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Flamboyant Markers: Gay Style in Urban Spaces

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Flamboyant Markers: Gay Style in Urban Spaces

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faulty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2011

Dedication

To Nicholas

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors, Professor Barry Brummett and Professor Dana Cloud, for their encouragement, patience, and insight. I would also like to acknowledge my friend and colleague Kristin Stimpson whose persistent insight, moral support, and veteran expertise in all matters difficult were a pleasant presence throughout my thesis writing.

Last, I thank my partner – the elephant is all gone.

August, 2011

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Abstract: This thesis explores gay style within urban spaces in downtown Austin, Texas. Employing style as a rhetorical and communicative approach and method, I investigate and analyze how gay style markers are read off the built material environment of urban spaces. Through an application and analysis of a rhetoric of style, I demonstrate how particular downtown Austin districts and neighborhoods can be read as de facto gay districts through a reading of the gay style marker *flamboyance*. The focus of the thesis is an analysis of the systematic and rhetorical signification of gay style markers, which function to define and constitute particular urban spaces as "gay" districts or neighborhoods. Through of an examination of flamboyance in downtown Austin's Warehouse District and surrounding districts, I demonstrate gay style is indeed present in a "non-gay" urban space. Ultimately, I argue that gay sexual style markers are capable of being read off the built environment of urban spaces; furthermore, it is these same gay style markers that come to define and constitute gay urban spaces, districts, and neighborhoods.

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INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Style and Sexuality

"The homosexual… is a prodigious consumer of signs – of hidden meanings, hidden systems, hidden potentiality. Exclusion from common code impels the frenzied quest: the momentary glimpse, the scrambled figure, the chance encounter, the reverse image, the sudden slippage, the lowered guard."

– Harold Beaver, *Homosexual Signs*

In an article published by the *New York Times* in January 2011, the plight of undocumented people, specifically gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals abroad, was made patent when it was reported some gay asylum seekers had to authenticate their non-heterosexual sexuality via "phallometric testing."[1] The notion of "gay enough" – the burden of proof in proving one's sexual orientation via appearance, presentation, and demeanor – has been made complex in this case: "Judges and immigration officials are adding a new hurdle in gay asylum cases that an applicant's homosexuality must be socially visible… The rationale is that if you don't look obviously gay, you can go home and hide your sexuality and don't need to be worried about being persecuted."[2]

At the heart of this account is the underlining belief that one has to certify one's sexual orientation because they do not match the presumed gay or lesbian sexual

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[1] Dan Bilefsky, "Gays Seeking Asylym in U.S. Encounter a New Hurdle," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011, accessed Feburary 10, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/nyregion/29asylum.html?pagewanted=all.

[2] Kilian Melloy, "Gays Seeking Asylum Can Be Turned Away If They're Not 'Gay Enough,'" *EDGE*, February 3, 2011, accessed February 13, 2011, http://www.edgeonthenet.com/?115779.

stereotypes of the "effeminate gay" or "butch lesbian." We have grown socially

accustomed to deciphering a person's sexual orientation on the basis of visible cues such

as what they wear, how they look, and how they perform – in a sense their style. We read

style markers, in this case sexual style markers to presume a sexual orientation. Although

this account is simply one particular instance illustrating the evolving nature of sexual

style representations, this phenomenon of reading sexual style markers does indeed

occurs on an everyday basis and is referred to as *gaydar*.

In particular, gaydar alludes to the ability to distinguish a person's sexuality in

public spaces. It is a process that makes sense – accuracy notwithstanding – of an

individual's outwardly expressed sexual orientation via the recognition, reading, and

decoding of non-heterosexual sexual style markers.

The literature on gaydar has only minimally expanded our understanding of this

complex yet prosaic cultural phenomenon. Most of the literature has approached gaydar

using social scientific frameworks and typically has only offered contradictory evidence.[3]

Notions of gaydar further point out the subsequent "*gayness*" people's intuitions discern

by way of their gaydar. It points to some distinct component that defines something

specifically as gay or gay-like, which I refer to as a sexual style marker. Further adding to

this understanding of gaydar is the idea it appears to be an intuitional appendage

frequently thought of in terms of aptitude, in which case someone may have "excellent"

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[3] Tobias Knofler and Margarete Imhof, "Does Sexual Orientation Have an Impact on
Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Communication," *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*
31, (2007): 189-204.
Gerulf Rieger et al., "Dissecting 'Gaydar': Accuracy and the Role of Masculinity-
Femininity," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39, no. 1 (2010): 124-140.

or "horrible" gaydar. Where do we learn and how are we coached into making sense of our gaydar?

Conversely, as made evident by the *New York Times* article, the rise of differing types and styles such as "butch gay bears", "metrosexuals", and "lipstick lesbians", the lines and boundaries of sexualities and the style stereotypes that reflect those sexualities have become blurred. The practice of determining someone's sexuality has grown more complex and it is increasing more difficult to gauge sexuality and sexual orientation on normative style notions of non-heterosexual sexuality. It would appear our normative patterns and style markers that have shaped our understanding of sexualities are in a state of flux. This phenomenon is socially significant in that we cannot "see" someone's sexual orientation *per se* – rather we are better apt at reading, judging, and making sexuality assessments via the presentation of style markers. The emphasis on style here figures prominently in sexuality and sexual orientation because we cannot validate a person's sexual orientation without the use of the signs and symbols that connote sexuality. We do not necessarily see "same-sex attraction", rather, we see the signs and symbols that (re)present and reflect a particular sexual orientation.

Is gaydar, however, strictly a keen sense solely reserved to body posturing, mannerisms, eye-gaze, touches and only applicable to an individual person, group of people, or the body? Is there an equivalent gaydar tool to detect sexual markers not attached to or associated with the body? What is at work when this taken for granted ability is scrutinized for its mechanics? How do we learn our gaydar? These questions are important because they direct attention to the symbolic meanings and systemtizing

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structures of gaydar; they hint at the underlining complexities working away under the cloak of the gaydar phenomena.

Ultimately, these questions point to the broader sense in which sexualities are constructed via sexual style markers, not only reserved to the simple domain of the body, but rather, also extendable in the material and created environment. In a time when the sexual style markers representing a variety of sexualities, be they heterosexual or non-heterosexual have grown complex, it is ever more important to consider how sexualities are made sense of, especially when one could propose that gaydar can equally be inverted to make attributions of all sexualities that rely on style for representation and validation.

Commonly, flamboyance, stylized aesthetics, coloring, and other style features tend to reflect sexual style markers that signify gay sensibilities, triggering a "gay" assessment of something or someone. What is at work in this delicate yet seemingly natural transaction of reading and translating sexual style markers into gay style appraisals? In a sense, how do we as readers of sexual style markers – successful or not – decipher and measure these style markers, and what repertoire do we draw from to make sexuality assessments?

This thesis proposes an examination into the signs and symbols that provoke a reader to conclude the presence of gay sensibilities via gay style markers, which are structured, systematized, communicated, and subsequently deciphered by everyday readers. Collectively these signs and symbols that signify gay sensibilities via gay style markers are what I term *gay style*.

By *gay style* or *gay style markers* I refer to the aggregation of multiple signs, symbols, and doings that register and communicate gay notions by means of *style*. By style I reference Barry Brummett's notion of style as actions, objects and behaviors as communicative messages that, "announce who we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be considered akin to."[4] Gay style is the moniker under which sexual markers are made to conjure or infer a gay sexual orientation. Sexual markers must also be understood as culturally specific and stylistic in nature, they are style markers that make the attribute or reading of gay concrete to the reader.

I should also note that sexual style markers can lead to inferences and assessments for any sexuality, heterosexual or non-heterosexual. Gay style is a style inasmuch as there are other several distinct styles such as *straight style*. We can only make sense of gay style when there is straight style to bifurcate sexual style markers. Gay style then might appear to be a singular phenomenon, yet gay style in fact is just one particular *style* in a menagerie of other *styles*. For example, there may be biker, sporty, punk, or alternative styles, each with their own social and cultural dynamics. As a result, if gaydar is a phenomenon that makes sense of sexual orientation via the reading of gay style markers, then there must natural be an equal phenomenon of "straightdar", where a heterosexual orientation is presumed.

Furthermore, gay style does not always appear as subversive, other, or purposive; rather, gay style is crafted strategically and systematically to reflect stereotypical depictions and portrayals of gay style. Gay style is the topography on which stereotypical

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[4] Barry Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), xi.

(re)presentations of gay sexuality are converted into cultural signs and symbols infused with cultural meanings of *gay*. We see this play out on a daily basis when a simple piece of skimpy colorful underwear is concluded to be "gay." Everyday vernacular has even crafted terms to articulate what we sense via style: femme, butch, queeny, masculine, nelly, feminine, sissy, fairy, dike, and lipstick lesbian. These words are the lexicon of gay style.

I argue current notions of gaydar are not strictly limited to the domain of verbal and nonverbal somatic cues; but rather, that gaydar can be used as a launch pad to speculate a theoretical notion of gaydar for use on the non-body. Gaydar that could conceivable distinguish markers of sexuality such as *gayness* or *gay style* in built material environments otherwise known as gay districts and gay neighborhoods. How does a reader of sexual style markers make the conclusion that they are in a gay space? What are the sexual style markers that signify or connote to gay people or even straight people the space they are situated in is gay or not?

My thesis will argue that gay sexual style markers are not only capable of being coded on bodies, but equally capable of being read of the built material environment of gay neighbors and gay districts. Similar to the manner in which gaydar reads sexual style markers off bodies, I propose we can correspondingly read sexual style markers off urban spaces. Furthermore, if gay sexual style markers can be culturally read, then they can subsequently be incorporated, reinvented, and infused with new cultural meaning as well. This is important to note because cultural and social capital attributed to urban gay spaces fundamentally epitomize general representations of non-heterosexual sexual minorities.

Put simply, gay spaces educate, promote, coach, and constitute gay style, both to gay individuals and the gay community at large and heterosexual people alike who use gay spaces as cultural reference points. This is paramount to consider because gay districts and gay neighborhoods typically frequented by non-heterosexual people are not entirely comprised of gay style markers. Gay spaces are a menagerie of sexualities, commodities, buildings, and people. This all the more raises the question of what a gay district really is? Are gay districts simply places frequented by non-heterosexuals or are they cultural sites of production, meanings, sign and symbols that communicate sexuality via style?

I answer this question by arguing that most gay districts are not necessarily urban areas and spaces used, inhabited, or simply a space where non-hetereosexual people congregate, but rather, gay districts and neighborhoods are spaces that serve as stages for gay style and gay style markers to communicate a certain defined space as a "gay district" or "gay neighborhood." The ability to register and make sense of gay style markers in gay districts and neighborhoods is significant in that these sexual minority spaces function as cultural and symbolic environments, which inculcate and channel, direct, prompt, and coach choices into making certain assumptions and inferences about sexual style markers.

Building on the works of scholars such as Aaron Betsky, George Chauncey, and Wayne H. Brekhus who have all elucidated the intersection of space, sexuality, and consumption as interrelated dimensions and in fact byproducts of well-structured social and cultural circumstances. I will examine gay style markers in urban spaces by detailing

the inner style components of gay style markers, which include their market context and aesthetic appeal and rationale.

Betsky in *Queer Space* exposes the nexus between the rise of the middles class and its need to authenticate itself in the social hierarchy via the production and use of spaces, tracing a close history of gay spaces as sites associated with social class institutions.[5] Equally demonstrating this connection, Brekhus details the process of gay men moving to and from space(s) as a form of gay identity formation, where an individual's gay identity is the formed via their commutes, transitions, or stationary movements within urban and suburban spaces. "Geography is both effect and cause of identity strategies."[6] Moreover, Brekhus alludes to the use of style or "auxiliary characteristics" to form an identity while transitioning between spaces; auxiliary characteristics similar to sexual style markers reflect a person's sexual orientation in given spaces.

The role of space and the infusion of sexuality into material spaces and consumption has also been argued by James Polchin. He argues the relationship between urban landscapes and the development of queer political and social identity in those urban landscapes as, "configuring a vision of queerness through a mediation between commercial culture and urban geography."[7] Noting the intersection of consumption and

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[5] Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 9.
[6] Wayne H. Brekhus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 221.
[7] James Polchin, "Having Something to Wear: The Landscape of Identity on Christopher Street," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, and Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 381.

identity, Polchin states: "[Q]ueer communities have emerged in the twentieth century amidst the rapid development of the urban landscape and, with it, the cosmopolitan character of commercial culture"[8]

Lawrence Knopp has similarly suggested urban environments and sexualities, "shape and are shaped by the dynamics of human social life."[9] For Knopp, the intersection of space and sexuality is a unique field where meanings are coded into urban spaces and contested spatially. "Urban images and experiences are now seen as manipulated, struggled over and reformulated in ways which are every bit as important to the accumulation (or loss) of social power by different groups as more traditionally material concerns."[10] The city and gay spaces are the result of social byproducts and function as sites of social production where "material forces, the power of ideas and the human desire to ascribe meaning are inseparable."[11]

Knopp proposes a gay district or neighborhood's sexuality is derived from a collection of many characteristic modern dimensions including: anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, authority, tactility, motion, danger, power, navigation, reslessness, and most in my examination consumption. "[T]he city, as a world of strangers in which people relate to each other as objects and surfaces, becomes an archetypal modern sexuality."[12]

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[8] Ibid., 387.
[9] Lawrence Knopp, "Sexuality and Urban Space: a framework for analysis," in *Mapping Desire: geographies of sexualities* (New York City: Routledge, 1995), 149.
[10] Ibid., 151.
[11] Ibid., 151.
[12] Ibid., 151.

These works are critical in that they underscore the linkage, strategies, and resources at the juncture of sexuality and the built environment of urban spaces. Moreover, they accentuate the ideological components of social categories, in this case sexuality, and how they are produced and re-produce within the space of gay districts and neighborhoods. Therefore, an examination of gay districts and neighborhoods as constructed spaces is important because they prompt, coach, and reflect social and representations of sexuality.

Scholars such as Jonathan Ned Katz and Michel Foucault have all demonstrated the ideological dimensions of sexuality. Katz demonstrates the creation of historically contingent categories of sexualities by chronicling the invention of "the heterosexual" and "the homosexual", and that, "The making of the middle class and the invention of heterosexuality went hand in hand."[13] While Foucault in his work *The History of Sexuality*, draws a parallel association between the rise of the Victorian bourgeoisie and the rise of the sexual sodomite deviant homosexual: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."[14]

With regard to the classist fabrication of the modern homosexual alluded to by Katz and Foucault detail, others such as Daniel Harris, Frank Mort, and Alexandria Chasin, have explored the dimensions of sexuality in more limited senses that observe

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[13] Jonathan Ned Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality: The Debut of the Heterosexual," in *Sexualities & Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*, (San Francisco: Sage Publications, 2007), 28.
[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

sexuality and its relationship to economic and social dynamics. They each individually detail the conspicuous and recurring nexus between sexual identity and modern capitalist consumerism. Harris notes in *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (1997) that gay culture was at once a separate and discrete community in the emerging years of the Gay Rights Movement in the 1960s, only to "fall" and assimilate into mainstream culture in the 1990s thus producing the "Teflon homosexual." As Harris makes evident when detailing the consumerist role during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s:

> *The gay market is so appealing to manufactures not only because homosexuals are psychologically predisposed to shopping as a means of redressing social inequalities through displays of tastefulness… but because the current [AIDS] health crisis has afforded a convenient solution to a recurrent image problem affecting corporations.[15]*

Frank Mort likewise questions how the debate over sexual politics impinges on the sphere of commercial culture. He details the role of space and consumption in reshaping the myths and roles of masculinity, specifically commodity markets aimed at young men in England during the economic boom years of the 1980s.[16] He further details the significance of style as a defining feature in the consumer market. "Overwhelmingly style was identified with the consumer marketplace. Commodities were the principal medium of cultural exchange… In more symbolic terms style was projected as the site of a protracted struggle over new forms of politics."[17]

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[15] Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1997), 235.
[16] Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and social space in late twentieth-century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11.
[17] Ibid., 25.

I emphasize these particular works and arguments because they underscore the linkage between the social and cultural arrangements constituting sexuality and the market mechanics manipulating those sexual identities. I argue gay style is the phenomenon reflecting this systematizing nature of social and cultural features at the hands of discourse, signs, and symbols.

Building on Barry Brummett's theory of a rhetoric of style, I argue gay style is not only a systematized and communicated style phenomena but moreover, reflective of an inherent and congruent relationship between gay style and its symbiotic relationship with consumption in gay urban spaces. Employing Brummett's method of style market considerations and aesthetics appeals, I explicitly argue gay style is tethered and replies upon market and consumer dynamics to become manifest as a *style* in gay urban spaces.

This thesis proposes the argument that gay style, as a marker of sexuality, is coded into the material environment of gay neighborhoods and districts and subsequently decoded. As made evident by the *New York Times* article I mention previously, the meanings attached to certain sexual markers have become increasingly difficult to discern, especially with regard to sexual orientation and sexualities as a result of the characteristics attributed to them – gay style markers – are increasingly contested. One way to amend and better understand this predicament in sexual style is to focus on one of the many terrains on which sexuality via style is communicated, and that is the built environment of gay districts and neighborhoods.

I should clarify at this point that my argument does not suggest that sexual style markers read of the built environment of urban spaces is the only manner to read gay

style and sexuality. Instead, my thesis focuses on one of the numerous style channels we employ to read gay style and sexuality via style markers off the material environment of gay urban spaces. I do not deny that gay style cannot indeed be read off of people or other stylistic terrains, but simply focus on the reading of gay style markers in the built environment where a collection of people, heterosexual and non-heterosexual, frequently congregate together indiscriminately.

Furthermore, while this thesis provides an overview of gaydar and notions of gay sensibilities, it does not specifically survey the rather large body of literature usually termed "camp", nor does it survey the field of social scientific approaches attempting to pin down sexual orientations via somatic communicative characteristics or mannerisms. I also do not propose gay style serves as a measure to authenticate any specific sexual orientation, gender, or sexuality. For instance, a person wearing a rainbow flag t-shirt does not necessarily make or authenticate some person as truly "gay." Rather, my focus is on exploring the underpinning structures that buttress social and cultural understandings of gay style.

The politics of diverse gender identifications and sexualities is also of concern in my thesis. I have limited the scope of my work to strictly exploring *gay* sexual style markers. My thesis only limitedly addresses other sexual identifications, sexualities, and genders. However, sexual style markers are not exclusive to gay identifications and are certainly applicable to queer or lesbian notions of styles. I have limited my scope to examining only gay style markers because they are the markers typically referenced. In addition, most gay spaces are overwhelming considered or defined as "gay" districts and

neighborhoods and not "lesbian" districts; however, this does not presuppose that there are no such lesbian districts, neighborhoods, or spaces. In addition, there are countless numbers of sexual styles and style markers in various social and cultural environments, be they local, geographically specific, or global in expanse. I have limited my work to examining gay style markers within the context of American urban spaces.

Inspiration for my thesis also warrants acknowledgement of two particular publications. The first is Barry Brummett's *A Rhetoric of Style*, which proposes an exploration into the new frontiers of rhetoric in the twenty-first century as being buttressed by *style*. Brummett asserts style is the name given to a system of persuasive signs and meanings and which serves as the foundation for making sense of and organizing contemporary social life.[18] Ultimately, he urges everyday people and scholars alike to pause and make note of the transforming terrain of rhetorics where we have gone from verbal and traditional notions of rhetoric, towards more aesthetic, stylized, and shifting rhetorical landscapes. I will elaborate further my use of Brummett's model in chapter three.

Second, is George Chauncey's *Gay New York* (1994), which elucidates the formation of gay cultural enclaves in New York City at the turn of the twentieth-century from 1890 to 1940. Chauncey elaborately chronicles the establishment and organization of visible gay enclaves and the sexual topography constituting New York City's gay communities and spaces. In surveying the cultural conditions of gay New York City, Chauncey argues against the dominant body of literature long describing gay culture as

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[18] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, xii-xiii.

isolated, invisible, and internalized at the turn of the century. "[G]ay life in New York was *less* tolerated, *less* visible to outsiders, and *more* rigidly segregated in the second third of the century than the first, and that the very severity of the postwar reaction has tended to blind us to the relative tolerance of the prewar years."[19]

Chauncey's work is critical because he points out the prominent role of social class in the formation of gay enclaves in New York, but also alluding that much of queer life at the time was stylistic. For instance, style markers such as plucked stylized eyebrows, green carnations, and body gesturing all serve as signs and symbols coded to imply a non-heterosexual orientation. Both of these works figure prominently into my thesis and serve as guides to support my argument. For example, prosecution of most men was based on how they appeared, dressed, or behaved.[20]

CHAPTER REVIEW

There are several facets and dimensions to gay style that will be examined in this thesis. This chapter has introduced the nature, scope and limits, and approach to my thesis. I have introduced how gaydar serves as a launch pad to explore and understand what truly is at work when sexual style markers I term gay style are communicated and read within the context of urban gay spaces. I have defined and fixed gay style as the central focus of my thesis and have shown the need for exploring sexual style markers within the built environment of urban spaces.

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[19] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay male World 1890-1940* (New York City: Basic Book, 1994), 9.
[20] Ibid., 343-348.

Chapter two will introduce a careful selection of literature focusing on works exemplifying the nodes among style, space, and consumption, specifically the communicative and organizing features as they pertain to gay spaces and style. Theories of style as systematizing and communicative will be emphasized in detail. The literature on space and consumption within the domain of gay spaces will also be of focus in my literature review. This literature review will serve as a backdrop to my thesis.

Chapter three will introduce my chosen method, or rather, speculative instrument to critically examine the systematization of gay style in gay urban neighborhoods and city districts. Employing Brummett's theory of a rhetoric of style, I will delineate Brummett's model of a rhetoric of style and outline my two chosen style components of style: market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies. I will furthermore introduce my chosen text for examination consisting of consist gay spaces, neighborhoods, and districts in the capital city of Austin, Texas.

Chapter four will demonstrate how gay style is culturally structured and systematized and then made manifest in public urban spaces. I will present an application of my thesis argument and illustrate how gay style functions in specific spaces and places. Lastly, chapter five will conclude my thesis by offering the politics and possible repercussions of gay style.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2: Style, Space, and Sexual Consumption

"A major fact about being gay and gay style is that it doesn't show. There is nothing about gay people's physiognomy that declares them gay."

– Richard Dyer, *Seen to Be Believed*

"Post-Stonewall urban gay men reek of the commodity. We give off the smell of

capitalism in rut…"

– Michael Warner, *Fear of a queer planet*

To offer a literature review on style, space, and consumption would be an exhausting and unending endeavor to say the least. Instead, I propose a more direct literature review surveying pertinent scholarship concerned with style, space, and consumption as formal and organized systems governing particular social and cultural practices. As noted in chapter one, the intersection of space, style, and consumption function is communicative, systematizing, and the site of production for meaning attached to signs, symbols, and social and cultural markers.

Put more clearly, I am interested in academic scholarship that discusses style, space, and consumption as dynamic cultural forces. For instance, the emergence and expansion of certain commercial markets and the subsequent impact they have had on the formation of personal identity. After all, were would be if we did not have the advent of advertising to tell us what we have to consume to be or become who we want to be?

The goal of this literature review is to paint a more complete picture of several

perspectives and arguments that extend the role of style into everyday social practices

and occurrences. Since I am arguing that gay style markers, particularly those in gay

urban spaces, communicate sexuality, it is important to survey literature that has

examined style as systematizing, communicative, aesthetic, and ideological. My approach

in this literature review is to conceptualize and consider style not only as a representative

phenomenon through the use of gay style markers, but also as a central component in

making, defining, and to some extent generating cultural notions of "gay" and "gayness."

Style

I start first with Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), which

argues that style is the topography on which social and cultural power struggles are

waged on, which he exams in the everyday stylistic expressions of the punk subculture

community in England during the 1960s. For Hebdige, style is the process by which

common objects are made to mean and mean again within certain subcultural cultures

and communities.[21] It is a form of subversive refusal and challenge to the dominant social

structures by way of reinventing the meaning attached to objects:

> *These 'humble' objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate*
> *groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a*
> *form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination…*
> *As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent'*
> *majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts*
> *the myth of consensus.[22]*

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[21] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1987), 3.
[22] Ibid., 18.

For instance, Hebdige offers the example of punk groups exploiting the use of safety pins and lavatory chains from everyday domestic objects with specific uses, to instead appropriating and refashioning them into subversive stylistic expressions.[23] "It is basically the way in which commodities are used within subcultures that mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations."[24]

Hebdige's work is significant because it particularly conceptualizes style as a well-structured process that generates meaning via stylistic significations. For Hebdige, style is a dynamic method to question and challenge the social order via symbols and objects infused with subcultural meaning. This process more importantly underscores the legitimacy and illegitimacy of signs and symbols in the social order, which can be used for subversive cultural purposes or appropriated into a commercial and market driven system of representation.

Furthermore, Hebdige's focus on the utilization of objects as communicative and always in constant and changing meaning underscores the role of consumption. It is after all in the process of consuming or the refusal to consume, subcultures – via their use of style – are able to usurp and appropriate new meaning into commodities. Hebdige makes this point clear by stating that style as a process is inherently concerned with the *use* of objects and products.[25] "Indeed, the creation and diffusion of new styles is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging which must inevitably

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[23] Ibid., 107.
[24] Ibid., 103.
[25] Ibid., 94.

lead to the defusion of the subculture's subversive power."[26] Consumption is the process that allows for the attainment of products to be subversively employed by subcultures and communicate newly generated meanings to overthrow and replace commercial meanings.

Other scholars such as Erving Goffman have also given emphasis to the significance of style as a well-structured framework that communicates specific meanings. However, instead of the use of objects to challenge the dominant social order, the manner in which people conduct themselves defines situations via style and presentation. How people express and impress themselves to others through style is what is signified and communicated, essentially describing a cultural system of symbols, gestures, and signs concerned with impression management of the self.

In *The Presentation of One Self* (1959), Goffman argues that people present, or rather, communicate themselves to the outside world via performances where actors "perform" their prosaic lives on *frontstages* and *backstages.* In Goffman's stylistic and dramaturgical framework the frontsage or *front* is defined by Goffman as, "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance."[27] Concurrently, backstage is defined as the private space of performers. The social and cultural stages are important because, like sexual style markers, they are kernels of meaning that re-present social categories, making them culturally valuable:

> *[I]t is to be noted that a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to*

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[26] Ibid., 95.

[27] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York City: Anchor Books, 1959), 22.

take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes a "collective representation" and a fact in its own right.[28]

In Goffman's model the presentation of oneself is important because it deposits that representation, image, and reputation with social capital, as a result a social or even commercial value can be affixed to the visibility of a sign or symbol; in this particular case someone's performance.[29] Goffman's focus on the imperative value of presentation directs attention to the appeal of such official images in the social hierarchy. For instance, what would make one image or people performance more valuable or authentic? According to Goffman, this question is critical in that signs and symbols are inescapable from their readers or audiences, as such, meanings but be discrete, organized, and systematic to avoid any dissonance, misrepresentation, or inconsistency in symbols.[30] As readers of style performances, we "fill in" and mange more or less to make sense of symbols or performances by filling in the gaps from our experience and repertoire of ideas implying a communicative component to style presentation.[31] "[T]he most objective form of naked power, i.e., physical coercion, is often neither objective nor naked but rather functions as a display for persuading the audience; it is often a means of communication."[32]

Another scholar who has contributed to the understanding of style as its communicative function and cultural capital is Stuart Ewen. In *All Consuming Images:*

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[28] Ibid., 27.
[29] Ibid., 32.
[30] Ibid., 58.
[31] Ibid., 73.
[32] Ibid., 241.

The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture (1984), Ewen details the role of image

management as a component of the systematizing nature of style. Ewen contends that

style has become the "legal tender" of cultural capital and an intimate component of

individual subjectivity, the marketplace, and politics. Style for Ewen is at once a

ubiquitous feature of social life always functioning and difficult to discern its

arrangements, definitions, and boundaries; and yet, very much an organized, discrete, and

systemic phenomenon. He defines styles as, "a visible reference point by which we have

come to understand life *in progress*… [and] inextricably woven into the fabric of social,

political, and economic life."[33]

Related to Hebdige and Goffman's work detailing the ever co-opted and

reinterpreted meaning of performances and commodities in relation to style, Ewen echoes

in the world of style, objects and symbols are charged with connotations and cultural

assessments that are continuously "eviscerated of meaning."[34] It is in this process of

muddied origins of meaning and the production of new meanings at the hand of style, that

ultimately lead to confusion, complexity, and misreading of style signs making them

almost indistinguishable from reality. Ewen notes the practice of style makes it difficult

to make sense of what is real, ultimately leading to the natural amalgamation of style with

the self and social experience:

> *The impulse to dissociate images from social experience, or to present*
> *images as a surrogate for experience, is reiterated throughout our culture.*
> *The perpetual repetition of this dynamic – affecting our sense of self and*

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[33] Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*
(New York City: Basic Book, 1988), 23.
[34] Ibid., 20.

of society – has created a world in which style has emerged as the predominant expression of meaning.[35]

For Ewen, our social experiences and own subjectivity are bounded by the functions of style where our own experiences are, "of little consequence, unless they are substantiated and validated by the world of style."[36] This is significant to consider, especially when style markers are perceived to be as real as what they signify; the profound meanings we attach to certain style symbols connote and denote social prescriptions such as race, gender, and class.

Style's role as a pervasive and formative social phenomenon muscling itself into the very domain of one's subjectivity, politics, and the marketplace is further detailed by the operative components of style, one of which is the form of aesthetics. Virginia Postrel extends the argument that much of the *substance* we attribute to style rests on the appealing and communicative function of aesthetics. Postrel contends the aesthetic imperative of style is curial to the function and execution of style.[37] Moreover, she advances similar arguments to those of Hebdige, Ewen, and Goffman by expanding on the use of style and its influential nature on meaning and personal identification.

In *The Substance of Style* (2003), Postrel conceives of aesthetics as characterized by their communicative, persuasive, and sensory features in which aesthetics themselves are rendered as sensory features noted as "prearticulate", " subliminal", and "value-

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[35] Ibid., 269-271.

[36] Ibid., 271.

[37] Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture & Consciousness* (New York City: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 5-6.

laden".[38] It is on the surface of everyday things that meanings are crafted and communicated to readers, a model where "surfaces matter, in and of themselves."[39] For Postrel, aesthetics constitute the sensory and affective appeals that are communicated to people and subsequently consumers alike. "Aesthetics is more pervasive than it used to be – not restricted to a social, economic, or artistic elite, limited to only a few settings or industries, or designed to communicate only power, influence or wealth."[40]

According to Postrel, as the preeminent dimension of style, aesthetics further validate the insidious and ubiquitous relationship between style, social experience, commercial markets, and even the presentation of politics – style has become the *substance* we derive meaning from and assign meaning. "The material – and hence the aesthetic – matters to people's sense of self. It isn't just surface and illusion."[41] A thorough consideration of aesthetics is crucial because as illustrated by the literature, they are communicative and convey attached meanings.

Expanding on the study of aesthetics scholars and popular writers such as Donald Norman, Daniel Harris, and Malcolm Barnard have likewise elucidated the systematic and communicative role of aesthetics as a dimension and function of style. Donald Norman, a cognitive psychologist by background, asserts that the aesthetic design and appeal of everyday objects are in fact emotive and sensory; we identify with and against

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[38] Ibid., 6-8.
[39] Ibid., 18.
[40] Ibid., 5.
[41] Ibid., 31.

the feel, touch, look, and emotion of objects on visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels of cognitive processing.[42]

What is significant in Norman's appraisal of aesthetics as affective and consigners of value and meanings is that the process role and function of aesthetics in everyday experience are seen as emotive affinities in people: "Attractive things do work better – their attractiveness produces positive emotions, causing mental processes to be more creative, more tolerant of minor difficulties."[43] In addition, earlier work by Norman adds to the understanding of aesthetics by elucidating the mechanics, models, and conceptual thought processing involved in reading of objects in an aestheticizied world.[44]

Daniel Harris in *The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (2000) further alludes to this incessant identification with aesthetics and the connotations associated with them, especially with the rise of consumerism and its ever-expanding role in the formation of individual identity. For example, Harris offers the "aesthetics of consumerism" – cuteness, quaintness, coolness, deliciousness, glamorousness, and cleanness – as "ascetic and cerebral, incorporeal illusions designed to stir up dissatisfaction, to provoke restless longings that cannot be fulfilled."[45]

The emphasis on aesthetics as a systemic and dynamic phenomenon generating meaning is furthermore put into relief when translated into something we take for granted – fashion. In *Fashion as Communication* (1996), Malcolm Barnard argues that fashion

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[42] Donald Norman, *Emotional Design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things* (New York City: Basic Books, 2004), 25.
[43] Ibid., 60.
[44] Donald Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York City: Basic Books, 1988)
[45] Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (New York City: Da Capo Press, 2000), xix.

and clothing as communication are the pivotal means of interaction within the Western cultural complex, and because they are communicative in form, they are the perpetuator of social categories and hierarchies, such as gender and class. "Fashion and clothing are profoundly political as they are among the means by which those inequalities [gender and class] have been maintained and reproduced from generation to the next."[46]

Again, what is significant in Malcolm's work is the systematizing role of a style component, in this case fashion, as organized and structured communicatively. As such then, fashion can be seen as a style territory where meaning can be created, contested, negotiated, and reincorporated: "[C]lothing and fashion, as communication, are cultural phenomena in that culture may itself be understood as a signifying system… in which a society's experiences, values and beliefs are communicated through practices, artefacts, and institutions."[47] Malcolm's semiotic approach presents a signifying system underscoring the systematic manufacture and transmission of meanings attached to fashion and clothing symbols, which ultimately can and are struggled and negotiated over since fashion as communication is value-laden with social values and judgments.[48]

In addition, Malcolm addresses the systematization and reproduction social categories and hierarchies at the hands of consumption as illustrated by the advent of domestic uniforms, which reproduce and propagate structures of class via fashion. Similar to Hebdige's argument, fashion is fundamentally an ideological affair concerned with power and status struggles all waged stylistically. "The products of capitalist

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[46] Barnard Malcolm, *Fashion as Communication* (New York City: Routledge, 1996), 6.
[47] Ibid., 28.
[48] Ibid., 39-48.

everyday life are reproduced, for example, in that someone has to make the garments that go to make up the uniform… servant[s] are ensuring that more such garments will continue to be made."[49]

Gay Spaces and Sexual Consumption

The notion of space can be conceptualized more easily as a terrain always already infused with meaning. It is in province of space after all where commercial buildings, civil infrastructure, and private homes are constructed on – they are areas made and brought into existence when real or imagined boundaries, margins, and borders are erected and placed. Space is also the terrain on which people construct their social identities and presentations of who they are. People *become*, *do*, and *are* people in spaces.

All things have a place and time, and the same applies to the broad literature on *space*. However, such a large area of study demands a more modest and defined scope to filter through this huge expanse of scholarship. For that, I limit the range of literature on space opting instead to emphasize literature addressing three explicit points concerned with my thesis.

The first is how space(s) systematically facilitates communication via the transmission of signs and symbols in urban spaces. Put more clearly, what does the body of literature offer in terms of space as a field for communicative potential? Second, how space – as rhetorical and communicative domains – contributes and impact the formation of subject positions in spaces, especially gay/queer subject positions. Lastly, I will submit

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[49] Ibid., 112.

scholarship that alludes to the intersection of style and consumption in relation to gay

space stylistically, structurally, and communicatively.

As mentioned in the previous style section, Erving Goffman argues that people

themselves serve as token reference points that define situations. Expanding on

Goffman's approach of presenting ones' self, Wayne H. Brekhus in *Peacocks,*

Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity (2003) argues

that space, specifically the moving to and from spaces, facilitates the formation of several

identity identification types which terms: the *lifestyler* (peacocks), the *commuter*

(chameleons), and the *integrator* (centaurs). As stated by Brekhus, identity is actively

negotiated in spatial and temporally social environments:

> *The underlying assumption is that gay individuals make a space more gay,*
> *but not necessarily that gay spaces might also make the individual more*
> *gay… Individuals may shift their overall concentration of a marked*
> *identity trait (such as 'gayness') to match their environment surroundings.*
> *That is,* who *one is depends, in part, on* where *one is and* when *one is.*
> *Identity resides not in the individual alone, but in the interaction between*
> *the individual and his or her social environment.*[50]

For Brekhus, the moving to and from or the static locality of people in spaces

constitute a person's subject position or rather identity. Focusing on gay subjects and

employing ethnographic measures, Brekhus illustrates the multiple ways in which

individuals negotiate "marked" identity attributes like gayness in culturally "unmarked"

identity spaces such as the normative spaces of suburbia.[51] In Brekhus' model the

lifestyler represents the unidimensional individual who conceptualizes his identity as a

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[50] Wayne H. Brekhus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16-17.
[51] Ibid., 5.

noun and values dominance, the commuter views his identity as a *verb* and values

mobility, and the integrator perceives his identity as an *adjective* who values

moderation.[52] Ultimately, these outlooks and penchants towards identity as either a noun,

verb, or adjective make up the grammar of social identity for Brekhus.

I emphasize Brekhus' work because it stresses the vital intersection of space and

identification and to some extent the allusion towards the significance of visibility, style,

and financial means in the identification process within spaces. For instance, Brekhus'

conception and description of "marked" and "unmarked" auxiliary characteristics –

which are the assumed and anticipated characteristics that accompany a specific status

role – underscore the role of style gestures in the construction of identity in space.

Although Brekhus does not explain in detail the dynamic role of auxiliary gay

characteristics, he does imply the critical role of visual style characteristics in the

formation and expression of identity. [53]

Furthermore, Brekhus obliquely notes the communicative dimension in the

formation of identity within space, which he describes as the "grammar disputes" in

which the gay community vies to see if ones' sense of self within the gay diverse

community should viewed as a noun, verb, or as an adjective: "These grammar disputes

form around the issues of duration, density, and dominance."[54] Identity formation is not

only a process occurring within liminal, spatial, and temporal places but also a function

of communicative elements.

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[52] Ibid., 95-98.
[53] Ibid., 14.
[54] Ibid., 98.

Not only is one's gay identity communicated in the process of moving between and among spaces, but additionally comprised by signs and symbols that connote orthodox social roles. Although termed "context-appropriate gestures" or "auxiliary characteristics" by Brekhus, these gestures and characteristics can similarly be seen as style markers used as an affectation that make up the lifestyler, the commuter, or the integrator.[55] For example, in his ethnographic examination the auxiliary characteristic of "being queeny" – a style marker – is used within the specific space of identity of a gay club to generate one's identity within that space. Brekhus notes since identity is a progression of moving between sites and places, in his exemplar from New York City to the suburban neighborhood of Northgate, New Jersey, gay men construct their sense of identity vis-à-vis stylistic gestures and comportment.[56] Brekhus highlights the marked, unmarked, and auxiliary characteristics of gay individuals.[57] The marked attribute connoting the "socially specialized" characteristics, while the unmarked represent the average and mundane characteristics of the "socially generic" (p14) "A marked item or trait is perceived as conveying more information than an unmarked one. (14)

Lastly, I underscore Brekhus's work in spatial identity because it accentuates the subtle influence of an individual's economic means to construct their identity. One naturally needs to own a vehicle to travel to and from suburbia and the city. Brekus notes occupational standing undeniably plays a role in identification: "Both high occupational

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[55] Ibid., 125.
[56] Ibid., 125.
[57] Ibid., 14.

prestige and income afford an individual more freedom to choose an identity grammar."[58]

Pecuniary forces in the form of occupational prestige facilitate formation of the one's

sense of self in terms of space and its boundaries: "The existence of wealthy lifestylers

shows that being a lifestyler is not necessarily always a response to oppression;

privileged groups too will maintain a noun identity as a master…"[59]

Echoing this junction of space, identity, and pecuniary thrusts, Aaron Betsky,

Dereka Rushbrook, Lawrence Knopp, David Bell, Jon Binnie, and George Chauncey

have all equally exposed the interconnection of gay spaces, identity, style, and

consumption. Betsky in *Queer Space* (1997) argues the construction of modern queer

spaces are the deliberate product of the bourgeois or "middle-classs" factions attempting

to craft a social identity reflective of their hierarchical social standing. He notes, "Only in

and through these spaces could the middle class validate itself. The city and the suburb,

the domestic environment and the place of work, the promenade and the bar – these were

the spaces that made the lives of the middle class."[60]

What is significant in Betsky's assessment of gay spaces, especially the material

translation of "queerness" into city buildings and space, is the functioning of queer space

as, "counterarchitecture, appropriating, subverting, mirroring, and choreographing the

orders of everyday life…"[61] Gay spaces, specifically gay districts are systematic arenas

where signs and symbols, usually gay markers, are communicated materially in space.

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[58] Ibid., 132.
[59] Ibid., 142.
[60] Aaron Betsky, *Queer Spaces: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York City: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 8.
[61] Ibid., 26.

Moreover, Betsky points out inherent predisposition of gay spaces ripe for gentrification and commoditization as illustrated by ideal neighborhoods with all the right logistics in place such as location and public transportation access:

> *Queer bars revel in anonymous structures, often on the outskirts of what are considered acceptable neighborhoods, but near good transportation and work. This means that they have gathered at the edges of downtown areas and have become the magnets for development of dilapidated areas… the West Village in New York, the anonymous, leftover strip of Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, and the warehouses of the South of Market area in San Francisco… [Queers] have used the voids of the city and filled them with life.*[62]

Lawrence Knopp has also illustrated the dynamic connection between sexuality and its place in urban spaces. As noted in chapter one, Knopp has argued the infusion of sexuality into urban spaces, acting as a prime site for the production and reproduction of spaces and the meanings associated with them. As such, material environments, spaces, and buildings can reflect social meaning via signs and symbols. Knopp notes as social relations organize around difference (i.e., race, gender, sexuality), we confront, encounter, and experience social categories vis-à-vis cultural markers such as sexual markers in urban spaces:

> *[W]hile difference is a fundamental feature of human experience, it has no fixed form or essence. What constitutes it, ultimately, is different experiences. To make these mutually intelligible and socially productive (as well as destructive!), we associate our different experiences with particular markers and construct these as the essences of our difference. These markers may be practices, they may be objects (such as features of our bodies), or they may be abstract symbols and language. Because human beings exist in space, these differences and the social relations*

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[62] Ibid., 158.

which they constitute (and through which they are also reconstituted) are also inherently spatial. The relations of sexuality are no exception.[63]

Building on the works of Henning Bech, Knopp notes that sexual experiences are profitable because they have grown increasingly dissected, categorized and commodified: "The proliferation of commodified homosexual experience… led to a homosexual consciousness among some people, and this way very threatening to the heterosexualised gender relations underlying the [modern] industrial city."[64] Spatiality and sexuality are fundamental experiences that influence prominently in the urbanization of spaces and cities.

This close relationship linking gay spaces and consumption is not without social and systematic consequences as described by Dereka Rushbrook, who points out that as commodified spaces, gay districts have themselves been appropriated for consumption through "bourgeois voyeurism", in which gay subjects have been commodified for spectatorship.[65] She declares that queer spaces have been made into "urban cultural landscapes central to strategies of capital accumulation" and offered as "equivalent venues for consumption at a cosmopolitan buffet" where the gay individual is erased from their histories, functions, and their bodies.[66]

As a result, gay bodies themselves are appropriated and consumed by the larger dominant social order as visual commodities in urban spaces. "There is a perceived

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[63] Lawrence Knopp, "Sexualtiy and Urban Space: a frame work analysis," in *Mapping Desire: geographies of sexualities* (New York City: Routledge, 1995), 154.
[64] Ibid., 155.
[65] Dereka Rushbrook, "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 (2002): 185.
[66] Ibid., 188.

watering down of gay space, a simultaneous sexing and desexing of places. Places

identified as gay and lesbian persist or become more salient, while gay space becomes

more uncertain."[67] This suggestion by Rushbrook underscores the vital place of style in

signifying "gayness" or gay style markers in urban spaces.

> *[T]he consumption of gayness is much more difficult to demonstrate without making gayness, precisely because invisibility allows queers to circulate without making being seen as queer… The deliberate consumption of queerness, however, almost necessarily takes place in place, where queerness is performed and visible but where it is not always evident who is the consumer and who is the consumed, and where the consumer regulates production in ways that are difficult to discern. The artifacts of queerness are less portable than those of race and ethnicity; instead, the consumption of queerness depends on interaction...*[68]

Rushbrook emphasizes that gays are more than markers of diversity and

consumption, but also serve as "markers of the cosmopolitan nature of the metropolis."[69]

Rushbrook and Knopp's work is crucial to my thesis because it establishes the

disconnection from somatic sexuality onto aesthetic, material, and urban sexuality in the

form of gay style, and moreover, demonstrate gay style can function as a generative force

in the reproduce and creation of gay style and gay style markers.

Finally, George Chauncey alludes to the node at which gay spaces and

consumption are made manifest through style in urban spaces. In *Gay New York: Gender*

Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940 (1994), Chauncey

details the ability for gay men to transform themselves stylistically from "fairies", or

"queers", to "quasi-women", highlighting the plasticity of gender and to some extent

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[67] Ibid., 196.
[68] Ibid., 198.
[69] Ibid., 190.

sexuality. He explores the cultural conditions that allowed gay men to congregate in open

urban spaces and thrive in coherent, organized, and visible gay enclaves in New York

City where gay men appropriated non-homosexual spaces employing survival strategies

on the level of presentation, style, and behavior:

> *While the fairy intended his style to mark him as a sexual invert, however, the queer intended to his style to deflect such suspicions. The adoption of such style did not entirely protect queers from ridicule for gender noncomformity, but it did allow them to recast, denigrate, and dismiss such ridicule as a sign of lower-class brutishness.*[70]

Vital in narrowing Chauncey's rich description of gay communities in New York

City at the start of the twentieth-century is his subtle reiteration of working-class

sentiments at the heart of gay communities and the role of consumption (i.e., alcohol,

prostitution, residential and commercial tenements). Early gay spaces were working-class

and evolved over time into a show of gay stereotypes: "The institutions and social forms

of the gay subculture were patterned in many respects on those of the working-class

culture in which it took shape: the saloons, small social clubs, and large fancy dress balls

around which fairy life revolved were all typical elements of working-class life."[71]

Since sexual mores were historically situated, Chauncey notes that before the

early 1900s one's sexuality – or desire for men – was independent from one's gender,

resulting in a variety of cultural terms such as "faires", faggots," and "queens" each with

its own definition of the *type* of homosexual a man was, "the ascendancy of *gay* as the

primary self-referential term used by men within the gay world represented a subtle shift

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[70] Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay male World 1890-1940*, 107.
[71] Ibid., 41.

in the boundaries of the male sexual world."[72] What is important in Chauncey examination of gay communities is the crucial role visibility played in the organization and arrangement of gay communities in New York City, styles where the defining node which reflected non-heterosexual sexuality.[73]

As noted in chapter one, Chauncey's work is crucial because he offers accounts and descriptions where the prosecution of homosexuals for congregating in public spaces was almost entirely based on detectable "homosexual markers" associate with "criminal" cell dwellers. Although, Chauncey details the significant role of style in gay communities and demonstrates the function of style with regard to bodies and people, he does not directly address the incorporation and signification of particular stylized characteristics associated. My thesis would expand on this missing style connection by addressing the manner in which we go about decoding particular style markers.

CHAPTER REVIEW

This chapter has outlined a thorough review of the existing literature on style, space, and consumption as signifying systems constituted by communicative and structured components. I have offered arguments by Hebdige, Postrel, Goffman, and Ewen that all suggest the relevance and structure of style as a cultural terrain on which meanings, such as cultural notions of sexuality, are constructed, contested, and communicated.

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[72] Ibid., 358.
[73] Ibid., 186-189.

It should be noted, however, that most of the literature I have offered pertains exclusively with the role of people as constituting markers of space. Both, Goffman and Hebdige contend people define situations via their presence in a space of their uses of spaces or commodities. Similarly, Chauncey demonstrates the development of gay enclaves by way of non-heterosexual people, where most spaces were defined anecdotally in relation to people. My thesis would propose an examination, independent of somatic markers and into the reading of sexual style markers in the form of gay style in the built environment of gay districts and neighborhoods.

In the subsequent chapters to follow, this review of literature will provide a comprehensive backdrop against which I will propose and demonstrate an examination of gay style gay urban spaces. This chapter has established an inherent link between style and gay spaces as communicative sites, which will be expanded in the next chapter in which I will introduce my cultural text and method.

TEXT AND METHOD

Chapter 3: Style and Gay Urban Spaces

This chapter begins with a brief description of what gay urban spaces, neighborhoods, and districts constitute, how they are defined, what they reflect, and how they can serve as sites for style and communication. Additionally, a rationale for examining these gay spaces and their appropriateness and applicability to gay style in urban environments will be detailed. The goal of this chapter is to offer an adequate background and familiarity with gay urban neighborhoods and districts, and illustrate how they serve as prime sites for the transmission and reading of gay style markers. I will furthermore present an overview of gay urban spaces as they pertain to style, signification of sexual style markers, and the decoding of those sexual style markers in the built environment of gay urban spaces. Finally, I will introduce my chosen text and method for analysis in my thesis.

Gay Districts, Neighborhoods, and Spaces

Gay spaces have various definitions determined by a variety of characteristics and circumstances. There exists a full array of terms to describe such urban sites and spaces: gay ghettos, gayborhoods, gay villages, red light districts, and gay towns. These spaces are defined by several elements and approached in a variety of popular and academic

lenses. Gay urban spaces particularly reside at the juncture of diverse resources, demographics, and social and cultural interests and ideologies.

My previous chapters have illustrated that gay spaces, particularly the movement to and from them are is an inherent component to identity formation and a sense of community. Gay spaces can be considered cultural sites where non-heterosexual and heterosexual individuals make sense of their place in society and culture. Second, because gay spaces are sites coupled with identity formation and community, these spaces are subsequently the arena where a variety of social and cultural ideologies manifest themselves and are contested, otherwise known as "spatial politics."[74] Finally, gay spaces are places that operate under a sense of agency, where people heterosexual and non-heterosexual alike *do* – either consume, observe, display, protest, assemble, and live.

However, most of these terms overlook and belie existential characteristics of gay urban spaces. Are gay districts merely urban sites frequented by non-heterosexual city dwellers, or can they also encompass heterosexual inhabitants and still maintain their "gayness" factor? Do merely the bodies that inhabit, use, or display themselves in a particular space define these districts as gay? Can a certain design aesthetic communicate gay style irrespective of where it is situated or what object, image, sign or symbol it is attached to or associated with? Most importantly, how does one recognize, read, and arrive at the conclusion that they are indeed within the boundaries and confines of a gay urban space?

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[74] Gordon Brent Ingram, "Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations," in *Queers in Spaces* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 40.

These questions are crucial points for study because they address the evolution of contemporary images and symbols that reflect sexuality via sexual style markers. In a social and cultural period where sexual mores are evolving to include non-heterosexual sexual orientations and flexible gender identifications, bodies become to some extent ambiguous and equivocal markers of sexuality. Although this social occurrence speaks to the progressive move forward in gender and sexual acceptance, this process subsequently blurs the communicative system by blurring the lines of sexual style markers this system relies on. When a gay person can be mistaken for a heterosexual individual and vis-à-vis on the basis of their style, material sexual style markers independent from the body become all the more significant in reading sexuality.

More importantly, gay spaces are cultural sites where people learn, discover, associate, and make sense of sexual variety, be it heterosexual or non-heterosexual. Although elementary at first glance, gay spaces do the cultural work of instilling and disseminating sexual orientation and sexuality via a system of communication structured upon signification of gay style through gay style markers. As a result, definitions and characteristics of gay spaces become all the more crucial to reading and generating gay style markers in the built environment of urban spaces.

Scholars such as Mickey Lauria, Lawrence Knopp, David Bell, Jon Dinnie, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, Dereka Rushbrook, and James Polchin have all highlighted the dynamic characteristics and sites that make up general understandings of what are considered gay or queer spaces. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rushbrook notes the "invasion" of gay spaces by heterosexual people to "consume" and capitalize on non-

heterosexual bodies in urban spaces.[75] Polchin and Knopp have argued extensively the nuances of gay spaces as distinct from other spaces and entitled with their own set of signs and symbols that communicate the nature of gay districts. [76] These signs and symbols are reflected in the commercial propensity for gentrification and why gay districts spring up in some cities and not in others. Finally, Bell and Binnie emphasize a scholastic reconsideration over the debate on "new urban orders", and instead propose how urban spaces are sexualized leading to the commodification of gay spaces and considerations over the authenticity of such spaces.[77]

What is significant regarding these arguments and the literature over space is the central role systems of communication in the form of style markers figure into the definition and utilization of gay spaces. Polcin, Knopp, and Rushbrook have all alluded to the central and significant role that "gayness" plays in defining gay urban spaces, but do not conspicuously address "gayness" through a communicative, rhetorical, and style lens. They do not highlight the communicative and stylistic dimensions of the signs and symbols that constitute gay style markers in urban spaces and the built environment of these spaces. Moreover, these scholars do not fundamentally address the constitution of "gay" or "gayness". Put simply, they do not expound the intricate working of what makes a particular area, object, or person "gay" in terms of style.

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[75] Dereka Rushbrook, "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 (2002): 183-200.
[76] Lawrence Knopp, "Some theoretical implications of gay involvement in an urban land market," *Political Geography Quarterly* 9 (1990): 337-352.
[77] David Bell and Jon Binnie, "Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance," *Urban Studies* 41 (2004): 1807-1820.

For example, one need consider a recent planned mega community development in the California desert known as the BOOM project, a "socially progressive township" built from the ground up to house primarily gay and lesbian residents (See Appendix 3). Set to break ground in 2012, the BOOM project is branded by developers and architects as a planned urban project intended to reinvent and pioneer new gay spaces where "inclusion, not seclusion" and "about living, not retiring" is the spatial goal.[78] With 300 planned residences, a slew of commercial venues, an entertainment complex, boutique hotels and wellness center, the BOOM project manifestly points to the significance of urban spaces and how they signify sexuality via sexual style markers. The BOOM urban project literally plans to create an urban gay community that is entirely "gay" by design. This large-scale project underscores the communicative, stylistic, and generative role of gay style. What better illustration of employing gay style markers to than to create a planned community that indeed attempts to "sell" gay style to gay and lesbian consumers via an actual planned urban community.

In my thesis, I propose an examination into the reading and decoding of systematic signification markers – gay style markers – as reflected in the built environment of gay urban spaces. My question simply is, how do we as everyday agents and cultural critics read gay style, successfully or not, in the built environment of gay districts and neighborhoods in urban spaces?

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[78] "Exclusive: BOOM in the Desert," Architizer Blog, accessed February 9, 2011, http://www.architizer.com/en_us/blog/dyn/14239/exclusive-boom-in-the-desert/.

Selected Text

Barry Brummett defines a text as, "a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set off effects or functions."[79] As such, a text can be any meaningful assemblage or amalgamation worthy of critical inquiry and investigation. The texts analyzed in my thesis consist of gay urban spaces, sites, districts, and gay commercial and residential venues and establishments within the direct metropolitan area of the capitol city of Austin, Texas. Public spaces such as Republic Park, Auditorium Shores, West Downtown, and specific downtown districts such as the Warehouse District and East Downtown all serve as spatial sites that constitute urban spaces considered "gay friendly" or known unofficially as "Austin's Gay District", as is the case in the city's downtown Warehouse District.

As distinct and constitutive urban spaces, Austin's urban spaces are well suited for a critical undertaking because they feature an array of spatial, sexual, style, and rhetorical markers and images that communicate and generate a sense of gay style. In my thesis I examine these specific districts, such as the downtown Warehouse District, and demonstrate how gay style markers reflected in the built urban environment reflect a non-heterosexual sensibility – gay style. However, I should also make clear that my examination is not limited to only the urban infrastructure and spatial features of Austin's gay-friendly and unofficial gay districts, but further extended into the interior and exterior of individual buildings, commercial establishments, and entertainment and

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[79] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, 34.

recreation venues. For instance, dance floors, bar arrangements, structural layouts, and interior décor.

It is important to note that the city of Austin does not have a defined "gay neighborhood" or "gay district" per se, but does host a variety of gay and gay-friendly residential neighborhoods, commercial businesses, cafes, restaurants, and nightlife venues. This apparent lack of an official "gay space" is significant because it makes Austin a prime space and text for examining the blurring definitions, boundaries, and sexual style markers in urban spaces. After all, it is in such an ambiguous space where the boundaries of sexual style markers are blurred, that sexual styles themselves within a distinct space become all the more important.

Put simply, because there is no wide, consistent, and "official" system designating why an area should be termed a "gay district" or "gay neighborhood", I argue, the mapping and topography of gay spaces is done entirely through style. This point is all the more crucial when one considers the direct vicinity of gay spaces where businesses, cafes, and nighttime venues are located, come and go over the course of city life. Gay spaces come and go and transform over time. For instance, one need only recall San Francisco's Castro District, which had formerly been the Mission District inhabited by lower-class Latino immigrants before it's gentrification into one of the most recognized and notorious gay districts in the United States.

As a rhetorical critic, and one drawn by a rhetoric of style, I have elected to approach my text as a cultural artifact and phenomenon worthy of critical critique, just as any political public speech or protest demonstration would warrant. Austin's gay space,

or lack thereof, is critical for study in that this urban space, similar to other gay urban spaces across the country, communicate social categories and norms that figure significantly into everyday life. Readers learn and make sense of social categories, such as sexuality in urban spaces on the basis of style and cultural stereotypes, which all operate on a communicative, persuasive, and stylistic topography. An examination of gay style in the built environment of Austin's gay space(s) is appropriate for analysis because, it is in such fluid spaces that we form cultural judgments, and are similarly inculcated by these cultural judgments as a whole.

Finally, I should note visual images and photos of Austin's downtown gay environment, buildings, public spaces, and commercial business examined in my thesis will be listed as an appendix item. I will utilize an assortment or urban features found within Austin's downtown districts usually regarded as a "gay friendly" district. In my next chapter, my examination of gay style in Austin's downtown district will demonstrate how gay style is signified and communicates a sense of sexuality.

Method

In the following analysis, I reference several speculative approaches to examine gay style markers in urban spaces. To answer my initial inquiry of how gay style markers are read, communicated, and decoded in gay urban spaces, I turn to a view of style as rhetorical, systematic, ideological, and cultural and ask: How are gay style markers read and communicated in the built environment of urban spaces, and how they connote stylistic notions of non-heterosexual sexuality – gay style?

Drawing on my initial question, I provide my analysis of gay style in gay urban spaces aided by Barry Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style. As noted from previous chapters, Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style focuses on the signs and symbols that communicate particular meanings, and as such can also be considered persuasive in that they can function and be decoded in particular ways. Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style consists of five rhetorical and structural components intended to guide the cultural reader in the of examination of cultural texts on a terrain of style: (1) primacy of text, (2) imaginary communities, (3) market contexts, (4) aesthetic rationales, and (5) stylistic homologies.[80] This rhetorical approach and method towards style figures prominently in my thesis and serves as an appropriate and applicable framework and model for examination of my text. Brummett cites three points for the value and application of style as a rhetoric, where style figures as the fundamental dimension on which everyday life, identity, social organization, and the political of the twenty-first century transpire.

First, Brummett notes that a *rhetoric* of style paints a cultural view where signs and symbols – styles – are nonexclusive in their meaning, and where their communicative and persuasive dimensions function as a "practice" or doing, resulting in a performance of style presentation.[81] Second, as a *theoretical* approach a rhetoric of style functions to demonstrate how, "persuasion works, [as] a systematic statement of the ways in which influence operates in particular circumstances", and "improve 'systematic understanding' of how rhetoric in general works in the worlds."[82] Finally, Brummett's method suggests it

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[80] Ibid., 117.
[81] Ibid., 116.
[82] Ibid., 116.

can be employed as a "critical method" or model for analysis, one spearheaded by "focused understanding" and "appreciation" for contemporary cultural artifacts and texts.

These justifications are crucial to consider because they lead to an approach where an examination of a chosen cultural text is probed for systematic structure, how it produces influence, and most importantly how to be on guard for such components at work. However, although Brummett's method of rhetoric as style is important, it is not a be-all and end-all approach. It is merely one method in a repository of other rhetorical methods available to the cultural critical to approach and examine artifacts and texts.

In my thesis, I elected to approach my selected text drawing from Brummett's method, a rhetoric of style on account of his method's emphasis on the systematic and focused understanding of cultural phenomenon on stylistic terms. What better method to employ in an examination of gay style in urban spaces than one focused on surfaces, aesthetics, expressions, and signs, and moreover, where those signs and surfaces construct our view of reality and meanings. As Brummett aruges, "If we live in a culture that is increasingly one of sign and image, then a style made of sign and image may be as 'real' as it gets, as real as anybody wants or needs for it to be."[83]

Moreover, Brummett establishes that style is the grounds of signifying upon which more and more of our social and cultural world is organized around.[84] As such, Brummett's model allows for an examination of gay style and gay style markers in the built environment of urban spaces as systematic, ideological, signifying, cultural, and rhetorical. This is crucial to consider when socially held systems of signification are the

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[83] Ibid., 11.
[84] Ibid., 3.

battle ground on which meanings are struggled over and contested, impacting social and commercial structures of everyday life:

> *Social organization is never value free. Style organizes the social and does so by also expressing values and judgments about people and groups. This expression of values of values is of the essence of style… Style is value laden because it is rhetorical and rhetorical because it conveys values.*[85]

Drawing from Brummett's five dimensional method of a rhetoric of style, I specifically employ three selected components for use in my anlysis: (1) the primacy of the text, (2) aesthetic rationales and appeals, and (3) market contexts and considerations. Although I do not focus directly on the remaining components, my selected components are appropriate since the five components are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. They are intended as flexible and interconnected points and not meant to be absolute or exhaustive speculative guides.[86]

First, *primacy of the text* as a component of a rhetoric of style guides the critic to critically examine the primary sites for the construction of everyday identity and social affiliation. Brummett contends that most situations in daily life are overwhelmingly centered on preexisting circumstances generated by already present texts. "Texts facilitate the creation of different meanings, values, motivations, allegiances, identities, communities, and intentions in people but not simply or unidimensionally."[87] As such, texts are the primary nexus we are familiar enough with to make sense of our world via the reading and generating of signs and symbols. In addition to the primacy of the text

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[85] Ibid., 50.
[86] Ibid., 117.
[87] Ibid., 118.

itself, we read and relate to texts either deliberately or reflexively resulting in a constant and simultaneous reading of texts.

I employ use of primacy of the text because it aids in the examination of cultural texts by noting that texts are the basis for modern life engrossed in style. We become aware of social patterns and categories via the reading of styles, which offer socially practical information regarding social patterns and norms such as class and sexuality. As noted by Brummett, "Identity and social allegiance merge with texts, which is not to say they become only texts but that all the real stuff of class, race, gender, sexuality, and so forth becomes continuous with texts."[88]

Second, I have chosen to employ *market considerations* in my analysis of gay style. Market considerations aid the critic in examining texts stylistically because, "Signs of rhetorical importance today include words but go far beyond words to include other symbolic systems, such as, goods."[89] Market contexts help make sense of a rhetoric of style in that signs and symbols are worked into the very fabric of social systems, such as the commodities we consume. This is significant because goods function as social and cultural units capable of representing and generating meanings via stylized goods. Signs and images become commodities within the realm of market contexts, and connect to aesthetic engrossment and aesthetic rationale in that the commodification of signs and images is a way of moving them into a market context that is all encompassing.[90]

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[88] Ibid., 118.
[89] Ibid., 124.
[90] Ibid., 145.

But most importantly market considerations are crucial to my examination of gay style in gay urban spaces because market contexts allow for the struggle over commodities and the meanings they carry to be examined as a system of cultural signification. What is significant over this struggle over style, as Brummett notes, is that this contestation over power is waged on a terrain of aesthetic rationales, connecting the bases for decision and judgments to aesthetic considerations. "The ability to affect decisions and judgments through aesthetic means becomes what is struggled over using aestheticized commodities. The outcome of such struggles takes the form of aesthetic bases for identity and social organization."[91]

In addition, I have opted to make use of market contexts in my analysis since market contexts account for commodities and good as "languages and systems of signs"; where people make sense of commodities by appropriating specific images, symbols, and meanings to those commodities.[92] For example, the frequent signification and manipulation of the gay rainbow icon represents doesn't represent a singular meaning, but rather an assortment of cultural meanings: "pride", "queer", "gay consumerism", and/or "subversive." Moreover, subcategories for market contexts take into account "aesthetic basis for identity and social organization", "communities and subjects coher[ing] around forms", and "pleasure and desire."[93]

Finally, I have chosen to make use of *aesthetic rationales*. Aesthetic rationales are imperative to an examination using a rhetoric of style as a method because motivations

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[91] Ibid., 145.
[92] Ibid., 146.
[93] Ibid., 148.

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are "activated aesthetically", especially in a culture dominated by aesthetic appeals. As noted by Brummett, "Reasons, motives and so forth are activated aesthetically in a culture that is aesthetically dominated, as is ours."[94] Thus, when design aesthetics are specially calculated for the purpose of selling commodities, an aesthetic rationale all the more appropriately links into market considerations. "When we decide less on the basis of argument, then the remaining bases for appeal – aesthetics, style, feeling, and so forth – tend to be mechanisms of the market."[95]

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter I have established the significance of studying and critically examining urban spaces as constitutive domains and the backdrop for sexual style markers. I also presented my selected text for closer examination via my chosen method of Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style. In the following chapter I analyze gay style in gay urban spaces via an application and analysis of these three speculative components and their subcategories to contribute to an examination in the process of how gay style is organized, structure, coded, communicated, and decoded by readers.

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[94] Ibid., 127.
[95] Ibid., 128.

APPLICATION AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 4: Gay Style and the Capitol City

"There is no 'gay ghetto' here. On the other hand, gay people are everywhere."

– Michael Barnes, *Austin-American Statesman*

In the previous chapters I have provided a framework and background for my analysis in this chapter. The central question of my thesis has been how we read sexuality via gay style markers in the built environment of gay urban spaces. This one question further underscores similarly related questions regarding gay space(s). How do we know we are in a gay space? What constitutes a gay space? How do gay spaces function stylistically to communicate sexuality? What are the sexual style markers that signify, either representatively or constitutively that a particular urban space is "gay" to non-heterosexual and heterosexual people alike? How do people conclude something is "gay" or gives off the impression of "gayness" from an aesthetic and point of view in an urban environment?

This chapter offers an answer to these questions. Making use of Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style, I employ his method as a speculative guide and demonstrate how readings of gay style markers allows for the ability to determine what constitutes a gay space, gay district, or gay neighborhood. By analyzing gay style within urban spaces in the city of Austin, Texas, I argue that gay style markers reflect a coherent and

consistent style that can be read as *gayness* or *gay style*. Additionally, I illustrate gay style markers are what representatively constitute a gay space.

Gay style and gay style markers are important because they figure prominently into the cultural and social organization of what "gayness" or gay style signifies and constitutes. It organizes our expectations of what a non-heterosexual space, person, object, or commodity should be akin to. In addition, where as "straight style" is a ubiquitous and taken for granted style because it is the socially dominant style order, it is nevertheless defined analogous vis-à-vis gay style. As such, a critical cultural examination of gay style markers as rhetorical, stylistic, and systematic is noteworthy because gay style puts into relief the heteronormative and hegemonic features of "straight style."

Having shared in the previous chapters that gay style and gay style markers operate within certain spaces to reflect a "gay space", I will demonstrate in this chapter how *coherent*, *consistent*, and *recurring* gay style markers within the built environment of downtown Austin reflect gay style. I do so by offering stylistic connections, or rather, stylistic themes that reflect gay style or gay sexuality. Noting that gay style is embodied in a recurring number of nodal texts and manifested, I investigate particular style markers that consistently and coherently appear in urban spaces. I have divided my analysis into three parts, each one focused on a recurring and consistent style theme reflective of gay style: (1) flamboyance, (2) identity, and (3) queerness.

To demonstrate flamboyance, identity and queerness as coherent and consistent gay style themes or rather style markers in Austin's urban spaces, I have used a number

of sources and data. Though, my sources and data are nowhere near exhaustive, they are demonstrative of readily familiar signs and symbols the everyday reader would discern. I gathered information from Austin's many downtown districts from official websites such as DowntownAustin.com, AustinMarketDistrict.com, 2ndStreetDistrict.com, AustinMarketDistrict.com and the official City of Austin website. In addition, extensive in-field spatial observations were undertaken on my behalf.

Gay City vs. Gay District?

Located along the Colorado River in the heart of central Texas and with a population numbering 800, 000, the city of Austin is a collection of urban nuances. Behind its much larger metropolitan neighbors of Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, Austin is the seat of government for the state, home to several Fortune 500 companies such as Whole Foods, Dell, and Freescale, and considered the undisputed "Live Music Capitol of the World." It is also home to one of the largest public universities in the nation, The University of Texas at Austin, which contributes to the city's diverse demographic population consisting largely of students, high-tech workers, white-collar and blue-collar workers, and also a large immigrant population.

However, despite Austin ideal urban logistics and demographics, the city is more infamously known for its "way of doing things." Many visitors and new comers alike are instantaneously familiar with the city's official/unofficial motto "Keep Austin Weird." Although Austin is located in Travis County, in the epicenter of "conservative country" in Texas, Travis County is incongruously one of the more, if not the most liberal county

in the state. The city's unofficial mantra subsequently not only reflects Austin's urban nuances, but also be seen stylistically in commodified forms. T-shirt mementos, billboards signs, city architecture and politics are all splashed and infused with the "Keep Austin Weird" imperative. The slogan is even reflected in this city's demographic population, as evident by the city's rather large transplant student, bohemian, and gay and lesbian population, which further reinforces and cements Austin's image as a "different" or "unique" city.

At the heart of Austin's "weirdness" is the city's spatial arrangement. Although most of the city may appear to be a coherent urban sprawl, it is divided spatially along discrete boundaries, especially along style boundaries as I demonstrate. One need only look at the city's popular and vibrant downtown district. Usually considered the square area around the Texas Capitol, downtown Austin is demarcated by The University of Texas to the north, Interstate Highway 35 to the east, Lady Bird Lake to the south, and Lamar Boulevard to the west (See Appendix 1).

But how has this particular urban area overwhelmingly grow to become known as Austin's official/unofficial gay district, especially districts such as the Warehouse, 2nd Street, and Market Districts? With no officially designated gay district in the city, how then does this one particular urban area indeed reflect a gay urban district? How can this one spatial urban environment be read as such? Moreover, how does the everyday person arrive at the conclusion that that are indeed in an urban district that is "gay" or "gay friendly?" For the answers to these questions I offer three coherent examinations consistently present throughout downtown Austin that communicate and can be described

as gay style. I should note that I do not mean to suggest that these particular themes are universal or exhaustive across all spectrums of gay style, but rather, they reflect dominant connotations of gay style.

Flamboyance

One recurring coherent and consistent style marker demonstrative of gay style is the marker, *flamboyance*. By flamboyance I do not aim to invoke the gendered perception of flamboyance as simply something an "effeminate," non-heterosexual individual would connote either through speech, gesture, or clothing. Rather, it denotes a threefold systematic understanding of flamboyance, where it is manifested stylistically either as a noun (flamboyance), an adjective (flamboyant), or an adverb (flamboyantly).

Simply put, I describe flamboyance as a stylistic gesture that signifies to be, to do, or constitute gayness/gay style. It is a coherent and recurring style theme that signifies, is read, and reproduced to impart generally agreed upon notions of extravagantness, aestheticism, sought-after attention, and to be consumed visually either by gay or straight patrons in an occupied space. Most importantly, flamboyance is concerned with the grandiose constitution of some particular text, be it an action, object, or person that allows for the signification and communication of flamboyance. However, it need not be a single manifested form, but rather, a conjured notion via some text that aesthetically and stylistically represents, constitutes, and/or generates flamboyance rhetorically through gay style markers.

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Conceptualizing flamboyance as a marker of gay style is significant because it further aids in understanding it as a primary text of gay style. Flamboyance as a primary text and marker of gay style is important because the primacy of a text affords the coherent and consistent organization of the signs, markers, and symbols that reflect gay style. In a similar manner we dominantly read others style such as "country", "punk", and "foreigner", we can also read gay style markers such as flamboyance that signify non-heterosexual sexuality from a particular aesthetic in a particular space. Flamboyance as a style marker further coalesces to constitute the system of signs, symbols, and images that connote dominate readings of gay style. For instance, the reading of "country", "punk", "foreigner", and gay style are read systematically; they are particular style markers that each reflect and (re)present these particular styles.

Moreover, an explanation and demonstration of flamboyance grounded in style as a systematic and coherent marker of gay style is important because, I contend that gay urban spaces are not necessarily or simply spaces occupied or inhabited by gay peoples, but rather, they are spaces constituted by a diverse collection of gay style markers. This is the case in Austin, which does not have an officially agreed upon gay district or neighborhood, and yet, can be read to be such a space via the reading of gay style markers such as flamboyance.

In downtown Austin, flamboyance is manifested in a variety of style texts and forms, and dominantly read to conclude a reading of gay style. More importantly, flamboyance is not only a marker of gay style within a particular urban space, as is the case in my analysis of gay style markers in downtown Austin, but can further be found

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within a variety of other spaces not necessarily deemed "gay." Where there are gay style markers, the potential to forge a gay urban space is present; any space can be or transform itself into a gay space via gay style markers. This notion further alludes to the constitutive nature of gay spaces. While I argue gay style markers are what define a "gay district", I should note and stress, however, that my argument of flamboyance as the primary gay style marker is supported by firsthand experience and infield observations of downtown Austin. In addition, I should not that I do not suggest that flamboyance can only be read as "gay", but rather, that it is dominantly read as such.

I start first by describing the Warehouse District located in the heart of downtown Austin. Instantly recognized by its assortment of brick-construction warehouses, formerly used at the turn of the century to house hay and grain, most of these single story warehouses have been partitioned and converted into to multiple popular cafés, restaurants, commercial offices, and nighttime venues. The district itself spans four full city blocks demarcated by Republic Square Park to the west, 3rd Street to the south, Colorado Street to the east, and 6th Street to the north (See Appendix 1). Although, known simply as the "Warehouse District" for its collection of cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs, this one particular area of downtown does indeed constitute a gay district regardless of its lack for being recognized as such. I use this one urban area, and surrounding neighborhoods, to demonstration how the material structures and interiors of these spaces illustrate markers of gay style.

Walking down 4th Street, which serves as the main thoroughfare in the district, structures in the Warehouse District stand apart from the newly constructed high-rises

condo towers and stucco façades of other buildings in the downtown area that surround

the district. Flaunting their brick-and-mortar façades, most of which have been

persevered, these brick buildings, although similar in form and construction, are

distinguish apart as "gay" by particular markers of flamboyance on building façades,

interior spaces, and structural layout. One need only look at the three gay nighclubs in

the Warehouse district Kiss and Fly, Rain, and Oilcan Harry's (OCH) as material texts

illustrative of flamboyance in the built environment. Flamboyance is read off these urban

structures in the form of visual aesthetics, mostly reflected in name banners, gay

iconography, spatial layout, décor and access into and out of the venues, which I refer to

as spatial experience.

First, the exterior façades of all three gay nightclubs in the district aesthetically

bespeak flamboyance via particular markers. Most, if not all, of the buildings in the

Warehouse District occupied by patrons or used for commercial business, have large

clear see-through doors, windows, or even moveable sliding walls to open the structures

to the outside. These openings clearly make visible anything occurring inside, allowing

patrons easy visible access into the interior of these structures showing people eating at

tables or gathering by bars. There is very little if anything to hide or obstruct what occurs

inside these "regular" buildings and spaces.

This is not the case, however, with OCH, Kiss and Fly, and Rain, where the

opposite occurs. The exterior façades of these structures appear rather deprived and

suggestive, as result of their incongruity by lacking visible window space compared to

other structures on the block. Instead, small windows on doors, frosted opaque windows,

and textured glass blocks mask and obscure the inside spaces of these structures from the public, offering only minimal peeks. Patrons walking by or wishing to know what lies beyond have only the option of going inside to experience the interior space of these structures.

All three buildings are also clad with several visual elements of gay iconography, which include the easily recognizable rainbow "pride flag." OCH's exterior façade features several pride flags draped along various flagpoles, while a rainbow-colored border is painted along the entire length of Rain's exterior façade, and Kiss and Fly simply has one oversized pride flag atop its structure. It should also be noted these three buildings are the only structures directly on 4th street that have their entire exterior façades painted over with bright colors; most of the other buildings in the district have their expose brick persevered. These features collectively differentiate these structures from all the other structures in the district.

Figure 1: Kiss and Fly exterior façade

The exterior façades of these structures is not the only terrain flamboyance can be read off of, the spatial layout and subsequent spatial experience at these venues can also be read as flamboyant. People entering OCH, Rain, and Kiss and Fly are instantly greeted with a discrete foyer space specifically designed to momentarily pause people and allow them to visually take in the expanse of the interior space. Not only do these discreet introductory spaces function as checkpoints for patrons to gain entry (i.e. ID-checking and payment for entry), but they also complement the spatial experience by building suspense and anticipation to what awaits further inside. These foyer spaces function aesthetically as introductory spatial points where patrons are inculcated into the full gay spatial experience to come in these gay venues, conjuring the experience of being at a theater where guests are greeted into a lobby only to wait in anticipation of an imminent performance.

Beyond these preface-like spaces patrons are confronted with the visual and spatial centerpiece of these structures, the dance floor. All three gay venues have designated spaces strictly dedicated for the purpose of holding performances and dancing. In fact, unlike other structures, these buildings are the only structures on 4th Street that have specifically designated spaces for dancing and are discretely marked by the instillation of wood railings, dance cages, strobe lighting, bright floor lighting, and raised platforms. These dance floors are also unique in that they almost act as flamboyant invitations for people to make use of them to publically display and express themselves. Unlike typical dance floors that restrict access to specific parts, such as raised platforms

and dance cages reserved for professional dancers or performers, these dance floors are easily accessible and open to anyone willing to perform and be on display.
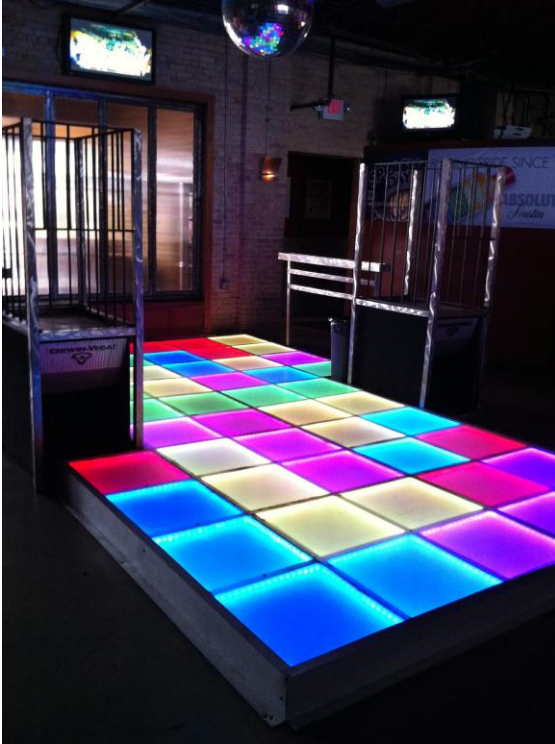
Figure 2: Lighted dance floor at Rain   Figure 3: Railing around OCH dance floor
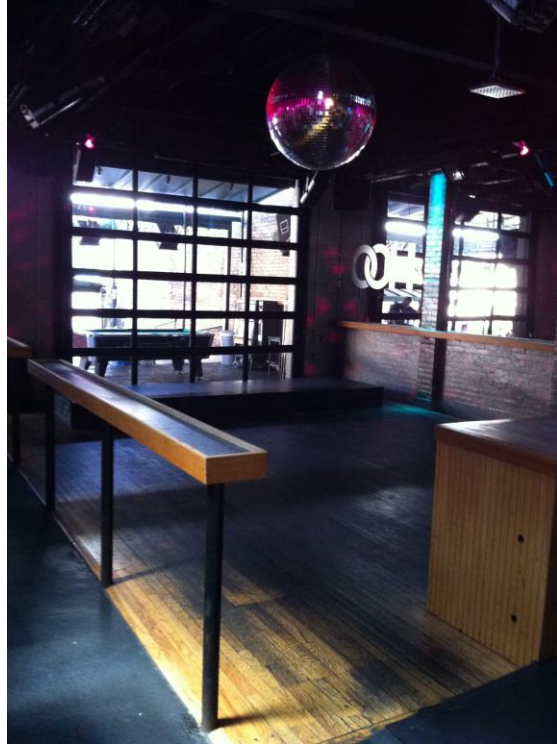
In addition to dances floors and introductory foyer spaces that build spatial hype, the building's decor is further suggestive of flamboyant gestures and connotations. Lighting throughout these interior spaces is dimmed and subdued at all times, OCH features colorfully unisex restrooms featuring slim shelving above toilet seats and urinals to place one's drink while busy. Here, instead of discretion and propriety, a visit to the restroom is merely another extension of public space to see and be seen. Similarly, Kiss and Fly further features several opaque restroom and stall doors and an underground basement lounge with several intimate lounging seating, and Rain features a caged space for anyone to flaunt themselves while dancing in public.

Finally, as people head toward the exit they are confronted with a choice of two strategically placed exist to use. In addition, to the main entrance at the front of these buildings, there is also another exit prominently yet discretely located at the rear of the building. Unlike most of the nightclubs, cafes, and restaurants in the Warehouse District that only utilize the main entrance, OCH, Kiss and Fly, and Rain make use of several exits, allowing patrons to enter and/or exit from the front or rear of the building. These exit spaces, which are only available at gay venues in the district, allow patrons to enter or exit discretely. One can equate this spatial occurrence to an ostentatious theatrical performance where a performer enters the stage from one entrance and magical disappears through another.

Taken together, these small structural and spatial features may appear insignificant but indeed systematically coalesce to reflect, constitute, and generate a coherent and consistent reading of flamboyance as a marker of gay style. Returning to Brummett's a rhetoric of style, we can conceptualize flamboyance as a prime text of gay style. It recurrently materializes itself in the built environment of these structures in the Warehouse District and communicates "gay style" because of the manner in which flamboyance is associated with particular meaning, read, and then related to.

In Austin's Warehouse District, structural cues in the form of inviting dance floors, suggestive façades, and alternative exits communicate flamboyant sensibilities as a result of the meanings associated with them. Masked exterior façades conjure the value of secrecy and privacy, while alluring dance cages and vibrant décor allude to uninhibited awareness and provocation. Flamboyance as a style text is read of the built environment

and functions to communication values, motives, identities, and sensibilities of gay style and subsequently the gay community at large.

I should note that I do not propose these structural and spatial features are necessarily flamboyant in and of themselves, but rather, they invoke and facilitate a reading of flamboyance. What is at play in the Warehouse District is the communication of gay style through flamboyance. As a marker of gay style, flamboyance anchors this urban district, and to a further extent the gay community in Austin. As a text, flamboyant gestures, markers, and cues within OCH, Rain, and Kiss and Fly facilitate a general consensus of the values, motivations, intentions, and identities of the Warehouse District – the values and motivations of a gay space. This is significant because cultural style markers, in this case the cultural text of flamboyance are what anchor the Warehouse District as a gay space and community.

As noted by Brummett, "The community that is an effect of a text is then held together by meanings that hold together the text."[96] Flamboyance, however, isn't also the primary text communities ahead to; there are a variety of other style markers to can similarly signify gay style such as verbal cues and stylistic contradictions. For example verbal elongation and flamboyant somatic gestures can both reflect gay style without being signified through a built material environment. The breath of my thesis only focuses and considers flamboyance. This systematic signification of particular signs and symbols is crucial because cultural texts, in this case connotative notions of gay style – mediate the creation of different meanings, values, motivations, allegiances, identities,

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[96] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, 137.

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communities, and intentions in everyday life. However, it should also be noted that the reading and decoding of a text will usually identity more than one possible meaning, but usually reflects a dominant reading. For instance, the notion of queerness, which will be detailed in the following section, can be in a variety of contexts and hold different meanings. The reading of flamboyance as a primary text is crucial because it functions to rhetorically communicate gay style.

Flamboyant Communities

Another coherent and recurring extension of flamboyance as a marker of gay style is the resulting rhetorical effect it has in signifying and incorporating gay style into the formation of individual and community identities. By this, I imply the impact of flamboyance in process of marking a specified space as a "gay" districts through rhetorical and commodified gestures – market contexts and aesthetic rationales. Brummett notes identity is constructed and rooted in style, where the role of commodification is part and parcel of identity formation: "[I]dentity is the sum (and perhaps a shifting and unstable sum) of who we are, with whom we affiliate, and against whom we align"[97] This is significant to consider in this analysis because as a marker and text of gay style, flamboyance anchors the Warehouse District community as a de facto gay urban space.

In addition to a reading of flamboyance off the built environment in urban spaces and structures, such as OCH, Rain, and Kiss and Fly, one can further recognize the

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[97] Ibid., 83.

rhetorical import of flamboyance through a commodified style approach. By going beyond the simple communication of gay style, we can further assess the meaning behind signs and symbols via the systematic system of them as a result of commodification and meanings that appropriate gay markers. After all, it is in the context of commercial and global mark systems that the meaning of specific signs and symbols is spread, produced, and incorporated; in this case the spread of gay style via readings of flamboyance. This is important to note because a reading of flamboyance and its aesthetic markers is inherently tied to market considerations, which ultimately function as the main terrain on which we make cultural judgments and decisions. As Brummett contends, "Reasons, motives, and so forth are activated aesthetically in a culture that is aesthetically dominated, as is ours."[98]

By identity and commodification I do not propose flamboyance is the sole marker of gay style defining a gay district or neighborhood, but rather, that it is the general marker widely recognized and agreed upon to make such a reading of a specific space. In the similar manner that a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, or horse, conjure a universal conception of "cowboy style" or "Western", flamboyant markers are token gestures that embody gay style.

Take for instance, the absence of any kind of LGBT community center in Austin or downtown Austin. This sentiment is noted by a district-wide survey conducted by the Austin-American Statesman: "What's missing in Austin, according to many survey participants, is a sense of larger gay identity. The loss of the Cornerstone community

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[98] Ibid., 127.

center several years ago – reputedly because of lack of interest among gay and lesbian Austinites – still saddens and confounds those who want a shared social space."[99] The lack of such a community center, usually seen as an indicator or qualifier for a gay district, does not appear to hinder the efficacy of downtown neighborhoods like the Warehouse District from being seen as gay districts.

This particular issue is noteworthy because of the Warehouse District's close proximity to other largely residential and commercial shopping districts such as Market and 2nd Street Districts (See Appendix 2). To the east of the Warehouse District lies the commercial and residential Market District, with several high-rise condo towers, commercial businesses, the Whole Foods flagship store, restaurants, and several health spas and gyms; the district serves as one of the more vibrant and expensive locations downtown. The area is touted as, "A nexus of activity that attracts locals, tourists, hippie hold-outs, soccer moms, rocker moms and hipsters alike."[100] Just south of the Warehouse District lies the 2nd Street District, spanning the entire length of 2nd Street, the area is comprised mainly of high-end retail shops, restaurants with residential units above commercial spaces and also home to Ballet Austin and the W Hotel.

This element of spatial proximity may be appear insignificant, but actually functions to appropriate and disseminate the meanings associated with gay style to

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[99] Michael Barnes and Sean Massey, "'Out' in Austin," *Austin-American Statesman*, June 3, 2001, accessed March 8, 2011, http://www.statesman.com/specialreports/content/specialreports/gaysurvey/3gaysurvey.html.
[100] "Creating a new classic Austin destination," Austin Market District website, accessed July 3, 2011, http://www.austinmarketdistrict.com/.

substitute for a sense of community and commodified identity, through commercial and aesthetic means. For example, the neighboring retail stores in the 2nd Street District occupy as an urban space that was intentionally built to maximize retail spending and ensure a pleasurable shopping experience. Strolling along double-wide sidewalks, canopy trees, and picturesque retail façades is not only an everyday experience but an experience encountered aesthetically and stylistically – a flamboyant experience. This flamboyant spatial experience is viscerally rooted within an already commercialized context as well. Known for its outdoor cafes and retail patios, the 2nd Street shopping experience is also one rooted in pleasure. Similar to OCH, Kiss and Fly, and Rain's flamboyant spatial markers, shopping on 2nd Street is an urban spot to shop while being put on display. Downtown Austin is unique in that retail shops and nightclubs coalesce to conjure the same commercial, aesthetic, and pleasurable experience.

What is unique in downtown Austin, especially the Warehouse District, 2nd Street, and the Market District, is the seamlessness of all three districts. It is no coincidence that nightclubs such OCH, Rain, and Kiss and Fly are only steps away from high-end retail stores and posh hotels. This whole urban environment is built for the influx of spending and the incorporation of style markers. As Brummett notes, "The market is a mechanism for spreading sign systems and their meanings… a rhetorical system that makes use of the market is relatively international…"[101] As such, flamboyance in this instance is infused into the aesthetic retail experience of these districts. This is important to note because the

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[101] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, 126.

spatial experience in these retail areas activate judgments and associations of gay style through flamboyant gestures of pleasure.

Figure 4: W Hotel on 2nd Street

Finally, the role of market contexts and aesthetic rationales is further complicated by larger social considerations. Not only is gay style a particular *kind* of style with its own unique markers and meanings, gay style can also serve and function towards political ends. Gay style, like another other form of popular culture can be a political instrumental in social and culture power struggles. This is a vital component of gay style because it functions to represent and/or reflect gay communities in heteronormative mainstream society, resulting in a kind of "battle over styles" played out rhetorically on a

topography of style. As cited by Brummett, "For style to be politically instrumental, the meanings of style must be widely shared and regularized – hence style as a language… All groups… express claims to power and to political alignment in aesthetic judgments that are keyed to style."[102]

This is important to consider because in an urban space such as the Warehouse District and similarly districts such as the Market and 2nd Street Districts – spaces that are not generally recognized as gay urban spaces – become "gay spaces" via a convergence of recurring signs and symbols that conjure widely held meanings. One triangulates the meaning and recognition of a gay district through a reading of style markers such as aesthetic and spatial experiences reminiscent of flamboyant gestures, which can be conceptualized as a mythic cultural text that holds valuable meaning for individuals and the community at large. "The community that is an effect of a test is held together by meanings that hold together in the text."[103] The holding-together of text and community and vice versa is done primarily through stylistic means.

Queerness

Another component factoring into the reading of gay style through the marker flamboyance is the role of *queerness*. By queerness I refer to a sense of gay sensibility that is both a mode and manner of *doing* or *being* "gay." This is not to be confused with the similar deprecating and derogatory phrase "That's gay", but rather, conceptualized as an attempt to identify and describe a specific essence or finesse in some text, situation, or

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[102] Ibid., 99.
[103] Ibid., 137.

image that is appropriated as gay. For example, the almost ubiquitous presence of rainbow-colored iconography in gay districts does not necessarily automatically signify "gay pride", it must be made to signify or be decoded as such accounting for context, medium and in this analysis style.

This is critical to take into account because the world of today is one enticed and engrossed by aesthetics and style. As a result the use of aesthetic rationales and motivations become all the more relevant and important in examining gay style in downtown Austin. "An aesthetic rationale is manifested in quality of image, what is compelling or not, pleasing or shocking, attention-getting, and so forth… the rhetoric of style is largely concerned with the visual and with the effects created by managing the image."[104] That said, not only can the image be "managed", but it can also be contested and struggled over a terrain of style. We see this occur on a daily basis when acceptable forms of gay markers are tolerate but not other markers that are considered too unorthodox from mainstream style, such as "overly effeminate men" versus "passable gay men."

This aesthetic engrossment is not only reflected in images and signs, but also manifested into the very spatial and aesthetic experiences patrons encounter in an urban space – how some experience a particular space, such as proximity to particular spaces and places gives insight into how a style markers can be contested.

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[104] Ibid., 129-130.

Figure 5: OCH on 4th Street with W Hotel and state government building in background

For example, in downtown Austin the city's city hall building up on 2nd Street and is located only two city blocks away from OCH, Rain, and Kiss and Fly. Furthermore, the Warehouse District, the Market District, and 2nd Street District are all blocks away from the state capitol, a spatial coincidence that many LGBT organizations and business have taken advantage for political advantage and influence. Groups such as QueerBoom, Guerrilla Queer Bar, and the Austin Pride Parade and Festival have all utilized urban spaces to spread their message by hosting parades, festival, protests, and rallies.[105] For

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[105] "QueerBoom Austin," accessed July 3, 2011, http://queerbomb.org/about.

instance, QueerBomb has conducted several protest sit-ins and rallies within the

downtown area, fully aware of its proximity to city, state, and federal buildings.

These spatial considerations are significant because style resides not only on

political, cultural, and aesthetic terrains, but also heavily rooted on an ideological

landscape. Style markers are visceral reminders of particular values, groups, and

resources where displays of style can function as discourse that is persuasive and capable

of influencing political action.[106] For example, the annual Austin Pride Parade and

Festival have been hosted downtown several times with the Pride Festival in Republic

Park and the Pride Parade's route always running through 4th Street in the heart of the

Warehouse District.[107] QueerBoom and Guerrilla Queer Bar have also employed the use

of urban spaces for political and ideological ends; with both groups having held political

rallies and sit-ins at Austin City Hall and local commercial businesses. Moreover, the fact

that all three districts are only a few blocks away from government institutions make

these urban spaces prime sites partially dependent on spatial access for influence.

The political and ideological components of gay style via queerness further reflect

a style language of sorts with great rhetorical import. For instance, if a retail store on 2nd

Street were to inadvertently incite an LGBT incident, they could literally undergo

financial hardship as a result of their direct location in a "gay" friendly district. This is

crucial to consider because it emphasizes the relevance and dominance of style as an

ideological tools or means. "[T]he ascendancy of style as a political language means that

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[106] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, 80.
[107] "Austin Gay and Lesbian Pride Foundation," accessed July 3, 2011,
http://austinpride.org/.

the gradual reduction of a long tradition of verbal, expositional, argumentative discourse as the hallmark of political and democratic discourse."[108]

In the case of gay urban spaces, especially in downtown Austin, the role of signifying flamboyant gestures and markers is embodied materially and stylistically through connotative aesthetics and evocative spatial experiences. In the "queer" sense, we see this manifest in this analysis when the very materiality of an urban space directly shapes the manner in which people and whole communities see themselves in specific social, political, and economic spaces and places. This is point further detailed by Alexander Doty, who contends that a reliance of queerness, introduces an inherent component of instability and continual reordering.[109]

Moreover, this crucial consideration of queerness's political and social import is tantamount to an analysis of gay style markers in downtown Austin, because so much of an urban space influences the way many individual and communities go about living day to day, especially when some groups are oppressed and/or disenfranchised from more power and dominate mainstream groups. My analysis has shown that the level on which this role is waged on is primary on a systematic, rhetorical, and stylistic terrain via appeals to aesthetics, commercial markets, and personal and community identity.

This focus on the impact and value of built material environment and urban spaces is highlighted by Sharon Zukin, who notes the potency of visual signs and symbols manifested and embodies in material spaces: "Visual artifacts of material culture

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[108] Ibid., 95.
[109] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993).

and political economy thus reinforce – or comment on – social structure. By making social rules legible, they represent the city."[110] For Zukin, urban spaces have become overrun by paradigm changes towards appeals that satisfy our "aesthetic urge." Moreover, this urban appeal towards aesthetics and style is further rooted on the very systematic order of signification, or rather; the symbolic economy of urban spaces is founded on two systems, "the production of space and the production of symbols, which construct both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity.[111] 45

A Reading of Gay Style

Thus far, I have offered an application and analysis of how a reading of gay style is accomplished through the decoding of particular flamboyant style makers present in Austin's downtown districts. I have demonstrated how the exterior façades and interior spaces of structures on 4th Street, building décor, spatial proximity, and aesthetic spatial experiences signify flamboyant notions of gay style. I have further demonstrated the interconnection of flamboyance as a primary text that anchors gay style aesthetically and through market contexts, community identity, and ideological efficacy via queerness.

However, at this point, my idiosyncratic reading of gay style in the built urban spaces in Austin's Warehouse Districts has not exposed the underlining thread that connects my analysis of gay style in downtown Austin, to one the everyday person would similarly concluded. How does a reading of gay style translate into one any other person

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[110] Sharon Zukin, "Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline," in *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the Twenty-First Century Metropolis* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1996), 44.
[111] Ibid., 45.

strolling through the Warehouse District and surrounding neighborhoods may know they are indeed in a gay urban space. For that, I turn to familiar and dominant gay culture stereotypes that generally employ gay style. As noted by Brummett, style's emphasis on aesthetic engrossment not only serves as the basis for identity and social organization, but also does so by incorporating cultural and social narratives. "[A]esthetic rationale largely incorporates a narrative rationale, and narratives are nothing if not systematic. It is the systematicity at the heart of narrative that connects it to systems of signs and meaning…"[112]

Narrative here is a crucial component to how universal readings of gay style can be deciphered and concluded because the signification of flamboyant markers hinges on a cultural repertoire of meanings that are drawn from to decode gay style. By this, I mean to suggest dominant stereotypical notions of gay style and more largely gay culture. Take for instance simple notions such "butch", "fem", "dyke", and "chic." They conjure particular images and symbols that have been inculcated into our style repertoire through cultural narratives of non-heterosexual culture – the myths, iconography, and symbols that have been perpetuate through various mediums such as the media.

In Austin's Warehouse District, structures like OCH, Rain or Kiss and Fly's dance floor, although simple enough, can be generally read as flamboyant because of their appropriated and associated meaning with larger notions of gay culture. A dance for example conjures notions of public display, bodily expression, and style when situated against the backdrop of the gay culture narrative. Not only do stylistic narratives serve as

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[112] Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*, 148.

the cultural repertoire which we draw from to read style markers, but they also aid in the decoding of gay style markers.

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter I have offered an application and analysis of a rhetoric of style examining my initial question: How does a one read gay style markers of the built environment and subsequently make the conclusion that they are in a gay space? What are the sexual style markers that signify or connote to gay and straight people alike that the space they are situated can de define as a "gay space?" I have shown through aesthetic appeals, market contexts, and community identity that flamboyance does indeed function as a style marker to signifies gay style within the material environment of downtown Austin's Warehouse District.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 5: Gay Style and Beyond

"The rhetoric of style is new, and it is old, and it is how we communicate in our world

today".

– Barry Brummett, *A Rheotric of Style*

In my thesis, I have argued a reading of gay style in urban spaces is accomplished through a decoding of particular gay style markers off the built environment. Through a detailed examination of the gay style marker flamboyance in downtown Austin's Warehouse District and surrounding 2nd Street and Market Districts, I have demonstrated that gay style markers are indeed present in this otherwise ordinary urban space. My initial point of inquiry was pausing to take a closer look into the everyday phenomenon of "gaydar", where a person's non-heterosexual sexual orientation is inferred through a decoding of their outwardly expressed appearance. I questioned if this prosaic phenomenon, usually reserved to bodily considerations, could be conceptualized in a broader sense by looking into a possible gaydar equivalent used to read sexuality off the built environment of urban spaces.

Employing gaydar as a launch pad to my initial question, I further developed my question by asking: How do we read and decipher sexual style markers off the built environment of urban spaces? From what cultural repertoire do we draw from to make

sexuality assessments based on gay style? What features or elements go into defining and/or constituting a gay space, district, or neighborhood?

Through an application employing Brummett's method of a rhetoric of style, the answer I have offered to these questions is that sexual style markers can indeed be read off the built material environment of urban spaces, and moreover, function as the defining markers that collectively band together to constitute a gay urban space. I argued that gay sexual style markers are not only capable of being coded on bodies and signified – as is the case with gaydar, but equally capable of being read off the built material environment of urban gay spaces. Moreover, I argued that gay spaces are not necessarily urban areas and spaces inhabited and used by predominately non-heterosexual people, but rather, gay urban districts and neighbors are urban spaces filled and constituted by gay style markers. As I demonstrated in chapter five, although Austin's Warehouse District is not an officially recognized gay district or neighborhood, an abundance of gay style markers present would prove it is indeed a de facto gay urban space. Through aesthetic appeals, market connections, and a sense of identity and community, this downtown area can be considered a gay urban space.

I demonstrated this by examining the style components of gay style through thematic extensions of flamboyance, flamboyant communities, and queerness, all of which took into consideration aesthetic rationales, market considerations, and the primacy of flamboyance as a cultural text that shapes and holds to a sense of gay community in downtown Austin.

Moreover, my application and analysis of gay style in urban spaces not only offers thorough answers to my initial points of inquiry, but also further expands insight into the growing complexity of the intersection of sexuality, space, and style. In my introduction chapter, I described the increasing variability and instability of relying on entirely somatic considerations for defining gay spaces. I emphasized this point by introducing an a New York Times article underscoring the significance of verifying someone's sexuality solely on stylistic appearance in a time when the sexual style markers representing a variety of sexualities, be they heterosexual or non-heterosexual, have grown complex and flexible.

Implications and Areas for Future Research

The implications of this project are profound when one considers the cultural and social significance of sexuality in all its forms, be they biologically, political, or economic. With growing social tolerance for non-normative heterosexual sexualities, the manner in which we go about reading, deciphering, and relating to sexual orientation and sexuality becomes all the more pertinent, especially when we consider that we cannot see sexual orientation per se, but only the signs, symbols, and markers that signify and communicate it. Not only are these sexual style markers signified, but they are done so systematically and rhetorically.

My thesis, although not exhaustive, has highlighted how a particular style marker – flamboyance – provokes readers to conclude the presence of gay sensibilities within certain urban space(s). Not only does the presence of gay style markers lead readers to

discern gay style within an urban space, but they also in defining a particular urban space as a "gay space." The presence of gay markers not only leads readers to discern gay style within an urban space, but also serves to define a particular urban space as a "gay space."

The implications of my argument further highlight future conceptualizations of gay spaces. If gay style markers indeed define and constitute gay urban spaces, how might the impact of growing social and cultural toleration reconfigure the meaning of gay spaces? Will there be a need for discreet districts and neighborhoods when any urban space can be stylized via gay style to become a gay space?

With regard to future areas of research, the intersection of space and style might serve as a fertile field to further explore, especially when style and spatial elements exert more influence in recent social, cultural, and political happenings. One recent example would be the introduction of portable and mobile phone apps that allow people to meet and find other people in particular spaces. Gay mobile phone apps such as Grindr and Jack'd allow gays men (and soon lesbian women) to find each based on their mobile phone location via GPS.[113] This piece of spatial technology allows people to bypass the whole "gaydar" process and instantly locate other gay people. I specifically point out this exemplar, because it underscores the role of space and sexuality, when gay people are everywhere and not necessarily bound by the boundaries of gay districts and neighborhoods the role of space and style become new indicators for deciphering sexuality in social settings.

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[113] "What is Grindr," Grindr website, accessed July 20, 2011, http://grindr.com/Grindr_iPhone_App/What_is_Grindr.html.

Another future area for research to consider would be the role that style and spatiality place with regard to LGBT political and economic progress. By this, I mean to imply a certain sense of gay "situated-ness", where gay and lesbian people have to be in some particular space or place for political or economic efficacy. Take for instance, several LGBT marches and protest rallies that take "*place*" in front of government building and open public arenas. For a community as diversified as the LGBT community, space and style factor into how they seek political, economic, and social equality. One only need consider a recent example of NYC's Pop-Up Gay Museum, where temporary public spaces throughout New York City are transformed into museum exhibits displaying LGBT history.[114] I point out this example because it highlights the working role of being "situated" in some particular space or place to communicate a deliberate message.

In closing, I offer my thesis as a token project exploring the ever increasing role of style as systematic, communicative, and rhetorical domain. While my thesis argues gay style consists of a collection coherent and systematic signs and symbols that can be read through material environments, my ultimate intention was to show an analysis of one type of style from a vast number of many styles.

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[114] "What We Do," The Pop-Up Museum of Queer History, accessed July 20, 2011, http://www.queermuseum.com/home/about/.

Appendix 1

DOWNTOWN AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

Attractions ○
1 Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum
2 Texas State Library & Archives
3 Capitol Visitors Center
4 Governor's Mansion
5 Austin Museum of Art
6 Arthouse at the Jones Center for Contemporary Art
7 Austin Visitors Center
8 Mexic-Arte Museum
9 Austin Children's Museum
10 New City Hall

Residential Buildings ○
1 404 Rio Grande Apartments
2 AMLI Downtown Apartments
3 Austin City Lofts
4 Avenue Lofts
5 Brazos Lofts
6 Brown Building
7 Cambridge Tower
8 Five Fifty Five
9 Gables West Apartments
10 Littlefield Quarters
11 The Nokonah
12 Penthouse Condominiums
13 Plaza Lofts
14 Posada del Rey
15 Railyard Condominiums
16 Regency Apartments
17 Towers of Town Lake
18 Villas on Town Lake
19 Westgate Building

Appendix 2

Austin's Warehouse District and W. 6th Street

- Revised January 4, 2006 -

Also available is a printer-friendly 52K PDF (Adobe Acrobat) map of the **Warehouse District and W. 6th Street** updated September 8, 2005.
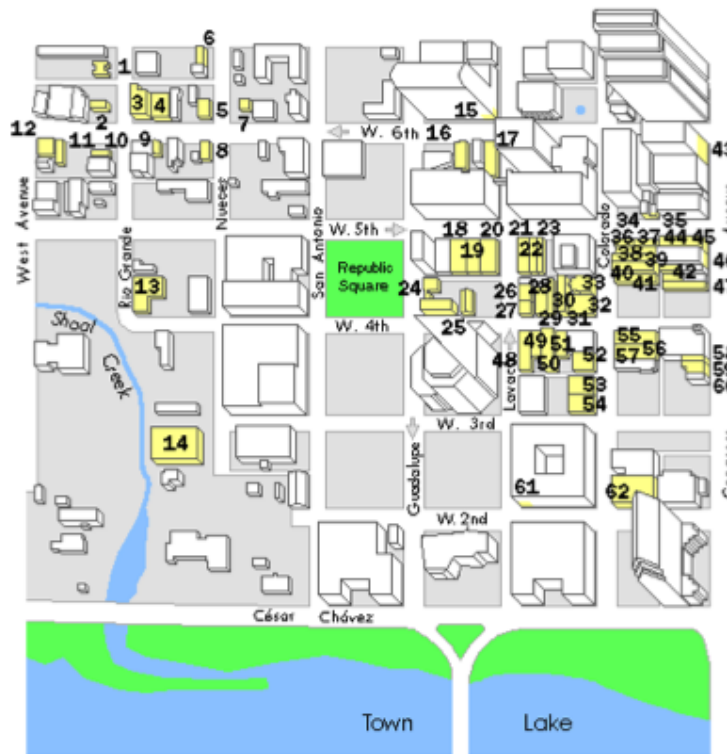
1. Aquarelle
2. Opal Divine's Freehouse
3. Katz's / Momo's
4. Rocco's
5. Star Bar
6. Ranch 616
7. Little Woodrow's
8. Thai Tara

32. Truluck's
33. Vicci
34. Apple Bar
35. The Onion
36. Kenichi
37. Noodle-Ism
38. Ringers
39. Cuba Libre

Appendix 3

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The community plaza that will form the central nervous system of the BOOM development near Palm Springs, California.

The project is the $250 million love child of BOOM Communities, Inc., a Los Angeles–based real estate investment company, in conjunction with project leader Matthias Hollwich of New York firm HWKN. (Hollwich is also the mastermind behind the New Aging initiative and — full disclosure! — a co-founder of Architizer.)

BOOM will break ground in 2012 starting with 300 residences built in eight neighborhoods, each designed by a different firm. The masterplan is under the purview of HWKN with landscape design by Surfacedesign, Inc. Phase 2 of the project will add another 600 residences. The social and geographic center of the development, shown above in rendering, will include an entertainment complex, a boutique hotel, a gym and spa, and a wellness center dedicated to the growing health needs of every generation represented onsite.

The BOOM concept extends to the online world as well with www.boomforlife.com, designed by renowned Bruce Mau Design in Toronto, who also developed the BOOM brand and graphic identity. The web portal uses social media to encourage participation from the virtual community in addition to the one built from bricks and mortar.

Without further ado:

J. MAYER H. Architects (Berlin, Germany)

Diller Scofidio + Renfro (New York City)

World Cup of Architecture,   more
June 04 2010

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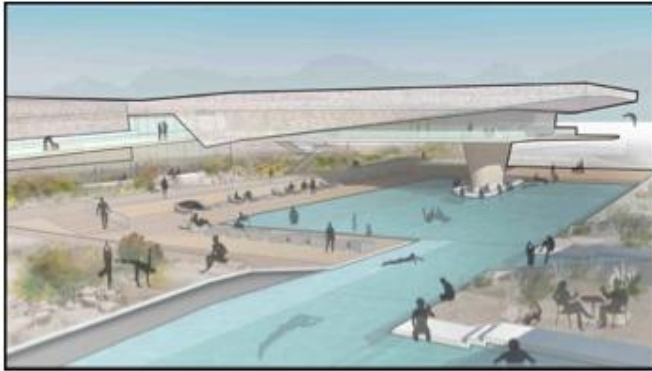
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L2 Tsionov-Vitkon (Tel Aviv, Israel)
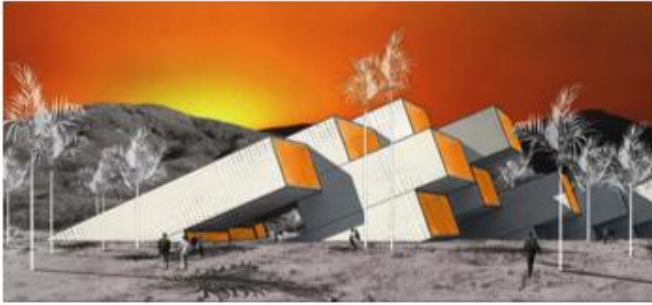
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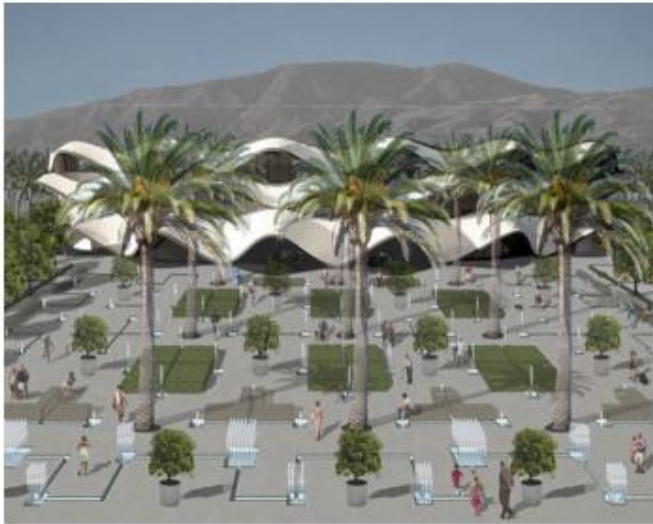Rudin Donner Design (West Hollywood, California)

SADAR + VUGA (Ljubljana, Slovenia)

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Arakawa + Gins (New York City)

Surfacedesign, Inc. (San Francisco, California)

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This thesis way typed by the author.