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Ceramics, Sex, and Infrastructure: A Queer Erotics of Urbanism

Max J. Andrucki

Queer Urban Infrastructure

What makes a queer city? How should we understand the intersection of desire, bodies, and nonhuman objects that continuously makes and remakes it? Geographers and other social scientists have attended to the spatiality of urban queer life since the 1980s, if not before, but in comparison to their quantification and elucidation of the bounded sites and spaces of gay life, little attention has been paid within queer urban studies to the networks of material infrastructure that actually enable queer life. The dominant method geographers have used to study the gay and lesbian—and, later, queer—urban is derived from what is sometimes called the "ethnic" model of urban clustering. John D'Emilio traced the emergence of gay urban subcultures in the United States to histories of urbanization associated with wage labor and thus the ability of people with same-sex attractions to live independently of families for the first time. Earlier studies, like that of Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells, pioneered the convention of treating gay men's urban land-use patterns as similar to the 1920s Chicago School's urban ecology framework for understanding how ethnic groups successively invade, take over, and then depart from particular zones of urban space. [1] For Castells, San Francisco's Castro and similar neighborhoods that flourished and became visible in the 1960s marked the radical territorial claims of a highly stigmatized and marginalized population and served as sites for the entry of gay people as subjects into the formal order of politics, embodied most famously by San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk. At the same time, Castells argued that white gay men contributed to the rescue and rebirth of cities devastated by economic restructuring and white flight. [2] Generations of geographers have focused on the role of neighborhoods, homes, and other bounded entities as containers for queer urban sociality. [3]

Many subsequent geographers and urban historians have deployed Castells's model to map not just the presence but the evolution of gay neighborhoods in various cities within the globalizing economy. The implications of imbrication with forces of neoliberal capitalism and, by extension, gentrification are never far away, but scholars are focused on attending to the extent to which gay neighborhoods are being selectively and problematically incorporated into the urban entrepreneurial strategies

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1 John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds., *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 467–76, here 470; and Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 138–70, here 156–58.

2 Castells, *The City and the Grassroots*, 166.

3 See, notably, David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995), 8.

by which cities attempt to position themselves within the international spatial division of consumption—by attracting gay tourist dollars and branding themselves as tolerant in the struggle to attract capital, as has been documented in cities such as Manchester, Singapore, and Tel Aviv. [4] A second and contrasting strain of research focuses on the apparent demise of urban gay neighborhoods. Scholars have noted that gay ghettos remain dependent on the contradictions of the capitalist space-economy and that, in the face of hypergentrification, as in New York, they disappear into myth and live on as constellations of memory. [5] Other scholars have attributed the demise of gay neighborhoods to processes of homonormativity, whereby upwardly mobile gay men, some of whom form nuclear families, invest in properties elsewhere in urban areas as they lose interest in spaces of queer politics, nightlife, and hedonism. The depressed property values that gay men raised through painstaking efforts of restoration in declining inner-city neighborhoods led directly to a process of hollowing out of the character of gay neighborhoods through their colonization and desexualization by curious tourists and other straight interlopers. [6]

Recognizing that gay venues and neighborhoods are always in flux, geographers have turned to oral histories and archival materials to record palimpsests of urban gay space for posterity. [7] In a similar vein, a sense of transience and loss, and the imperative to unpick queer practices of traumatic amnesia in the wake of the HIV-AIDS crisis, has led to new spatial practices of memorialization; that is, to the production of new, ostensibly permanent sites in urban landscapes commemorating gay civil rights struggles and the memory of gay and queer people murdered by fascism and taken by AIDS. Particularly notable are George Segal's 1980 Gay Liberation Monument (finally installed in 1992) in New York City and Karin Daan's Homomonument in Amsterdam (1987). The former has been the subject of intense criticism for how it whitewashes and cis-washes the legacy of the Stonewall Riots—and also for just being bad art. [8]

In this article I propose an alternative vocabulary for the queer urban, one that is anchored less to fixed sites and spaces. I ask how queer artistic and sexual practices might perform a queer urban infrastructure, and I explore a theory of queer infrastructure that takes seriously the performative materiality of the city.

If we want a history of the visualization of bodies as the infrastructure of the city, we do not need to look much further than the work of situationist Guy Debord. For his piece *Naked City*, he cut up a map of Paris and rearranged it to give a sense of the way the logics of the capitalist city channel our bodies, often

4 See David Bell and Jon Binnie, "Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance," *Urban Studies* 41, no. 9 (2004), 1807–20, here 1807.

5 See Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 188; and Camila Bassi, "Riding the Dialectical Waves of Gay Political Economy: A Story from Birmingham's Commercial Gay Scene," *Antipode* 38, no. 2 (2006), 213–35. See also the preface to Jen Jack Gieseking, *A Queer New York: Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).

6 Jason Orne, *Boystown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 4; and Amin Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2.

7 See Michael Brown and Larry Knopp, "Queering the Map: The Productive Tensions of Colliding Epistemologies," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, no. 1 (2008), 40–58, here 45.

8 See Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 77. See also Michael Kimmelman, "Sculpture, Sculpture Everywhere," *New York Times*, July 31, 1992.

unaware, through space. [9] The places we come together he calls "*plaques tournantes*." This is the French term for the rotating plates that reposition trains at depots, but for Debord they are psychogeographic "pivot points"—the most frequently used English translation of the term—where multiple logics and inhabitations of the city converge. For Debord, the meeting points occupy and substitute for the role of heavy industrial infrastructure. The city, rendered naked, is a place where capitalist urbanism is exposed as a force that brings bodies together in infrastructural moments. These moments have a latent capacity to create collective possibilities of reimagining; that is, infrastructures for unlearning.

9 Guy Debord, *The Naked City: Illustration de l'hypothèse des plaques tournantes en psychogéographique*, lithographic map (Loire Valley: FRAC, 1957).

For AbdouMaliq Simone, bodies themselves are infrastructure. His focus is on the ways that individual bodies improve the provision of public goods in cities such as Johannesburg and Abidjan, where the physical infrastructures that provide public goods are not reliable and where states lack the power to enforce a modernist division of spatial functions and assignment of bodies into them. As Simone writes, "The accelerated, extended, and intensified intersections of bodies, landscapes, objects and technologies defer calcification of institutional ensembles or fixed territories of belonging." [10] Simone argues that such "infrastructure" is not merely provisional but actively resists the inscription of institutional power in the urban landscape. This process is particularly marked in African postcolonial contexts in which material deprivation combines with an imperative to celebrate the indigenization of urban patterns and processes. In the present article I draw from psychoanalysis and its critiques to suggest that thinking through desire as a mode of infrastructure can help us move past fantasies of the queer urban as a legible series of discrete and organically coherent utopian counterpublics. Emphasizing desire becomes a way to think queer urbanism as a messy set of caring practices that exceed individuals and couples, households and families.

10 AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004), 407–29, here 408.

Gay male writers such as Edmund White have articulated a sense in which bodily traces and viscosities of public and nonmonogamous sexual encounter work as the "sticky semen-glue that binds [gay men] together." [11] The work of Samuel Delaney on Greenwich Village in the 1960s, for example, vividly presents the queer urban as a space of care that is performed through the management, exchange, and disposal of bodily surpluses. During the orgies that took place in trucks on the West Side Piers, he writes, "cock passed from mouth to hand to ass to mouth without ever breaking contact with other flesh for more than seconds. Mouth, hand, ass passed over whatever you held out to them, sans interstice." [12] For Delaney, this is a moving and deeply

11 Edmund White, *The Farewell Symphony* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 396.

12 Samuel Delaney, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village* (New York: Arbor House, 1988), 226.

human scene. Crucially, for him, it signifies a mode of "being for others" that is not prefigurative of utopia but is a mode of enacting urbanism as a form of conscious, engaged, and fleshy copresence and exchange. These queer infrastructures constitute what Thomas Strong calls "vital publics": "forms of embodied association elicited through the generalized exchange of body." Strong focuses on blood and the politics of gay men's blood donation in Canada (specifically, some blood's selective exclusion from the Canadian national bloodstream), pointing to how the circulation of bodily fluids "draw[s] persons into reciprocal relations peculiarly characterized by an intimate strangerhood." [13]

13 Thomas Strong, "Vital Publics of Pure Blood," *Body and Society* 15, no. 2 (2009), 169–91, here 173.

We can think of the nonmonogamous gay male body, among other urban bodies, as itself a *plaque tournante*, a public space, one where multiple, strangely intimate bodies are brought together, where intensities are performed and lived, connections made and broken, where the residue of temporary residence and mundane mobilities accumulates. As I have written elsewhere, [14] embodiments of care that range queerly across the boundaries of platonic and erotic, and of public and private, have been central to the way gay men have continued to reproduce themselves in urban contexts such as San Francisco that have been beset with repeated rounds of social and economic conflict since the middle of the twentieth century, particularly the ongoing response to the tragedy of HIV. Note that my intention here is not to argue that gay men's intimate body-publics are to be ontologically privileged as central to the constitution of the city. Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is just one example of careful historical work that places women's, in this case Black women's, sexual experimentation and nonmonogamous and queer practices as central to a rendition of the emergence of American urban modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. [15] As Hartman demonstrates, many, if not most, of the Black women whose lives she limns paid dearly for their sexual nonconformity, even as they constructed new worlds of experience in the emerging ghettos of America's northern cities before and during the Harlem Renaissance. Contemporary gay men provide a different kind of example for several reasons. We now live in an age in which formal legal equality for gays and lesbians has been attained in most jurisdictions of the developed world. Pharmaco-capitalism has, in the guise of PrEP and combination therapies, obviated the immediate threats of the AIDS crisis for many if not most. New digital technologies have massively expanded possibilities of access to multiple sexual partners (as well as infinitely multiplying the force of sexual rejection). Most significant, the messy and playful queering of

14 Max J. Andrucki, "Queering Social Reproduction: Sex, Care and Activism in San Francisco," *Urban Studies* 58, no. 7 (2021), 1364–79.

15 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019), 161–92.

distinctions between the erotic and the platonic, public and private, that so indelibly shapes gay men's urban socialities also "inoculates" gay communities from supposed threats of assimilationist deradicalization that, according to some, are always threatening gay libertine existence. [16] Saunas, bathhouses, sex parties, and dark rooms pepper the urban landscape in a way that is qualitatively different from that of many other urban subjects—after all, gay men continue to manifest forms of privilege vis-à-vis women, whose sexuality remains policed in very different ways, whose lives are constrained by lower incomes and economic restructuring, and whose vulnerability to violence sometimes precludes spontaneous engagements with strangers.

16 See, for instance, Timothy Stewart-Winter, "The Price of Gay Marriage" *New York Times*, June 26, 2015, SR1.

Ceramic World Building

If queer infrastructure is an infrastructure of improvised care, then urbanists might attend to the gay male body's material traces, which circulate through urban space, as the infrastructure of a queer city. One arena of materialization of those traces is how ceramics emerges not just as an assemblage point through which bodies and urban materials intersect and pass but specifically how ceramics materialize an erotics of care that simultaneously embodies and radically resists the normative sublimation of homoerotic libidinal energy. What follows is less an empirical claim than a set of reflections on the work of two gay male craft ceramics artists/producers in London, which I read through the postpsychoanalytic work of Guy Hocquenghem and Herbert Marcuse. I turn to the work of craft ceramicists for several key reasons that constitute their work as emblematic examples of a queer infrastructure. First, on a literal level, ceramics actually do constitute infrastructure. As Paul Mathieu in his book *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics* suggests, ceramics cannot be abstracted from the traditional close association with the body. He argues that "pottery is part of the cycle of life (and death) sustained by food, and pottery functions are closely related to bodily functions: pottery contains, preserves and excretes food and liquids, then receives the waste the body rejects." He continues,

> *"The scatological aspect of clay is reinforced not only by its appearance, colour and tactile qualities, but by its commonality, its availability, its cheapness, its crudeness, as well as its domestic nature, in relation to food primarily but also, and importantly here, to body functions. After all, the bathroom is an almost completely ceramic space."* [17]

Like bodies, ceramics can be hard or soft. Whether fired or not, they may crack or crumble. If glazed, they have a kind of skin that is smooth; if not glazed, they are rough and can

17 Paul Mathieu, *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 159.

be porous. Ceramics are thus not only closely associated with bodily functions and engagements with the world, but they can be said to possess a transitive property, not only coenacting bodily performances with the body but themselves emerging and circulating as traces of the body. Many pipes are ceramic. But also: bricks are ceramic.

Second, although craft production itself constitutes only a minor part of any urban economy, economic geographers have recently called attention to the role of craft production in the post-Fordist city. In their discussion of this overlooked sector of the "Third Italy" (industrial districts in northern and central Italy dominated by small manufacturing firms), Bertacchini and Borrione write of the need to attend to "the revitalization of craft based and design-intensive sectors whose products carry a strong semiotic and aesthetic content." [18] Though artisans are often strongly embedded in the cultural traditions of particular places, rather than being anachronistically out of place, craft production sits easily as a supplementary mode of flexible production alongside the consumption of mass-produced commodities financed through the deployment of nimble, footloose capital. The invisibilization of craft production in literatures on economic geography, as well as its marginalization in the art world, is inseparable from its status as feminized labor or, when performed by men, as "queer labor." The historian Allan Bérubé denotes work by men in the "decorative, designing, and self-expressive arts" as one such type of queer labor. [19] Mathieu argues that the traditionally large number of gay and lesbian potters might be the result of parallels with craft's marginalization in the art world. That marginalization, Mathieu suggests, is because of the commonness of ceramics—its usefulness and touchability devalue it in relation to the precious and untouchable "uselessness" of purely visual art.

18 Enrico E. Bertacchini and Paola Borrione, "The Geography of the Italian Creative Economy: The Special Role of the Design and Craft-Based Industries," *Regional Studies* 47, no. 2 (2013), 135–47, here 136.

19 Allan Bérubé, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 268.

The work of Frederik Andersson and Will Martin indexes the potential of desire, desublimated, to organize care. Gay white migrants to the global city of London, both men are prolific and active on social media. They both produce vessel work, often replete with sexual imagery, that they market through Instagram, Etsy, and local craft markets—Andersson through his comic illustration, sometimes imprinted on his pots; and Martin through his decorative urns, installation work, and other forays into the register of fine art. Both men's work is emblematic of the way ceramics constitutes a form of infrastructure, a set of improvisations for how erotics of care might be visualized and circulate to index fragments and gestures of the queer urban.

Swedish-born illustrator and ceramicist Andersson was trained as an illustrator and is a restless and prolific producer

of queer images, notorious for his anal imagery, in particular his depiction of rimming (oral-anal sex). fig.1 His ceramic work is mostly in the "vessel tradition"—objects useful in the social reproduction of everyday life. Cups, plates, and bowls are tools deployed in the work of providing nourishment to loved ones, a form of hidden and unpaid yet socially indispensable labor that, as feminists have long argued, subtends and subsidizes the productive capacity of capitalism itself. 20 Like photographs, ceramics are what Divya Tolia-Kelly calls "image objects," things that circulate materially while they signify. 21 As Mathieu notes, the core experience of craft is centered on touch—the passage of objects from hand to hand, whether through direct sale or through the provision of food and drink—as opposed to visual art, which separates us from the world and is perceived only with the eye. But Andersson's bawdy vessels insistently call attention to themselves, doggedly depicting imagery of male buttocks and rimming to disrupt the complicit invisibilization of infrastructures of reproductive labor through the exuberant discursive inscription of queer motifs on hand-produced items.

fig.1 Fred Andersson, *Rimming Vases*, 2020, ceramic. Source: Fred Andersson

For French proto-queer theorist Guy Hocquenghem, anality functions as a form of queer sociality because, while it is most private and in many ways constitutive of personhood, it cannot be owned and does not circulate discursively in the same way the phallus does. Drawing deeply on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Hocquenghem's 1970s essays describe nonmonogamous gay sex cultures as a "pickup machine" in which "all encounters become possible" and "polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis." 22 He offers the example of the "sexual communism" of the Turkish baths, where the anus recovers "its functions as a desiring bond and [is] collectively reinvested ... against a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret." 23 This is a project of rejecting sublimation by subverting the paranoia that is traditionally understood as its guardian.

The successful sublimation of homosexual desire channeled through the anus into productive social action and the genitalization of heterosexual desire in the properly oedipalized individual is a core tenet of psychoanalytic thought. 24 Sigmund Freud fully fleshes out his concept of the relation between homosexual desire, paranoia, and sublimation in *The Schreber Case*. 25

20 See Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Water Press, 1973), 5.

21 Divya Tolia-Kelly, "Materializing Postcolonial Geographies: Examining the Textural Landscapes of Migration in the South Asian Home," *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (2004), 675–88.

22 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 131.

23 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

24 See Sándor Ferenczi, "Stimulation of the Anal Erotogenic Zone as a Precipitating Factor in Paranoia," in *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac, 2002), 295–98, for a discussion of a man who withdraws from active participation in parish life after an operation to remove an anal fistula.

25 Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case: Sigmund Freud*, trans. by Andrew Webber (New York: Penguin, 2003).

Schreber, a nineteenth-century German judge confined to a psychiatric hospital, wrote extensive memoirs in which, according to Freud, he reported experiencing instinctual libidinal homosexual longings. In Freud's reading, these desires were unacceptable to Schreber, who defended against them by attributing them to the active desire of an Other. According to Schreber, first his doctor (Flechsig) and then God wanted to castrate and then penetrate him. Freud uses the case to argue that not just Schreber but everybody has homosexual and heterosexual libidinal urges and that in proper subjects the homosexual urges are sublimated or repressed into the unconscious and channeled into other, socially acceptable outlets. All of Schreber's desires that might be about pleasure and receiving it are transformed into familial longing, an attempt at nonincestuous closeness with his deceased brother and distant, formidable father. [26]

26 I am grateful to conversations with Adam Gaubinger for these and other ideas.

Freud uses the case to argue that paranoia is a way of reacting to the homosexual wish fantasy: in this and all similar cases, paranoia is about homosexual desire and the fear that one can never quite repress and sublimate it enough into socially acceptable channels. This is all couched in language full of bursting and flows:

"People who have not fully released themselves from the stage of narcissism ... are open to the danger that a flood of libido which finds no other outlet may subject their social drives to sexualization and so reverse the sublimations that they have achieved in the course of their development." [27]

27 Freud, *Schreber Case*, 52.

Schreber illustrates how the terrifying failure to effectively sublimate homosexual desire leads to the failure of the narcissist's world in the form of a collapse into paranoia.

Hocquenghem, writing decades later, chafed against the homophobia embedded in Freud's notion of a properly oedipalized subject whose homosexual longings are appropriately channeled into productive social investments. Hocquenghem posits a new ontology of queer desire, one that resists and circumvents the imperatives of sublimation to celebrate the polyvalent possibilities of sexual and social realignment always foreclosed by the teleology of psychoanalysis. He writes,

"To fail one's sublimation is merely to conceive social relations in a different way. Possibly, when the anus recovers its desiring function and the plugging in of organs takes place subject to no rule or law, the group can then take its pleasure in an immediate relation where the sacrosanct difference between public and private, between the individual and the social, will be out of place." [28]

28 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

The radical potential for homosexuality is its "group" or "annular mode," from the Latin word for "ring," which causes the "'social' of the phallic hierarchy ... to collapse." [29] Informed by his experiences in May 1968 in Paris, Hocquenghem sees the emergence of the radical gay movement at the same time as a wholly new form of the social that refuses any ontology of politics that excludes desire and that "desublimates everything it can by putting sex into everything." [30] These gay groupings are free to range across modes of sexual and political practice because they are predicated not on the repression of anal energy into civil society but on liberation from that repression. Nonmonogamy is not incidental here. This reformulation of the political infrastructure of desire allows us to reimagine the neoliberal city as one that is aspirationally post-oedipal; that is, not constructed according to heteropatriarchal logics of the family. This city is one in which sexual impulses, rather than being channeled through sublimation into the construction of "proper" infrastructures of reproductive futurity, proliferate through the creation of new modes of experiencing and inhabiting body parts in proliferating combinations. Thus we see how the enactment of multiple simultaneous forms of being-in-relation of publics and privates, and the ludic inscription of this anal order onto Andersson's ceramic objects, enacts the queering of orders of subjecthood and objecthood.

29 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111.

30 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 138.

Andersson is keen to point out that his work is not "erotica" but "cute," a way of visualizing, circulating, and prompting discussions about queer sex without making it "horny talk." [31] Andersson's objects can thus sit on public view within private homes, viewed by owners and curious visitors alike, drawing attention to themselves through a recursive emphasis on the anal on and in clay. This ability to attain nuanced registers of the erotic is, he explains, the very nature of illustration. Andersson's simple line allows sex to be depicted explicitly but in ways that do not alienate casual viewers. Craft production in a deeply unequal global city rests on a compromise such that, despite any radical intentions of artisanal producers like Andersson, to make ends meet they need to sell their products at high prices to those who can afford them. Mechanizing production would lower prices, but that, for Anderson, is unthinkable. His provisional response to this contradiction is to spend a large fraction of his time donating "cute erotic" art to and volunteering for social service organizations that serve the most disadvantaged queers in London.

31 All direct quotes come from two interviews conducted by the author in London. The interview with Fred Andersson occurred on March 10, 2019, and with Will Martin on August 11, 2021.

"Rather than speak for a community I'd rather offer my services for a community as a white gay/queer man. ... You have to sell hand-made ceramics for a certain price in London. A queer person that doesn't have a home wouldn't be able to buy

it, but that's why I work with the Outside Project, an LGBT homeless shelter."

His practice is implicitly not radical or disruptive but an improvised response that takes place within the confines of capitalist urbanism.

If gay male discourse enables a theorization of urban space as a "thirstscape" where we can locate ourselves through ongoing encounters with strangers, it might also enable new modes of misogyny through the invisibilization of women within narcissistic gay fields of vision. This points to the uneasy or even agonistic relation of multiple "queer" communities and identities to one another when premised on economies of desire: How do we articulate modes of accounting for—and caring for—those whom we do not desire? This inherent instability of the coalition of "queer" undermines any claims that formulations like Herbert Marcuse's famous world of Orphic Eros, a space of non-repressive sublimation, "where the life instincts would come to rest in fulfillment without repression," [32] are modes of utopia. Does the city emerge as a potential space of drowsy satisfied repose in which, as Marcuse has it, Eros and Thanatos converge through a desire to reintegrate the self with the rest of the natural world, or does it persist as a space of continuously multiplying yet unfulfilled desire that, as opposed to narratives of queer-as-excess, constitutes the urban as a space of lack, a space of "never enough"?

32 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 146.

The work of South African-born Will Martin unsettles these seemingly binary choices. Martin works in a variety of media, including textiles and installations, but is perhaps best known for his series of ceramic chains. **fig. 2** These chains clearly index modes of infrastructure as ligaments that connect as they also close-off and shackle. They are also in a sense trickster objects that are both fragile and indestructible. Martin mentions that they are an example of "the contradictory way I use my materials. And then there's the BDSM component that chains inevitably invoke." The fragility of ceramics also calls forth a time element. As Mathieu writes about queer ceramics in general,

"In our world there has been a resurgence of funerary or ritualised objects in the wake of the AIDS crisis, which brought to the forefront once again the relationship between sex and death; Eros and Thanatos. These objects, like all other ceramic objects, will become, in the distant future, testament and witness to our time, when all other materials have been reabsorbed into oblivion. And if sexuality is necessary for the continuation of the organic world, then similarly ceramics' capacity for preservation functions as the memory of humankind." [33]

33 Mathieu, *Sex Pots*, 13.

As material assemblages that underpin sociality, the ceramic chains—future unlinked links and shards of links—perform an infrastructural queer time of horizontality in which past, present, and future are copresent. These ceramics are delicate, always on the verge of snapping, and yet they also promise to remain as and with our waste for eons to come. The sexuality of the objects does not hover as decoration on the surface but is suffused into the way the chains are hailed in moments of durational performance. As in *Midsommar*, discussed below, Martin makes chains available to be worn by event and performance participant-observers, linking them to circuits of mutual enjoyment, calling into question the divisions of self and other that always suffuse the politics of spectatorship.

In my conversations with Martin he indicated that, for him, pottery was "a way of ... sublimating my anxiety and my desires which at the time were unacceptable" in the conservative white South Africa of his youth. He continues to make pottery as a way of managing anxiety—but, crucially, "making pottery itself is also quite anxiety inducing if you become financially reliant on it, and that for me was a bit of a killer." Precipitated by Britain's long lockdown in response to the 2020 to 2021 COVID-19 pandemic, Martin shifted his pottery production from a "fine art" register—for instance, his series of large funerary urns adorned with phalluses and linked by chains—to the vessel tradition focused on bowls and other tableware for which he can find a much bigger market. For Martin, making the functional ware was a "more down-to-earth way of functioning. It's less subject to the mania and depression of high stakes art, big shows, hoping someone will pick you up and look after you."

fig. 2 Will Martin, *Architrave*, 2016, ceramic installation, Charterhouse Square, London. Photograph: Will Martin

Regarding his current work, Martin's approach to pottery as a vessel of his own intentional sublimation has shifted:

"I'm trying to not sublimate at the moment, I'm trying to not dissociate. I'm trying to stay very present. With the wheel you have to be present. No chatting. If I'm not present and paying attention, this isn't going to go well. You have to perform

the movement or else it's not going to work. So it's the opposite of sublimating in a way."

For his current tableware work, he finds explicit use of representational stylistic elements to be unnecessary. **fig. 3** Martin, working on the wheel, notes that clay gives the artist an immediate feedback loop, as the clay responds immediately. The wheel is less forgiving than other methods of making ceramics. As Martin says,

fig. 3 Will Martin, Queer Art Boot Fair, 2021.

"If you do something, it's there for the rest of the object's life. So it acts as almost a diagnostic tool for how I feel. It's just you and this very receptive material. The material itself is very prone to projection. It's also a great way of forming and communicating identity. People tell me who they are by how they treat the clay."

The objects themselves emerge as erotic infrastructure both through their circulation as craft commodities and through their enfolding into durational performance work that enacts an Orphic world.

In summer 2021, shortly after the United Kingdom relaxed the limits restricting social gatherings imposed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for outdoor meetings of up to thirty people, **34** Martin, along with his two domestic partners, organized and performed an immersive event called *Midsommar*. **35** The event, although inspired by the Swedish pagan tradition of celebrating the summer solstice, was heavily influenced by both classical mythology and the melancholic pastoral Englishness of films by Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, such as *A Room with a View*. Martin made a large set of tableware specifically for the event, including large numbers of white, textured serving bowls made in crank. In the afternoon, Martin hosted a picnic party on his lawn with twenty-five invited guests. **fig. 4** The second half of the event was styled as a sexy bacchanalian party organized around the fire pit at the bottom of the garden, which he had rewilded over the previous year. Guests were sent a mood board suggesting they come in cheesecloths or dress as Victorian gentlemen. Martin's porcelain chains were also available in the living room along with a dress-up rail, so guests who did not bring a costume could choose something.

34 On the lockdown timeline, see https://www.institutefor government.org.uk/charts/uk-government-coronavirus-lockdowns (accessed April 24, 2022).

35 More information is available at https://www.williamjohnmartin.com/exhibitions/midsommar2021 (accessed April 24, 2022).

Midsommar was a decidedly ambivalent work of art. Its air of self-regard and sense of seclusion from the urban hustle and bustle could be read as profoundly anti-urban, a hypercuratedness that ruled out moments of unexpected encounter with, much less hospitality toward, the stranger, ideals that, as Tim Dean forcefully argues, are at the very root of a queer ethics of alterity. **36** For the guests, *Midsommar* was likely a high-camp party. But for

36 Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 176.

Martin it was an enveloping but nondidactic durational performance for which he and his partners built the structure, which guests then fleshed out through their own enjoyment. The table was laid in the garden and covered in twill, broadcloth, and lace. Vases filled with flowers from the garden flanked some of Martin's earlier urns. Home-cooked food was served in Martin's bowls, and drinks were served in his porcelain cylinders. fig.5 The event also functioned as a solo show for Martin's recent tableware pieces, all exhaustively documented with photographs, some of which now illustrate the website Martin uses to sell his work. In the second half of the evening, guests drank wine, cavorted, and reclined in the wild grass of his nighttime garden. The relation to domesticated nature was thus key to the work: timed to the solstice, *Midsommar* involved guests reposing among flowers while they used and were adorned by clay objects.

fig. 4 Will Martin, *Midsommar* (Early), immersive food event, June 26, 2021, Camberwell Grove, London. Photograph: Will Martin

The queerness of *Midsommar* emerges through its staging of an erotic relation to the world, in which libido is multiplied out, transfuses with work, and engages a sublime natural world, one not gazed at but inhabited. In the retelling, the piece could appear fey, camp, or even satirical, depending on the modulation of the narrative. But neither irony nor narrative was the driving motor of the event. An air of almost radical, even "tenderqueer" sincerity pervaded *Midsommar*, lending it a kind of power, an absorption of, as well as a transcendence of, camp. The essential quality of the work was a combination of bacchanalian excess crossed with Orphic stillness and repose with nature. The work was in no sense a parody but rather a kind of homage to Englishness on the part of an immigrant—a play with alterity that carefully abjured the seduction of judgment. The art of the event radiates out from Martin's sturdy, useful craft tableware, through the ephemeral erotic atmospheres of the event's curation, through to the surrounding urban natural landscape, which plays its role not only as an object of consumption but as an actant in the performance's assemblage. The queer space produced is intentionally ephemeral and notionally severed from the surrounding city landscape. In this aspirationally prefigurative setting, care is taken and care is passed around through clay objects, and it is inseparable from the pleasures taken from food, drink, bodies, and repose.

Geographers have grappled with the queer city in ways informed by a territorial ontology of space that owes much to

modernist, functionalist understandings of cities. I argue for an understanding of the social that is premised not on repression of the erotic but its liberation, whereby social obligations of care are aligned with a whole field of erotic vision. This is premised on a desire "for," but it is also a desire "with": queer infrastructures enable moments of care-taking and world-making in which the exigencies of capitalist exchange are exchanged for forms of craft work that align logics of cuteness and beauty with an erotic enmeshing of subject and object, public and private, in an oceanic expanse of fullness.

Ceramics thus constitutes one mode of queer infrastructure. Craft production plays its role in the neoliberal city but exists only in ambivalent relation to post-Fordist regimes of accumulation in global cities like London. Lauren Berlant asks, "do we need a better structural imaginary to organize the complexities of stranger intimacy?" [37] Ceramics as queer infrastructure performs a kind of recuperation and redemption that allows us to rethink not only the humanism but the supposed posthumanism of the contemporary city. They are a means to undoing urban chaos and alienation, which are embedded within and not external to post-Fordist cities. In a reiteration of the overwhelming flows of libido that can never be totally repressed, I also keep seeing the tumescence of these bodies and these pots, filled up and on the cusp of bursting. Ceramics possess a quality that indexes lines of power, surviving through visible fragility, the threat of breakage, that appears every time a ceramic vessel is moved or used. Ceramics perform a queer infrastructure as craft that is improvised. By viewing, feeling, holding, passing around, serving food and drink in, and constituting community through queer ceramics, we improvisationally craft the erotic infrastructure that keeps the queer city going. In this sense we can also accept Andersson's and Martin's queer craft's complicity with and enfolding into practices of urban restructuring internationally. Eros is desublimated, but I do not read these works as utopian totems of sexual liberation, radical economic practice, or declarations of zones of autonomy. Their work orientates us to a new mode of thinking queer embeddedness within the rhythms of the city, in relation to but never outside capitalist modernity. It is a provisional response to the fragility of our refusals, because it congeals circuits of erotic care that sustain us as we gesture our way toward a less repressive sublimation.

37 Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016), 393–419, here 398.

fig. 5 Will Martin, *Midsommar* (Late), immersive food event, June 26, 2021, Camberwell Grove, London. Photograph: Patrick Smith