

Biblical Performance Criticism: The Almost, But not Quite, Transubstantiation of Performance Studies into Religious Studies

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The focus of the article is about how a queer theological gaze affects both place and performance. It suggests that, through ritualized practises, one might be able to reimagine meaning for spaces and the bodies that inhabit them. This investigation is a kind of queer prophetic imagination in action. The article starts with a historical look at bathhouses from the 1960s and 1970s, and their impact on homosexual identity, while linking key theological thinkers to spatial theorists who suggest that people's behaviours create, maintain, or challenge conceived notions of space. The article includes an exegesis of scripture by imposing a rereading of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative onto the 1970s gay bathhouse, and by that, suggesting that the ritualized act of queer sex has the possibility of creating a kind of queer, sacred space.

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The Preamble

In the early months of 2007, a controversy arose between a senior scholar in performance studies, Phillip Auslander, as well as a publisher (Routledge), concerning performance studies as a discipline. Auslander published a book titled *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student Guide* (2007). It came to light that this book was almost an exact copy of William E Deal's and Timothy K Beal's book

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A Theory for Religious Studies (2004). Performance theorist Richard Schechner's article "Plagiarism, greed, and the dumbing down of performance studies" (2007) was a meta-response from several scholars in the field, mostly articulating their dismay at Auslander for his hand in authoring the allegedly stolen work. Schechner directed the thesis of his article towards Auslander and the publishers at Routledge, by asking questions such as the following: How did this happen? What part did Auslander play in this? What does it mean for performance studies if it is *said* to share the same key authors as religious studies? Also, there was a question that was implied throughout the article: Did the publishers know how identical the books really were?

For the purposes of introducing my own article, I am not interested if the work was plagiarized. I am also not particularly interested in placing blame or rehashing the struggle between a publisher, a senior scholar, and the vast and varied community that is performance studies. I am, however, interested that for approximately a year, a book about key authors and themes in religious studies was able to *pass*¹ as a book about key authors and themes in performance studies.

This mishap came to light when Beal and Deal wrote to the "Chronicle of Higher Education" as a way of exposing this alleged wrongdoing, not because some other scholars from performance studies realised that the authors in the work were not part of the multidisciplinary terrain that was performance studies. As Schechner expressed in his article, his main problem with the work was not so much who was actually included in the book, but that key theorists were absent from the conversation.

I am, by no means, arguing that religious studies and performance studies, or even theology for that matter, are the same disciplines. Performance studies, as a discipline, is young, agile, and in its late twenties. One wonders what the flexibility of interdisciplinary youth affords the scholars of performance studies. After much deep thought, and a bout of quasi-celebratory but misplaced happiness, I recognized that this mishap might possibly gesture towards the commonality of both disciplines, or rather at least serve to highlight the false dichotomy of performance studies (on the one hand), and religious studies and its relative, theology (on the other), being completely separate fields.²

¹ "To pass" can imply that one is not genuinely what/who they are passing as. It may imply being perceived by others as a particular identity, regardless of how the individual in question identifies

² It could be said that theology is written by *insiders*: practitioners of a religion who are articulating their spiritual convictions within a like-minded community. These religious convictions are unverifiable. In comparison, in religious studies, the arguments made about a given religion are designed to convince readers who do not practice that religion. Whether or not a religious studies text is written by an "insider" or an "outsider," the intended audience always explicitly includes "outsiders" to that religion.

I received my Master of Fine Arts degree in Experimental Choreography in a program that was highly theoretical, working on the assumption that performance, performance theory, and dance in particular, are intertextual and constantly referencing and incorporating other disciplines. I think of myself as a body-based performer whom has a particular interest in religiosity. And, if I can be so bold as to say, my interest is primarily in theo-cultural analysis³, so much so that it led me to pursue a PhD in theology and religious studies.

Often, when I reveal this fact, it is met with suspicion, as if I got on the wrong bus to the right discipline. Perhaps performance studies, with a lens of contextual theology, might be uniquely placed to offer the humanities another way of looking at the body. Richard Schechner noted that one simply cannot just switch the title of a book from different fields and assume that the theoretical frame still holds true (2007, p. 23). Yet, instead of just articulating why performance studies, religious studies, and my other primary interest, theology, have different histories, methodologies, and communities of citation, this article holds these fields in a robust conversation with each other, by identifying common phenomena, themes, and discourses. I would argue that there are common questions, common concerns, and uncommon approaches that make performance studies, religious studies, theology, and queer studies⁴ all interesting and fruitful bedfellows.

Through this article, I will champion the perspective that the bodily display of religiosity is a performance studies concern. To be more specific, the bodily enactment of belief can be hermeneutical and reflexive. Key issues, such as documentation, presence, sexuality, and disappearance, have appeared in my various investigations as central claims and themes in the performance studies field. These have been some of the same claims and questions, although framed differently, that have arisen as I have encountered sacred texts and the bodies that, knowingly or unknowingly, participated in the performing of, or were touched by, those same texts. The methodologies of these various fields are different, but to read performance on a religious body is, in some ways, to read religiosity and performativity anew.

I enter the sub-disciplinary conversation of religion and performance, from the perspective of one whom is a black, queer, Christian, and also a choreographer. It is important, as the article unfolds, that I acknowledge my own positionality, as identity is political. Identity is comprised of the way in which one sees the self, how others react to one's perceived identity, and those social factors that act on the said identities, both in terms of privilege and marginalization.

³ Theo-cultural analysis is the macro way in which theology is both a part of and produces cultural products.

⁴ Queer studies is the study of issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity usually focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex people and cultures.

These identity categories, in part, create embodied experiences through which one comes to relate in the world, a way of seeing or a lens, so to speak.

As a choreographer, I approach theology from the body. Bodies are racial, gendered, sexed, and classed. These identity categories shape how one participates in the world and, thus, they affect which bodies are controlled, punished, or rewarded. As a choreographer, I see the movement of bodies (sex, migration, or ritual) as performances. When Auslander published *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student Guide* (2007), unbeknownst to him, he was adding to a robust subfield, already looking at the intersections between performance studies and religious practises.

In terms of where this article enters the conversation, my key conversational partners (whom I will mention here, but will investigate more thoroughly as the article unfolds) are housed in theology, performance studies, and queer studies. For instance, I draw heavily from dancer and religious studies scholar Kimerer Lamothe's work, whose body of knowledge rests between dance, philosophy, and religion. Her most relevant works to this article are "What Bodies Know About Religion and the Study of It" (2008) and "Why dance? Towards a theory of religion practice and performance" (2005). Lamothe suggests that religious studies must consider the body as a site for knowledge production, and in particular, religious knowledge. I am also influenced by the work of Ann Pellegrini, who teaches in the same performance studies department as Richard Schechner and whose background is in religious studies. Pellegrini's works, "Talking pain(s), talking religion" in *Enchantment* (2008), *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (2005), and "Feeling secular" (2010), all bear the interdisciplinary imprint of intersections between religious studies and performance studies.



Bathhouses as Backstage of Sodom: Sex, Scripture, and Sacred Place



Fig. 1: Megaplex Bathhouse Providence, RI

This inquiry for me starts with the possibility of taking two theologians' banners to heart. Timothy R. Koch (2001), asked theologians (and gay men specifically) to find new ways to look at scripture, new ways of orienting ourselves in community in our bodies. He called it cruising the scriptures. This cruising of course is a play on words, with the word "cruising" being akin to the gay ritual of looking for a sexual partner. This raises the question, how do I make a sexual partner out of the biblical text (spatial), and nestled in this thinking is how do I find my self or how do I "orient" myself in and around the cultural spaces that scripture touches? The second theologian is Marcella Althaus-Reid, who has laid out an interesting methodological premise to those who disrupt normative readings of texts, named *Perv's theological ethics*. This approach urges one to lift up one's own skirts and in a way, ask one to start a theological reflection with one's own sexual stories.

For me, the theological, the cultural, and the performative make for a common cause, and in some ways this article breathes life into the term 'biblical performance criticism,' which was first written about by David Rhoads. Through this article, I will be asserting that the gay bathhouse is a sacred space created and maintained by a constellation of performative bodily practises. These prac-

tises have the possibility of extending a notion of queer hospitality. The success or, even more interesting yet, the failure, of this inquiry is based on a successful holding of three possibly overlapping, but distinct disciplines in concert with: performance studies, biblical studies, and spatial studies.

I was encouraged, but not surprised, to find Joan W. Scott's article '*Evidence of Experience*,' in *Religious Experience: A Reader* (2014) edited by Craig Martin and Timothy McCutcheon. Scott's article uses the autobiographical meditation of Samuel Delany's *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) to articulate and unpack the notion of embodied experience, and its place in the production and dissemination of knowledge. I will not, because of space constraints, be unpacking Scott's use of Delany in its fullness, but I found myself particularly interested in the notion of the bathhouse as a sacred experience. I find it more interesting still that this seminal article on queer subjectivity was located in a reader about religious experience. This leads me to the question: How might Delaney's bathhouse be the container, a temple of sorts, of a religious experience? How does the bathhouse function as a queered sacred place, and the container for religious experience, and how might performance theory help frame 'queer hospitality'?

In the first instance, I will consult spatial theorists who articulate the multitude of relationships bodies have in space, and the interconnectedness of human activity to the production of place, and more specific still, sacred space, or as I will articulate further in the article, 'sacred place.' To aid in this endeavor, I will also consult performance and dance scholars who articulate the stake that human movement has in meaning-making. This human movement is choreography, which has played a role in the creation and maintenance of such spaces. Finally, I will consult queer theologians who are arguing for a queer methodology for approaching the use of scripture.

Bathhouses, temples, and the making of place

Gay bathhouses, also known as gay saunas or steam baths, are commercial spaces for men to have sex with other men. These 'third spaces' are not quite private and yet are not purely public either. Gay bathhouses have been an important part of gay male identity since the 1970s. In several cities, they are still considered important parts of gay male social/sexual spaces. In 'The meaning at the wall: Tracing the gay bathhouse' (1997), Ira Tattelman charts the development of gay bathhouses from the early 1970s to the 1980s. Tattelman argues that bathhouses were not always 'gay spaces,' that their development stemmed from spaces for ethnic congregation, as an alternative to the country club (p. 392). Tattelman charted the Greco-Roman baths as the gay bathhouse's predecessor, these public baths being used by communities as 'space for gathering, repose, and communal, ritual, and physical stimulation' (391). While most middle-and

upper class apartments had bathtubs, few tenements were equipped with one (397).

Bathhouses and public showers were not plentiful in major urban centers during a period when people could not afford private washing facilities. Although they were not by and large the gay sexual institutions of the pre-AIDS 1970s and 1980s, a few baths in New York city were notorious as meeting places for sex (Weinberg, 1993, p. 9).

The idea of the bathhouse being a utopian place that fuels homosexual identity development is considered by some to be a revisionist historiography. Dianne Chisholm in *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (2005) argues that the capitalist press through the panic of the AIDS epidemic had a hand in the closing down of bathhouses. Chisholm argues that the spaces were not 'utopian spaces of sexual equity' or rather they were not just that, but they were spaces that were rewritten by queer historiographers to be such. I wonder if these spaces are both spaces where people are able to find sexual outlet and spaces that have fallen to capitalism. I will not be examining the capitalist effect on gay bathhouses per se, but I am interested in the concept of revisionist historiography, at the same time admitting that histories are written and rewritten and locations changed based on where you are standing in history.

The gay bathhouse is very much a question of space, bodies, and choreography. Bodies are connecting, finding, leaving, sharing, experiencing, and shaping space as they participate in consensual sexual acts. It is through the lens of the performative body and the performative space that I find the bodies in motion, in sex, a multidisciplinary concern.

According to Weinberg (1993, p. 19), these are the ideal conditions of a bathhouse:

1. They include features that protect the participant.
2. Provide ample access to good sexual partners and setting at a reasonable cost.
3. Promote a known, shared, and organized reality within the opportunity structure.
4. Bound the experience.
5. Include a congenial atmosphere.
6. Include physical settings that promote relaxation and connivance.

Bathhouses are ritualized spaces, spaces that are created by actors choreographing space, and both being affected by and affecting the space. In the equation of the bathhouse, it is as much about sex with people as it is about the ritualization of space. It is better to think of place as something produced by and producing ideology. In *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression*, spatial theorist Tim Cresswell (1996) suggests that places do not have intrinsic

meanings and essences; they simply have meanings that are more conventional and appropriate. The meanings of place are created through practise (Cresswell, 1996, p. 17). The concept of places having an effect on sexuality and gender and vice versa has been written about extensively by authors such as Valatine (1995) and Bell (2001). This is what the bathhouse is, both a practised and ritualized place. In Chapter 12 of her book *For Space* (2005), Doreen Massey describes how rock formations and mountain ranges are not fixed geographical points, but participate in migration themselves, proving that even the very idea of a place changes with time. Massey (2005) writes:

Water erodes rock while changing shorelines and mountain ranges shift with continental activity. If we can't go back home, in the sense that it will have moved on from where we left it, then no more, and in the same sense, can we, on a weekend in the country, go back to nature. It too is moving on. (p. 137)

How does this change the way we perform and understand space? It suggests that space is truly temporary and occupies no place of stability. The imposed imprints of our collective memories and feelings are in conflict with space and other actors, because they attempt to rest on and within a place that does not exist, yet it looks as we remember it. This tension or friction is what gives claims to territory and places their instability. Massey is challenging the very idea of place as somewhere permanent. I would argue the body does acknowledge residual energy left in spaces, and I imagine that this energy is a combination of histories, imagination, and a context that allow for a making of meaning through action. We are constructing meaning of a very real but fleeting space. Spatial theorist Tim Cresswell (1996) articulated the notion of space in this way:

Meaning is invoked in space through the practise of people who act according to their interpretations of space, which in turn, gives their actions meaning. This is a fluid process that changes over time, and any given set of interpretations of space can be and has been overthrown historically (p. 17).

Not only does place change geographically, but that change is augmented by how, and who, uses that very changing space. In short, spaces affect behavior and behavior affects how one perceives space. Space becomes contested when multiple ideologies (dominant and nondominant) and behaviors act or lay claim to the temporal location inevitably creating tension and in that tension an 'other.' To be the other is to not be one of us; it is to be on the outside.

In the chapter 'From Ritual to Theatre and Back: The Efficacy Entertainment Braid' (2003) performance theorist Richard Schechner (2003) argues that the dividing point between human behavior is context and emphasis. With ritual, the main dichotomy is concerned with efficacy vs. entertainment. Schechner

goes on to argue, in a way, that positionality is what decides between these two positions on the performative binary, and he goes on to articulate that both ritual and theatre are generally a mix of efficacy and entertainment. When looking at the actors in the space, I want to argue that the basic premise for behavior at the bathhouse is a variation of this theme:

1. A member comes in;
2. Clothes are stripped away, and a towel and locker key are given in their place;
3. One is invited to wander around (between corridors, rooms, and shower facilities);
4. Mutual sex is agreed upon and had;
5. One leaves the space or 3 and 4 are repeated (several times).

After the undressing, the stripping away of personal effects and clothing that could possibly denote status or class, the patrons immediately find their way to the showers to become clean to meet other bodies. This dance of waiting, watching, and touching is very much a choreography of bodies. Bathhouses are more than just spaces to have sex, they are ritualized places. In *Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge*, Tim Ingold suggested: 'I wish to argue, in this chapter, against the notion of space. Of all the terms we use to describe the world we inhabit, it is the most abstract, the most empty, the most detached from the realities of life and experience' (p. 29). The bathhouse is not just a space; it is a place that has intention to it. It is created and maintained by ritualized body practises. Schechner articulated ritual in this way in *Ritual and Performance* (1996):

Rituals are performative: they are acts done; and performances are ritualized: they are codified, repeatable actions. The functions of theatre identified by Aristotle and Horace, entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education (including political education), and healing, are also functions of ritual. The difference lies in context and emphasis. Rituals emphasise efficacy: healing the sick, initiating neophytes, burying the dead, teaching the ignorant, forming and cementing social relations, maintaining (or overthrowing) the status quo, remembering the past, propitiating the gods, exorcising the demonic, maintaining cosmic order. Theatre emphasises entertainment; it is opportunistic, occurring wherever and whenever a crowd can be gathered and money collected, or goods or services bartered. (p. 613).

I used Schechner here not because I am particularly interested in the polarisation of theatre vs. ritual, but because he articulates and opens up just what 'ritual' can entail. In *Bathhouse Blues* (2013), The character Luis Blasini goes on to describe his experience of the bathhouse in these ways:

As I walked through the dingy corridors searching for a cubicle to get undressed and set my stuff, the few patrons in the building were so brown and fit. Or at least, that was how I saw them. I located a small room near the back. It had a cot which was falling apart. The yellowish foam was bursting out of the ripped seams. Several hooks on a white-tiled wall which was covered in lewd graffiti in a language I didn't really understand. The light was not from the sole fixture up near the mildew encased ceiling, but from the row of glass bricks which ran above the cot. The entire room smelled of damp clothes, bleach, and sweat. I undressed, folded my clothes, placed them on my shoes, and slid them under the cot. Wrapping a towel around my waist, I wandered out into the dark halls. (p. 23).

Blasini's description of the bathhouse space does put the body in focus as it interacts with the shapes of objects, people, and light. What this undressing scene does is signal to the body that preparation has been done; this is very much ritual. The articulation of the senses also has a time-keeping aspect to it and the framing of time in space marking them as different articulates the space as different, maybe even special. This seems to echo ethnolinguist Jan Koster's articulation of ritual in this way (2003, p. 8): 'A ritual performance is a community's symbolic demarcation of a territory in space and time by complex ritual acts and techniques affecting the experience of identity of the participants away from individuality.' Delany's work would also suggest a look at bodies in motion marking/changing time and space. Delany (1988) writes:

The room was full of people, some standing, the rest an undulating mass of naked, male bodies, spread wall to wall. My first response was a kind of heart thudding astonishment very close to fear. I have written of a space at certain libidinal separation before. That was not what frightened me, it was rather that the saturation was not only kinaesthetic but visible. (p. 173)

This blending of space and bodies, this connectedness of place that Delany is describing is why bathhouses are both ritual and performance places. Yet bathhouses are not just performative places, nor are they just the container of ritual, they are queer spaces. They are third spaces and very much queer sacred spaces. Sally R. Munt opens *Queer Spiritual Spaces: sexuality in sacred spaces* (2010) by articulating a queering of both spatial studies and spiritual studies by investigating the connection between Lefebvre's idea of space as a place of knowledge (1991, p. 18), and by looking at Olu Jenzen's concept of the uncanny, in her work *The Queer Uncanny* (2007). The notion of the uncanny, the weird, the unsettling, and the slightly uncomfortable is a possible site for queer spiritual spaces. Munt (2010) writes:

She (Jenzen) has described the characteristics of the uncanny from a queer perspective as a 'repetition out of sync,' unsettling to the self, as upsetting, as

exposing the ways that otherness is produced. This more sober approach poses a more disquieting view of queer spiritualities, pointing to a structural disturbance with the category of Human, raising insecurities about the borders of human/nonhuman, organic/inorganic, animate/inanimate, and human/technology for example, binaries that ‘serve as normalizing and authenticating structures for a heteronormative way of being’ (2009, p. 278) — and I would add for the ‘life of reason.’ Conceptualizing queer spiritualities, like the queer uncanny, can give us ways of rethinking our relationships to others, including non-human others, so redefining our proximity to fishes, cats, and dildoes, for example, in that the strange comes near. (23)

Up until this point, I have been making the case for the bathhouse to be considered as both a performance and a ritualized place. The gears will be shifted now to look at the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative and the bathhouse experience as a way of looking at queer hospitality as it relates to the choreography of sexual bodies—a notion that phenomenology offers a way of looking at queer sacred space. This sacred space does not look pristine, the queer in ‘queer sacred space’ allows us to make sacred spaces that would not normally be thought of as ‘sacred.’ I would ask the reader to keep in the back of her mind as my focus shifts, that the concept of space extends to biblical thinking; that in some ways I am as interested in the spatial story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the impact this story has had on queer people in general, and in particular the space it has held for those queer people with commitments to Christian truth statements. I am not interested in finding ways to argue the case of homosexuality in the Christian tradition. Nor is this article an exegetical strategy for acceptance of the queers into an inclusive Christian community. It is about finding the moving body, a sexual body, a ritualized body as a place to investigate both theological and performance meaning-making.

Sodom, biblical interpretation, and trouble

The narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah can be found in Genesis Chapter 19 and is excerpted below:

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. “My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.” “No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.” But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so

that we can have sex with them.”... Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

A mainstream interpretation of this story goes that this city was destroyed because of homosexuality. This annihilation happened mainly because the men of the city wanted to rape other men, who were angels in disguise. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back, so to speak, so God destroyed the city. This is one narrative that has been used against queer men to argue against Christian inclusion. Within the last two decades several scholars have taken up the mantle of decoding this text often by looking at the context of the story, and the grammar/alternative translations of Greek and Hebrew to disrupt heteronormative ideologies. One way that this narrative has been used is to look at this story as a rape story, not one about consensual relationships, which is to undo the connection between homosexuality and rape. I would like to look again at the narrative that brought the use of the word Sodomite into English usage. For the purposes of this essay, I refer to a few contemporary queer theorists and their formulation of the meaning of queer. In *Bodies That Matter* (2011) Judith Butler writes,

If the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance. The political deconstruction of ‘queer’ ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, but, ideally, to extend its range, to make us consider at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought. (228–229).

It is here that I define the term queer prophetic imagination⁵ mentioned in it, as Butler suggest queer must always be replayed, never full owned, and with future imagining. for this gestures back to the ‘not here, but forever on the horizon’ that both Brurgerman and Muñoz gesture towards.

Derrida articulates ‘hospitality’ as:

⁵ The queer prophetic imagination, a term partly borrowed from Walter Brueggemann (1978), is placed into a queer context through the writings of Jose Muñoz. Munoz in concert with Brueggemann suggests that the possibility of imagining a future is achieved by choreographing bodies in space, and to choreograph a body in space is to imagine the virtual—as Bergson suggested, breaking into the actual. To prophesy is to see forward.

a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, *the* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name or compensation, or the fulfillment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional [...] by all of law and all philosophy of law [...] across the family, civil society, and the State.

These 'antagonistic terms,' the 'two regimes of law,' as Derrida goes on to argue are, nevertheless, interdependent and "inseparable." While "the law of hospitality" is "outside the law," it 'requires' the laws in order to mark out the possibilities of its coming into effect and, at the same time, the laws depend upon a concept of unconditional hospitality, of 'the law,' in order to define themselves as hospitable. (Derrida, 2000, p. 77).

I use queer hospitality here to suggest a way and in particular the visitation/invitation from Derrida. The kind of hospitality that bathhouses offer involves opening the body to multiple visitors. It very much plays on the idea of bodies as place and there is no perfect 'hospitality' in terms of bodies being offered, while risk is always present. Yet this queer hospitality is different from the hospitality of Lot, to comply with which he offered his virgin daughters to the men of Sodom as a substitute for his guests. This hospitality is about the collective sharing of bodies, one that often has its own rules. A desire, a gesture, and ritual that ignited through touch, it is in the looking, the wanting, the pacing this 'queer hospitality' is giving in spite of risk, and often because of it. In *Gay Steam: True Sex Tales From The Tubs* (2014) the unknown author *wrote*:

Sam is a jazz musician, who is Caucasian, and one such person who likes to cuddle. I first saw him when he entered the baths, fully clothed, before heading to his room to undress. From the outset, he looked tough. Leather jacket, flannel shirt, ripped jeans, black leather boots, and a goatee. I thought he must be into heavy S&M. Then he started to pursue me, and we wound up in my room. We did the usual oral but mostly we cuddled, specifically the touch of his fingers on my body. Sam is a studier of Chinese massage, and his touch is out of this world. I was screaming in agony and delight by his touch. His fingers barely touched my whole body, as his hands ever so gently, went all over my chest, arms, hands, legs, and especially the sides of my stomach area. That one area gets very sensitive when I am with a guy. When I am cuddling with someone, and the fingers pass that area, I howl in delight. Then Sam re-explored certain parts of my body using his tongue (a full-body tongue bath), and again threw in some oral along the way. Once Sam finished, it was my turn. I had some experience with touching and cuddling (although compared to Sam, I was a rank amateur). I tried to follow what Sam did, but I also had a few tricks up my sleeve. I used one technique I learned from a masseuse I used to know. First I asked Sam to lie on his stomach. Then I took Sam's towel and covered his back, ass and part of his legs. I then massaged him hard us-

ing the towel as a barrier. Finally I took the end of the towel and slid it off his body ever so slowly. It makes a man's body tingle all over. I have been with Sam twice since that meeting and each time it gets better and better. With both of us taking turns, we definitely let our fingers do the walking. *Gay Steam: True Sex Tales From The Tubs* (2014) (author unknown)

If God destroyed the city of Sodom and Gomorrah because of inhospitality, then surely that lack of giving is made perfect in the giving of one's body. Derrida offers a reading of the Sodom narrative in *Of Hospitality* (1996). In it he compares the Sodom story with the account of the concubine from Bethlehem (Judges 19) who is sent out by her 'master,' the Levite, to the angry mob of men where she is raped repeatedly. This is done so that the man can show hospitality to his guest. The next day, the Levite cut her body into twelve pieces and dispersed those pieces of flesh throughout Israel. Derrida, when considering the limits of hospitality, closes with this haunting question: 'Are we heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point?' (1996/2000, p. 155).

Yes we are. The question that surrounds Derrida's statement is for me: how much are we willing to give to be host, and to what cost? I think this idea of 'heirs to this tradition' becomes all the more interesting to me when we consider the queering of hospitality. I am not the first to suggest that there is something queer about the notion of hospitality. And that perhaps in its queering one might be able to see hospitality in a different way. Theologian John Blevins wrote in the essay *Hospitality Is a Queer Thing* (2009) that:

I can practice hostility towards the other and he can practice hostility towards me; I can practice hospitality towards the other and she can offer me hospitality as well the risk is greater—I cannot escape the possibility of violence—but so is the closeness, the possible impossibility of true hospitality (113).

The giving and receiving of bodies is an act of queer hospitality. Unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality (laws vs the law) comes to a point in the articulation of risk and in the violence/pleasure dichotomy - choosing to draw close in spite of the risk. These bathhouse encounters are in the first instance ritualized and marked by both space and time. This is evident in the preparation. The taking off of clothing, the showering, the wearing of a towel is ritualized behavior that signals to the mind that a time/space difference has occurred. This change is also marked by the searching for a partner, which involves the looking, wondering (often, but not always, silent). Because of the stripping of identifiable personal artefacts, customers are indeed coming into contact with anonymous bodies, but it is important to note that anonymous is not synonymous with unattached for Delany and the unknown author of *In Gay Steam*. We begin to see that the lack of knowing allows in some ways a greater amount of intimacy. The question of intimacy is taking down barriers and being vulnerable in spite of

the risk of violence. As other theologians have articulated through reflecting on writing found in Ezekiel about Sodom, we find that rooted in the question of homosexuality is the question of hospitality.

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done. “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen. (Ezekiel 16, 48–50).

The framing of the ‘*sin of Sodom*’ seems to be about their behavior and their treatment of the ‘other,’ perhaps the marginalised or the vulnerable (the needy). I am not attempting to direct attention away from the townspeople wanting to rape the angel. I just want to recontextualise that narrative in light of the bathhouse, which is about sodomy, but in the context of the giving of the body as microgifts to others. The bathhouse becomes a place where the markers of the overfed, the arrogant, and the unconcerned are in some ways muted and give way to unspecified bodies sharing moments of mutual pleasure. The sexual needs are satisfied, those hungry for human touch are fed, and those who are poor of connection can see themselves as one of the number.

Timothy R. Koch (2001) is correct when he suggests that we should cruise scripture, that we read the texts as we would read a sexual partner. In this, there is an orientation toward the text that does not seek to simply play by the rules. Several queer theologians (both queer theologians and straight theologians who write around queer inquiries) in the early ’90s started a push to look at the texts of terror, which are Biblical texts used to exclude LGBTQQIA people from the Christian community (Goss, 1994; West, 2000; N. Wilson, 1995). The theologians at this stage were apologetic about the homosexual question in the mainstream Christian denominations. Then, in the early 2000s we encountered theologians as they encountered queer theorists, and theologians began to search scripture for people who ‘represent’ a queer bent (eunuchs, Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David) see Goss (2000). In essence, reading queerness in ‘questionable’ straight biblical narratives, in Koch’s words, is pushing our queer bodies where they may not belong. In essence, Koch is asking us to use our imagination to connect with scripture, rather than just making straight *presenting*⁶ characters gay.

⁶ The narrative presented in 2 Samuel between Jonathan and David does seem queer to me. David says “ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women.” (2 Samuel 1:26)

With the arrival of theologians such as Lisa Isherwood (1999, 2004), Marcella Althaus-Reid (2002), and Ken Stone (2001), theologians began asking how do “we recreate ourselves in light of scripture,” For me, this is a question of ‘lived experience’ as much as it is a question of performance, space, and bodies. Sara Ahmed in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) and her article in *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (2006), “Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology” has helped me frame this idea of ‘enacting sacred space.’ She writes:

What difference does it make what or who we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire? If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with (p. 543).

Ahmed opens this chapter and her book with the question of a queer phenomenology with the primary question concerning lived experience. I have suggested elsewhere that the body is the primary medium through which we experience the world. Ahmed (2006) echoes this concern when she writes:

Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as phenomenology emphasises the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds (p. 534).

It is this very experience that I found useful and interesting and in some ways troubling. Ahmed argues that phenomenology makes orientation central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed toward objects and hence is always worldly, situated, and embodied. This includes relationships to bodies, spaces, and texts. What phenomenology does is by extension offer another way of articulating embodied knowledge. Narrative (written and oral) accounts of experience and experience are constellations that help navigate the watery terrain of ‘epistemological knowledge,’ which includes what kinds of knowledge is accepted as knowledge, and who gets to say when knowledge has been obtained, recorded, and disseminated.

Right away I see contextual theologians and queer theologians (Koch 2001; and Althaus-Reid 2009) arguing that one must already be looking inward to understand how the sexual and the biblical go hand in hand—that one must cruise scripture as if one were in a bathhouse cruising for a sexual partner. We go in the direction (although this may not be in a direct line) from our bodily desires to a given point. We are oriented toward ‘something.’ Ahmed uses Husserl’s idea of the writing table and his orientation toward it to situate her position that by having the ‘writing table’ as Husserl’s starting point (p. 535) that the rooms un-

fold around this table that is located where he is. It is located as his 'Here.' Ahmed writes:

Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here. Husserl relates the questions of this or that side to the point of here, which he also describes as the zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds and which makes what is "there" over "there." It is from this point that the differences between this side and that side matter. It is also only given that we are here at this point, that near and far are lived as relative markers of distance. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann also describe orientation as a question of one's starting point: "The place in which I find myself, my actual 'here,' is the starting point for my orientation in space." (2006b, p. 549).

I can see how orientation is from the body outward and simultaneously toward an object, but orientation is also as much a looking backward as it is a looking forwards. Our backgrounds have just as much to do with our orientation as objects do, because what emerges out of the background depends on the ways in which the body relates to objects, and by extension, other bodies (p. 549).

We might speak also of family background, which would refer not just to an individual's past but to other kinds of histories, which shape an individual's arrival into the world, and through which the family itself becomes a social given. Indeed, events can have backgrounds: a background can be what explains the conditions of emergence or an arrival of something as the thing that it appears to be in the present. (p. 2006b, p. 548)

So for me, to write about bathhouses as sacred spaces one must not only show how bathhouses came to be (historically) or how the abstract arrangement of bodies in place affect space (choreography). One must also show how the Christian text, and particularly texts about sexual desire between male-bodied people, might be reoriented. The goal is not to make the bathhouse sacred in a pristine or clean way as a heterosexual thinker *might*, by making the act of gay sex fall on the spectrum of violence/pleasure, but it is to see that the space is sacred because of the exchange of trust and and the overcoming of suspicion. It is because of a question of the notion of hospitality in inviting the unknown into your body, and welcoming it there even if the destination of the welcoming is unknown.

Phenomenology and seeing the scripture from where I am

In *Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God* (2004), Althaus-Reid states:

Therefore, when I say that 'I stand queer,' I want to make clear that I stand in a tension: alone, with full responsibility for my discourse but also with my

particular community of struggle. That community is made up of networks of aliens, or the community of strangers who cast a highly suspicious hermeneutical circle in the attempt to unveil the complexity of the sexual base lying below the construction of the church's dogmatics and politics alike. By doing so, queer theologies also try and find the presence of the stranger god, who stands outside the classroom definitions of heterosexual thinking and is among us. (p. 103)

When Althaus-Reid states that she stands 'in,' when she states she 'finds' or better still that the nature of theologians working in her community of struggle is to 'unveil,' she gestures to an orientation toward a theological gaze, a gaze that seeks to find something in the '*stranger*' of God Ahmed (2006a) writes about:

Orientations allow us to take up space insofar as they take time. Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future. The hope of changing directions is always that we do not know where some paths may take us: risking departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer (p. 54).

The sentiment about getting lost and following the path as articulated by Althaus-Reid and Ahmed, not knowing the destination, is echoed by Koch (2001) when he writes:

Therefore, I propose a scriptural hermeneutic for gay men that moves 'from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves.' This hermeneutic I call cruising the scriptures, for cruising is the name gay men give to using our own ways of knowing, our own desire for connection, our own savvy and instinct, our own response to what attracts us and compels us (p. 32).

Koch is here talking about the way in which he approaches scripture. He stresses that he is not in a pissing contest with other biblical scholars over the meaning of word(s) relating to homosexuality in the Bible; he is also not trying to find characters like himself in the Bible; but he is treating scripture as he would treat the finding of a sexual partner. He is looking for what attracts him, looking at the 'object' that draws him, just as he is drawn to it. The bathhouse and its possibility for 'queer hospitality' is not rooted in an attempt to use exegesis to find 'what the Bible really says about homosexuality' but it is to be excited about the orientation, in a way to be excited about what catches my attention, to be derailed or to 'get lost.' The bathhouse can become a sacred space not because of its liminality - although I would argue it very much is a threshold space. It is not a sacred space because of the ritualization (although the practise of preparing to enter such a space is very specific, and by Schechner's definition a ritual). It is a

sacred space because of the choreography of bodies cruising, moving, opening up in spite, and often because, of the risk. The flirtation is with both welcome and attack, because being vulnerable is being open in the face of the possibility of violence, yet hoping for safety.

Why choreography matters

What choreography also does is to allow one to see human movement (micro and macro) as a cultural by product. The stage or stage-like spaces are not the only realm in which human movement is examined; a choreographer might find that migration, the traveling backward and forward, holds importance. A hopeful choreographer becomes attuned to the ways in which human movement shapes space and how this place-shaping, world-making practise is worth examining, no matter in which discipline the inquiry resides. To restate Andre Lepecki, in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2006), concerning the nature of dance studies and its possibility to move beyond abstract arrangement of bodies in space, wrote:

Thus, any dance that probes and complicates how it comes into presence, and where it establishes its ground of being, suggests for critical dance studies the need to establish a renewed dialogue with contemporary philosophy ... a philosophy that understands the body not as a self-contained and closed entity but as an open and dynamic system of exchange, constantly producing modes of subjection and control, as well as of resistance and becomings. (p. 5)

Lepecki looks at works by artists (Jérôme Bel, Trisha Brown, La Ribot) who use choreographic elements, but who may not consider themselves choreographers because the work is not 'dance' per se, but looks more like performance events. Dance can be more, and this 'exhaustion of dance' is meeting with a renewed interest in politics, subjectivity, and the body. It is Lepecki's articulation of 'critical dance studies' that frames the way one could approach looking at human movement in general, and it makes the *dance* of cruising in the bathhouse a choreographic, religious, and in some ways a political concern. Lepecki (2006) writes:

Their work allows for reframing choreography outside artificially self-contained disciplinary boundaries, and for identifying the political ontology of modernity's investment in its odd hyperkinetic being. To address the choreographic outside the proper limits of dance proposes for dance studies the expansion of its privileged object of analysis; it asks dance studies to step into other artistic fields and to create new possibilities for thinking relationships between bodies, subjectivities, politics, and movement. (p. 5)

Dance is already sex, and movement in the bathhouse is an opportunity. Jane Desmond in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexuality on and off the Stage* (2001) makes this connection explicit. Desmond echoes Lepecki's concern in part about the artificial barriers of dance studies, and this is exemplified through Desmond linking the sexual body to the dancing body. The body is placed at the center of the investigation and through movement enacts or rejects socially constructed expectations, thus eliciting a politics of movement. Therefore, placing dance at the center of sexuality studies is imperative because how one moves and how one moves in relation to others constitutes a public enactment of sexuality and gender (Burt, 200; p. 213). Dance therefore provides a privileged arena for the body's performance of sexuality (Desmond, 2001: 3) and the opportunity for deconstructing, reassessing, and further pursuing homosexual representations and understandings of sexuality. Analysing dance can help us to understand how sexuality is literally inhabited, embodied, and experienced (Desmond, 2001, p. 13). Therefore, dance needs to be acknowledged and approached as an embodied social practise (Desmond, 2001, p. 13).

The Body-City

It is not just the sex act that grounds the bathhouse experience as a site of possible sacred exchange, nor is it the way that choreographed bodies dance as they search to and fro in dark spaces attempting to satisfy desire. It is realising in some way that bodies have a linkage to cities and that to imagine the body as a small city, one that has pathways, roads, city centers, markers, and boney landmarks⁷. The connection between bodies and cities has been best articulated by theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1998) in her chapter 'Bodies – Cities':

Like the casual view of the body (and not simply a disembodied consciousness) must be considered active in the production and transformation of the city. But bodies and cities are not causally linked. Every cause must be logically distinct from its effect. The body, however, is not distinct, does not have an existence separate from the city, for they are mutually defining. (p. 47).

I am not suggesting that Grosz meant they were the same thing, bodies and cities, but how does thinking of bodies as cities change the way we might understand the narrative of bathhouses vis-à-vis queer hospitality? The queer hospitality that one finds in a bathhouse is based on experience, and it has everything to do with space, body-cities, and the search for pleasure. This pleasure is about letting another enter the body-city, allowing a visitor who may bring

⁷ Boney Landmarks is term used in modern dance/somatic practices for using bones as a way of finding muscle/tissue connection.

STDs, or other version of complicated matters into a body city, but this is a part of this queer hospitality, which is conditional.

Then Sam re-explored certain parts of my body using his tongue (a full-body tongue bath), and again threw in some oral along the way. Once Sam finished, it was my turn. I had some experience with touching and cuddling (although compared to Sam, I was a rank amateur). I tried to follow what Sam did, but I also had a few tricks up my sleeve. I used one technique I learned from a masseuse I used to know. First I asked Sam to lie on his stomach. Then I took Sam's towel and covered his back, ass and part of his legs. I then massaged him hard using the towel as a barrier. Finally I took the end of the towel and slid it off his body ever so slowly. It makes a mans body tingle all over. I have been with Sam twice since that meeting and each time it gets better and better. With both of us taking turns, we definitely let our fingers do the walking!

It is here that I leave you, in the middle of a sexual exchange, in a bathhouse between cities, between bodies in the dark, feeling, and walking in a sacred exchange.

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