

The Dialectics of Gay Liberation

A marxist history of the gay liberation movement in
Britain in the 1960s and 70s.

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Abstract

This thesis is a historical inquiry into the politicisation of sexuality by the gay liberation movement in Britain. Its methodology folds together archival research methods and marxist critical theory, presenting a history of sexual struggle during the sixties and seventies that is simultaneously a history of capitalist social relations. Its central argument concerns the contradictory status of gay liberation as both a historically situated social movement and a visionary political horizon, deferred by the social crises and processes of restructuring unfolding from the mid-seventies.

Rather than approaching critique as an external model, to be applied onto the material of history, this thesis combines historical and theoretical modes of inquiry within the same space, arguing that they are mutually and reciprocally constituted. Influenced by the critical social theory of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and the subterranean tradition of open marxism, it marks a decisive departure from structuralist and positivist forms of historical materialism that reduce social and cultural transformations to the effects of abstractions such as "the economy." Consulting an expansive archive of gay life during the period, it instead advances a form of marxist history that foregrounds how lived experience registers and expresses the contradictions underpinning capitalist social relations. Accordingly, it relates to the archive of gay liberation not as a source of empirical data drafted in to support theoretical claims, but as an archive of critical and cultural knowledge in its own right. Its own theorisation of the role of capitalist social forms and institutions is consequently anchored by and articulated in dialogue with gay liberation's novel social critique.

The thesis' dialectical methodology is developed over the course of its investigations into the gay liberation movement's conflict-ridden relationship with British social institutions. Its chapters follow a thematic structure, each focusing on a particular arena – the street, the psychiatric clinic and the household – as a site of social and sexual antagonism. They situate the gay liberation movement within a constellation of emergent countercultural and social movements, and within the context of evolving forms of sexual surveillance and abjection within the British state. Citing archival accounts of the period, these chapters reconstruct gay liberation's radical critique of various social institutions and expand on their insights through a sustained engagement with open marxist theory. Throughout, the tensions between gay liberation's political vision and the limitations of its historical conditions repeatedly come into view. I argue that such tensions express a dialectic of freedom and compulsion underpinning gay life during the period of study and continuing to structure class antagonisms in the present.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

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31st March 2023

Introduction

1. Introduction

What is gayness to a politics of liberation? The history of the gay liberation movement in Britain forms a constellation of responses to question. In the term "gay liberation" itself, we find the contradictory concepts of the sexual and the social and the personal and the political placed side by side suggesting some kind of internal relationship. This project is an investigation into such contradictions as they were lived and felt by gay people connected to the gay liberation movement during the sixties and seventies in Britain. It is a synthesis of historical and theoretical approaches, at once situating the gay liberation movement in the moment of its historical emergence and engaging theoretically with its abundant archive of political writing and ephemera. Theoretically, it draws primarily on a form of marxist dialectics influenced by the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School and the "subterranean tradition of open marxism,"¹ often referred to as such to invoke "the living (and revolutionary) thread that various heterodox Marxisms... had in common against the more dogmatic varieties,"² as opposed to a single, formalised school of marxist thought. As will be explored later in this introduction, a common tendency within this subterranean tradition frames marxism simultaneously as a theory of struggle and a critique of political economy. Accordingly, this thesis presents a history of sexual struggle that is at the same time a history of capitalist social relations and makes the case for gay liberation's novel contribution to the history of revolutionary thought and struggle.

As with many historical social movements, the conceptual boundaries of "gay liberation" are unstable. In the British context, the term often automatically evokes the Gay Liberation Front, formed in London in 1970 and spreading into other British cities throughout the early seventies. Despite most of its local groups only existing officially for a few years, Jeffrey Weeks has said of the GLF that "in its 'rise and fall' is writ in microcosm the history of a particular and special type of movement."³ The politics of gay liberation and the countercultural structure of feeling in which it emerged formed a circuit of influence extending beyond the organisational form of the GLF, both predating and outlasting its official lifespan.⁴ This politics and structure of feeling shaped the activities of manifold social and campaigning groups, as well as the everyday experiences of many gay people in Britain. While this this thesis therefore makes frequent reference to the activities and writings of the GLF and

1 Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmos Psychopedis, "Introduction," in *Open Marxism Volume 1: Dialectics and History* (London: Pluto, 1992), xii.

2 Endnotes, "We Unhappy Few," in *Endnotes 5: The Passions and the Interests* (Endnotes, 2019), 54.

3 Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 185-6.

4 While there is no firm consensus on the periodisation of the gay liberation movement, the largest GLF group in Britain, its London assembly, was officially active between 1970 and 1973, closing its office doors by the end of 1973. It should be noted that smaller, London-based offshoots of the group, and more established GLF chapters in Bradford, Leeds and Lancaster, continued to operate throughout the seventies. For more detail, see Weeks, *Coming Out*, 204.

related groups, it is not primarily a history of organisational forms, but of gay liberation as a pluralistic, heterogenous movement opening onto a range of fragmentary experiences and perspectives.

With that said, the beginnings of this research project coincided with a new development in the organisational history of the GLF that has indirectly helped shape its central research questions. As of October 2018, a new configuration of original GLF members and younger generations of queer people began meeting for monthly "think-ins"⁵ at the London School of Economics, whose basement rooms hosted the first GLF assembly in October 1970. Over the past four years, the group has organised vigils, demonstrations and other interventions that explicitly reference and sometimes re-enact elements of historical GLF actions, including its first public demonstration in Highbury Fields against the policing of public sex in November 1971 and the first Gay Pride rally at the feet of Trafalgar Square's lions in July 1972. The group's meetings and actions have circled around the theme of Pride, questioning and critiquing its various entanglements with police and private capital. They have also become spaces of collective reflection on the uneven landscape of gay life over the past decades, and its cycles of moral panic, social abjection and crisis. I have personally followed and participated in this re-grouping of the GLF, not as a means of gathering empirical material to support this thesis, whose scope does not include its own oral history of the gay liberation movement, nor an in-depth study into its cultural memory. Rather, my interest in this new configuration has allowed me the space to consider the emotional and political legacies of gay liberation, and to anchor my research in the immediacy of struggle.

Participating in this new formation of the GLF has affected the development of this thesis primarily by revealing the "ambivalence" of gay liberation, a term Craig Griffiths uses to describe "the simultaneous attachment to conflicting feelings and attitudes"⁶ of the West German gay liberation movement. Drawing on ambivalence in its psychoanalytic conceptualisation, Griffiths characterises the movement as "structured by oscillations between irreconcilable poles," focusing on the ambivalences of "pride/shame, normal/different and hope/fear."⁷ While this thesis will bring different emotional and political tensions to the fore, the idea of ambivalence nevertheless aptly evokes the centrality of contradiction to the history of gay liberation. A key ambivalence present within the think-ins related to the sense of gay liberation as both a revolutionary vision and a vanishing horizon. The sense of collective mourning fostered in the think-ins – for lost friends and for social infrastructure dismantled by the British state – extended to the gay liberation movement's many unrealised objectives and deferred futures. While the mixed age composition of this new group effected differences in vocabulary and experience, highlighting the larger obstacles to inter-generational contact within gay social life, they co-existed with a shared desire for comradeship with each other and with the past of gay liberation itself. Similarly, this thesis relates to the history of gay liberation

5 A type of assembly involving long, open discussions on political and strategic questions.

6 Craig Griffiths, *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation: Male Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 9.

7 Ibid.

with a sense of comradeship and generosity, making visible gay liberation's unfinished business and unresolved contradictions, while refraining from nostalgic affirmations of the past. I invoke Griffiths' term "ambivalence", therefore, in reference to gay liberation's complicated legacy, in which it tends, according to Elizabeth Freeman, to "glimmer forth as an embarrassment, something that remains to be thought."⁸ Freeman's phrasing expresses the contradictory character of gay liberation, at once an object of historical inquiry, steeped in a *passé* countercultural aesthetic, and a visionary political imaginary whose moment never arrived. This contradiction – between the historically situated, localised character of gay liberation and its politically speculative moment – inspires the central theme of this thesis, itself a synthesis of historical and theoretical forms of inquiry.

This introduction now proceeds to clarify how the theoretical and historical dimensions of this research work. Its first section addresses the unevenness of marxist history's principal methodology, historical materialism, and advances a form of dialectical thinking drawn from Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno's debates on constellation and immanent critique. Here, I present my own understanding of the constellation as a form of marxist immanent critique and a potential counterweight to dominant ways of narrativising gay history in the present. I then move into a discussion of how these theoretical approaches figure in the actual practice of historical inquiry, introducing the project's archival research methods and considering the multiple, contradictory political and emotional resonances in the archive of gay liberation. Here, the thesis elaborates its open marxist approach, presenting a practically reflexive reading of social practice and theory as bound together in a single totalisation, and brings this analysis to bear on the history of gay liberation. Finally, I develop the thesis' dialectical framework in the context of its central question: the relationship of sexuality to liberation. Influenced by the contributions of queer marxist and open marxist critical theory, I offer a dialectical reading of sexuality as a social form constituted by and constitutive of capitalist value relations. This section identifies a crucial dynamic of freedom and constraint structuring the relationship between sexuality and capitalism, and a set of implications for the capitalist character of social institutions such as the state. The arguments I express here are revisited and developed throughout this thesis as it incorporates archival traces of lived experience and political insight into the realities of being gay in Britain during a particular phase in the historical development of capitalism.

2. Constellation and immanent critique

As a marxist history of the gay liberation movement, this thesis advances a dialectical understanding of history that I shall identify cautiously with the tradition of historical materialism. This caution, like much of the theoretical basis for this research, is derived from Walter Benjamin's peculiar form of dialectical thinking, which simultaneously identifies with historical materialism while critiquing its

⁸ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 14.

more traditional forms. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin proposes a version of historical materialism that radically departs from the linear, quantitative conception of historical time he attributes to "historicism." For Benjamin, "historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history," organising historical events in a progressive, sequential chain, "like the beads of a rosary."⁹ As Karen Feldman has pointed out, this theory of history contains more than an "interpretive 'critique'" of historicism's approach. For Benjamin, historical materialism is historicism's negation, "a matter of coming to a 'standstill'" in a way that directly "disrupts historicism."¹⁰ If historicism's method is "additive," presenting history as mass of chronologically organised data "to fill the homogenous empty time," then Benjamin's historical materialism constitutes the "arrest" and the "blasting" apart of historical continuity.¹¹ Benjamin thus conceptualises historical materialism as immanently disruptive to historicism and to the capitalist organisation of time that it codifies.

Yet the dividing line between historicism and historical materialism in marxist historiography is not necessarily clear or absolute. Benjamin's "Theses," which can easily be read as an appraisal of historical materialism contra historicism, hint at the murkiness of these historiographical approaches, particularly regarding the political factions they tend to serve. While Benjamin asserts that it is primarily with "the victor" of history "with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathise"¹² – a catch-all for capitalism's ruling classes – he also conceptualises historicism as a "common-denominator"¹³ of diverse political tendencies, including among them the more traditional articulations of historical materialism. The "Theses" name various political elements which espouse their own forms of historicism, including conservative and fascist powers as well as "the conformism which has been part and parcel of Social Democracy"¹⁴ and the "vulgar-Marxist conception of the nature of labour."¹⁵ This latter point is where Benjamin's immanent critique¹⁶ of historical materialism emerges and where his peculiar dialectic is most distinguishable from that of other marxist traditions.

Benjamin's characterisation of historicism as additive and chronological can be said to quite accurately describe the paradigmatic form of historical materialism shared by most dominant marxist currents throughout the twentieth century. This orthodox form of historical materialism takes its cue from Marx and Engels' assertion in *The Communist Manifesto* that "the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production,"¹⁷ centring the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie as the driving force of

9 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, (London: Pimlico, 1999), 255.

10 Karen S. Feldman, "Not Dialectical Enough: On Benjamin, Adorno, and Autonomous Critique," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 44, no. 4 (2011), 345.

11 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 254.

12 Ibid, 248.

13 Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, (London: Verso, 2016), 17.

14 Ibid, 250.

15 Ibid, 251.

16 While the concept of immanent critique will be unpacked in further detail later in this section, its use in this context refers broadly to the critique of contradictory cultural and social forms from within.

17 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 1967), 225.

historical development. This motif has been instrumental in the formation of positivist and dialectical materialist approaches to history, including the scientific conception of general laws of society and nature. As Enzo Traverso has summarised, within traditional forms of marxist historiography, "communism was postulated as a telos, as an end of history,"¹⁸ and capitalism understood as "both a system of exploitation of man by man and a historical progress driving civilization forward through an extraordinary growth of the forces of production."¹⁹ Massimilo Tomba has similarly traced how this "stadial conception of universal history" became codified in the marxisms of the Second and Third Internationals, which set themselves "the task of accelerating the phases towards the final stage of socialism, thereby justifying the destruction of the rural forms of self-government and imposing on so-called backwards countries an ordeal through the historical stages that lead to socialism."²⁰ In these positivist forms of historical materialism, we can see a shadow-image of the capitalist ruling class' own expansionary and progressivist conceptions of historical development, and of its attitude of colonial universality, reaching out towards the world beyond the centres of imperial power.

This positivist conception of historical time is precisely what Benjamin seeks to disturb in his account of historical materialism. The "Theses" advocate for an alternative mode of dialectical thought, embodied by the form of the constellation. Benjamin's historical materialism, rather than elaborating a sequential narrative of events arcing towards victory, "grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one."²¹ For Benjamin, past and present are oriented towards one another in a magnetic relation. "As flowers turn towards the sun by dint of a secret heliotropism," he writes, "the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history."²² This constellation is key to Benjamin's heterodox form of dialectical thinking which insists on the contradictory unity and reciprocity of past and present, whereby, argues Michael Löwy, "in an eminently dialectical process, the present illumines the past and the illumined past becomes a force in the present."²³ Benjamin's constellation thus involves a particular presentation of history as a mass of fragmentary and discontinuous elements, arranged in such a way as "to evoke revolutionary insight"²⁴ in the viewer, an approach that extends into Benjamin's treatment of art and aesthetics as well as his philosophy of history. This form of dialectical thinking refrains from the assumption that the victory of the proletariat will arise inevitably from the push and shove between capital and labour. In fact, this paradigm is inverted in Benjamin's claim that "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule,"²⁵ implying that capitalism persists in a constant state of crisis and contradiction. The perspective of the "oppressed class" inverts the progressive temporality of historicism, revealing history to be "one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon

18 Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2016), 58.

19 Ibid, 152.

20 Massimiliano Tomba, "Insurgent Universality," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 2 (2018), 81.

21 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

22 Ibid, 246.

23 Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 39.

24 Feldman, "Not Dialectical Enough," 346.

25 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 248.

wreckage."²⁶ If any form of redemption from this situation is possible, for Benjamin it arises from the moment of "arrest" brought about by the materialist orientation towards the past, an arrest which produces the revolutionary insight that "it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency."²⁷ Benjamin's historical materialism therefore brushes against the historicist temporality that structures both capitalism's development of its productive forces and the positivist dialectic of prevailing marxist forms of opposition. His historical materialism turns upon a dialectic best expressed in the form of the constellation, emphasising the interpenetration of contradictory moments, in this case past and present.

The magnetism between past and present in Benjamin's historical constellation takes on particular emotional and political resonances in the context of gay history. Benjamin's claim that "historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears... at a moment of danger"²⁸ speaks to the experience of desiring the gay past from the vantage of a crisis-ridden present I encountered in the think-ins of the reconfigured GLF and which motivates this research. Benjamin's critique of historicism can furthermore be brought to bear on the modes of narrativising gay history that currently dominate in British public life. One dominant tendency – which I call the "Pride model of history" – presents the past as an accumulation of gains, obscuring the continual social abjection of gay life, particularly as it is indexed by racialised and classed experiences. Much like modern Pride parades, which sweep from A to B evoking historicism's "triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate,"²⁹ this model tends to narrate gay history additively, as an accrual of progressive rights and reforms, mystifying the social antagonisms that have historically structured and continue to structure gay life and re-situating conflict as a temporary aberration in the arc of progress towards greater social acceptance and validation. As Alexander Kondakov has shown, such narratives are integral to the "schematic mapping" by both LGBT advocacy organisations and scholars, whose concept of progress hinges on "dichotomous geographical division" of East and West and linear concepts of historical time.³⁰ Throughout these discourses, Kondakov argues, the idea of progress is increasingly coupled with "Western legal norms," eliding "the conditions of heteronormativity that remain intact even in the places designated as progressive."³¹ Lived realities of abjection and violence thus continue to be externalised by these dominant narratives onto the global peripheries, while the idea of liberation is collapsed into the "inclusive sexual citizenship" ushered in by decriminalisation and marriage equality legislation.³²

Such progressivist gay narratives, I would add, also arise from and reproduce a principle vigorously disputed by the gay liberation movement: that sexual liberation is entirely compatible with a capitalist

26 Ibid, 249.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 247.

29 Ibid, 248.

30 Alexander Sasha Kondakov, "Challenging the Logic of Progressive Timeline, Queering LGBT Successes and Failures in Ireland and Russia," *Sexualities*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607211051555>, 2.

31 Ibid, 6.

32 Ibid, 8.

organisation of society. In this respect, the Pride model of history corresponds closely to Kristin Ross' work on the uses of the past by media-certified "sociologists and reformed *gauchistes*"³³ in the wake of May '68 in France. Since the mid-1970s, she argues, these "custodians of memory," have worked in tandem to curate an official story of the rebellions, "stripped of any violence, asperity or political dimension" and re-articulated as part of a "benign transformation of customs and lifestyles that necessarily accompanied France's modernisation."³⁴ In this "teleology of the present," May '68 is reframed as a "disruption in the service of consensus," a necessary step in the path to a more liberal, progressive phase of French capitalism, deemed not only a consequence of the rebellions but "the accomplishment of its deepest desires."³⁵ I argue that the Pride model of history constructs a similar teleology of the present with regards to the history of gay liberation, wherein Pride is construed as the fulfilment of gay liberation's revolutionary demands rather than a signifier of their failure or deferral. The Pride model of history has thus marked a crucial strategy in the domestication of gay liberation history, papering over the ugly details of the conflict-ridden relationship between gay life and Britain's social institutions.

The form of historical materialism I want to advance, by contrast, focuses on how crisis and antagonism are endemic to capitalist social life, taking on specific modalities for gay people during the years of gay liberation. This thesis explores how social antagonism registered in the emotional and political lives of those connected to the gay liberation movement during the two decades prior to the more explicit state of emergency represented by the AIDS crisis. Gay liberation developed during a fraught moment for British capitalism. By the late sixties, explains Werner Bonefeld in his historical overview of the recomposition of the British state, "the conditions that had prevented the tendency to overaccumulation from manifesting itself were exhausted."³⁶ The period of domestic economic growth and rising productivity that had prevailed since the Second World War, alongside sustained accumulation globally, now gave way to a slump in profitability between 1968 and 1973.³⁷ The global oil crisis of 1973 moreover tipped the British economy into recession,³⁸ unleashing a crisis whose effects are very much still unravelling. As Robert Brenner has demonstrated, 1973 marked a turning point, ever since which the average global rates of growth – for "output, capital stock (investment) and real wages" – "have been one third to one half of those for the years 1950 to 1973, while the average unemployment rate has been more than double."³⁹ In Britain, the onset of this crisis had grave consequences for the Keynesian framework of planned economic growth, integration of labour and full-employment guarantees, which now "came up against the limits of the capitalist form of

33 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2002), 6. *Gauchiste* is a French term for leftist, referring in this context to a loosely defined cluster of militant, far left elements in the '68 rebellions.

34 Ibid, 6-7.

35 Ibid, 7.

36 Werner Bonefeld, *The Recomposition of the British State during the 1980s* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1993), 72.

37 Ibid.

38 Matthew Worley, "Marx–Lenin–Rotten–Strummer: British Marxism and youth culture in the 1970s," *Contemporary British History* 34 no.4 (2016), 505.

39 Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945 – 2005* (New York: Verso, 2006), 4.

reproduction,"⁴⁰ the cost of which was borne heavily by the British working class throughout the industrial disputes of the seventies.

While it makes sense to describe the long crisis of the early seventies as an economic crisis, it must also be understood as immanently and irreducibly social. A key insight from the open marxist tradition, in its elaboration of a critique of political economy as critical social theory, is that, "however objective in its nature, economic nature is in its entirety a socially constituted nature."⁴¹ While the third section of this introduction will bring an open marxist dialectic to bear on the question of the relationship between sexuality, capitalism and the state in more detail, it should be highlighted here that I understand the crisis of capitalism to simultaneously constitute a crisis of gay life. Relations of production and accumulation belong to the social relations of capitalism in that they comprise real, living relationships between social actors, despite their frequent appearance as objective economic realities. As elucidated by Simon Clarke, "the immediate relationship between wage labour and capital is not an 'economic' relationship, but a social relationship... in the sense that it is a relation simultaneously of exploitation, of domination and of ideological struggle."⁴² Accordingly, it cannot be reduced to a mere effect of economic conditions that the crisis of the early seventies constituted a huge upheaval in the class composition of industrialised societies, propelling swathes of people into more insecure forms of work and underemployment.⁴³ Those already subsisting on the gendered, sexualised and racialised margins of society now had to navigate a world increasingly evacuated of opportunities for their social reproduction, whether through the wage or the welfare state. The increasing superfluity of the working class to the capacity of capital thus became the context in which differentials of race, sexuality and gender took on renewed significance as avenues of social abjection and exclusion in the class struggle.

Many marxist tendencies – particularly those of a dialectical materialist or a structuralist bent – nevertheless apply, according to Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis, a kind of "closure" to their analyses of capitalist social relations.⁴⁴ "'Closed' Marxism," they argue, "does either or both of two interrelated things: it accepts the horizons of a given world as its own theoretical horizons and/or it announces a determinism which is causalist or teleological."⁴⁵ This closure, I argue, has long plagued marxist approaches to sexuality, rendering the latter as unidirectionally determined by, or epiphenomenal to underlying, apparently economic forces. Yet, following an open marxist line of thinking, we can instead attend to how the experience of sexuality is both socially constituted and constitutive of important dimensions of the crisis at hand, namely that the possibility of workers' exclusion from or superfluity to the process of capitalist production inheres within the capitalist class

40 Bonefeld, *The Recomposition of the British State during the 1980s*, 80.

41 Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2

42 Simon Clarke, "The State Debate," in *The State Debate* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 9.

43 Endnotes, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," *Endnotes 2: Misery and the Value Form* (2010), 40.

44 Bonefeld, Gunn, and Psychopedis, "Introduction," in *Open Marxism Volume 1*, xii.

45 Ibid.

relation. The crisis of the early seventies was therefore less an originally economic crisis that determined secondary social and cultural effects, but a social crisis through and through, and thus a crisis of gay life, just beginning to make itself socially visible in Britain. This context – of a social crisis emerging adjacently to gay liberation and still unfolding to this day – is why the Pride model of history, with its erasure of antagonism, is insufficient for dealing with the gay past.

While Benjamin's concept of constellation has so far referred primarily to a way of configuring historical time as a mass of discontinuous moments, there is nevertheless a further possible usage of the term, as in Sergio Tischler Visquerra and Alfonso Galileo García Vela's elaboration of a "social constellation."⁴⁶ They extend Benjamin's "critique of abstract and homogenous temporality" to a more general "critique against abstraction as a form of homogenisation and domination," arguing that the idea of constellation also points to how, within any given historical situation, contradictory social forms arise, undermining "the idea of the homogenous revolutionary subject."⁴⁷ This sense of constellation, as a way of thinking through the shape of social struggles, responds to Benjamin's description of the past, in the seventeenth thesis, as "a configuration pregnant with tensions" in which historical materialism perceives "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed class,"⁴⁸ re-centring actual, lived, forms of struggle. Following Tischler Visquerra and García Vela's expanded notion of constellation, historical materialists must not only attend to the contradictions *between* historical moments, but also to the contradictory struggles, theories and forms of life that crystallise *within* those moments. For the purposes of this thesis, similarly, to "constellate" means both to arrange images and insights from the past to rub against progressivist historical narratives, but also to reconstruct and trace the different groupings, tensions and solidarities that comprise the history of gay liberation. In this latter sense, the gay liberation movement can be understood as both a co-ordinate in a constellation of revolutionary movements acting within the crisis-ridden conditions of the late sixties and seventies, and as an internally differentiated constellation of struggles itself. The cultural and emotional character of the movement, along with its political critique of numerous social institutions, register and express the shifting social relations of the moment, as well as contributing to a heterodox tradition of revolutionary thought and struggle. The particular shape taken by the crisis in capitalism for gay life in Britain ultimately involved the erosion and enclosure of the terrain within which the movement operated, one conditioned by the availability of social space, infrastructure and welfare provision. The political imaginary of gay liberation has thus been a vanishing horizon ever since the movement's fleeting moment of prominence five decades ago. While its forms of confrontation left a residual imprint on a "radical minority of AIDS activists,"⁴⁹ the political and emotional atmosphere of gay liberation was ultimately, necessarily superseded by organisational forms focused on care and advocacy in response to the mass death and moral panic of the eighties

46 Sergio Tischler Visquerra and Alfonso Galileo García Vela, "On Emancipation...," in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 1624.

47 Ibid, 1626.

48 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 254.

49 Alan Sears, "Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?," *Science & Society* 69, no. 1 (2012), 99.

and nineties. Consequently, gay liberation embodies a realm of possibility, foreclosed by the actual course of historical conditions.

The form of historical materialism derived from Benjamin's constellation therefore mobilises a disruptive critique of the Pride model of history, re-articulating gay history as a history of capitalist crisis. Yet in folding the gay past into this counternarrative also throws into relief potential limitations and unresolved tensions within Benjamin's historical materialist method. The context of a still unfolding "long crisis" touched upon above seems to invite a mode of historical and theoretical narrativisation that extends beyond Benjamin's intensive materialism. This is the premise, at least, of Adorno's critique of Benjamin's dialectical approach as expressed in the two men's correspondence while Benjamin was exiled in Paris. In 1938, Adorno wrote to Benjamin – in response to the latter's "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" manuscript – that "unless I am very much mistaken, your dialectic is lacking in one thing: mediation."⁵⁰ This charge forms the crux of Adorno's critique of both Benjamin's work on art and on historiography, which Feldman summarises, through Adorno's eyes, as being "not dialectical enough."⁵¹ For Adorno, mediation does not refer to the existence of a static middle element between objects, but a kinetic shifting "between particular and universal, intuition and concept, matter and idea, content and form,"⁵² where each of these moments is perceived in the other. Within Benjamin's dialectical images, he finds a form of materialism so intensive as to paralyse this theoretical movement, where motifs are presented as bare facts, "assembled... but not elaborated."⁵³ The form of immanent critique proposed by Adorno conversely stresses that such motifs only become comprehensible when "mediated through the total social process,"⁵⁴ referring to the mediation of particular moments through capitalism's totality via theory's negating movement. Adorno's characterisation elsewhere of "the glance of [Benjamin's] philosophy [as] Medusan"⁵⁵ doubles down on this critique, identifying Benjamin's method with the reifying, mystifying force of commodity fetishism. In identifying a lack of "mediation" in Benjamin's constellation, Adorno casts it as at odds with critique, narrative and theory. In the context of this thesis, this critique could be extended to argue that while honing in on images of the gay past and drawing out their discontinuities and contradictions may invoke an intense encounter between the historian and the past, the activity tells us little about the changing relations of capitalist social and sexual life over time.

While Benjamin does espouse an intensive and immediate form of historical materialism, this does not mean, however, that mediation is absent from his constellation. Benjamin's dialectical method relies on moments of arrest and stasis, folded into the very form of his writing which tends to be

50 Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence: 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicolas Walker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 282.

51 Feldman, "Not Dialectical Enough," 337.

52 Steven Helmling, "Constellation and Critique: Adorno's Constellation, Benjamin's Dialectical Image," *Postmodern Culture* 14, no. 1 (2003), <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.903/14.1helmling.html>.

53 Ibid, 281.

54 Ibid, 282.

55 As cited in Helmling, "Constellation and Critique."

structured into vignettes, fragments or short theses. Yet the arrangement of these freeze frames together give rise to a counternarrative of a larger social totality and ongoing social dynamics, appearing to the figure of the historical materialist as a vista of "wreckage [piled] upon wreckage." As Helmling argues, "if immanent critique is meant to reliquify an antecedent hardening, then the Medusa-gaze would seem to belong to the prequel of the story: the moment of its object's petrification would seem to be the indispensable narrative precondition for the repetition and reliquification to follow."⁵⁶ Benjamin's dialectical image performs the moment of reification in the presentation of the image itself, and its reliquification in the process of constellating of them together. This constellation can thus be read as an unorthodox kind of critical narrative, arising from the echo and magnetism between its different moments. Theorising the crisis-ridden temporalities of capitalism does require accounting for how social dynamics develop over time, while also zooming in on how those dynamics crystallise particular historical moments.

What Adorno perceives as the shortcoming of Benjamin's historical materialism, therefore, is at the same time the core of its unique insight. The difference between their dialectical approaches, Carmen Thong argues, is ultimately one of "philosophical temperament,"⁵⁷ where for Adorno, the dynamic movement of theory, restlessly negating its object, is the end in itself, while Benjamin lingers on each moment in his constellation, imbuing it with the possibility of redemption. In this sense, Benjamin's constellation does not constitute a fully developed, formalised historical methodology, but rather a critical stance, questioning historical approaches that seek out a direct cause and effect between events. The purpose of this discussion is not necessarily to affirm Benjamin's approach over Adorno's or vice versa, but rather to claim that, out of the generative tension between them, we can glean a richer sense of what dialectics can do. The history of gay liberation is brimming with contradictions and antinomies, which can be approached by moving between the narrative temperaments embodied by Adorno and Benjamin's approaches. Gay history consists at the same time in moments, motifs, fragments and echoes, and in processes, trajectories and shifts. The method advanced in this thesis therefore both attends to the intensively material and textural details of life and continually re-situates these details with the historical development of capitalist society. An open form of dialectical thought arising from Benjamin and Adorno's dialogue therefore motivates this project at every juncture, from engaging with archival research methods in the following section, to the matter of theorising the interpenetration of capitalism's social forms in section four.

3. The archive of gay liberation

The unorthodox form of historical materialism advanced in the previous section raises two key considerations for the process of archival research central to this project. Firstly, Benjamin's

⁵⁶ Helmling, "Constellation and Critique."

⁵⁷ Carmen Thong, "Adorno and Benjamin's Unmediated Mediations," n.d., https://www.academia.edu/8372933/Adorno_and_Benjamin%CA%BCs_Unmediated_Mediation.

constellation shows how the task of engaging with the past comes with different political stakes and emotional registers. For Benjamin, the figure of the historical materialist does not simply study or contemplate the past, but feels a sense of comradeship with it, along with a need to avenge its many casualties. He emphasises historical materialism's potential for "reactivating the past and transforming the present,"⁵⁸ articulated frequently in calls to "shatter," "blast" or "puncture" the continuum of homogenous, empty time. This imagery expresses the emotional magnetism of the past and the intuitive, almost visceral quality of encountering it through material things. Secondly, both Benjamin's constellations and Adorno's immanent critique gesture in their own ways to the presence of a more total narrative mediating these material encounters. Both the material forms taken by the past – objects, images, writing, ephemera – and the figure of the historian or critic themselves are situated within the conditions of their production and circulation. Exploring the archive of gay liberation therefore involves the touching together of two contradictory moments laden with affective and political baggage. The impossibility of a truly detached or "objective" marxist form of historical inquiry becomes especially evident in theses such as this, where my own positionality – as a gay person sympathetic to the politics of liberation, living among the unravelling threads of capitalist crisis – crudely emblematises the immanence of critique to its object. This section explores therefore what these two considerations – of the past's affective registers and the situatedness of the research process within specific historical conditions – mean in the context of my intertwined archival and theoretical methodology.

The history of gay liberation becomes legible to this project in two predominant ways: on one hand, via the repositories of articles, images, pamphlets and ephemera held at various public archives, and on the other, the remembered, autobiographical sources collated in existing historical literature (and sometimes also within those archives), usually in the form of oral history or written testimony. Together, these categories of sources form what I call "the archive of gay liberation," comprising an informal expanse of information still very much in the process of being collated. Existing academic,⁵⁹ popular⁶⁰ and activist⁶¹ histories of gay life during the sixties and seventies have relied extensively on the second, remembered category of sources, gathering testimonies and reflections on the moment of gay liberation from a diffuse range of historical vantages. For example, many written accounts, including both Cant and Hemmings' *Radical Records* anthology (1988) and the archived responses to the National Gay and Lesbian Survey's first round of directives (1986), attempt to make sense of the memory of the sixties and seventies in light of the AIDS crisis, mass unemployment, moral panic,

58 Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 46.

59 See Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Rebecca Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-war Britain 1945–71*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) and Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

60 See Alkarim Jivani, *It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Michael O'Mara, 1997) and Dan Glass, *United Queerdom: From the Legends of the Gay Liberation Front to the Queens of Tomorrow* (London: Zed, 2020).

61 See Lisa Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles: An Oral History of the Gay Liberation Front 1970-73*, (London: Cassell, 1995); Stuart Feather, *Blowing the Lid: Gay Liberation, Sexual Revolution and Radical Queens*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015) and Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings, *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957-1987*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

Section 28 and the creeping hegemony of the New Right. These accounts are therefore frequently inflected with nostalgia, embarrassment, pride and sometimes regret, as they recall the moment of gay liberation from the vantage of the following decade. Meanwhile, the mass of writings, images and objects stored, for example, in the Hall-Carpenter Archive or Bishopsgate Institute, allow insight into snapshots of gay life and gay liberation political materials in the context of their more immediate, day-to-day rhythms. Due to the regional unevenness of homosexual law reform across Britain during my period of study (detailed further in chapter two), the vast majority of the directly political materials I engage with hail from gay liberation groups based in England and especially London, whereas it has been possible to draw in accounts of everyday life from more dispersed regions of the UK. Barring a small minority of writings, including the 1971 GLF manifesto, these earnest documents of gay liberation rarely made it into wide circulation on the radical left, despite revealing much about the political conditions of their time.

In approaching the archive of gay liberation in the physical space of archival repositories and as a mass of existing testimonial literature, this project both attends to the moment of gay liberation's emergence and the diversity of prisms through which it has been re-considered in the fractured years since. While the testimonial category of sources are mediated by the complex mechanics of memory, with Traverso, I explicitly reject the tendency of marxist scholars to "reproduce a classical, positivistic dichotomy between history and memory... [where] memory is the subjective and volatile recollection of a lived experience, whereas history rigorously reconstitutes the events of the past."⁶² It is vital to understand all components of the archive of gay liberation as inflected by the moments of their production and reception. Whether they appear in the physically delineated space of the archive, subject to its cataloguing, storage and preservation processes, or in the form of audio recordings, transcripts or publications, or within the most incisive historical scholarship, the material of history is never unmediated or complete. This framing of the archive of gay liberation intentionally undermines any notion of archives as repositories of raw historical material waiting to be extracted and put to evidentiary purposes. It echoes Ross' suspicion of instrumentalising historical narratives that aim towards the "reconquest of identity" or towards "firm[ing] up the continuity of this or that subgroup or subculture."⁶³ On the contrary, this thesis attempts to make visible the moments of non-identity, contradiction and dislocation in the archive, rubbing against the grain of dominant narratives of gayness. It integrates archival material, including images and photographs, into its analysis, in order to both draw out their political implications and to illustrate the cultural, aesthetic and emotional life surrounding these politics. It ultimately regards archival accounts of gay liberation as forms of cultural and critical production in their own right, rather than as pieces of empirical evidence for pre-existing claims.

On one hand then, the archive of gay liberation is that of an explicitly politicised social movement, mobilising critiques of the capitalist social order that pierce our own historical moment. At the same

⁶² Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 54.

⁶³ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 2.

time, however, to use Matt Cook's phrase, it is also an "archive of feeling" in that it involves "a complex accumulation of emotion in cultural texts,"⁶⁴ bearing the traces of a particular historical situation. In a written reflection on his time spent in the gay liberation movement, Weeks has emphasised that "for me, it was fundamentally feeling part of a community... feeling that this identity had a social location, a political and moral location,"⁶⁵ corroborating the idea of gay liberation as a composite of political and emotional experiences. This idea can be taken forward via Raymond Williams' cultural materialist concept of "structures of feeling," a term he uses to evoke the way in which ideas, values and politics are "lived and felt"⁶⁶ within real social situations. In Traverso's reading of Williams, "life is made exclusively neither of moods and emotions nor of purely abstract values or ideologies. Between them, there is a relational continuity."⁶⁷ This continuity refers to how collective practices, behaviours and affects register social processes. Structures of feeling are thus "social experiences in solution,"⁶⁸ expressing the qualitative, sensuous dimensions of capitalist social life. Different epochs and societies can moreover give rise to "dominant," "residual" and "emergent" structures of feeling, referring respectively to those that exert some kind of hegemonic force, elements of the past that remain active and effective in later cultural processes, and alternative, oppositional cultural elements.⁶⁹ This conception is potentially very helpful for thinking about the archive of gay liberation's wealth of emotional and cultural detail, which often seems to express something so crucial about the period, but in ways that are elusive or difficult to articulate. In that they lie "at the very edge of semantic availability,"⁷⁰ structures of feeling are social forms that are still in progress, referring, according to Sianne Ngai, to "a social experience which is not fully semanticised yet does not require this semanticisation in order to exert palpable pressures and generate concrete effects."⁷¹ This thesis' archival investigations therefore frequently linger on the elusive, barely expressible, textural details of gay life during the sixties and seventies, exploring how they register the unstable social dynamics of the period.

The dialectical approach of this research therefore carves out an idiosyncratic position within marxist history, refusing the reduction of social experience to effects of impersonal economic forces and arguing instead that the experiential expresses and gives shape to the content of capitalist society's contradictory relations. This position corresponds to a particular understanding of the relationship between theory and history, informed by a group of theorists working together from the eighties onwards under the rubric of open marxism. One of the key insights from this tendency was a re-conceptualisation of theory and its uses in the context of a crisis both in left-wing modes of organisation and within academic marxism. Open marxism launched "an intervention in the name of

64 Matt Cook, "'Archives of Feeling': the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987," *History Workshop Journal* 83 (2017), 56.

65 Bill Thornycroft, Jeffrey Weeks, and Mark Sreeves, "The Liberation of Affection," in *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History*, 160.

66 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

67 Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 50.

68 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133.

69 *Ibid.*, 121-124.

70 *Ibid.*, 134.

71 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 360.

Marxism's critical, revolutionary, and destructive purpose – not just against the retreating forms of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, but also against the sociological and positivist forms of Marxism that had become dominant in academia."⁷² Often described as a "subterranean tradition,"⁷³ or counter-current, open marxism worked to identify and extend (rather than found or formalise) modes of marxist theorising "open to the heresy of reality,"⁷⁴ primarily attentive to the actualities of everyday life and struggle, as opposed to pre-given, objective logics or laws.

Richard Gunn's 1989 essay, "Marxism and Philosophy" articulates an exemplary open marxist critique of Critical Realism, a popular tendency within academic marxism during the mid-seventies. Critical Realism developed primarily through the work of Roy Bhaskar, who attempted to sketch out a philosophy for the left that could make sense and draw categorical conclusions from the "real," social practices empirically observable in the world. According to Gunn, this approach presumes a separation of first- (empirical) and second-order (meta-theoretical/philosophical) categories of theorisation, arising out of bourgeois enlightenment philosophy and translating into a dominant tendency in the twentieth-century, "to assimilate philosophy to 'methodology.'"⁷⁵ The left, Gunn counters, does not need a "philosophy" or "bourgeois sociology of knowledge"⁷⁶ to draw conclusions about the world, as theory is already present within concrete social practices, forming a "dynamic unity-in-difference"⁷⁷ between theory and practice. If theory occurs within everyday social existence, rather than floating above in a different stratum, then for the purposes of this thesis, archives of experience can be approached simultaneously as archives of theory.

Marx provides real examples of the dialectical unity-in-difference of social practice and social theory in the *Grundrisse*. The labour market, where workers sell their labour in exchange for a wage, is presented as the terrain where discourses of freedom and property ownership are actively negotiated and played out. Here, "exchange turns into its opposite and the laws of private property – liberty, equality, property – turn into the worker's propertylessness and the dispossession of his labour."⁷⁸ Exchange is shown to be a social relationship as much as an abstract or technical process: it is where notions of "the kind of subjects we are, how we understand ourselves, how we think and act"⁷⁹ are formed. Importantly, Marx does not posit a social relation ontologically prior to human activity but describes the process of exchange from a series of vantages, including through the worker's experience of it, as it shapes their sense of themselves and their place in the world. The relations of production and exchange therefore manifest in the social experience of exploitation and propertylessness. In emphasising this unity of theory and practice, open marxism thus resists the

72 Ibid.

73 Bonefeld, Gunn, and Psychopedis, "Introduction," *Open Marxism Volume 1*, xii.

74 Johannes Agnoli, as cited in Endnotes, "We Unhappy Few," 54.

75 Richard Gunn, "Marxism and Philosophy: A Critique of Critical Realism," *Capital & Class* 13, no. 1 (1989), 91.

76 Ibid, 95.

77 Ibid, 91.

78 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 674.

79 Endnotes, "We Unhappy Few," 59.

"long historical flirtation with determinism"⁸⁰ that has tended to structure orthodox marxist approaches, in which the terms of capitalist class relations are set solely by capital's objective laws of motion, unilaterally shaping the lives and struggles of the working class. Instead, open marxism offers a reading of Marx in which theory and practice are bound together in a mutually constitutive relationship.

It should be noted that Gunn's critique of positivist and orthodox marxisms only directly addresses the relationship between theory and practice rather than theory and history. My contention, however, is that what marxist history is, or at least can be in its richest form, is the mediation of social practice by social theory. This point doubles back to Adorno's idea of immanent critique as the quintessence of dialectical method, and which for Gunn "implies theorising of a practically reflexive kind."⁸¹ Practical reflexivity is the term Gunn gives to a mode of theorising "which asks after the validity of its own categories *in the course* of understanding itself as practically situated."⁸² Practical reflexivity corresponds to Bonefeld's argument that "dialectics does not proceed to its object from outside but from inside, as it attempts to appropriate conceptually social reality in its proper motion. Dialectical thinking conceptualises itself within, and as a moment, of its object."⁸³ Dialectical thinking as articulated by Bonefeld, and practical reflexivity as articulated by Gunn, thus take forward Adorno's concept of immanent critique – a mode of theorising that mediates images of the past according to the situatedness of the historian within the "total social process."⁸⁴ These perspectives strike a chord with this research into the dialectics of gay liberation, speaking to its imbrication within the history of gay life within capitalism and its status as "part of the contradictory social practice that it tries to make sense of."⁸⁵ Its purpose is to reconstruct and reconsider some of the many insights of the archive of gay liberation, an archive rich in theory. The type of marxist history embarked upon in this thesis therefore takes seriously the experiential detail of gay life in the sixties and seventies – in its diverse emotional and political registers – as expressions of social relationships, opening onto a critical theory of capitalist class relations.

4. Capitalism, sexuality and the state

So far, this introduction has sketched out the thesis' dialectical approach, informed by the critical social theory and readings of Marx by Benjamin, Adorno, Gunn, Bonefeld and other figures associated with the Frankfurt School and open marxist tradition. While in more orthodox forms of marxism, dialectics has "connoted general laws of nature and society" such as the dictum that

80 Gunn, "Marxism and Philosophy," 100.

81 Ibid, 102.

82 Ibid, 101.

83 Bonefeld, *The Recomposition of the British State during the 1980s*, 21.

84 Helmling, "Constellation and Critique."

85 Endnotes, "We Unhappy Few," 59.

"quantitative change will at some point become qualitative change,"⁸⁶ the theorists I have foregrounded instead present dialectics – in their own diverse narrative temperaments – as a mode of critiquing capitalist society from within. Contra to the "mystified form"⁸⁷ of the dialectic Marx encounters in his reading of Hegel, he advances a materialist dialectic focused on the presence of contradiction within capitalism's social relationships. This dialectic includes, writes Marx, "in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well."⁸⁸ As a mode of exposition, dialectics understands social relations as grounded in real historical circumstances at the same time as elucidating the unstable and processual character of those circumstances. Social forms which appear fixed and eternal are undergirded by a swirl of contradictions, always containing the possibility of their negation. While in the majority of existing open marxist theoretical production, sexuality, gender and the family are acknowledged yet under-explored themes, the forms of dialectical thought mobilised within this tradition intuitively question how social forms are naturalised, fetishised, constituted and contested within capitalist society. In the context of this thesis, therefore, open marxist theorisations of fetishism, social forms and social constitution, are paramount for thinking through how areas of social life that marxists have traditionally deemed superstructural, secondary or overdetermined by capitalism's relations of production, in fact intimately express, reproduce and constitute those relations.

Such dialectical curiosity also pervades the archive of gay liberation. As David Fernbach of the London Gay Liberation Front noted in 1976, the sexual and gendered realities of social existence often lurk "below the waterline" of marxist social critique, and yet were brought intentionally to light in the theorising of the gay liberation movement, which recognised its own "world-historical significance"⁸⁹ and that of the moment in which it arose. The political writing of gay liberation engages directly with various dialectical approaches to sexuality, as expounded in elements of socialist feminist, Freudo-Marxist and gay communist theory circulating on the radical left of the time. The gay liberation movement inserted itself into the tradition of marxist critique, historically ambivalent towards the social constitution of sexuality, and began to think dialectically about gayness from within the social experience of it. The final section now prefaces these efforts, unpacked over the course of this thesis, with a dialectical reading of sexuality and its role in capitalist society.

The relationship between marxist critique and questions of sexuality has historically been fraught and uneven. The institutionalisation of queer theory as an academic discipline in the late eighties and early nineties produced a wave of scholarship suspicious both of gay and lesbian identity politics and marxist critical theory. According to Kevin Floyd, "a strong sense of Marxism's limits, of its tendency

86 Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis, "Introduction," in *Open Marxism Volume 1*, xiv.

87 Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 1976 [1867]), 103.

88 Ibid.

89 David Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation," in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation*, ed. Pam Mitchell (London: Verso, 2018 [1976]), 153-4.

to elide questions of sexuality, was central to and even constitutive of what we might call queer theory's early stage,⁹⁰ emerging in the context of a broader crisis of academic marxism. Michael Warner's seminal collection of essays, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, emblematises early queer theory's sceptical attitude towards marxism, its introduction asserting that "core elements of the marxist paradigm may have to be seen as properly ideological moments in the history of reproductivist heterosexuality," namely "the general subordination of status conflict to class conflict."⁹¹ Though acknowledging the existence of "countercurrents,"⁹² Warner regards the majority of marxist scholarship to be conditioned by if not outrightly complicit with heteronormative dogma and upholds the conceptual and discursive separation of class and sexual "status." His vague reference to "countercurrents" minimises and misrepresents the lively traditions of heterodox marxism already rethinking the category of class, as well as the paradigm-shifting work of gay and lesbian social movements theorise sexuality not in spite of but propelled by marxist politics.⁹³ Such countercurrents have in their own ways attempted to theorise the reciprocal imbrication of class and sexuality rather than subjugating the latter to the former, yet for Warner they insufficiently break from marxism's implicit "totalised view of the social."⁹⁴ Warner's critique can be seen as part of a tendency within queer theory to position dialectical theorising "as if it were the cause, rather than the critique, of capitalism's totalising movement,"⁹⁵ gravely undermining the potential of marxian concepts to meaningfully theorise the social constitution of sexuality. These charges arise from an over-cautious reading of marxist dialectics through the cipher of its most economic and dogmatic forms. As the remainder of this introduction will elaborate, marxian dialectical exposition can instead mobilise an enriched understanding of sexuality as constituted by and constitutive of capitalist social relations.

The world of academic queer theory has not remained universally hostile to the insights of marxist critique, and multiple efforts to advance a form of queer marxism have laid the groundwork for synthesising critiques of sexuality and capitalism over the past two decades. The following pages will now reconstruct some of these arguments and expand on them in light of the modes of dialectical exposition touched upon already. In *The Reification of Desire*, now considered a staple text in the field of queer marxism, Floyd brings the marxian concepts of reification and totality to bear on the constitution of queer sexualities. Building on Georg Lukács' work on reification, Floyd connects the capitalist system of commodity exchange to the formation of social and sexual subjectivities. For Lukács, reification refers to the dynamic by which, as the capitalist labour process is reorganised in the pursuit of increased profitability, "rational mechanisation extends right into the worker's 'soul',"⁹⁶

90 Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 2.

91 Michael Warner, "Introduction," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, 1993, xxiv.

92 Ibid.

93 While "Chapter One: Situating Gay Liberation" discusses some of these countercurrents in further detail, the open marxism stream already discussed in this Introduction is a paradigmatic example of a heterodox marxist tendency already surpassing classical and dogmatic theorisations of class. Moreover, while the paragraph immediately above notes some of the marxist influences upon the emergent gay liberation movement, the following chapter unpacks these in further detail.

94 Warner, "Introduction," xxi.

95 Amy De'Ath, "Gender and Social Reproduction," *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 1540.

96 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 88.

engendering a splintering and objectification of human capacities. Following this thread, Floyd invokes the marxian concept of commodity fetishism to describe "the way in which capital, even as the social division of labour grows in complexity, represents varied, qualitatively different use values as quantitatively commensurate exchange values."⁹⁷ In the same way that the material, qualitative specificities of commodities are razed in the process of exchange, reduced to commensurate quantities, the social relationships undergirding production "take the form of (exchange value) relations between static, autonomous things, things that appear to be independent of people."⁹⁸ Reification thus conduces to a certain "dispersal and compartmentalisation of social life,"⁹⁹ with real implications for sexual subjectivities. With the increased rationalisation of the labour process, sexual desires and capacities also become reified, reflected in the rise of psychoanalytic discourses and the sedimentation of sexual object-choice as a defining facet of identity over the course of the twentieth century.

Floyd's use of reification nevertheless subverts Lukács' "narrative of decline,"¹⁰⁰ which implies a prior, organic social whole lost to the ravages of capitalist development. Floyd mediates the concept of reification with the concept of totality, arguing that reification represents the vantage point from which a "queer aspiration to totality"¹⁰¹ can develop. This aspiration to totality emerges from and responds to the social differentiation and dispersal that characterises capitalist social life. "Totality thinking" for Floyd is therefore the critique of "capital's systemic, privatising fragmentation of social production especially and of social life more generally."¹⁰² Rather than erasing particularity and difference – as implied by the "totalised view of the social"¹⁰³ of which Warner and others accuse marxism – totality thinking probes at how such particularities are produced and mediated within a social whole. For Floyd, "the aspiration to totality then refers to historically determinate knowledge that is also praxis capable of negating reification,"¹⁰⁴ binding the two concepts of reification and totality together in a dialectic. Floyd's queer aspiration to totality involves the dialectical mediation of the particular with the total and reification with liberation: queerness represents the particular vantage from which universal liberation becomes desirable, and the reification of sexual identity becomes a condition of possibility for that liberation. This aspirational account of totality therefore allows us to think various horizons of difference, such as sexual subjectivity, as "infrastructural"¹⁰⁵ conditions of possibility for the transformation of society, rather than the by-product of the economy's inner workings.

97 Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, 17.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid, 18.

101 Ibid, 20.

102 Ibid, 6.

103 Warner, "Introduction," in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, xxi.

104 Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, 17.

105 Ibid, 35.

A queer marxist aspiration to totality is also advanced in Rosemary Hennessy's work on sexual identities under late capitalism. Like Floyd, Hennessy invokes the concept of reification to describe the "process whereby the history of social relationships underlying identities becomes occluded or made invisible, and identities come to be seen as natural 'things in themselves.'"¹⁰⁶ She arrives at this argument via Deborah Kelsh's concept of "outlawed need," referring to the ways in which capitalism produces, mediates and unevenly meets the human needs for food, shelter, clothing, care, pleasure, fulfilment and so on. Outlawed need is for Hennessy "the companion to the production of surplus value,"¹⁰⁷ integral to the system of commodity exchange. A fundamental contradiction of capital is that it produces the very needs it also outlaws, dispossessing people of the direct means to meet their needs and instead mediating their access via the wage and market. As Hennessy elaborates, "under capitalism, workers do not retain control of very much of their human potential, and the outlawing of so much human potential is, in fact, one of the sites of struggle between capital and labour."¹⁰⁸ Here, Hennessy gestures to the totalising force of the capitalist labour process, which posits "an individual's entire time as labour time,"¹⁰⁹ in that the vast potentialities of human activity are reduced to an alienated form via the wage relation. For Hennessy, this realm of outlawed potential includes the "sex-affective energy"¹¹⁰ of sexual and emotional needs and desires, increasingly compartmentalised, differentiated and valued against each other within dominant discourses on sexuality. The production of "normative and perverse sexual identities"¹¹¹ thus manifests the capitalist organisation of desire into discrete, commensurable and saleable units, mirroring the quantitative and fragmenting movement of commodity exchange.

For Hennessy, like Floyd, therefore, the constitution of sexual identities is infrastructural to capitalism, given that the ceaseless play of producing and outlawing need necessitates the abstract sexual differentiation of human societies. As Hennessy argues, "outlawing the development of full human potential comprises the very scaffolding of human relationships in commodity exchange,"¹¹² in that the relations of production and exchange comprise social real relationships. At the same time, however, the production of outlawed need generates a "monstrous necessity"¹¹³ impossible to fully accommodate within commodity society. Hennessy locates political potential within this "monstrous" position of exclusion and abjection, similarly to how Floyd presents the experience of reification as a condition of possibility for liberation, suggesting that sexually marginalised vantage points can be understood "as the place to begin to provoke the formation of more comprehensive, collective agency."¹¹⁴ The key insights of Floyd and Hennessy's queer marxisms for this thesis therefore lie in

106 Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018 [2000]), 217.

107 Ibid, 215.

108 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 215.

109 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 708.

110 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 215.

111 Ibid, 217.

112 Ibid, 95.

113 Ibid, 228.

114 Ibid, 230.

their understanding of sexuality as socially and historically produced, infrastructural to the capitalist social order, and as a terrain for antagonism and struggle.

Floyd and Hennessy's contributions to queer marxism have created important entry points for thinking about why and how sexuality is constituted within capitalism without recourse to the forms of vulgar determinism preferred by traditional iterations of dialectical thought. Their theorisations of capitalism as a totality of social relations pushes against the idea of forms of oppression as separately constituted, intersecting vectors. Nevertheless, their consensus that the formation of sexualities is anchored in processes of production and exchange does imply that *some* form of determinism, *some* chain of causation, is at play, the character of which requires further exploration. Marina Vishmidt and Zoe Sutherland have approached this question by offering an account of capitalist value relations as "stratified social relations" or a "negative totality,"¹¹⁵ building on Floyd and Hennessy's queer marxisms by showing that the partial and uneven exclusion of abjected populations from the labour process and social life in general is not only historically produced by capitalist value relations, but is necessary to them. Such forms of exclusion, they argue, lived through race, gender sexuality, form "constitutive internal outsides to value relations."¹¹⁶ Drawing on a form of negative dialectics, Vishmidt and Sutherland note how capitalist valorisation is a fundamentally negative process. The production of value necessitates its own exterior in that the valorisation of some labours and commodities derives from the devalorisation of others, indexing in practice with areas of life "that seem not to be directly mediated by the wage relation and yet shape it at every level."¹¹⁷ In Clover and Spahr's phrasing, social and cultural differentiation create "differentials across which value can flow,"¹¹⁸ and is therefore integral to and constitutive of capitalist social relations. As I have argued elsewhere, "the social forms of race, gender and sexuality [are] mediations of that class relation into which we are all compelled;"¹¹⁹ they are means of differentially valuing categories of work and personhood and rendering labour more stratified, manageable and productive.

The concept of negative totality therefore exposes the capitalist process of valorisation as conflict-ridden and internally differentiated. This chimes with the insights of open marxism into the historical development of capitalism as "an open process of valorisation," described by Gunn as

"...always ready to incorporate – viciously, and voraciously – whatever in pre-capitalism can serve its purposes and lies ready to hand. It incorporates them as its own mediations, and in so doing re-'forms' them... In this way, capital re-forms the family and transforms sexual

115 Marina Vishmidt and Zoe Sutherland, "(Un)Making Value: Reading Social Reproduction through the Question of Totality," in *Totality Inside Out: Rethinking Crisis and Conflict under Capital*, ed. Kevin Floyd, Jen Hedler Phillis, and Sarika Chandra (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 75.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid, 78.

118 Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, "Gender Abolition and Ecotone War," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (2016), 292.

119 Sophie Monk, Joni Alizah Cohen and Lucy Freedman, "Editorial," *Invert Journal* 1 (2020), 6.

relations within the family into a 'form' of the capital-labour relation itself... The sexual relation becomes a mediation of the class relation and vice versa."¹²⁰

Here, Gunn presents sexual relations and institutions as forms or "modes of existence"¹²¹ of the class contradiction in capitalism. The material basis of such social forms may historically predate capitalism, but they acquire their specifically capitalist character in the heat of ongoing class conflict, rendering the history of sexuality at once a history of capitalist class relations. As Christopher Chitty puts it, both "labour and the sexual relationship predate capitalism but are categorically transformed in societies dominated by the commodity form,"¹²² mobilising a conception of sexuality as a *capitalist* social form. In situating the process of capitalist valorisation within a narrative of class struggle, Gunn furthermore emphasises that his analysis is precisely "the opposite of reductionist," construing "the process whereby capital re-forms sexual relations as one of struggle."¹²³ In that sexual relations mediate the class relation, they change its shape and set its terms, much in the same way that "a rope linking two climbers is constitutive of the relation in which they stand."¹²⁴ Bonefeld advances this perspective in his critique of Moishe Postone's theorisation of capitalist social domination in *Time, Labor and Social Domination*. Postone's argument that "social domination in capitalism does not, on its most fundamental level, consist in the domination of people by other people, but in the domination of people by abstract social structures that people themselves constitute"¹²⁵ rightly critiques the orthodox marxist tendency to reduce society's contradictions to two warring blocs or factions. Yet as Bonefeld illustrates, Postone over-corrects this reduction by neglecting to theorise how that domination is constituted and realised in struggle. Bonefeld insists instead on the dialectical character of social forms, claiming that their "genesis" is not separate "from their constituted existence."¹²⁶ Capitalism, Bonefeld argues, is not just the afterlife of a historical dispossession – as tends to be the implication of some accounts of primitive accumulation, including Postone's – but is the ongoing "sheer unrest of life."¹²⁷ This social antagonism "asserts itself not only over the social individuals," but "also in and through the social individuals who for the sake of their life 'react under the compulsion' of the movement of economic quantities."¹²⁸ Thus for Bonefeld, social forms are the modes in which antagonistic relations are realised and expressed rather than secondary effects of an objective process. Understanding sexuality as a social form thus points to its expansive social role: sexual relations not only reflect antagonistic class relations, they also reconstitute them at a material level.

120 Gunn, "Marxism and Mediation," *Common Sense* 2 (July 1987), 61.

121 Ibid, 60.

122 Christopher Chitty, "Sex as Cultural Form: The Antinomies of Sexual Discourse," *Blindfield: A Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 2016, <https://blindfieldjournal.com/2016/04/19/sex-as-cultural-form-the-antinomies-of-sexual-discourse>.

123 Gunn, "Marxism and Mediation," 61.

124 Ibid, 57.

125 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30.

126 Bonefeld, "On Postone's Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism from the Critique of Political Economy," *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 3 (2004), 107.

127 Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*, 59.

128 Ibid, 60.

This dialectical theorisation of the constitution of social forms is most directly articulated in Bonefeld and Clarke's conceptualisations of the capitalist state, articulated in response to the marxist state debate of the 1970s. I include a gloss of their arguments here, both by way of suggesting the capitalist character of other social institutions addressed within this research, and by way of introducing the British state's crucial role in the policing of sexuality during my period of study. According to Bonefeld, the state comprises a "historical process that establishes social conditions which constitute the reality of value production"¹²⁹ such as the enshrinement of formal freedoms and equalities which appear to promote and protect some idea of a social good above and beyond capitalist accumulation. Yet "behind formal equality and formal freedom lies social reproduction in the form of capital,"¹³⁰ revealing the state's mediating role in the production of value. In its management of the antagonism between capital and labour, the state simultaneously obscures this antagonism, "concentrat[ing] the social reality of exploitation in and through the guarantee of formal freedom and formal equality of property rights."¹³¹ The capitalist state is thus fundamentally implicated within class struggle, in which it contradictorily "denies and disorganises by use of force, in the name of citizenship [and] social emancipation."¹³² For Clarke, this ambivalence of the capitalist state is due to its contradictory status "not simply [as] a tool of capital" but as "an arena of class struggle."¹³³ While the state has existed in various institutional forms throughout history and is "not a peculiarly capitalist institution,"¹³⁴ it nevertheless forms "an integral part of the class struggle"¹³⁵ within capitalism. Hence the "capitalist state" is referred to because its capacities and constraints are bound up with the production of value. Among other contradictions, its "need to force down the value of labour-power contradicts the need to reproduce labour-power," while "the need to break down all non-capitalist social relations contradicts the need to sustain the family as the unit for the reproduction of labour-power."¹³⁶ Thus, according to Bonefeld, "the limits of capital are, at the same time, limits of the state,"¹³⁷ meaning that the form of the state "needs to be seen as a mode of existence of the class relation which constitutes and suffuses the circuit of capital."¹³⁸ The capitalist state therefore arises out of and expresses the capitalist class struggle while mediating the contradictions integral to capitalism.

This discussion on the constitution of the capitalist state forms an important theoretical context for this thesis' investigation of gay liberation's antagonistic relationship to the British state and other social institutions. As the following chapters will explain in further historical detail, the material conditions that both gave rise to the gay liberation movement and foreclosed its political horizons

129 Bonefeld, "Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State," in *Open Marxism Volume 1*, 115.

130 Ibid, 116.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid, 120.

133 Clarke, "State, Class Struggle and the Reproduction of Capital" in *The State Debate*, 163.

134 Ibid, 165.

135 Ibid, 172.

136 Ibid, 176.

137 Bonefeld, "Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State," 121.

138 Ibid, 122.

were mediated by the British state, itself in a process of recomposition in the post-war period and especially during the downturn of the seventies. That the capitalist form of the state, as theorised by Bonefeld and Clarke, expresses and embodies the material constraints of capital, moreover gestures to a dialectic of freedom and constraint structuring capitalist social life more broadly. For Vishmidt and Sutherland, in that "capitalist accumulation produces or contributes to the production of varying forms of social hierarchy and oppression," it increasingly tends to be experienced "as a series of constraints rather than possibilities."¹³⁹ These constraints are endemic to capitalist accumulation, which hinges upon the paradoxical "drive to exploit labour-power" (so as to extract more surplus value) "and, simultaneously, to expel it from the production process" (in order to reduce to a minimum the time it takes to produce commodities).¹⁴⁰ The capitalist wage relation is an inherently precarious relationship reliant upon the tendential expulsion of the very thing it needs most: labour-power.¹⁴¹ Its promise of freedom – from more direct forms of violent coercion into labour such as serfism or slavery – is based paradoxically upon compulsion and constraint. To subsist, people are compelled into an increasingly precarious and downwardly competitive system of labour, tying together the fate of working-class survival with that of the social reproduction of capitalism. The experiences of freedom and constraint are therefore dialectically interlinked within capitalism: each concept contains the possibility of the other, and each is a form of appearance adopted by the other. This central contradiction of capitalist accumulation is lived, felt and expressed on an expanding scale, in and through capitalism's social institutions. The dialectical theorisation of the relationship between capitalism, sexuality and the state elaborated in this section therefore makes visible the inherent instability and negativity of capitalist social forms, simultaneously arising out of and giving shape to class antagonism.

5. Structure of the thesis

This introduction has begun the work of interweaving historical and theoretical analysis into an open form of marxist critique. It has made the case for how dialectical modes of theorising can help make sense of complicated histories, even and especially those with the kinds of sexual, emotional and political stakes alien to traditional marxist history. Its key theoretical reference points – Benjamin's constellation and Adorno's immanent critique – map onto the combination of registers or temperaments adopted throughout the rest of this thesis, which intentionally expands and contracts, zooming in on moments, images and texts and zooming out again to resituate them within the unfolding of historical conditions. Dialectics moreover frames this project's relationship to the historical past, as recorded in the "archive of gay liberation," the term I use to refer to an unstable, growing archive of emotion and theory. My approach to this archive is informed by Williams' notion of

139 Vishmidt and Sutherland, "(Un)making Value," in *Totality Inside Out*, 82.

140 Endnotes, "The Moving Contradiction: The Systematic Dialectic of Capital as a Dialectic of Class Struggle," in *Endnotes* 2, 108.

141 *Ibid*, 126.

structures of feeling, which emphasises the emotional life of social forms, and Gunn's open marxism, which presents social practice and social theory as internally, mutually related. This thesis therefore advances a form of dialectical theorising that is fundamentally "open to the heresy of reality," centring struggle and everyday life. Following Clarke, marxist theory should not "legislate for history [or] dictate theoretically what history can and cannot be," but rather flows from "a fundamental aspect of the everyday experience of the working class."¹⁴² So, while "the contradictory foundation of production underlies the historical development of a society based on that form of production," this "contradiction cannot determine its own outcome."¹⁴³ In other words, as the fourth section of this introduction has shown, the social forms of gender and sexuality, traditionally regarded within marxism as epiphenomenal to or unidirectionally determined by capitalist class relations, are in reality mutually constitutive of them. Sexual relations both express the contradictory character of capitalism and set the conditions of possibility for its social reproduction. The marxist history elaborated in these pages therefore situates gay liberation as a dimension of capitalist class relations, exploring how the movement registered and contributed to the social transformations of the sixties and seventies.

Subsequently, "Chapter One: Situating Gay Liberation" now turns to the moment of gay liberation's emergence itself, as the sixties gave way to the seventies, identifying the key conditions of possibility for its formation, and cataloguing some of the critical perspectives that it produced. Its first half focuses on the constellation of countercultural and social movements in which gay liberation was forged, registering a combination of international and localised transformations in the social relations of capitalism. Using the 1971 manifesto of the GLF as its primary source, the second half of the chapter then reconstructs some elements of gay liberation's novel politics of sexuality, bringing these elements into dialogue with a series of emergent countercurrents in marxist theory.

The remainder of the thesis then directs its attention to the gay liberation movement's conflict-ridden relationship with British social institutions. These chapters follow a spatialised, thematic structure, each focusing on a particular social arena – street politics, psychiatry and domestic life – as sites of contestation. Chapter two explores gay liberation's public cultures of sex and protest, as expressed in its early writing on the politics of visibility and within peoples' testimonial accounts of their access to public space during the period. These experiences are framed by the shifting post-Wolfenden codes of public order and decency, which I argue mobilised new forms of policing and surveillance according to a dialectic of freedom and constraint governing British social life. Chapter three then focuses on the arena of clinical psychiatry, reconstructing the gay liberation movement's anti-psychiatric critique as a key coordinate in the counterculture of the sixties and seventies. This chapter moreover examines the changing shape of mental healthcare throughout the twentieth century, feeding into the historical role played by psychiatry in the policing of sexuality during the sixties and seventies. It moreover draws upon experiential forms of knowledge from the archive of

¹⁴² Simon Clarke, "Althusserian Marxism," in *One-Dimensional Marxism* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 20.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

gay liberation to theorise the contradictory relationships between mental health and capitalism, subjectivity and society, and the personal and political. Finally, chapter four addresses the politics of domesticity and family abolition arising from gay liberation's constellation of alternative household formations. This politics is situated alongside the reorganisation of Britain's housing infrastructure during the period and its reshaping of domestic structures of feeling. Each of these chapters advance an open marxist approach towards the constitution of social institutions such as the state, psychiatry and family, feeling out their underpinning contradictions and examining their conflictual relationships with the gay liberation movement. They moreover locate, within the history of gay liberation, visions of revolutionary social change produced by and constitutive of the social reality in which they emerged.

Chapter One: Situating Gay Liberation

1. Introduction

This chapter contextualises the development of the gay liberation movement in Britain within a constellation of social transformations during the sixties. Upheaval in the capitalist class relation and the related growth of dissident elements on the political left saw the development of a contested politics of liberation, with fresh insights into the character of capitalist social domination, the role of sexual, gender-based and anti-colonial struggle, and the temporality of revolutionary social change. This chapter foregrounds the historical encounter between gay people and this politics of liberation in the late sixties, taking up the question asked at the beginning of my introductory chapter: what is gayness to a politics of liberation?

The theoretical pluralism of gay liberation and the political situation in which it arose renders this a complicated question. The social movements of the sixties and seventies, alongside the burgeoning counterculture and heterodox left, contained multiple, often contradictory theoretical dimensions. This chapter reconstructs some of these tendencies, focusing particularly on those whose breakthroughs and contradictions map onto those of the British gay liberation movement. Its first half gives an overview of the contested politics of liberation, situating its development alongside the recomposition of the left, class politics, and forms of social domination. The second half looks more specifically at forms of critique advanced within the gay liberation movement, considering how these forms modulated and contested elements of the politics of liberation circulating in the sixties. Overall, the chapter identifies at the heart of gay liberation's theoretical contribution, a multi-layered and dialectical conception of gayness as an affirmative form of revolutionary subjectivity, a new mode of relating socially and sexually, and ultimately, the negation of capitalist sexual relations.

2. The dialectics of liberation

The gay liberation movement in Britain arose out of a series of encounters between left-wing intellectual and countercultural tendencies in the late sixties. The open revolt of students and workers in Paris in May '68 registered an emergent form of coalitional politics on the European left, formed out of "the union of intellectual contestation with workers' struggle."¹ The 1969 Stonewall Riots, following one year later in the United States, retrospectively came to mark the advent of the international gay liberation movement, for which race, sexuality and gender were crucial objects of critique. These events were part of a late sixties constellation of revolutionary movements formed on the European and North American left, gathering in some other primary capacity than as workers and

¹ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 2.

broadly espousing what I describe in this chapter as a "politics of liberation." Among others, this constellation included gay liberation, Black Power, women's liberation and anti-imperialist groups. Around the same time, a number of heterodox marxisms also began to gain traction, including Italian *operaismo*, French situationism and the German Neue Marx-Lektüre, naming capitalism as their object of critique, as both a mode of production and a set of social relationships. These tendencies reinterpreted Marx "as a theorist of the alienation prevalent in both work and society, and hence as a critic not just of exploitation but also of domination."² Their interventions widened the scope of critique on the left, challenging the institutionalised marxisms that, as I have already argued, had tended to privilege a narrative of the traditional industrial proletariat as the ultimate revolutionary subject and driver of social change.

While events such as Stonewall and May '68 have functioned as fulcrums in the collective memory of radical social movements, the tendency to overload them with signification risks obscuring the protracted dialogues and confrontations in which the emergent political configurations of the late sixties were forged. In Britain, for example, the absence of a mass event such as May '68 or Stonewall could mistakenly infer that the upsurge of liberation politics throughout Europe in the sixties simply passed Britain by. On the dangers of overburdening events with signification, Brian Thill has criticised an impulse among historians of the radical left "to fall prey to figuration, converting historical realities into occasions for leftist nostalgia and simplification."³ Against the figuration of historical events, Thill urges historians to "scrutinise the social and political forces that brought that figuration and simplification into being," revealing the longer, processual character of historical moments and their relationship to "real conditions of existence."⁴ This calls for renewed attention towards the slower cross-pollinations of social movements, intellectual tendencies and countercultures which collaboratively produced what can now be recognised as a politics of liberation in the late sixties, and to which the British left was far from impervious. This section therefore explores the politics of "liberation", as it figured in the debates of the late sixties countercultural left, sketching out the term's theoretical contours and illustrating the political environment in which gay liberation formed.

July 1967 marked a point of convergence for many of these radical tendencies, at the fortnight-long Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation at the Roundhouse theatre, London. The Congress brought together Frankfurt School marxists like Herbert Marcuse with social movement leaders such as Stokely Carmichael of the US Black Panther Party (later known as Kwame Ture, as he will be referred to hereafter), and prominent proponents of anti-psychiatry, RD Laing and David Cooper. In its structure, the Congress prefigured the modes of left-wing organisation it sought to build. In Cooper's account, "this is why the 'principal speakers' mixed so freely and spontaneously with the 'audience.' It is why so many young people actually took to living in the Roundhouse and then took their seminars

2 Aaron Benanav and John Clegg, "Crisis and Immiseration: Critical Theory Today", *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 1630.

3 Brian Thill, "Black Power and the New Left: The Dialectics of Liberation, 1967", *Mediations* 23, no. 2 (2008), 119.

4 Ibid.

out into local pubs, cafés and public places."⁵ The Congress' supersession of pedagogical hierarchies, as well as its own spatial boundaries, reflects its concerted departure from the rigidity of the institutional left. In this milieu of dissident perspectives, the conceptual specificities of liberation were thrashed out, pre-empting many of the tensions that would later beset the social movements of the seventies for whom liberation was such a crucial concept. As a movement that self-evidently held liberation in its horizon, the gay liberation movement rearticulated over the course of its life many of the discussions unfolding at the Congress. Both a specific historical event, and coordinate in a larger political constellation, the Congress, according to Robinson, "represented the coming together of all of the significant factors that informed the style, form and approach of the gay liberation movement."⁶ To elaborate on the contested conceptions of liberation circulating in the late sixties, this chapter now critically reconstructs three key strands in the Congress' programme: anti-psychiatry, dissident marxism and Black Power. Each presents a particular "dialectic" of liberation, as per the Congress' title, variously influencing the theoretical work of the gay liberation movement in the following decade.

2.1 Anti-psychiatry

The 1967 Congress was organised by four practising psychiatrists influential in the growing countercultural anti-psychiatry movement: David Cooper, RD Laing, Joseph Berke and Leon Redler.⁷ The form of anti-psychiatric critique advanced by these figures rests on a dialectical understanding of liberation, though articulated in a different register to the marxian dialectic elaborated in my introduction, drawing primarily on psychiatric vocabulary. The "dialectics of liberation" explicated particularly in the work of Cooper and Laing, refers to the interdependence of the liberation of large social blocs with the liberation of individual psyches. Cooper's Congress address, "Beyond Words", presents dialectics as the mediation of "the lives of individuals, families and networks," with "the study of the anonymous, large-scale, social-political events."⁸ The "answer" to the problem of mediation, Cooper argues, "is in the question when the question is fully formed in our minds and bodies."⁹ In other words, social individuals embody and personify the contradictions of global capitalism, manifesting in the psychic and corporeal suffering of modern life ("That," Cooper concludes, "is dialectic"¹⁰). Cooper's introduction to the volume of collected Congress speeches further argues that the dissociation of individual psychic life from the temporalities of social change had historically been the "cardinal failure of all past revolutions,"¹¹ calling into question the long-held tendency of the institutional left to consign personal freedom to an afterthought of class struggle.

5 David Cooper, "Introduction," in *The Dialectics of Liberation* (London: Verso, 2015), 11.

6 Lucy Robinson, "Three Revolutionary Years: The Impact of the Counter Culture on the Development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 3, no. 4 (2006), 448.

7 Cooper, "Introduction", 7.

8 Cooper, "Beyond Words," in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, 193.

9 Ibid, 194.

10 Ibid.

11 Cooper, "Introduction", 9.

This anti-psychiatric understanding of liberation bears the traces of a Maoist dialectic of particularity and totality, highly influential within Western counterculture during the period of intensified US imperialism in East Asia. Mao's claim that "it is so with all opposites; in given conditions, on the one hand they are opposed to each other, and on the other hand, they are interconnected, interpenetrating, interpermeating and interdependent," is linked by Colleen Lye to the formation of identity-based social movements in the US and Europe during the sixties, who sought "the cultural construction of a new mass revolutionary agent in a situation where existed on the horizon no apparent working-class proletarian vanguard."¹² According to Lye, "identity held out the prospect of unity"¹³ for these emergent social movements in that the propagation of fragmentary and differentiated experiences spoke to the totalising, social character of their shared oppression.

This legacy is especially evident within Laing's account of the dialectics of liberation, which looks to the peripheries of global capitalism for the potential sites of revolutionary subjectivity. His address at the Congress, titled "The Obvious" reflects that "a person does not exist without a social context,"¹⁴ reinforcing Cooper's dialectic of the psychic and the social, and vocalising a sentiment that would travel into the politics of women's and gay liberation in their insistent politicisation of "the personal." Laing furthermore brings this dialectic to bear on two pressing contexts: the institutionalisation of psychiatry and the United States' invasion of Vietnam. In both cases, he argues, a "spiral of alienation" is at work, resulting from the construction and abjection of various pathologised and racialised "Others".¹⁵ Regarding the patients of modern psychiatry, he argues, "the more they fight back, clearly the more they need to be pacified; the more persecuted they feel at being destroyed, the more necessary to destroy them."¹⁶ Hannah Proctor describes Laing's spiral as "the endless feedback loop between people categorised as mad, and the bad mad world producing those categories,"¹⁷ capturing the dialectical, vicious circle precluding liberation, as theorised by the anti-psychiatric leaders of the conference. Capitalist society's irrational and brutal machinations are, according to this perspective, externalised onto populations, figures and scapegoats inhabiting both the internal and external peripheries of the world-system. These populations, following a Maoist dialectic of the particular and the total, are in turn affirmed as sites of revolutionary subjectivity and liberation in lieu of an organised industrial proletariat.

Laing's dialectic is demonstrative of an affirmative politics of liberation circulating on the radical left and counterculture of the sixties, exerting its own particular influence upon the gay liberation movement as later sections of this chapter will explore. This anti-psychiatric imaginary presents the task of radical social movements as finding "a way of disarticulating the circuit somewhere from

12 Colleen Lye, "Identity Politics, Criticism, and Self-Criticism," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 119, no.4 (2020), 711.

13 Ibid.

14 RD Laing, "The Obvious", in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, 17.

15 Ibid, 28.

16 Ibid, 18.

17 Hannah Proctor, "Mad World: Radical Psychiatry and 1968," *Verso* (blog), 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3888-mad-world-radical-psychiatry-and-1968>.

within."¹⁸ The particularities of this opposition are only lightly alluded to in Laing's speech, but it is exactly his lack of specificity that gives the sense of a presumed shared understanding or intuition – an "obvious" of Laing's own, to counter society's common sense. For Laing, opposition sits somewhere in the irrational depths of the psyche itself, "a source that is much deeper than our egos."¹⁹ He concludes – both in this speech and across his written work, according to Proctor – that "the only way out of the infinitely complex and knotted 'tapestry' of society is a retreat into the primal depths of the self,"²⁰ a problematic call-back to an imagined, unified human nature predating the sullyng machinations of capital. Laing's affirmative "dialectic of liberation" thus differs from the negative dialectic advanced throughout this thesis so far, which has conceptualised liberation as the negation of capitalist social forms from a vantage point immanent (rather than prior) to them. His approach nevertheless represents an important theoretical disposition at work in the countercultural imaginaries of the sixties and seventies that we shall see contested and re-articulated variously in the archive of gay liberation.

2.2 Dissident marxism

Marcuse's contribution to the Congress offers another take on the politics of liberation from the angle of a conspicuously marxist dialectic, articulated in an ambivalent register that swings between the affirmative and the negative. His address begins by conceptualising liberation as the elaboration of capitalism's internal contradictions, "a liberation by virtue of the contradiction generated by the system, precisely because it is a bad, a false system."²¹ This approach leads Marcuse to consider some specificities of the historical moment in which the Congress took place, consisting of relative working-class affluence in the tail-end of the post-war long boom. This period of technological growth, Keynesian public spending and general increase in real wages in the overdeveloped world, seemed to refute, in the eyes of the emergent marxist dissidents, the "old pauperisation theory"²² in *Capital*: the idea that "as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse."²³ The post-war boom appeared to break with this "general law" of traditional marxist theory, setting the scene for dissident theorists to reframe marxism as a theory of social domination, "a critique not merely of [capital's] distribution of wealth, but also of its reign as an independent power over all social classes."²⁴ Marcuse's conception of the "affluent society" in his Congress speech locates him within this dissident strand of marxism, naming capitalism as a system of "massive scientific manipulation and administration of needs,"²⁵ in which human subjectivity itself is highly rationalised. Marcuse identifies alienation as the defining social experience of post-war

18 Laing, "The Obvious", 29.

19 Ibid.

20 Proctor, "Lost Minds: Sedgwick, Laing and the politics of mental illness," *Radical Philosophy* 197, (2016), 36.

21 Herbert Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society", in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, 175.

22 Adorno, as cited in Benanav and Clegg, "Crisis and Immiseration", 1631.

23 Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy vol. 1*, 799.

24 Benanav and Clegg, "Crisis and Immiseration", 1630.

25 Marcuse, "Liberation from the Affluent Society", 182.

Western capitalism, prevailing even when working and living conditions appear good. In light of these circumstances, liberation for Marcuse entails a re-definition of socialism altogether, not as "planned development of the productive forces, and the rationalisation of resources," but as the "negation" of capital's "established systems": socialism defined as "the abolition of labour, the termination of the struggle for existence – that is to say, life as an end in itself and no longer as a means to an end."²⁶

Marcuse's account thus names a more total liberation than that offered in the programmes of the organised left. Echoing Cooper, he identifies the key shortcoming of actually-existing socialism as a failure to break with the temporal logics of capitalism. He quotes Benjamin, recounting that

"...during the Paris Commune, in all corners of the city of Paris there were people shooting at the clocks on the towers of the churches, palaces and so on, thereby consciously or half-consciously expressing the need that somehow time has to be arrested; that at least the prevailing, the established time continuum has to be arrested, and that a new time has to begin – a very strong emphasis on the qualitative difference and on the totality of the rupture between the new society and the old."²⁷

In one sense, then, Marcuse offers a dialectic of liberation that folds in the influence of his fellow Frankfurt School theorists. His description of revolutionary change as both the "negation" of capitalism's contradictions from within and the arrest of capitalist historical time, could be read as a promising synthesis of Adorno and Benjamin's approaches. Yet elsewhere in his speech, Marcuse ultimately reiterates Laing's affirmative proposition, locating the path to liberation somewhere in the deepest recesses of the human psyche, in its "vital, biological drive for liberation... the opening and the activation of a depth dimension of human existence."²⁸ Despite espousing a form of immanent critique in the opening of his speech (advancing a form of liberation "developing within such a system"²⁹), Marcuse's understanding of human libidinal depths as "even more material than the material base"³⁰ once more signals a retreat to an imagined location prior and external to capital's contradictions. His argument that in a "free society... rebellion would then have taken root in the very nature, the 'biology' of the individual"³¹ amounts to a psychoanalytically influenced variant on the traditions of marxist theory with which he claims to break. Lukács' notion of class consciousness as an affirmative form of radical proletarian subjectivity is ultimately reconfigured here within Marcuse's invocation of an originary human essence: "the 'biology' of the individual." He therefore sidesteps the romanticism of the labour movement for a type of biological humanism equally disposed to the

26 Ibid, 184.

27 Ibid, 177.

28 Ibid, 183.

29 Ibid, 176.

30 Ibid.

31 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 5.

"romantic invocation of the revolutionary subject's immediacy,"³² one that will become increasingly familiar in some theorisations of subjectivity born of the gay liberation movement.

2.3 Black Power

Despite the theoretical resonances between Cooper, Laing and Marcuse's readings of liberation, the 1967 Congress was nevertheless a site of deep contestation. One of the fiercest critiques of these dialectics of liberation came from within the Congress itself, in an address delivered by the then honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party, Kwame Ture. By this point, Ture's disdain for white academia was well established; one year prior, he famously delivered a speech at UC Berkeley accusing those given to the abstract philosophising of liberation of "intellectual masturbation."³³ During a Q&A session at the 1967 Congress, he stood and pointed at one of his white critics, repeating "What have you *done*?... What *have* you done?... What have *you* done?"³⁴ (Cooper's emphasis), bemoaning the pacifism of well-meaning white intellectuals and radicals in the face of real, racialised oppression. For Ture, the tendency of the other speakers to centre on the "individual" as an agent of liberation was a "cop out,"³⁵ placing too much stock in a repressed human essence already racialised as white. Marcuse's universalising designation of "the affluent society" is here upset by Ture's reference to the "internal colonies"³⁶ of Europe and America: racialised slums and ghettos as repositories of cheap and flexible labour, speaking to the continued expendability of Black life even under conditions of general working-class prosperity for the white majority. Racism, Ture argues, is so integral to the development of capitalism, that the liberation of the repressed psyche – itself entrenched in whiteness – holds little promise of liberation to those already excluded from the affluent society described by Marcuse. His concept of the affluent society had already begun to come up against its limits in the late sixties – even for the white sections of the working class who had largely benefitted from the post-war long boom – with growth stagnating and the promise of full employment ringing hollow. Ture's objection to the universalising impulse within Marcuse's address struck therefore upon a more general blindspot on the countercultural left as to the often racialised asymmetry of capitalist social life, and the perseverance of immiseration within the social experience of affluence. This will become relevant to later discussions of the development of gay social life in Britain according to a dialectic of freedom and constraint, where uneven degrees of inclusion and access to the institutions of post-war affluence also structured the formation of gay subcultures and solidarities.

While Ture's critical contribution to the Congress' theorisations of liberation is by no means an exhaustive survey of its limitations, his intervention sheds light on some of the more problematic

32 Bonefeld, "Capital as Subject and the Existence of Labour", in *Open Marxism 3: Emancipating Marx* (London: Pluto, 1995), 189.

33 Stokely Carmichael, "Stokely Carmichael's Black Power Address," *Verso* (blog), 2017, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2280-stokely-carmichael-s-black-power-address>.

34 David Cooper, "Beyond Words", 195.

35 Stokely Carmichael, "Black Power," in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, 150.

36 Ibid, 161.

elements of the countercultural left of the time, particularly the elite esotericism of its star intellectuals, and its tendency to obscure forms of racialised exclusion within liberation movements. Ture's more voluntaristic concept of liberation instead begins with concrete expressions of resistance rather than in a pre-existing human orientation towards freedom. Unwilling to wait for the "natural" or inevitable resolution of the dialectical movement of history, he draws on Frederick Douglass' appropriation of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to claim that "when a slave stops obeying a master, then and only then does he seek his liberation."³⁷ Following Fanon, Ture recasts liberation less as the triumphal resolution of history's dialectical movement privileged within traditional forms of marxist theory, but rather as the beginning "of a new history of man," in which there is "no question of a return to nature... what we want is to go forward all the time, night and day."³⁸ While Marcuse's temporal break with capitalism ultimately reverts back to an imagined, pre-social consciousness, Ture's idea of total rupture, based on a reading of Fanon, entails the supersession of capitalist society by a new, liberated mode of existence. Liberation is here theorised as an actively resistant political strategy, through the raising of what Ture calls "resistance-consciousness,"³⁹ a concept that would prove enormously influential upon the consciousness-raising practices of gay and women's liberation in the following decade.

2.4 Liberation

Throughout the Congress, the concept of "liberation" therefore embodied multiple contradictory visions of social change, each cleaving in their own way from the dogmatism of the organised left and affirming the revolutionary possibility of marginalised and oppressed life. If, among the pluralism and internal differentiations of this emergent counterculture, any kind of shared politics is to be identified at all, Dennis Dworkin asserts that it was negatively defined: a rejection of "the old left's integration into the corporate and bureaucratic capitalist state, its rigid adherence to the centralised machinery of the labour movement [and] its advocacy of conventional lifestyles."⁴⁰ It may be helpful to conceive of the late sixties less as a stable historical moment with a uniform, essential idea of liberation, but rather, as Fredric Jameson has argued, "the sharing of an objective situation to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible."⁴¹ Recalling Williams' notion of structures of feeling, these shared conditions gave way to a constellation of social experiences, relationships and affects. Rather than a transhistorical human impulse, liberation must therefore be understood as a historically produced concept, registering the social conditions and contradictions of the time.

37 Ibid, 171.

38 Franz Fanon, as cited in Carmichael, "Black Power," 172.

39 Carmichael, "Black Power," 163.

40 Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 132.

41 Fredric Jameson, "Periodising the 60s", in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 484.

This chapter now turns its attention to the historical conditions of possibility through which the contested politics of liberation came to form the bedrock of sixties social movements. As indicated by the debates unfolding in the 1967 Congress – itself only a small window into a sprawling constellation of intellectual and countercultural movements – the concept of liberation was by no means restricted to the context of British or European politics, but held in its purview the international upheavals of the capitalist world-system. According to Jameson, the spectacle of successful revolutionary struggle during the fifties, not of the European industrial working class, but of anti-colonial movements in British and French-controlled portions of Africa, precipitated a "Third Worldist" turn on the European and American lefts and signalled "the convulsive birth of what will come to be known as the sixties."⁴² As demonstrated by the discourses on liberation reconstructed in the above sections, this anti-imperialist tendency re-appropriated the concept of revolutionary consciousness from Lukácsian marxism, perceiving its possibility within various actors of a "nonclass type,"⁴³ a highly questionable term used by Jameson to designate anti-colonial, women's, Black and gay liberation movements which will be problematised in the below paragraphs. This Third-Worldist tendency, according to Alexander Stoffel, comprised a "dialectic of the international," positing that "the totalisation of systems of domination and the rapid spread of revolutionary fervour were to be understood as oppositional yet interrelated effects of a *single* historical process."⁴⁴ This dialectic presented the conceptual division of West/East, North/South, First/Third as an effect of the mystifying movement of colonial capital. The historical placation of the British working class via the post-war social democratic programme could now be understood, in light of this dialectic, as an effect of the intensified extraction of surplus value in the colonies; in short, "the working class of the core states was bought off with excess profits from colonial exploitation."⁴⁵ This understanding of the international presented capitalism as a totality of synchronic, particular situations existing in reciprocal relationships to one another – or in other words, a constellation. Jameson's periodisation of the sixties therefore concludes with the identification of a "single process at work in the first and third worlds, in global economy and in consciousness and culture, a properly *dialectical* process in which 'liberation' and domination are inextricably combined."⁴⁶ This heightened awareness of capitalism as a totality of synchronous, international processes, shaped how emergent social movements, including gay liberation, saw themselves as smaller pieces of a broader coalition (both geographically and in terms of experience) for collective liberation.

Another key context for the rise of a politics of liberation during the sixties was the deepening crisis of class politics and of the institutional left. The claim to revolutionary subjectivity from the standpoints of sexual, racial and gender difference in the sixties needs to be situated alongside the re-

42 Ibid, 486.

43 Ibid.

44 Alexander Stoffel, "The Dialectic of the International: Elaborating the Historical Materialism of the Gay Liberationists," *International Studies Quarterly* 66 (2022), 7.

45 Rory Scothorne and Ewan Gibbs, "Origins of the Present Crisis? The Emergence of 'Left-Wing' Scottish Nationalism, 1956–81," in *Waiting for the Revolution: The British Far Left from 1956*, ed. Matthew Worley and Evan Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 170.

46 Jameson, "Periodising the 60s", 515.

composition of the category of class – "the more universal category that had hitherto seemed to subsume all the varieties of social resistance"⁴⁷ – in the post-war decades. The crisis of Soviet socialism, converging around Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin and the repression of the Hungarian workers' movement in 1956,⁴⁸ precipitated widespread disillusionment with the communist project on Europe's radical left. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was no exception to this phenomenon, shedding thousands of members in the late fifties.⁴⁹ Multiple Trotskyist factions blossomed in the wake of the CPGB's decline, absorbing some of the runoff of members, while reformulating many of its political assumptions, particularly its fixation on the form of the Party. These factions related unevenly to the emergent liberation movements, some with caution, some with overt disdain. The party line of International Socialist during the sixties, for instance, held the politics of liberation at arm's length, deferring the questions of gender and sexual liberation until after the revolution,⁵⁰ and redoubling base-building efforts in the workplace at a time when huge, non-aligned swathes of radicals were gathering beyond its walls. Robinson's overview of the Trotskyist left in Britain during this period indicates that while it contained multiple different theories of working-class organisation, it remained persistently sceptical towards the notion of "personal" liberation, leading to the "pragmatic railroading [and] condemnation of the growing politics of gender and sexuality."⁵¹ The role and status of the gay liberation movement in relation to the organised left was therefore uncertain and fractious from the start.

In his account of the recomposition of the left unfolding from the late fifties, Jameson maintains that the crisis was purely one of the left's institutional base, having little to do with the composition of class itself. It would be "idealistic," he contends, "to suppose the deficiencies in the abstract idea of social class... can have been responsible for the emergence of what seem to be new nonclass forces."⁵² While Jameson offers a compelling periodisation of the sixties' shifting politics, his presumption to separate the conceptuality of class from its concrete manifestations is nevertheless highly questionable. Many dissident marxisms with roots in the historical conjuncture he identifies have emphasised how conceptions of class are both historically situated and productive of the relationships they describe. According to Thill, "the formulation of a viable leftist position has always been a dialectical process, its specific character most immediately differentiated from its past and future variants by the pressing social crises of its historical moment."⁵³ So, while not directly "responsible" for the recomposition of the left in the sixties, traditional, industrial, affirmative conceptions of class as the "essence of capitalism and centre of gravity of all radical critique,"⁵⁴

47 Ibid, 486.

48 Paul Blackledge, "The New Left: Beyond Stalinism and Social Democracy?," in *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, ed. Matthew Worley and Evan Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 45.

49 Scothorne and Gibbs, "Origins of the Present Crisis?" in *Waiting for the Revolution*, 169.

50 Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain*, 27.

51 Ibid, 25.

52 Jameson, "Periodising the 60s", 486.

53 Thill, "Black Power and the New Left: The Dialectics of Liberation, 1967", 119.

54 Norbert Trenkle, "Struggle Without Classes: Why There Is No Resurgence of the Proletariat in the Currently Unfolding Capitalist Crisis," in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, ed. Neil Larsen et al. (Chicago: MCM1 Publishing, 2014), 211.

offered impoverished descriptions of everyday reality for large swathes of working-class life. In that the crisis of the left created a condition of possibility for the politics of liberation, it set in motion new expressions and mediations of the class relation, evidencing the prismatic disunity of the international working class. Jameson's description of the sixties' social movements as "nonclass forces," is therefore a misnomer: the emergence of these forces was at once determined by and constitutive of a crisis in the class relation itself.

This section has summarised how the sixties saw various crises come to a head, including that of colonial extraction, of the increasingly fragile British left and of the post-war social contract. Rather than indicating a unidirectional determination of capitalism's social and cultural relationships by a regionally separate economic base, the confluence of these tensions should be understood as part of a single process of totalisation shot through with specific and localised instantiations. With Stoffel, I argue that means of social domination also constitute a "site of immanent possibility"⁵⁵ for their negation. The social upheavals of the fifties and sixties, recomposition of class politics and the rise of liberation movements thus formed the context in which the gay liberation movement in Britain emerged.

3. Elements of a gay critique⁵⁶

While the first half of this chapter reviewed the contested politics of liberation arising in the sixties, the second half now focuses on how this politics was mediated and inflected by gayness. One of the foundational theoretical insights of gay liberation, argues Stoffel, was the understanding of "seemingly disconnected sexual formations" as "historically constituted by the same imperial organisation of social relations"⁵⁷ structuring colonial systems of extraction and national forms of social domination. This international dialectic was a key context for the formation of the British gay liberation movement, which had an expansive attitude towards social critique, throwing its lot in with liberation movements of all stripes. The GLF's self-styling as a "liberation front," for instance, nodded to ongoing Algerian decolonisation movements and to communist forces in Vietnam, which for Weeks is "the surest touchstone of GLF's radical intent."⁵⁸ This was one way in which gay liberation referenced and absorbed elements of international revolutionary struggle, mirroring the anti-imperialist orientation of the contemporary counterculture and dissident left.

If, as the previous section has argued, the unifying tendency of liberation politics at large was to locate revolutionary subjectivity within spaces of social abjection and exclusion, gay liberation was exemplary of this impulse. The gay liberation movement in the United States took multiple

55 Stoffel, "The Dialectic of the International," 8.

56 The title of this section is a reference to the subtitle of Mario Mieli's *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*, an influential text from the archive of gay liberation whose insights are engaged with at length in the following pages.

57 Stoffel, "The Dialectic of the International," 4.

58 Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present*, 187.

organisational forms, including local GLF groups and many other related groups such as the Third World Gay Caucus, formed by gay people of colour,⁵⁹ the women-only Radicalesbians⁶⁰ and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), made up mostly of trans sex workers.⁶¹ The development of these groups moreover occurred in close dialogue with existing liberation movements, particularly Black Power. In 1970, Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton launched a paradigm-shifting call for Black-gay solidarity in a communiqué that explicitly validated gayness as a revolutionary standpoint, arguing "there is nothing to say that a homosexual cannot also be a revolutionary. And maybe I'm now injecting some of my prejudice by saying that 'even a homosexual can be a revolutionary.' Quite the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the *most* revolutionary."⁶² Newton's address presented the historically abjected status of homosexuality as the ground for revolutionary opposition, galvanising the emergent gay, lesbian and transgender movements in the US, and embodying the coalitional, expansive outlook of the countercultural left.

The development of the gay liberation movement in the United States also proved instrumental to the formation of its British counterpart. In 1969, two young gay Brits, Aubrey Walter and Bob Mellors crossed paths in New York City at an anti-police demonstration called by the local GLF group outside the Women's House of Detention, having both been travelling separately in the States that summer.⁶³ The two went on to spend the following months among the thriving cultures of the New York GLF and STAR, ultimately travelling "with Sylvia the drag queen and Martha Shelley and others"⁶⁴ to Philadelphia to attend the Revolutionary Peoples' Convention (RPCC) organised by the Black Panthers. The few-hundred strong contingent of gay liberationists at the RPCC formed, "in effect the first gay liberation gathering."⁶⁵ Returning from their excursions through the overlapping worlds of Black and gay liberation in America, Bob and Aubrey called the first meeting of the London GLF that October at the LSE, where Bob was enrolled as a student,⁶⁶ introducing the politics, culture and structure of feeling marked by "gay liberation" into the British context, where it would undergo new, locally inflected re-articulations.

Under the pen-name John Wilde,⁶⁷ Aubrey published an article in the underground newspaper *IT* in the first few months of GLF's founding, describing its roots in the American movement, and summarising the contemporary state of homosexual oppression since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. The column concludes with a call: "so, if there are any gay sisters and brothers still in the closet – an

59 Emily Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (University of California Press: Oakland, 2016), 82.

60 *Ibid.*, 33.

61 *Ibid.*, 26.

62 As cited in Stuart Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 48.

63 Aubrey Walter, as cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 4.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 33.

66 Walter, as cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 4.

67 John Chesterman's annotations to this archived press cutting indicate that John Wilde is Aubrey Walter. This is corroborated by the biographical details mentioned in the article, for instance, meeting Bob Mellors outside the Women's House of Detention in NYC.

American expression meaning 'in hiding' – we say to you *COME OUT! NOW!!* Join us in GLF in the fight against our oppression... NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT US!"⁶⁸ This call for gay people to collectively "come out" politicised gay visibility, situating it as a key component of the dissident left and the struggle against capitalism. The article also directly cited the collective statement produced by the male homosexual workshop at the RPCC which he had attended in Philadelphia earlier that year, which stated: "No Revolution without us! An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose! All Power to the People!"⁶⁹, stressing the indispensability of gayness to international liberation politics. Aubrey's call to action constituted an early iteration of what would become an extended project by gays and lesbians in Britain to collectively (though with many internal disagreements) make "gayness" a site of theory and critique, breaching the conceptual limits imposed by existing legal, medical and media discourses on homosexuality.

Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter explores the collective theorisation of a specifically "gay" liberation through three key conceptual valences of gayness: its relationship to repression, liberation and the family; its subjection to social discipline; and its communist horizon. I primarily focus on the articulation of these elements in the GLF's 1971 manifesto – a foundational text of British gay liberation – while drawing out some of its key intertextual references. The 1971 manifesto is an exemplary instance of a small group of people expressing disparate, expansive and richly theoretical ideas in relation to their own lived experiences, arising in part from the pluralist interests of the GLF working group responsible for producing the 1971 manifesto. Though remembered accounts of the group's members differ slightly from one to the other, all appear to agree that it included GLF founder, Aubrey, his partner David Fernbach, Elizabeth Wilson and Mary McIntosh, each of whom brought their own theoretical predilections to the table, including marxist-feminist critique, psychoanalysis and anti-psychiatry texts, and theories of deviancy.⁷⁰ The pluralism of the manifesto working group furthermore reflected a constellatory style of theorising common within the gay liberation movement, drawing together discontinuous elements to spark critical insight. This in turn mirrored the composition of the movement at large, as a highly internally differentiated group of people struggling for what they saw as a total form of sexual liberation.

3.1 Repression, liberation and the family

As gay liberation groups began to spread and multiply from the end of the sixties, so did the movement's critique of heterosexuality as the valorised sexual regime of capitalism. The idea of repression became particularly pronounced in the debates that ensued, and with it, a tendency to identify the oedipal family as its leading instrument. The GLF's 1971 manifesto describes the family

68 John Wilde, "Gay Lib – Say It Loud, Gay Is Proud," *IT*, December 20, 1970, HCA/Chesterman/27, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

69 "Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention – 'Statement of the Male Homosexual Workshop' and 'Demands of the Lesbian Workshop' (1970)" in *We are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, eds. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (London: Routledge, 1997), 405.

70 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 73-74.

as "the most basic unit of society,"⁷¹ premised on heterosexual coupling and the imperative to not only biologically procreate, but also to reproduce gendered behaviours and "prove boyishness or girlishness."⁷² In its "very form," the manifesto argues, the family "works against homosexuality," in that by the time of adolescence, "we are expected to prove ourselves socially to our parents as members of the right sex (to bring home a boy/girlfriend)."⁷³ In its critique of the heterosexual family, the manifesto strikes upon the vicious circle binding together sexuality as sexual object-choice and gender. The imperatives to form a familial unit with a partner of the opposite sex and to express one's assigned gender correctly, appear to go hand in hand, forming a microcosm of an overarching, patriarchal division of labour. The "patriarchal family" is here identified as an institution both transformed by and transformative of the capitalist system of labour, an "essential" component of a society "where work is minutely subdivided and highly regulated,"⁷⁴ pre-empting Floyd's queer marxist interrogation of capitalist reification. Failure or refusal to be instrumental in this circular, mutually reinforcing interplay of gender and sexuality, the writers assert, must be repressed, hence the historic vilification of homosexuality. "By our very existence as gay people," the manifesto asserts, "we challenge these roles," and demonstrate that "human beings could be much more various than our constricted patterns."⁷⁵ A key aspect of gayness as theorised in the manifesto, is the will, therefore, to uncover these possibilities, to become "more various" through the negation of the repressive forces of the family ("we must aim at the abolition of the family") and the gender distinction.

The relationship sketched out in the manifesto between heterosexuality, gender and the family, bears the unmistakable imprint of debates in Freudo-Marxism re-circulating on the countercultural left around the time of gay liberation's ascendance. Wilhelm Reich's *Sex-Pol* essays, for example, which document Reich's programme of free workers' sex education, received renewed interest upon their translation into English in 1972, while Reich's newer texts, such as *The Sexual Revolution* were already important reference points for the French gay liberation movement.⁷⁶ His insights into what he termed "sexual economy" were moreover tied to the outbreak of the student movement in France in light of his warm reception at the University of Paris Nanterre in 1967, where occupations of gender-segregated dormitories became an early feature of student unrest, "in protest at rules restricting students from receiving guests in their rooms."⁷⁷ Reich diagnoses, at the core of capitalist social relations, a dialectical meeting of opposing libidinal interests: between "the demands of instinct... [and] the reality which prohibits or punishes its gratification"⁷⁸ in service of class society's reproduction. His vision of capitalism's revolutionary overcoming entails the unbinding of proletarian

71 Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Reich is cited heavily (and critically) by Guy Hocquenghem in *Homosexual Desire*, particularly in the chapter, "The Homosexual Struggle."

77 Proctor, "Mad World: Radical Psychiatry and 1968".

78 Wilhelm Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," in *Sex-Pol Essays* (London: Verso, 2012), 31.

sexuality, an unleashing of the libido's "revolutionary energies"⁷⁹ as a necessary step in toppling the ruling class and its sexual dogmas.

These ideas did not seamlessly translate into the gay movement however, given that Reich's concept of revolutionary proletarian sexuality is roughly reducible to the proliferation of heterosexual orgasms, and according to his many critics, is "undermined by a very localised corporeal understanding of sexuality and social change."⁸⁰ David Fernbach, whose intellectual interests centred around the Freudo-Marxist tradition, expresses a similar critique of Reich in a 1971 article in the underground press, noting his privileging of the sexual freedom of a male, heterosexual, proletarian straw man, and promoting a "theory of the orgasm [which] suffers like the whole psychoanalytic tradition, from male-supremacist bias."⁸¹ Moreover, in an early issue of *Gay Left*, Weeks situates the Reichian framing "of heterosexual fucking as the height of sexual health" as a residual factor "in the early counterculture of the 1960s, which at first at least, was extremely hostile to gay sexuality,"⁸² demonstrating the limitations within Reich's framework arising from his naturalisation of heterosexuality. Fernbach and Weeks' critiques of Reich do fairly portray his treatment of homosexuality: despite asserting that homosexuality "harms no one,"⁸³ he ultimately casts it as a "perversion" of the repressive society, "the result of an early developmental disturbance of the heterosexual love function,"⁸⁴ leaving a question mark over the status, or possibility, of homosexuality under his vision of socialism and problematising his reception in the gay liberation movement.

The assumption of heterosexuality as the default, affirmative form of human sexuality identified Reich as a point of critique for the daring sexual theorists of the early seventies' gay liberation movements. Mario Mieli, a founding member of the Italian gay liberation faction, FUORI!⁸⁵ was particularly critical of Reich, displacing his focus on genitality and the coital imperative in favour of a more diffused, socially transformative, communistic theorisation of sexuality. As a student, Mieli visited London between 1970-71, where he spent time with the nascent GLF,⁸⁶ just one of the chance encounters forming the constellation of gay movements in the early seventies. In 1977, he produced an extended contribution to the Freudo-Marxist tradition, which David Fernbach translated into English and published with Gay Men's Press in 1980 as *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique* to become a landmark text of gay liberation.⁸⁷ Mieli's characterisation of "Eros," as a pre-personal, infinitely polymorphous sexual instinct draws heavily on Marcuse's theorisation of sexuality, which hold that the erotic instinct is not *absolutely* repressed (as with Reich), but rather sublimated into the

79 Reich, "What is Class Consciousness?" *Sex-Pol Essays*, 337.

80 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, 43.

81 David Fernbach, "The Sexual Revolution," *7 Days*, November 17, 1971, Amiel Melburn Trust Internet Archive.

82 Weeks, "Where Engels Feared to Tread," *Gay Left* 1 (1975), 5.

83 Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, trans. Therese Pol (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 221.

84 *Ibid.*, 219.

85 "FUORI!" had a double meaning: the acronym stands for Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano (Italian Revolutionary Homosexual United Front), while "*fuori*" is Italian for "out."

86 Massimo Prearo, "Introduction," in *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of Homosexual Critique*, by Mario Mieli, trans. David Fernbach and Evan Calder Williams (London: Pluto, 2018), xvi.

87 A more recent (2018) translation of Mieli's text, *Towards a Gay Communism*, is the edition cited in this thesis.

labouring activities required of proletarians by capital, or the body's "social utilisation as an instrument of labour."⁸⁸ Mieli takes up and stretches Marcuse's arguments to their limits, condemning the repressive compartmentalisation and "mutilation" of Eros by straight society and advocating for the liberation of traditionally abjected sexual practices, particularly anal sex. The character of gayness in his work thus reflects a commitment to "the plurality of the erotic tendencies and the original and deep hermaphroditism of every individual"⁸⁹ resounding with the GLF manifesto's desire for "more various" forms of life, an end to the determinism of gender, and the abolition of the oedipal family. Such ideas were radical and controversial even on the gay left of the seventies; in the 1978 "bowdlerised"⁹⁰ revision of the GLF manifesto, its original calls to abolish the family and gender (the parts closest to Mieli's work) were removed, due to the editors feeling they were too extreme.⁹¹ In encountering these ideas in the form of the 1971 manifesto, however, we can see how "liberation" figures as a counterweight to sexual repression in the politics of the gay liberation movement.

3.2 Social discipline

Due to its pluralistic theoretical temperament, the GLF manifesto nevertheless folds together insights from the Freudo-Marxist tradition with other pieces of intellectual and political insight. While the bourgeois family and the concept of sexual repression sit at the heart of the manifesto, the precise dynamics of repression – as to its absolute vs. sublimatory character – remain ambiguous here and elsewhere in the GLF's bibliography. While emphasising the family as a central and basic unit of capitalist society, the manifesto also pays attention to the role and significance of other social institutions such as the education, health and criminal justice systems. In these discussions, a different strand of critique becomes visible, extending some forms of anti-psychiatric critique from the *Dialectics of Liberation* Congress and offering an account of sexuality as socially and historically constructed and disciplined through institutional forms of power. The manifesto's description of the school system, for example, highlights the ways in which education actively inculcates and disciplines gendered behaviours, pushing children "into a rigid sex-role which we did not want or need" and disciplining them "for behaving in any way like the opposite sex."⁹² Similarly, the manifesto argues, the expansive reach of mass media deliberately entices and normalises sexual behaviours and roles, transmitting "images of people... in their pictures and words [which] do not subvert, but support society's image of 'normal' man and woman."⁹³ These forms of social discipline find their apex, the manifesto argues, in the institutionalisation of "a body of psychiatric 'theory' and 'therapy'",⁹⁴ utilising a range of techniques to condition and induce certain aspects of the patient's sexuality.

88 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 39.

89 Mario Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism*,

90 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 100.

91 The 1978 version was published by the GLF Information Service, the project of Max McLellan and Martin Corbett, who, following the decline of the GLF in Britain, reprinted (with heavy editorial intervention) the GLF's pamphlets, badges and manifesto.

92 Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto", 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

Running between the institutions of education, media and psychiatry, therefore, the manifesto identifies a common thread of social discipline, whereby sexuality is understood not as a natural fact of life, but as the construction of highly specialised discourses and knowledges.

This aspect of the manifesto's critique bears the clearest example of Mary McIntosh's influence within the writing group. In her capacity as a professional sociologist, McIntosh had recently published a landmark essay, "The Homosexual Role," in 1968. In it, she contends that homosexuality is neither condition nor pathology (as had been the insistence of dominant psychiatric and juridical discourses since the late nineteenth century), but instead a socially produced "role" or position. For McIntosh, the field of comparative sociology to which she belonged had the capacity to ask new questions as to the social function of existing sexual taxonomies. "The Homosexual Role" argues that the pathologisation of homosexuality operates "as a form of social control," in that it demarcates "a clear-cut, publicised and recognisable threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour," and secondly, deepens the marginalisation of so-called deviants, so that "their deviant practices and their self-justifications for these practices are contained within a relatively narrow group."⁹⁵ Commonly read as a theorist of sexual deviancy, McIntosh's intervention provided ammunition to the gay liberation movement's critique of social discourses and knowledges that normalised heterosexuality and marked homosexuality out as deviant and abject. Her input moreover enriched the gay liberation critique of psychiatry, elaborated through its Counter-Psychiatry working group, which opposed the continued subjection of gay people to aversion therapy, through incisive political pamphleteering and direct action against psychiatric institutions (as is the focus of my third chapter).

In identifying the connection between the construction of sexual deviance and social discipline, McIntosh also prefigured some of the arguments that would make Michel Foucault famous a decade later upon his publication of *The History of Sexuality*. "The Homosexual Role" offers a slightly different topography of sexuality and power to those popularised in Reich and Marcuse's Freudo-Marxist accounts and taken up by gay liberation thinkers like David Fernbach and Mario Mieli. McIntosh's emphasis on the social construction of deviancy and norms emphasises the disciplinary rather than exclusively repressive dimension of social power to categorise, mediate and regulate sexual types and roles, anticipating some aspects of Foucault's thesis on the productivity of power. Foucault's characterisation of sexuality as a "a historical construct," consisting in "the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistance"⁹⁶ refutes the "repressive hypothesis"⁹⁷ common to most psychoanalytic conceptions of sexuality, including that of Freudo-Marxism. As noted by Hennessy, many key queer theorists of the late eighties and early nineties drew "heavily" on Foucault's arguments, "that subjectivity is first of all historical and social, that identities are discursively constructed, and that these constructions are enacted through disciplinary technologies and regimes

95 Mary McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role," *Social Problems* 16, no. 2 (1968), 183.

96 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 105-6.

97 Ibid, 10.

of power."⁹⁸ Yet despite the continuities between Foucault and McIntosh's understandings of disciplinary power, the two theorists embody very different legacies with regard to the idea of liberation. Unlike McIntosh, who championed and advanced the theory of gay liberation in Britain, Foucault applied his critique of the repressive hypothesis to the politics of sexual liberation, within which he argued "power is seen as having only an external hold on desire."⁹⁹ While for McIntosh and the gay liberation movement, it was thinkable that sexuality could both be repressed and incited within capitalist society, for Foucault and the leagues of queer theorists who took up his ideas, the repressive hypothesis fatally misunderstood the overdetermining role of sexual discourses in the production of sexuality.

That the tension between the repressive and disciplinary conceptions of sexuality did not paralyse the theory of the gay liberation movement is due in part to the historical timeline of these ideas' academic institutionalisation. Publishing "The Homosexual Role" in 1968, McIntosh contributed directly to a growing body of work among her contemporary sociologists and criminologists focused on the social production of deviancy, whose insights appeared to correlate with the development of "deviant" sexual subcultures and subjectivities in the early seventies. This was the climate in which the gay liberation movement elaborated its social critique, years prior to the publication of *The History of Sexuality* and its legacy in academia, which saw a widening partition between social constructivist and Freudo-Marxist lines of thought. These developments within academic theory also coincided with a slew of transformations in the British state and economy which undermined the material conditions – such as access to social space, communal and affordable living arrangements and income supplemented by the state – in which gay liberation had thrived during the early seventies. How exactly these conditions shaped the theoretical output of the gay liberation movement will be explained in more detail over the course of the remaining chapters, but for now, it is worth noting that the movement's social critiques arose in and registered a very different set of historical circumstances than those in which Foucauldian constructivism rose to popularity as a cornerstone of academic queer theory. McIntosh's work and her personal stake in the GLF manifesto therefore remain important resources for understanding the gay liberation concept of sexuality as simultaneously repressed and socially disciplined, before the battle lines between such perspectives became quite so exaggerated and impermeable.

Another reason, however, that gay liberation was able to think these elements together, was the rootedness of its theoretical production in the immediate rhythms of collective struggle. Among other queer marxists, Chitty has identified within Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, a tendency "to attribute all too strong an agential role to forms of knowledge, such as sexual science," without delivering an account "for how it achieved such hegemony."¹⁰⁰ This "cherished piece of

98 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 54.

99 Ibid, 83.

100 Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony*, 154-5.

Foucauldian doxa¹⁰¹ derives in part, Chitty argues, from a "lopsided"¹⁰² overemphasis on a historically specific form of bourgeois, modern sexuality, capable of spontaneously and unilaterally generating sexual subjectivities across social classes. For Chitty, this perspective effaces the dynamics of social antagonism at work in the production of social life and the categorisation of sexuality. With Chitty, and in the spirit of a marxism "open to the heresy of reality," this thesis maintains that, while Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis innovatively demonstrates the socially constructed basis of modern sexuality, this exercise can only be enriched by an attentiveness to its class dynamics. From this perspective, sexualities and sexual cultures are constituted by antagonism, arising in the interstices of contradictory social forces. Within this strand of queer marxism, Chitty advocates for "a narrative strategy" of contradiction "for representing events, institutions and cultural formations over which multiple forces have struggled to achieve certain outcomes."¹⁰³ Social forms such as sexuality emerge from the contestation between forms of domination, mediated by social institutions, and modalities of struggle, at work in a single, contradictory process. This theorisation of social forms, expounded further in the last section of the introduction, allows us to avoid collapsing sexuality into institutionalised forms of knowledge, and instead see the history of lived struggle as a terrain of social theory. Finally, it allows us to appreciate the echoes across McIntosh and Foucault's conceptions of social discipline, while also accounting for their divergent attitudes towards the theory and practice of sexual liberation.

3.3 Gay communism

The third and final element of gayness discussed in this chapter relates to its vision of revolutionary social change. Rather than representing a qualifier or minority concern within a wider project, the "gay" in gay liberation mediates its total meaning, highlighting the contingency of liberation at large upon the achievement of sexual freedom, as articulated in Aubrey's earnest claim, "no revolution without us," reading both as a demand and a statement of fact. In this context, "gayness" expresses a form of "insurgent universality,"¹⁰⁴ to cite a term used by Tomba to describe how the enshrinement of "universal" freedoms have historically depended on the revolutionary struggles of marginalised social groups. In terms of liberation politics, Sutherland and Vishmidt interpret insurgent universality as the supersession of supposedly universal but unevenly applied formal rights and freedoms by "a more encompassing universality, one committed to dismantling the naturalised hierarchies of sex and race, public and private, that the legal nation state upheld."¹⁰⁵ In a similar vein, the insurgent universality of the gay liberation movement informed its particular vision of communism and its temporality of revolutionary social change. "Gay" signified a collective experience and a new realm of social and

101 Ibid, 142.

102 Ibid, 156.

103 Ibid, 158.

104 Tomba, "Insurgent Universality."

105 Vishmidt and Sutherland, "(Un)making Value," in *Totality Inside Out*, 81.

sexual relationships. In the early years of the movement, the term was taken up by gay men, lesbians and transsexuals and transvestites (as trans people more commonly tended to describe themselves during the period). These different sub-groups within the gay world shared in the term as a way of expressing a collective, if differentially inflected, situation. The women of the GLF tended to refer to themselves as "gay girls" (as opposed to lesbians) as was the "up-and-coming term"¹⁰⁶ in the early seventies, while the Transsexual and Transvestite (TS/TV) working group of the GLF declared in a 1973 communiqué, "we are all gay... we are all breaching the same barriers, the same rules: a man is this, a woman is that, and don't you dare cross over."¹⁰⁷ The communistic, coalitional potentials of gayness was therefore expressed in part through the construction of an insurgent form of universality, forged through and in spite of differences in experience, sexual object choice and gender expression. The call to come out as gay in the early seventies thus exceeded the micro-identities and fractions now more familiar to contemporary queer life, referring more to a shared politics than an essence.

In the context of gayness as a collective form of politicisation and solidarity, the gay liberation movement in Britain turned its hand to revolutionary strategy, thinking about what communism might look like and how it might be achieved. The 1971 manifesto expresses its communist intent in its conclusion, explaining "the way forward," as the task of building the infrastructure of liberation in the here and now:

"...we believe that, in the ever-sharpening crisis of western society, the time may come quite suddenly when old institutions start to crack, and when people will have to seek new models. We intend to start working out our contribution to these new models now, by creating an alternative gay culture free from sexism, and by setting up gay communes."¹⁰⁸

These "new models" manifested in a number of different gay liberation practices, including the formation of alternative households, social spaces, consciousness-raising groups and cultures of protest, as will be investigated in the following three chapters. Underpinning these different formations, however, was the development of a highly politicised sexual culture, and particularly gay male sexual culture. During the early seventies, gay liberation meetings, marches and pickets became sites of cruising and sexual experimentation at the same time as they were sites of political strategy and theoretical production. Reflecting on the seventies and his brief experiences with the GLF in London, Derek Jarman noted that "fucking became a full-time leisure activity. Men discovered their sexuality. The Dionysian orgy was unleashed in the park, sauna and backroom."¹⁰⁹ Multiple theorists from the broader European gay liberation milieu perceived this emergent sexual culture not as frivolous or secondary to its revolutionary work, but as immanently revolutionary. Mieli's work in

106 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 13.

107 Gay Liberation Front Transsexuals and Transvestites, "Declare Your Sex," 1973, HCA/Chesterman/7, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

108 Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

109 Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk* (London: Penguin, 1993), 77.

particular sits within a counter-tradition of gay communism, defining communism as a new type of social relationship, consisting in "the rediscovery of bodies and their fundamental communicative function, their polymorphous potential for love."¹¹⁰ For Mieli, gay communism entails more than just the broadening of communist theory to include marginalised groups such as gay people, but speaks more universally to the "liberation of the homoerotic desire in every human being."¹¹¹ Marcel Stoetzler has characterised the dialectic of this gay communism as follows: "If homo- and heterosexuality are negations of some aspects of life, 'gayness' is the negation of that negation"¹¹² and thus carries within it the prospect of communist sexual relations. Developing similar arguments in the context of the French movement, Guy Hocquenghem of the FHAR¹¹³ outlines the blueprint of a sexual communism within the sexual network of bathhouses, public toilets, pickets and parties during the gay liberation years. This sexual communism involves "the plugging in of organs subject to no rule or law,"¹¹⁴ and melting away the "division between society and the individual"¹¹⁵ reproduced by capitalism's highly regulated and privatised forms of sexuality. These articulations of an emergent gay communism counter the tendency of Marxist-Leninist and Trotskyist elements of the European left to cringe away from thinking about pleasure, desire and sex, deferring these matters to some distant socialist future, if not to dismiss homosexuality altogether as bourgeois deviance. They moreover invert traditional paradigms of revolution which presume the working class is thought to first acquire revolutionary consciousness and then seize the means of production, a sequence of events that inevitably affirmed and entrenched a clichéd image of that class as "some rough, muscle-bound, virile proletariat."¹¹⁶ Hocquenghem claims instead that "revolutionary demands must be derived from the very movement of desire," accompanied by "a new questioning of... the notion of the seizure of power,"¹¹⁷ thus locating within gay desire itself the possibility of a liberated society, organised around communal pleasure and the meeting of needs.

As discussed in the first half of this chapter, it had become increasingly common within gay liberation's countercultural constellation to extend the modes of revolutionary subjectivity traditionally afforded to the industrial working class to new terrains of struggle. The gay communisms expounded by Mieli and Hocquenghem, refracted through the gay liberation movement in Britain, reproduced this affirmative tendency to some extent, yet at the same time posed an alternative temporality of revolution, in dialogue with the communising tendency in French and Italian marxisms. This tendency incorporated the Italian followers of Amadeo Bordiga's left-communism and its interlocutors in the orbit of *Invariance* journal, edited by French ultra-leftist Jacques Camatte, key

110 Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism*, 135.

111 Ibid, 67.

112 Marcel Stoetzler, "Adorno, Non-Identity, Sexuality," in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, eds. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros and Sergio Tischler (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 162.

113 The primary organisation of the gay liberation movement in France, "FHAR", stands for "Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire" or "Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action" in English.

114 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 95.

115 Ibid, 96.

116 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 135.

117 Ibid, 100.

reference points for Mieli in particular. Despite encompassing multiple perspectives, the communising tendency converged around a critique of left-wing programmatism, or the workers' movement's traditional affirmation of labour as capital's opposite dialectical pole. The "affirmative proletarian project of programmatism," the communisation thesis posited, corresponded to an impression of socialism inherited from the Second and Third internationals as "that of workers receiving the true value of their labour in a planned economy."¹¹⁸ Drawing primarily on Marx's newly translated *Grundrisse*, Camatte contends rather that "the proletariat must struggle against its own domination so as to be able to destroy itself as class and to destroy capital and classes,"¹¹⁹ or in other words, that the abolition of the capitalist class relation requires the double abolition of the categories of labour and capital, rather than the affirmative victory of labour over capital. In parallel to Stoetzler's characterisation of gay communism as "the negation of the negation", the form of communist critique developed in *Invariance* resisted the temptation of calling for "reconciliation with some lost human essence."¹²⁰ Rather, it posited the mediation of life by capitalist value relations as a negation of its many disparate possibilities, advocating for the negation of that negation and the "development of the species' innumerable possibilities and forms of living."¹²¹ The communising current and its cousins in the gay liberation movement therefore envisioned a form of communism arising from the real activities and relationships present within liberation, in the struggle to meet needs and desires in forms "more various" than permitted within the capitalist system of labour.

This communising tendency, shared by Mieli, Hocquenghem and various other European communists, percolated into the British gay liberation movement's theorisation of revolutionary change. There, its vision of communism as the dissolution of constraints, including those of sexual identity, formed a contradiction with other theoretical influences prominent in the movement, including models of revolutionary subjectivity derived from the politics of liberation circulating on the British countercultural scene. A theoretical ambivalence permeated the gay liberation movement's presentation of gayness: as an affirmative category of identity to be liberated; as a set of practices and relationships to be generalised under communism, untethered from identity; and as the immanent destruction of capitalist sexuality. The tension between these two temperaments reflected the deep contestation of the politics of liberation, articulated in the first half of this chapter, and extended into almost every arena of the gay liberation movement's theory and practice. The affirmative articulation of liberation politics translated into the gay movement in the form of what Weeks has called a "predominant personalism,"¹²² whereby the traditional left's notion of revolutionary subjectivity is merely supplanted from the industrial working class onto gay people, without interrogating the basis of this affirmative approach. This predominant personalism is

118 Endnotes, "Communisation and Value-Form Theory," *Endnotes 2* (2010), 105.

119 Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Works of Marx*, trans. David Brown (London: Unpopular Books, 1998), 165.

120 Francis Cooper, "The Passion of Communism: Italian Invariance in the 1970s," *Endnotes 5: The Passions and the Interests* (2020), 259.

121 Ibid.

122 Jeffrey Weeks, "Preface to the 1978 Edition" in Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 42.

definitely at work within the GLF's 1971 manifesto, particularly its claim that "gay shows the way. In some ways we are already more advanced than straight people. We are already outside the family."¹²³ This form of gay vanguardism repurposes the programmatic left's "romantic invocation of the revolutionary subject's immediacy"¹²⁴ with regards to the working class, and the dissident, countercultural left's pursuit "of a new mass revolutionary agent"¹²⁵ in light of the crisis in working-class organisation. The practical influence of this affirmative personalism moreover became increasingly visible over the course of the movement's rise and fall, as its initial, coalitional, communistic conception of gayness fragmented into smaller offshoots, whose borders only hardened as the seventies wore on.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to draw together the various articulations of the politics of liberation and the politics of gayness materialising in the sixties and seventies in Britain. Far from a singular, coherent entity, the gay liberation movement took up and re-worked a range of theoretical influences, reflecting the growing heterogeneity of the left and the recomposition of capitalist class relations. This theoretical pluralism also structured the gay liberation movement's internal debates around such topics as coming out, the family, the gay ghetto, temporalities of reform and revolution and the status of the "personal" in gay politics. As the next three chapters will show, the contradictions and disagreements underpinning these categories only intensified over the course of the seventies, manifesting in the movement's antagonistic relationship with various British social institutions.

Carrying forward a form of dialectical thinking set up in the introduction, this chapter has continued to approach the politics of liberation and the politics of gayness through the lens of contradiction, ambivalence and contestation. Emphasising the gay liberation movement's marxist allies and interlocutors in particular, the chapter has scrutinised the presence of dialectical thinking within its theoretical production, once more taking on temperaments in the form of affirmative and negative dialectics. Subsequently, the chapter has focused heavily on the relationship of sexuality to the category of class – a category in crisis in the late sixties – considering how gay liberation repurposed notions of revolutionary subjectivity, named heterosexuality as a regime of capitalist social reproduction, and reimagined what communism could look like, if "derived from the very movement of desire."¹²⁶ Taking its cue from these theoretical insights, the chapter has resisted the temptation to extricate sexuality from the conceptuality of class, advancing a dialectical view of sexuality as a dimension or modality of capitalist class relations. This framing allows for a continued focus on the

123 Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto", 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10.

124 Bonefeld, "Capital as Subject and the Existence of Labour", 189.

125 Lye, "Identity Politics, Criticism, and Self-Criticism," 71.

126 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 100.

gay liberation movement's particularised critique of the capitalist totality, pointing towards a form of universal liberation, exceeding the confines of identity.

Chapter Two: Street Politics

1. Introduction

The gay liberation movement in Britain forged itself primarily in the public arena of the street, greatly advancing the social visibility of gay people. The politicisation of visibility and "coming out" became organising principles of the movement from the late sixties onwards, arising within a conjuncture of changing legislative approaches to sexuality and emergent countercultural tendencies. The 1957 Wolfenden Report and 1967 Sexual Offences Act enacted in England and Wales bore the contradictions underpinning the British state's policing of sexuality, which according to Stuart Hall, made "visibility its principal object" and invoked "the sense of decency of the ordinary citizen"¹ to justify the decriminalisation of some homosexual activities. Simultaneously, the 1967 legislation mobilised harsher forms of surveillance against public sex, relationships breaching an unequal age of consent, and any behaviours that could be linked, however imaginatively, to "importuning."² Constituting both a relaxation of and a narrowing of possibilities for gay sexuality and sociality, homosexual law reform therefore raised the stakes of visibility and privacy for gay people in Britain, creating a condition of possibility for the formation of the gay liberation movement and its politics of the street.

In the aftermath of 1967, the public spaces of streets, parks, bars and cottages³ acquired renewed significance as sites of social conflict. The everyday activity of GLF groups in the early seventies involved public demonstrations, zaps,⁴ pickets and street theatre, all structured by a set of styles, aesthetics and mannerisms particular to gay liberation's countercultural structure of feeling, which this chapter will later flesh out in greater detail. But the collective coming out of the gay liberation movement was also a deeply uneven and tangled process, coming up against the contradictions embedded in British social life as expressed through various antagonisms with the state, the police, commercial venues and at times, the general public. Despite attempts by gay liberation groups to affirm and generalise a politics of coming out, visibility was complicated by the continued risk of arrest, harassment, exclusion and interpersonal violence, risks that deepened and mutated as the seventies wore on and social conservatism recaptured parliamentary and street-based politics.

This chapter therefore unpacks the contradictory politics of visibility within the gay liberation movement from the late sixties onwards. It begins by focusing on the significance of what I term the

1 Stuart Hall, "Reformism and the Legislation of Consent," in *Permissiveness and Control: The Fate of Sixties Regulation*, ed. National Deviancy Conference (London: Macmillan, 1980), 11.

2 Sexual Offences Act, 1967, as cited in Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto", 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10.

3 Gay slang for public bathrooms used for sex.

4 A popular form of gay liberation public activity, defined by Robinson in *Gay Men and the Left* as "a sort of playful performance used as protest."

"closet/street antinomy" to the movement's conception of itself, and its relationships to friendly and rival social movements – both homosexual law reform locally and the broader gay liberation movement globally. The chapter then moves to consider how the paradigm of the closet/street actually interfaced with social space in Britain in the late sixties and early seventies. Bringing the insights of open marxism into conversation with Henri Lefebvre's dialectics of social space, this section reframes mundane locations such as streets, public toilets, bars and parks, as sites of intensified social contestation in the years of gay liberation. The following section then proceeds to constellate, the historical materialist manner outlined in this thesis' introduction, some archival and testimonial depictions of these conflictual relationships, pulling fragmentary experiences of the past into a relation with my own, historically situated reading of capitalist social space. Here, I look at the many ways in which people experienced and emotionally registered both the gay liberation movement's collective modes of public protest, as well as more individualised everyday confrontations, thinking about how the diversity of these experiences register the contradictions of freedom and constraint and abstraction and differentiation within capitalism. The chapter then considers finally how the right-wing resurgence of the later seventies and related moral panics intensified the social abjection of gay people in Britain and brought the limits of gay liberation's politics of visibility into sharp relief. Throughout, I explore how the changing stakes of visibility and recomposition of the gay movement in this context illustrate the intimate, reciprocal nature of the relationship between capitalism's shifting social relations and the structures of feeling and organisational forms taken up in social struggle more broadly.

2. Out of the closet, into the street

The gay liberation movement's contribution to Britain's late sixties/early seventies counterculture reproduced a certain aesthetic and rhetorical style from its American counterpart. Recounting the first meeting of the London GLF in October 1970, Aubrey Walter writes in his introduction to the collected issues of GLF's newspaper, *Come Together*, "Bob and I spoke about GLF in the States and our experiences there. I think we were still rather full of American rhetoric and gay liberation jargon which many of those present didn't really understand, slogans such as 'We gotta get out of the ghetto,' and 'Out of the closets and into the streets.'"⁵ These catchphrases emphasised movement and motion, framing "coming out" as a spatial process, while allowing the nascent British movement to feel part of the radical and dynamic movement growing out of Stonewall. The conventional understanding of coming out as an important temporal milestone in a gay person's life was politicised by the gay liberation movement, connecting the individualised event to the idea of mass social change. The injunction to come out features almost universally in the early pamphlets, flyers and other forms of agitprop produced by GLF and adjacent groups in the early seventies, as typified by a

⁵ Aubrey Walter, "Introduction", in *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation*, 11.

flyer produced in 1971 by Camden GLF under the headline "HOMOSEXUAL WOMEN AND MEN COME OUT":

"We're tired of leading double-lives, of using double-standards. We're tired of hiding our homosexuality and living the way other people want us to live. We're tired of feeling guilty about what we are. GAY WOMEN AND MEN ARE COMING OUT PROUD against the oppression that distorts our life."⁶

Even beyond the immediate vicinity of the big cities where local GLF groups thrived, the concepts of the closet and coming out leaked into the consciousness of gay people attempting to make sense of everyday life. The directives issued in 1986 by the National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS) – a Mass Observation-style project gathering the perspectives of gay people across Britain – included the key questions of when, how and if the respondent "came out". The written responses to these directives from the first few years of the project provide fruitful insight into how the concepts wielded by the gay liberation movement were processed by people living peripherally to GLF social scenes. Many describe their experiences of coming out according to an abstract timescale, in such terms as "early," "late," "finally," and "inevitably." The directive guidance too is couched in temporal terms, asking: "How young were you when you confided the nature of your sexuality to your parents? Were they able to deal positively or negatively? If the latter, how long before they were able to take positive steps in coming to terms with your sexuality?"⁷ Between the sloganeering of the gay liberation movement, and these testimonial insights into everyday life, it is possible to think of "coming out" as a quasi-universal trope of gay life after 1967, the emotional core of gay liberation's structure of feeling.

The spatial configuration of the closet as being something a person is either "in" or "out" nevertheless often falls short of reflecting the lived realities of gayness in sixties and seventies Britain. One response to the NLGS, from a lesbian in her thirties, speaks to the conceptual contradictions of coming out, noting how "coming out was/is very much a process, full of anxiety but never, I felt, really to be doubted, and increasingly introducing a greater sense of emotional *being* into my life."⁸ Rather than pinpointing a singular event, she describes her experience of coming out through a string of different moments: the first time she had lesbian sex (which, "at the age of 26, was terrifying!"), her two years of self-reflection in psychotherapy, the collapse of her "last-ditch attempt at a heterosexual relationship," and her entry into the public gay world of the seventies: "I decided that action should balance thought and I launched myself onto the scene."⁹ Her account highlights the emotional resonance of the language of coming out, while demonstrating that exiting the closet is never really done. The archive of gay liberation is replete with similar accounts of coming out as a problematic and unfinished process. An article written by Anthony Peppiatt in *Out* magazine's second issue, for

6 Camden GLF, "Homosexual Women and Men Come Out," 1971, HCA/Beach/9, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

7 Kenneth Barrow, "Autumn Directives," October 7, 1985, SxMOA16/2/1/1, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

8 "Contributor Code: 184," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

9 Ibid.

example, notes how "you don't really come out all whole and perfectly gay, because there are always innumerable situations in which it's easier to do what you used to do, to pass for straight," drawing on the writer's own experience to conclude that "the respectability of heterosexuality... can get me through the day free of snide remarks, anti-gay jokes or downright insults, and I won't face the likelihood of being attacked on my way home from the pub."¹⁰ Heterosexual society's norms, bureaucracies and burden of repeated disclosure thus rendered the experience of coming out a lot muddier and riskier than was apparent in the strategic discourses of gay liberation. This chapter therefore proceeds from a conceptualisation of coming out as fundamentally antinomic, reflecting deeper contradictions at play in the development of public homosexual culture from the late sixties, as will shortly be elaborated.

The imagery of coming out in gay liberation discourses tends to evoke what Eve Sedgwick has described as a "salvational-epistemologic certainty against the very equivocal privacy afforded by the closet,"¹¹ in which visibility is figured as essential to the movement's collective confidence and power. For many gay people in the sixties and seventies, social inclusion within family life, workplaces and social circles was conditional upon the concealment of homosexuality, reflecting the socially diffused and institutionalised character of heterosexuality in capitalist society. Coming out at least subverted the risk of discovery, which may explain the emotional and political significance that attached itself to the experience. A politics of visibility thus shaped the formation of demands and principles in GLF around the idea of public sexual freedom, including calls for "gay people [to] be free to hold hands and kiss in public, as are heterosexuals," and "gay people [to] be legally free to contact other gay people... on the streets."¹² These demands spoke directly to the contradictions of the recent reform legislation in 1967, which according to the GLF's 1971 manifesto, offered

"...a limited license to adult gay men. Common law however can restrict us from talking about and publicising both male and female homosexuality by classing it as 'immoral'. Beyond this there are a whole series of specific minor offences. Although 'the act' is not illegal, asking someone to go to bed with you can be classed as 'importuning for an immoral act', and kissing in public is classed as 'public indecency'. "¹³

Gay liberation's politics of visibility therefore confronted the limitations of the Sexual Offences Act, understanding them as integral to the politics of law reform. While a fuller account of these limitations is given in subsequent sections of this chapter, from the perspective of GLF member, "Ramsey," in a *Come Together* article, the reforms were structured by a kind of homophile¹⁴ realism,

10 Anthony Peppiatt, "Second Time Around," *Out*, December 1976, GALE Archives of Sexuality and Gender.

11 Eve K Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 71.

12 Gay Liberation Front, "Our Demands Are...", in *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation*, 47.

13 Gay Liberation Front, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

14 The term homophile was taken up by many reformist and lobbying organisations "to defuse the explicitly sexual force of homosexuality and thereby render it less troubling to the dominant culture." Richard Meyer, "Gay Power Circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006), 450.

"as if we have lived with the present situation for so long that no other seems possible, or that the gay community has suffered from so much violence and inhumanity it finds it difficult to summon the will to fight back."¹⁵ The article goes on to describe the fragile social contract under which homosexuality became nominally decriminalised under a strict set of conditions in England and Wales, as a "pact of secrecy," wherein "we have been willing to sacrifice at least a part of our personal fulfilment and stability to the community in order to receive such economic and social perks as it may offer so long as we exist behind the mask."¹⁶ This "pact of secrecy" did not begin with the Sexual Offences Act, but was codified via its public/private distinction, which according to the Gay Rights Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, distinguished between "the public regulation of homosexuality (which is to be rigidly enforced, if not strengthened) and the space given over to private adult consent, which is no longer seen to come within the scope of the state."¹⁷ Gay liberation's politics of visibility and commitment to the "out of the closet, into the street" slogan thus responded to a specific and contradictory set of conditions restricting gay peoples' access to public space.

The gay liberation suspicion of law reform extended by proxy into the movement's relationship to homophile groups working at the level of parliamentary lobbying, rights and reform. It became commonplace to regard members of the Albany Trust, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) - formerly the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) - and Scottish Minorities Group (SMG), as "straight gays"¹⁸ or "closet queens,"¹⁹ groups of homosexuals perceived as colluding with the state's strategy of containment. In return, the "libbers" associated with GLF were typically regarded with suspicion in some homosexual rights circles, who feared that gay liberation's "shock tactics can harm the gay cause."²⁰ Hugh Corbett's article in the eighth issue of CHE's institutional magazine, *Lunch*, presented the extremes of this perspective, describing GLF members as "frenetic faggots frolicking through the streets" and warning that "a minority that makes a nuisance of itself arouses hostility, not sympathy,"²¹ in phrasing that echoed Lord Arran's appeal that homosexuals "show their thanks by comporting themselves quietly and with dignity"²² when presenting the Sexual Offences Bill to the House of Lords.

Despite these tensions, the line between the "straight gays" and those who considered themselves for liberation was hardly clear cut. The amorphous nature of the gay liberation movement as both a political commitment and structure of feeling, rather than an official membership organisation, meant

15 Ramsey, "Why Fear?," in *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation*, 126.

16 Ibid.

17 CPGB Gay Rights Committee, "Workshop on Sexuality and the State," n.d., HCA/Thornycroft/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

18 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 18.

19 Ibid, 33.

20 Paul Brownsey, "SMG News: Monthly From the Scottish Minorities Group," June 1977, HCA/SMG/3/1, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

21 Hugh Corbett, "Militancy Is a Nonsense," *Lunch*, May 1972, Archives of Sexuality and Gender, <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender>.

22 Lord Arran, "Sexual Offences (No.2) Bill HC Deb," 21 July 1967, vol 285, cols 522-6, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1967/jul/21/sexual-offences-no-2-bill>.

that many in its ranks still saw value in pursuing legislative reforms. Meanwhile, organisations such as the CHE, due to their more structured organisational form, had much wider geographic reach, extending beyond the large metropolitan centres, and so inevitably included in its membership gay people with liberationist sympathies. There was therefore a heavy cross-pollination of individuals and ideas between gay liberationist and reformist factions of the movement; Antony Grey, who was active in the Albany Trust, and a key figure in the HLRs' lobbying in the approach to 1967, was also involved in the early meetings of the London GLF and even suggested the idea for its first public demonstration in response to the arrest of Louis Eakes for importuning.²³ Yet Floyd's observation – despite speaking primarily to the American gay liberation movement – that these tensions were "dialectically over-determined" by polarised representations of an "assimilationist, minoritising emphasis on winning basic civil rights" vs. a "radical, universalising argument for the subversive character of homosexuality,"²⁴ rings true also in the British context. While based on largely imagined division, the homophile/gay liberation rivalry informed both sides' senses of themselves and their politics, and deepened the mythologisation of the street/closet antinomy within emergent homosexual cultures.

The critique of the closet was, therefore, a constitutive aspect of the early gay liberation movement in Britain, shaping its attitude towards both the state, as the arbitrator of legislative reform, and to different segments of the gay movement. This critique moreover conduced to a politics of visibility and a politics of the street in gay liberation rhetoric in which coming out constituted "not simply... a private act of self-disclosure but... a public demand for visibility,"²⁵ a strategic attempt to generalise the fraught and incomplete process of coming out into a collective political commitment. Yet, as the rest of this chapter will explore, the reality of coming "out of the closets" and "into the streets" was not only an uneven and problematic individual experience, but was a fraught and contradictory *social* process, unfolding in the highly contested public space of streets, parks, bars and toilets. By virtue of being so broad and diffuse, the gay liberation movement in Britain and its widespread archival traces constellate a mass of contradictory vantages on "out of the closet, into the street," which must be understood as an antinomic formation, referring to locations that are simultaneously symbolic and material, and which overlap, clash and mutually constitute one another in the discourses of visibility.

3. The dialectics of social space

So far, I have attempted to show that the 1967 Sexual Offences Act marked a threshold and condition of possibility for the development of gay liberation's politics of visibility. The Act also expressed a shift, however, in the British state's approach to policing homosexuality. Similar legislation was not passed in Scotland until 1980, or in Northern Ireland until 1982, meaning that "for the first time since

²³ Weeks, *Coming Out*, 190.

²⁴ Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, 127.

²⁵ Meyer, "Gay Power Circa 1970," 447.

1885 proscription of homosexuality differed in England and Wales as compared with Scotland [and] Northern Ireland."²⁶ The regionally uneven application of homosexual law reform heightened the urgency for reformist organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland, meaning that no exact counterpart to the GLF rose to the same level of visibility in these countries. Instead, the Scottish Minorities Group (SMG) became the dominant Scottish gay political organisation in 1969, "which had as its aim a desire to bring gay men and women into the public eye and integrate them into civil society,"²⁷ while the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), formed in 1975 to campaign similarly "towards repealing laws criminalising sodomy" in Northern Ireland.²⁸ This is not to say that the actual strategies of policing and prosecution differed wildly in these nations: in Scotland, for example, "there were distinctive features of the criminal procedures... which minimised the number of men prosecuted for homosexual offences in private with consenting adult partners."²⁹ Nevertheless, as Daryl Leeworthy has shown, the "liberalisation of the English law, even on the relatively modest terms of the 1967 Act, encouraged a gay migrant's trail from the island of Ireland to major cities in England – most notably London,"³⁰ suggesting that the limitations integral to the Act nevertheless did little to hamper its public appearance of progressive reform. Subsequently, the discussion of gay liberation's street politics in this chapter largely converges on the situation in England, where, following Wolfenden, the antinomies of public and private and visibility and invisibility were especially sharp. As this chapter will show, the ostensible freedoms extended to gay people in the context of homosexual law reform – within the limits of private property and commerce – implicitly mobilised the harsher policing of public sexuality. The closet/street paradigm thus began to map onto actual physical locations, such as public toilets, parks, streets, and bars, which became sites of intensified conflict between gay people and various threads of the British state and capital, in a struggle to define and claim access to a very fraught notion of public space.

The gay liberation movement's street politics involved making visible the bureaucracies, profit motives and surveillance practices necessarily underpinning British society in the post-Wolfenden years. If, as queer geographer Michael P. Brown asserts, "the closet is more than just a spatial metaphor at the urban scale... it is a material production of heterosexism and is inscribed in urban space,"³¹ then some demystification of this production process is required. Relatedly, the "streets" figured in gay liberation rhetoric must be understood not as neutral, pre-existing ground fought over by different actors, but rather as a social terrain produced by contradictory forces. Enlisting Lefebvre's theorisation of abstract space, this section now begins to think about how developments such as the Sexual Offences Act, shifts in policing practices and the expansion of the gay commercial

26 Daryl Leeworthy, "Rainbow Crossings: Gay Irish Migrants and LGBT Politics in 1980s London," *Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* 10, no. 10 (2020), 83.

27 Jeffrey Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland: Male Homosexuality, Religion and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 89.

28 McKenzie A Livingston, "Out of Troubles and into Rights: Protection for Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals in Northern Ireland Through Equality Legislation in the Belfast Agreement," *Fordham International Law Journal* 27, no. 3 (2003), 1214.

29 Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis, "'A Field for Private Members': The Wolfenden Committee and Scottish Homosexual Law Reform, 1950-67," *Twentieth-Century British History* 15, no. 2 (2004), 181.

30 Leeworthy, "Rainbow Crossings: Gay Irish Migrants and LGBT Politics in 1980s London," 83..

31 Michael P. Brown, *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe* (London: Routledge, 2000), 56.

scene produced and reconstituted the social terrain in Britain. Lefebvre's insights into urban spatial production, Greig Charnock has argued, can be read as consistent with the "subterranean tradition" of open marxism³² that has informed much of the theoretical basis of this thesis so far. Lefebvre's understanding of marxism as a "path, not a model,"³³ for instance, and his insistence that "Marx's analysis of the commodity-form... be supplemented by an account of the space it inhabits,"³⁴ echoes the "openness" in open marxism to the "heresy of reality."³⁵ His "regressive-progressive" method of analysis aims to "get back from the object (product or work) to the activity that produced and/or created it"³⁶ pre-empting Gunn's influential concept of "practical reflexivity," examined in my introduction, referring to a mode of theorising that "reflects upon and understands itself as inhering in a practical (a social) world."³⁷ Lefebvre's regressive-progressive dialectic therefore approaches "(social) space... [as] a (social) product,"³⁸ tracing and demystifying the processes underpinning its production.

Lefebvre's dialectical theorisation of capitalist space, particularly through his concepts of "abstract space" and "concrete abstraction," provides a useful way to parse some of these contradictions undergirding gay public cultures in the sixties and seventies. Lefebvre's notion of "abstract space" firstly, attends to the question of how social space is produced, by analogising the marxian concept of abstract labour. For Marx, abstract labour is the form of human labour historically specific to capitalism, producing commodities stripped of "every trace of their natural and original use-value and of the particular kind of useful labour to which they owe their creation, in order to pupate into the homogeneous social materialisation of undifferentiated human labour."³⁹ In the capitalist system of labour, all of the concrete and sensuous qualities of individual labours are rendered exchangeable quantities via the "negating concept"⁴⁰ of abstract labour. Abstract space, which for Lefebvre "is realised through the urban form"⁴¹ likewise speaks to the subjugation of human needs and differences to a homogenising organisation of space. State bureaucracies, legislation and spatial planning can all be understood therefore as vectors of social domination and abstraction, including those that concern public and private forms of sexuality. This conception of abstract space is developed further through Lefebvre's engagement with Marx's notion of "concrete abstractions," highlighting the dialectical character of the abstraction process. Urban space is produced and regulated by the abstract logic of the commodity, yet also like the commodity, is realised through concrete social relationships. Analogously to abstract labour, abstract space only "becomes true in

32 Greig Charnock, "Challenging New State Spatialities: The Open Marxism of Henri Lefebvre," *Antipode* 14, no. 5 (2010), 8.

33 Ibid.

34 Chris O'Kane, "Fetishistic Concrete Abstraction, Social Constitution and Social Domination in Henri Lefebvre's Writings on Everyday Life, Cities and Space," *Capital & Class* 42, no. 2 (2018), 266.

35 Johannes Agnoli, as cited in Endnotes, "We Unhappy Few," 54.

36 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 113.

37 Gunn, "Marxism and Philosophy," 92.

38 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

39 Marx, *Capital vol. 1*, 204.

40 Charnock, "Challenging New State Spatialities," 13.

41 Ibid.

practice."⁴² Practically, this means that the process of urbanisation and state planning tends to homogenise social space, "eras[ing] distinctions... [and] seek[ing], often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there."⁴³ Yet because this process of abstraction takes place in a world that is "socially real and as such localised,"⁴⁴ it is fragmented by the real existence of people and their heterogenous needs, desires and experiences. Lefebvre's concept of abstract space therefore turns on a dialectical contradiction: it is "homogenous, yet at the same time broken up into fragments,"⁴⁵ an incomplete process of totalisation. This allows for an understanding of class struggle as "inscribed in space," representing the concrete and irreducible contradictions which for Lefebvre, "include the political action of minorities"⁴⁶ and contain possibilities for liberation.

In the context of gay urban life in Britain, the Sexual Offences Act constituted a homogenising and abstracting force, firstly by scrubbing gay sex and other indecent behaviours out from public view, and by applying an abstract set of conditions onto a complex and fragmented situation. The legislation's sweeping definition of public and private, for example, occluded the vastly differing levels of access to private property among gay men, for whom public cultures of cruising held a class dynamic. Those for whom privacy (conferred by property) was not an option, were vulnerable to arrest and prosecution "via the use of non-specific 'receptacle' or 'residual' laws, i.e. against vagrancy, soliciting, loitering with intent, breach of the peace, etc."⁴⁷ British police forces moreover developed entrapment techniques to target men in public toilets or parks who might be cruising, dispatching "agents provocateurs in public lavatories throughout the country" referred colloquially within gay subcultures as "pretty policemen."⁴⁸ A letter published in the sixth issue of *Gay News* in August 1972 registers with alarm the uptick in such forms of policing, describing the "terrifying precedent" set by "piggery alas at yet another cottage," this time in the form of "a cute looking fuzz in fetchingly butch mufti – leather jacket and lovely black hair and moustache – taking down the particulars of several gay brothers whilst a colleague with an Alsation dog looked on."⁴⁹ The legislative bureaucracies of the Sexual Offences Act and the policing powers it mobilised can therefore be understood as exercises in abstraction, often violently enforced. Following Chitty, their efforts to establish "bourgeois sexual hegemony" and confine "sexuality within private spaces and forms of intimacy revolving around the family," enacted a kind of "enclosure,"⁵⁰ both of sexual possibility as well as actual, localised cultures of gay sexuality.

The contradictory, dialectical character of social production, as theorised by Lefebvre, may also help in understanding how particular subcultural forms such as the "gay ghetto" changed during the gay

42 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 105.

43 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 49.

44 Ibid, 342.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid, 55.

47 David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), 70.

48 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 59.

49 Jim Scott, "WARNING," *Gay News* 6, 1972, Gay News Archive Project, <http://gaynews.fighting-words.co.uk/>.

50 Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of The World System*, 154

liberation years. Jennings has traced the "expansion in urban consumer culture centred on bars, nightclubs and dance halls"⁵¹ in post-war Britain, leading to the solidification of more "coherent and physically discrete"⁵² lesbian and gay male bar cultures than ever before. In a 1973 primer on gay liberation later published in *Red Mole*, socialist feminist Carol Riddell defines the gay ghetto as "that very restricted area of social life which at the present time is allowed to gay people by the police. Certain pubs, certain clubs, certain public lavatories" still subject to "harassment... undertaken sporadically and indiscriminately"⁵³ though cushioned somewhat by venue owners' claims to private property. In a similar vein, the editorial of the second issue of *Gay Left* outlines the dual function of the gay commercial scene as providing "social intercourse for the stigmatised" and "segregat[ing] the 'deviants' from the population at large."⁵⁴ On one hand, commercial venues facilitated some limited freedoms and protections, as registered in Bob Cant's account of his time in the ghetto during the early seventies ("The rest of the world was unbearable, but for those few hours on a Friday or Saturday night the world was ours"⁵⁵), but only on the highly conditional basis of continued profitability for bars' and clubs' private owners.

The landscape of the gay ghetto moreover often gives the impression of a fragmented constellation, comprising different scenes and venues, such as the Coleherne in Earls Court, a site of the "nascent leather scene" (comprised largely of masculine gay men) from the sixties onwards,⁵⁶ or the longstanding Gateways in Chelsea, a staple of lesbian butch/femme postwar bar culture.⁵⁷ While gay subcultures of the sixties and seventies consisted in a multitude of different styles, presentations and desires, they were united almost universally by this profit motive, as registered in archival accounts describing the feeling of being exploited by the "rip-off joints"⁵⁸ of the gay commercial scene. One respondent to the NLGS, for example, describes coming out during the early seventies and immediately entering the Earls Court gay scene as a way to meet other gay men, reflecting that "most gay pubs are a bit exploitative; but that's private enterprise – charge what you can get is the rule throughout!"⁵⁹ Luchia Fitzgerald, a regular of the Union pub in Manchester during the sixties, also recalls in her interviews with Jivani how she became gradually disillusioned with the scene upon encountering some lesbians from the local GLF, developing an understanding of the Union as "exploiting a captive clientèle."⁶⁰ The gay liberation movement thus began to foster a critique of these commercial establishments in the early seventies, identifying the exploitative ways in which venues related to their customers, trading limited protections to the propertyless for profit. Recalling

51 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 113.

52 Ibid, 112.

53 Carol Riddell, "Some Notes on Gay Liberation Lancaster Socialist Women's Group and IMG," 1973, POLLARD/2/4/1, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

54 Gay Left Collective, "Within these walls...", *Gay Left* 2 (1976), 1.

55 Bob Cant, "Living with Indecency," *Gay Left* 8 (1979), 24.

56 Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 119.

57 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 119.

58 Gay Left Collective, "Within these walls..." 1.

59 Contributor Code: 136," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

60 Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, 157.

Lefebvre's dialectics of homogenisation and fragmentation, expansion and enclosure, the contradictory nature of the ghetto is described by *Gay Left* editors as enclosed by "invisible" walls that are "nevertheless effective in containing us."⁶¹ It is possible to see the structuring role played by a logic of profitability within homosexual subcultures, furthering the fragmentation of gay life following the so-called permissive reform of 1967.

As O'Kane has pointed out, Lefebvre's expansive theory of alienation is where his more romantic tendencies reside, and where he "conceives of creative, desirous and expressive activities in urban life as qualitative opponents to the abstractions of organised capitalism,"⁶² without really dwelling on the messy and contradictory ways these oppositional tendencies are forged. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's notion of abstract space is valuable to this project because of its openness, acknowledging that which is irreducible to the process of abstraction. This concept of irreducibility connects to a number of pertinent theoretical reference points: John Holloway, a figure more explicitly identified with the counter-tradition of open marxism, presents a similarly interstitial notion of social revolution that may help in framing the development of gay liberation's politics of visibility. Holloway describes social struggle as "the movement of anti-identity... a movement of negation and creation, a movement of creating cracks in the texture of domination."⁶³ In Holloway's negative dialectics, struggle must be theorised from the perspective of the irreducible: "that which does not fit, from those who do not fit, those who are negated and suppressed, those whose insubordination and rebelliousness break the bounds of identity, from us who exist in-and-against-and-beyond capital."⁶⁴ Reading this passage with gay eyes, it is difficult not to read in Holloway's "cracks" an echo of Hocquenghem, who describes "the gay movement [as] a wildcat movement," in that it opens a "crack" in capitalism's system of "civilised loves."⁶⁵ It becomes possible to imagine the gay liberation movement forming "in the interstices"⁶⁶ and negative spaces of British social life, attempting to carve out spaces of sexual freedom and pushing against reconciliations of gayness to private property or commodification. "Out of the closet into the street" speaks therefore to gay liberation's status as a form of spatialised struggle, contoured by the contradictions of capitalist spatial production.

4. Gay liberation cultures of protest

Having described some of the processes of abstraction conditioning gay life in the sixties and seventies, the following two sections now attempt to show how gay liberation's street politics responded to these processes, through a sustained engagement with the movement's archival traces. Here, I attempt to constellate experiences of confrontation and conflict in the years of gay

61 Gay Left Collective, 'Within these walls...', 3.

62 O'Kane, "Fetishistic Concrete Abstraction," 229.

63 John Holloway, "Negative and Positive Autonomism. Or Why Adorno? Part 2", in *Negativity and Revolution*, 98.

64 Holloway, "Why Adorno?," in *Negativity and Revolution*, 15.

65 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 138.

66 Gay Left Collective, "Collective Statement," *Gay Left* 1 (1975), 1.

liberation, both in the movement's highly visible culture of public protest, and at the level of everyday public confrontation, in which gay people experienced the costs of visibility directly. Pulling from a range of different sources, including written testimonies, existing published oral histories and assorted forms of archival documentation (pamphlets, newsletters, personal notes etc.) this section explores how gay people theorised visibility in the sixties and seventies in their own terms and how the familiar locations of bars, parks, streets acquired emotional and political meaning.

While the Gay Liberation Front was not a membership organisation, its existence as an informal network provided people with a banner under which to respond to the fraught conditions of visibility and policing following the Sexual Offences Act. Accordingly, the first public demonstration under this banner took place in London in November 1970, framing itself around a recent public event in which many of the concerns of the movement had converged. The recent arrest of Louis Eakes near a cottage on Highbury Fields had caught some GLF members' attention due to Eakes' position as a leader of the Young Liberals and his status as "an uneasy comrade in arms"⁶⁷ to the gay movement. He had been arrested by a pretty policeman on the grounds of importuning, despite his claims to have been merely asking another man for a light.⁶⁸ In the first issue of *Come Together*, a writer going by "Jonathan," explains the reasoning behind the demonstration in the following terms: "the sisters and brothers were seething with anger at [Eakes' arrest], the latest amongst hundreds of crimes committed against gay people by the police and the establishment every year."⁶⁹ Eakes' situation thus highlighted the cultures of policing and surveillance arising out of the so-called permissive reform of the late sixties and provided the gay liberation movement with an opportunity to oppose these conditions publicly.

The subsequent demonstration involved a group of gays and lesbians descending on Highbury Fields, directly performing the gestures and interactions that they wanted to liberate: kissing en masse, lighting each other's cigarettes in the dark, wielding banners and chanting "gay is good."⁷⁰ Coverage in the underground press noted that "about 150 turned up with balloons, streamers, flares, and fireworks,"⁷¹ expressing a visual vibrancy that would become second nature to gay liberation actions. Its relatively static location in a public park rather than a march from one point to another, and its emphasis on gay kissing and touching, also typified much of the GLF's public presence in the years that followed. The element of collectivity provided participants with a sense of safety in numbers from the negative attention of police or passers-by, recontextualising gestures and actions that – if removed from the communal context – could qualify as grounds for arrest, as demonstrated by Eakes' own misfortune and countless others'. Though basically non-violent, the action took on the character of confrontation and militancy, by "directly challeng[ing] the Sexual Offences Act's 'in

67 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 71.

68 Ibid.

69 Jonathan, "We're Coming out Proud," in *Come Together*, 45.

70 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 74.

71 "Gay-In Protest," *IT*, December 1970, HCA/Chesterman/28, Hall-Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

privacy' clause,"⁷² effectively breaking the law and getting away with it. Many testimonial accounts of the protest remark on its enduring significance to the gay liberation movement's sense of itself and particularly its politics of visibility. Aubrey Walter's reflections on the demonstration ten years later, for example, names it "a very exhilarating moment for homosexuals in Britain, to actually be banded together in public for the first time, holding hands and shouting our 'Give us a G' slogan. Burning torches were distributed and we kissed warmly and perhaps a little dramatically for the press. We all felt so tremendously high."⁷³ Likewise, remembered accounts of the demonstration in Power's oral history echo the sense of empowerment that accompanied flouting the post-Wolfenden codes of public order and its lasting effect beyond the demonstration itself. Jeffrey Weeks notes that afterwards, "there was an atmosphere of outness, people were hugging on the tube carriages and so on... it wasn't really about Louis Eakes, but we wanted to go out on the streets to make a public presence."⁷⁴ Similarly, Feather remarks that being able to engage in romantic and sexual contact publicly without legal reproach "was extraordinary... it was an enormous release to be able to kiss and carry on,"⁷⁵ indicating how the action pierced prevailing public morality and created a temporary amnesty for behaviours that remained criminalised.

The Highbury Fields demonstration served therefore as a mould for the gay liberation movement's emergent politics of the street. The "atmosphere of outness" that it helped to create was sustained through gay liberation activities like "Gay Days," which according to Aubrey, entailed "get[ting] together," in parks, "sit[ting] around talking, laughing and smiling, holding each other, touching, playing games of various kinds,"⁷⁶ as in the photograph presented below as Fig. 1. In GLF's London group, the first to be formed, these types of activities were largely overseen by its Action Group, one of many autonomous "functional"⁷⁷ groups (working groups reflecting a specific purpose or priority) listed non-exhaustively in a 1971 article in *Time Out*: "We have a Counter-Psychiatry Group, a Schools Group, a Trade Union Group, a workshop which produces our journal 'Come Together,' a Street Theatre Group, Research and Education Group, and Action Group and several Awareness Groups."⁷⁸ The GLF Action Group organised events that heightened the movement's visibility and allowed for a collective violation of the particular public morality codified in the Sexual Offences Act. An article in Bob Mellors' *Gay International News* periodical from 1972 describes the Gay Days of the previous summer as "happening almost every weekend. The atmosphere would vary a great deal. It was electric at times in Victoria Park, in the working-class East End."⁷⁹ These outings embraced the friction and confrontation that inevitably accompanied heightened visibility, as exemplified by an encounter described in the same article, where "one middle aged woman ran into the middle

72 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 71.

73 Walter, "Introduction," in *Come Together*, 12.

74 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 33.

75 Ibid.

76 Walter, "Introduction," in *Come Together*, 25.

77 Ibid, 13.

78 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 53.

79 "Gay Days in London," *Gay International News*, no.3, May/June 1972, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

screaming insults. The local kids though, who came to jeer (it was their park after all) stayed to talk and we were still sitting around on the grass and discussing the gay scene until it was dark."⁸⁰

In a similar way to Gay Days, GLF "Peoples' Dances" became a staple of gay liberation groups' social calendars nationally, usually involving the hiring out of a public hall where people could socialise with some distance from the commercial bar and club scene. One Peoples' Dance, held in Hammersmith Town Hall in 1971, is pictured below in Fig. 2, demonstrating the blend of bohemian, countercultural styles in which the politics of gay liberation were immersed. The role of Gay Dances was theorised in similar terms to the Gay Day, with an introductory document on the GLF's Action Group describing them as "part of our liberation," creating "an atmosphere where we talk and dance and enjoy being with people," while also remaining "open to anyone" and hence both visible and vulnerable to the public.⁸¹ They developed in tandem with ongoing tensions between GLF and local commercial venues. For example, a cluster of pubs in the Notting Hill area began refusing service to groups of gays and lesbians who would flock into the pubs after GLF meetings. Some of these pubs were straight, others were ostensibly gay or at least gay-friendly, but uncomfortable about "the new style of homosexual in their midst" associated with gay liberation.⁸² In large part, this shift was motivated by the local police who were monitoring the ongoing GLF campaign against the National Festival of Light, who "swiftly took against the weekly influxes of hippie perverts from all over London and discouraged publicans from serving them."⁸³ Tensions mounted into a full-scale GLF campaign to occupy the Notting Hill pubs en masse, in which loitering and kissing were once again the favoured tactics, as pictured below in Fig. 3. One sit-in at the Chepstow Arms resulted in (according to a GLF press statement), the police agreeing to evict GLF members (who had to be carried out only after the manager declared his pub closed).⁸⁴ With the threat of further occupations, however, "by Monday, all pubs in the area had backed down" and agreed to resume serving GLF customers. A separate situation had soured the relationship between the iconic Gateways bar and its new wave of lesbian customers hailing from the gay liberation movement. In the late sixties, the Gateways' managers, Gina and Smithy, had hired out the venue as a filming location for *The Killing of Sister George*, marking them out among gay liberation groups as exploitative and profiteering, due to the film's reputation for "portray[ing] lesbians as 'sick'".⁸⁵ Later, Elizabeth Wilson was barred from the Gateways for distributing GLF leaflets inside the club, prompting a wave of sit-ins that ended in the police making 13 arrests.⁸⁶ The breach between the politics of the gay liberation movement and the older staples of gay and lesbian commercial subculture grew evidently stark, accelerating the GLF Action Group's programme of Peoples' Dances as an alternative social scene.

80 Ibid.

81 Gay Liberation Front Action Group, "Introduction," n.d., HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

82 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 170.

83 Ibid.

84 Gay Liberation Front, "Press Statement, October 13 Re: Harassment of Gay People in and around Notting Hill Pubs," 13 October 1971, HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

85 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 129.

86 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 59.



Fig 1. Gay Day in Hyde Park, summer 1971.
HCA/Chesterman/1, Hall Carpenter Archive,
LSE Library, London.



Fig 2. Gay Liberation Front People's Dance,
Hammersmith Town Hall, July 1971.
HCA/GLF/17, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE



Fig 3. Sit-in at Chepstow Arms, October 1972.
HCA/GLF/17, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE
Library, London.

A further feat of the Action Group, embodying a wider tendency in the gay liberation movement, was its demonstrations of public solidarity with the trade union movement. The status of gay people within the institutional left had long been ambiguous, coming into conflict with the latter's own flavour of respectability politics. Though no universal left-wing attitude towards homosexuality could be said to exist, that "the working class rested on presenting itself as heterosexually masculine"⁸⁷ remained an unspoken, dominant assumption across its many factions, leaving gay people unsure of where they stood. The separation of gay people from the realities of working-class life was largely imaginary, since the experience of wage labour cut across sexualities, just as homosexuality cuts across the striations of class, as reflected in the slippery class character of GLF networks, in which "very few were factory workers, but very few, too, had any significant class privilege" and where workers of different stripes, the self-employed and dole claimants all rubbed shoulders.⁸⁸ As the GLF Action Group argued, gay people had much to gain from a positive relationship with the labour movement, whereby "we might make it a little more difficult (though of course not impossible) for employers to sack us for being gay, and make it a little easier for our sisters and brothers to come out at work."⁸⁹ The workplace therefore figured in gay liberation imaginaries as yet another field in which discretion was demanded of them in the wake of partial decriminalisation.

The movement's response to this tension was once more shaped by the same politics of visibility structuring its own demonstrations, Gay Days and Peoples' Dances, as exemplified by GLF's very lively participation in the mass demonstration called by the Trades Union Congress in February 1971. The march was organised in opposition to the Industrial Relations Bill introduced by the Heath government, which threatened significant restrictions upon union freedoms, such as compulsory registration for unions to gain legal status, "compulsory 60-day cooling off periods before action" and the establishment of an Industrial Relations Court with the power to "fine unions that broke the new rules."⁹⁰ This was a formative moment for the gay liberation movement's image of itself and relationship with the straight left, featuring extensively in individuals' remembered accounts of the early seventies. In Anny Brackx's written description of the march, GLF's participation involved an array of bright, theatrical aesthetics, "with placards and colourful balloons, plumes and feathers."⁹¹ John Phillips' entry in *Radical Records* likewise notes the volume of the gay bloc, remembering how, "marching down the Haymarket, I became aware of the ever-increasing amount of noise that we were making and, looking behind, I realised our numbers had increased to nearly two hundred."⁹² The contrast between the gay liberation bloc and the trade unionists' "very 'proletarian', revolutionary image"⁹³ is understood in most accounts as generative and important. As John notes, "we were criticised by many in the TUC for marching under the GLF banner but it was imperative to make the

87 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 21.

88 Walter, "Introduction," in *Come Together*, 13.

89 Gay Liberation Front Action Group, "Introduction," n.d., HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

90 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 83.

91 Anny Brackx, "Out into the Open," *Spare Rib*, 1979, 42, British Library Journal Archives.

92 John Phillips, "Coming to Terms," in *Radical Records*, 62.

93 Walter, "Introduction" in *Come Together*, 25.

point that our homosexuality was as important as our alliance with the trades union movement.⁹⁴ For Anny too, though "trade unionists did not seem to take to our double-edged slogans 'Poof to the Bill' and 'Heath we're right behind you!", this tension only contributed to the sense of political significance, wherein "the mere affirmation of our sexual identity was a revolutionary act."⁹⁵

Gay liberation's culture of public protest also revolved around the form of the "zap," described by Robinson as "a sort of playful performance used as protest."⁹⁶ A zap tended to take the form of a short burst of action, such as a picket or piece of street theatre, usually targeting an event or organisation understood as complicit in the oppression of gay people. Zaps had been popularised by the Gay Activist's Alliance (GAA) in the US, as a way of making visible the violence and antagonism embedded in heterosexual society. In a 1973 issue of the New York newspaper *Gay*, GAA members and self-described "architects of strategy for the gay liberation movement,"⁹⁷ Morty Manford and Arthur Evans, offered an explanation of the zap as a form of action which "personalizes abstract issues by completely disrupting the tedium which separates oppressor bureaucracies from the consequences of their actions."⁹⁸ Infused by the gay liberation movement's characteristically camp style and informed by its politics of visibility, zaps thus involved publicly staging the kinds of conflicts experienced at the level of everyday life by gay people in Britain. They were organised autonomously by the various working groups of the GLF, as well as adjacent groups on the gay left. Their many forms included the dramatisation of a backstreet abortion by GLF's Street Theatre group in 1972 "complete with coat hangers and raw liver, and plenty of convincing screams,"⁹⁹ and paint attacks by the socialist-feminist Red Lesbian Brigade against the Maudsley Hospital and the London Stock Exchange in 1971.¹⁰⁰ Strategic affinities were also formed between members of "the Leeds Lesbian Group and the Bradford Gay Women's Group" with GLF and CHE nodes across Britain "to gate-crash [a British Medical Association] conference on 'psychosexual disorders' at Bradford University which discussed homosexuality, transsexuality and transvestitism"¹⁰¹ in September 1973. The zap's call to action invited gay people from across the country to gather in Bradford and decide collectively on some kind of disruptive action to demand that the BMA "stop fucking us up."¹⁰² Conceptualised by the participants as "hit and run demonstrations,"¹⁰³ zaps consisted of a temporary seizure of public space either to desecrate the image of existing institutions or to accelerate the visibility of oppressed people, often through the use of shock tactics.

94 Philips, "Coming to Terms," 63.

95 Brackx, "Out into the Open," 42.

96 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 70.

97 Morty Manford and Arthur Evans, "The Theory and Practice of Confrontation Tactics," *Gay*, 1973, Archives of Sexuality and Gender, 18, <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender>.

98 Ibid, 19.

99 Walter, "Introduction," in *Come Together*, 24.

100 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 125.

101 Helen Spandler and Sarah Carr, "A History of Lesbian Politics and the Psy Professions," *Feminism and Psychology* 31, no. 1 (2020), 127.

102 Bradford GLF, "Bradford Zap - 12-13 September," 1973, HCA/GLF/11, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

103 Ibid, 97.

One zap that seems to linger in the archival memory of the gay liberation years, and that embodies many of the zap's core features, is London GLF's counter-demonstration against the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFOL). The NFOL was a movement launched by a pair of British Christian missionaries, which held a large public congress in London in September 1971, supported and attended by a slew of socially conservative public figures, including Mary Whitehouse, Malcolm Muggeridge and Cliff Richard. It was part of an organised backlash against the moral reformism of the late sixties, including homosexual law reform, and symbolised for Stuart Hall, an attempt to "return to moral orthodoxy... powerfully fuelled by religious fundamentalism."¹⁰⁴ Orchestrated by John Chesterman and the GLF Action group, the zap on the NFOL, codenamed "Operation Rupert", was a well-organised attempt to publicly sabotage the event through a broad diversity of tactics. Operation Rupert's planning notes described the NFOL as "the shit that will fertilise the grass roots of demagogues," warning that behind its "comic media caricatures" sat a dangerously reactionary and proto-fascist political movement.¹⁰⁵

Operation Rupert primarily targeted the NFOL's inaugural event at the Methodist Central Hall Westminster, the details of which Chesterman and the Action group were privy to due to their installing of Janet Phillips, a mole, into an administrative role in the NFOL office.¹⁰⁶ The Action group then got together a number of small, autonomous affinity groups to infiltrate and disrupt the event at Central Hall. Each group only knew the content of their own action and the one prior in the roster, their cue for action,¹⁰⁷ allowing for a form of organised chaos to unfold. Feather's narrative of events ordered them as follows: first, a group of GLF infiltrators began slow clapping in the audience to the discomfort of the Christians around them;¹⁰⁸ next, mice were unleashed on the Hall floor;¹⁰⁹ a group of gays dressed as nuns, (passing so well for the actual nuns in the delegation that "we weren't sure whether they were ours or theirs"¹¹⁰), "lifted up their skirts and can-can danced their way down the aisle";¹¹¹ next, the GLF youth group performed a banner drop from the balcony declaring "Cliff for Queen";¹¹² clouds of talcum powder were released into the air and religious pamphlets were dispersed with pornographic inserts;¹¹³ a kiss-in began among same-sex couples dotted throughout the audience;¹¹⁴ a piece of street theatre followed, along with a stage dash by Michael James in drag;¹¹⁵ another street theatre troupe took to the stage dressed as the KKK yelling "burn them like

104 Hall, "Reformism and the Legislation of Consent," 6.

105 GLF, "Operation Rupert," 1971, HCA/GLF/15, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

106 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 197.

107 Ibid, 198.

108 Ibid, 200.

109 Ibid, 201.

110 GLF, "Rupert... Bared," in *Come Together*, 118.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid, 202.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid, 203.

115 Ibid, 204.

faggots!";¹¹⁶ and finally, an action group disguised as workmen cut the lights for the entire hall.¹¹⁷ Each time one eruption was contained by event administration, another would begin, undermining attempts to police or disperse the counter-demonstration, in that its dispersal – throughout the hall and across a litany of different tactics – was precisely its strength.

The zap was wildly successful in ridiculing and disrupting the NFOL's attempts to rally reactionary public sentiment. Speaking to the significance of the zaps' impression upon the wider left, an article in the underground magazine *7 Days*, described "the attack GLF led against the Festival of Light" as "far more effective than anything that either the underground or the straight left could mount, and for GLF this was only one of a number of ongoing campaigns."¹¹⁸ The GLF report on Operation Rupert in the ninth issue of *Come Together* also notes a specific incident directly after the zap, outside the hall, where the camaraderie and energy generated by the action allowed a group to successfully de-arrest a participant, and to disempower a police officer in the process, subverting the dynamic of fear and subjugation that pretty policeman had come to instil:

"More cops arrived, two men started to kiss, which upset the cop who was trying to harass them – at which a brother kissed a policeman on the cheek. He was so surprised that he jerked backwards and his helmet fell off. They tried to take the brother, but we all asked what the charge was and said that Jesus loved us, Jesus would have kissed us, and eventually the cop admitted (between gritted teeth, says one of those near him): 'Yes, Jesus does love you,' and disappeared with his comrade leaving the brother who'd kissed him all alone: deserted."¹¹⁹

Operation Rupert is a case in point of the "new forms of communal activity" by which gay liberation actors "asserted the confident presence of gay men and lesbians in the public sphere."¹²⁰ The NFOL ultimately constituted a foundational moment in the gay liberation movement's shared culture of protest rather than its intended purpose as the launchpad of a successful moral crusade. As the remembered accounts and photographs of these zaps, Gay Days and dances attest, the politics of gay liberation involved becoming as visible as possible in order to violate the moral order of the time, through theatrical shock tactics, flamboyant aesthetics, and above all else, public displays of kissing and sexual contact. Gay liberation's intertwined cultures of sexuality and protest have moreover been heavily documented by their participants, in photographs, planning notes and written accounts, stored in carefully curated personal archives, since subsumed into the larger institutional archives consulted throughout this project. As Richard Meyer argues, archival documents such as these must "be seen as highly mediated images of homosexual activism rather than as snapshots of historical

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid, 205.

118 Peter Edwards, "Gay Is Good," *7 Days*, 1 December 1971, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

119 GLF, "Rupert... Bared," in *Come Together*, 120.

120 Meyer, "Gay Power Circa 1970," 447.

truth,"¹²¹ speaking to the gay liberation movement's understanding of its own historical significance, and its urge to be seen, not only by its contemporaries, but across historical time, piercing the present. That these protests and zaps have left such extensive archival traces speaks to their enduring emotional and political significance for those involved in the gay liberation movement.

5. Conflict as a facet of everyday life

So far, the picture I have presented of gay liberation's street politics has largely focused on the overtly politicised activities organised by GLF groups in big cities. Yet the stakes of visibility during the sixties and seventies were encountered far more often in mundane and provincial situations, reflecting the extent to which conflict and violence assimilated into the rhythms of everyday life. Public protest, dances, zaps, and other organised forms of gay liberation activity allowed gay people to collectively contest the post-Wolfenden pact of secrecy, but life of course went on outside the boundaries of these actions, bearing the often very visceral risks of visibility. This section now constellates some lived examples from the archives of confrontation between gay people, the police and the so-called "general public." Threaded together, these accounts provide insight into the antagonistic social relationships shaping gay life as it was lived and felt beyond the more obviously political articulations.

As this chapter has already shown, the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 in reality entailed an expansion in the policing of public gay sex and the enclosure of sexual subcultures. Cruising, argues Houlbrook, had long played an important role in gay male sociality in particular. From the early twentieth century, "for those excluded from residential space" (though to this we might also add propertied men with families and/or fantasies about cross-class sexual contact), "the public city became the necessary locale of tenuous moments of privacy"¹²² in public toilets and the surrounding parks and alleys where they were often constructed. The British state's redoubled policing of public sex following Wolfenden targeted gay men seeking sexual contact in these spaces. As a result, experiences of cruising in the sixties and seventies were often mediated and constrained by a culture of fear around entrapment or discovery. One respondent to the NLGS recalls getting "myself picked up in a cottage" in the late sixties in Birmingham, where the experience of "kiss[ing] and fond[ling]" and "the pleasure at the taste of smoke in his mouth, and therefore in mine," was marred by "the rushed, furtive nature of the contact."¹²³ The presence of pretty policemen on the gay scene could just as easily be obvious and banal as immediately threatening, as indicated by another gay male respondent to the NLGS, who recalls seeing

"the policeman outside the Coleherne in 1975 when I came out, standing in ordinary clothes, with torn trousers showing his buttocks obviously no underpants, and I stared at him in

121 Ibid, 451.

122 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 49.

123 "Contributor Code: 135," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

disbelief and mild disdain. He looked away! It was only afterwards that I surmised that this person was probably an 'agent provocateur' of the locality at the time."¹²⁴

Despite the farcical nature of this anecdote, gay men were nevertheless often caught out by police *agents provocateurs*, as evidenced by the uptick in arrests and prosecutions following the 1967 legislation,¹²⁵ and subjected to degrading and humiliating court trials. In the eighth issue of *Gay Left*, Bob Cant gives an extended account of his own arrest under these circumstances, having visited a cottage in the early hours of the morning, stood at the urinal next to another man with whom "there was neither physical contact nor eye contact," and been arrested for gross indecency by "three policemen enter[ing] from both ends of the toilet."¹²⁶ The year that followed his arrest, leading up to a trial in which he was eventually acquitted, is told through a spiral of different emotions: "fear" – of the police and even "to go out"; "isolation," which "felt like I was clutching at fog"; and the "sudden smashing of my confidence."¹²⁷ Bob's narrative gives insight into the way post-Wolfenden policing re-shaped the emotional landscape of cruising. His discovery, moreover, that feelings of shame, anxiety and fear were those of a closeted mindset, were not considered "right on" in his gay liberation social circles, and "could not, therefore be expressed",¹²⁸ highlights a gap between gay liberation's affirmative politics of visibility and the banal forms of violence continuing to structure gay life. As the Highbury Fields demonstration had shown, the gay liberation movement was prepared to enthusiastically politicise the issues of cottaging and entrapment, but when it came to dealing with the awkward emotional surplus of such confrontations, many groups were ill-equipped. Arranged together, then, these accounts paint a picture of social antagonism as a constant and unfurling process, situated as much in the interstices of everyday life as in the highly commemorated moments of public protest, and often outside the scope of gay liberation's vocabulary of visibility.

While the legislation on homosexuality I have described only pertained directly to gay men, the atmosphere of public scrutiny that it codified nevertheless incorporated a much wider cross-section of gay people. The heightened confidence of the emerging gay liberation movement during the early seventies furthermore made gayness and gay people more visible to the "public," a term I use critically to refer to both the abstracted "public" of public order and decency invoked in state discourses. A lesbian respondent to the NLGS theorises this integral relationship between policing and the "public" via her own experiences, recalling anecdotally "5 or 6 burly policemen hustling – with quite unnecessary physical force – one or two women out of a Gay club into a police wagon," and drawing the conclusion that "the Police, on the whole, adopt an overtly aggressive stance towards Gays, and... are no more immune than the 'general public' from homophobia."¹²⁹ This abstraction of

124 "Contributor Code: 136," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

125 Vicky Iglkowski, "The Passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act," *National Archives Blog* (blog), 2017, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/sexual-offences-act/>.

126 Bob Cant, "Living with Indecency," 24.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid, 26.

129 "Contributor Code: 184," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

the "public" should be understood (calling back to Lefebvre's concrete abstractions) as concretely realised in the form of everyday harassment of gay people in the streets by people presuming to defend public order and decency. Recalling a specific incident on the way to a GLF People's Dance in December 1970, Angie Weir, a participant in Power's oral history, remarks how:

"In those days it was very unusual for a crowd of women in short hair and trousers to be together in any numbers and men would scream at you and pick fights and so on. That happened all the time, constantly. You went out with women who were harassed. These men started having a go at us and ended up pouring their beer all over us."¹³⁰

Encounters such as these, where the signifiers of female homosexuality – "short hair" and "trousers" – incite public hostility and humiliation, reflect the dispersal of the power to police and scrutinise conformity throughout the public during the sixties and seventies. The rising visibility of lesbians in this context had a lot to do with ongoing contestations over female sexual autonomy and access to public space in the remit of the burgeoning women's liberation movement. As Hall has argued, the reform of divorce and reproductive rights legislation during the late sixties at once constituted "a measure of relaxation in the social and legal control of selected aspects of female sexual practice" but also, "in effect, a new modality of 'control' over these aspects – a more privatised and 'person-focused' regulation."¹³¹ Lesbianism presented a problem for this modality of control, implying the existence of a sexual community outside the private household's regulatory parameters, thus inciting random members of the public to lash out at signs of deviance and indecency.

In general, the expanded social visibility of gayness from the late sixties onwards troubled the long-held gendered distinction of public and private space, involving varying degrees of abdication from traditionally gendered behaviours, roles and styles. Nowhere was this tendency more pronounced however than in the situation of transvestites and transsexuals (TV/TS). I would argue that trans experience during this period belongs to a history of gay liberation because the TV/TS working group of the GLF, despite some contestation over its welcomeness within the movement, describes gayness in expansive terms: "To be gay means to break the rules of your official sex, to cross over the guidelines set up by the family, the schools, and the church. Some of us cross over by sleeping with the 'wrong' person. Some of us dress the 'wrong' way. Some of us do both. We are all gay."¹³² The policing of gay sexuality after 1967 had specific intensities for TV/TS people, however, relating less to the legality of sexual acts than to the particular vulnerabilities to public and police scrutiny that accompanied visible gender deviance. "At demos, the pigs always grab the people in drag first and hit them the hardest," notes the same TS/TV communiqué, remarking that, "it is no coincidence that of all the people arrested at the Festival of Light, the only person facing a prison term was dressed as a

130 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 35.

131 Hall, "Reformism and the Legislation of Consent," 21.

132 Gay Liberation Front Transsexuals and Transvestites, "Declare Your Sex," HCA/Chesterman/7.

cigarette girl."¹³³ An article written by a TV woman named Connie in a Birmingham GLF newsletter illustrates this point further, detailing a series of arrests and run-ins with the police over the course of her life, the most recent of which occurred in 1973, a few months prior:

"...a number of 'bowver boys' [skinheads] started calling and badgering me while walking through the crowded Coventry central shopping arena when, although I had passed some six or eight of the Fuzz at different spots, and they had taken little or no notice of me or the way I acted or was dressed, I was grabbed by the arm and told that I was being arrested for 'acting in a manner against the peace of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, her crown and dignity,' was then pushed into a police van and taken to the station. There I was told that 'I should thank my lucky stars' as the louts had told the arresting PC that they were about to 'knock the living daylight's out of me. From this we must conclude that the victim is much easier to arrest than the aggressors, especially if they number more than one."¹³⁴

Despite the police officer's claim to have arrested Connie charitably, in anticipation of violence from the skinheads, they proceeded to interrogate her as to whether she also possessed any "male clothes," the existence of which alongside her otherwise feminine appearance warranted a breach-of-the-peace charge. She was then "detained in a cold station cell for over three hours" and sentenced "to be bound over to good behaviour for the sum of twenty pounds."¹³⁵ A further account, hailing from an interview with Rachel Pollack in Alison Fell's feature on gay liberation in *INK* magazine, reinforces the mundanity of violence within gay and trans life. Fell's preamble to the interview notes "transvestites are often very obvious casualties of the sex role business – the streets are perilous for them; since most of their activities are necessarily 'closet' very little is known about them and they have no obvious place in any liberation movement."¹³⁶ Rachel's responses to the interview corroborate Fell's remarks:

"One of the great illusions that straight people have is that your body is yours. For actually your body is owned by the people on the street. If you try to assert your claim to your body, they react exactly as if you had stolen some of their property. I sometimes almost expect them to call the police."¹³⁷

Rachel's description of public reactions to transsexuality demonstrates viscerally how the logics of property and the commodity imprint upon human life, attesting to Vishmidt and Sutherland's description of capitalist value relations "as stratified social relations."¹³⁸ Through this lens, the public

133 Ibid.

134 Connie, "Justice through the eyes of a TV," Birmingham GLF Newsletter, 1973, FL/HARRIS/7, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

135 Ibid.

136 Alison Fell, "Gay is Good: A Report on the Development of the Gay Liberation Front," *INK*, December 3 1971, FL/HARRIS/7, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

137 Ibid.

138 Vishmidt and Sutherland, "(Un)making Value," in *Totality Inside Out*, 74.

policing of sexuality can be understood as part of the process by which the appearance difference increasingly marks out "highly monitored and increasingly abandoned" populations, whose lives constitute "the lived negativity of value relations."¹³⁹ This constellation of public confrontations therefore reflects the contradictory nature of "coming out" as an incomplete and fraught process, circumscribed by punitive social reactions and invocations of public order. It illuminates a dynamic of freedom and constraint at work in the "out of the closet into the street" paradigm, relating to the violence and policing integral to the new era of heightened visibility. While it can sometimes be tempting to view the early years of gay liberation as politically transcendent and exceptional, these archival traces register their circumscription by forms of domination embedded in British social life during this time.

6. Limits of visibility

Having begun to demystify the gay liberation politics of visibility, this chapter now considers some social transformations that advanced the contradictions of this politics and foreclosed much of its revolutionary vision. In a performative and immediate sense, gay liberation achieved a number of its demands – e.g. "that gay people be free to kiss and hold hands in public,"¹⁴⁰ – simply by doing just that. While not codified in law or "formally accepted," writes Weeks, "as gay people in coming out did them, and the heavens did not fall in, so it became easier for gay people to be more open in their sexuality."¹⁴¹ That the heavens did not fall in, however, and that "the edifice of militaristic capitalism" did not "come crumbling down,"¹⁴² was also a problem for gay liberation, troubling the belief that a real social revolution would flow automatically from its public cultures of sexuality and protest. What actually followed the movement's eruptive first few years was more akin to a counter-revolution, related to the emergence of a crisis in capitalism, with both global and local ramifications. The late seventies and early eighties in particular saw a confluence of disastrous circumstances that contributed to the social abjection of the newly visible gay population, including a swell of moral panics arising out of the New Right and onset of the AIDS crisis. Rosalind Delmar has observed that "if the 1960s are dubbed a decade of love, the 70s can be called a decade of anger," a shift in the countercultural structure of feeling generated by "the growing sense of crisis felt by those who lived through it."¹⁴³ These observations chime with Jameson's periodisation of the long sixties – whose end he places "around 1972-4"¹⁴⁴ – as a precursor, "in the worldwide economic crisis, to powerful restorations of the social order and a renewal of the repressive power of the various state apparatuses."¹⁴⁵

139 Ibid, 78.

140 GLF, "Our Demands Are...", in *Come Together*, 47.

141 Weeks, *Coming Out*, 205.

142 Weeks, as cited in *Power, No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 16.

143 Rosalind Delmar, "7 Days: On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Moment in Time (Introduction)," *Barry Amiel & Normal Melburn Trust*, 2017, <https://banmarchive.org.uk/7-days/introduction>.

144 Jameson, "Periodising the 60s," 510.

145 Ibid, 513.

In Britain, the reigning in of the long sixties' militant energies was partially expressed through what Hall calls the "swing to the right," incorporating the ascendance of fascist and far-right political elements as well as "tough industrial and economic strategy in the face of the recession and crisis in capital accumulation; the emergence of 'Thatcherism' and the anti-Left campaigns."¹⁴⁶ One of the key coordinates of this swing to the right was the growth of the fascist National Front from a "marginal force at the beginning of the 1970s" to "the fourth largest political party" by 1976.¹⁴⁷ While primarily deploying racist, anti-immigration talking points, this right-wing resurgence compounded existing constraints and challenges bearing down on gay life and threatened the fragile reclamation of public space launched by the gay liberation movement. A flyer produced by the Brixton squatting community in 1978 spoke directly to how gay people "are feeling the brunt of the move to the right in this country," listing a number of recent instances, including "a gay man... beaten to death after leaving a gay disco," "a group of lesbian women... viciously attacked by thugs after leaving a women's disco in Vauxhall," and the police reserving their "filthiest abuse" for "the gay people among the anti-fascist demonstrators" at the recent NF (National Front) marches.¹⁴⁸ In the following year, the London GAA (Gay Activists' Alliance) produced a pamphlet, drawing on an archive of news reports and personal testimony, charting various anti-gay attacks by fascist groups in the previous few years, including NF raids on an East Sussex CHE meeting in 1975, on the North London Gay Centre and East London Gay Centre in 1976, on the Leeds Gay Centre in 1977 and on the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (a popular coordinate in the London gay nightlife) in 1978.¹⁴⁹ Another pamphlet, produced a few years prior by the Manchester Gay Libertarians group, situates the rise of this anti-gay fascist element within "a time of deep social crisis," leading to "many people seeking a solution in the intensification of authority," at the expense of "all groups seen as outsiders or as having low status."¹⁵⁰ These various excerpts indicate that radical gay groups were highly aware of the rising right-wing threat during the mid-late seventies and that they were able to theorise its relationship to sexuality and capitalism.

As the previous chapter section has shown, homophobic public feeling had already been a feature of everyday life during the early seventies, preceding the surge in traction of the National Front. Traces of the fascist element had also been a spectral presence within the NFOL's base of support, which according to the GAA's aforementioned pamphlet, shared "similar attitudes on moral issues" – particularly in its emphasis on the sanctity of family and marriage – "to the NF."¹⁵¹ Feather's account of Operation Rupert supports this point, describing a number of the NFOL's attendees as having "raised their right arm" passing the GLF group as they left the event, "as many had done inside

146 Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show," *Marxism Today*, January 1979, 14.

147 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 111.

148 All London Gay Group, "Why We Are Here," 1978, HCA/GLF/8, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

149 London Gay Activists' Alliance, "An Anti-Fascist Handbook," 1979, LAGNA Pamphlet Box 3, Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

150 Manchester Gay Libertarians, "On Opposition to Fascism - A Libertarian Approach," 1974, POLLARD/7/2/2, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

151 London Gay Activists' Alliance, "An Anti-Fascist Handbook," 1979, LAGNA Pamphlet Box 3, Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

the hall, in a gesture reminiscent of the fascist salute."¹⁵² As early as 1971, the NF's journal, *Spearhead*, began to incite panic about gay liberation:

"Hot on the heels of the bra-less bouncing biddies of the WLF and its UK offshoots come mincing the pretty boys of the GLF. Among the demands of these pathetic creatures are that discrimination against their ilk by employers be made illegal and school children be taught that homosexual relations are normal."¹⁵³

The "swing to the right" in British politics should therefore be understood as an extended process, unfolding from long-simmering social anxieties about permissiveness and authority, of which organisations such as the NF represented the sharp end. Subsequent calls for a return to law and order and the moral sanctity of the traditional family deepened the precarity of gay people in Britain. As a result, though a politics of visibility remained a residual part of radical gay strategies throughout the seventies, even by the decade's close it conveyed a degree of anachronism, leading to a much lower frequency of zaps, Gay Days and Peoples' Dances in particular. The gay liberation movement had greatly increased the visibility of gay people nationally, but this visibility was coupled with greater vulnerability. It had furthermore prioritised non-violence, in conscious opposition to other revolutionary tendencies many gay liberation groups perceived intuitively as macho and patriarchal. The adequacy of non-violent, subversive activity such as zaps was highly questionable, not to mention at times trivialising in retrospect: the KKK play-acting by one of the Street Theatre affinity groups at the NFOL (comprised entirely of white members) had to now sit uncomfortably in the shadow cast by actual, organised ranks of white nationalists.

With the dissolution of the GLF, smaller organisations such as the GAA, Gays Against Fascism and Gay Libertarians now began to find their feet, with a focus on defensive rather than performative activities. An article by Stephen Gee in the seventh issue of *Gay Left* characterises the particular structure of feeling underpinning the GAA as "the new fightback mood," highlighting "the theme of 'defence'" in the group's literature.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Gay Libertarians group based in Manchester advocated a community organisation approach, or "a strategy of mass involvement," to draw people in from "their everyday situations, both at work and in the community."¹⁵⁵ This shift in strategy mirrored the trajectory of the socialist feminist tendency in the gay liberation movement, which, as early as 1971 had theorised in the "Women's Issue" of *Come Together*, that big public interventions such as zaps and Gay Days could "only be a preliminary stage in GLF's development,"¹⁵⁶ and must be followed by the slower and less glamorous business of working-class solidarity. "Now we must go to the East End and the poorer areas of London," the article elaborates, "to talk to people and convince

152 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 205.

153 Ibid, 7.

154 Stephen Gee, "Homosexuals Fight Back: The Gay Activists' Alliance," *Gay Left* 7 (1978/9), 15.

155 Manchester Gay Libertarians, "On Opposition to Fascism - A Libertarian Approach", 1974, POLLARD/7/2/2, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

156 Gay Liberation Front, "Where It's At," in *Come Together*, 90.

them that we are fighting the same people who deny them decent housing, milk for their children at school, a share in the factory's wealth."¹⁵⁷ As more gay organisations expressing this politics emerged throughout the seventies, the gay movement's horizon of social change shifted from the moment of coming out into the more difficult task of building resistance in an increasingly hostile world.

A further form of crisis forcing a recomposition of the gay movement was the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Gay liberation's politics of visibility had taken a direct approach to liberating sexuality, in the forms of bawdy street theatre, mass public displays of affection and cultures of non-monogamy. It had projected an atmosphere of sex-positivity that extended well beyond the politicised gay liberation movement and into the commercial bar and club scene where poppers-fuelled cruising cultures thrived.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless "by the early eighties," writes Jarman, "two men having sex was no longer perceived as a transgression. HIV changed that."¹⁵⁹ According to Weeks, "AIDS produced, or accentuated a crisis in societal responses to homosexuality."¹⁶⁰ The moral panic around AIDS, propelled by the British media and right-wing political class, re-fashioned gayness as a threat to public health and public morality. The heightened visibility leveraged by the gay liberation movement, Cook argues, was now publicly reinterpreted as a flouting of Wolfenden's "moral compromise" which had offered a form of "tolerance... contingent on privacy, discretion and a certain invisibility."¹⁶¹ Hence the AIDS crisis ushered in a "revival of prejudice and homophobia as well as enormous fear among gay men themselves," and a reorientation of gay politics, involving "the development of a Safer Sex culture, the growth of support networks, the lobbying of governments, the links formed with other AIDS-affected groups."¹⁶² While Robinson has remarked how "the aspirations of the GLF were revisited through AIDS,"¹⁶³ most explicitly in the "zap-like performativity"¹⁶⁴ of big public actions organised such as Outrage!, this was a residual tendency in an expanding landscape of care, lobbying and advocacy organisations. Ian Townson's archived papers attest to this break, describing the "toll" of HIV/AIDS "not just in terms of human suffering and loved ones lost, but also in terms of the possibility of greater moral/political backlashes and the channelling of gay activism away from anti-establishment politics into AIDS work."¹⁶⁵ If the sense of sexual possibility that had mounted during the early seventies mapped onto a sense of political possibility, then both underwent a radical process of restructuring with the renewal of moral panic arising from the AIDS crisis.

The crisis further shaped gay peoples' relationship to public space through its effect on the subcultural space of bars and clubs. Despite the gay liberation movement's critique of the ghetto and

157 Ibid.

158 Poppers (amyl nitrate) are a drug which when inhaled, relax the muscles. The significance of poppers to gay history is explored in Adam Zmith, *Deep Sniff: A History of Poppers and Queer Futures* (London: Repeater, 2021).

159 Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 85.

160 Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985), 49.

161 Cook, "AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017), 246.

162 Cant and Hemmings, "Introduction," in *Radical Records*, 8.

163 Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 174.

164 Ibid, 176.

165 Ian Townson, "Structure of the Book," n.d., TOWNSON/8/1, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

the commercialisation of gay culture in general, these venues continued to form the basis of many gay peoples' social worlds regardless of whether they identified politically with the aims of gay liberation. Gay venues were swept up in the public moral panic around HIV/AIDS, which during the eighties manifested in a series of police raids on the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, a staple of the London gay nightlife. These raids accompanied a new wave of reporting "connecting gays, their hedonism, disease and death," including a *Sunday Telegraph* article on the dangers of poppers and their role in the spread of AIDS, which named the RVT as a site of poppers use.¹⁶⁶ Wearing rubber gloves, police arrested the RVT's landlords, staff and clientele on a string of spurious charges including health and safety violations and drunkenness.¹⁶⁷ While localised, the raids and their media coverage reinforced the public characterisation of HIV/AIDS as "the gay plague" – a symbol of moral decadence – and demonstrated the penetrability of gay, commercial spaces to the police. The backlash against gay venues thus constituted a foreclosure on some of the promises of visibility. The gay liberation movement's equation of visibility with social change was now flipped on its head, becoming a pretext for social abjection.

7. Conclusion

Gay liberation's street politics was fraught with contradiction. As the archival accounts cited in this chapter reveal, becoming visible, or "coming out" even at the level of the individual, has rarely ever been a clean or complete process, but one that demands continuous repetition and re-negotiation. The processual and uneven character of peoples' individual coming out also mirrors its contradictory political and social status. During the years of gay liberation, coming out was experienced simultaneously as a means of collective liberation, a form of revolutionary praxis, and a marker of vulnerability to the various forms of public violence and policing embedded in Britain's social order. This chapter has therefore attempted to unpack the interplay of freedom and constraint structuring the social visibility of gay people in Britain during the sixties and seventies.

Because of its implicit spatial dimension ("out of the closet *into* the street"), gay liberation's politics of visibility also necessarily had to navigate and reckon with the conflict-ridden social space of capitalism. The Sexual Offences Act created a condition of possibility for the gay liberation movement through its partial relaxation of sexual legislation, while at the same time mobilising forms of policing and social control deeply hostile to actually existing public sexual cultures. The commercial venues of the emergent gay ghetto furthermore mediated the visibility of gay people in contradictory ways, providing them with limited protections and opportunities to socialise, while frequently asserting their property rights and commitment to profit when conflict arose. Lefebvre's dialectics of social space has illuminated some of these contradictory circumstances by showing how the production of space consists of a push and pull between expansion and enclosure, homogeneity and fragmentation. His

¹⁶⁶ Zmith, *Deep Sniff*, 83.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

insistence furthermore that capitalist processes of abstraction must always be realised in actual arrangements of people, buildings, streets and institutions, with their own needs and motives, allows for a theorisation of gay liberation as a form of struggle arising out of the contradictions of Britain's public sexual order.

There is always a lived and felt aspect to these contradictory processes. Contestation over public space leaves behind emotional and political legacies, of which the archive of gay liberation houses many traces. Accordingly, this chapter has presented a constellation of archival accounts on gay liberation's street politics, looking firstly at the movement's innovative forms of public protest and the significance of its urge to document these forms in archival memory. These politicised accounts are supplemented in turn by a consideration of the quieter and more insidious ways in which policing and public scrutiny occurred in everyday experience during the sixties and seventies. That gay people in the moral climate of post-Wolfenden Britain could attract negative public attention by drinking in a bar, walking down the street or using a public bathroom, implies that visibility alone was not an automatic precursor to liberation. These limitations became more and more evident as the crisis-ridden seventies wore on, social tensions brewed and public attitudes towards homosexuality hardened. The efficacy of zaps and Gay Days lay in their ability to flout dominant social and legal expectations of decency and order, but within the higher stakes of an emboldened far-right, widespread moral panic and punitive social policy, the shape of gay struggle underwent a forced evolution.

What can be gleaned from this history of the gay liberation movement's politics of the street firstly is that forms of social struggle are shaped by the historical situations in which they arise. The politicisation of coming out within the gay liberation movement was at the same time made possible *by* and forged in antagonism *to* the visibility clause implicit in the new legislation on homosexuality. Likewise, as manifold social crises beset the seventies and early eighties, the forms taken by radical gay organisations registered these shifting conditions. Yet as this chapter has shown, in line with the rest of this thesis more broadly, terrains of struggle extend beyond the space of big, public, collective interventions. The struggle for gay liberation consisted ultimately then in the everyday realities of going out, socialising and having sex, which in sixties and seventies Britain, were reconfigured as matters of public order.

Chapter Three: Psychiatry

1. Introduction

While the previous chapter focused on emerging cultures of protest and public sexuality in the years of gay liberation, chapter three now turns to the murkier world of psychiatry as a site of sexual antagonism during the sixties and seventies. I use the term "psychiatry" in a broad sense, referring to a professional field increasingly integrated into general healthcare provision in post-war Britain, but also to a broader set of social attitudes circulating in public life. For the purposes of this chapter, "psychiatry" encompasses the harsh world of aversion therapies, surgeries and institutionalisation, the esoteric world of competing behavioural and psychoanalytic theories, and also the more mundane world of consultations, referral processes and medical bureaucracies. These various dimensions of psychiatry are explored both as facets of an emergent social and moral order in post-war Britain, and as they were experienced by gay people directly, in their capacity as patients and occasionally as workers in public and private healthcare settings. If the public politics of the streets was where the gay liberation movement announced and enacted its programme of self-determination and sexual freedom, its critique of psychiatry is where the contours of sexual oppression within capitalism, rooted in the structure of the heterosexual family and mediated by social institutions, are made visible.

Psychiatry became a flashpoint for homosexual politics in the sixties and seventies due to ongoing transformations in the provision of mental healthcare across the twentieth century and their implications for gay life. This chapter investigates how the liberalising reforms of the late sixties, which in 1967 included the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, were part of a broader shift in the sexual and social order of post-war Britain. Resurgent psychiatric approaches towards homosexuality, coupled with an emergent sector of professionals and experts, became new terrains of policing and regulation, increasingly re-framing homosexuality as a social and individual pathology. Psychiatry thus became a key target of critique within the emergent gay liberation movement, which – as detailed in the previous chapter – founded itself on a politics of outness and visibility, contra the pathologising discourses rising to dominance.

The first section of this chapter now proceeds to reconstruct some critiques of the institution of psychiatry from the archive of gay liberation, foregrounding the theory and practice of the anti-psychiatry stream of the GLF. Here, I show how the gay liberation movement's anti-psychiatric critique developed in dialogue with tendencies on the broader countercultural and radical left. I detail how psychiatry came increasingly to be theorised as a "capitalist" institution, in the sense it reflected the dynamics of freedom and constraint underpinning social life and helped to produce conditions amenable to the social reproduction of capitalist society. The following section then situates these

emergent modes of anti-psychiatric antagonism within the uneven, shifting history of mental healthcare provision in the twentieth century, focusing especially on the legacies of decarceration and integration of psychiatry into general practice. The next section turns its attention to the psychiatrisation of homosexuality as it unfolded in practice during the sixties and seventies, citing at length the experiential knowledge of its structures and practices recorded in the archive of gay liberation. The final chapter section then demonstrates how this archive of experience is filled with theoretical exposition on the antagonistic character of psychiatric institutions. Here, I consider how accounts of everyday gay life speak to the relationship between mental health and capitalism and the relationship between the personal and the political. Throughout these sections, I thread in my own reflections on the imbrication of theory and experience in the archive of gay liberation and on the role of social institutions like psychiatry in the social reproduction of capitalism.

2. Gay anti-psychiatry

While the following pages primarily look at the militant forms of anti-psychiatric critique developing within the gay liberation movement, it should be acknowledged that homosexual attitudes towards psychiatry were not monolithic and did not develop unilaterally. Jennings has traced a long, transatlantic "history of cooperation" between homosexuals and the psychiatric profession, extending from early-twentieth century efforts of homosexual reformers in Britain and America "to develop a notion of the respectable 'middle class' homosexual"¹ to the formation of organisations such as the Minorities Research Group (MRG) in the early sixties in Britain, whose stated purpose was "to conduct and to collaborate in research into the homosexual condition, especially as it concerns women."² Composed mainly of professional, "middle class women, whose educational background rendered medico-scientific literature and ideas more accessible," the MRG attempted to change the growing post-war social perception of homosexuals as "psychopathic and untrustworthy" from within, in the hopes that more sympathetic approaches would trickle into general public opinion.³ Via its institutional magazine, *Arena Three*, the MRG invited, published and participated in psychiatric studies with the view to contesting popular perspectives on homosexuality as pathological and socially deviant. It earnestly engaged with a range of psychoanalytic theories, including, for example, the idea of lesbianism as a form of arrested development, thought to arise from "a girl becoming fixed at an earlier stage of sexual development" and "failing to reach adult sexuality."⁴ This concept frequently interfaced with the Freudian idea of "genital envy," which, in the contemporary psychoanalytic wisdom, attributed lesbians' desire for other women to a failure to process the anxiety arising in childhood at their lack of a penis. For the MRG and the readership of *Arena Three*, Jennings argues, "scientific and quasi-scientific studies of lesbianism" in the tradition of

1 Jennings, "'The Most Uninhibited Party They'd Ever Been to': The Postwar Encounter between Psychiatry and the British Lesbian, 1945-1971," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008), 885.

2 *Arena Three*, as cited by Jennings, "'The Most Uninhibited Party They'd Ever Been to'", 899.

3 Jennings, "'The Most Uninhibited Party They'd Ever Been to'", 885.

4 *Ibid*, 886.

these theories "constituted the most widespread, detailed and authoritative source of information"⁵ available, and therefore stimulated the growth of a community of lesbians who found in these discourses, an outlet for talking about themselves and their desires. This "history of cooperation" illustrates, therefore, how some sections of the gay and lesbian population in the sixties intervened in psychiatric discourses on homosexuality while still acknowledging their authority and legitimacy.

With the end of the sixties and the rise of the gay liberation movement, however, a more hostile, overtly antagonistic response to psychiatric literature and practices began to develop on a large scale. This is not to suggest that the collaborationist tendency embodied by the MRG died out when the organisation folded in 1971;⁶ in fact it remained residual within the strategy of different groups throughout the seventies, especially those aligned more closely to the objectives of law reform. The Scottish Minorities Group (SMG) for example, which formed in 1969 as the first homosexual rights organisation of its kind in Scotland,⁷ struggled largely to attain a better legislative deal than had been enacted in England and Wales via the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. In maintaining an unequal age of consent "to divide the line between male homosexual crime and non-crime," the SMG argued that the Act only furthered "discrimination against homosexuals under 21 which is no less offensive than the discrimination applied to homosexuals generally by the present Scottish law."⁸ Though the SMG argued that the legal situation in Scotland was functionally similar to that of England and Wales, at least in terms of the level of prosecutions, the group stated that its "primary reason for seeking a liberalisation of the law arises from the fact that the present law indirectly encourages social discrimination against homosexuals."⁹

Similarly to the MRG, then, which prior to decriminalisation legislation in England, the SMG "actively cultivated links with medical professionals and religious groups,"¹⁰ so as to bring about a more favourable legal and social climate for homosexuals in Scotland. A brief anecdote published in a *Gay News* article in August 1972 attested to the SMG's generally good faith engagements even with overtly homophobic psychiatric literature. A newly published medical handbook, *The Principles and Practices of Medicine*, was brought to the group's attention after one of its members came across an "offending passage"¹¹ on homosexuality. Echoing the classic invocation of arrested development in psychoanalytic theory, the text had described homosexuality as a "form of deviant behaviour" and "the result of distorted experiences at the stage of development when boys and girls learn their sexual role."¹² The response of SMG's chairman, Ian Dunn, was to immediately dip into the organisation's wide network of contacts, telephoning the writer of the handbook, a professor of

5 Ibid, 901.

6 Ibid, 904.

7 Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland*, 89.

8 SMG, "The Case for Homosexual Law Reform in Scotland," 1971, HCA/SMG/4/1, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

9 Ibid.

10 Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland*, 91.

11 *Gay News*, "Contented Deviants," *Gay News*, 1972, *Gay News Archive Project*, <http://gaynews.fighting-words.co.uk/>.

12 Ibid.

psychiatry at the University of Glasgow, and asking him to re-write the passage in question. "The Professor agreed to consider this," according to Dunn, and asked for some notes to aid him in his task. Here, then, is an opportunity for the gay community to ensure that the real life facts on being homosexual get inserted into the best reference books."¹³ In framing this type of engagement as an "opportunity," groups like the SMG thus extended the collaborationist efforts of the MRG, vying for the inclusion of homosexual voices in the production of psychiatric knowledge. While not exclusively limited to pre-decriminalisation contexts, these approaches built strategic relationships with various fields of expertise, with the view to harnessing their authority in pursuit of legislative reform.

This history of cooperation with the psychiatric establishment throws into sharp relief the militancy that characterised the model of gay anti-psychiatry emerging the late sixties and early seventies. Many gay liberation groups in Britain related antagonistically to the psychiatric establishment, viewing it as a vector of gay oppression and finding little use in strategies of collaboration. As this chapter will argue, the antagonistic stance of this emergent gay anti-psychiatry made visible and concrete the deep social antagonisms already structuring the relationship between psychiatric institutions and gay people. The Counter-Psychiatry (CP) group of the London GLF was one of the longest lasting and most vocal elements within this tendency, existing virtually from the moment of GLF's founding. Its politics were encoded in the GLF's public demand "that psychiatrists stop treating homosexuality as though it were a problem or sickness, thereby giving gay people senseless guilt complexes"¹⁴ – published in the first issue of *Come Together*. In the CP group itself, Power notes, "there was a combination of experience" bringing together those "who had received treatment and those who were employed within the psychiatric system."¹⁵ There were some direct experiences of clinical aversion therapy among the working group's attendees, but many more cases of close shaves with the practice. For example, Micky Burbidge, a key figure in the group, had written to a therapist and joined a waiting list for aversion therapy in the early sixties, because "I knew that I was gay... and decided I didn't want to be."¹⁶ It was only later that Micky realised "it was awful to think of switching off loving feelings by shock treatment" and "changed [his] mind."¹⁷ As this chapter elaborates, Micky's near brush with aversion therapy is reasonably representative of many gay people's experiences throughout the sixties and seventies, over which psychiatric intervention loomed as a threat or possibility.

Like many facets of gay liberation politics, this anti-psychiatric tendency was entrenched in the aesthetics and affects of the late sixties' counterculture, highlighting once more how political concepts and critiques frequently attached to a sense of pleasure and excitement during the period. This can be seen in Jeffrey Weeks' anecdotal account of his participation in the GLF's CP group at the

13 Ibid.

14 GLF, "Our Demands Are..." in *Come Together*, 47.

15 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 91.

16 Micky Burbidge, as quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 92.

17 Ibid, 93.

home of its founders, Mary McIntosh and Elizabeth Wilson, "the two leading dykes in GLF", whose reputation as "very articulate" "intellectual" and leading a "very cool lifestyle" made him "slightly nervous."¹⁸ "Lifestyle" and politics in the gay liberation movement frequently folded in on each another, informing peoples' sense that they were part of something historically significant and worthwhile. In many archival accounts of the period, for example, Mary McIntosh's social currency in the movement derives simultaneously from her appealing bohemian lifestyle and her groundbreaking sociological research, in which she theorises a key aspect of gay anti-psychiatric critique: that psychiatrists are "diagnostic agents in the process of social labelling,"¹⁹ responsible for demarcating normal and deviant behaviours. If the broader left-wing critique of psychiatry had been forged in the orbit of countercultural figures like RD Laing, the gay articulation of these arguments also had their own aesthetic life and star intellectuals. Elizabeth, Mary's then partner, also inflected the CP group's critique of psychiatry with insights from her own professional background. She had worked throughout the sixties as "very unhappy psychiatric social worker"²⁰ at the Tavistock Clinic in a child guidance department, a branch of psychiatric care heavily influenced by psychoanalysis, and in Elizabeth's own description, geared towards the "ambitious, humanistic, well-intended" goals of "improv[ing] family life, to relieve the suffering of disturbed children, to promote an ideal of child-centredness."²¹ Reflecting on the realities of her career path, however, she describes her disappointment in discovering its core function, "to police other women"²² by measuring their performance as mothers and caregivers against the yardstick of social gender roles. It was precisely Elizabeth's own feeling of complicity in her work's disciplinary function that spurred her towards the critique of psychiatry: "I was so fed up with my job..." she writes, "so perhaps for me it felt particularly transgressive and wicked and amusing to be involved in this gay liberation and then in the daytime trot off to the Tav."²³ The politics of gay anti-psychiatry thus conveyed a particular, countercultural structure of feeling, relating to the thrill of "transgress[ing]" social norms and, in Elizabeth's case, the drudgeries of a 9 to 5 job. These various snapshots into the life of the CP group speak to how the culture of gay liberation allowed people to openly experience pleasure in the course of political theorisation and organisation.

At the heart of this politics and structure of feeling was confrontation. Protesting psychiatric wards and sector events became commonplace in the early seventies, as with the zaps on Maudsley Hospital and BMA conference in Bradford described in the previous chapter. A further "PsychoZap" at a conference of the British Psychological Society (BPS) is also advertised in a 1973 issue of the London GLF diary, calling readers to action on the basis of the organisation "trying to make our reality their sphere of expertise."²⁴ The BPS had once been a long-time partner of the MRG, who frequently

18 Jeffrey Weeks, as quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, Ibid, 91.

19 McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role," 184.

20 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 91.

21 Elizabeth Wilson, "Memoirs of an Anti-Heroine," in *Radical Records*, 45.

22 Ibid, 44.

23 Ibid.

24 GLF, "Gay Liberation Diary April 5-11," 1973, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

published the work of its research fellows such as Charlotte Wolff on the psychology of lesbianism.²⁵ In the context of an emergent gay anti-psychiatry however, the BPS came to be identified increasingly as an engineer of gay oppression. The "PsychoZap" of the BPS conference had echoes of another fairly momentous anti-psychiatric picket two years prior at the International Congress of Sexology in San Remo, whose "stated aim... was to focus on the most modern therapies for sexual deviance, which included the most humiliating and violent psychiatric treatments."²⁶ According to an article in *Gay International News*, the counter-demonstration to the conference brought together members of "FUORI, the Italian gay activists, FHAR from France, and representatives from the London GLF, and the new movement in Belgium,"²⁷ reflecting the cross-pollination of anti-psychiatric ideas between Western European gay liberation groups. The CP group in GLF was buoyed and given confidence by the growing international anti-psychiatric movement, leading it to develop its own increasingly high-risk, militant forms of direct action against psychiatric institutions. Throughout Britain and Europe, anti-psychiatry fast became a strong tenet of the gay liberation movement.

One of the CP group's most significant theoretical legacies exists in the form of the 1973 pamphlet *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*. The pamphlet's writers published it anonymously under the subheading "Gay liberation pamphlet no.1," although in his contribution to Power's oral history, Jeffrey Weeks names himself, David Hutter, Andrew Hodges and Paul Bunting as some of its writers, many of whom participated in the original CP group. In its critique of psychiatry, the pamphlet introduces a number of key concepts that will be referred back to throughout this chapter. One such concept is the "myth of expertise"²⁸ assumed by psychiatric approaches to homosexuality. "The knowledge that a psychiatrist must also be a medical doctor," the pamphlet explains, "has the effect of extending to psychiatry the respect given to medicine, so that even the silliest psychiatric pronouncements are accepted, since they are made by doctors."²⁹ Psychiatry is presented here as a specialised form of knowledge geared towards the policing of sexual deviance: "it is the task of psychiatry to counter [homosexuals'] repudiation of the appropriate gender-roles by the simple expedient of labelling gay people as sick."³⁰ This extension of medical authority to the institution of psychiatry, the pamphlet argues, manifested too in its role in the British parole system, "which can involve a reduction of a sentence by as much as two-thirds... when the prisoner is prepared to undergo treatment; and there is also a situation when a magistrate allows treatment as an alternative to a prison sentence."³¹ The troubling relationship between gay people and psychiatry thus reflected a more general situation in which the profession's "myth of expertise" could be wielded to intervene in matters of justice. The pamphlet's claim is supported by Robinson's history of the countercultural sixties and seventies in Britain, in which

25 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 144.

26 Evan Calder Williams, "Translator's Preface," in *Towards a Gay Communism*, 77.

27 "San Remo," in *Gay International News*, no.3, May/June 1972, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

28 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual: A Brief Analysis of Oppression, Gay Liberation Pamphlet 1* (London: Pomegranate Press, 1973), 8.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid, 3.

31 Ibid, 22.

"a number of defendants in the counter cultural trials of the time were submitted to actual or threatened detention in psychiatric units. Lesbian mothers lost custody of their children on the basis of unfavourable psychiatric readings of their potential to bring up a 'normal' child. Such medical justifications for political actions added grist to the mill for the increasingly vocal gay activists."³²

The "myth of expertise" identified within *Psychiatry and the Homosexual* thus refers to the authority of psychiatric institutions to police not only sexual behaviour but political activities too, furthering the gay liberation movement's – at once a sexual and political movement – antagonistic orientation towards psychiatry.

Psychiatry and the Homosexual also explores the complex dynamics of freedom and constraint structuring gay people's relationship to psychiatry in the context of the limited and partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. The pamphlet draws attention therefore to a second key concept: "the myth of voluntary freedom,"³³ referring to the idea that gay people were free to seek out or not seek out psychiatric treatment in Britain during the sixties and seventies. Psychiatrists, the writers say, "invariably justify what they do to gay people by saying that homosexuals come 'of their own free will' to their consulting rooms, asking for help."³⁴ While this myth of voluntary treatment conveniently discounted the many instances where referrals to psychiatrists are made via the criminal justice system, it also rests on the questionable assumption that the choice to seek treatment could possibly be meaningfully free, given the social compulsions, pressures and norms permeating post-war British culture, which Bartlett and King note could just as easily take the form of "public humiliation [as] a court order, or pressure from... families."³⁵ "What 'free choice,'" *Psychiatry and the Homosexual* asks, "does society ever offer a young person to decide what he or she wants? They have been bludgeoned every day of their lives into believing that happiness lies only within marriage and the family."³⁶ The idea that psychiatric treatment is freely sought, according to the pamphlet writers, is belied by the compulsory nature of heterosexuality, as enforced through social institutions such as the family, the state, and of course psychiatry. Whether treatment was accessed for free through the NHS, or in private healthcare where there at least existed some semblance of consumer choice, the authority of the psychiatrist is ultimately reaffirmed. When "psychiatry enjoys an unrivalled status as the only authority on homosexuality," the pamphlet states, "obviously the customer has no free choice in this monopoly situation."³⁷ According to this argument, the coercion of homosexuals into psychiatric treatment is mystified as a form of freedom, reflecting a deeper dynamic of freedom and constraint at

32 Robinson, "Three Revolutionary Years," 460.

33 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, 10.

34 Ibid.

35 Michael B King and Annie Bartlett, "British Psychiatry and Homosexuality," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 175 (September 1999), 109.

36 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, 11.

37 Ibid 11.

work in Britain's social institutions. While this dynamic has been introduced in a theoretical register in the introduction to this thesis, it shall be applied more directly to the history of psychiatry throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Psychiatry and the Homosexual therefore brings together critiques of the connected myths of expertise and of voluntary treatment, offering a uniquely gay perspective on the institution of psychiatry. Yet within the gay liberation movement, there was an awareness of and a connectedness to anti-psychiatry as it existed in the wider countercultural and radical left. In a typical meeting of the CP group in GLF, according to Jeffrey Weeks' oral history interview, "we sat around and talked about the whole counter-psychiatry movement, which had been going on through the 1960s, the whole critique of psychiatric practices, the idea that it wasn't so much the individual who was sick and to be treated by objective science but that society itself fucked you up and that you needed ways to deal with that."³⁸ Chapter one touched briefly upon the role of anti-psychiatry in the British countercultural politics of liberation developed during the sixties, primarily through the contributions of Laing and Cooper and coalescing around the 1967 Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation in London. But beyond the cult of personality in which Laing, Cooper et al., thrived as "the Che Guevaras of psychiatry,"³⁹ many grassroots organisations also facilitated solidarity between those who had suffered in clinical settings and produced their own critiques, grounded in experience. For instance, a 1973 edition of the London GLF's diary announces the formation of the Mental Patient's Union (MPU), set up to "work towards the abolition of compulsory treatment" and fight for "the effective rights of patients to refuse specific treatments, as well as the right to refuse to act as guinea pigs for medical experiments."⁴⁰ A 1974 newsletter produced by MPU theorises the processes of diagnosis and designation within psychiatry as conduits of social control: "the psychotic is someone the doctor cannot (or will not) understand. We believe that accusing a person of being mad, schizophrenic or psychotic... is part of the process by which psychiatry treats us as things rather than people... Challenge him for control of your body and mind."⁴¹ In a similar vein to the MPU, the group People Not Psychiatry (PNP) also grew out of the British counterculture in 1969, taking the form of a loose network rather than a union. An advertisement for the local PNP network in the *Brighton Gutter Press* articulates its opposition to the mainstream psychiatric focus "upon the psychopathology of the individual, largely ignoring the patterning of relationships which contributes frequently to the initial diagnosis of 'mental illness'; ignoring for the most part too the pressures of social norms to which we are all subject."⁴² PNP's founder, Michael Barnett describes the network's purpose as being to "shake sick and critical states of mind and being out of the grip of psychiatry and its formalised patterns of approach that... reduced individuals to units, suitable cases for treatment."⁴³ While primarily shaped

38 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 93.

39 As described in the letter section of the *International Times* newspaper by a reader named Mandy Whitlock. "Dear IT...", *IT* 54, 1969, 22.

40 GLF, "Gay Liberation Diary April 5-11," 1973, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

41 Mental Patients' Union, "A Dictionary of the Side Effects of Psychiatric Drugs," 1973, RM/8, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

42 Brighton Anarchists, "Brighton Gutter Press No.7," April 1972, May Day Rooms, London.

43 Michael Barnett, *People, Not Psychiatry* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973), 87.

by the specific vantage point of gayness, gay anti-psychiatry also developed in close contact with, and shared in the critical perspectives of notionally heterosexual grassroots anti-psychiatric groups.

A further current developing in close proximity to gay anti-psychiatry arose from non-aligned left-wing organisations, including the libertarian communist group Solidarity and socialist-feminist group Big Flame. Both groups produced a high volume of critical writing on the social institutions of capitalism during the sixties and seventies. Big Flame's 1978 pamphlet "Red Therapy" for instance, lays out a programme for leaderless, autonomous community therapy and theorises psychiatry as a form of social coercion, one of capitalism's "means of internalised self-discipline and motivation amongst its labour force."⁴⁴ As with "most psychological means of control," within capitalism, the pamphlet argues, the institution of psychiatry is reliant on "convincing the person in question – whether worker, patient, housewife or child – that really her or his interests are the same as that of whatever institution they are in – factory, hospital, family, school – so that the correct motivation is instilled."⁴⁵ In a 1974 article in Solidarity's organisational magazine, a writer using the moniker "H.W.B.F." explores the mechanics of psychiatric control in relation to homosexuality, acknowledging that "since the law permitting acts between consenting adults... aversion therapy is generally done with the consent of the person," arguing that this consent is nevertheless leveraged "by the ideological pressures of society," whereby a person is "persuaded... that he wishes to choose this 'treatment'... clearly a far more pernicious process than the naked power behind treatment in a Special Security Hospital (for those detained under the 1959 Mental Health Act, e.g. in Broadmoor)."⁴⁶ In a similar vein to the writers behind *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, Solidarity's H.W.B.F. connects psychiatric power and its subtleties to a capitalist organisation of healthcare, noting that "therapy, like anything else in a capitalist economic system, can be made into a commodity."⁴⁷ In both Big Flame and Solidarity's analyses, then, the institution of psychiatry is understood as belonging to a specifically *capitalist* society. For the Big Flame writers, the essence of capitalist psychiatry lies in its mystification of personal emotions and desires by making them appear identical to the impersonal compulsions of accumulation. Similarly, for Solidarity, the spectral quality of the commodity haunts social institutions such as the NHS, whose commodification is heralded as an imminent possibility in the mid-seventies, bringing with it "economic exploitation of the consumers (patients) [to] complement the present exploitation of the staff."⁴⁸ Here, the power of psychiatry to constrain and compel rests both in its illusion of consumer/patient choice combined with the multifarious disciplinary and bureaucratic procedures that accompany increasing commodification.

In this excursion through various critiques of psychiatry on the radical left, as with the explicit form of gay anti-psychiatry expounded in *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, we find the institution of psychiatry

44 Big Flame, "Red Therapy" (Rye Express, 1978), 10, May Day Rooms, London.

45 Ibid, 11.

46 HWBF, "Politics in All Therapy," *Solidarity for Workers' Power*, 1974, 22-23, Libcom.

47 Ibid, 27.

48 Ibid.

increasingly tied to the social reproduction of capitalism. While this relationship between capitalism and psychiatry feature mostly gesturally within these archival texts, a shared thread connecting each of them is the sense that psychiatry, along with other social institutions, is somehow, irreducibly capitalist. Before coming to a close, this chapter section now draws out this implication, thinking about what it might mean to describe psychiatry as capitalist. Where these various perspectives seem to converge, first and foremost, is around the idea that the formal freedom to seek out or reject forms of therapy is in fact underpinned by a range of coercive social forces. Here, we can draw an analogy with the dynamics of freedom and constraint integral to capitalist society. In the final section of my introduction, I argued that the capitalist system of labour pivots on a form of freedom that contains its opposite. What this means, for Marx, is that the formal freedom to sell one's labour power – without direct coercion – is the differentiating and constitutive characteristic of the capitalist system of labour. In the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism, Marx describes the newly formed proletariat as a "free and rightless proletariat [which] could not possibly be absorbed by the nascent manufacturers as fast as it was thrown upon the world."⁴⁹ This "free and rightless" condition comes from Marx's use of the German term *vogelfrei*, which Fowkes' translator's note clarifies, literally means "as free as a bird."⁵⁰ In other words, the proletarian is under no direct, external compulsion to work, yet is simultaneously "freed" (dispossessed) of everything else *but* their labour power, including the means to meet their own needs directly. They are therefore subjected to an internal, indirect form of compulsion, given no choice but to subsist via the mediation of the wage. They must moreover exist in a position of increasing superfluity to the wage, due to the tendency within capitalism to reduce socially necessary labour time to a minimum, and the dwindling of wages in comparison to the requirements for sustaining life. As Marx asserts in the *Grundrisse*, "the concept of the free labourer contains the pauper,"⁵¹ and so inclusion in the capitalist system of free labour necessitates the condition of exclusion. The proletarian condition is thus fundamentally fragile, a form of inclusion that contains the possibility of its own exclusion.

This dialectic of freedom and constraint foundational to capitalism finds expression in actual lived, realities, which is where the role of social institutions comes into view. As Alan Sears has argued, "the combination of consent and compulsion that underlies basic labour relations under capitalism also shapes the realities of sexual freedom within the bounds of that freedom."⁵² The institutionalisation of heterosexuality, for example, naturalises the capitalist division of labour and mediates the modes of subsistence available to the working class. The unfreedom underpinning the formal freedom of the worker can thus be understood as operating on expanding scale, conditioning peoples' social and sexual relationships as well as their relationship to labour. If the capitalist system of labour is premised on the dispossession of workers from the means to subsist directly, then "the establishment of bourgeois sexual hegemony" within capitalist society, to return to Chitty, can be

49 Marx, *Capital vol. 1*, 896.

50 Ibid.

51 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 604.

52 Alan Sears, "Body Politics: The Social Reproduction of Sexualities," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, (London: Pluto, 2017), 172.

considered "tantamount to a kind of enclosure, forming one episode in a long history of accumulation by dispossession."⁵³ The subjection of gay people to psychiatric treatments thus expresses and reinforces the "quasi-universal condition of propertylessness"⁵⁴ structuring proletarian life more generally. As with the worker's fragile inclusion in the capitalist labour market (wherein the concept of the free labourer ever contains the pauper), the freedoms afforded to gay people during the sixties and seventies should be understood as limited, conditional, and heavily mediated by psychiatric institutions. The fragile form of social inclusion extended to gay people in the sixties and seventies must likewise be understood as containing the threat of exclusion. While the specificities of this relationship remain elusive in the various critiques of psychiatry surveyed above, they do seem to concur at the very least that the social control wielded by psychiatrists rested on marking out some forms of life as different, sick, deviant and perverse. As explored in previous chapters, capitalist value relations thrive on the existence of a pliable, hierarchised and stratified working class, whose inclusion in the wage relation always contains the possibility of exclusion. The institution of psychiatry arising within capitalism furthers this social differentiation upon which the social reproduction depends. In line with the insights of open marxism threaded throughout this thesis, we can understand the social institution of psychiatry to be a capitalist institution, therefore, not in the sense that it is singularly determined by a set of laws or structures, but in the sense that it mutually forms and is formed by capitalist class relations. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, we will see how the changing structure of psychiatry in Britain continued to mediate and stratify social life in Britain, with uneven and often unpredictable effects upon gay life.

3. Restructuring of twentieth-century mental healthcare provision

The previous section introduced a dialectic of freedom and unfreedom – in which so often conditions of unfreedom can appear as freedom and vice versa – at work in the subjection of gay life to psychiatric treatment in the sixties and seventies. This section now identifies how this situation – which I call the psychiatrisation of homosexuality – came to be, via a series of historical shifts in the British state's provision of mental healthcare. Over the course of this historical narrative, we see in further detail how psychiatric institutions combined the experiences of freedom and constraint. Joan Busfield has identified a string of key developments within mental healthcare provision in the interwar years, in which some of the precedents for psychiatrisation were set. In particular, the 1930 Mental Treatment Act changed the landscape of mental healthcare by introducing "a new category of voluntary treatment for those who were willing and able,"⁵⁵ and by setting up publicly funded outpatient clinics, facilitating the "integration of the mental health services into the medical mainstream."⁵⁶ This move towards a more integrated mental healthcare service also heralded a

53 Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony*, 34.

54 Ibid, 27.

55 Joan Busfield, "Restructuring Mental Health Services in Twentieth Century Britain" in *Cultures of Psychiatry and Mental Health Care in Postwar Britain and The Netherlands*, 15.

56 Ibid, 16.

recession of the public asylum. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the figure of the asylum, "developed within the framework of the Poor Law" had been "the centre point of the mental health services in Britain."⁵⁷ Exercising legal powers of detention and physically cutting off those deemed insane from the rest of society, asylums were custodial institutions, described by Nick Crossley as "vast receptacles for the concealment and safekeeping of lunacy."⁵⁸ The mental health reforms introduced in the interwar years are therefore considered by both Busfield and Crossley as the beginning of the end of custodialism – known for "high walls, closed doors and tight security measures"⁵⁹ – moving mental healthcare away from the spatially distinct location of the asylum and into the world of general medicine.

This integration of mental healthcare provision into general health services only accelerated in the postwar years with the invention of the NHS. The 1944 white paper "A National Health Service" was the first of the NHS plans to seriously consider this integration, recommending that "mental health services should be taken over by the new joint authority... in accord with the principle, declared by the Royal Commission on Mental Disorder, that the treatment of mental disorder should be approximate as nearly to the treatment of physical ailments as is consistent with the special safeguards."⁶⁰ As a vocal supporter of integration, Aneurin Bevan's promotion to Minister of Health and leadership in the creation of the NHS, cemented the plans to integrate, on the basis that "the separation of mental from physical treatment is a survival from primitive conceptions."⁶¹ The retreat (though by no means disappearance) of custodial forms of mental healthcare was thus wrapped in a discourse of progress and humanitarianism, in cohesion with the postwar Labour government's socially democratic project, designed to "*medicalise and humanise* pauper lunatics,"⁶² the term by which mentally ill, propertyless people had previously been categorised.

The integration of mental health services was a slow and uneven process, with many of its aims and effects only realised many years later. It wasn't until the 1954-7 Royal Commission on the Law Relating to Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency and the subsequent 1959 Mental Health Act, that the residential population of mental hospitals actually began to decline, a process described succinctly by Andrew Scull as "decarceration."⁶³ This legislation was specific to England and Wales however, and the process of decarceration developed unevenly across the rest of Britain. As Vicky Long details, the 1960 Mental Health (Scotland) Act "enshrined the principles of extramural care"⁶⁴ only one year after the 1959 Mental Health Act effective south of the border, but "inadequate

57 Ibid, 11.

58 Nick Crossley, *Contesting Psychiatry: Social Movements in Mental Health* (London: Routledge, 2006), 50.

59 Ibid.

60 Ministry of Health, "A National Health Service" (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1944), 36/H24/41, Warwick Digital Collections, https://cdm21047.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/health/id/114/rec/1_15.

61 Busfield, "Restructuring Mental Health Services," 16.

62 Crossley, *Contesting Psychiatry*, 50.

63 Andrew T. Scull, *Decarceration: Community Treatment and the Deviant - A Radical View* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 1.

64 Vicky Long, "'Heading up a Blind Alley'? Scottish Psychiatric Hospitals in the Era of Deinstitutionalization," *History of Psychiatry* 28, no. 1 (2016), 10.

resources"⁶⁵ led to a significant lag in the development of community care alternatives. Meanwhile, the 1948 Health Services Act (Northern Ireland), integrated the province's six mental hospitals into a general hospital structure, understood by Pauline Prior to be "due primarily to a new commitment by the Westminster government to public service provision in Northern Ireland."⁶⁶ Yet it was not until the mid-sixties that the residential population of Northern Irish mental hospitals began to fall significantly, reflecting a several-year lag in the evolution of mental healthcare outside of England and Wales.

The application of decarceration across Britain – and resourcing of alternatives to the mental hospital – was therefore uneven, if loosely following a similar pattern. Besides designating "a state-sponsored policy of closing down asylums, prisons and reformatories,"⁶⁷ Scull notes that the concept of decarceration also implicitly signified "a shift in social control styles and practices,"⁶⁸ in step with the general expansion of social welfare in the post-war years. As residential inpatient populations declined in the fifties, alternative strategies of mental healthcare provision were developed, such as that of "care in the community." Nebulously defined, community care generally referred to mental health services administered outside of mental hospitals, within the remit of public sector institutions. The 1957 Report on the aforementioned Royal Commission thus described community care as largely taking the form of

"...supervision from the local health authorities while living in the general community, without compulsory control, though there is always the possibility in the background of compulsory admission to hospital or guardianship if the social conditions in which the defective lives, or his own behaviour, deteriorate to the extent that it becomes necessary to remove him from his home for his own protection."⁶⁹

Community care therefore incorporated a more socially diffused form of mental healthcare, incorporating the work of an emergent professional sector including general practice, social work, psychiatry and psychotherapy. These transformations in the field did not put a complete stop to incarceration as a psychiatric strategy, however. On the contrary, community care leveraged "willing" participation from its patients on the very basis of the prospect of forced institutionalisation ever lurking, in the above report's phrasing, "in the background." Once again, the forms of consent and freedom embodied in the development of community care contained the spectral presence of unfreedom. The term "decarceration" should therefore be used with some caution, not least because the quantitative reduction in incarcerations it signified went hand in hand with the mobilisation of other forms of carceral control.

65 Ibid, 11.

66 Pauline Prior, "Mental Health Policy in Northern Ireland," *Social Policy & Administration* 27, no. 4 (1993), 327.

67 Scull, *Decarceration*, 1.

68 Ibid, 152.

69 Lord Eustace Percy, "Royal Commission on the Law Relating to Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency 1954-1957," *Command Papers* (House of Commons, 1957), <https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1956-046595?accountid=9727>, 208.

Community care moreover depended on a massive and uneven injection of capital into the public sector following the second world war, accompanying results-driven economic and social imperatives. The field of social work, for example, emerging at the intersection of criminality and mental health, was geared towards making good on that investment. In Jennings' estimation, its purpose was to "address postwar anxieties about juvenile delinquency and the nuclear family by intervening in 'problem families,'"70 but I would add that it also functioned to reproduce those anxieties by affirming or sanctioning certain behaviours in line with social conceptions of deviance and normality. Certainly, this was the perspective of many proponents of gay anti-psychiatry during the sixties and seventies, as with Elizabeth Wilson's aforementioned disenchantment with her role as a psychiatric social worker to "police other women."⁷¹ Likewise, a letter by Andy Lipman featured in Bradford GLF's 1976 newsletter, *Graft*, de-mystifies some of the contradictions of community care, expressing the desire of the gay liberation movement "to care for and help each other back into our communities and out of the hands of the pseudo-scientific 'experts' whether they be doctors, social workers or whatever."⁷² The reality of the community care model, as it was encountered in the gay movement, thus constituted a dissemination of psychiatric power throughout emergent professional sectors.

The expansion of the post-war welfare state can therefore be understood, following Demetra Kotouza, as a form of state-managed philanthropy, involving "investigative officers and retraining and reform centres still in operation, albeit at a smaller scale, providing expert knowledge on local 'needs'."⁷³ In this sense, "philanthropy had retained its policing role,"⁷⁴ a feature of British statecraft that Kotouza traces back to the Poor Laws of the 1830s. Analogously, we might reimagine the softening touch of mental healthcare over the course of the twentieth century as a remodeling of (rather than break from) the carceral approach of nineteenth century psychiatry. Despite terminological shifts that left behind conceptions of the "pauper lunatic," and organisational shifts that saw a retreat in compulsory institutionalisation, Scull notes that "for many... ex-inmates and potential inmates, the alternative to the institution has been to be herded into newly emerging 'deviant ghettos,' sewers of human misery and what is conventionally defined as social pathology."⁷⁵ For those who "became lost in the interstices of social life,"⁷⁶ the realities of community care could mean a life of underemployment, social exclusion, and a permanent reliance on welfarism. While the dissolution of custodial institutions with powers of forced detention created better opportunities for mentally ill people to live more comfortable and less directly surveilled lives, these critical perspectives on decarceration emphasise the important point that historical transformations are

70 Jennings, "The Most Uninhibited Party They'd Ever Been to," 892.

71 Wilson, "Memoirs of an anti-heroine," in *Radical Records*, 45

72 Andy Lipman, "Letter," *Graft*, April 1976, HCA/Thornycroft/1/2, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

73 Demetra Kotouza, "Lies and Mendacity," *Mute*, 2006, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/lies-and-mendacity>.

74 Ibid.

75 Scull, *Decarceration*, 153.

76 Ibid.

rarely simply good or bad, progressive or regressive. Rather, thinking in terms of contradiction, we can see how the freedoms and improvements mobilised by care in the community also renewed forms of stigma and marginality within the mental healthcare system.

The transformations in mental healthcare in the twentieth century do not tell a story of straightforward progress and improvement, therefore. Processes of decarceration and integration went hand in hand with the creation of new, non-custodial forms of policing and control. The emergent consensus on mental illness as a medical problem mobilised new medical solutions, and so the strategy of community care was accompanied by a slew of therapies that would become very familiar to gay people in the sixties and seventies. From the late 1930s, innovations in the technology of mental healthcare began to emerge, initially including "coma and convulsion therapies, such as insulin coma therapy and electro-convulsive therapy (ECT)," and later, "developments includ[ing] lobotomy and leucotomy."⁷⁷ As Crossley elaborates, "these treatments are all biological in character. They assume that mental illnesses have a biological cause and attempt to cure them by inducing biological changes."⁷⁸ From the 1950s onwards, these techniques were accompanied by an "expanding gamut of psychotropic medications" which "gave a new rationale for, and legitimacy to, psychiatric intervention."⁷⁹ The rise of biomedical approaches and the incorporation of mental disorder into public health may therefore have diminished the power of individual mental hospitals and their medical superintendents, but they also effectively expanded the authority of a wider class of professionals and practitioners to legitimise invasive and controversial treatments.

These transformations – the integration of mental healthcare into medicine, the development of community care and the slow retreat first of the public asylum and later of the mental hospital – have provoked much debate among historians as to the status of psychiatry as an institution in the late twentieth century. Busfield summarises these debates within her own ambivalent reading of the sector's history. On one hand, she understands community care and the diversification of mental health provision as introducing a range of competing knowledges that threatened to displace the authority of "psychiatry" as a discrete field. In particular, "the move away from mental hospitals" as distinct arenas of care, signal for Busfield "a potential loss of empire for psychiatrists."⁸⁰ So far in this chapter however, the forms of anti-psychiatric critique I have engaged with have tended to think of psychiatry as both a specific profession *and* in more general terms, as a set of approaches towards policing and moulding social behaviour. According to Lovell et al., "the unity of the system [of psychiatry] really lies in the diversity of the services it undertakes to provide,"⁸¹ and its broad reach into the "community," as opposed to the consolidation of specific practices. Busfield also touches upon this train of thought, considering that psychiatry's "empire" may have fractured into "new

⁷⁷ Crossley, *Contesting Psychiatry*, 56.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Busfield, "Restructuring Mental Health Services," 20.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 23.

⁸¹ Anne Lovell et al., *The Psychiatric Society*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), xxi.

empires – a range of smaller but more numerous satellite states,⁸² rather than withering away. This leads her to introduce the key concept of "the psychiatrisation of society" to describe the technocratic reorganisation of psychiatric institutions in the twentieth century. If psychiatrisation refers to a spreading, or a diffusion of practices, then, the psychiatrisation of homosexuality, as theorised in this chapter, is a useful way to think about how psychiatry extended its reach into the lives of gay people during the sixties and seventies.

4. The psychiatrisation of homosexuality

Having traced some of the key transformation in the field of mental healthcare in twentieth century Britain, I now want to bring these shifts to bear on the particular situation of gay people in the sixties and seventies. If decarceration had been a key organising principle of the restructuring of mental healthcare leading up to this period, its logic also informed the uneven and partial decriminalisation of homosexuality being worked out in the 1957 Wolfenden Report and subsequent Sexual Offences Act in 1967. The legislation reclassified sexual activity between men from a criminal problem into a more generally social problem, joining lesbianism in the ranks of social ills that could be policed through less direct means. This change in tack was also reflected in the evolution of medical approaches to homosexuality. According to Tommy Dickinson, the "shifting of control and power from the courts to the medical profession" marked by Wolfenden, was capitalised upon by practitioners, who now began "optimistically promoting their worth in being able to cure these individuals by reporting successful outcomes."⁸³ While assembling the 1957 Report, therefore, the Wolfenden committee consulted a pool of doctors "drawn mainly from psychiatry, forensic medicine, venereology and general practice."⁸⁴ The results of that consultation are a case study in the intermeshing of medicine with political, social and moral concerns, since, "despite reluctantly conceding that the age of consent for men should be 21 years, the BMA report was also replete with moral disdain for homosexuals, who were considered in the same light as prostitutes."⁸⁵ Pre-figuring the overall conclusions of the Wolfenden committee, the BMA's recommendations emphasised that "prison is not usually the most suitable place for dealing with the offender, and many, especially first offenders, could be helped more effectively by medical treatment and moral encouragement outside the prison."⁸⁶ The approaches proposed in the report therefore combined preventative forms of action, such as "the encouragement of social conditions favourable to development of normal heterosexual love,"⁸⁷ as well as moral interventions that included religious conversion therapies,

82 Ibid.

83 Tommy Dickinson, *Curing Queers: Mental Nurses and Their Patients, 1935–74* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 65.

84 King and Bartlett, "British Psychiatry and Homosexuality," 109.

85 Ibid. It should be noted that the writers mention prostitution here because of the Wolfenden Report's explicit grouping of homosexuality and sex work in the same category of sexual offences, not to use the latter as a moral foil to the former.

86 British Medical Association, "Homosexuality and Prostitution: BMA Memorandum of Evidence for Departmental Committee," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 4954 (1955), 167.

87 Ibid, 169.

deemed a valid means of helping "he (or she) [to] become spiritually fortified to overcome his sexual orientation."⁸⁸ Their contribution to the report thus advocated for a new social approach to homosexuality, simultaneously highly pragmatic and medical as overtly moralising.

Sasha Durakov's understanding of psychiatry as "chiefly related to the matter of the technical resolution of contradictions,"⁸⁹ speaks presciently to the opportunistic attempt of the BMA to make its own kind of sense out of the "problem" of homosexuality, at a time when direct criminalisation was falling out of favour. Its report attempted to do just that by creating an opening for psychiatry, now integrated into general medicine, to offer highly technical solutions in the form of experimental therapies and treatments. This technical attitude was reflected in the BMA's explicit taxonomy of homosexuals by "degree and type of homosexuality,"⁹⁰ also theorising as to how people's class positions might make them more or less amenable to different treatments. While "well-compensated homosexuals of good character" were seen as liable to benefit from "analytical psychotherapy," more vulnerable "young adults and adolescents who require protection from effects which might delay their transition through a temporary phase" were seen as better suited to "psychiatric and social treatment."⁹¹ For "highly sexed" lascivious homosexuals – those more likely to be among the "seriously damaged personalities"⁹² category – the report recommended the use of physical and drug treatments "such as ECT or abreaction" in order to "produce temporary cessation or diminution of sexual desire."⁹³ Encouraging the liberal use of these largely experimental practices, and collapsing together social and moral concerns, the BMA's intervention into the social management of homosexuality exemplify what Durakov has described as the psychiatric "circuit of control," in which "psychiatric status is used to define a population's needs so that psychiatric treatment becomes the goal."⁹⁴ The opportunism of the medical establishment in the Wolfenden years thus created a key condition of possibility for the heightened authority of psychiatric approaches to homosexuality arising in the sixties and seventies and generating new antagonisms with the emergent gay liberation movement.

Many of the BMA's recommendations did ultimately come into force when medical treatments designed "to change homosexuals into heterosexuals peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s."⁹⁵ Psychiatric and medical approaches to homosexuality after Wolfenden lived up to the BMA's vision of a diverse and experimental set of technical practices. While it was commonplace for private homosexual patients to be offered some form of psychoanalytic therapy, treatment through the NHS

88 Ibid, 170.

89 Sasha Durakov, "The Dream of the Outside: Deinstitutionalization, Anti-Psychiatry, and the Move Into the 'Community,'" *Of Unsound Mind* (blog), 2021, <https://www.unsoundmind.org/post/the-dream-of-the-outside-deinstitutionalization-anti-psychiatry-and-the-move-into-the-community>.

90 BMA, "Homosexuality and Prostitution," 168.

91 Ibid, 169.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Durakov, "The Dream of the Outside."

95 Glenn Smith, Annie Bartlett, and Michael King, "Treatments of Homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s—an Oral History: The Experience of Patients," *BMJ Online*, 2004, 1.

involved a wider variation of techniques, in which behavioural aversion therapy was the most common.⁹⁶ Most archival accounts cited in this chapter make reference to aversion therapy, largely because they were recorded by people who couldn't affordably pursue private treatment. Aversion therapy arose from a particular strand of psychiatry known as behaviourism, resting on the understanding that problematic or deviant behaviours could be corrected via behavioural conditioning. The field was strongly influenced by Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov, famous for conditioning dogs to salivate when presented with certain stimuli.⁹⁷ After Wolfenden, the principles of behaviourism increasingly informed medical approaches to homosexuality. A 1970 paper by behavioural psychiatrists, MacCulloch and Feldman, explained their core principle that "the therapist can retrain his patient in the essential social preliminaries of heterosexual behaviour,"⁹⁸ revealing an understanding of homosexuality not simply as a social problem, but a behavioural problem. As Bartlett and King elaborate, this reflected a shift in the medical consensus of the time on homosexuality, since "a study of doctors' attitudes carried out in the early 1970s indicates that although only 8% of psychiatrists considered homosexuality a disease, 69% regarded it as an aberrant behaviour pattern."⁹⁹ Practitioners cemented the association of homosexuality with deviance, and subsequently adopted a range of therapeutic techniques aimed at straightening out deviant behaviour. Aversion therapy – a key target of gay anti-psychiatry in the sixties and seventies – constituted "the logical extension of Pavlov's classical conditioning"¹⁰⁰ by mimicking the study of animal behaviour in laboratories. The technique usually involved attempting to get its subject into a state of sexual arousal via the use of photographic stimuli, followed by administering electroconvulsive shocks and/or emetic drugs to deconstruct the patient's erotic response. As summarised by a 1972 special feature on aversion therapy in the countercultural magazine *7 Days*, behaviourism rested on the simultaneously over-simplifying and over-technical idea that "nasty experiences: nasty associations."¹⁰¹

Before examining further the actual indignities involved in these practices, as they were experienced by gay people in the sixties and seventies, it is worth expanding a little on behaviourism's problematic politics, and the reasons it drew so much opposition on the countercultural left, both within and beyond the gay liberation movement. According to Phil Brown, British radicals on the anti-psychiatry scene "opposed behaviorist models which applied a highly reductionist model of stimulus-response conditioning and learning, a model full of narrow, empirical observations but with little sense of the social whole."¹⁰² In other words, behaviourism extracted human activity from its social context and reduced it to a series of patterns capable of being learned and unlearned. As illustrated in the image

96 Ibid, 2.

97 Dickinson, *Curing Queers*, 65.

98 As quoted by King and Bartlett, "British Psychiatry and Homosexuality," 108.

99 Ibid, 110.

100 Dickinson, *Curing Queers*, 65.

101 John Mathews and David Triesman, "Aversion Therapy: Treating People Like Rats," *7 Days* 18, 1 March 1972, Amiel Melburn Trust Internet Archive.

102 Phil Brown, "Marxism, Social Psychology and the Sociology of Mental Health," *International Journal of Health Studies*, 14.2, 1984, 238.

in Fig. 4, below, of a person trapped on a hamster wheel (which accompanied the abovementioned article in *7 Days*) behavioural aversion therapy appeared as particularly dehumanising, cold and cruel to those who prized the countercultural politics and aesthetics of freedom and self-expression. The writers of the article, Mathews and Triesman, critique behaviourism – then becoming something of a popular science with contemporary practitioners like Fred Skinner rising to fame – for its efforts to scientifically rationalise, "predict and control"¹⁰³ human emotion and behaviour. The article names behaviourism as a form of social engineering, sifting out abnormal and deviant behaviour from its subjects and individualising pathology in a way that occludes its role in the reproduction of class relations. What behaviourists won't tell you, the writers argue, is that "engineers come from the technocratic ruling class, and the individuals whose behaviour is to be 'corrected' will come from subordinate classes, and will be 'cured' by virtue of the fact that they have limited access to objects or states which are designated as rewards."¹⁰⁴ The article therefore raises the important point that not only did behavioural psychiatry mystify the conditions and experiences of ill mental health "within the social whole,"¹⁰⁵ but it also produced them by reinforcing the existing distribution of resources by which punishment and reward are administered.

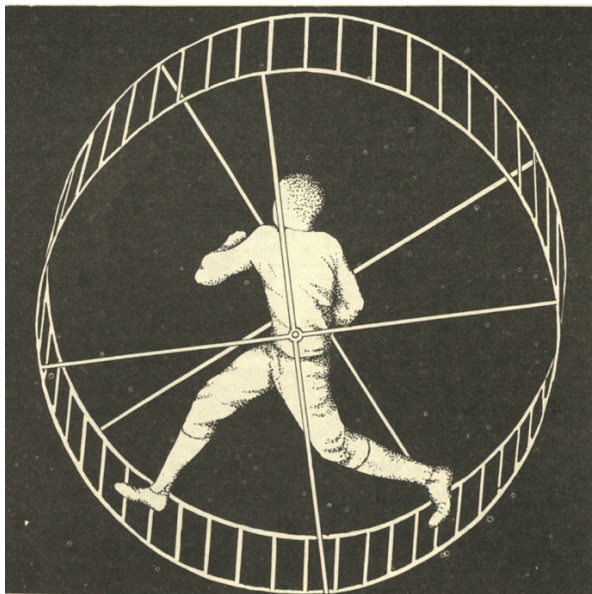


Fig 4. Illustration from John Mathews and David Triesman, "Aversion Therapy: Treating People Like Rats," *7 Days*, March 1, 1972, Amiel Melburn Trust Internet Archive.

The critique of behavioural aversion therapy found some of its most powerful articulations in the emergent gay liberation movement. *Psychiatry and the Homosexual* voices a very similar critique to that of the *7 Days* article, attacking the scientific rationalism of behavioural psychology. ("For behaviourists, the proper study of mankind is rats."¹⁰⁶) The pamphlet also situates the practice as an mutation of nineteenth century forms of carcerality, arguing that "the very process of associating sex with pain puts us back into the nineteenth century, with its wicker cages to prevent masturbation, but

103 Mathews and Triesman, "Aversion Therapy," 18.

104 Ibid.

105 Brown, "Marxism, Social Psychology and the Sociology of Mental Health," 238.

106 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, 7.

our twentieth-century practitioners are acting at a deeper level. They are no longer punishing the act, but attempting to enter the mind and destroy deviant desire."¹⁰⁷ Here the pamphlet highlights the insidiousness of contemporary psychiatric power to penetrate the very desires and emotions associated with homosexual behaviour. Its commentary on the transformations of psychiatric power echoes those expounded in Laing's *The Divided Self*, which critiqued the behaviourist tendency within psychiatry as "a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behaviour that is adjusted by (preferably) non-injurious torture."¹⁰⁸ Laing's anti-psychiatry also shares with *Psychiatry and the Homosexual* an emphasis on the residual elements of the nineteenth century madhouse within contemporary psychiatric practices, writing that, even in the most progressive and enlightened institutions, "where straightjackets are abolished, doors are unlocked, leucotomies largely forgone, these can be replaced by more subtle lobotomies and tranquilisers that place the bars of Bedlam and the locked doors inside the patient."¹⁰⁹ These texts therefore depict psychiatrisation as a process involving the dispersal of carceral mechanisms throughout society, as well as their internalisation into the human psyche via ever subtler therapies and treatments.

A similar conception of psychiatric power is sketched out in an article in the second issue of *Come Together* (December 1970), where the writer – a nurse in a mental hospital going only by "Martyn," – describes the central aim of aversion therapy as "breaking down the individual's pleasurable response to someone of the same sex that he/she might feel drawn to emotionally and physically, and substituting an aversion reaction."¹¹⁰ The delegation of the task of administering the "emetic drug or electric shock almost invariably [to] a psychiatric nurse,"¹¹¹ moreover tended to distance the doctor themselves from the ordeal, thereby maintaining their authority and appearance of trustworthiness, while "destroying a potentially supportive relationship"¹¹² between patients and lower level staff. The growing authority of psychiatric professionals hinged too on the diminishing job security of the sector's lowest paid workers. Martyn goes on to describe an incident in his place of work where "a colleague of mine, a young, skilled and compassionate ward sister, was dismissed when it was discovered that she was having a love affair with one of the female student nurses. (After all, she might assault the patients.)"¹¹³ The culture of suspicion and policing within this mental hospital thus extended to its workforce, so that "to challenge, question or protest about the treatment meted out to a homosexual patient, renders one 'suspect,'"¹¹⁴ and thus vulnerable to disciplinary proceedings and dismissal. The critiques of aversion therapy in *Psychiatry and the Homosexual* and *Come Together* – written in historical and experiential proximity to the practices they describe – provide further insight into the shifting status of mental healthcare traced in this chapter. They testify to an organisation of

107 Ibid.

108 RD Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1960), 12.

109 Ibid.

110 Martyn, "Homosexuality and Therapy," in *Come Together*, 53.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid, 54.

114 Ibid, 53.

mental healthcare under the rubric of "care in the community" that consolidated authority within a class of psychiatric professionals, dispossessing both patients and lower-paid staff of the capacity to exert any actual communal influence over the therapeutic process. They also speak to the evolutions of psychiatric power following decarceration. While it generally became less common for psychiatrists to detain the mentally ill and sexually deviant directly (though these powers did remain in a residual form), the medical profession was given licence to sculpt the behaviour, emotions, capacities and relationships of their patients in the name of scientific experimentation.

As this chapter has already begun to expound, the pathologisation of homosexual desire registered profoundly at the level of everyday experience. Interfacing with psychiatry as workers and patients, many people within the orbit of gay liberation drew on their experiences of conflict and contradiction within the clinic to form the basis of an emergent gay anti-psychiatry. While the sources I have drawn upon so far have tended to take an overtly political form – as pamphlets and articles from the archive of gay anti-psychiatry – there is also much to be gleaned about the historical processes tracked in this chapter from the more descriptive, testimonial accounts that also sit within this archive. Accounts of psychiatric practices do more than empirically support periodising claims about the evolving character of the capitalist state – they also tell us about how its processes of social differentiation and control were lived, felt and embodied and in turn point to the underpinning relations between the various social institutions of the family, judicial system and clinic. The remainder of this chapter section therefore considers some shared experiences – of familial pressure, violence, carcerality, emotional healing and changes to sexual desire – and draws out their implications for the social role of psychiatry.

4.1 Family Pressure

In Bartlett, King and Smith's oral history on medical treatments of homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s, the majority of its interviewee pool had been "impelled... to seek professional help" by "hostile family and social attitudes... rather than the police or courts."¹¹⁵ The same can be said of many accounts of psychiatric treatment spanning the archival materials I have reviewed. In the first series of the National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS) conducted in 1986, discussions of psychiatry by respondents almost invariably refer to familial pressure or rejection. One respondent – a young gay man from Glasgow – reflected on coming out in the early sixties in Scotland, noting that his parents "insisted I went to a psychiatrist at Gartnavel (until the passing of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960 it had a dreadful (deservedly) reputation and was called the 'Loony Bin' by everyone and used as a 'threat' if you were troublesome...) It was a futile gesture."¹¹⁶ The spectre of institutionalisation still loomed large over gay life during the sixties, though not just in Scotland where decarceration had happened at a slower pace than in England. While this NLGS respondent was unwilling to go along

¹¹⁵ Bartlett, Smith and King, "Treatments of Homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s," 2.

¹¹⁶ "Contributor Code: 169," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

with his parent's insistence upon psychiatric treatment, others were less resistant to traveling through the referral pipeline from family to GP to psychiatric ward. Jivani's *It's Not Unusual* includes a lengthy interview with a gay man named Peter Price, who in 1963 put himself up for [aversion therapy] under pressure from his family."¹¹⁷ In Peter's own words, "I knew in my heart of hearts that I would never be cured but for my mother's sake, I decided to see if there was a road I could go down that would help me."¹¹⁸ Similarly, Jack Babuscio's anthology of homosexual counselling experiences, *We Speak for Ourselves*, includes an account written by a young lesbian, Sandra, who upon telling her parents she was gay at the age of 17 was swiftly ushered into psychotherapy. Her mother's

"...first words were: 'What are you *saying* to me?' She repeated that twice. Then she told my father. He came into the room and slapped me across the face... I was sent to our GP and he advised therapy. One month after telling my parents, I had my first appointment with a psychotherapist... As for my parents they kept hoping I'd be 'cured'. They also warned me against ever telling anyone about being gay. They were very concerned about what our relatives and neighbours would think.... I think they thought, at first, I had devised some cruel means of hurting them."¹¹⁹

The combination of physical violence, shock and emotional manipulation in Sandra's parents' response here paints a picture of a heterosexual family trying and failing to make sense of gayness. Their intuitive recourse to medical expertise seems to indicate that the growing pathologisation of homosexual desire in postwar Britain in turn helped shape familial responses to it, where a mother literally cannot parse the emotional content of her daughter's confession ("What are you *saying* to me?") and feels the only socially appropriate, respectable solution to be deference to a medical professional.

Another response to the NLGS – written by a young lesbian living in England – illustrates the indirect power of familial expectation and pressure even prior to coming out. She recounts an anecdote from her own time spent in a mental hospital in the sixties, relating to a fellow patient:

"...in my inpatients group (I was hospitalised for three months) there was one man who, after several weeks of the ten-week course, disclosed that he was homosexual. He was in his late 30s, a teacher, and found it extremely painful to tell us about his homosexuality; he had not been able to come out to his parents. The therapist and I (everyone else seemed to shy off) encouraged him to confront his feelings about his parents in relation to his sexuality; as he struggled to speak his head began to corkscrew away from his body, and he was helpless to

117 Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, 124.

118 Ibid.

119 Jack Babuscio, *We Speak for Ourselves: Experiences in Homosexual Counselling*, (London: SPCKm 1976), 97.

stop this – his parents were literally screwing him up and tearing him apart. He failed, in the end, to speak with his parents, and not long after he killed himself."¹²⁰

The respondent's visceral description of her fellow patient speaks to the forms of coercion and violence embedded in family life. In this scenario, the man in question – an adult in his thirties, economically independent and not out – has been subjected to the intense psychological pressure of familial expectation to the point of suicide, at least in the eyes of the respondent, another gay patient with a difficult relationship to her family. This moment of resonance between the respondent and the man over a perceived shared situation seems to illustrate one of the key contradictions highlighted within *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, relating to the role of psychiatric institutions as damage control for a family structure in decay. "It is a staggering fact," the pamphlet notes, "that despite the obvious defects and strains of the nuclear family," – indicated by the steady rise in divorce and emergent feminist critiques – "gay people are constantly bombarded with propaganda about the joys of family life, pitied for lacking it, and reproached for not wanting it."¹²¹ The relationship between the institution of the family and the institution of psychiatry can thus be understood as cyclical and mutually reproductive: families sustain a steady flow of patients into psychiatric institutions which in turn attempt to prepare them for reabsorption into family life, and together, they continue to "screw up" and "tear apart,"¹²² actively producing the neuroses and miseries they claim to remedy.

4.2 Violence of clinical practices

So far it has been possible to consider psychiatric approaches to homosexuality (and their subsequent gay critiques) at the level of historical trajectory and their relationship to capitalism. But it must also be emphasised that the psychiatrisation of homosexuality has been opposed by gay liberationists and anti-psychiatrists because of its more immediate brutalities. Earlier in this chapter, I alluded to some of the therapeutic developments (ECT, emetics, lobotomies etc.) that accompanied the retreat of custodialism and the rise of medicalisation in British mental healthcare, but have yet to examine in much detail the corporeal realities of those treatments, or the actual living conditions of care facilities. The archive of gay liberation is filled with personal testimonies that bring an experiential and felt dimension to anti-psychiatric critique. An interview recorded in the aforementioned feature article in *7 Days* with a gay man (and member of GLF) named Jim Scott, describes his experience receiving the ECT method of aversion therapy as an outpatient at a clinic in 1964. Jim's doctors informed him "that this was very experimental – I was only the third homosexual in Britain it had been tried on,"¹²³ which, whether accurate or not, attests at least to the instrumentalising, trial-and-error attitude taken by members of the medical establishment towards homosexuals in the post-Wolfenden years, making good on the BMA's optimistic recommendations

120 "Contributor Code: 184," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

121 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, 10.

122 "Contributor Code: 184," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

123 Mathews and Triesman, "Aversion Therapy," 20.

from 1955. Jim recalls some elements of physical pain, but focuses mostly on the humiliation and abjection involved in the process:

"I sat in a comfortable armchair in a warm darkened room, equipped with an automatic slide-projector which I controlled, and a screen. My bare feet were placed on a sackcloth mat, embroidered with wires and placed on a lino floor to encourage the feet to sweat (and thus facilitate conduction). Behind a screen – out of my vision but within earshot – a nurse controlled the supply of current. I was encouraged to masturbate while looking at the photos I had supplied, and the shocks came randomly, or whenever it was thought I was having an orgasm – though since the electricity caused me to gasp and since I actually didn't masturbate (more through embarrassment than an unwillingness to cooperate) it didn't work out that way. The shocks were increasingly painful – they were about the intensity of a shock you would get from a sparking plug of a car... Sometime on the Wednesday I announced that I wasn't having any more. I felt that the therapy was producing more of the very tension it was supposed to alleviate."¹²⁴

In Jim's account, the circular and productive character of psychiatric treatment comes into view. If behaviourism's voiced purpose was to condition behaviour at the level of stimulus-response, this reduction occluded existing, socially rooted constraints on sexual behaviour. Jim's homosexuality first had to be rendered legible to the medical professionals in the form of a slideshow of erotic images, and his response to those images then subjected to their scrutiny. The irony of Jim's embarrassment rather than arousal – in this highly alienated, clinical setting – highlights the practitioners' lack of concern for context. Moreover, the humiliation involved in the process belies the claim to scientific, amoral detachment made by many proponents of behavioural therapies, demonstrating the inextricability of social pressure and emotional experience in these clinical settings.

Another image of the excesses and degradations of aversion therapy can be found in Jivani's interview with Peter Price. Upon submitting himself to a psychiatric hospital in the early-mid sixties, at the point that decarceration was already underway, Peter found himself housed in "a dismal row of huts on the edge of the hospital's grounds" and surrounded by people having psychotic episodes, including "people pissing on the wall behind me, people whispering in my ear while I was trying to sleep. People screamed out at night and I was very frightened."¹²⁵ The aversion therapy itself, Peter notes, was even more abject and traumatising. He was placed "in a small windowless room which contained nothing but a bed, a crate of Guinness – which was Peter's tippie at the time – a stack of erotic gay books and a tape recorder on which they played back Peter's interview with the psychiatrist concerning his sex life."¹²⁶ As he drank and read, he was given injections to induce nausea. There being no toilet facilities accessible. "I just had to sit in my own vomit and excrement,"

124 Ibid.

125 Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, 124-5.

126 Ibid, 125.

said Peter. "I was in a terrible state."¹²⁷ Peter's treatment followed the classic "slide and emetic" method of aversion therapy, designed to "create a Pavlovian reaction in the person every time they were faced with such stimuli in the future."¹²⁸ It would be all too easy to assume that, as mental healthcare underwent reform and integration into general health and welfare provision, that patients would also be treated with greater dignity in the clinic. But as Peter's (and others') experiences suggest, developments in mental healthcare in fact gave licence to the subjection of homosexuals to brutal treatments, hailed in the medical world as markers of innovation and social progress.

4.3 Punishment and exploitation

Related to the previous point, there is much to be said about how post-Wolfenden psychiatric approaches to homosexuality sustained and advanced carceral regimes rather than undoing them. I have already touched upon how the historical integration of mental health services into general healthcare provision facilitated the development of more consolidated, managerial approaches of statecraft, but it is in the archive that the interrelations between the judicial system and the clinic truly become visible. For people whose first point of referral into the mental health system came not from familial intervention but from the world of social work and/or the courts, the punitive and exploitative elements of mental healthcare were particularly pronounced. They are explored in a second interview conducted by Jivani, this time with Luchia Fitzgerald, a Manchester-based lesbian. The particularities of Luchia's situation – inflected by generational poverty, periods of houselessness and delinquency charges – already positioned her in a state of social marginality. At the time, Jivani explains, Luchia "who was of Irish origin, was seeing a probation officer, over a minor juvenile offence, who talked her into visiting a psychiatrist. Between the two of them, the psychiatrist and probation officer, they persuaded Luchia that she had a problem and that it was her sexuality."¹²⁹ The collusion between probation worker and psychiatrist thus cemented the association of gay sexuality with delinquency and criminality, leading to the more extreme treatment suggestion of lobotomy early on in Luchia's consultations. Ultimately, however, Luchia elected not to undergo the procedure, describing the encounter as a "close shave." She also recounts confiding in "an older butch" in the Union (a staple of the Manchester gay club scene in the 70s), who

"...was absolutely horrified when I was telling her that this guy would just cut out a little part of my brain. She just put her arms around me and said, 'Luchia, please don't go back to these people because you will not end up heterosexual, you will end up like a cabbage. You won't have any feelings whatsoever. You won't be able to love anybody.'¹³⁰

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid, 126.

129 Ibid, 127.

130 Ibid.

Neither was Luchia's situation particularly untypical. Though Bartlett, Smith and King's study found that the most common prompt to seek treatment was familial pressure, they note that referral through the courts was also common.¹³¹ Despite the increasing medicalisation of homosexuality, lines of communication were very much open between the police and medical professionals; one participant in the study suspected that "his name was given to the police and his family" by his doctor.¹³² Incarceration and custodialism in mental healthcare may have been quantitatively on the decline from the end of the fifties, but the undergirding logics of punishment and constraint persisted well into the supposedly more humane and progressive era of the sixties and seventies.

The carceral social role of mental health institutions was reflected too in the conditions experienced by inpatients, especially in the mental hospitals which had mostly retained their independent status from general healthcare. While many of the social historians I have already mentioned (Scull, Busfield, Crossley) broadly concur in situating decarceration at the end of the fifties, experiential accounts of life in mental hospitals in the sixties and seventies encourage a flexible approach to this periodisation. They provide a narrative of decarceration as a slow, uneven process. Returning to the article by Martyn the mental health nurse in *Come Together*, we see how exploitative and punitive practices remained endemic to the mental hospital. Writing in 1970, Martyn recalls:

"...only a few years ago when I was working in a mental hospital, a young sixteen-year-old boy who had been committed to us by order of the Courts was admitted to a locked ward along with patients whom the hospital had found to be most disturbed or who were considered dangerous. When I asked about his diagnosis I was told that he was 'another fucking queer.' ...Once in the hospital he was subjected to the usual ridicule of staff and was made to feel abjectly guilty and despicable. One of his daily tasks was to clean the ward lavatories, this presumably being considered suitable 'occupational therapy.'¹³³

Martyn's story demonstrates the uses of labour – particularly devalued and feminised forms of labour – as a mode of punishment for sexual deviance. The patient in question was initially admitted to the hospital after being caught "indulging in a homosexual relationship... [and] stealing some of his sister's clothes," and so the abject labour meted out to him was presumably thought befitting of "another fucking queer." The anecdote therefore illustrates the unevenness of decarceration and progress in mental healthcare in general, in which the clinic functioned as a site of brutality and growing psychiatric authority well into the sixties.

To a similar effect, the Brighton Ourstory Project's anthology of gay and lesbian experience in the fifties and sixties includes a testimony from a woman named Janice, whose stint in Graylingwell

131 Bartlett, Smith and King, "Treatments of Homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s," 3.

132 Bartlett, Smith, King, 2.

133 Martyn, "Homosexuality and Therapy," in *Come Together*, 53.

Hospital – in her words, "a very prominent nuthouse down in Chichester"¹³⁴ – in the early sixties, coincided with the moment of its restructuring. Initially admitted for treatment for her agoraphobia, the discovery of her lesbianism during her time in hospital led to her doctors reducing her mental health issues to her sexuality and refocusing their efforts on curing it, in league with her parents. Her subsequent subjection to aversion therapy ("forced, against my will... which to this day I will never forgive them for")¹³⁵ along with the culture of intensive surveillance in which all of her letters and phone calls were read and observed by the administration, led her to conclude "it was a bit like being in prison really."¹³⁶

For context, as an economic entity, Graylingwell had operated not dissimilarly to a prison since it opened in the late nineteenth century, relying on inpatient labour to remain self-sufficient, again under the remit of occupational therapy. The hospital's archival records indicate that its gardens were used to produce crops for onsite consumption as well as for sale at market, and were maintained by patients in exchange for tokens which could then be used to buy items from the hospital shop,¹³⁷ akin to a prison commissary. The division of labour within the hospital's inmate population was also gendered: while men tended to work the farmland and sometimes in the hospital's carpentry workshop, on the principle that "each man should have a man's job to do,"¹³⁸ female patients were often tasked with helping in "the needleroom and laundry, with preparing vegetables for the hospital kitchen and, on the wards, either doing domestic work or looking after other patients under nursing supervision."¹³⁹ Val Finch, an ex-patient and interviewee in the Graylingwell Heritage Project's history of the hospital, opined that "it was a good thing when the employment of patients was abolished, as it had amounted to slave labour."¹⁴⁰ The exploitation of inmate labour by the hospital had functioned both to bolster its economic interests and reinforce a sexual division of labour construed as essential to a healthy society. These practices had been phased out by the time of Janice's admission in 1964, softening the hospital's reputation as a carceral institution. But the experiences of gay people in Graylingwell nevertheless attest to the continuation of cultures of surveillance, discipline and policing in mental hospitals even during a time of decarceration. We see this reflected in Janice's experiences in psychiatry, where the overriding message she received positioned sexual deviance at the root of all her mental ills, leading to the intense scrutiny of her activities and communications. With the modernisation of Graylingwell and other hospitals of its kind, the shift away from direct forms of (gendered) labour exploitation and

134 Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts: Lesbian and Gay Lives of 50s and 60s Brighton* (Brighton: QueenSpark Books, 1992), 35.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid, 36.

137 Catalogue Description, "Reprovision of Graylingwell Hospital, Chichester," 1995-2001, WDC/SS16/1, West Sussex Record Office, <http://185.121.204.173/SearchOnline/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=WSCC%2f3%2f14%2f16%2f1&pos=3>

138 Gillian Edom et al., eds., *Beneath the Water Tower: The Graylingwell Heritage Project* (Chichester: Graylingwell History Project, 2015), 47.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

towards heightened surveillance again illustrates an evolution rather than cessation of the technologies of coercion.

4.4 Emotional healing

The archive of gay experience consulted in my research is not, however, exclusively an archive of suffering; it also constellates a diversity of encounters with psychiatry which does not exclude those of a genuinely healing and therapeutic character. While in the above account Janice's time in Graylingwell bore so much of the residue of the hospital's custodial period, she notes in her account that she later met with a psychiatrist as an outpatient, who refrained from pathologising her gayness and essentially encouraged her to come out, saying "the only way you'll ever get better is to live the sort of life you need to live. You can't be so restrained and bottle things up the way you are."¹⁴¹ Responses to the NLGS also reflect a diversity of attitudes among mental health professionals at the time. For instance, the aforementioned respondent who was affected by her closeted fellow patient's suicide, describes her own experiences in the clinic as broadly positive, though with the caveat that she felt this to be lucky or exceptional. She elaborates: "In the gay world, I have also met many who have had psychiatric treatment and many who work in the caring professions" and "seen more than enough of both sides of the fence... to know that the positive treatment I received is very, very rare in the public health service; my first step into that world could so easily have been the first on a downhill slide into institutionalisation."¹⁴² Similarly, a respondent to the Lesbian Identity Project,¹⁴³ going by the pseudonym Judith, recounts her experience of a nervous breakdown during the sixties, prompting her to see out psychiatric treatment. According to Cook and Oram's reading of her account, this experience was uncommonly rewarding: "fortunately for her in the context of the then highly punitive treatment of lesbians and gay men in psychiatric practice in the 1960s, Judith's psychiatrist not only helped her come out and feel positive about it but put her in touch with other lesbians in Manchester."¹⁴⁴ In Judith's own words, "from what I've heard of psychiatrists since, I must have just fallen on my feet,"¹⁴⁵ echoing the idea that positive experiences in psychiatry during the sixties were rare and fortuitous.

To illustrate this point further, another account in the NLGS, from a Birmingham-based gay man, recounts a range of clinical encounters across his adult life, encompassing both abjection and healing. "I have had some 'personality problems' and have consulted doctors, social workers, psychiatrists over the years," the respondent writes, and "mainly I have found them unhelpful or inadequate," especially in the case of a doctor who tried to insist on aversion therapy, which the

141 Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts*, 36.

142 "Contributor Code: 184," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex.

143 The Lesbian Identity Project was a National Lottery-funded lesbian oral history project conducted in Bradford in 2008. The section referred to in this chapter is as cited in Matt Cook and Alison Oram, *Queer Beyond London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

144 Ibid, 152.

145 As cited in *ibid*.

patient refused. By the time of his participation in the survey in the mid-eighties, however, the respondent writes, "I now attend a Gestalt therapy group and from them I have received considerable love, caring and understanding as well as firmness and confrontation."¹⁴⁶ At least within this man's own personal timeline, there is a narrative of gradual improvement in psychiatric attitudes towards homosexuality over time. In this case, the positive impact of counter-psychiatric, countercultural and community therapy practices across the sixties and seventies (including Gestalt techniques developed by Frederick S. Perls, a disciple of Wilhelm Reich)¹⁴⁷ was not felt until after the close of the seventies. The rise in popularity of such techniques, enabled in part by the strength of the countercultural and counter-psychiatric movements, helped to displace aversion therapy as the dominant psychiatric response to homosexuality, and allow for the possibility of more emotionally enriching, non-punitive therapeutic experiences for gay people.

That psychiatry could simultaneously function in gay people's lives as a form of coercion within capitalism *and* as a durable means of relief and comfort, must be held together and in contradiction. While one of the main focuses of this chapter has been the extension of pathologising and disciplinary models of psychiatry into the late twentieth century, the subsequent integration and diffusion of psychiatric approaches into wider society was also a condition of possibility for the development of therapeutic relationships and communities that provided some reprieve from the miseries of heterosexual capitalism. If one of the key aims of this thesis has been to show how the politics of gay liberation formed within the cracks of transforming social relations in Britain, then the fields of psychiatry and medicine represent therefore yet another site of opportunity and conflict in this history. Regardless of its status as an institution of capitalist society, psychiatry cannot be said to have vertically or unilaterally succeeded in organising homosexual life according to a distinct set of objectives; rather the psychiatrisation of homosexuality must be understood as an open, antagonistic process, a dialectical relationship between forms of social control and irreducible human responses.

4.5 Effects on sexual desire

With this latter point in mind, I want to close this section by touching upon just some of the unquantifiable intended and unintended outcomes of psychiatric treatment recorded in the archives. Given the experimental application of behavioural aversion therapies and other physiological treatments to homosexuality, the effects upon the sexualities of their subjects were understandably wide-ranging. The basic motivations underpinning the psychiatrisation of homosexuality are summarised pithily in the BMA's report, "Homosexuality and Prostitution" as being "to control and cure"¹⁴⁸ the socio-medical problem of sexual deviance. In practice, however, the treatment of homosexuality often had repercussions beyond its control. In his *7 Days* interview, for example, Jim Scott described the after-effects of his ECT treatments, in which his "orgasm responses were

146 "Contributor Code: 135," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex..

147 Lovell et al., *The Psychiatric Society*, 270.

148 BMA, "Homosexuality and Prostitution," 165.

disturbed" and, having kept the photographs used as stimuli in the treatment, he "continued to feel an involuntary spasm in the soles of [his] feet when [he] turned to particular pictures."¹⁴⁹ While not exactly having the intended consequences of breaking down Jim's attraction to men, the treatment clearly had some kind of lingering effect on his capacity to become aroused by visual stimuli so that some element of pain and discomfort persisted in his sexual experiences. Similarly, in Janice's account of her time in Graylingwell, she describes the immediate effects of her chemical aversion therapy: "For about three months I felt dreadful about it, I mean, I couldn't face being anywhere near the proximity of women. But what it doesn't do, you see, is make you like men any more. It can't actually make you like something. It can put you off something you do like but it certainly can't work the other way round."¹⁵⁰ Janice's experience of temporary aversion – not to sex with women specifically, but "at the sight of women doing anything"¹⁵¹ – demonstrates the general difficulty in assessing the efficacy of aversion therapies, if such a measure is possible at all. In one sense, her subjection to emetics did condition her ability to be attracted to and near women temporarily, but only by producing a response that actually debilitated her socially, contra to the aims of encouraging more socially acceptable behaviours.

Janice's account in *Daring Hearts* nevertheless also exemplifies one of the more common unintended consequences of the psychiatrisation of homosexuality to be found in the archive of gay liberation, in the form of her longer-term recommitment to lesbianism. Prior to aversion therapy, Janice had come into contact with another lesbian patient at Graylingwell, a "very attractive thirty-year-old"¹⁵² named Stella, notorious on the ward for seducing other women. Upon embarking on a secret relationship, Janice noted that she'd "never felt so happy and elated in all my life. This is what I'd been looking for, this was it, this was the missing point of the puzzle and my health improved dramatically."¹⁵³ Having been separated from Stella and subjected to the nausea-inducing aversion therapy against her will, Janice later found that "once the treatment wore off, I'd learned to be crafty. I no longer told the truth in sessions. I said what they wanted me to say, really in order to get better, in order to get out and see her. So in actual fact she instigated my recovery quite a lot without realising it."¹⁵⁴ On balance then, despite the obvious grimness of Janice's situation at Graylingwell – scrutinised by hospital staff and coerced into treatment by her parents and psychiatrist – her institutionalisation presented her unintentionally with opportunity to exploit the therapeutic possibilities of sex. Ironically, it became possible for Janice to equate "getting better" with the indulgence of the most pathologised elements of her personality. In staging the conflict between her lesbianism and social convention, the heightened environment of the medical hospital brought the contradictions of Janice's life as a gay person in the sixties into sharper focus, resulting in a greater cynicism towards psychiatric expertise and a route into sexual discovery. This narrative is mirrored in Peter Price's concluding remarks on

149 Mathews and Triesman, "Aversion Therapy," 20.

150 Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts*, 36.

151 Ibid, 35.

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid, 36.

his own hospitalisation. After being subjected to a particularly abject and squalid experience of emetic aversion therapy for three days straight, Peter decided to abandon the process, saying to his psychiatrist (who wanted to introduce electrodes): "No you're not, I want out, I've had enough."¹⁵⁵ He describes this moment of refusal as a turning point, after which "I started living my life." Similarly to Janice, Peter's rejection of psychiatric treatment was paired with a re-affirmation of his sexual desires, in that, after leaving hospital, Jivani relays "he went back to his friend's home where he had repeated baths and showers and then made love as a gesture of defiance. So much for the treatment's efficacy. It did have one beneficial, if entirely unintended effect."¹⁵⁶

These accounts testify to the contradictions of the clinic, as both a totalising project with many, diffuse nodes throughout postwar British society, and as a site of struggle and contestation. The archival accounts that I have reproduced and organised thematically here represent a wealth of experiential knowledge within the broader archive of gay liberation. Each of them reflects on the situatedness of their experiences in their own historical moments, which when arranged together, offer a vantage on the restructuring of the twentieth century clinic. In that the archive also comprises such a diversity of responses and interpretations, it illustrates the dialectic of freedom and constraint at work in the transformation of psychiatric institutions, as a conduit of both sexual discipline and a condition of possibility for the development of sexual defiance among gays and lesbians in the sixties and seventies.

5. Dialectics of the personal and the political

So far, this chapter has constellated a number of perspectives on the institution of psychiatry, intentionally shifting between the registers of personal testimony, historical analysis and political pamphleteering so as to see what connections and meanings might emerge between them. In structuring the chapter in this way, I have actively tried to express the interrelatedness of the personal and the political mirrored in gay liberation politics. What remains in this final section of the chapter is to consider the politicisation of the personal and the personalisation of the political in the archive of gay liberation and to draw out and elaborate some theoretical implications for the status of mental health under capitalism.

"The personal is political" came into widespread use as a slogan of women's and gay liberation movements in the sixties and seventies, both in Britain and beyond. Its precise meaning was widely contested between different sections of the gay and feminist left, with some emphasising the primacy of the personal (relationships, lifestyles, emotions), others the primacy of the political (the state, economy and production process), while others insisted on the symbiosis and mutual constitution of these categories. Without wanting to get too side-tracked by these internal, often

¹⁵⁵ Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, 126.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

internecine debates, relying on caricatures of drab, male chauvinist socialists on one side and frivolous, lifestylist radical feminists on the other, I do want to look at some of the practices mobilised by "the personal is political," and the critiques of psychiatric institutions unfolding from them. In particular, the practice of consciousness-raising became a means for British gay liberation groups to forge their own therapeutic communities and work out for themselves the relationship between capitalist society and emotional life. Consciousness-raising was a practice inherited from the American women's liberation movement and adapted by large portions of the British counterculture. Some communist elements in GLF were at pains to express its deeper roots in the Chinese revolution, in which "the poor and landless peasants who had been oppressed for millennia by the ruthless landlord and bureaucratic class were encouraged by the Communist Party to talk about their lives until everyone began to deeply understand how their particular individual fates were all linked up."¹⁵⁷ In practice, consciousness-raising involved the formation of small "awareness groups," who gathered separately from the main assemblies to discuss personal experiences of a given topic, e.g. "coming out," in the hope that a "general pattern could be discerned"¹⁵⁸ and political objectives could be set. The frank discussion of personal experience was thus encouraged as a means of collectively producing experiential knowledge, mobilising political action and strengthening solidarity among participants.

A primer on consciousness-raising, written by an affinity group of the New York GLF and circulated throughout the British gay movement, described its purpose as being "to step outside the straight man's myths and institutions, to suspend the limited ways we deal with each other, and experiment with new ways of relating."¹⁵⁹ While acknowledging the healing and therapeutic possibilities of this kind of communal activity, the article distinguishes consciousness-raising from therapy-proper which, informed by psychiatric theory, "defines the gay person's situation as that of individual sickness, while CR substitutes the perspective of gay people as collectively oppressed by society."¹⁶⁰ This latter distinction seems to affirm Jeremy Gilbert's description of the "*super*-therapeutic function" of consciousness-raising in sixties and seventies countercultures, "enabling participants both to overcome their sense of personal alienation and disenfranchisement, and to feel increasingly empowered to engage with a patriarchal society on their own terms."¹⁶¹ In practice, consciousness-raising on the British gay scene could take many forms, from structured discussions on political strategy, "self-oppression, zaps, politics, lifestyles, communes and how to change society"¹⁶²; to intensely emotional "exchange[s] of personal histories and feelings, bringing out a shared experience"¹⁶³; to dropping acid in the countryside¹⁶⁴ and orgies.¹⁶⁵

157 Walter, "Introduction," in *Come Together*, 18.

158 Ibid.

159 New York Gay Liberation Front, "GAY CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUPS," n.d., HCA/Chesterman/7.

160 Ibid.

161 Jeremy Gilbert, "Psychedelic Socialism," *Open Democracy*, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/psychedelic-socialism>

162 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 46.

163 Keith Birch, "A Community of Interests," in *Radical Records*, 54.

164 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 46.

165 Gay Liberation Front, "Newsletter," May 1973, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London

Whether experimenting with the plasticity of consciousness or with sexual and emotional intimacy, however, underlying these various forms was an emphasis on communal experience.

Consciousness-raising formed a countermeasure to what Derek Cohen has called the "clienting" approach dominant within "social work and other 'helping' professions," whereby "conflicts and tensions" associated with being part of a minority group are reduced to "individual personal internal problems rather than collective experiences."¹⁶⁶ For Cohen, writing in the seventies, the process of "de-clienting" already existed within "the amorphous huddle that is the gay movement," where "there are groups of lesbians and gay men that meet and try to make use of their shared experiences."¹⁶⁷ While not directly related to the anti-psychiatric function group of the GLF, or even particularly versed in psychological vocabulary, consciousness-raising groups thus embodied real efforts by gay people to collectively de-pathologise their sexual behaviours and desires, re-situating them in patterns of social oppression.

While "the personal is political" can by no means be reduced to a single, shared meaning, the archive of gay liberation contains shards of dialectical exposition on subjectivity, consciousness and psychology that I would now like to develop and relate to the gay critique of psychiatry. The writers of *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, for example, began to think about the role of "a new gay consciousness" as a corrective to the subjugation of gay people to "social, moral and psychiatric denigration."¹⁶⁸ For them, the acquisition of consciousness was not a dogmatic certainty, as often associated with Lukácsian conceptions of class-consciousness, but the product of a desire for "flowing, shifting relationships based on affection and need rather than social convention."¹⁶⁹ This mode of analysis, foregrounding desire in the formation of consciousness, was prefigured by the socialist feminist tendency within GLF, whose two articles in *Come Together* issue 7, "Revolution in the Head" and "...or in the world" (designed to be read together), staged the contradiction between the personal and the political and attempted a synthesis. The first article deliberately reframed revolutionary politics as "a continuous way of living"¹⁷⁰ as opposed to a distinct realm of public activity. The writers present an idea of political consciousness as processual and experiential. Consciousness is not generated mechanically from the experience of subjugation, but is understood as the product of collective nurturing and desire, a "seed of freedom [that] sleeps in every contemporary human being" brought into fruition by people's "longing towards something other than the existing world order."¹⁷¹ By the late seventies, with GLF mostly dissolved across Britain, this socialist feminist stream had regrouped into a new collective calling themselves Lesbian Left, whose 1977 pamphlet of the same name elaborated on these prefatory notes on the dialectics of the personal and the political from *Come Together*. The pamphlet reads within "the personal is political" a reciprocity between social change and the structure of emotional life. Laying out their aims to

166 Derek Cohen, "Clienting: Individual Solutions to Collective Problems," *Gay Left* 6 (1978): 22–23.

167 Ibid.

168 GLF, *Psychiatry and the Homosexual*, 29.

169 Ibid.

170 GLF, "Revolution in the Head," in *Come Together*, 94.

171 Ibid.

"analyse the material basis of gay oppression,"¹⁷² the pamphlet theorises the imbrication of the personal and the political, in which neither concept functionally precedes the other. Its conclusion – that "our society depends greatly upon the endless divisions and competitions which are embodied and symbolised in our personal relationships"¹⁷³ – sketches out a situation in which the realm of human relationships both express *and* constitute capitalist social relations.

Elsewhere, similar tendencies within the gay liberation sphere of influence also began thinking through the dialectical constitution of the personal and experiential within capitalism. One avenue for this type of critique was Gay Left Collective – a self-identified extension of the male gay socialist tendency within GLF – and its publication *Gay Left*. In the initial aftermath of the breakdown of London GLF in 1973, and with the fires of factionalism lingering, Gay Left Collective positioned itself in direct opposition to most signifiers of a personal politics. The introductory statement of *Gay Left* caustically lumped together "awareness groups, consciousness-raising groups, political drag, communes and dropping out" as indicators of gay liberation's slide into lifestylism and abandonment of radical politics, wherein "the power structures of society were left completely untouched."¹⁷⁴ However, a few years into the project, *Gay Left* gradually opened itself to a wider range of contributors, evolving into a platform for more reflective and sophisticated theoretical developments. An article in its sixth issue written by John Shiers, for example, took as its premise that "to accept that 'the personal is political', [means] the way we live as people cannot be ignored any longer."¹⁷⁵ Using the example of his own long-term struggles with anxiety and depression, Shiers attributes his mental and emotional anguish to the internalisation of "the contradictions" between his personal, sexual desires and the weight of social expectation. He asks: "Shouldn't we start examining some of the 'internal' factors which generate our oppression, how 'the system' gets into our system. How to cope with and change our psychic structures which have been shaped in a sexist capitalist world that is also the world we have to survive in but at the same time work to transform?"¹⁷⁶ Shiers' article thus begins to clarify the relationship between personal and political life, as an internal, mutually determining relation, stressing the fundamental importance of "the way we live as people" as a register of capitalist social relations.

An article by Chris Jones in the same issue of *Gay Left* examines the contradictions of gay life further, but now within the specific context of psychiatry. The role of psychiatric institutions, Jones argues, in continually attributing "the problems a homosexual experiences to his/her own condition, a maladjusted/abnormal/deviant/ immature/neurotic etc. person,"¹⁷⁷ presumes and reproduces a hard border between the internal world of the self and the external world of society, moreover sustaining

172 Lesbian Left, "Lesbian Left – a Collection of Papers by Women in Lesbian Left: A Socialist Feminist Group," 1977, POLLARD/2/4/1, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

173 Ibid.

174 Gay Left Collective, "Collective Statement," *Gay Left* 1 (1975), 1.

175 John Shiers, "Two Steps Forward... One Step Back," *Gay Left* 6 (1978), 11.

176 Ibid.

177 Chris Jones, "A Cure for Psychiatry?," *Gay Left* 6 (1978), 26.

the social marginality of those deemed abnormal. "A strict dichotomy is established between inner and outer, public and private, society and the individual,"¹⁷⁸ writes Jones. By contrast, Jones posits marxism not as "the crude effect of matter on brain, but a relationship or better still the interrelatedness of human consciousness within and to social context."¹⁷⁹ The particular form taken by Jones' critique of bourgeois psychiatry is that of marxist dialectics, advancing an emergent thread in the wider world of gay anti-psychiatry that focused on discrediting the notion of mental illness as purely individual pathology. This form of critique, living and rooted in the struggle of everyday life, corresponds to the openness to "the heresy of reality" shared by the heterodox marxisms invoked repeatedly throughout this thesis. In this open and immanent mode of critique, the "personal" is not reducible to the effects of large-scale social change, neither is politics reducible to the effects of subjective decisions; these poles instead form a contradictory unity between the multiple temporalities of the trajectory of capitalist development on one hand, and the actuality of human life on the other.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to clarify the process by which the twentieth century clinic became a site of social and sexual struggle before and during the time of gay liberation. This struggle took many forms, including the emergence of gay anti-psychiatry, which has formed the basis of this study. Pockets of gay anti-psychiatry in the sixties and seventies – including but not limited to the CP group of the GLF – added their voices to the mounting critiques of capitalist psychiatry scattered across the counterculture and radical left. Its specifically gay vantage expounded the violence of behavioural aversion therapy and post-Wolfenden forms of psychiatric coercion, while also expressing in its own terms the more universal conditions of unfreedom, propertylessness and exclusion endemic to proletarian life. These forms of coercion, bracketed conceptually in this chapter as "the psychiatrisation of society" were precipitated by long processes of restructuring and recomposition of the British clinic, in turn reflecting the shifting priorities of the British state in the twentieth century.

Finally, I have attempted to draw out elements of experiential knowledge of the psychiatric clinic from the archive of gay liberation. Following the notion expressed by the subterranean tradition of open marxism, that "theoretical mysteries find their rational explanation in the comprehension of the actual relations of life,"¹⁸⁰ I have attempted to treat archival accounts and testimonies as critiques of psychiatry emerging immanently to their subject matter, that speak to the contradictory character of gay life within capitalism. The politics of gay liberation relied fundamentally on the production of personal testimony of this kind; experiential knowledge of social institutions fuelled the movement's struggle to abolish them. One of these accounts gave us the image of a gay man in anguish over the

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

180 Bonfeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*, 101.

irreconcilability of his sexuality to the demands of his family, to the extent that "his head began to corkscrew away from his body." For me, the tragedy of the corkscrewing man is a dialectical image, embodying the contradictions of gay life that many find ways to live with, while many others do not. Thus as the field of psychiatry fine-tuned its techniques of policing and managing sexual subjectivities, and as gay anti-psychiatry grew in response, the decades of gay liberation saw the intensification of those contradictions, bringing to light the antagonisms structuring social life more broadly.

Chapter Four: Domestic Life

1. Introduction

The critique of the nuclear family elaborated by the gay liberation movement was bound up with the development of a distinctly gay domestic politics and culture during the sixties and seventies. Swathes of gay writing from this period emphasise the conflict-ridden status of the family as both a site of patriarchal relations and mediator of the capitalist division of labour, while alternative and experimental living arrangements proliferated in the context of an increasingly privatised housing market and lagging post-war reconstruction efforts. This thesis now shifts its focus onto the realm of the household as a site of social conflict for gay people living in Britain, in which domestic experiences tend to bear out the underpinning contradictions existing "below the waterline"¹ of social visibility. Households and living arrangements were essential to sustaining and reproducing the political activity of gay liberation groups, as well as another of many terrains of social antagonism – between tenants and landlords, family members, partners, communards. What follows therefore is a constellation of gay peoples' experiences within a number of different household formations, and an investigation into how those involved in the gay liberation movement politicised their relationship to the home.

As a chapter that primarily draws on gay peoples' lived experiences of domesticity, combining archival accounts and existing written and oral testimony, it is also necessarily laden with the texture and haptic detail of everyday life. These insights into domestic life increasingly demonstrate the gay liberation impulse to politicise lifestyle, aesthetics, emotions and relationships, and in turn invite us to consider the social transformations they register. Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," as a way of thinking through the "lived and felt"² dimensions of historical processes will therefore continually inform this discussion of the affective registers of gay domestic life. The archival accounts cited and images reproduced in this chapter show gay people lived out their critiques of the family by distinguishing themselves aesthetically from dominant cultural forms, and carved out their place in the countercultural atmosphere of the time. In a similar vein to previous chapters, I also intend to show how gay people's scattered attempts to create, subvert, elude or belong to some idea of "home" during the sixties and seventies have broader implications for the role of households in the social reproduction of capitalism. As a chapter about households, this is necessarily also a chapter about the interlocking histories of the family as a social institution and capitalist property relations, two fault lines in the archive of gay liberation struggle.

1 Fernbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation," 153-4.

2 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

The chapter therefore begins with a reconstruction of the gay liberation critique of the family, paying particular attention to the different emphases elaborated by factional positions within the movement. The purpose of this section is to provide some theoretical contextualisation to the various gay households that formed in the sixties and seventies and to ground later discussions of the tensions and conflicts arising within them. The chapter then locates these approaches within their historical contexts, introducing some key developments in the organisation of housing in Britain after the Second World War, along with the shifting status of "the family" in public life. Here, I argue that a particular structure of feeling involving a crisis of the ideology of the family and the uneven growth of urban homosexual subcultures formed conditions of possibility for the development of alternative gay households from the sixties onwards. The following section then proceeds to elaborate how these historical transformations registered in the lived experience of gay people during the sixties and seventies, constellating a number of different living arrangements and paying attention to the solidarities and conflicts that tended to play out within and between them. In particular, I draw attention to communal and couple-based household formations, both of which involved gay people struggling to reproduce their lives, relating in a range of negative and positive ways to the institution of the family in the process. Finally, the chapter then re-situates these relationships according to the recomposition of the British state and of class struggle more broadly during the late seventies. Returning again to the insights of open marxism, it uses the marxian concept of fetishism to theorise the relationship between the general crisis of capitalism occurring in the mid-seventies and the collateral public backlash against gay life. This section prioritises what was *unfinished* and *unrealised* by the gay domestic experiments of the period, drawing out some elements of gay liberation's communistic temporality of social change that will be revisited in my conclusion.

2. Critiques of the family

In chapter one, "Situating Gay Liberation," I introduced the antagonistic approach of the GLF to the idea of "the family" through an engagement with its 1971 manifesto. Its critique of the family as "the basic unit of society" and a fundamentally repressive force, working in its "very form... against homosexuality,"³ bears the intellectual traces of Freudo-Marxist perspectives on heterosexual capitalism associated with the Frankfurt School and their later modulations in the gay communisms of Mieli and Hocquenghem. Its call for the wider gay movement to "aim at the abolition of the family, so that the sexist, male supremacist system can no longer be nurtured there,"⁴ also contains an impulse towards the abolition or overcoming of the family institution through the communisation of domestic life. The manifesto proposes "setting up gay communes" as a practical contribution towards a future where, "in the ever-sharpening crisis of western society,"⁵ new social infrastructures will be required to replace capitalism's crumbling institutions. Its vision of a "more varied and more

3 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

pleasurable"⁶ organisation of society furthermore posits the generalisation or communisation of pleasure, sex and care from the moral confines of the family.

In practice, this utopian theorisation of the gay commune was accompanied by a slew of different experiments in communal living throughout the sixties and seventies, on the fringes of a squatting scene already established within Britain's straight counterculture and women's liberation movement. While the 1971 manifesto had presented a cohesive politics of communal living as an essential component of social change, the general disorganisation of the gay liberation movement – tending towards horizontalism and fluidity – meant that no single party line on the family and its relationship to capitalism, necessarily rose to dominance. The critiques that did develop generally mirrored diverging tendencies in British feminism of around the same time. This section now looks at how these tendencies were articulated within gay liberation, paying specific attention to radical feminist and socialist feminist articulations of the critique of the family. While the various factional elements of the gay liberation movement seemed to broadly agree that the family was a key outpost of heterosexuality and needed to be abolished, the pathway to its abolition and the nature of its power were highly contested. In reconstructing these approaches, I hope to introduce some key theoretical contexts that will frame the rest of the chapter, especially as it considers how contradictory approaches to communal life registered in the lived experience of gay people in various household formations.

2.1 Radical feminist articulation

Though the gay liberation movement had originally hoped to unify the concerns of gay men and lesbians, a combination of factors – including the gradual inclusion of lesbians in women's liberation groups and the side-lining of lesbian-specific struggles in the gay movement – led many women involved in London GLF to walk out of the group in 1972 and meet and organise autonomously from that point onwards. This shift in the affinities of many lesbians – from the gay population as a whole, to the "sisterhood" – reflected a growing gender separatism in the wider gay movement bound up in the emergence of radical feminism as a political imaginary. Following the split in London GLF, the Women's Liberation workshop circulated a communiqué entitled "How the Gay Women's Liberation Group Got off the Ground", reinforcing the radical feminist focus on the gender distinction as the primary source of social antagonism. "We question the sex roles that people are socialised into in the family and the sexism arising from this," the writers explain, noting a growing solidarity between gay women and non-gay women "in the fight against the servicing role that women have been put into."⁷ This tendency informed the thinking of many men in the gay liberation movement too, if for different reasons. The women's walkout was applauded by David Fernbach and Aubrey Walter, for example, who published an article ahead of the 1972 GLF national think-in in Lancaster which echoed many

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Women's Liberation Workshop, "How the Gay Women's Liberation Group Got off the Ground." n.d., FL/Harris/7, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

radical feminist talking points: "gay liberation starts from the recognition that male supremacy and the gender-role system has to be rooted out; that gay men can't be liberated except in the context of a radical transformation of the relationship between males and females in general."⁸ Later, at the height of the gay commune movement, similar ideas remained influential among male-dominated sections of the movement, as indicated in a 1974 South London GLF leaflet advancing the idea of the sexism structuring household labour divisions as "the root cause of all oppression"⁹ in society.

The growing traction of the radical feminist tendency over the course of the seventies also informed the development of lesbian separatism in political organising and communal living exercises. Its more extreme articulations tended towards an insistence on the gender distinction as biologically and socially immutable. An article written by Jill Griffin in the lesbian magazine *Sappho* in 1977 takes this tendency to its logical conclusion, arguing "we are so different [from men] as to be nearly a different kind of animal," and betraying a level of squeamishness around the perceived excesses of gay male sexuality, such as "legal cottaging."¹⁰ A separate column in the same issue of *Sappho* likewise claims that "all men, whether straight or gay, are dominated by sex" due to "the anatomy and physiology of the male body."¹¹ Gay male public sexual culture (reduced dismissively by the writer to "a grope in a shop doorway or a public lavatory"¹²) are framed here as an unfortunate by-product of an evolutionary disparity between the sexes as opposed to a way of relating constrained by the social production of public space, as discussed in chapter two. Not all articulations of the radical feminist approach necessarily culminated in these kinds of essentialisms: the form of radical drag, for example, which emerged as one of its effects, consciously attempted to de-naturalise gender, as we will see later in this chapter. But the fragmentation of gay and lesbian politics in the early seventies can nevertheless be understood as a decisive moment in the shift towards separatism in lesbian feminism that would be registered in and through key forms of communal domesticity seen throughout the seventies.

2.2 Socialist feminist articulation

The socialist feminist tendency in the gay liberation movement emerged primarily at its intersection with various socialist organisations. After the flight of women from GLF in 1972, many lesbians aligned to the socialist feminist tendency – including Mary McIntosh, Elizabeth Wilson and Nettie Pollard, whose writing has already been touched upon elsewhere in this thesis – continued to think and write collectively with gay male socialist comrades. Two polemical articles, written when tensions over the question of separatism and the primacy of sexism were at their height, laid out the

8 Aubrey Walter and David Fernbach, "Gay Activism and Gay Liberation: A Message to Gay Brothers," 1972, HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London. It should be noted that this intervention was understood by many former and current GLF members (of both radical feminist and socialist feminist persuasions) to be opportunistic and driven by David and Aubrey's Maoist agenda to cement GLF's status as a gay male organisation from which to build a political mass.

9 South London Gay Liberation Front, "Gay Liberation Front Newsletter," 1974, HCA/Thornycroft/2/1, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

10 Jill Griffin, "Women - Do Us a Favour," *Sappho*, 1977, GB 1534 JF/2, Lesbian Archive, Glasgow Women's Library.

11 "Amazon," *Sappho*, 1977, GB 1534 JF/2, Lesbian Archive, Glasgow Women's Library.

12 Ibid.

basic socialist feminist rebuttal. In an article published in a 1973 edition of the GLF's monthly diary, Brian Burt proposes that the horizon of gay liberation essentially necessitates a socialist revolution: "radical change starting at the roots of society – the Family – and changing all the institutions of society... such complete change is revolution."¹³ Though in one sense a fairly straightforward re-articulation of the 1971 manifesto's critique of the family, Burt's intervention also clearly positions itself against the radical feminist tendency towards subverting patriarchal power, arguing that patriarchal relations involve but are not reducible to men's oppression of women. For Burt, the totalising grasp of heterosexuality "hurt[s] our lives" and points to a "society [that] oppresses everyone in it."¹⁴

In a similar vein, a rejected *Come Together* submission by Andy Elsmore – who had acquired a reputation as bit of a militant in GLF by virtue of his connection to the Angry Brigade¹⁵ – highlighted the creeping tendency in radical feminism to subjugate *all* forms of social antagonism to the notion of "sexism."¹⁶ For Elsmore, "it is useless to discuss class struggle in isolation from the struggle against sexism" because heterosexuality must be understood first and foremost as a regime, built on "the monogamous marriage" and its relationship "to the development of private property" and the class relationships therein.¹⁷ His conclusion that "we cannot be free until everyone is free"¹⁸ pushes against the separatisms becoming increasingly influential in the gay and women's liberation movements. GLF's media working group wrote up a long list of reasons as to their exclusion of Elsmore's article from *Come Together* in late 1971, including a shared suspicion that it might compromise the newspaper's "function of recruitment" – of as-yet non-political gay people – and might invite "a take-over of GLF"¹⁹ by outside forces such as the Angry Brigade with whom Elsmore was loosely associated. The decision generated great controversy across GLF's different factions that ultimately accelerated political clashes and the subsequent "sundering of [GLF as] a cohesive grouping."²⁰

After the petering out of London's GLF group and others around the country, the later seventies saw the continuation and development of socialist feminist approaches in the longer-form writing of various ex-GLF members having regrouped into new collectives. Here, some of the most provocative insights into the relationship between the family and capitalism were articulated. Lesbian Left's 1977 pamphlet critiques the radical feminist tendency to "side-step the interest which capitalism and its institutions has in maintaining sexual antagonism" and its lack of curiosity as to "by what necessity

13 Brian Burt, "Gay Lib News: 28 August to 3 September 1973," 1973, HCA/GLF/4, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

14 Ibid.

15 The Angry Brigade was a militant left-wing group active in the early seventies who claimed responsibility for several bombings of private property. A fuller account of their relationship to the gay movement is given in Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 84-86.

16 Andy Elsmore, "Towards a Revolutionary Gay Liberation Front," 1971, HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 GLF Media Workshop, "Reasons Why This Article Should Not Appear in *Come Together*, Put Forward by Some Members of Media Workshop," 1971, HCA/GLF/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

20 Jeffrey Weeks, as cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 189.

such an institution [as the nuclear family] exists and in whose interests it is maintained."²¹ Attempts to elude the miseries of class society through communal living, separatism, radical feminist drag and other lifestyle changes, the writers argue, however edifying for the participants, can easily become "a means of convincing oneself that one has achieved the political change which one seeks without attacking its material basis or the major institutions through which ideology is filtered through to peoples' consciousness."²² The pamphlet offers a dialectical reading of the heterosexual family within capitalism. It argues that the "the norm of heterosexuality" facilitates the "sexual division of labour" in capitalism, *and* that "all social relations" – inclusive of the institution of the family – are both "determined by the organisation of the society in which they occur" and "also condition the way in which the struggle to transform them is perceived and organised."²³ This idea of the family as a social institution that is both constated by and constitutive of the antagonistic relations of capitalism prefigures many of the arguments of queer marxism that have developed in recent years and influenced the theoretical approach of this thesis. These socialist feminist insights were expressed moreover, in direct tension with the radical feminist faction's notion of the family as the seat of an originary patriarchal power from which all other social antagonisms flow.

A similar line of argument can be found among the papers of the national Communist Party of Great Britain's Gay Rights Committee, formed in 1976, whose members overlapped with the Lesbian Left collective and also included some ex-GLF socialist men such as Bill Thornycroft and John Lloyd. A CPGB circular on "Sexuality and the State" for instance, offers a marxist understanding of the historical relationship of the capitalist state to the family, arguing that, while "patriarchal relations... pre-date capitalist development," the capitalist state "takes up, transforms and modifies pre-existing patriarchal relations" re-configuring them as irreducibly capitalist.²⁴ This particular framing of capitalist sexual relations speaks presciently to the arguments I have made throughout this thesis as to the way in which social institutions, including the patriarchal institution of the family, become forms or expressions of capitalist class struggle. While this socialist feminist tendency largely thinks at the level of large historical processes, partly in reaction to the perceived lifestylist politics of other elements in the gay liberation movement, the rest of this chapter draws out and extends its implications to think about how those social processes were lived and felt by gay people during the sixties and seventies.

21 Lesbian Left, "Lesbian Left – a Collection of Papers by Women in Lesbian Left: A Socialist Feminist Group," 1977, Pollard/2/4/1, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 CPGB Gay Rights Committee, "Workshop on Sexuality and the State," n.d., HCA/Thornycroft/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

3. Post-war transformations to the institution of the family

Having touched upon some of the key political and theoretical considerations framing gay liberation attitudes towards domestic and family life, I now want to introduce some historical contexts to this relationship, pertaining to post-war transformations to the institution of the family and relatedly to the provision of housing during this period. "The family" as an object of gay liberation critique had a specific historical character, arising from the reorganisation of the British state following the second world war. The valorisation of the heterosexual family in British public life in the 1950s was, according to Cook, instrumental in rebuilding a sense of national stability "after the crisis and dislocation of war," and necessitated "a retreat from the streets as places of socialization, courtship and sex" as a corrective to the general relaxation of sexual morality during wartime.²⁵ Despite the actual diversities of domestic life in Britain in the post-war decades, a certain image of the family, grounded in a gendered division of labour and bourgeois norms, nevertheless appeared to prevail across different sections of the population during this period. For Hall, this was part of a larger moment of cultural de-differentiation, a "temporary blurring of class distinctions"²⁶ in a time of rising working-class living standards and social mobility. In this context, the ideology of the private, nuclear family cut across social asymmetries as a prevailing idea and institution. This generalisation of bourgeois family norms moreover allowed some sections of the British working class to assert legitimacy and leverage concessions from the state, including better wages, social security and the expansion of social housing. With the emergence of the post-war welfare state, the family became "the unit to which state services [chose] to relate"²⁷ particularly in the arena of housing provision, demonstrating a growing partnership between the state and the family in the social reproduction of the British labour force. Put simply by the Conference of Socialist Economics (CSE) State Group, if you belonged to a family "made up of a male breadwinner and a dependent wife and children... your chances of obtaining council housing, various social security benefits, etc. are greatly increased,"²⁸ thus significantly incentivising heterosexual marriage and procreation. The family thus became a cherished institution within British society.

But the family ideal and its aspirations to affluence and stability in post-war Britain existed in a constant state of tension with the increasingly fragmentary realities of domestic life. While during the 1950s, the policy of dispersal involved the organised relocation of families from inner cities into suburbs and satellite new towns,²⁹ and legal developments attempted to normalise the model of owner-occupation within housing,³⁰ upward social mobility was far from universally accessible, even to notionally heterosexual households. "For those at the bottom of the 'housing ladder,'" write the

25 Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 144.

26 Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978).

27 Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State: Management of Cities and People*, (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 61.

28 Conference of Socialist Economists State Group, *Struggle over the State: Cuts and Restructuring in Contemporary Britain* (London: CSE Books, 1979), 18.

29 Christine Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney," *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017), 80.

30 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State*, 76.

CSE State Group, "a house does not represent a financial opportunity but a necessity for living... far from being an aspect of 'capital', a house is a constant burden."³¹ In inner-city London and other large metropolitan centres, this "burden" was expressed in the housing conditions which "remained very poor and overcrowded just at the moment when expectations of living standards were rising."³² Housing needs went increasingly unmet as post-war reconstruction plans stagnated in the sixties, leaving swathes of buildings empty and council housing waiting lists "hopelessly long."³³ War-derelict buildings were increasingly repurposed and subdivided into flats and bedsits for single and shared occupancy, largely absorbing poor and racialised fractions of the working class. Domestic life remained for many people during this period – particularly the large concentration of racialised immigrants "forced into poor quality housing, primarily, often in areas identified for slum clearance"³⁴ – out of step with the institutionalised ideal of family life. The fragmentation and subdivision of buildings into smaller household units at work during these decades can be read as an expression of the more general strategies of dispersal and differentiation at work in capitalist social life. As emphasised by Floyd, and explored in the introduction to this thesis, capitalist value relations rely upon a "systemic, privatizing fragmentation of social production especially and of social life more generally,"³⁵ which in the context of this history, maps onto the differentiation of the British working class' housing conditions, in spite of and through the cultural dedifferentiation of family norms and values.

While the cultural hegemony of the heterosexual, private family deepened, the actual, crisis-ridden conditions of family life and housing were mystified. Throughout the fifties and sixties, inner-city boarding houses, hostels, bedsits and other private rental situations increasingly came to accommodate single workers and those "dislocated from their home towns and their families."³⁶ In this context, many gays and lesbians left their own family situations, from a diversity of locations and backgrounds, and flocked towards cramped and unfit housing in big cities. When the 1957 Wolfenden Report recommended the decriminalisation of homosexual acts performed only "in private" and positioned homosexual sex as "reprehensible from the point of view of harm to the family,"³⁷ it codified the idea of the private household as the cradle of moral decency. Accordingly, a sense of marginality and incongruity to the family shaped the experiences of many gay people entering adulthood in the sixties and early seventies. In a personal account of his life published in *Gay Left's* eighth issue, Keith Birch notes on his own feeling of distance from his family "with their mixture of rural and working-class conservatism,"³⁸ and his eagerness to find a job and move to London as

31 Ibid.

32 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 149-150.

33 Christine Wall, "'We Don't Have Leaders! We're Doing It Ourselves!': Squatting, Feminism and Built Environment Activism in 1970s London," *Field 7*, no. 1 (2017), 130.

34 James Rhodes and Laurence Brown, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Inner City': Race, Space and Urban Policy in Postwar England," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 17 (2018), 3245.

35 Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, 6.

36 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 88.

37 Home Office and Scottish Home Department, "Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution [The Wolfenden Report]" (London: HMSO, 1957), Wellcome Collection, 22.

38 Keith Birch, in "Personal Politics Ten Years On," *Gay Left* 8 (1979), 4.

soon as he turned 18. "For about three months" after arriving, he writes, "I had no meaningful contact with anyone, living in a hostel, going to work and loosely working with the Young Socialists."³⁹ One respondent to the NLGS Survey likewise describes how, at the age of 21 (in 1965), between YMCA hostels and bedsits, he felt himself to be "a stranger in a strange land."⁴⁰ In an autobiographical reflection on his life in *Gay Left 2*, Angus Suttie also recalls his flight from the pressurised environment of his family in a small Scottish town – where "I sometimes felt like a jam-pot cover that was being stretched to fit over a jam-pot that was too big"⁴¹ – into London's bedsitterland. The precarity, anonymity and alienation of inner-city life bore down hard on Angus' wellbeing to the point of suicidality: "because I hated living in a bedsitter, and hated the dull, repetitious work I was doing; because there seemed to be no way out of this, I attempted suicide."⁴² Social research produced during the fifties on high rates of suicide in London's inner-city areas "populated by individuals and groups caught in a web of transient and impersonal social relationships"⁴³ suggest that Angus' experience was part of a larger phenomenon of intense social isolation in the private rental housing market.

The housing options available to precarious and working-class gay people in urban areas throughout the sixties thus tended to express a contradiction between freedom and constraint that has re-appeared continuously throughout this thesis. Affordable, low-quality accommodation in bedsits and hostels loosened gays and lesbians from the moral codes of family life, which during the post-war years had begun to extend across different class situations. It moreover brought a high volume of people into very literal close quarters in high-density housing, a key condition of possibility for emergent forms of sexual and social exploration and the development of sexual subcultures. Yet these escape routes from the family simultaneously tended to propel people into other forms of domestic drudgery and social isolation found in bedsits and other rented accommodation that in many ways reproduced the isolating and immiserating experiences of family life. The "familialisation" of society described by McIntosh and Barrett here speaks to the multiple contradictions mediated by the "privileged institution of the family."⁴⁴ While this institution does not accurately encompass the diverse realities of domestic life, it nevertheless exerts a kind of monopoly on the relations of love, care, comfort and pleasure, "as if the family had drawn comfort and security into itself and let the outside world bereft."⁴⁵ Thus as the ideology of the family strengthened and extended its reach, gay people increasingly sought to build relations of solidarity and community elsewhere, with varying degrees of success.

39 Ibid.

40 "Contributor Code: 179," n.d., SxMOA16/1/1/36, National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS), The Keep, Sussex. The particular phrasing here evokes the title of Robert Heinlein's 1961 novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a popular countercultural text of the time. The reference reinforces the way in which gay people during the sixties and seventies conceptualised their lives and experiences in relation to a set of countercultural politics and affects.

41 Angus Suttie, "From Latent to Blatant," *Gay Left 2* (1976), 6.

42 Ibid, 7.

43 Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 102.

44 Mary McIntosh and Michèle Barrett, *The Anti-Social Family* (London: Verso, 1982), 77

45 Ibid, 80.

The combination of increased sexual freedom and social isolation during the sixties produced a diversity of responses in the world of gay liberation. As many GLF groups across Britain began to lose momentum in the early seventies, with many ceasing activity altogether, a large portion of its London membership regrouped to continue the work of liberation in the form of squats and communes, motivated by a desire to live and relate autonomously from both the family structure and the state's housing bureaucracies. A communiqué from North London GLF's commune on Parkhill Road related the formation of the commune to the alienating living conditions described above, noting how "loneliness is possibly the greatest reason for unhappiness, and as everyone knows, many gay people live alone. Most of us came from that situation and think it's true to say we are all now feeling a sense of community and hence happiness which was for so long absent from our lives."⁴⁶ Others meanwhile found cohabiting in couples more conducive to emotional wellbeing and to sustaining their involvement in political struggle. Despite the often conflictual relationship between these approaches, the unpredictable and precarious nature of proletarian gay life meant that more often than not, individuals passed between these categories frequently.

The following two sections now consider the character of these different household formations – grouped loosely as gay communes and gay couples – through a constellation of personal testimonies and archival accounts, relating these experiences to ongoing capitalist reorganisations of the home. This thesis therefore reluctantly reproduces much of the London-centricity of existing gay liberation histories, in part due to the high volume of empty buildings in the capital acting as a beacon for the squatters' movement, but also due to the comparative shortage of information about gay squatting beyond London contained in public archives. Some of this is owed to the process by which gay archival holdings come into being, in that they tend to be composed of the items that individual donors kept hold of and felt to be of historical significance. The vast majority of archival material I have encountered relating to gay communes – even in archives located outside London – was donated by people who lived in the capital during the seventies, where the hubbub around gay liberation was loudest. What we deem historically significant can thus become self-fulfilling and cyclical: writing on the past must draw on the archival contributions available, but those contributions are not the raw material of history; they too are informed by contributors' anticipation of historical significance and archive managers' calls for contributions. Snapshots of gay domestic life beyond London have therefore been included as much as possible within the scope of this project.

4. Gay communes

In the early seventies, gay liberationists carved out a space within the broader squatters' movement, itself an outgrowth of sixties counterculture and radical social movements and characterised by "left

⁴⁶ "The GLF Commune: 44 Parkhill Road, London, NW3," 1973, HCA/GLF/6, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

libertarian and anarchist⁴⁷ politics. With the ebbing away of London GLF, no organisation or overriding set of principles existed to ground the various gay experiments in communal living that emerged in the capital over the course of the seventies, leading to a range of differing approaches. This section now sketches out some of those approaches, drawing upon existing historical writing on the period and archival accounts. The early gay liberation communes⁴⁸ that formed in the midst of London GLF's dissolution often reflected the different factional positions introduced earlier in this chapter. A group of ex-GLF radical feminists (mostly lesbians plus one gay man) formed a squat on Faraday Road in West London, in close proximity to an all-male squat of radical drag queens on Colville Terrace (and later Colville Houses) in Notting Hill, nicknamed "Colvillia."⁴⁹ In Camden, Hampstead, Bounds Green and Muswell Hill in North London, majority-male communes with broadly socialist leanings and a "much milder temperament"⁵⁰ also took shape. Each of these gay liberation communes – in both North and West London – tended to exist in their own small enclaves, taking root in the relative safety of London's gayer areas and separating themselves from the activities of the broader squatters' movement.

During the mid-seventies, gay squats began clustering in London's working-class areas where other radical movements had already laid down roots. In East London, Hackney was fertile ground for squatting due to its high density of derelict and vacant houses, and the existence of Broadway Market Squatters' Association, who in the early seventies had begun entering buildings and assembling community storerooms for tools and food.⁵¹ By the late seventies, around fifty women-only communes were established around Broadway Market, with at least seven of these populated by a majority of lesbians.⁵² Brixton in South London, an area that had undergone deep demographic shifts during the twentieth century, also became home to one of the largest and longer lasting gay squatting communities of the seventies. According to Cook, throughout the post-war period, Brixton had been notable for cheap rents and high-density housing, and by the 1970s, had become home to significant, intersecting working-class, Black and immigrant populations.⁵³ Railton Road, the heart of this squatting community, had originally been squatted by Olive Morris of the British Black Panthers in 1972⁵⁴ laying the groundwork for the entry of gay squatters into Brixton's working-class community. After years of corporate management techniques adopted by Lambeth Council between 1968 and 1974, unemployment had trebled, housing waiting lists had lengthened by 33 per cent and

47 Wall, "We don't have leaders!", 131.

48 It should be noted that while all of the households discussed in this next section self-designate as communes, the reality of their structure, situation and relationship to the housing market vary widely. Many were squats, occupying abandoned properties illegally, while some others were shared private rentals hosting more residents than named on the tenancy, while others were mobile groups of people who transitioned between these categories. The precise nature of the situation, where known, will be mentioned in each example.

49 Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 214.

50 Ibid, 211.

51 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 85.

52 Ibid, 86.

53 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 201-202.

54 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting," 83.

only half the borough's dwellings "were thought to be structurally in good condition."⁵⁵ The so-called "'rediscovery' of poverty,"⁵⁶ as the local council understood it, conveyed the increasing superfluity of working-class life to the capacities of the capitalist state at the moment of a global crisis of profitability. This sense of superfluity contributed to an upsurge in "the growth of "more militancy outside the workplace than ever before" in the form of tenant organisations, squatters' networks and social movements,⁵⁷ which is where the gay commune movement found its niche.

These contexts also informed the structure of everyday life across the gay communes. In the early experiments in communal living, arising out of GLF, there was a strong focus on sharing possessions, resources and space in attempts to undermine the notion of private property ownership conjoined to the prevailing ideal of the family. In the Bounds Green house in North London – a private rental shared by a large group of gay men and two women – communards paid "an equal share towards the rent, bills and kitty for food," which due to the "differences in employment and the level of each person's wage meant that for some it was easy while for others it could be a problem."⁵⁸ This model of financially sustaining communes was made possible by the availability of unemployment benefit, which allowed Mark Roberts, one of Keith's fellow communards in Bounds Green, "to afford to live that way and pay my share."⁵⁹ Many other communes adopted a system of means-based (rather than equal) contributions to a kitty, as with the Camden GLF commune on Medburn Street, where "each communard puts what he can afford in the 'House Fund': averaging about £5-£6 a week, which moneys go towards Light, Heat, Rates, Repairs and potential future development. (If not working, then Social Security meets the Rent Charges!!)"⁶⁰ In his account of the radical drag commune in Notting Hill, Julian Hows recalls buying a Clarice Cliff art deco teapot from Maidstone Market to hold the household kitty, conveying the pleasure that the queens took in infusing the means-based, sharing economy of the squat with a draggy aesthetic. The practice of injecting a camp sense of glamour into the everyday also extended to the practicalities of sourcing income, indicated by Julian's anecdote about going down to the dole office in "a very nice Grecian frock, boots from Granny Takes A Trip, red-hennaed hair, long cigarette holder and a gold lamé clutch purse," a get-up intentionally designed to bewilder the officials ("I thought, well, no one's going to make me fucking work, dear."⁶¹) For Stuart Feather, a resident at the same squat, the commune's economics – "putting all our money in one teapot and sharing all our clothes and possessions" – were what set them apart from both non-commune dwelling gay people ("the middle-class Marxists in their cosy flats in West Hampstead"),⁶² and the socialist communards (who "could not apply 'from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs' to their own, self-created situation"⁶³) – as truly and immanently revolutionary.

55 Cockburn, *The Local State*, 67-68.

56 Ibid, 66.

57 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State*, 371.

58 Keith Birch, "A Commune Experience," *Gay Left 2* (1976), 12.

59 As quoted in Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 315.

60 "The Gay Liberation Front Squat Commune," 1973, HCA/GLF/6, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

61 As quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 226.

62 Ibid, 222.

63 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 520.

Over on Faraday Road, in what many considered to be Colvillia's radical feminist sister squat, the breaking down of private property meant literal communal ownership of space, possessions and income, with the squatters deciding to "share all our clothes" and pool all of their money "for food, tampax, toilet rolls and cat food."⁶⁴ This culture of sharing was stretched to uncomfortable extremes, to the extent that "if two or more of us got together and talked, then anything said should be repeated to whoever was missing," to avoid the formation of factions.⁶⁵ Within these various codes and practices, notions of private property, personal possessions and basic personal privacy were intentionally conflated, so as to bring "barriers... down in painful crashes."⁶⁶

While a general opposition to private property permeated all of the communal living arrangements discussed in this chapter, this opposition had different practical applications and interpretations, especially when it came to approaching the actual spatial organisation of communal households. Many of the early GLF-aligned communes, of both socialist and radical feminist orientations, allocated one room in the house, strewn with mattresses, for everybody to sleep in communally. Communal sleeping arrangements made economical use of the space available – since the terraced houses often taken over by squatters and communards generally weren't designed to accommodate so many dwellers – but also facilitated the growth of close bonds beyond familial ties. In Bounds Green, Mark Roberts "used to find it very comforting to go to sleep in there, in a room with other sleeping bodies. It was painted a dark colour and the curtains were drawn, the light was only very dim, it was very relaxing, very comforting hearing people breathing, you weren't alone."⁶⁷ On Faraday Road, despite radical feminism's wider reputation for tending towards separatism, communal sleeping arrangements allowed for non-sexual intimacies to grow between gay men and women: "Even Jenny, an ex-SCUMite,⁶⁸ now enjoys cuddling Richard in bed, and loves without hang-ups many the brothers who come to the house."⁶⁹ More often than not, however, these sleeping arrangements conduced to the ethos of sexual non-monogamy central to many gay communal experiments. Announcing "we have virtually done away with the concept of monogamy," Faraday Road framed the sexual organisation of the commune as "living our politics" and aiding "the destruction of the nuclear family."⁷⁰ In Colvillia the communards totally re-imagined the disused film studio they all lived and slept in through campy design elements: "lots of big orb lights hung from the ceiling, paper lanterns sprayed with sequins and hung with feather boas just suspended in space and lots of very cheap carpeting with deco rugs thrown on top."⁷¹ Camp sensibility informed the group's flippant dismissal of monogamy, too, articulated from a sense of ennui and distaste for the concept, as in Bette Bourne's reflection that "couples were really uncool," because "everybody wanted to have sex with

64 Carolyn, "Fuck the Family," in *Come Together*, 156.

65 Ibid, 157.

66 Ibid, 156.

67 As quoted in Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 316.

68 "SCUMite" here refers to a proponent of Valerie Solanos' 1968 SCUM Manifesto (SCUM: the Society for Cutting up Men") a controversial classic of radical feminism.

69 Carolyn, "Fuck the Family," 157.

70 Ibid.

71 Julian Hows, ss quoted in *Power, No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 224.

everybody!"⁷² The focus on experimentation and play in Colvillia – with sex, hallucinogens and drag – nevertheless often came at the expense of the practicalities involved in sustaining a household. According to Michael James, "these dizzy queens, dear, couldn't shop to save their lives, so I made sure we had food in"; meanwhile the lack of running water meant that on Saturdays, a friendly neighbour would have "upwards of ten to fifteen of us from two o'clock" round for a bath.⁷³

These creative uses of domestic space were particular to a structure of feeling arising from the early seventies gay liberation scene. Playfulness, overblown sarcasm and gaudy aesthetics became highly influential parts of gay communal culture, expressing Richard Dyer's understanding of camp as "an eye and an ear for surfaces, appearances, forms: style."⁷⁴ Here, camp stylings were combined with sincere calls for the abolition of the family and a belief in the political effectiveness of the communes to this end. This collapsing in of aesthetics and politics spoke to a particular notion of revolutionary change as arising immanently from lifestyle and from people's relationships with one another. The development of this highly aestheticised politics in the gay communes thus conduced to a particular kind of gay vanguardism, wherein sleeping arrangements, shared economies and usages of space came to reinforce groups' image of themselves as revolutionaries. Particular aesthetics, as seen in the above examples, frequently mapped onto different factional positions, with the radical feminist, drag-focused communes in Colvillia especially embracing camp, and distancing themselves both from other elements within the gay movement and from the values embodied by the heterosexual family.

As the seventies wore on, however, the character of gay communes and their creative usage of space shifted, in line with the ebbs and flows of the gay liberation movement. Further afield in Leeds, a communal house for gay men (dubbed "Radclyffe Hall" after the lesbian novelist) afforded each resident a separate bedroom, which did not at all impede the culture of "identity experimentation, radical drag, make-up, drugs, GLF, protest and parties" fostered within.⁷⁵ Many of the women's liberation and lesbian squats forming in London in the mid-seventies also took a more practical and functional approach to space, delineating the squats as "women's centres, refuges from domestic violence, workplaces, and nurseries as well as homes."⁷⁶ In the Broadway Market cluster of lesbian squats, Frankie Green describes how the squatters' community outreach was not limited to lesbians but extended indiscriminately to local working-class women: "we would often help local women who were on the housing list, living in squalid conditions with their kids, having split up from men or something, not pleasant like that. So, we would go with them to the housing office at the council or we would break into houses to assist them and support them to take over their own housing."⁷⁷ The

72 Ibid, 214.

73 Ibid, 225.

74 Richard Dyer, "It's Being so Camp as to Keep Us Going," in *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2001), 59.

75 Stevan Alcock, "A Safe Space for Gay Men in 1970s Leeds," West Yorkshire Queer Stories (blog), 2020, <https://wqgs.co.uk/post/a-safe-space-for-gay-men-in-70s-leeds/>.

76 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 83.

77 Frankie Green, *From a Whisper to a Roar: Love and Protest Stories of LGBT+ Women*, Transcript, 2020, FAWTAR, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

focus of these households was less upon incubating a revolutionary gay consciousness within their walls and more upon embedding themselves in their neighbourhood. This shift was in some ways informed by the changing circumstances of working-class lesbians in Britain in the years following the rise and fall of gay liberation, in which lesbians increasingly "lost their children in custody battles and their jobs through discrimination, while many were thrown out of the parental home."⁷⁸ These squats were therefore organised spatially around meeting peoples' needs for support, shelter and community in an increasingly cold social climate.

Lesbian squatters also poured their labour into making buildings fit for habitation, often acting on tip-offs from local residents, who welcomed any restoration efforts after years of neglect by local authorities, as to which buildings were squattable. Anny Brackx, a one-time key member of the GLF media workshop, recalls re-routing electricity from a neighbouring squat into her communal home on Marlborough Avenue, while her girlfriend "took a course in plumbing, and... plumbed in a bath, which was, I thought, fantastic."⁷⁹ While on a practical front, the acquisition of traditionally masculinised trade skills allowed the lesbians to re-shape the built environment to meet their communal needs, Anny's delight in her partner's plumbing skills suggests that it also formed part of a distinct set of styles, affects and pleasures. Gardening, for example, was not only useful for growing vegetables and rearing chickens, but also, according to Frankie Green, for creating "an absolutely beautiful"⁸⁰ environment to exist communally in. The customisation of these squatted buildings also accounted for a variety of different household formations, as opposed to the compulsory communal sleeping area that had characterised the early GLF squats. While the basements of the terraces tended to be used for workshops and meeting rooms, the upper floors were "adapted for communal living, for couples, or as informal single units where women had their own kitchens and living/bedrooms,"⁸¹ organised flexibly around the requirements and preferences of the dwellers.

A similar architectural creativity characterised the gay squatting community in Brixton during the mid-late seventies. In the adjacent houses on Railton Road, garden fences were razed to form one large communal outdoor area, as pictured in Fig. 5, and back doors were left unlocked to allow a flow of people between homes.⁸² An adjoining wall between 157 and 159 Railton Road was demolished to communalise use of one house's kitchen (as pictured below in Fig. 6) and the other's bathroom.⁸³ Despite the flow of people between the squatted terraces, however, their layout afforded some degree of privacy and flexibility, with many households providing each resident with a private bedroom, "to keep some sense of privateness, of individuality."⁸⁴ Similarly to the lesbian squatting community around Broadway Market, the majority gay male Brixton squatters tailored the built

78 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 93-94.

79 Ibid, 89.

80 Ibid, 89-90.

81 Ibid, 89.

82 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 203.

83 Peter Vetter, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1981, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

84 Ibid.

environment towards political and community activity. 79 Railton Road became the South London Gay Centre⁸⁵ which alongside many of the other squatted buildings hosted the group meetings of South London GLF (the longest-living London group after the broad decline of GLF), the Gay Left Collective and the Brixton Faeries theatre group among others.⁸⁶



Fig. 5: Ian Townson, "Music in the communal garden, Brixton," (n.d.), Townson/16/142, Bishopsgate Institute, London.



Fig. 6: Ian Townson, "Peter Cross (Petal), Peter Vetter, unnamed woman, Julian Hows (standing), and unnamed woman in the downstairs back room of 159 Railton Road, Brixton," (n.d.), Townson/16/10, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

85 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 199.

86 *Ibid.*, 203.

By the time of the Brixton squatting community's heyday, older factionalisms between socialists and radical feminists had a residual rather than dominant effect on everyday life, allowing for a pastiche of different styles and political influences to characterise everyday life in the squats. A "mixture of camp fantasy and radical gay politics"⁸⁷ remained an important part of the Brixton squatters' shared culture, exemplified by the Brixton Faeries' production and performance of the original play, *Mr. Punch's Nuclear Family*, "an interpretation of the musical tragedy of a nuclear family."⁸⁸ In the play, the patriarchal Punch character murders his gay son after he is seduced into "the Gay Centre in Railton Road... standing there in the rain and smelling the hot tea brewing and all that gay laughter."⁸⁹ Radical drag was less of an everyday practice than in Colvillia, but the residency of Julian Hows (a veteran of the radical drag scene) in 159 led him naturally to become the "arbiter" of the squatters' flirtations with drag.⁹⁰ By this point, Julian had become "sick of" the idea of drag as immanently radical, coming instead to understand it as a more "private" mode of "exploration of self... to do with how you wish to be desired,"⁹¹ speaking to the general tempering of hardline radical feminist perspectives in gay male squatting cultures. Style, aesthetic and sensory experience nevertheless remained a core part of how communards' recorded and remembered squatting in the later seventies, even as the camp glamour that had characterised Colvillia now began to recede. Archival accounts of the Brixton squats are laden with sensuous detail, activity and emotion. 159 Railton Road was noted consistently for its "woolly"⁹² atmosphere, imparting a kind of "homeyness... as if these queens baked bread,"⁹³ while John Witte's diarised account of life in an unknown house on the same road is told mainly through a swirling narrative of meals he cooked and ate ("Potatoes Alsace and Sweet and Sour red Cabbage... Basbousa with Almonds... Apple Koresh and Persian Potato Omelette") and people he slept with ("woke beside David in Sally's room and walked in cold mist to Keynes... had tea at 159 and slept with my good friend Jamie and did have very pleasant experiences... Ian was sitting about and so we danced and danced and danced and did lots of things, clothes came off and drunken groping in freshly painted rooms.")⁹⁴ These various accounts give a sense of the squatting community as a site of intensive emotional and sexual experimentation and discovery, as people attempted to live out their countercultural politics through even the most mundane details of domestic life.

Despite the freedoms and varieties of experience opened up by the communal living experiments discussed in this chapter, each of them nevertheless had to metabolise a range of social antagonisms. When the Faraday Road commune announced that "couples in bed-sits will always be vulnerable to society's hostility in a way that a collective will not,"⁹⁵ in the early seventies, they had underestimated the level of public aggression that could be directed against communes. For the early

87 Matthew Jones, Interview by Jamie Hall, Transcript, 1983, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

88 Ian Townson, "Draft Chapter: Drama Queens," n.d., Townson/8/2, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

89 Ibid.

90 Julian Hows, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1984, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

91 Ibid.

92 Michael Kerrigan, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, n.d., Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

93 Paul Coyle, "Letter to Ian Townson with attached autobiographical notes," 1997, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

94 John Witte, "Letter to Ian Townson with Attached Autobiographical Notes," 1996, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

95 Carolyn, "Fuck the Family," 158.

gay liberation communes, relations with neighbours and local authorities were extremely fraught, for example. Before Colvillia became Colvillia, its founding members had started out in a rented house on Athlone Road in Tulse Hill/Brixton shared by eight men, where the spectacle of "pairs of tights and skirts and what is traditionally called women's clothing hanging on the line" and the queens "in the garden in our make-up" incited the ire of the neighbours.⁹⁶ Harassment from local teenagers escalated, with one resident, Alaric Sumner, "getting hit over the head with [a] bottle", the "front door [getting] bashed down" and "bricks [being] thrown through all our windows,"⁹⁷ pushing the group "to leave the stonier ground of Brixton and on to the slightly less stony area of Notting Hill Gate."⁹⁸ Despite the rhetoric of defiant self-expression that tended to permeate the communes, their experimentations were structured and conditioned by their surrounding areas, to the extent that roughly the same group of communards constructed wildly different domestic living arrangements in Covillia than they had done in Athlone Road.

While more amicable relationships with neighbours were possible, as demonstrated by the Broadway Market lesbian squatters, hostility from property-owners (usually local authorities) was almost universal, contributing to a constant sense of impermanency and precarity. A combination of eviction and uninhabitable living conditions forced Keith Birch's commune to move constantly "around several inadequate homes across London, some four or five of us surviving the whole process and always at least a group of eight or more of us living together."⁹⁹ 42 Colville Terrace, the next stop for the Athlone Road queens, reported in a GLF newsletter that officials from Notting Hill Housing Trust had attempted a very heavy-handed eviction, "savagely attack[ing] the window of the door with a crowbar, smashing it into the hallway... break[ing] in the door leading to the basement" and upon "finding that there was no way into the house from the basement... [breaking] the main water supply to the house."¹⁰⁰ In Hackney, Frankie Green describes the eviction of a women's squat on Amhurst Road in which the police used a "telegraph pole... as a battering-ram," causing a huge confrontation with the squatters in which many were "chucked into police vans and [taken] off to... Stoke Newington Police Station."¹⁰¹

The policing of gay squats was inflected by the changing social circumstances of the 1970s. For the GLF squats in the early seventies, confrontations with the police largely arose from the connections between GLF and the Angry Brigade. GLF's Agitprop collective (in which Andy Elsmore was involved) was at the time based out of a commune in Muswell Hill which was subjected to multiple raids in 1971.¹⁰² According to Angie Weir, the police "used to go through the address book and then everybody would get raided in turn, so you knew that if you had been telephoning a house that's been

96 Cloud Downey, as quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 215.

97 GLF, "Gay Liberation Front Newssheet 5-13 October," 1972, HCA/Chesterman/7, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

98 GLF, "Happy Families," in *Come Together*, 195.

99 Keith Birch, "A Community of Interests," in *Radical Records*, 54

100 GLF, "Gay Liberation Front Newssheet 5-13 October," 1972, HCA/Chesterman/7

101 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s," 85.

102 Feather, *Blowing the Lid*, 8-13.

raided and that the house that had been raided had got your address in their address book, then it was very likely that you would get raided yourself."¹⁰³ Accused of "connections to international gun smuggling," Angie was among the Stoke Newington Eight, a group of individuals tried in 1972 for a series of Angry Brigade bombings, though she was fully acquitted alongside four other defendants.¹⁰⁴

These types of aggressive policing became more generalised with the onset of the long crisis of the seventies, constituted by mass unemployment and cuts to social spending. In Brixton, the police's relationship to the gay squats was overdetermined by their physical proximity to Black working-class communities and the local drug trade. In the years preceding the 1981 Brixton riots, the Met's Special Patrol Group "practiced 'manoeuvres' on the Black population of Brixton" that in practice involved "beatings and terror tactics," often catching "long-haired hippie types", 'squatter types', 'shifty looking character types', 'working class types', 'anarchist types', 'queer types' and anyone else who did not conform to an image of middle-class respectability" up in their wake.¹⁰⁵ While very few gay squatters "were subjected to the kind of police harassment that Black men in particular experienced,"¹⁰⁶ drug use in the squats often formed a pretext for police surveillance and occasional raids. 159/157 was once raided on suspicion of being the base of a drug dealing operation, with police bursting in on Julian "in me knickers sewing a frock" to find one withering dope plant on his windowsill.¹⁰⁷ While the Brixton squatters' comparative large numbers, connections to other political groups, and degree of permanency in the area allowed them to withstand aggressive policing with resilience and good humour, the later seventies also saw a higher occurrence of criminalised activities among the squatters. While the early gay liberation scene's use of "dope and perhaps hallucinogens" for their "expressive and exploratory" possibilities had extended into the culture of the later squats, a newer "druggy subculture" based on heroin use also took root in Brixton around the time of the Gay Centre's closure and the arrival of "rent scene" queens (hustlers and sex workers) from Earls Court and Chelsea and Piccadilly.¹⁰⁸ For one squatter, who struggled for some time with opiate addiction, the collision of these subcultures became an obstacle to the squats' communising project, "because I was into drugs and I didn't really cooperate and do things,"¹⁰⁹ as well as drawing further attention from the police.

Assaults upon communal life were not simply the imposition of external forces like the police and local authorities, however. Despite the general ethos of "dropping out" from straight society, gay squats still had to reproduce themselves in a capitalist world, which in turn required negotiating their own divisions of labour. Describing life in Colvillia, an article in *Come Together's* Notting Hill issue admits frankly, "there are many problems that arise when ten gay men live together in one room as

103 As quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 187.

104 Robinson, "Carnival of the Oppressed: The Angry Brigade and the Gay Liberation Front," *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History* 6 (2003), 6.

105 Ian Townson, 'Prelude 3: Racism, Unemployment and Policing Brixton', n.d., Townson/8/2, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

106 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 211.

107 Julian Hows, Interview by Ian Townson, Transcript, 1984, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

108 Dennis Simmonds, Interview by Ian Townson, Transcript, 1997, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

109 Ibid.

we are at present. There are the problems about who does the shit-work that men usually force women to do, such as washing, cooking and cleaning."¹¹⁰ In Faraday Road, "tears, traumas, temper, all became the order of the day" as the communards grappled with the ever-unresolved issue of "work sharing."¹¹¹ In Keith Birch's commune, "simple things like washing up remained a source of unending argument but got done eventually, though sometimes with several depleted stocks after much crockery smashing."¹¹² Though disputes around housework were also a feature of life in the Brixton squatting community, Bill Thornycroft has indicated that their intensity was alleviated by the partial separation of households between the terraces. For Thornycroft, "the concept of one large house with one large communal kitchen and one large communal living room etc. contains the seeds of its own destruction," whereas housing people together with compatible needs and expectations allowed for "several different types of household, sharing some things and not others, joining together in all sorts of differing ways."¹¹³ Ironically, the problem of labour distribution in the communes held up a mirror to a key facet of the archetypal heterosexual family so reviled by gay liberationists. In this sense, it reveals the communes' subjection to the same impasse of reproduction structuring heterosexual society, despite their best efforts to extricate themselves.

Broader social antagonisms thus tended to be expressed in the form of conflicts, tensions and exclusions within communal households. In particular, most of the communes discussed in this chapter had a deeply awkward relationship to whiteness and race, with most of them having a large majority of white members. As the only Black resident in the Bounds Green house, Ted Brown found that in spite of the proclaimed openness and anti-racism of the commune, frank discussions about racialised experience were impossible, since with "everybody being very liberal and so on, they would just say yes to whatever I said and it didn't get anywhere."¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, a sense of neighbourly rapport existed between the mostly white gay squatters in Brixton and their Black neighbours, with many of the squatters finding "a welcome oasis to socialise in" in the unlicensed drinking clubs – or shebeens – run out of squatted buildings, such as Pearl Allcock's.¹¹⁵ This "cordial"¹¹⁶ relationship nevertheless translated unevenly into actual expressions of solidarity during the Special Patrol Group's protracted assault on the Black population of Brixton and subsequent Brixton riots in 1981. While "many gay people were out on the streets during the conflict in solidarity with other oppressed groups,"¹¹⁷ others such as Paul Coyle, felt more inclined to "observe, to see from the centre of the tempest what was happening," assuming the role of "the uncommitted tourist"¹¹⁸ at this climax of racialised class conflict. Other members of the Brixton squatting community attest to a

110 GLF, "Getting Down to the Nitty Gritty," in *Come Together*, 206.

111 Carolyn, "Fuck the Family," in *Come Together*, 156.

112 Keith Birch, "A Community of Interests," in *Radical Records*, 55.

113 Bill Thornycroft, "Brixton Faeries, South London GLF: A Personal View," 1977, HCA/Thornycroft/2/5, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

114 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 213.

115 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 213.

116 Ibid, 211.

117 Ian Townson, "To Cassell Publishers: Structure of the Book," n.d., Townson/8/4, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

118 Paul Coyle, "Letter to Ian Townson with Attached Autobiographical Notes," 1997, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

tendency to paper over class and race differentiations among the squatters, with a shared gayness acting as "the lowest common denominator."¹¹⁹ According to one communitarian, "there was this ideal that we cut across all these barriers" when in reality, "what we tended to do was ignore a lot of those issues."¹²⁰ The squats' gayness thus interacted with their whiteness in ways that tended to alienate the Black minority of residents and efface the racialised class antagonisms raging in the borough.

The various gay communes' attempts to "live out" their politics also often ran into a swamp of contradictions. While cultures of sharing, radical drag and non-monogamy were premised on the notion of personal freedom from gender roles, for Alaric Sumner, they came to constitute a "moral insistence upon revolutionary behaviour" that he found unbearable and "dogmatic."¹²¹ Even where codes of behaviour were not structured by explicit rules – as in the more socialist-leaning GLF squats – informal norms such as non-monogamy were particularly troublesome for those in couples. In the Bounds Green commune, Ted Brown and Noel Halifax "got a lot of hassle for being a couple" and were criticised "for having a nuclear family set up."¹²² Frankie Green has also spoken about struggling with the culture of compulsory non-monogamy in her lesbian commune in Hackney, where the "ideological issue... of not wanting to replicate heterosexual relationships and marriages," meant that her relationships with other women tended to be transient and unfulfilling, which she found "very difficult and very gruelling emotionally."¹²³ In Brixton, this culture of "couple-busting" is understood by Ian Townson as a residual aspect of radical feminism's influence on the gay liberation movement.¹²⁴ Dennis Simmonds' relationship with Alex Beyer, while not explicitly outlawed, provoked constant guilt, with Dennis finding himself "apologis[ing] to people in the market that I'd met, other queens that I had met, because we were still together."¹²⁵ John Witte's diary entries also describe feeling "so absolutely lonely," "very much the left-one-out" and "not wanted" as he attempted to navigate non-monogamous relationships,¹²⁶ reflecting a dimension of feeling that was rendered inexpressible in the moral economy of the squats.

"Couple-busting" also frequently intersected with an intense suspicion of bisexuals passing through the squatting community. While not strictly separatist, a casual kind of gay separatism among the Brixton squatters led to "privately muttered tones of disapproval" and occasional "outbursts of fury" at the community's bisexual element.¹²⁷ Similarly, within the women-only squats where separatism was more formalised, the marking of individuals and groups as outsiders on the basis of biologically essentialised notions of gender had corrosive interpersonal effects. Rachel Pollack, a trans woman

119 Julian Hows, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1984, Townson/8/3.

120 Peter Vetter, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1981, Townson/8/3.

121 Alaric Sumner, as quoted in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 220.

122 Ibid, 212.

123 Frankie Green, *From a Whisper to a Roar: Love and Protest Stories of LGBT+ Women*, Transcript, 2020, FAWTAR, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

124 Ian Townson, "Draft Chapter: Chapter 12," n.d., Townson/8/7, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

125 Dennis Simmonds, Interview by Ian Townson, Transcript.

126 John Witte, "Letter to Ian Townson with Attached Autobiographical Notes/"

127 Ian Townson, "Draft Chapter: Chapter 12."

active in GLF's Transsexual and Transvestite cluster experienced a "hardening of the social atmosphere"¹²⁸ quite abruptly during the early seventies, after which she was no longer welcome in women-only communes. While space does not permit a deeper investigation of the negotiations of gayness, bisexuality and transsexuality within the gay commune movement, it is clear that many of the tendencies associated with liberating personal relationships from patriarchal and heterosexual conventions often led to the solidification of new exclusions and standards of behaviour.

Gay squats and communes during the seventies were thus ridden with conflict and contradiction. While they created a space of freedom and experimentation, their little utopias were subject to intense pressure from local authorities, police and hostile neighbours and to manifold internal divisions. Gordon's reflection on the Medburn Street commune that the politics of "the outside world often creep into the commune relationships,"¹²⁹ even while maintaining a hard conceptual border between the inside/outside, speaks to the fragility of the shared fantasy of exteriority to capitalist reproduction shared by many communards. If, as ME O'Brien has argued, "the combination of care and violent domination is the dual character of any family structure in class society,"¹³⁰ the gay communes of the seventies only advanced, rather than resolved, this contradiction. Frequently, attempts to live out liberation led to the imposition of new restrictions and norms that bred resentment and accelerated the breakdown of collectives. In this sense, the gay communes of the seventies reveal an important contradictory dimension of family life in capitalism more generally: while the family can be understood as a genuine source of comfort and reprieve from the violence of class society, it also metabolises and reproduces that violence within its own internal relationships. It is not surprising then that despite an overriding commitment to abolishing the family, some of the fondest anecdotes on communal life tend to invoke the sense of being part of one, "the simple thing of feeling a sense of belonging to a group of people... having a family."¹³¹ For this reason, O'Brien reads within the demand for family abolition, shared by the various factions of gay liberation described in this chapter, and by many other quarters of the countercultural and radical left, a marxist concept of abolition, containing both negative and positive dimensions. The destruction of the institutionalised family form, O'Brien argues, is at the same time a "positive supersession" in the form of "the preservation of and emancipation of the genuine love and care proletarian people have found with each other in the midst of hardship: the fun and joy of eroticism; the intimacy of parenting and romance."¹³² This simultaneous sense of destruction and preservation is reflected in the multiple meanings of the German *Aufhebung* from which abolition, in the traditions of marxism, is translated. The conclusion of the thesis will pick this idea back up and bring it into conversation with the gay liberation movement's particular conceptions of social revolution, but for the purposes of this chapter, the antinomies of abolition are a useful way for thinking through the contradictions of the

128 Davina Anne Gabriel, "The Power and the Passion: An Interview with Rachel Pollack," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism* 9 (1995), 47.

129 GLF, "Newsletter," May 1973, MCLELLAN, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

130 ME O'Brien, "To Abolish the Family," *Endnotes* 5, 2020, 366.

131 Julian Hows, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1984, Townson/8/3.

132 O'Brien, "To Abolish the Family," 417.

gay commune movement, whose innovative forms of relating simultaneously defied family norms while suspending and preserving some elements of familial, domestic life.

5. Gay coupledom

While the commune movement acted as a laboratory for gay liberation experiments in different ways of living, the attempts of gay communards to generalise their situation socially therefore never quite came off. By the end of the seventies, the recomposition of social struggle in Britain saw each of the experiments discussed in this chapter evolve into something else entirely, the precise nature of which will be interrogated in a later section. As Cook has noted, however, even at the height of their popularity, "squatting, communal living, experimental sex... were still things that did not feel possible for most queer men and women," rendering them "peripheral" to the bulk of gay and lesbian life.¹³³ Julian's understanding of Colvillia as "another planet to all extents and purposes"¹³⁴ – a culture defined by its own transience – invites the question of what kinds of living arrangements constituted gay and lesbian life during the sixties and seventies on a more long-term basis. Despite the tenuous status of couples within radical gay milieus, couple-based households interfaced frequently with the wider gay movement, leaving an indelible imprint on the archive of gay liberation. This section now moves to look more closely at some forms of gay coupledom and their relationships to the shifting social conditions of the sixties and seventies in Britain. Constellating archival traces of gay coupledom, it attempts also to demystify the opposition between the commune and the couple structuring gay liberation thought.

While the 1957 Wolfenden Report's recommendations addressed and helped construct a domesticated, "respectable" form of homosexuality,¹³⁵ the realities of gay domestic life in the two decades that followed were variable and messy. Gay couples during the sixties frequently turned to inner-city bedsit accommodation, in which they could plausibly fly under the radar of the intensified policing of public sex. Ambiguous domestic configurations often arose, such as in Eric's account of his relationship with a man in Brighton's Churchill Square:

"I had a bedsitter upstairs and he had a bedsitter down below... he was partly rent – he would expect you to give him something – so we used to have sex together on that understanding. Then sometimes he would arrive home and two o'clock in the morning and wake me up and say, 'Come on, I'm hungry, I want you to cook me something.' That meant egg and chips or something like that and he said, 'If you don't do it quick I'm going to burn your curtains down.' He would hold his lighter, or throw your transistor out of the window, things like that."¹³⁶

133 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 193.

134 Julian Hows, Interview by Bill Thornycroft.

135 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 145.

136 Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts*, 40.

Within this account are echoes of nuclear family life, particularly its strange combinations of transactional sex, domestic labour and interpersonal coercion, registering the shifting social status of male homosexuality the sixties. On one hand, the era of so-called progressive reform had begun to make private domestic life a more viable option for working-class gay people, especially if they could pass as single sharers to prospective landlords. Meanwhile, the increasingly run-down and cramped quality of accommodation available, paired with intensified social hostility towards public cultures of sexuality, rendered social isolation as much a characteristic of the cohabiting household as of single life. Cook's research into the "intensely insular"¹³⁷ domestic life of playwright Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell in their Islington bedsit, for example, emphasises their attempts to "mark out a domestic difference"¹³⁸ from a society they disdained. The single, austere decorated room where they lived, worked and slept throughout the sixties housed an "undiluted and unsustainable" form of gay coupledness culminating in Halliwell murdering Orton and killing himself in 1967.¹³⁹ Cook's view of their home life as neither "compatible with the elusive domestic norm" nor with "Wolfenden's vision of respectable homosexual domesticity,"¹⁴⁰ is supported by Orton's own commentary on his forays into the city for sex, and his vocal aversion to Halliwell's effeminacy throughout his diaries (one entry cites himself scolding Halliwell: "Please don't let the whole neighbourhood know you are a queen!"¹⁴¹). This highly historically scrutinised relationship thus exemplifies – to a tragic extreme – how gay domestic scenes could act as a crucible for the contradictory social demands on homosexuals, restrictive living conditions and alienation during the sixties.

For all the oft-cited conceptual incompatibilities between gay liberation and couples, the emergence of the gay movement in the early seventies facilitated the development of a particular form of gay coupledness, with a fluid relationship to sex, monogamy and politics. Prior to joining the communards at Colvillia, for example, Bette Bourne (an actor and drag queen) lived for an extended period with the painter Rex Lay in a flat at 38 Colville Terrace. The couple's proximity to London GLF – "full of young gays and very cruisy"¹⁴² – facilitated a peculiar kind of gay domestic intimacy, involving lively political discussion, radical drag at home, and an implicit freedom to sleep with other people. The below painting (Fig. 7) by Rex depicts himself and Bette taking a bath together, illustrating the close quarters in which they lived and the intensive yet playful sense of intimacy between them. In an extended interview with Mark Ravenhill, Bette describes moments of domestic tenderness between the two of them, informed by experimentation with psychedelics and with the living space, in a similar vein to the GLF communes of the time. One story involves Rex and Bette clearing out all of their furniture – "smart little Victorian chairs, smart little round tables and cabinets" – to be replaced by large floor cushions, after which they "sat on the floor... had some dope... did acid. A complete change. And it

137 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 179.

138 Ibid, 184.

139 Ibid, 187.

140 Ibid, 190.

141 Joe Orton, *The Orton Diaries*, ed. John Lahr (London: Methuen, 1986), 243.

142 Dan de la Motte, ed., *GLF at 50: The Art of Protest* (London: Camp Books, 2021), 9.

was wonderful."¹⁴³ Rather than cutting off their domestic environment from the world, their home also became a stage for the confrontational modes of coming out mobilised by gay liberation. At one point, Bette invited his homophobic father to "see the jewel in its crown," where, decked in "long red hennaed hair and a lot of make-up" he told him: "'I'm not afraid of you. I think you're a shit. I think you've been absolutely evil to me...'" And he was terrified because he'd never seen a beautiful queen, let alone the fact I was his son."¹⁴⁴



Fig. 7: Rex Lay, "Rex and Bette in the Bath," Oil on Canvas, in *GLF at 50: The Art of Protest* ed. Dan de la Motte, 8, (London: Camp Books, 2021).

Bob Cant's unpublished memoirs paint a similar picture of domestic life with his boyfriend Pedro at the beginning of the seventies in their rented Haringgay flat. While their home was on one hand a "cocoon of intimacy,"¹⁴⁵ they had elected to live near the Bounds Green commune for the opportunities for political activity this provided, and mutually agreed that "we were not sexually monogamous."¹⁴⁶ Like Rex and Bette, hallucinogenic experimentation was an intimate activity between them, with Bob recalling the pair taking LSD in their kitchen: "Pedro and I are sitting at the table and he is beginning to make grasping gestures with his hands; back and forward, back and forward. He comes right up to my face and his hands seem to be about to swallow me."¹⁴⁷ For Bob, who was by this point a seasoned socialist and trade unionist, being in a couple relationship made it easier to come out to his straight leftist friends, with he and Pedro attending a Troops Out protest in 1972 in their GLF badges "to help clarify things."¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, in an autobiographical article in *Gay*

143 Mark Ravenhill and Bette Bourne, *A Life in Three Acts* (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), 18.

144 *Ibid*, 19.

145 Bob Cant, "Belonging/Not Belonging: Tales of Times I Spent with Friends and Comrades and Fuckbuddies between 1967 and 1981" (Unpublished memoir, February 2021), 6, CANT/6, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

146 *Ibid*, 77.

147 *Ibid*, 76.

148 *Ibid*, 78.

Left 4, Bob attributes the breakdown of their relationship to a combination of factors: in 1973 they both suffered from "consecutive bouts of hepatitis," which despite efforts to care for one another, "were the kiss of death for the relationship";¹⁴⁹ and in the same year, the GLF in London began to fold. With it, Bob reflects, "it might have been possible for us to work out another way of relating to each other. But in our isolation, we were afraid to do this and the relationship froze."¹⁵⁰ These accounts imply that simply residing in the orbit of the GLF, even for its brief lifespan during the early seventies, had the effect of extending an experimental, countercultural structure of feeling into the relative privacy of the home and temporarily loosening the more restrictive elements of gay coupledness.

Gay liberation thus opened up horizons of sexual freedom and political rebellion often as appealing to gay couples as gay communes. Yet *both* couple-based and communal gay domesticities were often beset by a tension between the speculative, utopian aspects of liberation and the travails of relating to others and getting by in a hostile social environment. Cultures of experimentation and non-monogamy were by no means the invention of the gay liberation movement but were claimed as part of its radical practice, often presuming them as immanently subversive of capitalism's sexual norms. Reflecting on the seventies, Jeffrey Weeks emphasises "the real sort of tension"¹⁵¹ that formed around his relationship with his partner, Angus:

"On the one hand what the gay movement had done was to involve me in a very intense one-to-one relationship, a couple relationship, and at the same time the ideology that the movement was instilling in me was away from the idea of couple relationships and away from the idea that sex should be conventionally tied to relationships or a single relationship."¹⁵²

The "utopian hopes" of sexual and emotional freedom in relationships, underestimated "all sorts of tensions and conflict" that, for Jeffrey, seem inseparable from the basic experiences of relating socially and sexually to others,¹⁵³ suggesting a certain degree of naivety structuring gay liberation ideals. His reservations are echoed in Elizabeth Wilson's identification of the gay liberation movement's "essentially liberal" extension of London's emergent gay social scene, informed by sixties counterculture.¹⁵⁴ Referring to her relationship with Mary McIntosh, Elizabeth highlights a contradiction within the sexually progressive culture of the late sixties and early seventies, in which

"...we *said* it was okay for everyone to do their own thing; you could sleep with whom you wanted and you shouldn't really be jealous; a good relationship was an open relationship; you

149 Bob Cant, "Five and a Half," *Gay Left 4* (1977), 15.

150 Ibid.

151 Thornycroft, Weeks, and Sreeves, "The Liberation of Affection," in *Radical Records*, 160.

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid, 164.

154 Elizabeth Wilson, "Gayness & Liberalism," *Red Rag* 6, 1974, Amiel Melburn Trust Internet Archive.

shouldn't make moral judgements about sexual behaviour—an extreme of liberalism that clashed violently with the wish to 'succeed' as a stable lesbian couple."¹⁵⁵

Elizabeth's experience of non-monogamous coupledness was in reality fraught by a desire for stability, leading the relationship to mirror "many of the worst features of a 'straight' couple" in that "when either of us did have an affair, these relationships instead of challenging the nature of our coupledness actively reinforced our mutual dependence."¹⁵⁶ These accounts suggest that gay liberation – with its own set of progressive moralisms – compounded rather than resolved the awkwardness of navigating gay romantic and sexual relationships.

The contradictory circumstances underpinning gay coupledness only intensified throughout the mid-seventies as gay and lesbian relationships and feminist critiques of the family acquired greater social visibility. In the gay liberation milieu of the early seventies, it had been common to think of gay coupledness as a capitulation to heterosexual capitalism, but the intensification of public backlash against "problem families" in the mid-seventies heaped pressure onto many gay households. Lesbian motherhood in particular became the flashpoint of a renewed moral panic, leading to "closer state scrutiny of lesbian-headed households"¹⁵⁷ via the courts, social work and the press. A 1976 edition of *Spare Rib*, "Out of the closet into the courts," features an investigation into the court's heavy bias against lesbian mothers during the seventies, speaking to a deeply rooted social "phobia not just of lesbianism, but of non-conformity in general: people who deviate from society's ideas of what is normal."¹⁵⁸ The feature includes a case study of a lesbian couple, Sue and Mary based in the West Country, who lost custody of Sue's son John on the basis that the couple's "deviation from normal" sexual behaviour could potentially affect "John's future emotional and psychological development."¹⁵⁹

An oral history of lesbian life in the seventies by Stewart-Park and Cassidy includes a similar account of a working-class lesbian couple, Pauline and Pauline, living together with children from separate marriages in Plymouth, in the midst of a custody battle with one of their vengeful ex-husbands. They describe a fairly typical and frustrating legal situation, in which "the solicitor took Philip's side completely - he was surprised that I wanted the children... Philip had got up (in court) and said that Pauline was an evil influence on the children and that was about it."¹⁶⁰ In many ways, Pauline and Pauline – in their general separation from an urban gay scene, political involvement with their local CHE rather than GLF, sexual monogamy and frank identification as "the homely type"¹⁶¹ – embody the archetype of unchic gay coupledness frequently caricatured in gay liberation narratives. Despite often falling outside the purview of the radical gay movement, situations such as these nevertheless reveal

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 85.

158 Eleanor Stephens, "Out of the Closet into the Courts," *Spare Rib*, 1976, 8, British Library Journal Archives.

159 Ibid, 7.

160 Angela Stewart-Park and Jules Cassidy, *We're Here: Conversations with Lesbian Women* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 13.

161 Ibid, 19.

important shifts in the social status of homosexuality during the seventies. The everyday life of couple-based gay households certainly captured the attention of the courts, media and psychiatric establishments during this period, if not that of gay communalists in sprawling urban centres. They need therefore to be understood as important sites of conflict, illustrative of how gay households rarely arise out of pure voluntarism, but more often as the necessary outcomes of painful circumstances.

From this constellation of gay couple-based households across the sixties and seventies can be gleaned – on one hand – a sense of their vulnerability to a slew of social pressures emerging from the organisation of housing, state bureaucracies and policing of homosexuality. That these vulnerabilities expressed specific iterations of the same punitive social forces circumscribing gay communal life goes some way to destabilising the couples/commune paradigm in gay liberation thought. If any meaningful distinction can be identified between communal and couple-based households, it is not that the former was successfully able to carve out a space external to heterosexual capitalism while the latter was not, but rather that the structure of feeling in the communes produced a tendency to self-consciously and *collectively* politicise lived experience. In reality, so-called private households were as much a site of social struggle in the sixties and seventies and must therefore be thought of as a terrain of gay liberation struggle, despite their ambiguous status in the movement's discourses.

6. The recomposition of gay struggle

The various household formations discussed in this chapter register the changing social landscape in Britain during the sixties and seventies, as well as the growing confidence and visibility of gay liberation groups. By the end of the seventies, however, the conditions that had given rise to these formations had transformed dramatically. The restructuring of housing and social security provision, paired with the redoubling of traditional "family values" in public life, drove a recomposition of the gay liberation movement and the modes of everyday, domestic life it had mobilised. This chapter section now examines how the crisis-ridden social forms of the family and the British state mutated over the course of seventies, biting into gay life and narrowing the span of possible domestic configurations. By focusing on the interplay of economic and social policy with public sexual morality in this conjuncture, I moreover draw out some of the broader implications of this history for how we think about such categories as "the political", "the economic" and "the social" when theorising the relationship between capitalism and social institutions.

The global crisis of capitalist accumulation taking hold in the mid-seventies had specific instantiations in Britain, among them a crisis in housing directly related to "the dwindling profitability of British industry, the mounting deficit of local authority expenditure, hyper-inflation in the market for

owner-occupation and the steady increase in mortgage interest rates."¹⁶² Successive Labour and Conservative governments oversaw programmes of cuts to housing provision, culminating in the Thatcher administration "virtually putting an end to the building of council housing"¹⁶³ after its electoral success in 1979. As indicated by a pamphlet produced by the Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, the sparse availability of affordable housing signified for gay people yet another axis of social exclusion. "Whether you live in a city or a small town," the pamphlet notes, "you already know how difficult it is to find accommodation to rent. With hardly any council houses now being built, and the drastic cutback in Housing Association work, the number of people looking for rented accommodation is on the increase."¹⁶⁴ While these conditions on one hand increased the appeal of alternative ways of living such as squatting, they also coincided with "a new era of legal 'revanchism'" including legislation that made it possible to arrest and evict squatters without a court order.¹⁶⁵ The Greater London Council's (GLC) 1977 squatting amnesty moreover issued thousands of London's squatters with temporary licenses, encouraging "the formation of housing co-operatives and associations to manage the licensing process, undertake negotiations, and seek funding for refurbishment,"¹⁶⁶ splintering the broader squatters' movement into more manageable units and paving the way for house prices to rise.

These measures thus entailed a real narrowing of options – in both communal and private living arrangements – for poor and socially marginalised sections of the population. They were, however, also made possible in some ways by the gay commune movement's successes. The practical labour undertaken by squatters to make homes fit for habitation laid some of the groundwork for the regeneration projects overseen by the GLC during the eighties. The long-standing presence of gay and lesbian squats in Hackney and Brixton moreover conveyed a certain air of the exotic and bohemian associated with "the wider artistic culture of the 1970s" that, despite the commitments of many communes to uprooting heterosexual capitalism, ultimately "did inform the particular trajectory of [these areas']... subsequent gentrification."¹⁶⁷ This moment therefore not only spelled the geographical decomposition of seventies squatting communities, but a fracturing of the class character of gay struggle, driving a wedge between those who welcomed and benefited from local regeneration and those who found themselves dispossessed of their support system and means of survival.

However unevenly the effects of privatisation and gentrification were felt across the gay population, they sounded a death knell for the squats and communes that had grown out of the gay liberation

162 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State*, 78.

163 Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar, eds., 'The Housing Crisis: A Short Summary', in *Squatting: The Real Story* (London: Bay Leaf Books, 1980), 222.

164 Scottish Homosexual Rights Group, "Trouble With... Buying a House," n.d., HCA/SMG/4/1, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

165 Alexander Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (London: Verso, 2017),

166 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 215.

167 Ibid.

movement. Despite initially planning to boycott the GLC's amnesty proposals,¹⁶⁸ Broadway Market Squatters' Association – the organisational base underpinning the many squats in the area – ultimately split into three housing co-operatives in the late seventies, with most of the lesbian squats dissolving into the London Fields Housing Co-op.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, in South London, the Brixton Housing Co-op formed at the beginning of the eighties absorbed many of the squatted households on Railton and Mayall Road, initiating "a refurbishment programme in consultation with the squatters" and the conversion of the buildings "into single occupancy units."¹⁷⁰ While many gays and lesbians continued to squat both areas throughout the eighties, they did so on a different set of terms, and with a different relationship to the state and to criminality. Culturally, "this was the time of punk and a very different politics"¹⁷¹ far removed from the brown rice, patchouli and utopianism that had characterised the gay commune movement of the seventies. For many of the Brixton gay communards, the absorption of squats into housing co-operatives also represented the dashing of political hope. In a 1984 interview, one ex-communard reluctantly concedes that "the whole thing will lose its sense of identity," signifying that "everything we thought about, everything that everybody fought for in the 70s... well, it just ain't going to happen"¹⁷²; another interviewee describes the squats' subdivision into single occupancy residences as an abandonment of the "flexibility" fostered by the squatters, and "part of the recession of living in the 80s as much as anything."¹⁷³ The reorganisation of housing in the late seventies thus effectively functioned to capture and neutralise the energies of the gay commune movement, destroying what remained of gay liberation infrastructure right at the moment of a general crisis of social reproduction.

The programme of social restructuring launched in the mid-late seventies was also connected to a sustained moral backlash against the so-called permissive society and a public re-entrenchment of traditional family values. Households identified as incongruent to these values (including those headed by lesbian mothers) became the subject of intensified moral panic in the press, prefiguring the generalised social hostility towards gay people arising at the time of the AIDS crisis. The religious right, congregating around the Nationwide Festival of Light movement, meanwhile launched campaigns to censor gay organisations, as with the blasphemy trials brought against *Gay News* by Mary Whitehouse in 1977.¹⁷⁴ In the tenth and final issue of *Gay Left* in 1980, Dave Landau frames this resurgence of moral panic as a strategy of the state during a time of social crisis, wherein "the material presence of the nuclear family presents a ready-made universe to replace the vacuum created by the crisis."¹⁷⁵ The public fetishisation of "the family" became a way for the state to compensate for its own greatly reduced capacities to employ, house and provide liveable conditions

168 Past Tense, "Common Land and Squatting in London Fields, Hackney: A Historical Wander", *Past Tense* (blog), 2021, <https://pastenseblog.wordpress.com/2021/03/01/common-land-and-squatting-in-london-fields-hackney-a-historical-wander/>.

169 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting," 92.

170 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 215.

171 Wall, "Sisterhood and Squatting," 93.

172 John Stanbridge, Interview by Jamie Hall, Transcript, 1984, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

173 Peter Vetter, Interview by Bill Thornycroft, Transcript, 1981, Townson/8/3, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

174 Frank Mort, "Victorian Afterlives: Sexuality and Identity in the 1960s and 1970s", *History Workshop Journal* 82 (2016), 204.

175 Dave Landau, "Facing the Crisis," *Gay Left* 10 (1980), 36.

for the population, while identifying certain demographics such as gay people, Black people and so-called "scroungers" as the real agents of social decay.

Here, the marxian concept of fetishism – "regarding the social relations of capitalist society as natural or eternal"¹⁷⁶ – is useful for understanding how the ideology of the family has operated in British public life during times of crisis. "Ideology" is a heavily contested term within marxism's many traditions and counter-traditions, and its usage in this chapter again holds a particularly open marxist resonance. Here, ideology is conceptualised differently from the structuralist marxist tendency to consign it to a separate sphere of "the political," overdetermined by "the economic." My open marxist usage of ideology should also be distinguished from forms of ideology critique dominant in some post-structuralist and post-marxist strands of queer theory, whose "arguments against a reductive economic determinism end up excluding entirely any consideration of capitalism's relationships of exploitation, accumulation, or domination in social life."¹⁷⁷ Understood through the prism of open marxist dialectics, ideology "is not a worldview that attributes meanings to social things from this or that moral or political standpoint... [but] an objective term that focuses the socially necessary appearance of society, one in which human social reproduction appears in the form of a movement of incomprehensible economic qualities."¹⁷⁸ In this sense, ideology is neither the superstructural effect of economic inner workings, nor a regionally autonomous bundle of discourses, but is rather a fetishised form of appearance taken by class conflict. Ideology expresses, crystallises and mediates the core tension within capitalism between workers' need to reproduce themselves and the social reproduction of capitalism. In the context of this chapter, the family, presented as a bulwark of social stability, emblematises what John Holloway has described as "the fetishised forms in which capital appears."¹⁷⁹ The persistence of the family rests upon the mystification of its own contradictions: "factories, families, schools... [are all] riven by conflict, disruption and impermanence – far from the havens of peace and tranquillity which bourgeois ideology suggests."¹⁸⁰ The surge of moral panic in the late seventies can be understood as key to this process of mystification, whereby the conflicts that form the daily reality of family life are displaced onto an identifiable group of deviants on its margins.

Holloway's use of the concept of fetishism in relation to the ideology of the family is modelled on a particularly open marxist mode of theorising which, as I have previously argued, emerged during the eighties in response to a cluster of interrelated crises: of academic marxism, of left-wing institutions, and of the concept of class itself. A crucial insight arising out of this tendency notes that the capitalist restructuring unfolding in the mid-seventies was "not just a crisis of 'the economy' but of the social relations of domination between the capitalist class and the working class,"¹⁸¹ and thus a qualitative

176 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State*, 13.

177 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 60.

178 Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*, 55.

179 Holloway, "The State and Everyday Struggle," in *The State Debate*, 211.

180 Ibid, 212.

181 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State*, 5.

shift in the social relationships that constitute class society. Clarke has argued that the conceptualisation of the economic and the political as separate spheres of social existence is a type of bourgeois common-sense, peculiar to capitalist societies, and "a central aspect of the way in which the state has responded to [class] struggles,"¹⁸² by narrowing the field in which oppressive social relations can be contested. The highly individualised adjudication of tenant-landlord conflict in court, the marketisation of housing and the funnelling of political struggle into the electoral system, for example, all express this conceptual distinction, functioning to "decompos[e] class forces and recompose[e] them as 'interest groups.'"¹⁸³ Social oppression is in reality structured by a contradictory unity of political and economic pressures: in a housing tenancy for example, "the power and the property rights of the landlord are enshrined in the law and enforced by the state," and "the tenant experiences his or her exploitation not simply as economic, but as inseparably economic and political, with the threat of the bailiff and eviction standing behind the landlord."¹⁸⁴ As this chapter has attempted to show, the history of gay domestic life reveals countless examples of this dynamic, in which local authorities, the police and courts all "stand behind" the privatisation and defunding of gay domestic life.

Open marxist perspectives invite us to think of class struggle expansively, to the extent that "struggles around housing and urban planning, patterns of consumption, gender relations and the family, transport, leisure and the state" can all be understood as expressions of class struggle.¹⁸⁵ This approach nevertheless also forces a reckoning with the moments of foreclosure and failure that beset the history of gay liberation, since if the various household formations discussed in this chapter do represent key sites of class conflict, they are also necessarily "lived under capitalist conditions, constrained and torqued by the brutality of wage labour."¹⁸⁶ By the time of the late seventies, this realisation had already begun to manifest in a particular kind of pessimism among groups such as the Gay Left Collective whose 1976 editorial concludes that "the failure of many gay communes illustrates very clearly the great difficulties of escaping from capitalist values and of creating viable alternatives."¹⁸⁷ A paper produced by Bradford GLF in 1975 similarly notes contingency of this viability on the organisation of the state and housing infrastructure: "communes cannot be spread effectively because land and housing policy are controlled by landlords, the local government and the state... The communes showed us what was possible. But they cannot make a new life possible for the majority."¹⁸⁸ These commentaries attest to a growing conviction among the remaining caucuses of the gay liberation movement in the mid-late seventies, as to the totalising reach of capital into gay life and the blockages to gay liberation's vision.

182 Clarke, "The State Debate", in *The State Debate*, 29.

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid, 31.

186 O'Brien, "To Abolish the Family," 411.

187 Gay Left Collective, "Within These Walls...", *Gay Left 2* (1976), 1–5.

188 Bradford GLF, "Gay Liberation" (Sheffield CHE, 1975), HCA/Thornycroft/2/3, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

It is ultimately not of interest to this thesis to assess the gay liberation movement according to a balance sheet of perceived successes and failures, but rather to expand, from a constellation of gay domestic life, kernels of a revolutionary future. Failed revolutions, argue Bernes and Clover, are like "false dawn[s] in the long night of capital," in that they allow us to "understand from the present prospect what was possible within the given conditions, what was not, and how that might inform the question, *what is possible in our own given conditions?*"¹⁸⁹ The households connected to the gay liberation movement made it temporarily possible to meet and even exceed the human needs for shelter, nourishment, sex and community through a reliance on each other rather than on the capitalist institution of the family, and in doing so, demystified its monopoly on meeting these needs. In this way, they contain a speculative moment, whose "utility is not in reading them as proposals to be implemented by the convinced," but rather in making "visible the tenuousness and horror of the present, and in supporting an unfolding process of exploration and discovery in the midst of struggle."¹⁹⁰ In other words, the susceptibility of these gay households to their historical conditions can provoke a curiosity about what conditions would need to come about for their experimental modes of relating to be generalised socially.

This curiosity, which starts from the point of needs and desires, is fundamental to the process of communisation envisioned within gay liberation. When the GLF's 1971 manifesto theorises that, "in the ever-sharpening crisis of western society, the time may come quite suddenly when old institutions start to crack, and when people will have to seek new models," it predicted optimistically that this new society might take "decades" to come into fruition.¹⁹¹ Yet the gay liberation movement's temporality of social change also consistently pairs the notion of "revolution" with the immediate and everyday work of relating to one another differently: "We intend to start working out our contribution to these new models now, by creating an alternative gay culture free from sexism, and by setting up gay communes. When our communes are firmly established, we plan to let children grow up in them."¹⁹² Social change in the imaginary of gay liberation is understood as both immanently worked out in practice and a deferred horizon, constituted by both large-scale class confrontation and everyday struggle. This dialectic continuously informs the modes of theorising emerging out of all sorts of domestic situations during the gay liberation years, to the effect that gay households were crucial to the "vast strain of trying to rebuild society from your inner self outwards."¹⁹³

189 Joshua Clover and Jasper Bernes, "The Ends of the State," *Viewpoint Magazine*, 2014, <https://viewpointmag.com/2014/10/12/the-ends-of-the-state/>.

190 ME O'Brien, "Communizing Care," *Pinko Magazine*, 2019, <https://pinko.online/pinko-1/communizing-care>.

191 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10.

192 Ibid.

193 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 210.

7. Conclusion

The critique of the family constitutes a lived, practical aspect of the gay liberation movement, worked out in the thick of social struggle during the sixties and seventies. This critique took different factional forms shaped by the shifting composition of the gay movement, as well as an ongoing crisis of capitalist reproduction. At the crux of these differentiations lay an uncertainty about how to relate to other liberation movements and class fractions, in turn reflecting the strategies of the capitalist state during this time to recompose collective class interests into smaller, more manageable fragments. The broad constellation of domestic arrangements that emerged out of the gay liberation movement nevertheless coalesced around the goal of making life liveable beyond the privileged institution of the private, nuclear family-based household. The confidence and visibility imparted by the gay liberation movement made possible the formation of experimental communal living projects, as well as more intimate partnerships on the edges of the movement. Many of these situations arose within a structure of feeling that combining countercultural, psychedelic and camp stylings with very earnest aspirations towards the abolition of the family and the revolutionary overcoming of capitalism.

These domestic situations were far from impervious to the same contradictions that structure domestic life under capitalism, however, and were beset by antagonisms with the state, property owners, and within their own ranks as the social crisis of the seventies began to unfold. Just as "the left could not choose the ground on which it fought"¹⁹⁴ during this period of heightened labour conflict and the breakdown of the social contract in the seventies, the efforts of gay communards and liberationists were circumscribed by a set of definite limitations set by transformations to the housing market and to the social role of the family. Mapping the lived experience of gay households alongside the historical trajectories of crisis and restructuring, I have tried to make visible the fundamentally antagonistic constitution of households within capitalism more broadly. In spite of these reorganisations, moreover, the historical efforts to communise everyday life in the gay movement constitutes an opportunity seized and a utopian vision pushed to its limit, that from the perspective of the present is utterly magnetic. The tendency within gay liberation to build households around the priority of meeting needs and desires thus signifies an indispensable contribution to any communist future.

194 Clarke, "The State Debate," 60.

Conclusion

1. Introduction

Over the course of the previous three chapters, this thesis has investigated how the gay liberation movement was articulated politically and lived and felt in everyday life. These chapters connected the experiential, textural details of gay liberation continuously back to the conditions of their emergence. Moving between the registers of history and theory, I have brought the history of gay liberation to bear on a marxist critique of capitalist society, speaking to Hennessy's claim that "to historicise is to make visible the complex mediated relationships between particular or local cultural forms and global capitalism's fundamental class structures of which they are a part."¹ A vital insight from this process has been that the particular, localised forms of gay life and struggle discussed in this thesis are neither inconsequential, nor straightforwardly determined by those "class structures," but actively implicate and mediate the broader sexual politics of capitalism. This became evident through engaging with a vast and disparate archive of gay experience, serving as an entry point for thinking about the shifting social conditions of the sixties and seventies in Britain as they were registered in the cultural and political practices of gay liberation. This is an archive steeped, moreover, in social theory, containing rich insights into the social dynamics of capitalism, which this thesis has brought into dialogue with its own dialectical theorisations of capitalist sexuality.

This conclusion now reconsiders two propositions from my introduction: firstly, my claim to present a history of gay liberation "that is at the same time a history of capitalist social relations" and secondly, to make visible gay liberation's "unfinished business and unresolved contradictions." The following sections therefore recapitulate and clarify why, as per the title of this thesis, my theoretical interests lie specifically in the "*dialectics* of gay liberation." Beyond the obvious nod to the "dialectics of liberation" which found many articulations in late sixties counterculture, this thesis has also broached an idea of dialectics connoting less a cohesive methodology that can be applied to history externally, than a way of thinking social phenomena through the antagonistic relationships that underpin them. Dialectics, in this thesis, designates a critical stance on capitalist social relations that departs from traditional representations within marxist theory, of capital's objective logic, laws of motion or structure made up of separate levels. Drawing on the dialectical premise that "the critique of capital has to articulate the suffering that it inflicts,"² this research has therefore foregrounded the concrete, social realities of gayness as a facet of capitalist social life. We see this dialectic at work in the dynamic unity of theory and practice within the archive of gay liberation, in how the intensively material and particular traces of gay life are mutually mediated and torqued by the social reproduction of capitalism. This conclusion therefore reiterates its dialectical attitude by

1 Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 32.

2 O'Kane and Bonefeld, "Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy," in *Adorno and Marx: Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 7.

summarising some contradictions within the history of gay liberation, which express in turn the contradictions of capitalist social relations. It then considers how gay liberation's rise and fall was contoured by specific historical possibilities and limits, tracing some afterlives which continue to circumscribe gay life today. It then turns finally to gay liberation's unfinished business and deferred horizons, speculating as to how they might inform ongoing revolutionary thought and struggle.

2. Contradictions

Contradiction has been a central theme of this thesis, giving shape to the particular kind of marxist history it set out to write. Thinking dialectically and centring contradiction allows historical inquiry into gay liberation to avoid reducing it to any "one thing," and to appreciate it instead as a constellation of localised social groups, political imaginaries and structures of feeling, threaded together by manifold determinations. While Benjamin's idea of constellation has primarily informed the historical methodology of this thesis as a way of narrativising the past, it has also proven an invaluable resource for thinking through the simultaneously fragmentary and interconnected moments that constitute the history of gay liberation. This constellatory approach tallies with Ross' departure, in *May '68 and its Afterlives*, from histories that seek to "firm up the continuity of this or that subgroup or subculture... in service of a conquest or reconquest of identity."³ Ross' description of the May '68 rebellions as having "very little to do with the social group – students or 'youth' – who were its instigator" and "much more to do with the flight from social determinations, with displacements that took people outside of their location in society, with a disjunction, that is, between political subjectivity and the social group,"⁴ speaks to the presence of instability and dislocation in the formation of political movements. Similarly, this thesis has highlighted the unstable composition of gay liberation in Britain, appearing less, to quote the Gay Left Collective, as a "single organisational form" emanating from a coherent gay subject, and more as "the self-defined activity of gay people fighting to gain control of their own lives and destinies."⁵ Derek Cohen's characterisation of the movement as an "amorphous huddle" in the sixth issue of *Gay Left* likewise evokes gay liberation's irreducible tendencies and temperaments, a movement comprised of "groups of lesbians and gay men that meet and try to make use of their shared experiences."⁶ The history of gay liberation appears frequently, then, as a collective social experience expressed in discontinuous ways, a movement of real people living out the contradictions between social convention, gay desire and the struggle to reproduce themselves in a capitalist society.

This amorphous quality of the gay liberation movement renders it resistant to categorisation, leading existing histories of the movement to struggle particularly in pinning down its class character. For

3 Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 2.

4 Ibid, 2-3.

5 Gay Left Collective, "Why Marxism?," *Gay Left* 5 (1977), 5.

6 Cohen, "Clienting: Individual Solutions to Collective Problems," *Gay Left* 6, 23.

example, Robinson categorises the constituents of the early seventies' gay liberation scene as "predominantly white, male, middle class, and financially independent," claiming that this composition mirrored the "relative affluence" of the broader sixties counterculture.⁷ In his research on the Brixton gay squatting community, Cook conceives of class in a more fluid sense, contingent on different generational and cultural experiences, noting "it is difficult to roll out any simplistic class analysis in relation to the community" since "the way in which [his interviewees] talk about class suggests that it functioned differently for them than for their parents or some of their straight contemporaries."⁸ While the majority whiteness of the gay liberation movement's core organisational forms is indisputable, the tendency to treat class and race as fixed, interchangeable categories of experience only mystifies the contextual specificities through which these terms acquire meaning. For this reason, I have intentionally avoided assessing gay liberation according to a stable taxonomy of class, or claiming the movement as essentially working or middle class in character, at least not in the way that its historians traditionally handled these terms. The dialectical theory I have drawn on tends to frame class as a dynamic social relationship rather than a sociological category, a relationship that, according to Bonefeld, "though independent from the individuals, prevails in and through them as the dispossessed producers of surplus value whose access to subsistence depends on the successful sale of their labour power."⁹ The instability of this relationship is especially visible in the history of the sixties and seventies in Britain, where amidst the tail end of the post-war long boom and the stagnation of industrial productivity, working-class experience conveyed increasingly uneven and precarious relationships to labour and property, as explored further in chapter one, "Situating Gay Liberation." In this context, the experience of class came to be mediated by the experience of sexuality in new ways, as the crisis of capitalist class relation reconstituted the role of the family and other social institutions such as the British state. The social abjection of homosexuality within various British social institutions often dislocated people from their familial backgrounds and threw them into new, antagonistic social relationships. The class composition of gay liberation therefore refers, in my usage, not to a quantitative analysis of the different class backgrounds of its members, but to its relationship to the "living contradiction"¹⁰ that is the capitalist class relation. Despite gay liberation not organising primarily at the point of capitalist production (with the caveat that many gay workers' groups did flourish during the seventies), gay liberation can be understood as a dimension of the class struggle in the sense that it was structured by an interplay of contradictions relating to the historical role of sexuality in capitalist social reproduction.

This thesis is a marxist history of gay liberation therefore in the sense that it approaches gay liberation through the prisms of struggle and contradiction, pulling together accounts of both political and interpersonal strife and of the everyday struggles involved in reproducing gay life in general. Throughout, it has constellated perspectives from the urban centres and campuses where GLF

7 Robinson, "Three Revolutionary Years," *Cultural and Social History*, 458.

8 Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 208.

9 Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*, 107.

10 Ibid.

groups thrived, as well as lives touched by the movement less directly, looking at how peoples' relationships and experiences registered the contradictions of capitalism in Britain during the sixties and seventies. While Marx's claim that "the movement of capitalist society is full of contradiction"¹¹ nods foremostly to the contradiction underpinning the form of the commodity itself (between its use- and exchange-value) it bears repeating that this contradiction also permeates the manifold social forms that have developed in the history of capitalism. This framing of contradiction as the *modus vivendi* of capitalist society has been furthered by Gunn, Bonefeld, Holloway and others associated with the open marxist counter-tradition, demonstrating how social forms and institutions express and constitute capitalist social relations in historically specific ways. Refuting the charge traditionally levelled against marxist dialectics, that the "notion of contradiction means the suppression of differences, the reduction of a multi-coloured multiplicity of varied lives and struggles to the single contradiction of labour against capital,"¹² open marxism reframes dialectical thinking as a way of opening up concepts rather than seeking closure or resolution. This openness invites us locate the history of gay liberation as a dimension of the expansive class relations of capitalism and an expression of capitalist social antagonism. Within capitalism, social institutions are not epiphenomenal to class relations, but are arenas of struggle; they set "the social conditions which constitute the reality of value production."¹³ These institutions mediate and constrain gay life in various ways, exerting forms of sexual control and differentiation, and reproducing the sexual and moral norms necessary to the reproduction of capitalism.

In approaching gay liberation as a dimension of class struggle, this thesis has also struck upon a dialectic of freedom and constraint at work in its history. Marx's critique of political economy demonstrates how capitalism hinges upon a notion of freedom that contains its opposite, taking on various forms of coercion and control. This contradictory premise of capitalist freedom, writes Marx, is what distinguishes the capitalist system of labour from that of other modes of production. Within capitalism, the worker is "free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realisation... of his labour-power."¹⁴ Though the worker is ostensibly free to sell their labour in exchange for a wage, this freedom is compromised by the denial of any opportunity to meet their needs directly. Due to the creeping enclosure of social life through regimes of accumulation by dispossession, the wage – alongside limited forms of state provision that supplement and reinforce it – prevails as the principal means by which "members of the working class gain access to the necessities of life"¹⁵ and thus constitutes a form of constraint, a condition of survival. This relationship, at once free and unfree, is crucial to the social reproduction of capitalism, and is reproduced, as part of the capitalist class antagonism "on an

11 Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* vol. 1, 103.

12 Holloway, Matamoros, and Tischler, "Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism," in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, 4.

13 Bonefeld, "Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State," in *Open Marxism Volume 1*, 115.

14 Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* Vol. 1, 272.

15 Sears, "Situating Sexuality in Social Reproduction," *Historical Materialism* 24, no. 2 (2016), 139.

expanding scale."¹⁶ As queer marxists have been arguing for the past few decades, this contradiction obtains too in the form of sexuality. Sears' work contends, for example, that the "freedom and compulsion" underlying capitalist social relations designate an "experience of embodiment,"¹⁷ in that formally free labour presupposes some kind of ownership over one's own body, while the compulsion to work is driven by the impulse to meet corporeal and sensuous needs. According to Sears, "sexuality arises in the contradictory places where agency through ownership of one's own body meets subordination through dispossession"¹⁸ dovetailing with Floyd and Hennessy's arguments, discussed in the introduction, that the development of sexual faculties and subjectivities is itself an expression of capitalist reification.

The dialectic of freedom and constraint as articulated in this thesis therefore relates fundamentally to the experience of sexuality. In the context of this historical inquiry, its dynamic suffuses the struggle of gay life to reproduce itself. Here, contradiction is not merely a theoretical concept guiding how we think about history from a distance, but is embedded within social reality, finding expressions in gay liberation's conflictual relationships with social institutions. As this thesis has shown, the British state's implementation of homosexual law reform in the late sixties, for instance, offered a contradictory form of sexual freedom, decriminalising some sexual activities between men under extremely specific conditions, not in spite of, but as a condition of possibility for its redoubling of the social regulation of public sexuality. The simultaneous expansion of the gay commercial bar and club scene offered an additional form of freedom to gay people to socialise with some degree of distance from the scrutiny of the state, yet also circumscribed these opportunities within an increasingly segregated and profit-oriented gay ghetto. Meanwhile, the continual pathologisation of homosexuality by the British medical establishment and its subjection of gay people to a litany of psychiatric therapies marked further avenues of control, abjection and enclosure accompanying the liberalisation of mental healthcare. Finally, a dialectic of freedom and constraint fed into the experience of family life for gay people in the postwar decades. Here, the valorisation of a particular ideal of the family, by both the British state and institutions of the left, stood in tension with the realities of a mounting crisis in housing provision and the propagation of gay subcultures in deprived urban centres. The intertwined crises of housing and of the private, heterosexual family thus forced many gay people into an impasse, where the search for non-familial, non-heterosexual forms of freedom and community entailed navigating other socially isolating and immiserating household formations. This interplay of freedom and constraint, shaping the social conditions of gay struggle, also fed into the ambivalent theory, politics and culture of gay liberation, which over the course of this thesis has tilted back and forth between images of gayness as a source of collective power and freedom and as a site of misery and oppression. Throughout these examples, the constant push and pull between freedom and domination takes on disparate expressions in the institutional forms of the British state, psychiatric establishment and heterosexual family, each of which has historically

¹⁶ Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*, 93.

¹⁷ Sears, "Situating Sexuality in Social Reproduction," 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 157.

contributed to the abjection of homosexuality as a way of shoring up their own legitimacy and setting the conditions for capitalist social reproduction.

3. Afterlives

The tension between freedom and constraint running throughout this work speaks also to the knotted historical conditions of possibility that shaped and were re-shaped by the gay liberation movement in Britain. While it is not sufficient to say that the machinations of the British state and economy directly or unilaterally determined the rise and fall of gay liberation, a crucial facet of this marxist history has been to document the movement's internal relationship to these social forms. My introduction argued that gay liberation's central contradiction is between that of its historically situated, localised character and its deferred political vision, a contradiction between possibility and limitation. While the politics and culture of gay liberation arose within and registered the shifting composition of British capitalism and its social institutions – of which this thesis looks specifically at the state, the police, psychiatry, the family and housing – it was also a radically creative movement which reconfigured the relationship of gay people to these institutions and speculated extensively on what society could look like if liberated from them. In this respect, the extended historical moment of the sixties and seventies can be read as a key breakpoint in the simultaneous, interrelated histories of capitalist social relations and sexual struggle laid out in this thesis. Once more, Benjamin's historical materialist constellation, which stages the collision of past and present in a moment of shock and rupture, sheds light on both the alterity of the past, and on the continuities threading through the last few decades of crisis and restructuring, reaching into our present historical moment. The social transformations occurring within the sixties and seventies frequently had circuitous, uneven and often unforeseen afterlives which continue to press upon the present, some of which will now be re-evaluated here.

By the time of the mid-seventies, a crisis both in the organisational form of the GLF and in the politics and culture of gay liberation at large had become apparent. A 1974 pamphlet written by Martine O'Leary (a member of Leeds GLF) conjures a sense of the gay liberation movement in a state of decomposition only a few years into its rise to visibility. Referring to the proliferation of gay liberation groups internationally in the late sixties and early seventies, the pamphlet describes how "the frenetic activity of that period, the amazing vistas of liberation and the sense of general euphoria it produced have already become so much subject matter for sentimental reminiscence" due to "a colossal downturn in the amount and quality of gay activism."¹⁹ O'Leary attributes the localised expression of this decline in London to "the collapse of the revolutionary wing of the gay movement – [while] the reformist wing survives," a situation largely avoided in the longer-lasting GLF groups in Lancaster, Bradford and Leeds "which have had for some time real connections with the broader revolutionary

¹⁹ Martine O'Leary, "Gay Liberation, Reformism and Revolution" (Isophile Pamphlets, 1974), HCA/Thornycroft/2, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

movement."²⁰ Organisationally, this "degeneration" of the movement for O'Leary was expressed in the resurgence of a less combative tendency in gay activism in the form of CHE groups, the SMG in Scotland, publications such as *Gay News* and various gay befriending services, each of which she argues was disinterested in "analysis of social relations" and established their own forms of "pseudo-bureaucracy."²¹ Though O'Leary's narrative of decline may over-simplify the causes of the movement's disintegration, given that militant elements persisted in these notionally reformist wings, and that the "broader revolutionary movement"²² to which she refers simultaneously experienced a crisis of its own institutions, the salient point of her account is that even by the early seventies, the horizon of liberation had begun to recede from gay politics. Clearly, the social conditions in which the movement had been founded were not the same as those materialising only a few years later.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated how these social conditions were de- and re-composed across a range of social institutions in Britain during the sixties and seventies. It must be stressed that such transformations did not simply happen by some misfortune, but are heavy with implication regarding both the relationship of the gay past to the politics of the present and the relationship between capital and struggle. Chapter two detailed how the passage of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act in England and Wales and the expansion of a geographically distinct gay commercial scene reinforced a distinction between public and private sexuality, shifting the political stakes of gay visibility. Following Lefebvre's theorisation of abstract space, moreover, as "homogenous, yet at the same time broken up into fragments,"²³ I have argued that, during the sixties and seventies, the British state subjected the highly differentiated needs and desires of gay people to a homogenising and bureaucratic organisation of society. Both these processes are forms of capitalist spatial production, premised simultaneously on the penetration of all areas of social life by the profit motive, and the stratification of the working class according to varying attributions of social value. In that the liberalisation of the law around homosexuality directly politicised and moralised gay sex, and that the growth of gay commerce facilitated a highly mediated form of social contact between gay people, these contexts simultaneously contained conditions of possibility and limitations for gay liberation's politics of visibility and the growth of its public cultures of sexuality and protest.

Chapter two also drew out some of these developments' more immediate afterlives, including a swing to the right in British politics and renewal of moral panic around gay sexuality in the late seventies and eighties. While such developments may not appear as immediate or obvious afterlives of the gay liberation movement, they played a crucial, constitutive role in shifting the horizon of gay politics towards community defence, care and HIV/AIDS advocacy. The restructuring of public sexual culture has also had further-reaching ripple effects, including the creeping erosion of public space available to gay people for social and sexual congress, which continues to shape gay social life today.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 342.

If, as I have already argued, the 1957 Wolfenden Report and subsequent Sexual Offences Act ten years later mobilised renewed efforts by the British state to police public sexuality, the decades since the Act's passage have seen the extension and modulation of this form of enclosure. Johan Andersson's research on the desexualisation of public space draws out this legacy through the example of "landscaping schemes" in Bloomsbury's public parks throughout the 1990s and 2000s, "specifically introduced to displace the men who used these squares for cruising."²⁴ The erection of gates with restricted opening hours and the paring back of shrubbery that might otherwise conceal sexual liaisons constitute for Andersson a "radical curtailment of public space,"²⁵ and serve as highly localised instantiations of a general tendency in the British state's approach towards public sexual culture. According to Andersson, this process of enclosure must be understood as happening in concert with, rather than in spite of, "the creation of gay villages and other spaces that promote queer visibility (albeit in a heavily commodified form)", including the creation of commercial venues such as saunas specifically designed to facilitate sex for wealthier and whiter sections of the gay male population. Rather than espousing a form of sexual puritanism akin to the violent policing of gay bars during the HIV/AIDS moral panic of the eighties, these more recent reorganisations of public space can be understood as attempts to resituate sexuality within the highly mediated world of gay commercial venues, presenting a new iteration of the public-private distinction codified by the 1967 Act.

In a similar vein, chapters three and four focused respectively on the organisation of mental healthcare provision and domestic life in Britain during the sixties and seventies, highlighting a series of processes that are still unfolding and which speak urgently to the role of these "hidden abodes" in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. While chapter three traced the postwar integration of mental healthcare into the broader medical establishment and the subjection of gay people to psychiatric therapies as an integral strategy of homosexual law reform, chapter four historicised the privileging of private families in British welfare policy, coterminous with the flight of many gay people from their family homes into socially deprived, inner-city forms of accommodation. Ostensibly, these developments undermined directly coercive forms of state control and extended more social benefits to the British working class, yet did so on an abstract, universalising premise in which real social differentials and divisions were eclipsed. It was in this context that the gay liberation movement, conscious of the social abjection of gayness within the institutions of psychiatry and the family, launched its expansive social critique, in dialogue with broader anti-psychiatric and family abolitionist tendencies on the countercultural left. As I have argued throughout this thesis, drawing on open marxist theorisations of the capitalist state, these processes must be understood as aspects of capitalist class domination. The idea that the state's reorganisations of mental healthcare and domesticity belong to some distinct strata from that of the capitalist class relation presumes, according to the Conference of Socialist Economics' pamphleteers, "the separation of the economic

24 Johan Andersson, "Heritage Discourse and the Desexualisation of Public Space: The 'Historical Restorations' of Bloomsbury's Squares," *Antipode* 44, no. 4 (2012), 1081.

25 *Ibid.*, 1088.

and political" which is in turn "the principal fetish which attaches itself to the capitalist state."²⁶ For the CSE writers, "class domination in the state is concealed behind various fetishised forms of impersonal authority,"²⁷ which in the postwar decades, I have argued, increasingly came to be exercised in the expanding professional sectors of social work, general practice and housing authorities.

Both healthcare and housing are fundamental to peoples' basic ability to reproduce their everyday lives, yet the decades of gay liberation increasingly saw access to both mediated intensively by the British state – which, in light of the abovementioned insights from CSE and others associated with open marxism (particularly Clarke) – must be understood as a *capitalist* state. The onset of social crisis unfolding during the mid-seventies manifested partly in the dismantling of the welfare state and the reorganisation of the provision of mental healthcare and housing, processes that are still very much being lived today. Over the past few decades, the experience of these necessities of life have become increasingly strained and contradictory. While the forms of aversion therapy experienced widely by gay people during the sixties and seventies are no longer integrated into Britain's general health service, they retain a residual presence within the practices of some conservative religious organisations and a fringe of healthcare professionals.²⁸ More generally, while the deinstitutionalisation of mental healthcare has been a continual process throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act (which marked "the destruction of the *image* of the asylum and the symbolic function that it has served"²⁹ rather than the practice of institutionalisation altogether), detention of people in acute mental distress remains the prerogative of the police through Section 136 of the Mental Health Act in England and Wales, and similar legislation in Scotland Northern Ireland.³⁰ As Leah Sidi has further shown, one of the longer legacies of decarceration and the development of community care tracked in chapter three has been the effective privatisation of mental healthcare through the construction of an internal market within the NHS, enabling the purchase and provision of resources from "NHS Trusts to Local Authorities for the delivery of social care in the community."³¹ Mental healthcare has thus continued to be structured at the same time by the imperatives of social control and private competition in the decades since the gay liberation movement articulated its anti-psychiatric critique, even as the practice of more controversial therapies has retreated from general healthcare provision.

26 CSE State Group, *Struggle over the State: Cuts and Restructuring in Contemporary Britain*, 15.

27 Ibid.

28 In the 2018 National LGBT survey carried out by the UK Government, 2% of respondents reported undergoing "conversion or reparative therapy in an attempt to 'cure' them of being LGBT, and a further 5% had been offered it." In 51% of these cases, the therapy was conducted by a religious organisation and in 19%, by a healthcare provider or medical professional. Government Equalities Office., "National LGBT Survey: Summary Report" (London: GEO, 2018), 3.

29 Leah Sidi, "After the Madhouses: The Emotional Politics of Psychiatry and Community Care in the UK Tabloid Press 1980–1995," *Medical Humanities* 48 (2022), 452

30 Ian Cummins, "'Defunding the Police': A Consideration of the Implications for the Police Role in Mental Health Work," *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X211047795>.

31 Sidi, "After the Madhouses," 457.

Meanwhile, privatisation has also underpinned the provision of housing since the mid-seventies, advanced by Thatcher's flagship "Right to Buy" policy (whereby council housing was sold to tenants at a discount while constraints on new council building were imposed) and the liberalisation of the mortgage market.³² Through these policies, "social housing was marginalised, owner-occupation became the dominant tenure form and finance played an increasingly important role in expanding the number of people who could access homeownership via easier access to credit,"³³ creating the conditions for housing to be re-conceptualised as a financial asset rather than a social need. As discussed in chapter four, localised expressions of the general privatisation of housing, such as the gentrification of historically deprived Hackney and Brixton, were assisted, ironically, by gay squatting cultures, which restored dilapidated housing stock where the state was unwilling or unable to do so, and injected a countercultural strain of social capital into these areas. While more affluent fractions of the gay population have since been able to climb the property ladder and benefit from processes of privatisation and gentrification, cultures of gay squatting have effectively been crushed, while inequalities in housing wealth and conditions have deepened, interfacing closely with experiences of sexual and gender marginalisation. The culture of "rentier-capitalism" emanating from the privatisation of housing has, according to Tom Ward, superseded the "Fordist-based, family-centred, heteronormative, nuclear family-oriented [form of] suburban domesticity" with new "forms of queer proletarianisation" whereby people are increasingly forced to either remain living in their parental home later into their lives, or in privately rented, shared occupancy households typically spending huge portion of income on rent.³⁴ The development of rentier-capitalism can thus be understood as a further form of enclosure, circumscribing the opportunities for sexual and political community, and the possibility of communistic forms of relating such as those exercised in the gay commune culture of the seventies. In sum, the steep privatisation and financialisation of housing over the past few decades, with roots in the years of gay liberation, has continued to bite into gay social life.

This discussion of gay liberation's many afterlives is key to the counternarrative to what I have earlier termed the Pride model of history, dominating the public discourses of British media, corporate and social institutions. The reframing of liberation as a liberal form of inclusion and equality, and the accomplishment of capitalist development, has tended to mystify the histories of conflict wherein gay people acquired greater social visibility, generated collective, political consciousness, and struggled against forms of social abjection. Conversely, this thesis has sketched out a constellation of conflictual relationships underpinning the struggle for gay liberation. As this section has shown, gay liberation arose in a historical moment whose interlocking, institutional crises extend into the present, producing forms of immiseration that are both familiar and novel, and mobilising what Amber Hollibaugh has called a "rising queer precariat."³⁵ This rising precarity has formed the context in which the reconfigured form of the GLF, mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis, has begun

32 Mary Robertson, "The Great British Housing Crisis," *Capital & Class* 41, no. 2 (2016), 198.

33 Ibid, 202.

34 Tom Ward, "The Politics of Queer Precarity: Queer Resistance to Rentier-Capitalism," *Women, Gender & Research* 33, no. 1 (2022), 107.

35 Amber Hollibaugh and Margot Weiss, "Queer Precarity and the Myth of Gay Affluence," *New Labor Forum* 24, no. 3 (2015), 18.

to meet, think and strategise together again. For many of the remaining members of the GLF, and their comrades in newer generations, the past fifty years have not amounted to a tale of seamless progress and general gay affluence, but one of housing and health precarity, social exclusion and an increasingly hostile public sphere. These shared conditions are precisely why it is necessary to counter the Pride model of history and the historicist fallacy that the Wolfenden Report began a trajectory of upwards, progressive social change, and emphasises instead how forms of coercion and constraint reside in new forms of sexual freedom.

Particular narratives of historical progress and commemoration must be seen furthermore as actively implicated in the deepening of class inequalities that continue to mediate gay social life. On this note, Jeremy Atherton Lin has recently drawn attention to the role of "heritage" in the historical narrativising of gay public and commercial space, naming the National Trust's public recreation of the Caravan Club (a West End gay club from the interwar period) in 2017, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, as an effort to "institutionalise the subculture as heritage,"³⁶ masking the way in which this subcultural space is gradually eroded. In the context of housing and healthcare, too, the contradictions of gay life have deepened and evolved rather than finding any form of resolution in the idea of progress. As Carin Tunåker has also persuasively argued, we face a "paradox of progress,"³⁷ wherein the public celebration of different gender and sexual identities is out of sync with the persistence of domestic forms of homophobia and exclusion, leaving queer people liable to fall between the cracks of an increasingly privatised and unfit housing system. In conclusion, the Pride model of history is belied by the core of antagonism that still constitutes gay peoples' relationships to Britain's social institutions.

Historically, the gay liberation movement has played an ambivalent role in the legacies of enclosure, abjection and privatisation traced in this section. Its experimental cultures of sex, protest, consciousness-raising and communal living, despite their grounding in social critique, all heightened the social visibility of gayness so far as to create the conditions of possibility for the greater privatisation of gay sociality. The emergence of new forms of gay and queer subjectivity and community based on consumption, property-ownership and progressive reform are undeniably afterlives of gay liberation, already visible in O'Leary's commiseration for the receding horizon of liberation in gay politics. A bitter irony in the history of gay liberation is that it ultimately gave way to a politics of liberal equality and freedom it despised, a politics that continues to mystify the social realities of exclusion and immiseration. This is not to say however, that these are logically necessary consequences of gay liberation, arising from some defect in its politics or organisational forms. The processes I have identified in this thesis belong to a history of capitalist crisis and class struggle, of which gay liberation is only one of many moving parts. The point of this thesis is not ultimately to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the gay liberation movement, or to imply that it should

36 Jeremy Atherton Lin, *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out* (London: Granta, 2021), 28.

37 Carin Tunåker, "The Paradox of Progress: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in South East England" (PhD Thesis, University of Kent, 2017).

somehow have predicted the events of the following decades, but rather to show that social movements do not always produce the legacies they anticipate. Liberation is a circuitous, uneven process, inflected by social conditions while also intervening in and re-moulding those conditions in real time. The indivisibility of liberation from this continual struggle means, then, that a surplus of potential abides within the politics and culture of gay liberation, still to be realised.

4. Visions

The mode of dialectical theorising cultivated in this thesis has, in the tradition of open marxism, resisted the urge to impose closure and simplicity onto the history of gay liberation. It is fitting, therefore, that it should end with a recapitulation of some of the movement's most provocative openings, points of departure and deferred horizons. This thesis' investigation into the archive of gay liberation has presented it as one of rich and novel contributions to revolutionary thought and struggle. Yet due to the amorphous, unstable and often contradictory character of the movement, it is neither straightforward nor intuitive to try and pin down a singular, definitive vision of what a gay revolution could or should look like, despite the earnest efforts of the movement's various subgroups to do so. A crucial contradiction of gay liberation, as we have seen, is that of its revolutionary vision, appearing in one sense as the flourishing of a liberated gay community, based around an affirmative, radical gay subject, and on the other, as a movement of negation, sweeping away existing social relations, including the categories of sexual identity. The former aspect of this vision can be said to have already been realised in a very limited and conditional sense in the legislative reforms and shifts in social attitudes occurring in the past few decades, whereby gay people can now nominally enjoy greater inclusion within social institutions like the family through marriage rights, and experience highly mediated forms of sociality through the expansion of gay commerce. The latter aspect, however, referring to the movement's kernel of communistic negation, remains yet to be realised, and according to the 1971 manifesto, can only be done so through "a revolutionary change in our whole society."³⁸ This aspect of gay liberation's revolutionary theory finds its expression in the tendency of gay communism outlined in chapter one, with reference points in the Italian and French gay liberation movements, shaping the British movement's core principle, to "abolish all forms of social oppression."³⁹ As the following paragraphs will elaborate, this negating, communistic tendency within gay liberation provides a unique vantage on the concept of abolition, as in *aufhebung* in the tradition of marxist thought, wherein the revolutionary negation of capitalist social forms conduces not to the pure annihilation of society, but to the negation of the constraints of wage-based reproduction, to the holding of all things in common, and to the promise of "more various"⁴⁰ forms of social and sexual relationship.

38 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

39 GLF, "Principles of the Gay Liberation Front," in *Come Together: The Years of Gay Liberation 1970-73*, 48.

40 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

In chapter one, I argued that the "gay" in gay liberation constituted an expansive and ambivalent term. In the process of implying some kind of collective experience, "gay" simultaneously exploded existing medical and sociological categories of sexual identity. The generalisation of the term to different, unevenly marginalised fractions of the movement, as expressed by the TS/TV working group's declaration "we are all gay,"⁴¹ moreover displaced the idea of a single, representative gay subject, envisaging instead a unity of contradictory experiences and perspectives. This conception of unity in and through difference reflected the gay liberation movement's broader revolutionary vision of a society freed from social oppression and therefore from bureaucratic categorisations of identity and experience. As expressed by Luke Fitzgerald, a former GLF member, in conversation with Robinson, "we were all part of a large inchoate revolutionary movement that would change society from without and within, and of course make the gay movement unnecessary,"⁴² gesturing to the movement's orientation towards its own self-overcoming, via the abolition of the conditions that made it necessary to begin with. This idea of gay liberation as the ultimate negation of sexual identity mapped onto emergent ideas on the radical left, such as the critique of programmatism in the communising tendency, which posited revolution not as the seizure of power by an industrial working class, as per the traditional paradigm of the workers' movement, but as a highly differentiated and increasingly precarious proletariat struggling "against its own domination so as to be able to destroy itself as class and to destroy capital and classes."⁴³ This reimagination of revolution as the self-abolition of the proletariat flowed throughout the gay liberation movement's concept of itself, in which gender and sexuality figured primarily as constraints to be overcome. As highlighted by contemporary queer marxist theory, the history of sexual identity politics over the past decades, beginning with the programmatic tendencies of the gay liberation movement itself, has undermined this core of self-negation, tending towards the "deflation of political struggle into individualised, 'rights-based' issues"⁴⁴ and sidestepping the question of why and how social differentiation relates to the reproduction of capitalism. Jules Gleeson's proposition that "we can hope for better than a careful itemisation of anxieties: homophobia, transphobia, interphobia," stresses that "a gay communist view demonstrates that each of these are mashed together."⁴⁵ Liberation *from* rather than *of* sexuality and gender thus remains a tantalising and yet unrealised premise of gay communism.

Gay liberation's politics of the streets, its "super-therapeutic"⁴⁶ consciousness-raising circles and its communal living cultures were all pervaded by an effort to theorise the relationship between the personal and the political, as reflected in Tony Halliday's characterisation of the movement as a "vast strain of trying to rebuild society from your inner self outwards."⁴⁷ The communistic, abolitionist thrust within gay liberation similarly operated on expanding scale, striking upon both individual and

41 GLF Transsexuals and Transvestite Working Group, "Declare Your Sex," 1973, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

42 As cited in Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain*, 85.

43 Camatte, *Capital and Community*, 165.

44 Vishmidt and Sutherland, "(Un)making Value," 74.

45 Jules Gleeson, "Hermaphrobia," *Pinko Magazine*, 2020, <https://pinko.online/pinko-2/hermaphrobia>.

46 Gilbert, "Psychedelic Socialism", *Open Democracy*, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/psychedelic-socialism>.

47 As cited in Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles*, 210.

collective identity, but also upon larger social institutions. Gay liberation formed a key part of a wider left-wing tendency, gaining traction in the late sixties, that extended its scrutiny and critique from "class" – as it had traditionally and narrowly been conceived – into the realm of social institutions. Building on the 1971 manifesto's critique of the "social power" of the family, education, psychiatry, media⁴⁸ the archive of gay liberation muses at length on the role of these institutions in capitalist social reproduction. A common gay liberation perspective arising, for example, out of its socialist feminist and gay marxist factional positions, posited the family as "an institution designed for exploitation,"⁴⁹ both presupposing and shoring up the capitalist wage relation. Subsequently, chapters two, three and four detail how the gay liberation movement related negatively to social institutions including the family, identifying their complicity in the capitalist social order and producing various demands to abolish the family, psychiatric therapies and the policing of gay sexual and social spaces.

Given that multiple factional articulations of these demands existed in tension with one another, we can glean from the constellation of these perspectives (rather than from a single, particular tendency) that the abolition or negation of social institutions contains multiple meanings. In the tradition of the demand for family abolition, which for Marx and Engels is "the infamous proposal of the Communists,"⁵⁰ O'Brien writes that "abolition" implies both "preservation and destruction,"⁵¹ deriving from the simultaneous, contradictory meanings of the German *aufhebung*. According to Kathi Weeks, "the family is so fully equated with intimacy, care and solidarity themselves that to be anti-family is understood to be anti-relational."⁵² Yet as demonstrated in gay liberation's politics of family abolition, lived practically through alternative and communal domestic experiments, it is not the abolition of these relations themselves whose abolition was desired, but rather the family's monopolising hold on them. With the dissolution of the family's institutionalised form, domestic relations could be generalised beyond its confines and able to take on more various, freer forms. Likewise, the desire for therapeutic support and for sexual freedom, flowing throughout the archive of gay liberation, show that it is the mediation and contortion of these concepts by the psychiatric establishment and by the state's legislative bureaucracies that inflict harm and negate life's pleasures, rather than the concepts themselves. The organisational and cultural forms taken by gay liberation's negative critique of these institutions therefore frequently transform or repurpose some of their aspects, reflecting the complex meanings of abolition and negation in communist theory more broadly.

This latter point, regarding the contradictory character of abolition, in which elements of the old are suspended and preserved in the new, relates ultimately to the complex temporality of communist revolution theorised within the gay liberation movement. How and when gay communism will arise

48 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE, London.

49 Gay Trade Unionist Group, "Know Us!! We Are Gay!! We Are Angry!!," 1975, HCA/Thornycroft/2/1, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

50 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 35.

51 ME O'Brien, "To Abolish the Family," 361.

52 Kathi Weeks, "Abolition of the Family: The Most Infamous Feminist Proposal," *Feminist Theory*, 2021, 2.

remains a great, unanswered question of the gay liberation years, yet its openness is also revealing. The 1971 manifesto claims that "the time may come quite suddenly when old institutions start to crack, and when people will have to seek new models" and subsequently commits to "working out our contribution to these new models now, by creating an alternative gay culture free from sexism, and by setting up gay communes."⁵³ In locating the horizon of revolutionary social change simultaneously within the day-to-day life of the movement, its infrastructures, cultures and relationships, and within a deferred future, the manifesto here expresses gay communism's characteristic conception of revolution. While many competing theories of revolutionary change have been advocated for by various institutions of the revolutionary left, the classical, programmatic concept of revolution in the Second and Third Internationals forecasted the unilateral redistribution of ownership, wealth and power from the capitalist to the worker, ushering in the passage from capitalism to communism. Gay communism's contribution to this rich history lies however in its demonstration – through the missed opportunities and breakdowns of its own revolutionary experiments – that revolutionary change is likely to be a twisting and non-linear process. While this communising tendency in gay liberation, as we have seen, sometimes slid into forms of gay programmatism, where the activities of the movement were thought to have already transcended capitalist society, the complex temporalities of the movement attest overwhelmingly to the centrality of relationships and ways of relating to the pursuit of communism. O'Leary's insight into the "permanent revolution dynamic" of the movement thus stresses *both* that gay liberation "can only come to its full political expression in the context of a socialist revolution," and that "gays must organise now both amongst themselves and others for participation in the class struggle."⁵⁴ The negating movement of gay communism is articulated simultaneously therefore, against the immediate constraints of social differentiation and institutional power as immanent expressions of capitalism's deadly negation of free and communal forms of sociality. The logical conclusion of this tendency, which I consider to be the profoundest insight of the movement, is that gay liberation can only be realised in the communistic negation of the capitalist social order, and communism can only be realised in the liberation of sexuality.

5. Concluding remarks

This thesis has set out to write a history of gay liberation that attends to both to the material intensities of the movement and to its relationship to the social transformations of capitalism. Its methodology has therefore melded together history and theory, drawing out the theoretical implications of the history of gay life in Britain and thinking about how political ideas are themselves produced by underlying historical processes. The archive of gay liberation, theorised as a simultaneous archive of experience and archive of theory, has been at the heart of this research. The

53 GLF, "Manifesto," 1971, HCA/Chesterman/10, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

54 Martine O'Leary, "Gay Liberation, Reformism and Revolution" (Isophile Pamphlets, 1974), HCA/Thornycroft/2, Hall Carpenter Archive, LSE Library, London.

aesthetic, political and emotional traces of the gay liberation movement recorded in the archive, speak to this project not as second-order, empirical evidence for its claims, but as documents of theory, helping us to glean a richer understanding of the relationship between sexuality and capitalism. This thesis therefore constitutes a very particular type of marxist history, pulling on a range of threads within open marxism, Frankfurt School critical theory and queer marxism. Its approach constellates fragments of the gay past and looks for the contradictions present among them. In this way, it brushes against the grain of dominant narratives of the gay past by centring themes of conflict, dislocation and instability. Throughout, I have steered away from assessing the gay liberation movement in terms of success or failure, or to affirm certain aesthetics and practices over others "in service of a conquest or reconquest of identity."⁵⁵ Rather, I have situated gay liberation within its historical social antagonisms, drawing out its negative, communistic temporalities of revolution.

The gay liberation movement in Britain therefore represents a vista of theory and practice, launching a revolutionary critique of heterosexual capitalism and beginning the work of building the communal, communistic infrastructure necessary to its overcoming. While the decades since tell a tale of counterrevolutions and enclosures, in the vein of Benjamin's historical materialism, it is possible to think of gay liberation as an unfinished project, whose revolutionary energies remain yet to be detonated. For Benjamin, the constellation as dialectical method exposes the violence and immiseration endemic to capitalist history, and imparts the insight that "it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency."⁵⁶ In true dialectical fashion, this formulation shows us that the conditions of struggle and abjection become the conditions in which revolutionary insight occurs, in which liberation becomes desirable. This dialectic is at work in the history of gay liberation, in which the capitalist social institutions of the family, state, psychiatry, and so on, become arenas of intensified social conflict and the basis of experimental cultures, infrastructures and ways of living. The history of gay liberation speaks therefore to the forms of critique and struggle unfolding in the present, showing us the possibilities of living and relating in a revolutionary future.

55 Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 2

56 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 248.

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Appendix: Archival Sources

Throughout this thesis, the "archive of gay liberation" has referred to the broad and sporadic range of political and experiential writing by gay people in Britain during the sixties and seventies. During my archival research, I encountered a mixture of different sources, including pamphlets, manifestoes, meeting minutes, newsletters, press and magazine articles, diary entries, interview transcripts, unpublished memoirs and books. Many of these sources never found their way into wider public circulation, but for one reason or another, were deemed historically significant by the people who collated and eventually deposited them in the archives in which they currently sit. Coming across these various materials, often sitting side by side in archival holdings, was centrally important in shaping the thesis' argument as to the unity of theory and practice and the richness of everyday life as a source of critique.

For the sake of clarity, archival sources that were later reproduced in published anthologies or works of history have been included in the general bibliography above, as opposed to this appendix. All other archival sources were encountered in public archives, accessed either in person or online. These sources are arranged below according to the archive in which they were found.

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