Queer neighborhoods, often referred to in studies as “Gayborhoods”, act as vitally significant markers in queer collective memory. Amin Ghaziani’s 2020 study, “Why Gayborhoods Matter: The Street Empirics of Urban Sexualities”, analyzes hundreds of national media reports, ultimately offering insights as to how queer neighborhoods figure in queer collective memory. The first significant attribute of gayborhoods is that they positively impact voting blocs and elections. Specifically, queer people gain political benefit when they are grouped in “clusters”, and can “exert electoral influence” if they are grouped together in a recognizable voting bloc (Ghaziani 91). To that end, the existence of gayborhoods increases the voter turnout of its inhabitants, as the unity of queer people in a physical location leads to a positive influence on political action (Ghaziani 91). When grouped together, queer people are more likely to be influenced to act politically— especially if the matters that they are voting on will ultimately decide the future of the community they reside and thrive in. While queer people

are proven to be more active and engaged in political and public affairs than heterosexual people, the existence and active participation within gayborhoods increases this disparity even further (Ghaziani 92). This insurgence of political participation in queer neighborhoods is clear through the power of protest. Physical location, and the people that make it up, matter when it comes to political activism, and gayborhoods hold much power for activism efforts (Ghaziani 99). Specifically, protests against Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign and the criminalization of gay marriage, alongside active responses to the 1980s AIDS crisis and 1990s escalation of homophobic hate crimes, were all spearheaded in gayborhoods (Ghaziani 98-101). Gayborhoods allow queer individuals to stand together resolutely to face any forms of oppression that may come toward them.

Gayborhoods are also important for the sex and love lives of queer individuals, as they make it easier for queer people to find other (queer) sexual partners (Ghaziani 93). New York City's Christopher Street acted as the first recognizable magnum opus for this collection of queer communities, where the streets were constantly lined with queer people, leaving them never having to "question" if they were engaging with someone queer or not (Ghaziani 94). It is for these reasons, too, that the inhabitants of gayborhoods "depend on the streets of gayborhoods, which are often shielded from the heterosexual gaze, to connect with each other" (Ghaziani 94). The existence of gayborhoods allows queer individuals to yearn for and seek out their desires without facing the potential threat of heteronormative backlash.

It may sound rudimentary, but the existence of gayborhoods as safe spaces for queer individuals cannot be underscored enough. Despite a (general) increase in positive attitudes toward homosexuality, the threat of violence is most definitely still looming, and queer people feel that they can live more safely and securely in gayborhoods (Ghaziani 94). Comfort and

freedom are the priorities here: queer people want to be able to walk down the streets with their partner(s), hand in hand, and not feel the risk or threat of imminent violence for their sexual preferences (Ghaziani 94). These neighborhoods, in turn, allow people who do not feel safe and accepted in their homes to feel safe and accepted in the arms of their community (Ghaziani 95). These feelings of safety, security, and acceptance are especially important for the queer POC youth, as these neighborhoods are frequently the only places where they feel they can truly be themselves (Ghaziani 95). To that point, it is important to remember that "the idea of safety underlying the popular notion of 'safe space' is relational, context dependent, and constructed through the collective experiences of people interacting with others on the streets" (Ghaziani 97). In other words, while these neighborhoods may act as beacons of safety, there is still more work that needs to be done to ensure that they are safe for *all* members of queer communities.

Lastly, queer neighborhoods are significant for queer culture and collective memory because they allow further community building and flourishing. Seeking community within gayborhoods helps people further develop and solidify their identity by allowing them to be around people similar to them (Ghaziani 103). Ghaziani explains that "Like attracts like. This is a well-established fact of human life, one that sociologists call homophily. Geography is a key precondition for homophily" (Ghaziani 103). In other words, queer individuals are more likely to naturally come together and flourish with people that are also queer. Seeking community within gayborhoods allows a location to celebrate this like identity, one that has been oppressed for many years in other heteronormative spaces. Gayborhoods also act as a cultural location— a living artifact— that serves as an active and always producing archive for queer communities.

Alongside the more general physical queer spaces exist the specific queer spaces that hold true in queer collective memory. First, Christopher Street's Stonewall Inn is a "symbol of

gay liberation" (Ghaziani 106). Stonewall is the site of the historic Stonewall Riots of 1969. However, the neighborhood of Christopher Street (The Village) has been a booming location for queer people, specifically queer artists, since the 1920s (Furman,et al. 172). Particularly, after World War II, there was a large growth of American subcultures, which "set the stage for dramatic social progress in the LGBTQ+ community in the United States and beyond"' (Furman, et al. 172). Stonewall first opened as a bar from 1967-1969 before reopening in 2006, operating as a "dive bar populated primarily by gay men and trans women" (Furman, et al 172). Stonewall was frequently raided by corrupt police officers, those of which usually ended in the arrest of queer individuals (Furman, et al. 172). These patrons "were rounded up into vans, fearful for their jobs and their reputations in the largely intolerant, homophobic society of mid-century America" (Furman, et al. 172). However, on June 28th, 1969, a typical raid ended differently: as police lined people up for arrest while harassing and sexually assaulting trans women, the patrons began to fight back (Furman, et al. 172). Specific to the start of these events, infamous activist and drag queen Marcia P. Johnson threw a shot glass at a mirror, ultimately breaking it (Furman, et al. 172). Raids then turned to riots, as the patrons and cops ended up fighting in the bar and into the streets as Stonewall patrons and the community worked as a "united front" (Furman, et al. 172). Their united front could not be broken because "Although met with police batons and tear gas, the rioters were ignited by a sense of solidarity and propelled by a new visibility. They would return the following night to continue this form of radical queer protest as performance…this event would mark Christopher Street as the genesis location of modern LGBTQIA+ culture" (Furman, et al. 172). Now, Stonewall exists and continues to thrive as a gay bar on Christopher Street. In this location, queer people can coexist and blossom among members of their community through drinks, dance, pool, and drag performances. Across the

street from Stonewall, in Christopher Park, there now exists the Gay Liberation Monument, which commemorates the liberation and freedom offered by the bravery of the patrons on that June morning (Furman, et al. 172).

Years of activism spearheaded by queer POC in London led to the creation of a physical location for the Black Lesbian and Gay Center in London, England— a creation that was long overdue (Furman, et al. 68). The creation of the Black Lesbian and Gay Center was a vital component in the development of a black queer community in England, as the center acted as a safe space and refuge (Furman, et al. 68). Within this space, the black queer community in London met regularly, the consistency of which acted as a lifeline of support for those in the community (Furman, et al. 68). At first, these meetings were held in various different places, before a group within the community formed in search of a more *permanent* location (Furman, et al. 68). The solidification of a reliable, physical space for the BLGC— one that was more recognizable and able to receive further funding— was a huge step for London's black queer community (Furman, et al. 68). This search for a more fixed physical location was not without pushback, however, as "discriminatory landlords, and the loss of funding" made the search for a physical center more difficult for the community than it could have been (Furman, et al. 68). Nevertheless, the BLGC fought back against these discriminatory efforts by forming "coalitions with unions, and community groups, rallying thousands to protest against the rise in anti-gay sentiments" (Furman, et al. 68). Specifically, the 1987 Tottenham march 'Smash the Backlash', which included over 3,500 people, came together to recognize black lesbian and gay community in London (Furman, et al. 68). Similarly, the BLGC has organized the Black Lesbians and Gays Against Homophobia in the Media campaign, has participated in 'Black Lesbians and Gays in the Community' conferences, has collaborated with the Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights

charity, and has contributed to literature like ‘Shot by Both Sides’ (Furman, et al. 68). After years of searching and fighting back, the BLGC found a physical home for their center in Peckham Rye (Furman, et al. 68). The founding of this center was a landmark achievement for queer communities, as it was the first black lesbian and gay center established in the world (Furman, et al. 68). Although the creation of this center was paramount, pushback against it continued, as obtaining funds was continually met with discriminatory roadblocks (Furman, et al. 68). Unfortunately, in 1999, the center closed its doors, moving at first to a small office run by volunteers before shifting into an office in a volunteer’s home (Furman, et al. 68). Although the center’s (first) physical location has closed, the memory of it has not: the timeless and mobile energy of the space of the center has and will continue to live on in queer collective memory. This memory, at large, is encapsulated by “many life-affirming friendships and relationships, underpinned by the belief in a society that could be truly equal for all” (Furman, et al. 68). The spirit of the center will live on as a symbol and marker of the relentless fight for equality, and a space to do so.

While it is important to analyze and appreciate queer spaces of the past and present, both as physical containers of queer archival matter and as figments of collective queer memory, looking at what has and does exist is not enough. Rather, it is time to raise our gaze to the future so that we can begin to form and reform space(s) that queer individuals of the present and future can grow up and live in. The formation of a queer future space(s) is suitable and perfectly in line with the idea of Queer Futurity, an idea coined by José Esteban Muñoz in his text, “Cruising The Toilet: Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity.” In this text, Muñoz responds to Lee Edelman’s text, *No Future*, by offering up a different approach to futurity. Specifically, while Edelman believes that queer individuals should deny the future

altogether, Muñoz believes that queer people should instead embrace what he calls Queer Futurity. Queer Futurity is the rejection of a stagnant, exclusionary "straight-time"; a call for embracing a hope-filled queer future, one that exists on a different timeline than "straight-time" altogether. To that end, Queer Futurity is unique and dynamic in that it "is not an end but an opening or horizon" (Muñoz 360). Queer Futurity, for Muñoz, is not an option but a requirement: in order for the memory of queer communities of the past, and the existence of queer communities of the present, to live on, a queer future needs to actively exist. Muñoz foregrounds his proposal of Queer Futurity in favor of politics that calls for the active and gestural fracturing of a discriminatory past— that which finds itself repeated in the present — so that it may not exist in the future (Muñoz 365). The active and future departure from a straight timeline to a queer timeline is vital because "it is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity. The dominant mode of futurity is indeed 'winning,' but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a 'not-yet' where queer youths of color actually get to grow up" (Muñoz 365). In the present world that we live in, one that is heavily influenced and governed by white heteronormative systems of power and oppression, the creation of a queer future is dire to ensure that marginalized groups within the queer community not only get the chance to *exist*, but to *prosper as their true selves*.

This essay, and the admiration and acknowledgment of queer spaces within it, ultimately operates in the same spirit and vein as Queer Futurity. To explain, Queer Futurity exists through a principle of hope: hope for a future in which *all* queer people can live and prosper in harmony. Likewise, queer spaces allow both a physical venue and a means by which Queer Futurity can be enacted. If Queer Futurity is the theory of queer hope, queer space is the practice. Once one

enters a queer space, they immediately and simultaneously exit “straight-time”, while entering a new (timeless) timeline where Queer Futurity can be practiced.

But what do queer spaces of the future look like? Perhaps returning to Bachelard’s notions of space will be useful here. As discussed above, Bachelard believes that the most meaningful space to exist is the home, which does not have to be an actual house, but is any space where the inhabitant feels safe, protected, and secure. Additionally, Bachelard urges the reader to resist signifying space with its description and suggests that individuals should gauge the importance of space by the memories and “spirits” they provoke and that are embedded within them. It is for this reason that it can be concluded that all queer spaces, for the queer communities that inhabit them, are their “homes”. These spaces, such as the bars, community centers, neighborhoods, and much more, all hold within their bones the collective memory and spirits of the queer communities that have and do inhabit them. Additionally, they act as safe spaces for these inhabitants, sheltering them from the otherwise prejudicial, unjust, and unequal “straight-time” that lay just beyond its doors. Within these spaces, a home is constantly being created and recreated, formed and reformed, as the queer inhabitants within them build the walls, floors, doors, and hearth of *their* home.

The reformulation of these homes is crucial when looking into the queer future, because there is still much work to be done: the homes now may be built and standing tall, but the shakiness of their structure renders them vulnerable to attack and destruction on any given day, at any given time, at any given moment. Thus, the proposed queer spaces of the future, in which Queer Futurity can be practiced, will exist as a metaphorical “home” of indefinite spaces, those of which coexist and overlap at the same time and in the same frequencies. These indefinite homes, these indefinite spaces, will all follow the basic requirements needed for all queer spaces:

they will act as a space of comfort, security, and protection, all of which are free from judgment and urge those to be their true, authentic selves. It is key that these indefinite spaces operate within and inside of each other simultaneously, because it is in this way that *all* queer people feel welcome, included, and safe within its walls. It is nowhere near enough for a queer space to only cater to the needs of *some* members of its communities. Rather, and in the spirit of Queer Futurity, which pushes for political action of today so that queer communities can see tomorrow, these queer spaces of the future need to cater to all of the needs of all queer communities at once. This concurrent harmony of indefinite, physically indescribable places is the Utopia where Queer Futurity can take place— *will* take place.

As previously stated, there really is no place like home. Understanding that phrase in its most literal, plain sense is the key to the future. That is, particularly for queer individuals, there is no place where they will feel as comfortable, safe, and treasured as their homes. These homes, as analyzed, are the spaces created by queer communities— the spaces they inhabit, dream in, breathe in, dance in, and come together in. The physical spaces here, like the Black Lesbian and Gay Center of London, England, may not physically exist forever— it would be almost impossible for them to. However, that is okay, because the spirit of the space and the collective memories made and cherished within them have and will last forever, rendering those spaces mobile and truly transcendent of all space and time. That is what makes these spaces so special because, amid oppression, violence, discrimination, and ridicule, these spaces can never and will never be torn down. Rather, they stand strong and sturdily built, occupied and reinforced by its devoted and faithful inhabitants, those who give the space shape and meaning. When reflected back onto them, these spaces not only help them grow and bloom as themselves, but they also

reinforce back to them that *it is okay* for them to be themselves, for the space will always defend them in these transformative moments, as a perpetual beacon of solace and hope for tomorrow.

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