DANCING WITHOUT A FLOOR:

THE ARTISTS’ POLITIC OF QUEER CLUB SPACE

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Club events have been an important element of queer culture in urban North America. At times, the club culture of dancing, music and socializing has been treated as insignificant to the understanding of queer cultures. At other times, queer club culture has been criticized as non-political and superficial in nature. In the following article, I document a specific queer club space, Vazaleen, in Toronto, Canada. I argue that queer club space can contribute positively to queer transformative politics when the conception of space is based upon an ethics of change that refuses ontological foundations. The club space, properly envisioned, makes a significant contribution to a culture of diversity for queers. I describe the historical context of Vazaleen, an event that is conceptualized and organized by Will Munro, an artist, impresario, activist and community organizer. The
elements of the space that exist alongside one another at Vazaleen contribute to concrete sensuous, specific relations. The relations in the space are both real and acted out as fictions. The taken-for-granted is turned inside out due to Munro’s interest in ephemeral, open-ended, communal space. His refusal to rush to judgement has been influential in participants’ experiences of rebellion and revolt. The politics of the space is a challenge to the abstract, the transcendent, and to conceptual purity we are accustomed to in academic settings. Social critique and experimentation are important to participants who value the subjective construction of local culture in the present through the historicity of the moment.

The analysis of the club event named Vazaleen was accomplished through participation in the event over a three and a half- year period, and extended interviews with the founder Will Munro. I have also reviewed articles about Will Munro and Vazaleen in Toronto’s alternative press for a two-year period.

Historical Context of Vazaleen

The club event, Vazaleen, was started as a queer night at Toronto’s El Mocambo, a rock and roll bar on Spadina Road. Vazaleen was first held in January 2000 in order to commemorate the Millennium. Due to the success of the initial night and the ongoing enthusiastic participation of queer participants, Vazaleen became a regular monthly event. Today, Vazaleen continues at Lee’s Palace, a club with a reputation for booking progressive and alternative rock and roll bands. Vazaleen has grown in popularity to the
point that on major dates, such as New Years Eve and Gay Pride Week, the event takes over two levels of the rock and roll club and attracts as many as 1,000 people.

It can be argued that the type of queer space that exists within Vazaleen is similar to many other existing queer commercial spaces. The importance of queer space within commercial venues is well documented in the queer history of Toronto. Commercial, for-profit bars and bathhouses have been places where queer community members have met and created relationships for generations (Kinsman, 1996; Warner, 2002). In these commercial spaces people have been able to experiment with gender while experiencing contact across differences according to gender identification, class, and race (Delany, 1998).

The intent of Will Munro is to embrace this history of queer spaces. However, the creation of Vazaleen is based on the perception that a number of commercial queer spaces have resulted in a homogenized capitalist culture for queers. At times, the homogenizing influence is experienced through the imagery that is present in commercial space. At other times, homogenization is experienced because the participants in the space have similar identities and diversity is discouraged. Will Munro is intent on constructing a not-for-profit event within a commercial space. The imagery, explicit politics of the organizers, and the not-for-profit character of the event is meant to allow for a unique mixing of people and a different experience of engagement among community members.

Although Vazaleen is an event that is collaborative in nature, its conception and implementation has been the passion of Will Munro. In the same manner that it is impossible to separate Andy Warhol from the Factory, it is impossible to write about
Vazaleen without considering Will Munro’s vision of the event. Will Munro, an artist and impresario, moved to Toronto from the suburbs to attend art school. Underwear is Will Munro’s primary medium for artistic expression. He reconstructs undergarments from items discovered in thrift stores. The underwear is meant to challenge concepts of gender, intimacy and sexuality. It is also a medium that makes the private public (Hirschmann, 2003; Munro, March, 2003).

The abject, all that is expelled due to its perception of perversity and “being outside” (Kristeva, 1982), is present in Munro’s art. According to Kristeva (1982) social rites exist to:

…separate this or that social, sexual, or age group from one another, by means of prohibiting a filthy, defiling element. It is as if dividing lines were built up between society and a certain nature, as well as within the social aggregate, on the simple basis of excluding filth (Kristeva, 1982, p. 65).

Both Munro’s art and his events defy this form of ritual. At times, the underwear is purposefully stained by bodily fluids (Hirschmann, 2003). The limits of gender and the body are challenged through the reconstruction of the underwear so that gendered expectations of the items are overturned. The presence of bodily fluids on the underwear suggests a type of grotesque defined at the limit of the body and the blurring of boundaries (Bakhtin, 1984b). Ambivalent and feminized garments are vilified in Western culture, since they challenge the closed non-porous body of the male. Munro’s art is a challenge to all that is represented as ‘pure and clean’, in particular the straight male (Kristeva, 1982).
Munro’s conceptual, artistic experimentation with gender, diversity and boundaries is key to understanding the event *Vazaleen*. Munro imagines a space in which all that is normally perceived as grotesque and abject is explored. The bodies of participants at *Vazaleen* are imagined to be open-ended and irregular rather than symmetrical and balanced. Participants can relax into the communality of imperfect bodies and porous boundaries rather than the individualizing forces of fastidiously perfected beauty (Emerson, 1997).

Upon his graduation from art school, Will Munro hoped to create a new social scene in Toronto. He wished to create a “downtown space with a mixed crowd” in a place that was known to be a *straight* space. Since Munro associated himself with the rock and roll subculture, he preferred to situate the event in a rock and roll club (Munro, January 2003). Munro hoped to contribute to a “more humane” environment for queer people by offering spaces outside of the established urban *gay ghetto* with distinguishable geographic boundaries. He has intentionally expanded the urban boundaries within which queer people can feel safe. He has challenged the exclusion that queers experience in other neighbourhoods when assigned to a central ghetto (Munro, January 2003).

While challenging the lack of spatial alternatives for queers in Toronto, Munro also challenged the nature of queer space. In planning for his events, he appealed to “all sorts of queer subcultures” because most gay male public spaces did not reflect the diversity he knew existed in Toronto. In reaction to the type of homogeneity that existed, particularly in bars catering to males, he endeavoured to create “a space that was mixed up” (Munro, January 2003). His intention was to create a space where people could be “…as queer and
freaky or crazy as they wanted to be.” Will Munro “just wanted to have a party and celebrate with more of a queer mixed thing” (Munro, January 2003).

The nurturing of this alternative space marked by diversity came out of an overtly queer community whose membership included punks and activists. The punk queer community places a value on creating a community for outsiders (Treleaven and Munro with Hart, 2004). According to Scott Treleavan, a Toronto queer zinester/ artist/ filmmaker/ short story author, the Toronto punk scene has an ethos that had an “inclusive, over-arching leftist stance. It revelled in difference, defiance and personal expression…” (Treleavan with Murphy, 2003, p. 9). Members of the community are involved in social causes that reflect their social, political commitment. Will Munro volunteers at the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Line. Another member of the community, the D.J. Miss BarbraFisch, is a sex worker activist who works at a shelter for women (Munro, March, 2003).

The cultural musical side to the queer punk community is made up of an international network of homocore groups. In cities such as Vancouver, New York, San Francisco and Chicago, parties are held with performances by bands such as Gossip, Limp Wrist, The Butchies, and the Skin Jobs (Munro, March, 2003). Vazaleen is a result of Munro’s concern as a queer punk with inclusivity, outsider status, and difference (Liss, 2003; Munro, September 2003). He arranges for the bands from the queer punk community to perform at his events.

Munro took his “experience as a punk kid” and as someone who went to house parties to conceptualize Vazaleen as an expression of punk ethos. Will Munro credits punk rock
with teaching him how to be a critical thinker. His older brother’s punk records were a seminal influence on Will Munro’s thought. The “do-it-yourself” ethos of punk culture with its emphasis on self-sufficiency has continued to be appealing. Popular, local forms of communication such as punk zines have been influential to his mode of communication (Munro, March, 2003). The promotion of Vazaleen as an event is about the promotion of punk cultural values such as respect for diversity and local autonomy in art (Munro, January, 2003). His early posters and flyers were hand-made. The Vazaleen posters continue to be designed by local artists. The posters, placed in a variety of neighbourhoods, serve a number of purposes beyond promoting the event. The posters claim queer space where it is unexpected. The posters also champion local art through the do-it-yourself aesthetic as artworks (Munro, January 2003).

Will Munro is also a member of Toronto’s Queen Street West art scene. The Queen Street art scene has flourished in Toronto since the 1970s. The scene is named for a street in Toronto where artists’ events are held in a variety of spaces including galleries, parks, shop windows and bars. Although no longer geographically centralized, the spirit of the Queen Street scene continues to exist in events such as Vazaleen. The Queen Street artists and community members are an amorphous group of people who have created and nurtured an art presence that defies mainstream interpretation of both art and social relations. The subversive nature of the scene is expressed through creative experimentation in all art forms, as well as a credo of tolerance for multiplicity and difference. Galleries, such as the S.P.I.N. Gallery and Zsa Zsa Gallery, represent the ethos of this community. Vazaleen is one of the spaces in which members of the Queen Street community can socialize.
The club space has taken on an important role as an intermediary space between the street and the commercial gallery. Within such venues a form of artistic immediacy is apparent (Ricard, 1981). Smaller clubs or special events within larger nightclubs have become an urban institutional phenomena within North America. Performance art and art installations in nightclubs are elements of this cultural scene (Bowman, 2001; Colacello, 1990; County, 2003; Hoban, 1998; Ramone, 2000; Ricard, 1981). These institutions within commercial establishments have created a place for self-defined bohemians, such as musicians, artists, and queers to socialize and mix. During the 1970s and 1980s, the New York club scene was an integral part of the art scene. Clubs such as the Mudd Club, C.B.G.B.s and Max’s Kansas City were meeting places where partying mixed with networking. The social milieu encouraged the sharing of artistic ideas while participants experienced a social alternative; the contagious mix of art and social experimentation encouraged creativity (Hoban, 1998). In Toronto, events such as Dyke Night and KGB parties at the Boom Boom Room nightclub drew special crowds made up of participants who might not attend a regular night at the club.

Will Munro’s struggle to create and nurture queer space is part of militant contemporary Canadian queer organizing (Warner, 2002). The right to queer space, a space that is defined by the mores, norms and standards of the queer community, has been central to the fight for Canadian queer liberation. (Grube, 1997; Kinsman, 1996; Warner, 2002). In 1981, demonstrations by gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered Torontonians and their allies after the bathhouse raids marked the beginning of an extended period of community organization for queer space (Grube, 1997). Similarly, lesbians were involved in
community organizing in 2000 to challenge police raids on the *Pussy Palace*, a lesbian organized bathhouse (Warner, 2002). Warner (2002) argues that those queers who demand the right to self-defined space are members of a radical group of queer organizers. The fight for queer space has challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions about Canadian social institutions and community moral standards. The limits of tolerance and inclusivity within both mainstream and gay cultures have been challenged through this battle (Warner, 2002). Public space for contact among queer people has been gained only through “cumulative victories against repression” (Grube, 1997, p.145). The spaces have been created based on the willingness of queers to fight for and to inhabit those spaces on their own terms (Delany, 1999; Grube, 1997).

The Elements of *Vazaleen*: The Sense-Based Specificity of a Local Cultural Space

*Vazaleen* has drawn participants of all genders, including women, men and transgendered persons. As well, the appearance of participants suggests a diversity of sexual types are in attendance at the event. The diversity of the participants has contributed to the characterization of *Vazaleen* as an alternative space (Boles, 2003; LaBruce, 2003; Mitchell, 2003) and a “queer fringe thing” (Treleaven with Murphy, 2003). Bruce LaBruce (2003), artist, filmmaker, pornographer and social commentator, has enthused that due to the radical nature of his events “Club impresario Will Munro has put homosexual Toronto on the international map…” (La Bruce, 2003, p. 18). The *Vazaleen* crowd reflects some of the subcultures within Toronto’s queer culture. Munro explains the mix of participants at an event might consist of:
...like your gay rock and rollers um as well as your dyke kind of like punks um also you get into like leather subcultures. So you have like dykes who are into leather … as well as fags who are into leather. As well, you get all those sort of trans subcultures - so your getting tranny boys and tranny girls. You are getting people who are into gender fuck, um you are getting like bear subcultures, you’re getting swingers, you’re getting cool straight hipsters, music kids. Um, its pretty shook up. …I’ve seen most sexual subcultures. I think there’s also a pretty strong bi contingent that shows up … You get a lot of people who come out who have wanted to ah explore queer things ah and they identify mostly as being straight and will come to this event specifically. (Munro, January 2003)

The social contact within the space has fluidity both by purpose and type. 

*Vazaleen* is a social space where people of differing classes, professions and work status mix. Members of the Toronto arts community including visual artists, gallery owners, curators, collectors, musicians, journalists and critics are in attendance at *Vazaleen*. The attendance of the unemployed, hairdressers, labourers, civil servants, academics, lawyers, social workers, architects, clerks, computer programmers, and salespeople is equally significant. Cultural workers network, negotiate and collaborate on new artistic ideas. Many participants are as likely to flirt, cruise and pick up prospective sexual partners. Due to the diversity of the crowd and the queer punk ethos, *Vazaleen* is a space where “life (is) at its most rewarding, productive and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in the mode of good will” (Delany, 1999, p.111).
The space that is *Vazaleen* is best understood as a scattering of social fragments. Depending on the focus of your glance, *Vazaleen* can appear to be a leather bar, a transgendered space, a discotheque, or a rock and roll club. These fragments are constituted through the participation of queers. *Vazaleen* is part of networks of social possibilities, such as, the Queen Street Art Scene, the punk subculture, and any number of sexual subcultures. The presence of the diverse social influences within the space informs the nature of the event. The unpredictability of the consequences of the social mixing define *Vazaleen* as an art event (Rajchman, 2001).

Will Munro values social experience between people such as those relations “between the young and old sharing knowledge” (Munro cited in Liss, 2003). He worries that experiential relations across difference are eroding: “Instead it’s all about fucking. That’s great. That’s fine. But if you don’t have anything else, then what’s gonna happen to our culture? Is our culture gonna become *Queer as Folk*” (Munro cited in Liss, 2003)? The principle of encounter is key to the form of experimentation at *Vazaleen*. The social relations are constructed so that sense based phenomena and the abstract are integrated. Forms of relations are created so that thought, art and social life are informed by the sense based experience of another person (Rajchman, 2003).

The *artistry of being* at *Vazaleen* is based in a practice of *un-working* or de-transcendence of heterosexual culture. Participants are involved in the contradictory exercise of undoing the work of culture while demanding a culture based on specificity (Haver, 1997) and the sense based experience of others. New York City’s rock and roll musician and D.J. Jayne County (2003) demands a type of sensible recognition by explicitly explaining to the crowd “I am a transsexual with drag queen tendencies”
Furthermore, she claims a specific subjectivity by declaring at *Vazaleen* “I am not Alice Cooper, I am not Marilyn Manson… I am Jayne County.” The approval of the audience to her declaration of identity connotes the recognition of her specificity (County, 2003; Munro, January, 2003). Jayne County couples her specific claim of identity, with stories of Lou Reed’s and David Bowie’s manipulation of identity controlled by the business of market-driven rock (County, 2003). By separating herself from pop stars, Jayne County situates herself and *Vazaleen*’s participants outside the capitalist play of surface realities such as identities defined solely by market forces (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000). The sense based phenomena and the specific are honoured in the space. The queer punk emphasis on local do it yourself culture is reconstituted in the space.

Similarly, the club participants are invited to engage in the outsider status whose productivity is tied to their sense based experience of each other (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000). Jayne County cries out to the crowd: “I want to see the freaks. Where are the freaks? Are you a freak? Good for you.” Similarly the lead singer for the *Skin Jobs* calls out for a response “from the queers” so that they can join the band on stage. The club participants are reminded their politics are not so much about abstraction or transcendent referents for social comprehension (Foucault, 1980; Moffatt, 2001), rather the politic of the club is:

A metamorphosis or a passage, in any case a movement, from pathos to affectivity…from the interiorities of subjectivity and identity to an exteriority that is not merely the outside of the inside…from community to the being in common of whatever singularities, from history to historicity, from society to sociality,
from authority to power, from communication to significance: from the cultural to the political (Haver, 1997, p. 291).

Will Munro, as one of the D.J.s for Vazaleen, keeps alive the politic through his choice of music. He has relied heavily on 1970s rock and roll in his play list because the music was created during a decade of change and movement. His choice of music is not simply a history lesson but informs the historicity of the moment. Often he plays music that is unexpected in a queer club so that it provides surprise and disruption at the event. The queer connotation in ‘straight’ rock and roll music is made explicit when played at Vazaleen. Queers “take back” music that has had racist, misogynist and homophobic connotations to free the revolutionary potential of rock and roll (Munro, September, 2003). This music is offered in the context of the other elements of the club such as queer positive video projections and/ or stage presentations. The interaction of the elements subverts the original intent and meaning of the music or at least brings it into question.

The D.J. is key to the creation of contemporary performance space as she or he sculpts aural sound-scapes key to the tone of the event. Toronto artists such as Andrew Zealey, Luis Jacob and Will Munro spin records as an art form that is part history lesson as it refers to other aural artists such as Laurie Anderson and part sound-scape. At the same time, a key role of the DJ is to facilitate the social mixing of people with diverse identities through the use of sound. In this manner, DJs such as Denise Benson at Toronto’s Dyke Night, have taken on a socially significant role as icons of difference and outsider status. In New York City, Wayne County was the D.J at a New Year’s show
starring the Ramones and the Heartbreakers (Ramone, 2000). In 2003, she was the D.J. at Vazaleen as Jayne County.

Specific activities within the space of Vazaleen promote performance by both guest stars and club participants. Munro offers a description of the event:

You are going to see sheets projected on, that are hanging from the ceiling on two sides of the room. Your are (sic) going to see all kinds of different projections: slides, super eights, sixteens, video. Sometimes, video mixing. And there is a stage where a lot of performances happen, ah people in the audience are encouraged to, you know, come on stage and participate in certain themes or events…as well as performers who are brought in as a main act. Then sometimes we will set up things that are more interactive in another corner of the space by the side of the stage. We’ve done various different photo shoots…we once did a biker shoot with a low rider bicycle…Other things happen in the space we’ve done roller derbies, we had drag races once, drag queens and drag kings racing on bicycles… all sorts of things that happen …the audience is participating so in a sense the performance is happening everywhere…For example, when we had the prom night massacre …forty per cent of the audience was wearing some kind of weird gore or prom outfit so that then makes the whole space a kind of performance (Munro, March, 2003).

Some performances at Vazaleen are based in political critique that is suitable for public spaces rather than the formal stage. In this manner, the performances are a type of artistic agitational propaganda (agit prop). Historically, in Toronto, agit prop has
consisted of activities such as short political sketches, drama, choral speeches, poetry readings and street performances often with a socialist or anarchist message (Moffatt, 2001). The agit prop at *Vazaleen* demands a reconsideration of social expectations within both the gay and the mainstream cultures.

During Toronto’s Gay Pride week, Will Munro challenged the corporate sponsorship and consumerism of the Gay Pride Event by holding an event entitled *Shame*. A confessional was located on the site of *Vazaleen* during the Roman Catholic Church’s World Youth Symposium. During a SARS outbreak men showed up at the event dressed in protective gear. The week after a raid by Toronto police on the *Pussy Palace*, a lesbian bathhouse, a performance was held by drag queens “that was totally about cops busting up queer spaces” (Munro, March 2003). These performances make transparent public anxieties and challenge the taken for granted nature of the media coverage and public perception of social issues. At times, the critique is implied; at other times, the performance explicitly takes to task forces such as capitalism, liberalism, and social conservatism.

Agit prop need not be severe and sombre. In fact, much of the performance at *Vazaleen* is remarkable for how it incites laughter as well as the celebratory tone. The performative and the playful are means of addressing social, political issues. According to Munro (March 2003), a *Vazaleen* event focused on so serious a theme as challenging the war in Iraq is done in a “fun and very playful way”. The intent is to help the survivors of government policy to be “political in a bit of a different form.” Social roles are experimental while politics are unveiled “without oppressing people”. Participants who
have not been critical are encouraged to become critical for the first time (Munro, March, 2003).

In this respect the performances contribute to the Bakhtinian carnival flavour of the event. *Vazaleen* is an oppositional culture based on alternative cultural production and expression of desire. All that has been marginalized becomes the centre of activity and awareness (Bakhtin, 1984b; Stam, 1989). *Vazaleen* is a form of carnival as understood by Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin (1984b) carnival:

> is by no means a purely artistic form nor a spectacle… It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play… Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it… During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is the laws of its own freedom. (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 7)

Those relations and concepts that are dogmatic or repressive become incomplete and open, so that all that was formerly fixed becomes fluid (Bauman, 2000; Harvey, 2000; Irving and Young, 2002). Eccentricity is encouraged as a form of challenge to the external, hierarchical ordering of social relations (Bakhtin, 1984b; Irving and Moffatt, 2002). Will Munro is interested in relations that are non-conventional, sensuous, and experimental in spaces that are elusive and transitory. While political consciousness and


social identities are based on good will, communality and a critique of corporate capitalism, they also multiply in all their eccentric permutations.

The Philosophy of Vazaleen: Art Space Defined by the Encounter in the Planar

Although complex, the politic of Vazaleen is best understood by a logic that involves the encounter (Rajchman, 2003) in the context of planar relations (Rajchman, 2003; Sedgwick, 2003). The planar, purposefully placing elements beside one another, serves an important queer politic. By placing elements such as sexual identities, gender identities, performative acts, and symbols in proximity to one another, a dualistic interpretation of social life is avoided. Dichotomous categories of subject versus object, antecedent versus precedent, cause versus effect are subverted. Furthermore, the “spatial positionality of beside… seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which beneath and beyond turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 8). The shift from dichotomous thought opens the possibility of multiplicity in subjectivities and expressions of agency. Juxtaposing the various elements makes possible “a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, learning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (Sedgwick, 2003, p.8). Space, in this case queer club space, has a rich dimension (Sedgwick, 2003) from the philosophical, artistic, social and moral points of view.

The ephemeral quality of the space further enriches the experience of the planar (beside) rather then the historical origins of the event (before) and/or the psychology of
the participants (*beneath*). By its nature the rock and roll bar is a transitory space, since the crowd changes according to the event and the performer; people coming for a particular show constitute the culture of the space accordingly. To place a queer event in a ‘straight’ space is still more elusory (Munro, January, 2003). The principle of encounter in the moment is heightened as other explanations for the social politic are diminished.

Through the aesthetics of the self, that is, making oneself present, ‘taken for granted’ social codes are challenged (Foucault, 1997). The unfolding takes place in a form of *heterotopia*, a place where signs, languages, interpersonal relations are incongruous, disordered and multiple (Foucault, 1973). The unfolding of a diversity of selves allows for the “violation of the usual” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.166). Rather than ask why our selves exist or what our selves do, we are interested in the negotiations involved in the empirical existentiality (Haver, 2003). We are not present to serve capitalist production through preoccupation with exclusion, safety, security, and predictability (Bronski, 1998; Delany, Kinsman, 1996; Munro, September, 2003; Vaid, 1995). Rather, we are interested in productivity of the self and the expression of eros which “undoes the work of culture altogether. It is the unrecognizable face of the stranger each of us is at the brink of pleasure – or death” (Haver, 2003, p. 283).

In coexistence with this openness, there is comfort with “a discovery of the new and as yet unseen things” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 166). Within the dramatic ‘being in common’ (Haver, 2003) at *Vazaleen*, an open endedness of subjectivity is possible. Support for each other occurs even as personal subjective possibilities are uncertain (Kristeva, 2002). According to Munro (January, 2003), journalists, authors and
performers comment on how “mixed up” the audience is. Some comment that they “have not seen a slice of life like this since the early 80s.” Cultural codes are rewritten without yet understanding the outcome of the change. Underlying this risk however lies a good will marked by openness – a refusal to rush to judgement of others (Rajchman, 2003).

Freed of a preoccupation with origins and telos, an experimental space, an art space is created. Within this space, all participants perform in the context of anarchic social relations based on situatedness, specificity and historicity. The performative within such an experimental space challenges bourgeois values such as monogamy or consumerism. In fact, the concept of fundamental precepts or values is challenged. Brought to task is “a model of humanity that had absorbed into itself the transcendent ideal (God) and which, from his immanence was in hot pursuit of values and objects” (Kristeva, 2002, p. 25).

A solidarity is created based on “awareness of one’s discontent” (Kristeva, 2002, p. 42), rather than a stable code of values (Kristeva, 2002). Change occurs in the revolt against the ongoing capitalist ethos of calculation and management (Kristeva, 2002; Munro, March 2003). Within the queer punk community members are “always politicized… There are problems facing our community and … there are issues that are ‘pissing people off’…” (Munro, March, 2003). As Kristeva (2002) states: “I revolt: Therefore we are still to come” (Kristeva, 2002, p. 42).

Will Munro is interested in the construction of the self in a play of productive, amorphous and desirous relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000). Like Deleuze, he avoids the problems of “the retreat into metaquestions of judgement - a symptom in fact of…a ‘weak period, a period of reaction’” (Rajchman, 2003, p. 62). In his article “Pride Terrorism” Will Munro
(2003) questions the tone of Gay Pride celebrations in Toronto. He challenges the reader to reconsider that Gay Pride events were born of revolution and riot. He states: “Probably over a million people will converge on Toronto for Pride this year. With attendance figures like this it’s really hard to imagine that Pride used to be a radical and serious underground event that was part of a larger struggle” (Munro, 2003, p. 31). Even as he engages in his polemic based on an acknowledgement of history (before), he still maintains the importance of the present (beside) by writing: “I do not wish to judge or alienate those involved, my focus is to encourage change” (Munro, 2003, p. 31).

When encouraged to judge the mainstream audiences over their ignorance about the queer nature of stadium rock and roll, since queer bands such as the Freddy Mercury’s Queen are often used at sporting events, he responds with hesitancy. When pressed to make a judgement about how blinded ‘straight’ populations are to many queer cultural influences, he responds: “I think people know” and “maybe they just don’t mind so much. It is just about the unspoken… they don’t want someone to beat it over their heads…” (Munro, January, 2003).

The success of his events has created a difficult contradiction for Will Munro. The events are so well attended that lines form and at times people cannot get in. The popularity creates difficult questions about whether the space should be allowed to spill over to the street or to other venues or whether it should be contained to carefully ensure the original subversive character. Some of the original participants have become alienated. Shannon Mitchell (2003) interviewing members of the Skinjobs, characterizes the event as mainstream. She asks:
How do you feel about playing such big events such as Vaseline (sic)? You’ve got the queer punks but over time it’s become the cool thing to do with that you get the corporate yuppie queers coming to it…. It used to be really awesome but now it’s gotten so big, there are even VIP cards! The lineups are insane with lots of people who aren’t even there to see the bands, and half the time unless you get there early you can’t get in. Queer punks finally got their space, to do our own thing but then it gets taken back. Community gets replaced by scenesters (Mitchell, 2003, p. 23).

Due to its utopian nature, the culture of laughter as a part of carnival may or may not lead to full rebellion and fully defined opposition. According to Bakhtin (1984b): “The consciousness of freedom …could only be limited and utopian… It would therefore be a mistake to presume that popular distrust of seriousness and popular love of laughter, as of another truth, could always reach full awareness” (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 95). The polyphonic voices of Vazaleen allow for an open interpretation to allow for multiple forms of rebellion.

The social at Vazaleen does not seek to be authorized outside the placement of elements beside each other at the event. The “social seeks no authorization in any putatively ontological ground that, as a solicitude subject to no necessity whatever, anarchic sociality founds the ethic-political as such. The very fact that unauthorized protocols and etiquettes exist here at all is the foundation of ethicity altogether” (Haver, 1997, p. 282). So, Munro refuses to rush to meta-judgement, and he continues to speak to the importance of the planar. He states: “I go to spaces that I do not personally inhabit to encourage people to come” (Munro, January, 2003). If someone who is not normally
comfortable within the queer ‘underground’ chooses to “come to this space and think its cool and interesting” then the value lies in the fact that “something is changing, you know” (Munro, January, 2003).

Conclusion

Within the space that is Vazaleen, performance challenges the taken-for-granted. By focusing on the planar (beside) and the encounter, Vazaleen is a queer space that allows for the unworking of assumed cultural codes. The radical nature of the space is due to the refusal to seek ontological understandings outside the experience of the elements of the space. The politic of the space is created through staged performances that comment on social anxieties, social welfare, repression, and death, alongside the randomness of social encounter in the context of difference. The space in its entirety becomes an art space as people seek out sense-based phenomena including the experience of the specific other person. The performance is existential due to its lack of concern with psychology (beneath) and its ephemeral treatment of time (before). Experientially, participants are artists of their being while intellectually they are “dancing without a floor.” In this manner, participants begin to imagine productive life and an aesthetic of existence outside the calculation and management of the bourgeois, capitalist Western culture.
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