'Still (Mighty) Real': HIV and AIDS, Queer Public Memories, and the Intergenerational Drag Hail

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In August 2014 the hottest theatre ticket in Montréal was *Saint Jude du Village*, which sold out its run at Place des Arts. Set in the early 1980s against the backdrop of fear that accompanied the emergence of AIDS, the play follows teenage runaway Jude as he explores his sexuality in the Gay Village, eventually finding work as a stripper in a seedy bar along the Main,[1] where he is befriended by the trans diva Ms. Gracie and the budding activist Michel. Written by Divers/Cité Festival co-founder Puelo Deir, *Saint Jude* is actually a French-language adaptation of his 2013 Montréal Fringe Festival hit, *Holy Tranity!* Significantly, the English version of the play had been staged at Café Cléopâtre, a legendary strip club in the city whose upstairs space has been a haven for Montréal's trans community for forty years, and which only narrowly escaped expropriation to make way for a new 'Quartier des spectacles' when the queer community rallied in 2011 to convince the City of Montréal to recognize the building's landmark status (its roots as a burlesque venue date back to the nineteenth century).

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Deir's play constellates a number of the issues I explore in this essay, including the use of drag as a strategy of both performative and temporal transitivity. Drawing on the work of queer theorists of temporality and performance theorists of re-enactment and the repertoire, I focus on two drag/performance couples in Montréal and Vancouver whose embodied engagements, in the present, with past losses to the AIDS pandemic are registered not just through the citational labour of the drag performer but also through the theatrical incitement of the audience toward a kind of queer political (re)call. I am particularly interested in excavating those moments in performance when a subject's and a community's generationally and situationally contingent social formation in the here and now makes manifest the co-presence of past events, movements and struggles. Here I am drawing on the work of queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman (2010: 63ff) and performance scholar Rebecca Schneider (2011: 14ff), who argue, respectively, that queer time and theatrical time flout the conventions of 'straight' time; they do this not simply by rejecting a temporal logic based on productivity and futurity, or what Freeman calls '*chrononormativity*' (3),[2] but also by constructing intimate and embodied genealogies that are expressly concerned with those who came before—and from whom queers and actors alike have learned to play their part. This analeptic impulse at the heart of queer performance and politics is especially pertinent in the context of a generation of North American LGBTQ millennials for whom the history of HIV and AIDS may seem impossibly distant and who are thus affectively detached from a true sense of queer belonging, which Freeman defines not simply as a desire to *be* part of a community, but also as 'persisting over time'—of '"being long"' (13). In this respect, the drag queen, is, as theatre scholar David Román has suggested, the queer performance archivist par excellence, her impersonations of faded and *dépassées* divas and her repertoire of recycled songs channelling a history (of both performance and queerness) that endures despite its supposed obsolescence and that in its successive re-stagings becomes insistently fused with the contemporary—not least in inspiring a new generation to creative action and activism (2005: 174). Such recursivity contributes to what I am theorizing as the inter- or cross-generational drag hail, the call out from the stage—and who hasn't been called out by an all-seeing queen during the course of her show?—that simultaneously locates us in a current moment *and* interpellates us within a history of queer public memories with which it is always coterminous.

I begin with an examination of the Montréal-based 2boys.tv (Aaron Pollard and Stephen Lawson), contextualizing their performance aesthetic

and history before focusing on the duo's recent performance piece, *Tightrope* (2011–). Taking its inspiration from the stories of the disappeared in South America, *Tightrope* uses a posse of young, local drag queens recruited from the cities to which the work has toured to channel an historical archive of grief and loss around AIDS that I argue also becomes a future-oriented act of repertory remembrance—one addressed to a specific performance community, but also performatively transnational. Next, I turn to Vancouverites Cameron Mackenzie and Dave Deveau, who through their company, Zee Zee Theatre, have created *Tucked and Plucked* (2011–), a sassy and outrageous live 'herstory' of the drag scene in Vancouver from the 1960s to the present. I am particularly interested in how *Tucked and Plucked* drags into view for its audiences not just a history of queer activism and education and philanthropy related to HIV and AIDS in Vancouver, but also a present crisis tied to the gentrification of many of the social spaces in which these activities took place. Thus, one of the interesting additional 'sites' of connection between my case studies is the way in which the performance of place—and place as a performative—helps to embed questions of queer motility and publicity within larger issues related to mourning and memorialization, but also to narratives of development (economic, social, political) as they play out differently in urban communities across Canada and the Americas. In other words, how might the materially situated and locally grounded performances discussed in this essay supplement or even disrupt, through a repertory replaying of temporally disjunctive but spatially conjunctive public memories, the unequal inheritances of HIV and AIDS as they are visited upon queers not just generationally, but also geographically? And why should a young twink in Montréal or Vancouver even care? I attempt to answer both questions in a concluding coda that briefly suggests some of the ways in which a coalitionary politics of public assembly and protest bequeathed by AIDS might be linked to more recent antiprecarity movements and demonstrations of sovereignty that, according to Judith Butler, likewise depend on a recognition, across time and space, of our shared bodily vulnerability.

2boys.tv: *Tightrope*

2boys.tv is made up of life partners Stephen Lawson and Aaron Pollard, who as their cheeky drag alter egos Gigi l'Amour and Pipi Douleur are fixtures of Montréal's queer cabaret scene. Their more theatre-based

performance work supplements a camp aesthetic derived from drag with sophisticated video projections, original and found sound scores, the art of lipsynch and object-oriented and site-based installation, among other elements. All of this is marshalled—often through trademark hyper-theatricality and miniaturized scale—to explore a set of recurring themes: the relationship between art and fear; the porous perceptual borders between truth and illusion; the complicit act of spectatorship; and who or what has been made to disappear in our midst without us even knowing it. Thus, in *Zona Pellucida* (2007–9) a cross-dressed Lawson re-enacts his somnambulistic character's guilt over the accidental death of a baby left in her care not just through a virtuosic miming of dialogue from *All About Eve* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, but also by re-playing an interrupted fairy tale allegory on a succession of stages, each a *mise en abyme* of the previous one: the artificially constructed proscenium stage upon which Lawson's character appears; the miniature version of this stage that the character uses to entertain her collection of stuffed animals; and the projected image of this miniature that appears on the screen next to it. In *Zona Pellucida* Pollard's projections also appear on the blank pages of a storybook held by Lawson, a conceit the duo adapted for their next project, *Phobophilia* (2009–11). In this piece a pop-up book is transformed into a scale-model theatre, which Lawson's projected shadow self navigates in a way that contrasts with our initial glimpse of his live body: perched precariously on a box, arms outstretched, head hooded by a paper bag in a pose meant to recall the most infamous of the photos from Abu Ghraib.

Finally, in *darlingARCADE* (2011) 2boys.tv collaborated with the Darling Foundry, an artist-run centre, and curatorial collective Urban Occupations Urbaines to create a site-based installation in the historically working-class and rapidly gentrifying Montréal neighbourhood of Griffintown. Commissioning fellow Montréal artists to create a series of fictionalized and fantastical narratives about the area's sub-rosa spaces and inhabitants, the discarded or forgotten people and places that exist betwixt and between a temporality of decay and re-development, Lawson and Pollard animated these narratives as tiny maquettes, Lilliputian video projections and intimate audio soundscapes inside a succession of shoeboxes. Each shoebox had a corresponding shoe that was displayed on one wall of the Darling Foundry's garage, which was re-purposed to look like a hip new retail outlet. Selecting a shoe, visitors are brought not its mate, but rather its container, a portable world in miniature that functions as a reverse-scale sublime disturbance, challenging us to look at 'the imagined

nooks and crannies that are easily missed from the vantage point of a car, train or bus' (Janssen 2011).

Queer publics have historically existed in the nooks and crannies of major urban centres, carving out space and visibility—even if in a ghetto—via the unequal efforts of the frontline workers in our sexual decolonization, including sex workers, trans folk, working-class lesbians, queers of colour, and, of course, drag queens. By contrast, affluent cis-gendered gay white men have often been at the vanguard of gentrification, including at the height of the AIDS-epidemic in the 1990s, part of 'the new homonormativity' that queer sociologist Lisa Duggan has linked to neoliberalism and 'a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2003: 50). Negotiating the space between a meaningful exchange with the communities to whom they are presenting their work and the potential risk of commodifying those very communities within its content and form is, as writer Rachel Cole has pointed out, something that Lawson and Pollard have wrestled with their entire careers, particularly in relation to the 'artist's role when traveling and creating work in foreign locations' (Cole 2011). The pair tackles this question head-on in *Tightrope*, which premiered at Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in June 2011 and was subsequently adapted as an installation for Montréal's Musée d'art contemporain in October of that year. Always evolving, the piece has since toured to various cities in Latin America, including Mexico City, São Paulo and Havana—with a planned mounting in Granada, Nicaragua in the works. In October 2015, *Tightrope* came back to Montréal for a one-night performance at Sala Rossa as part of the Phénomena Festival, and it is the video documentation of this version of *Tightrope* from which the analysis that follows derives.

Site-specificity is a key element of the show. Lawson and Pollard, together with their collaborators, adapt the content of the piece, and especially the language in which it is presented, to suit the spectating requirements of local audiences. In Montréal this has meant moving back and forth seamlessly, and without recourse to surtitles, between French and English. In Mexico City and Havana, Lawson and co-creator Alexis O'Hara, who serves as *Tightrope*'s emcee-cum-funeral director, performed their texts and songs in English and Spanish, and in São Paulo Portuguese was also added. (Appropriately, the title of the piece also changes depending on performance location: *Tightrope/Corde raide/Cuerda Floja/Corda Bamba*.) Additionally, while *Tightrope* has for the most part always been staged on an indoor proscenium stage, each version since the Buddies

premiere has begun outside, with a public procession that includes the audience and that wends its way to the performance venue from a nearby neighbourhood landmark. In the case of the Phénomena Festival perfor-mance, the procession started at parc Lahaie, in the trendy Mile End dis-trict of Montréal's Plateau Mont-Royal, and just a few short blocks from the Sala Rossa. However, to refer back to the opening of this essay, La Main, as this area is also known, has long constellated overlapping histo-ries of class, ethnic and sexual marginality. The march at the start of *Tightrope* thus commemorates lives lost to AIDS within the context of other social vanishings. Leading each of these processions is a posse of local drag queen mourners—most of them young, most of them adopting a deliberately trashy aesthetic of fabulousness—who have been recruited to participate in the piece and whose crucial presence throughout the show, I argue, is not just what addresses its local collectivist politics trans-temporally to the present, but also what connects its dispersed global audi-ences to each other. In other words, the queens hail us to remember whom we have lost, but also to consider a larger ethic of care that might arise from grief or outrage shared across time *and* space—a point I return to at the end of this essay. Finally, a major design element tied to 2boys.tv's use of projections and shadow play calls for a large screen to be constructed from pages of a newspaper local to each city in which the piece is per-formed. That, in an effort to avoid too much distracting colour, Lawson and Pollard have gravitated to using mostly classified and obit pages for this bit of scenography perfectly encapsulates the twinned themes of sex-ual self-fashioning and collective memorialization that have largely consti-tuted the ambit of queer claims upon the public sphere in North America from Stonewall to AIDS.

It was while touring *Zona Pellucida* through South America that the idea for *Tightrope* was born. Lawson and Pollard kept hearing stories of the disappeared from presenters and audience members; they connected to these stories emotionally via their own experiences of losing a generation of friends to the AIDS crisis. Taking their cue from Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared who marched in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires during Argentina's Dirty War, they asked what it might mean to bear ritual witness in public to systemic and state-sanctioned loss? How might the simple act of gathering together to remember and mourn transform the performance of individual privation into an act of abundant collectivity, in which a city square or a civic theatre becomes a quietly insistent or loudly proclaiming bulwark against enforced

forgetting? How, in other words, does grief, which in its backward glance to the past is always already consigned to the archive of history, become a repertory act of remembrance that is also future oriented? Performance theorist Diana Taylor's compelling discussion of how the sons and daughters of Argentina's disappeared have taken up the performative protests of Las Madres offers one possible model that, as we shall see, has explicitly influenced the dramaturgy of *Tightrope* (2003: 161–189). In *Performing Remains* Schneider engages directly with Taylor's reading of the archive, as well as that of Jacques Derrida (1995), to ask how such spectral encounters of intergenerational relevance/revenance might be activated via the simple assembly of live bodies and ghostly characters on stage (2011: 105–110)?

To answer this last question in *Tightrope*, 2boys.tv have had to abandon their usual creative process of working independently, diminutively, and with a largely pre-recorded and sampled sound score of film dialogue and opera arias. Instead, *Tightrope* features original music by O'Hara and Radwan Ghazi Moumneh, monologues by Lawson and O'Hara, cappella songs by Pollard, and kaleidoscopic video projections and giant shadow images created by Lucie Bazzo that dance across the newspaper screen. All of this is framed by an opening invocation from O'Hara, who tells the audience that they are gathered together in celebration and commemoration and who invites us to think about the paradox of those who are no longer here nevertheless continuing to be a part of us by referencing the molecular transformation that happens every time we breathe, a mixing of self and other, the living and the dead, that is akin to the transmission of a virus. In this scenario accounting for how individual subject-bodies are fundamentally discontinuous with themselves temporally and spatially also means recognizing how they are co-extensive with, and responsible for, the bodies of others. As O'Hara remarks: 'The body that walks is not the body that stands.' In addition to O'Hara's narration, Lawson's Gigi, as queen bee of the bereaved—the 'saddest widow on the block, the one [we've] all been dying to die for', to quote O'Hara—knits together the disparate segments of the performance with her lipsynching and storytelling, including twin tales about a man who cannot remember and a woman who cannot forget. Asking us whom it would 'be better to be', Gigi paradoxically sums up an epistemology of HIV and AIDS in which two different generations encounter each other as if from opposite banks of the river Lethe: 'The ecstasy of never knowing or the sorrowful bliss of continual recognition.' A bridge between these equally impossible states, and

between the witnessing that is happening on stage and the witnessing that is taking place in the audience, occurs via the public testimonials that interrupt the action, with O'Hara selecting random spectators to read out letters written by the show's creators recounting different scenarios of vigil for the missing.

However, at the heart of *Tightrope* are the six professional drag mourners who are summoned by O'Hara near the top of the show to bear hysterical witness to the entire extravagantly elegiac event. These queens, drawn from the ranks of the local communities to which the show tours, literally ground *Tightrope*, helping to mitigate any impulse toward mere aestheticization by making the theatricality and pageantry of each successive performance, like that of any drag ball, context specific. As Pollard (2016) explained to me, recruitment of these performers changes from place to place, depending on schedules and budget. That said, 2boys.tv have made every effort to represent a diversity of bodies on stage in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, physicality and age. Making space for these queens to perform their own numbers, Pollard and Lawson then assist them to integrate this material within the show, helping to edit sound and video, advising on costuming and content and coaching performances. At the Phénomena Festival production of *Tightrope* these performances included a standout collaboration between a bearded 2Fik (aka Giselle Bin Laden) and a veiled CT Thorne on the Barbra Streisand/Donna Summer standard 'No More Tears (Enough is Enough)' and a spoken word monologue by the trans diva Judy Virago that points to the ways in which memory work begins with, but immediately exceeds, the self: 'I've been so many different people in our life, sometimes it's hard to hear through all their voices. Remember their names. Remember which voice belongs to whom.'

Remaining on or immediately adjacent to the stage for the entire performance (Fig. 5.1), their black mourning weeds linking them to the black shadows of the departed that float across the screen, these distractively keening, fabulously feeling bodies channel a 'queer genealogy' (both real and lipsynched) of pain and suffering and, above all, survival that simultaneously enacts in its 'relational' logic a utopian vision of what performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz has called 'queer futurity' (2009: 3). In this networked space of 'intergenerationality', as critic T.L. Cowan (2011) has described the politics of *Tightrope*, the souls of the dead are not only *not* forgotten but are also intercorporeally 'inter(in)animated' via the drag queens' at once iterative and 'still [mighty] real' presence on stage—to

Fig. 5.1 Left to right: Judy Virago, CT Thorne, Jamie Ross, Stephen Lawson (aka Gigi Lamour), and 2Fik in 2boys.tv's *Tightrope/Corde raide*, Phénomena Festival, Montréal, October 2015 (Photo by Caroline Hayeur. Courtesy 2boys.tv)

borrow from Schneider on Walter Benjamin, by way of disco star Sylvester (see Schneider 2011: 161–162). That is, the live encounter with these bodily 'copies', like the thumbing of an old photograph, casts the past not simply as something contingent with the here and now, but also, much like a playscript, as an address directed to future viewers (Schneider 2011: 163). This is encapsulated most effectively in the coda to the show; the local queens hold foam-core placards onto which are projected the faces of a virtual choir (the Montréal drag troupe House of Bogue), who sing a simple, yet haunting song of address from a space beyond: 'Hello… Can you hear me…?' As Pollard has noted (2016), the idea for this conceit was modeled directly on the intergenerational corporeal uses to which family photographs of lost loved ones have been put in vigils in Argentina, in which brandished images of the disappeared 'work to reappear those who have been erased from history itself' (Taylor 2003: 169). Adapting this explicitly embodied and cross-generational act of witnessing to the context of HIV and AIDS in *Tightrope*, the show's doubly imprinted chorus line of queens thus marks an important confluence of theatrical time and

queer time. That is, the subcultures of the theatre and of queerness—which drag queens the world over continue to combine into paradigmatic counterpublics—remind us that events and lives deemed superfluous to official history can be re-staged in the interstices of that history, enacting specifically queer moments of *re*-membering in which 'times touch' (Schneider 2011: 35; see also Dinshaw 1999: 151) and bodies are affectively—and cross-generationally—hailed.

Zee Zee Theatre: *Tucked and Plucked*

This idea of an intergenerational drag hail is also relevant to my Vancouver case study. My focus here is on husband and husband drag artists Isolde N. Barron (Cameron Mackenzie) and Peach Cobblah (Dave Deveau), who since 2011 have been hosting several monthly drag shows-cum-dance parties at Vancouver's Cobalt Bar, on Main Street, including *Apocalypstick*, *Hustla: Homo Hip Hop* and *The Gay Agenda*. The events are notable not just for the fact that they take place on the east side of the city, and not in the West End's de facto Gay Village, but also for the younger, more diverse queer, non-queer and genderqueer audiences they attract. The success of the Cobalt drag shows has led some commentators in Vancouver's queer community to play up an apparent generational, demographic and aesthetic rift between 'east side drag' and 'west side drag.' In this binary, the former is the citational upstart threatening to usurp, overwrite or displace the specific temporal and spatial 'erotohistoriography' mapped by the latter.

But for Freeman, from whom I borrow the term, to the extent that 'erotohistoriography' expresses an encounter with the past that is registered in the present on and through the body, the enjoyment, excitement and pleasure one derives from a drag performance is always already queerly transtemporal and non-linear, and in ways that wrest drag, in particular, from a chain of expressly gendered citations that, *pace* Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), are all too often read as unmoored from history. As Freeman writes, with explicit reference to Butler,

> To reduce all embodied performance to the status of copies without originals is to ignore the interesting threat that the genuine *past*-ness of the past sometimes makes to the political present .... Might some bodies, in registering on their very surfaces the co-presence of several historically specific events, movements, and collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of *gender*-transitive drag to queer performativity? (Freeman 2010: 63)

In *Time Binds*, Freeman draws on drag's additional connotative associations with 'retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present' (62), to formulate a notion of 'temporal drag' that serves as a cognate to erotohistoriography, and that is also akin to Román's use of 'archival drag' as a critical framework to analyse a succession of queer US performances that '[set] out to reembody and revive a performance from the past' (Román 2005: 140). Freeman is likewise interested in queer re-enactments and re-performances; hence the resonance of her work for Schneider's ideas of 'theatrical' and 'syncopated' time in *Performing Remains* (2011: 6). But what is most interesting to me in the context of this essay is that Freeman deploys 'temporal drag' less to refer to 'the psychic time of the individual' than to demarcate what she calls 'the movement time of collective political fantasy', a dragging together of past and present that in the context of her discussion of lesbian feminism's often vexed relationship with queer politics—including activist politics around HIV and AIDS—complicates a progressivist narrative of generational mobilising around social issues *and* performance practices (Freeman 2010: 65).

Consider how this relates to the transtemporal soundtrack one might hear at *Apocalypstick* or *Hustla*. What might it mean, for example, to read Peach's bad bitch performance to Nicki Minaj's 'Super Bass' not as a flagrant travesty of drag's calcified disco-era conventions, but rather, following Isolde's more recognizably queenly take on Shirley Bassey's 'Let's Get This Party Started', as an interesting comment on the historical continuity of white gay men's identifications with and appropriations of female pop artists of colour? If the soundtrack of North American gay liberation is disproportionately made up of hits by Donna Summer and Gloria Gaynor and Thelma Houston—songs that, by their very titles ('Last Dance', 'I Will Survive', 'Don't Leave Me This Way'), became instantly elegiac with the appearance of HIV and AIDS—then the fierceness of contemporary artists like Minaj, Missy Elliott, M.I.A., Beyoncé and Rihanna speaks to a generation of urban gay men who, while no longer living under the spectre of a plague, have nevertheless inherited other forms of precarity. Shared precarity (in the double sense of what may be owed and to whom one may be beholden) is something, I have been arguing, that is performatively constellated in the intergenerational hail of the drag queen, who draws from the past to remind us that any party started in the present always unfolds against borrowed time.

As interesting to me in this respect is the fact that *Apocalypstick* and *Hustla* are not the only monthly drag shows to take place at the Colbalt.

The venue also hosts the drag king variety show *Man Up*, which decamped there in 2011 following the closure of the Lick Nightclub that was, until the Lotus Hotel's sale and re-development four years ago, Vancouver's lone lesbian bar. Beyond the Cobalt's queerly performative commitment to representing the full gender spectrum onstage (which extends to trans and 'drag thing' performers), what the spatial confluence of these different shows under one roof also helps to temporalise is private development's accelerated encroachment over the past decade on Vancouver's queer public history. There are fewer and fewer explicitly designated drag- and queer-friendly social spaces in Vancouver; in addition to Lick's closing, many of the clubs in the West End that hosted drag shows on a regular basis—including Denman Station, The Dufferin, The Odyssey and The Oasis—have shuttered their doors, most often because their buildings were sold and turned into condominiums. Then, too, many younger queers in the city (including Mackenzie and Deveau) have opted not to settle in the West End, priced out of the gay ghetto by an inflated real estate market and a shortage of affordable rental units—a history of diminishing queer public space in Vancouver that in some respects represents the inverse of queer visibility in the city during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1990s.

Something of that history is on view in *Tucked and Plucked*, a show created by Mackenzie and Deveau through their company, Zee Zee Theatre, and from which the Shirley Bassey/Nicki Minaj song pairing cited above actually comes. Originally staged at PAL Theatre in 2011, the piece has since been revived four times: at the rEvolver Fesival in 2013; at Club PuSh in 2014; at Surrey's Centre Stage in July 2015; and most recently at the gay bar XY in December 2017. This 'herstory' of Vancouver's drag scene takes the form of a live studio talk show (Fig. 5.2). In between their own and invited guests' solo musical performances, Isolde and Peach interview a succession of their bewigged and still-bedazzling queenly foremothers. In the version of the show I saw, at Club PuSh, the guests included three past Empresses of the Dogwood Monarchist Society (DMS), the organization that has presided over drag coronations in Vancouver for the past forty-four years. This gave *Tucked and Plucked* a sanctioned historical through line, but as Mackenzie and Deveau put it to me, you get the best stories by knowing what queens to talk to (Mackenzie and Deveau 2016). Thus we heard from Mona Regina Lee about the early origins of DMS and what it was like, under British Columbia's antiquated liquor laws (and before the decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada

Fig. 5.2 Peach Cobblah (Dave Deveau), left, and Isolde N. Barron (Cameron Mackenzie) in Zee Zee Theatre's *Tucked and Plucked*, Club PuSh, Vancouver, January 2014 (Photo by Tina Krueger Kulic. Courtesy Zee Zee Theatre)

in 1969) for queers to gather together in bottle clubs; from the legendary Joan-E about dishing with Debbie Reynolds during the filming of *Connie and Carla*; and from three-time Empress Myria Le Noir about the DMS' important charitable work during the early days of the AIDS crisis. Much of that work happened in the very bars that have since closed down, with drag queens at once the queer community's biggest cheerleaders and most fearless foot soldiers in fighting the spread of the pandemic, and the moral panic that accompanied it. As Le Noir summarized, this meant headlining benefits, performing at wakes, handing out condoms at safer sex parties, and just generally hectoring folks to give, do and *be more*.

The intergenerational conversational exchange on view in *Tucked and Plucked* clearly exemplifies Freeman's concept of 'temporal drag', with the older drag mother offering instruction to her onstage daughters not just in drag as a live performance form, but in queerness as an ethic of living. In both cases, the sharing of queer public memories from the past in the present displaces a 'sight' of gender transitivity (all those queens lined up on stage) onto and into a 'site' of queer performativity, in which the embodied theatricalization of time (all those queens lined up on stage) moves a live

studio audience to collectively and corporeally re-encounter a place-based history with which it thought it was familiar. I am especially interested in how this operated in a place like Surrey, a culturally diverse suburb that is set to overtake Vancouver in population within the next decade, but that continues to be read as homo- and transphobic. That this version of *Tucked and Plucked* was also programmed as part of the first season of Surrey's new Centre Stage, whose performance venue doubles as the council chambers of City Hall, and that the show actually became the highest grossing act of that season, speaks to some of the ways in which the performativity of drag does not just queer time, but also space.

To this end, much of the conversation between Isolde and Peach and their guests—the 'Queen Bee of Surrey', Mz Adrien (who hosts a drag show each month in nearby New Westminster), the city's current drag Empress, Amanda Luv, and, once again, the always regal Mona Regina Lee—focused on the Flamingo Hotel. Like Café Cléopâtre, the legendary Montréal bar I referenced in the introduction to this essay, Surrey's Flamingo is primarily known for its strip club. But its adjacent lounge has also unofficially served as a gathering place for queers (in all senses of that term) since the hotel first opened in 1955, a confluence of working-class and sexual minority masculinities that has co-existed through the decades, surviving vice sweeps, gang violence and the spread of HIV. Indeed, as Mz Adrien told Isolde and Peach, in the absence of an official gay bar or other local support services, in the early 1990s the Flamingo served as de facto ground zero in providing general education about the disease and safer sex practices—not least to otherwise straight-identified men. Mz Adrien, who travels as far east with her act as the semirural enclave of Mission, summarized her past and present ambassadorial duties this way: 'In the suburbs, it's hard to ignore a black man in a dress.' Fittingly, then, following the Surrey presentation of *Tucked and Plucked*, Isolde, Peach and their guests repaired, in full drag, to the Flamingo for a nightcap. As Deveau put it to me, there was a moment in the parking lot, facing down the stares of some assembled youths, when he feared a potential *Priscilla*-esque escalation of violence (Mackenzie and Deveau 2016). However, the queens were welcomed enthusiastically at the bar. And since their visit, the Flamingo has even started to host monthly drag shows, with an 'emerging LGBT community' co-existing happily in a space that continues 'to operate … as an old-school blue collar stripper bar' (Zytaruk 2016)—an overlaying of past and present erotic histories that extends one's view of both the ties and times that bind.

And yet, like so many other queer spaces in greater Vancouver, the Flamingo's future is in doubt. A developer plans to begin a massive construction project that would see the Flamingo and adjacent buildings give way to a mix of residential towers, commercial space and parkland (Zytaruk 2016). Mourning this literal levelling of local queer history, and in particular a history of organizing, witnessing and support related to HIV and AIDS, has become an unintentional aspect of Zee Zee's recent performative acts of commemoration. Indeed, the company's newest work, *Elbow Room Café: The Musical* (written by Deveau and Anton Lipovetsky), premiered in March 2017 and the iconic social landmark that it honours will very soon close its doors for good. A tiny breakfast room opened by life and business partners Patrice Savoie and Bryan Searle in 1983, in its current location on Davie Street (where it moved in 1996), the Elbow Room is renowned for the caustic verbal abuse served up by Savoie, Searle and their employees alongside orders of pancakes, eggs and toast. Savoie, in particular, treats all customers with equal disdain and many Hollywood stars have lined up for a chance to be on the receiving end of his rebarbative wit. But the Elbow Room has also long been a driving charitable force in the community, with a strictly enforced donation policy for every plate upon which food remains—monies that are passed on to A Loving Spoonful, the volunteer-driven, non-profit society that has provided free meals to people living with HIV and people living with AIDS in Greater Vancouver since 1989. More quietly, Savoie and Searle worked behind the scenes in the early days of the pandemic to ease the burden of those living with the disease, which included retaining several employees who were HIV-positive. All of this is referenced in the musical, a contemporary day in the life of the café that culminates in a wedding presided over by a chorus line of drag queens and that sees several parallel storylines (including a yokel from Kansas discovering his glittery inner diva) coalesce around Bryan and Patrice's 'fictional' decision about whether or not to shut down the business and retire to Mexico. The real-life consequences of this decision raise questions about where queer public memories reside and how they get transmitted. In the general paucity or wholesale absence of built monuments to the history of queer struggle—including the struggle around HIV and AIDS—it is in the living archive of contemporary performance that we see the past in dialogue with the present (see Román 2005: 140). As Bryan laments at one point to Patrice: 'This isn't just a café. It's a testimonial. It's a map' (Deveau and Lipovetsky 2016: 54).

CODA: 'BODIES IN ALLIANCE'

Another way of framing Bryan's statement is to ask: What is the heritage of HIV and AIDS for today's queer community? And, further, what might it mean to explore this question not just in terms of a positive legacy that accrues by virtue of the accident of one's birth, but rather as a result of actively deciding to ally oneself with a history of bodily vulnerability and suffering? Thinking about these questions in terms of Bryan's metaphors of the testimonial and the map means acknowledging the important patrimony of AIDS activist organising and public protest. Defiantly theatrical and queerly confrontational, the AIDS movement crossed generations, genders, sexualities, races, classes *and* borders and established a new template for local grassroots organising while also offering a model of what it means to be obligated to others globally. In the context of this essay's two-city focus, let us take as arbitrary temporal bookends to this movement the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montréal in 1989 and the Eleventh International AIDS Conference in Vancouver in 1996. At the former, a coalition of several hundred angry members of ACT UP, AIDS Action Now and Réaction-SIDA stormed past security guards, seized microphones and demanded representation for PWAs at the previously closed event as well as participation in the designing and administering of future drug trials. Seven years later in Vancouver the world was introduced to a new combination therapy aimed at treating HIV-related opportunistic infections with protease inhibitors; within weeks, hundreds of thousands of infected patients in the Western world had begun a new antiviral regimen that held out the promise of a vastly improved and potentially very long quality of life. But the prohibitive cost of the therapy meant this promise was not available to everyone, especially people living with HIV in the Global South.

What we see in the distance between these two different scenes in Montréal and Vancouver is how, as bodily subjects, we are always already beholden to and constituted by perspectives we cannot, or may not want to, inhabit: the scientist who makes grudging room for the people living with HIV at the conference table; the HIV-positive gay man in Canada who reads about sick female sex workers in South Africa as he swallows his morning cocktail of pills. This ontological condition of relationality extends across time and space and, within a given social context, establishes the terms by which we seek to define ourselves. In this I am following the recent thinking of Judith Butler, who in formulating a 'performative theory of assembly' in the wake of the Arab Spring and the global Occupy

movement posits the inherent injurability of our physical selves as that which enables us to appear together in public as 'bodies in alliance' (Butler 2015: 66ff). And likewise what obligates us to displace our perspective toward, and thus account and grieve for, bodies that exist elsewhere: 'Even as located beings, we are always elsewhere, constituted in a sociality that exceeds us. This establishes our exposure and our precarity' (Butler 2015: 97). Butler does not deny that 'precarity is differentially distributed' (96); rather, in seeking to expose the specific material conditions underpinning separate precarious events and processes, she is arguing that no individual lack can be accounted for without assessing 'the failures and inequalities of socioeconomic and political institutions' designed to safeguard against that lack (21).

Butler's discussions of Tahrir Square and the Occupy Wall Street encampment are connected to the performative politics of assembly, vigil and protest on view during the height of the AIDS crisis, in which we witnessed just how clearly an individual life 'is dependent on social relations and enduring [political] infrastructure' (Butler 2015: 21). Remembering that history and its connection to our present moment is part of the transtemporal and transnational pedagogy of the drag performances discussed in this essay. If the spread of HIV and AIDS established just how porous and proximate are the borders between us virologically, then the global political movement that swelled in response to the pandemic likewise demonstrated that distance and absence are not impediments to coming together—be it in the corridors of state government or in our local bars—to demand change. And always in our ranks we find queer royalty, gesturing back to where we have come from, pointing the way forward, and in that nexus reminding us what we still need to be angry about.

Notes

1. 'The Main' is the name by which locals refer to Saint-Laurent Boulevard, which traditionally marked the dividing line between Montréal's French (east) and English (west) communities. Now increasingly gentrified, for

years the street's gathering places and restaurants welcomed successive immigrant communities. The Main was also the heart of Montréal's red light district and a magnet for sexual minorities, something celebrated by Québécois playwright Michel Tremblay in *Sainte Carmen de la Main* (1976), to which the title of Deir's play is an obvious homage.

2. See, as well, Lee Edelman (2004) and Judith (Jack) Halberstam (2005). Within the context of this volume, it is worth noting that Halberstam states: 'Queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly at the end of the twentieth century, from within the gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic' (2).

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