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PICTURING QUEER DEATH: ALTERNATIVE INSTANTIATIONS OF TEMPORALITY  
WITHIN PROCESS ART

by

JAINY JUNG YEON KIM

Under the Direction of Susan Talburt, PhD

ABSTRACT

During the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, the U.S.' hegemonic heteronormative society saw AIDS as an epidemic threat to the future rather than as a threat to the present, which helped mark queer bodies affected by the virus as being erasable and replaceable. In response to this rise in fear and rage as the only potential affective productions of AIDS-related deaths, much of the queer art produced during this time sought to capture the permanence as well as ephemerality of queer desire and mourning. This project seeks to locate these alternative instantiations of temporality within queer art's vivification of death during this time period in order to disrupt the narrative of chrononormativity—as passage of time being only linear and one-directional—that is employed by neoliberal biopolitics to police and exclude subaltern bodies. To do so, this thesis applies a critical visual analysis to two photography pieces and two process art pieces that depict forms of loss or death by way of a reparative reading that is affectively driven and motivated by desire, pleasure, and curiosity.

INDEX WORDS: Queer Death, Alternative Temporality, Photography, Process Art, Queer Art



PICTURING QUEER DEATH: ALTERNATIVE INSTANTIATIONS OF TEMPORALITY  
WITHIN PROCESS ART

by

JAINEY JUNG YEON KIM

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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2017

PICTURING QUEER DEATH: ALTERNATIVE INSTANTIATIONS OF TEMPORALITY  
WITHIN PROCESS ART

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May 2017

**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father who charted unknown temporalities and spaces  
before me, for me.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1 Time as a Neoliberal Regime of Truth .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.2 Death as Signified .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.3 Art as Signifier.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3 THE BECOMING PHOTOGRAPHS .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3.1 Candy Darling on Her Deathbed .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3.2 “Untitled” (Peter Hujar).....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4 INSTALLATION ART .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>5 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>53</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 Ebony G. Patterson, "Invisible Presence: Bling Memories." (2014) .....	13
Figure 2 Ebony G. Patterson, "Invisible Presence: Bling Memories." (2014) .....	13
Figure 3 "Untitled" Abu Ghraib (2003) .....	15
Figure 4 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Go-Go Dancing Platform). (1991) .....	18
Figure 5 Peter Hujar, "Candy Darling on her Deathbed." (1973).....	26
Figure 6 David Wojnarowicz, "Untitled" (Peter Hujar). (1989).....	35
Figure 7 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed). (1991).....	42

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is a certain voyeuristic pleasure involved in the process of witnessing death as a subject in queer art—specifically art produced during the AIDS crisis in the mid-1970s through the late 1990s—that, for all intents and purposes, should be judged as an “inappropriate” response to the heaviness of death. I feel this pleasure, this inappropriate response, when my eyes meet Candy Darling’s gaze staring back at me but not seeing me from within Peter Hujar’s photograph. “If queerness marks the excess of something always unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse of informing normativity,”<sup>1</sup> then queer art exists to open up and “democratize all experiences by translating them into images,”<sup>2</sup> including experiences of pleasure and desire in a period that demanded that the only heteronormative moral response to AIDS and its queer carriers be rage and fear. If queer art has endless potential as a “kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences... [and] facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging,”<sup>3</sup> then I wish to provide interpretations of the works of Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres that resist chrononormative politics and instead bring into possibility a way of belonging and existing within an alternative rhizomatic temporality.

For the purposes of my thesis, I situate queer death specifically within the timeframe of the AIDS crisis, during which queerness became hypervisible through an intensification of death and disease scripted within a linear temporality of hetero- and homo-normativity. Under this particular truth of chrononormative temporality, proper heteronormative subjects are always

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<sup>1</sup> Dinshaw, Carolyn, et al. “Theorizing Queer Temporalities.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13:2-3 (2007), 189.

<sup>2</sup> Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London, Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd (1978), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Muñoz, Jose Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: NYU Press (2009), 98-99.

supposed to be progressing and productive. As time is always moving forward, so should the proper citizen always look towards futurity and be productive. Within this narrative of linear time, the past, present, and future are always separate and cannot exist simultaneously. However, in postmodernist art of the late twentieth century, which developed alongside postmodern theories of disillusionment and disidentification, queer artists sought to develop their structures of feelings and experiences outside of the identities and subjectivities shaped and enforced on them through biopolitical regimes of truth<sup>4</sup> like linear time. To disrupt this totalizing, limited notion of linear time, we must begin to consider a new direction that pushes us to regard the real potential of imaginaries in art as pushing into what the hegemonic neoliberal system would have us believe to be impossible.

My thesis research explores and disrupts this dominant ideology<sup>5</sup> of linear temporality, situating the construct of the progress narrative as a central regulatory function of maintaining the myth of the ideal neoliberal subject that produces the excluded queer and subaltern<sup>6</sup> body. I disrupt the myth of linear time by engaging with photographic and installation art pieces as places of potential in which participants experience moments of alternative temporality in which the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously. This research lends itself to a Deleuzian analysis of rhizomatic structures to define temporality as [dis]identifying from the linear structural assumption underlying chronobiopolitical progress narratives.

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 185.

<sup>5</sup> Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press, 1971). Web

<sup>6</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Columbia UP (2010), 21-78.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis explores the significance of “inappropriate” positive affective productions like pleasure, playfulness, and desire that can be present in the temporality of art pieces when studying the subjectivity of death in photographic and performance art to see how particular art pieces create ruptures in temporality. To do so, this research plugs into the ongoing conversations within what I have categorized as three different fields of literature. First, in order to deconstruct chrononormative linear temporality and the naturalization of certain regimes of truth within heteronormativity, I explore the current literature surrounding hetero- and homonormativity and chronobiopolitics as developed by Foucault, Bersani, and Lemke.

Most importantly, I am interested in the coexistence of homonormativity, homoprotectionism, and homophobia as it focuses on the construct of linear time as a tool used by the biopolitical Western society to claim modernity and regulate the proper gay citizen subject. This includes the theory of interpellation developed by Althusser and the ideas of time and history as theorized by Elizabeth Freeman. Second, I enter conversations surrounding queer death as an amorphous process that artists seek to signify within their art by looking at Thomas Nagel’s symposium on death in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic structure. The affective productions of loss and melancholy surrounding death become particularly prominent within many of the literatures regarding death and its construction, and I situate my research within this conversation in regards to how the artworks of Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres work as signifiers of a specific type of queer death to shape and create affective productions that subvert the dominant societal feeling-state of rage and fear that is demanded by a heteronormative society.

Third, I locate my research within the literature surrounding art as the signifier of death in two parts: the picture and the installation. Here, I focus on the literature of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and W. J. T. Mitchell to develop the definition of pictures and photography in an effort to further the discourses surrounding the temporality of art that is always becoming. It is in this section where the interlocutors of an art piece—the artist, the audience, the curator, and the subject—begin to be fleshed out with Foucault’s work on the infinite relation between translation and the image being translated—ekphrasis, the gap in which affective responses are produced and unmediated. In this last section of my literature review, I further develop the idea of the different participants and witnesses of art in its installation form by expanding on the conversations happening around performance and installation art pieces through Muñoz and Michael Warner, because the theories of disidentification and the public/private binary are key to viewing art as an experience of nonlinear temporality.

## 2.1 Time as a Neoliberal Regime of Truth

What, then, is Time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.<sup>7</sup>

In his series of lectures titled “Birth of Biopolitics,” Foucault formulates the idea that the delimitation between state and society marks the turn from liberalism into neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as Foucault defines it, is a political rationality that merges the social sphere with the economic sphere as a means to reduce state services and shift the language of responsibility and morality onto the individual subject body. Within neoliberalism, there is a shift in

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine. *The Confessions*. 11.14, 123. Print.

governmentality and social regulation “in the sense that subjects are increasingly conceived and conceive themselves as entrepreneurs of the self, who attempt to maximize their human capital.”<sup>8</sup>

As Thomas Lemke goes on to explain:

The neoliberal forms of government feature not only direct intervention by means of empowered and specialized state apparatuses, but also characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them. The strategy of rendering individual subjects "responsible" (and also collectives, such as families associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc. and for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible ... The key feature of the neoliberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts.<sup>9</sup>

This “neoliberal rationality” roots itself through different regimes of truth, the types of discourse that get accepted as truth and established as hegemonic within the system in power. For example, in neoliberalism the language of morality becomes ascribed onto economic responsibility, and the neoliberal subject replaces the regulatory mechanisms of the state as a self-regulating subject, or human capital, of the free market. Therefore, neoliberalism becomes a determining factor in the societal and governmental response to AIDS in the form of what Leo Bersani calls

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<sup>8</sup> Oksala, Johanna. “Johanna Oksala on Foucault, Marx and Neoliberal Subjects.” *Theory, Culture & Society*. Web.

<sup>9</sup> Lemke, Thomas. “‘The Birth of Bio-Politics’—Michel Foucault’s Lecture at the College de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality.” Web.

“malignant aversion,” in which the funding for research and treatment for AIDS was delayed, a push was made towards testing rather than curing, and policies were made that had more to do with protecting straight communities from being penetrated rather than with saving queer communities. More specifically, in response to AIDS, “a public health crisis [was] treated like an unprecedented sexual threat” brought on by the queer body and its inability to police and regulate its own desires, and there was a “general tendency to think of AIDS as an epidemic of the future rather than a catastrophe of the present.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, during the AIDS epidemic, queer bodies within the neoliberal system became synonymous with death caused by an individual moral failure and sexual threat.

I engage with the term *chronobiopolitics* from a Foucauldian perspective in which we understand neoliberalism to be a configuration of power relations that is not only an intensification of capitalism and capitalist exploitation of bodies, but also a system that creates biopolitical regimes of truth<sup>11</sup> that establish social practices necessary for the sustainment of neoliberalism as absolute. In this thesis, I situate linear temporality and *chrononormativity* as one such example of a regime of truth that neoliberalism asserts on the queer body with AIDS in order to regulate the individual subject body. Elizabeth Freeman describes this regulatory structure of temporality as such:

Naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation: binding is what turns mere existence into a form of mastery in a process I’ll refer to as *chrononormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity. And I mean that people are bound

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<sup>10</sup> Bersani, Leo. “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* 43 (1987), 198-199.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 185.



to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time: Dana Luciano has termed this *chronobiopolitics*, or “the sexual arrangement of the time of life” of entire populations.<sup>12</sup>

The heteronormative structuring of social reality works under this very assumption of a chrononormativity that is linear and progressive, in which milestone markers of individual development—grade school graduation, college, career development and advancement, creating a nuclear family—are enforced and adhered to properly. The failure to adhere to this chrononormative timeline is seen as a failure to produce and mature into a moral, responsible member of society. Particularly in regards to productivity and the individual responsibility to maximize one’s own “human capital,” time becomes synonymous with money, and every minute becomes a commodity that must be capitalized on. Linear time becomes central to the organization and the maintenance of the commercial structure of society: hourly wages, monthly rent, time-interest rates, and built credit over time—things that visibly queer bodies of the late twentieth century did not often get access to.

## 2.2 Death as Signified

Man stands aghast when, thinking deeply about the problem of death, he becomes aware that it means the elimination of "this my very self who am conscious in the here and now." This is awful. Awful, more than anything else.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press (2010), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Kishimoto, Hideo. “My View of Life and Death: While Tarrying in a State of Life-Hunger.” *Contemporary Religions in Japan* (1964), 107-18.

In developing the idea of death as the act and happening of a moment rather than a form of religious compulsion or cultural faith, I use the word “death” in this discussion to refer simply to the *process* in which the body dies. It is important to note that there are different religious ideologies of death that construct narratives of life after death, like the Christian promise of heaven or the Samsara doctrine of cyclic existence called reincarnation. However, in my thesis, I am strictly interested in opening up secular modernity’s dominant ideology of queer AIDS-related death as the ultimate failure of productivity. What I mean is, the questions of whether a soul exists and outlives the body in death or not become unimportant. Instead, within chrononormativity, the live queer body is seen as something to be feared, and the death of a queer body is brought into the realm of the hypervisible as a spectacle, while at the same time marked as insignificant in its expendability and replaceability. Chrononormativity instrumentalizes queer death as a tool of managing the proper citizen body. As Elizabeth Freeman describes:

Pierre Bourdieu declared that strategies of power consist of “playing on the time, or rather the *tempo*, of the action,” mainly through managing delay and surprise. Yet this chronopolitics extends beyond local conflicts to the management of entire populations: both the state and the market produce biopolitical status relations not only through borders... but also through temporal mechanisms. Some groups have their needs and freedoms deferred or snatched away, and some don’t... Some events count as historically significant, some don’t... Most intimately, some human experiences officially count as a life or one of its parts, and some don’t. Those forced to wait or startled by violence, whose activities do not show

up on the official time line, whose own time lines do not synchronize with it, are variously and often simultaneously black, female, and queer.<sup>14</sup>

Within this thesis, I am concerned with the distinction between this idea of queer death and unacknowledged life in which queer bodies are viewed as nonexistent even when they are alive, and how this situates them as always being familiar with the proximity of death.

Therefore, moving away from a spiritual understanding, I wish to define death as a process, one in which there are interlocutors—the experiencers being the dying, those who are affected, and those who witness and therefore are also affected in order to counter the narrative of queer death as always being tragic. Echoing Sharon Holland, I am interested in the “phenomenon of the space of death... and the dead who inhabit such space in direct juxtaposition and perhaps contradistinction to our societal notions about what it means to be ‘living’ in the first place.”<sup>15</sup> In this understanding of death, it ceases to be an end, a permanence, or a beginning of the afterlife because there is a constant reproduction of death through those who are affected and are being affected, and at the same time there is also an ephemerality of death that exists for the dying subject. This ongoing resonance is significant because the concept of death as a temporal termination of present life situates it as only existing as something that has passed and therefore we mourn, or something that is impending in our future and therefore we fear.

On a linear timeline, death is assumed to mark the end of the line, and secular neoliberal thinking would have us believe that to exit the timeline without having been a productive, good citizen is an evil or bad thing. However, this view of death and temporality is limiting because it

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<sup>14</sup> Freeman, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Holland, 391.

is only applicable to those productive subjects who are already accepted as being on the appropriate timeline of neoliberal progress. As Thomas Nagel states:

If we are to make sense of the view that to die is bad, it must be on the ground that life is a good and death is the corresponding deprivation or loss, bad not because of any positive features but because of the desirability of what it removes. We must now turn to the serious difficulties which this hypothesis raises, difficulties about loss and privation in general, and about death in particular.<sup>16</sup>

Subaltern bodies who live in a permanent state of oppression are always in a process of slow death, which refers to “the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence.”<sup>17</sup> Heteronormative neoliberal subjects are taught to fear death, just as they are taught to fear deviating from a linear timeline and other assumed norms within hegemonic society. There is a parallel drawn between death and exclusion from the neoliberal myth of progress that is significant in the biopolitical regulation of bodies; to be labeled abnormal is to die a social death, defined by Lisa Marie Cacho as an ineligibility for personhood.<sup>18</sup> However, death is inevitable, and all of us “become aware of the commonality of death long before we have to confront it in its singularity as our *own* death.”<sup>19</sup>

We—the proper straight neoliberal subjects—are always exposed to and implicated in the othering of others, just as we are exposed to death constantly throughout life. The neoliberal subject is also always aware of their own progression towards death, and fights any hint of the

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<sup>16</sup> Nagel, Thomas. “Death” *Noûs* 4.1 (1970), 75.

<sup>17</sup> Berlant, Lauren. “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007), 754.

<sup>18</sup> Cacho, Lisa Marie. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. New York: NYU (2012), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Plant, Bob. “The Banality of Death.” *Philosophy* 84.04 (2009), 571-596.

fact that their own bodies become less and less productive on their prescribed timeline. In this way, the view that death is bad because it constitutes a movement off and away from the productive linear timeline not only erases the potential of an alternative rhizomatic temporality, but also the existence of subaltern bodies that are already living within such alternatives. An assumed linear movement through time erases the experience of death as a moment in which multiple temporalities exist simultaneously, and it is this simultaneity that I wish to engage with in art's production of death as playful transience and haunting permanence.

Queer death and its affective productions, I argue, exist as a rhizome in which each moment of change or development of affect and temporality (beginning, ending, past, present, future) is a juncture that is not an accumulation of experiences. Rather, it becomes rooted in Deleuze and Guattari's principle of asignifying rupture:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad.<sup>20</sup>

The rupture is asignifying when it resists territorialization. Death as a process is such a moment of asignifying rupture in rhizomatic temporality, which is then defined through its relationality to the interlocutor's experiences rather than the biopolitical neoliberal notion of death as finality and ending. In this model of rhizomatic death and time, the hegemonic notion of death as final to

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<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizomes." *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota (1987), 9.

progress becomes merely another line of flight—a fraction of the experience. I will explore how these affective processes caused by death on individual bodies work through emotions like loss, grief, pain, and haunting to interpellate the good neoliberal subject into a structured linear time of productivity, overlaying Susan Sontag’s developments of pain and Eve Tuck and C. Ree’s haunting as existing alongside how neoliberalism regards the suspension of life—no matter how temporary—as a misfortune.

### 2.3 Art as Signifier

To ask, what do pictures want? Is not just to attribute to them life and power and desire, but also to raise the question of what it is they *lack*, what they do not possess, what cannot be attributed to them.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Art Politik*

Shifting the definition of death into an amorphous process creates space for the artworks of Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres to be signifiers of the processes of death as a political movement. Ai Weiwei, a contemporary Chinese artist and political activist, in an interview once claimed that “if somebody questions reality, truth, facts; [it] always becomes a political act.”<sup>22</sup> Particularly for those who are oppressed, art can be a very poignant and powerful tool that helps challenge and break open the regimes of truth that keep in place hegemonic systems of power. A very visible example of one such art is Ebony G. Patterson’s performance piece titled “Invisible Presence: Bling Memories.” This performance piece is a perfect example of the ways in which art can give voice to bodies that have been othered and exploited by the myth of the perfect neoliberal subject.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, W.J.T. *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2004), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Ai Weiwei. “Art and Questions are Political Acts.” Interview by Stephen Sackur. *Hardtalk*. (BBC 2014). Web.



Figure 1 Ebony G. Patterson, "Invisible Presence: Bling Memories." (2014)



Figure 2 Ebony G. Patterson, "Invisible Presence: Bling Memories." (2014)

In Patterson's original performance, a procession of people holding 50 coffins decorated with feathers, tassels, and sequins of vivid colors performed marching down the streets of Kingston for Bacchanal Jamaica, also known as Jamaica Carnival. The performers were preceded by a marching band playing traditional Jamaican funeral songs transformed into reggae and dancehall—a funerary practice that is common in lower-income communities in Jamaica where those who have been deemed valueless by hegemonic society are celebrated and given value in death by their families and community. This performance piece not only explores the alternative cultural rituals of funerals and death in Jamaica in which death is celebrated and glorified, it also creates a vehicle for remembrance of those who are invisible and marginalized in society. If chronobiopolitics claims through linear temporality that untimely death is the end and ultimate failure to productivity, here we see an instantiation of death being celebrated as the overcoming of the silent and invisible existence of the subaltern.<sup>23</sup> This art brings the voice of the subaltern oppressed group into the sphere of the public hegemonic group and forces the two spheres to share in a moment of alternative instantiation of death and temporality. This kind of participatory nature of art that draws in multiple interlocutors—the performer, the artist, and the audience—becomes foundational to creating spaces of shared alternative habitability.

To further elucidate the importance of “an alternative instantiation of humanity that does not rest on the mirage of the western [neoliberal ideology] as the mirror image of human life as such,”<sup>24</sup> I draw from Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* to explore the idea of the marginalized subject's body as being a singular, specific example excluded from the potential of universality.

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<sup>23</sup> Spivak, 21-78.

<sup>24</sup> Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press (2014), 43.



Chrononormativity in neoliberalism,<sup>25</sup> as well as regulatory and ideological state apparatuses,<sup>26</sup> functions by enacting violence upon othered bodies, and this violence is made justifiable and acceptable through the assurance of the incommunicability of pain. This confidence of incommunicability is explored in depth by Nicole Archer in her article “Security Blankets: Uniforms, Hoods, and the Textures of Terror,” in which Archer writes about the power of illegibility and anonymity through the discussion of the violence of hooding. Archer references a very famous photograph of a torture scene from Abu Ghraib in which a man, whom the audience is supposed to assume to be a suspected terrorist, with a hood covering his entire head is standing on a box with his arms spread out to his sides with wires hanging off of them.



*Figure 3 "Untitled" Abu Ghraib (2003)*

<sup>25</sup> Jakobsen, Janet. “Can Homosexuals End Western Civilization as We Know It?: Family Values in a Global Economy.” *Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities*. New York: New York U Press (2002), 49-70.

<sup>26</sup> Althusser, Web.

By using this photo as an example, Archer claims that hooding renders its victim invisible and therefore insignificant, and promises that the victim will not be able to relate their pain to the audience, which allows state-sanctioned violence to be enacted on the body without shame or guilt. However, with the circulation of the image through reproductions of the photograph, the assurance of incommunicability is erased, which produces shame and guilt within its audience. Hooded figures, particularly in photography like that which Nicole Archer analyzes, become symbolic of illegible subaltern bodies who exist outside of the linear temporality of neoliberalism. These bodies are failed subjects who were abjected from the promise of futurity, much like the queer body with AIDS, and the illusion of their silence as symbolized by the hood makes it easier to justify the subaltern body's slow death under oppression.

The oppressors see the affects of pain, loss, and haunting as existing outside of the possibility of articulation, and Weheliye's analysis of the erasure of black feminist scholars and theorists falls under the violence of an erasure of history and culture in which they are expelled from the linear progress narrative of neoliberalism. Not only are othered queer bodies of failed neoliberal assimilation excluded from the promise of futurity, their contributions to history are also erased. Weheliye's clarification of the violent and ever-present force of racializing assemblages helps us to see how erasure and exclusion work to regulate which bodies are allowed to partake in the myth of climbing the neoliberal linear timeline and which bodies are exploited and expended to build and sustain said timeline. *Habeas Viscus* reads to me like a call for alternative political and theoretical canons that incorporate marginalized scholarly thought as not just particularized minor sections of academia, but as significant contributors to developments that transform theory. In other words, *Habeas Viscus* brings to light the need to

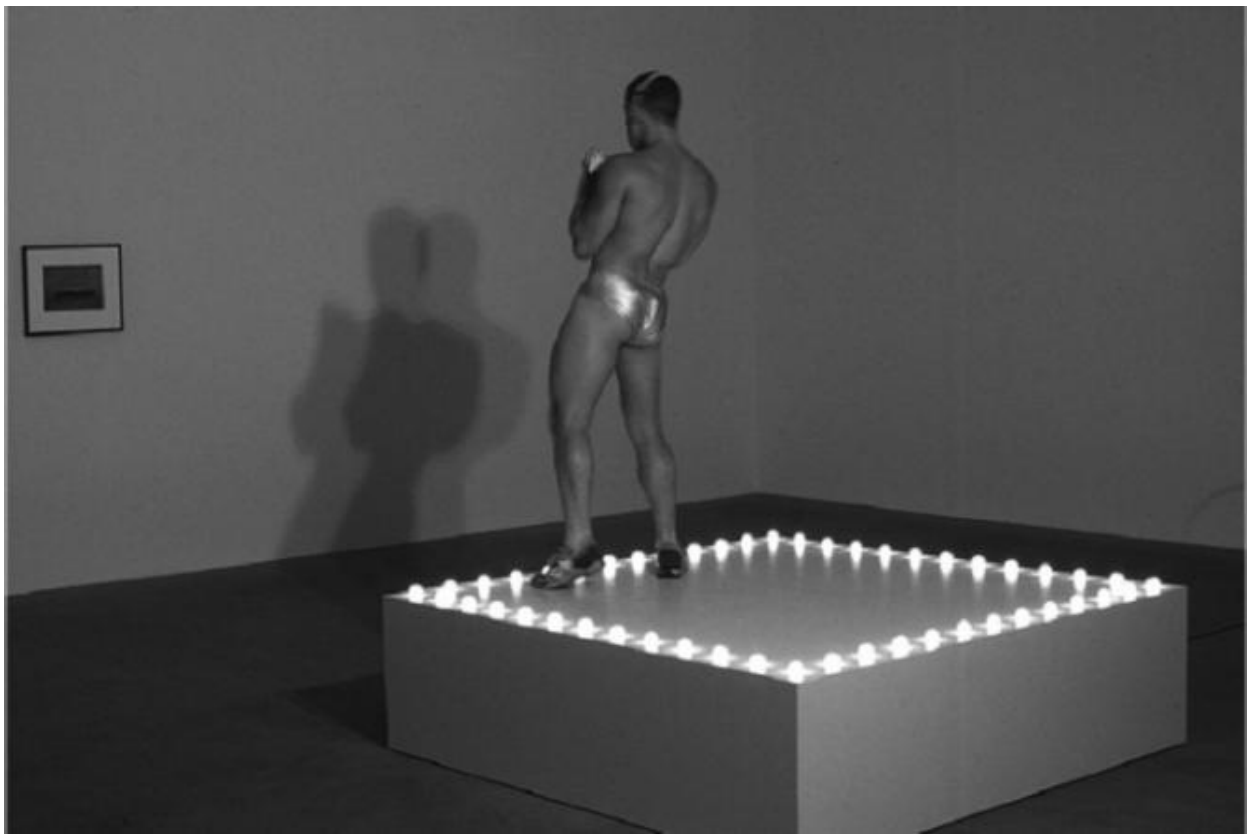
break down what neoliberal hegemony builds as regimes of truth in order to enable the possibility of alternate modes of being. Specifically, by engaging with Archer's article "Security Blankets: Uniforms, Hoods, and the Textures of Terror "along with Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus*, this thesis works to understand how hegemonic regimes of truth spread through control of language and communication in regards to temporality and the incommunicability of death.

### *Art Ephemeral*

In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz fleshes out the possibility of art as a method of political resistance against the dichotomized public/private minoritarian subjectivity enacted upon queer bodies. Throughout this thesis, I utilize this particular idea of disidentification by Muñoz to engage with the analysis of private/public binaries presented in art. By engaging with the different processes of space-making and time-making found in the multiple visual mediums of performance art, film, porn, mass media and literature, among other installations of visual culture, Muñoz explores how the act of disidentification as a tool of reclaiming agency works amidst the relations between theory and practice. But rather than advocating for a permanent existence disassociated from dominant discourses defining space/time, Muñoz addresses and focuses on the possibility of a subversive freedom from the colonizing societal regulations found in the mundane and ordinary. This method of using art as a medium for disidentification with the dominant discourses and ideologies that occupy and regulate the space in which the performer, artist, and audience become blurred and undefined is also translatable to how these bodies experience temporalities within the moment of art.

Throughout the book, Muñoz consistently engages with a vast collection of visual works throughout multiple genres and mediums with a critical visual cultural approach to build his

argument. For instance, he pulls from televisual activist Zamora’s work on MTV’s *The Real World* to explore how minoritarian subjectivity is disseminated and publicized. He analyzes the performance of drag superstar, Vaginal Crème Davis, to see how certain oppressed bodies resisted whitewashing and heteronormative protocols. In one of his most effective engagements with an artist and their performance, Muñoz analyzes how the installations of Felix Gonzalez-Torres work to disidentify the subjects at play from hegemonic chrononormative formations. For example, Gonzalez-Torres’ work *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* positions “a dark young man, who is probably Latino, go-go dancing on a platform surrounded with lights.



*Figure 4 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (Go-Go Dancing Platform). (1991)*  
 He wears jockey shorts and a red T-shirt that he strips off during his routine.”<sup>27</sup> This dancer’s performance—a dance to music that he alone experiences through headphones—disrupts the

<sup>27</sup> Muñoz, Jose Esteban. *Disidentifications*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota (1999), 172.

assumption of a cohesive, linear temporality in which it is being performed and pushes the audience into having to disidentify with their surroundings. The performer dances to a beat that is not recognizable to the audience, and thus a dissonant temporal space is created. Yet there is still an intimate connection between the performer and audience through the nakedness of the dance outside of shared temporalities that emphasizes the possibility of shared affect spaces as affect-laden and private, even as the display of the performance in front of an audience thrusts the piece into the public space. I engage with Muñoz' methods in analyzing specific art pieces, which utilize both visual and art analysis, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the affective and political impacts that can be made through art. Muñoz's methods, alongside Sontag, Freeman and Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical frameworks, create the backbone of my research as I search for alternate instantiations of temporality within the inappropriate emotional responses that are produced by the way death is portrayed in the productions of Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Specifically with the reproductive powers of photographs and installation art, this thesis explores how the rhizomatic temporality of the artworks manifests in the medium itself, because the existence of the photograph itself confuses the concept of temporality and death. As Barthes argued,

The photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live; by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow

eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead.<sup>28</sup>

The photograph immortalizes the subject and the decisive moments of time within a single immobile frame, and thus it brings the past into the present for the audience, and promises that the subject will continue to be reproduced in the future. However, as Barthes describes, the photograph is also mortal in that it is born through the exposure of film to light, and then it ages and eventually fades. Therefore, in this one medium, immortalization and ephemerality coincide to create a wonderfully playful and perverse instantiation of time and existence. Because photography creates this existence of transitory suspension in time for the subject that it captures, photographs capturing death also suspend death into an unproductive space of playfulness in an alternative instantiation of temporality.

The skewing of temporality that Barthes describes also works similarly within installation pieces. Installation process art pieces are reproduced repeatedly through different installations in different moments of time, promising a futurity to the subject that it captures. However, the performances themselves are always ending, and therefore cannot be seen as productive. This constant reproduction of an unproductive subject through photography and installation art disorients the grief of death, its subject, and displaces it with what Heidegger names “wonder”—a playful fantasy—of why things exist.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang (1981), 79.

<sup>29</sup> Silverman, Kaja. “All Things Shining.” *Loss*. Los Angeles: University of California Press (2003), 325-326.

## **Methodology**

### *Art Temporal*

Throughout this research, I explore how the interlocutors of the queer art creation process—the artist, the subject, and the audience—are ejected into an othered space of broken temporality that provides imaginaries of the possibility of alternate modes of being. Also, if violence on subaltern bodies is justified and made more acceptable by the assurance of the incommunicability of pain, does art provide an instantiation of shared experience between the participating bodies that disrupts this justification? To delve into these questions, within this thesis I use critical visual culture theory and visual analysis to look at three different pieces of art. A critical visual methodology is helpful in understanding the social and cultural effects of images that work as representations and interpretations of the world. These images that are produced in the photographs are important tools in defining the relations of power that existed within society at the moments when the images were captured. A critical visual methodology, therefore, helps us to understand how subaltern ways of viewing the world are obscured, and even erased by, the images put forth by dominant normative culture.

Throughout my research, I make connections among Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic restructuring of temporality, Elizabeth Freeman's theories of chrononormativity, and Gayatri Spivak's ideas on the incommunicability of the state of being subaltern, all while keeping in conversation with Muñoz' methods of art and performance analysis in four parts. First, I define and situate queer death as being a spectacle that is instrumentalized by the state's chronobiopolitics to produce specific emotion cultures of fear and shame within the queer community and fear and rage within the proper heteronormative citizen body during the AIDS epidemic. I further develop a thread of the idea of queer death as being a marker of replaceability

and waste in the neoliberal order of the AIDS crisis and exploring its potential of communicability through the visual images produced in photography. Second, I define what it means for photography to be seen as a signifier of death and its affective productions, asserting its necessity in developing new directions of understanding temporality. I illustrate the political potential of art in regards to the ways in which the works provide new languages through which regimes of truth like linear temporality and sexual morality may be evaluated, and how temporality becomes decentered and deconstructed within the asynchronicity of a photograph's constant state of becoming. Third, I take these two developed frameworks and combine them to analyze the images produced in Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres' photographic works. I explore how this specific medium of art illustrates the significance of the pleasures and desires that are evoked alongside instantiations of alternative temporalities, as the medium of photography as a print or installation explores the alternative affects and temporalities present in death that are at once disruptive and captivating of dominant heteronormative ideologies.

The three pieces of art that exemplify the political potential of embracing impossibility that I analyze are broken up loosely into two parts: a print photographic image section and an installation photographic image section. The photography pieces that I study are "Candy Darling on her Deathbed" by Peter Hujar and "Untitled" (Peter Hujar) by David Wojnarowicz. The installation photography piece I look at is Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed).

In Peter Hujar's photography piece titled "Candy Darling on her Deathbed," I map the workings of temporality as it becomes blurred between the past of the subject captured, the futurity of promised death, and the present in which the interlocutors of the artwork interact with



the piece. I also specifically pull out the subjectivity of Candy Darling and how her presence in the photo, along with her positioning and pose, brings about a queer desire to the subject matter of death that exists in the medium. I engage with the significance of the ephemerality of the flowers placed within the scene, and tie together the above-mentioned themes as central to a composition that creates a space of alternative instantiation of temporality and affectivity of death—what I will refer to as rhizomatic temporality.

In a similar fashion, when analyzing David Wojnarowicz’s “Untitled” (Peter Hujar) I focus on what the picture wants—what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the “metapicture”—by reflecting on the posturing of the face and the clear visual imagery of death that is present within the frame through Hujar’s slightly open eyes and ajar mouth. I assess the tight framing of the picture and analyze how the lack of scenery in the frame serves to build a stronger setting for the instantiation of death, and I particularly call upon the lights and shadows of this piece to pull out the affective productions that result from the image. Specifically when analyzing these photographs, I adhere to the guidelines for analyzing art as outlined and defined by the article “Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy: Writing About Photography” published by the writing studio from Duke University, to discuss the form of the artwork.<sup>30</sup> Also important to note, I compare the two photography pieces’ affective productions to show the multiple different types of affective responses that can arise from death in its various stages as a subject matter.

In my analysis of the images, I view the photographs through a critical visual culture lens in which the analysis happens within a subaltern model of the picture, one in which the question is shifted “from what pictures *do* to what they *want*, from power to desire, from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or (better) to be

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<sup>30</sup> “Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy: Writing About Photography.” Writing Studio. Durham: Duke University. Print.

invited to speak.”<sup>31</sup> To ask these questions, I reckon with images not just as imitations or representations of the subjects that the artworks portray, but rather as animated beings that demand a reparative reading—a reading that is affectively driven and motivated by desire, pleasure, and curiosity.<sup>32</sup> I believe that this type of reparative reading can be done through a specifically visual and art analysis-based approach, outlined by W.J.T. Mitchell in *What Do Pictures Want?* and also as explored by Muñoz by example in *Disidentifications*, that pulls heavily on both the form and subject matter of the artworks. I focus on the different subject matter that is present within the image by exploring the lighting, the exposure, and the perspective from which the picture is taken. I refrain from engaging with the artist and his background to show the potential that pure imagery holds. It is my hope that this type of approach will open up the dialectics of power in our relations with art and concretely show how new types of impossible languages are opened up through the medium of photography that would not exist otherwise.

When analyzing the photograph installation work “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed), I turn to affect theory and use Eve Sedgwick’s theory of reparative reading of words and images to explore the “pleasure and curiosity... directed toward the textures, the sensuous feel, of one’s objects of study,”<sup>33</sup> in this case death and art, to assess the impact of art participation on the interlocutors of the process. With this piece, I also include the artist as a crucial participant, for the entire process of art creation becomes central to the affective meaning of the creation of the piece. The blurring of the private and public sphere becomes especially important within the photography installation piece because of the artwork’s dependency on space as part of its image

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<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You.” *Touching Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press (2002), 146.

<sup>33</sup> Cvetkovich, Ann. “Public Feelings.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:3 (2007), 463.

making and cultivation of emotion-states. This differentiation between my analysis of the photographic pieces and installation art piece is significant because the process installation art pieces are not within the realm of pure imagery. Rather, they are works of art that are continually being produced and reproduced through different installments and interactions with different audiences in public spaces. To document how Gonzalez-Torres' process art subverts linear temporality through the creation of a constant recreation of ephemerality, I rely on Helena Reckitt's ideas of reenactments as tools<sup>34</sup> that reform and shape events, things, and art from history into ephemeral subjects. Through recreation, the linear temporality of hegemonic ideology is destabilized.

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<sup>34</sup> Reckitt, Helena. "To Make Time Appear." *Art Journal* 70.3 (2011), 58–63.

### 3 THE BECOMING PHOTOGRAPHS

#### 3.1 Candy Darling on Her Deathbed



*Figure 5 Peter Hujar, "Candy Darling on her Deathbed." (1973)*

Before entering into the visual analysis of the image, I believe it is necessary, for the purposes of this thesis, to first engage with the temporality surrounding the identity of Candy Darling, the subject of the photograph, because of the ways in which her trans womanhood marks her as being unable to participate in producing a neoliberal chronobiopolitical futurity. In fact, queer bodies like Candy Darling are always in a process of slow death. Moreover, Candy Darling is marked for death through the nation's attitudes towards queer bodies in which public queerness "asserts full access to one's sexual identity and political being and then seems to conflate the two"<sup>35</sup> where "[it is] then possible to say that what makes a subject queer is her/his relationship, both performatively and literally with death and that this relationship is of national concern."<sup>36</sup> Because the hypervisibility of queerness in dominant culture is always centered around queer death, the queer body is seen as one that is unable to invest in a neoliberal futurity. Proper, normative citizen-subjects under chronobiopolitics are taught to fear death, just as they are taught to fear deviating from a linear timeline and other assumed norms within hegemonic society. It seems important to this analysis, then, to think upon Eric Stanley's question, "What then becomes of the possibility of queer *life*, if queerness is produced always and only through the negativity of forced death and at the threshold of liberation?"<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, during the time of Peter Hujar's photographs, which took place in New York in the wake of the AIDS crisis of the late 1970s, queer death marked a particular kind of failure within a system of chronobiopolitics that simultaneously evoked fears of replaceability and of wastefulness. Simultaneously, the nation saw a rise in homophobia and intensification in

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<sup>35</sup> Holmes, Amanda. "That Which Cannot Be Shared: On the Politics of Shame." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29:3 (2015), 416.

<sup>36</sup> Holland, Sharon. "Bill T. Jones, Tupac Shakur and the (Queer) Art of Death." *Callaloo* 23:1 (2000), 391.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley, Eric. "Near Life, Queer Death." *Social Text* 107 29:2 (2011), 1.

the marginalization and dehumanization of queer life. Stanley addresses this dichotomy of queer death and life through Agamben's theory of bare life later in his text:

For Agamben, bare life signals a kind of stripped-down sociality, skillfully articulated via his reading of the Nuremburg Laws enabled through a legal state of exception. If for Agamben bare life expresses a kind of stripped-down sociality or a liminal space at the cusp of death, then near life names the figuration and feeling of nonexistence, as Fanon suggests, which comes before the question of life might be posed. Near life is a kind of ontocorporal (non) sociality that necessarily throws into crisis the category of life by orientation and iteration.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, overwhelming numbers of queer people living with HIV/AIDS experience a disproportionate amount of structural and interpersonal violence. Especially during the AIDS epidemic, there was a rise in reactionary violence induced by fear and rage. The hegemonic heteronormative response to queerness in the late twentieth century—and I would argue even now—was one that only had space for negative feeling states. On the other hand, identifying with death and being in a constant intimate proximity with death also allows the queer artist and subject body, in this particular case Candy Darling and Peter Hujar, to acknowledge that death is not necessarily the spectacle of bereavement and loss that discourses focusing on protecting those with life in chrononormativity make it out to be. This kind of expulsion from the dominant narrative meant that many HIV-positive young queer folks found themselves free from the constraints of having to adhere to neoliberalism's forward thinking. They didn't have to worry about building a savings to sustain themselves when they were older or playing the proper productive citizen, because this was before treatments for HIV/AIDS were available, and they

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<sup>38</sup> Stanley, Eric. "Near Life, Queer Death." *Social Text* 107 29:2 (2011), 13.

felt that they were facing certain death before they could get old enough to reap the rewards of policing their young bodies. The young queer body became the embodiment of a radical counter-culture defined by a live-in-the-moment mentality, completely antithetical to the chronobiopolitical narratives of progress and futurity. Through the photographing of a young trans woman on her deathbed, Peter Hujar questions this constant need for productivity and subverts the narrative of the failed chrononormative subject, and subsequently disrupts the idea of a singular linear timeline.

Peter Hujar's "Candy Darling on her Deathbed" is a black and white image in which Candy Darling is depicted casually posing on a hospital bed. Most of her figure, from the chest down, is covered by the white sheet of the hospital bed in a way that the sheets hug and accentuate her figure. A part of her face and her arms are also obscured by a white pillow in a way that fills most of the frame with soft, white fabric rather than the figure of Darling herself. A tray table juts into the picture on the right side of the image, cropped so that it is recognizable, but so that the objects placed upon it are obscured, with the exception of a few flower petals indicating the presence of a bouquet of flowers. Also in the foreground of the image, dark, wilting flowers rest on the bedside table, while in the background, fresh white flowers protrude from behind the figure of Darling so that Darling's figure is framed throughout the picture by the ephemerality of the three distinct groups of flowers. Darling herself is thrust into this life cycle of flowers with the placement of a single flower resting on the bed in front of her. There are three light sources present within the image, the brightest and most recognizable being the light fixture above the bed. Dim fill light streams in from a cropped window on the top right of the frame, and the viewer is led to assume that there is another light source outside of the image that is illuminating Darling's figure and the white sheets of the hospital bed.

We, the audience and perhaps speculatively the photographer Peter Hujar as well, enter the photograph through Candy Darling's gaze—or perhaps it is more accurate to say that we become passive observer, pulled in and arrested by Darling's black gaze as it is even more off-putting and made even more mesmerizing by her stark white face. In her gaze lies, again, the lure that sends inappropriate chills of desire and pleasure down my spine, even as I know I am meeting eyes with a subject that is always dying and already dead. In her face, I cannot find any trace of the fear or rage that we have been told was the proper, the only one necessary and allowed at the very least, emotion culture of the time in which the image was produced. Instead, I see a mundane matter-of-factness that belies acceptance, and by identifying with death, Darling is able to “participate in a simultaneous embrace and repudiation of death's spectacle.”<sup>39</sup> Her gaze also situates the audience as a close friend or intimate participant in her queerness and dying process. At the same time, as the audience, we must contend with the fact that Darling's alluring gaze never in fact sees us or is intended for us. Susan Sontag says about the photographs of Diane Arbus, a photographer who utilized the frontality and direct gaze of the “freaks” she photographed to produce a certain aesthetic and effect:

In the normal rhetoric of the photographic portrait, facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence. That is why frontality seems right for ceremonial pictures... What makes Arbus's use of the frontal pose so arresting is that her subjects are often people one would not expect to surrender themselves so amiably and ingenuously to the camera. Thus, in Arbus's photographs, frontality also implies in the most vivid way the subject's

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<sup>39</sup> Holland, 389.



cooperation. To get these people to pose, the photographer has had to gain their confidence, has had to become “friends” with them.<sup>40</sup>

The hospital room is an intimate and private space reserved for loved ones and confidants, and therefore being present within this space through the image thrusts the audience into the space of private intimacy even as they observe physically from within a public space. In those furtive, stolen glances, the onlooker is arrested in both an alternative time and space as, for a moment, we lock eyes with Candy Darling and become implicated in the bare, trusting gaze of the subject being shared with the photographer through the camera lens.

The image of Candy Darling in her dying state produces two very distinct levels of indexical knowledges. The photograph is beautiful, as is Candy Darling. She is clearly in a hospital room. This informs us of the studium of the photograph. But the *punctum* pierces us through the image, perhaps through, or perhaps in spite of, the studium—she is going to die. Roland Barthes, in his response to a photograph of a young Lewis Payne who was at the time of the photograph waiting to be hanged for the attempted assassination of the Secretary of State W. H. Seward, describes his response to the “going to die” subject as such:

But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence... Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of

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<sup>40</sup> Sontag, 30.

contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die.<sup>41</sup>

First, the three different sets of flowers, which move the viewer through the photograph and create a natural frame around Candy Darling, all depict different stages of dying and decay in a way that alludes to the inevitability of death. Flowers are the quintessential symbol of ephemerality, and yet, by becoming frozen through photography in their different stages of life and decay, they are thrust into a permanence that merges the past, present, and future of the flowers together into the photographic image. Through the creation of the image, the flowers are ejected into a space of alternative temporality that opposes the notion of linear temporality found in chrononormativity. Therefore, in the image, Candy Darling is encased within a never-ending process of alternative temporality through the framing created by the triangle of flowers.

Secondly, the alternative temporality of the always “going to die” subject of Candy Darling within Peter Hujar’s photograph emanates from the corpsing of the setting in which the image of the photograph exists. Not only is the hospital a conventionally understood place of birth, life, decay, and death, it is also a place in which the tension of stasis—a constant waiting—coexists with constant urgent activity. Patients are always waiting for the restoration of their health—the narratives around illnesses seem to commonly be that life is put on hold. Yet others, like Candy Darling, are waiting to die, while patients are also constantly *doing*—taking medicine, receiving treatment, and actively fighting for recovery. Thirdly, as mentioned before, the subject of Candy Darling is captured in this photograph in her process of corpsing, which defines the punctum<sup>42</sup> of this specific photograph as “Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme*

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<sup>41</sup> Barthes, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Barthes, 27.

(“*that-has-been*”).”<sup>43</sup> This illustrates a moment in which the past and future exist simultaneously as an anterior future, because we know that the subject of the photograph is going to die and yet is alive in the moment of the image. While in chrononormative temporality we accept the past as lost time and the future as what we approach but have not yet reached, the corpsing of Candy Darling and her surroundings in Hujar’s photograph causes the interlocutors of the photograph—the artist, the audience, and the subject—to share in each other’s temporal space. Roland Barthes describes this disruptive and disorienting experience in this way:

These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village... how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then *already* dead (yesterday). At the limit, there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience this vertigo of time defeated.<sup>44</sup>

The photograph immortalizes the subject and the decisive moments of time within a single immobile frame, and thus it brings the past into the present for the audience and also promises that the subject will continue to be reproduced in the future. However, as Barthes describes, the photograph is also mortal in that it is born through the exposure of film to light, and then it ages and eventually fades. Therefore, in this one medium, immortalization and ephemerality coincide to create a wonderfully playful and absolutely perverse instantiation of time and existence. Because photography creates this existence of transitory suspension in time for the subject that it captures, photographs capturing death also suspend the corpse into an unproductive space of pleasure in an alternative instantiation of temporality. This constant reproduction of an

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<sup>43</sup> Barthes, 96.

<sup>44</sup> Barthes, 96-97.

unproductive subject through photography disorients the grief of queer death, its subject, and displaces it with what Heidegger names “wonder”—a playful fantasy—of the living image.<sup>45</sup>

The culmination of these moments of conflation between the unproductive always dying subject and the living image that exist within “Candy Darling on her Deathbed” causes those who experience the photograph to experience what Barthes felt while looking through historical photographs: a vertigo resulting from linear time’s failure to fully explain or encompass the temporality of the image. The photograph illuminates the need to understand temporality as something more complex and rhizomatic.<sup>46</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, “most modern methods for making series proliferate or a multiplicity grow are perfectly valid in one direction, for example, a linear direction, whereas a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic, dimension.”<sup>47</sup> While chrononormativity built on a linear notion of time is valid within neoliberal heteronormative dominant narratives, it is exactly because its laws fail to encompass bodies that fall outside of the linear direction of dominant discourse that we must shift our understanding of temporality as existing on a rhizome.

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<sup>45</sup> Silverman, Kaja. “All Things Shining.” *Loss*. Los Angeles: University of California Press (2003), 325-326.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. “Introduction: Rhizomes.” *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota (1987). Print.

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, 8.

### 3.2 "Untitled" (Peter Hujar)



Figure 6 David Wojnarowicz, "Untitled" (Peter Hujar). (1989)

Like the analysis of “Candy Darling on her Deathbed,” I believe it is important to understand the context in which this photograph “Untitled” by David Wojnarowicz was created, because in photography, the existence and presence of the subject captured within the image is never metaphoric, but rather indexical. It is a trace—a truth of the subject having been there and having posed in front of the lens. Similarly, the intent with which the photographer captures the subject is equally as important to the creation of an image. For the photograph to have been created, the photographer had to deem that subject at that very moment in time important enough to arrest and preserve onto film. In the case of this photograph, Wojnarowicz’ main goal was to build an archive of Peter Hujar, his lover and photography mentor. In his essay, “Living Close to the Knives,” Wojnarowicz explains:

And his death is now as if it’s printed on celluloid on the backs of my eyes...  
Then the still camera: portraits of his amazing feet, his head, that open eye again—I kept trying to get the light I saw in that eye... I mean just the essence of death; the whole taboo structure in this culture the mystery of it the fears and joys of it the flight it contains this body of my friend on the bed this body of my brother my father my emotional link to the world this body I don’t know this pure death this event produces in bystanders contains more spirituality than any words we can manufacture.<sup>48</sup>

I feel that it is important to mention that I do not want to erase the reality that all of the photographs included in this research are steeped through and through in desolation, pain, and heartbreak. Wojnarowicz makes that clear in the rhythm of his words, the desperate longing of his writing. Part of the importance of studying these photographs is to acknowledge that the

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<sup>48</sup> Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage Books (1991), 102.

deeply painful, private affects are thrumming through the camera into the image. Although the AIDS epidemic was one in which many queer lives were taken, the hypervisibility and spectacle through which these deaths were represented and used erased the fact that these very public sensations were a culmination of moments of private losses from within the queer community.

Ann Cvetkovich thinks through this idea of the importance of archival works surrounding queer knowledge and emotions<sup>49</sup> because there was such a strong push of chronobiopolitics during the AIDS epidemic that sought to erase queer interpersonal emotions within private spheres by overwriting them with forced feeling cultures of public shame and fear. Wojnarowicz uses the moment immediately following Hujar's death—depicted within these sets of images—to create an affective space for queer intimacies through an exploration of loss and melancholy, but also is able to capture love, desire, and beauty alongside these ostensibly negative emotions. This is why I find it so important to point out that the photographing of these moments captured in the images allows the artists to articulate moments that they encounter in the private sphere in which the artist is grieving, and these emotions are so strongly present that just witnessing these images is enough to make accessible those affective productions into the public. However, the audience does not always receive these emotions as intended or felt, but rather reassembles the negative and the desirable into something private and personal, and by doing so participates in a queering of temporality.

David Wojnarowicz' "Untitled" (Peter Hujar) is made up of three black and white photographs that are all different parts that make up one image. The first frame contains a cropped image of Peter Hujar's face post-mortem from the shoulder up. The image is framed tightly to the profile so that the only other thing visible besides Hujar's head, neck, deeply

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<sup>49</sup> Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings*. Durham: Duke UP (2003). Print.

protruding collarbone, and left shoulder is the whiteness of the pillow and sheets surrounding his head. On his visible left shoulder is a thin gown with a basic polka-dot pattern that perhaps could be mistaken for pajamas, but is most likely a hospital gown. This natural frame caused by the stark whiteness of what can be assumed to be the hospital bed brings Hujar's dark figure into the foreground and prohibits the viewer's gaze from being able to look away from the grotesqueness of the expression on his face. Hujar's eyes are not quite all the way closed and his mouth is hanging open in an expression that could be the face of a dead man or the vulnerable face of a man in deep slumber.

In the second image, we see a close-up of a hand this time, again aggressively cropped so if one were to look at this image alone, the hand would have no body to which it would belong. The index and middle finger are extended to reveal dark, discolored nails that I, as the audience, desperately hope is nail polish, but know is something else—something much more morbid, and the ring and pinky fingers are tucked under the hand in an uncomfortably unnatural gesture that suggests that the hand is rigid. Like the head, the hand is framed by a thin, transparent white sheet that covers most of the background of the image. Through the sheet, the polka-dotted fabric can be seen. In the third photograph, the close crop image contains a pair of feet, again framed by the same crisp white sheets. This time, the sheets crop the feet and dismember it from the rest of the legs that might lead up to a body. The feet are nondescript, and what becomes the focus of this photograph is the ways in which they seem to almost hang off what appears to be the edge of the bed. Perhaps, the audience can speculate, the person to whom those feet belong was too tall for the bed and sheets. Perhaps the sheets were pulled back specifically for the purposes of the picture. Perhaps the owner of those feet was hot and pulled up the sheets themselves. Whatever the speculations, the feet hold no real marker of identity to reveal to the audience, which leaves



room for interpretation and imagination to take over—those feet were important or significant enough for someone to have wanted to capture in a photograph.

The zoomed-in shots create an aggressive dismemberment of the body parts by the frame that asks the viewer to sew together the different parts of the body within the images to build the corpse of a person, and they bring us to the materiality of death. I believe that this puts the viewer into an active role in which they produce the freakish body that represents the dominant image-making of the homosexual body, the body that is a host of AIDS, and the corpse as grotesque. This act of piecing together body parts also, I believe, highlights the dehumanization and objectification of the body by drawing parallels to the all-too-familiar narrative of Frankenstein's monster—a body that is reoccurring in queer theory as being representative of the grotesque and rejected. Elizabeth Freeman's parallel between the monster's body and the queer body goes as such:

The monster's physique, a patchwork of remnants from corpses his creator robs from the grave, is itself an index of temporal nonsynchronicity—specifically, of dead bodies persisting in the present and the future, of non-reproductive, yet still insistently corporeal kinship with the departed. His body literalizes Carolyn Dinshaw's model of the queer touch of time, of past bodies palpably connecting with present ones.<sup>50</sup>

The three separate images of Peter Hujar's dead body encompass a similar non-linear temporality to Frankenstein's monster—a dead body persisting and arrested through photograph to exist in the present and the future. The photograph's production of the image of the corpse of

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<sup>50</sup> Freeman, 60.

Hujar attests that the corpse is real and is somehow alive in its death. Therefore, within these images, the queer body is given permanence even in its constant state of slow death and near life.

The studium<sup>51</sup> of the images, made up of the white sheets, pillow, the polka-dot fabric, and the cropped body parts, consistently signals to the presence of death within the photograph in a way that produces the uncanny effect, as Peter Schwenger describes:

Attesting to the reality of the object depicted, the photograph implies that it is alive, even if that life is always in the past tense and thus already dead... When the image is that of a corpse, the photograph “becomes horrible,” it seems, largely because of its undecidability; it is “the living image of a dead thing.” And this undecidability carries with it an effect of the uncanny, which often involves “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate.” The uncanny effect is not that different in a standard photograph. The “living image,” whatever its subject matter, is always the figurative corpse of what has been alive...<sup>52</sup>

This uncanny effect, I would argue, is not merely produced by the conflation of the living and the dead, but is also a byproduct of the disorientation of temporality that results from this simultaneity. In Wojnarowicz’s photographs, there literally is a corpse within the image that become immortalized in a constant state of the living image during its decaying process.

In Wojnarowicz’s sets of images, unlike “Candy Darling in her Deathbed,” the viewer is pulled into and through the images by the whiteness of the hospital sheets rather than the gaze of the subject. While the grotesqueness of the dismembered body and the uncanniness of the

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<sup>51</sup> Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang (1981). Print.

<sup>52</sup> Schwenger, Peter. “Corpsing the Image.” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000), 396.

corpse subject produces a very distinct jarring and uncomfortableness, I also feel a desire to stay within the photographs—to linger in the queer sensations of beauty, longing, and relief that is present there. The fact that these images exist becomes a testament to the idea that someone wanted to preserve as trace and archive the subject's presence, even in death in the form of a corpse. While I reside in the photograph, I am able to participate in the intimacy that existed between the photographer and the subject, and I am able to catch a glimpse of what Wojnarowicz saw when gazing upon the corpse of this person whom he deemed worth photographing, something that he invites the audience to participate in further by describing the photographic moment, "his open eye, his open mouth, that beautiful hand with the hint of gauze at the wrist that held the i.v. needle, the color of his hand like marble, the full sense of the flesh of it. Then the still camera: portraits of his amazing feet, his head, that open eye again—I kept trying to get the light I saw in that eye."<sup>53</sup> There is a sensuousness with which he describes the corpse in the image. The immortalization of the corpse through an image within a photograph that is always becoming and therefore always deteriorating, along with the strange sense of relief expressed on the face of the corpse and the hungry desire of the lens to devour every detail of each body part depicted in the image all produce a strange suspension of time in which the viewer hangs transfixed in a brief moment of eternity.

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<sup>53</sup> Wojnarowicz, 102-103.

#### 4 INSTALLATION ART



*Figure 7 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed). (1991)*

Felix Gonzalez-Torres' installation photograph "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed) is unique from the other images analyzed in my thesis in two distinct ways. First, this photograph is displayed on a billboard as an installation work that has a specific duration of performance life within a specifically public space. While the works "Candy Darling on her Deathbed" and "Untitled" (Peter Hujar) are displayed in ways so that they are available for the public to access and see, they require the audience to actively seek the spaces in which the works are displayed to participate in them. What I mean by this is that a person must go to a gallery or museum that specifically houses the pictures, search for digital copies of them online, or seek them out in their print form in an art book in order to become spectators of Hujar and Wojnarowicz's works. Because of this, these photographs reach a very specific and purposeful audience. However, by placing his image on a billboard—a medium made for the purposes of reaching wide, unspecified audiences—Gonzalez-Torres directly disrupts the hegemonic notions present during the AIDS crisis of queerness as being something that should be contained and segregated from hegemonic public spaces within which heteronormative bodies are supposed be protected from being touched by queer bodies, queer temporalities, and queer death.

The temporality present within an installation piece is unique because these works are made to be reproduced constantly without detracting from the authenticity or originality of the works. In fact, specifically with Felix Gonzalez-Torres' art, the replication and restaging of his works in different spaces is a crucial stage in the performance of his images in their stages of constant becoming. Josh Takano Chambers-Letson, in regards to the necessity of reproduction to Gonzalez-Torres' process installation art, describes:

Gonzalez-Torres employs the contractual agreement, in the form of the certificate of authenticity, to assure the reproduction of the art piece that is the viral host...

In the certificate of authenticity/ownership for one of the early billboard pieces, the certificate stipulates the following: The intention of this work is for the owner to reproduce the specific provided image as a public billboard. Regardless of how many times the image of the billboard is printed, (title of the piece) is a unique work of art which has been purchased by (name of owner), the current owner thereof. The owner has the exclusive right to reproduce the billboard in public as often as they like, at whatever scale they like, at however many locations they choose. The work's future life, and as a result the artist's legacy, become reliant upon the owner taking responsibility to produce and distribute the piece purchased.<sup>54</sup>

With these certificates of authenticity, Gonzalez-Torres ensures that the displaying of the image of the empty bed is always past as it is erased from a certain billboard, while always being viewed in the present on another billboard, and simultaneously also being installed for the future. The reproduction of Gonzalez-Torres' work becomes part of his art-making in a way that ensures that "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed) becomes permanently stuck in a rhizomatic temporal space in which the photograph is always decaying, is always ended, and is also always beginning. Another thing that these certificates do is make the purpose of acquiring the rights to the work far removed from the artwork's ability to accrue surplus value for the owner who purchases the responsibility for the work. It completely flips the script of the production of wealth on its head by demanding that the owner of the work become responsible for the expenditures involved in distributing, producing, and displaying the image. In this way, the installation processes of "Untitled" (billboard of an empty bed) mirror the subject that it seeks to

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<sup>54</sup> Chambers-Letson, Josh Takano. "CONTRACTING JUSTICE: THE VIRAL STRATEGY OF FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES." *Criticism* 51.4 (2009), 577.

encapsulate—the queer body that is antithetical to productivity, profit, and proper chronobiopolitical participation.

Secondly, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed) is different from the previous images analyzed in this thesis in that it lacks a corpse or body within its frame, and is a picture of a bed that acts as an indicator of the presence of two bodies that have left their traces upon it. This lack of bodies in the image, instead of erasing the existence of the human corpse, pushes the audience into experiencing the traces—the corpsing of the image—left behind by the live body and makes the absent bodies more prominent and hyper-present within the image.

Much like I discussed before about Hujar and Wojnarowicz, Gonzalez-Torres’ purpose for this installation work could be interpreted as an attempt to build an archive of his own feelings of loss and desire following the death of his partner brought on by AIDS. Also, as with the other photographs, “Untitled” (billboard of an empty bed) depicts a white bed—the frame of Gonzalez-Torres’ photograph is filled with the top half of a full-sized bed covered by one thin sheet that is rumpled and half-made. Specifically in Gonzalez-Torres’ image of the bed, there are two pillows with prominent depressions in the center of each pillow, which seem to indicate that each pillow had a head nestled in it moments ago. Also, because there are not just one but two pillows present within the photograph, the image of the bed transforms into a shared space that contains within it an acknowledgement of a relationship between two, in this case queer, bodies. The depth and clarity of the indentions on the pillows let the audience know that they were made not long before the picture was taken and produce a feeling of suspension of time—I feel as if I could lean into the sheets and still catch a whiff of the lingering perfumes and scents of the people that have been there. The pillows have not fluffed up on their own, as they tend to do after long absences of bodies, and the freshness of the imprint of bodies on this shared bed

indicates to the audience that they are staring into an intimate and private space. When I look upon this photograph, I find myself feeling a small tingling sensation of pleasure along with a feeling of shame produced by my clear act of intrusion into this profoundly intimate space.

Much of this voyeuristic pleasure, I believe, can be attributed to the fact that the image that Gonzalez-Torres calls upon his audience to witness is that of a bed in which the artist's partner used to be but can never return to. Through this photograph, Gonzalez-Torres is expressing his grief of having lost his lover, while also presenting the audience with a jarring experience of his desires for his lover to share the bed once more. This specific desire is not removed from the pain and loss present within the photograph. In fact, Eve Tuck and C. Ree define desire as an affective production that is inherently tied to the acknowledgement of suffering:

Desire is a refusal to trade in damage; desire is an antidote, a medicine to damage narratives. Desire, however, is not just living in the looking glass; it isn't a trip to opposite world/ Desire is not a light switch, not a nescient turn to focus on the positive. It is a recognition of suffering, the costs of settler colonialism and capitalism, and how we still thrive in the face of loss anyway; the parts of us that won't be destroyed... Desire is complex and complicated. It is constantly reformulating, and does so by extinguishing itself, breaking apart, reconfiguring, recasting.<sup>55</sup>

Within Gonzalez-Torres' image of this bed, then, is a desire that is frozen in its extinguishing state—the photograph is an attempt to capture this moment and to remember this feeling of queer desire. Like Wojnarowicz, Gonzalez-Torres is attempting to capture the

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<sup>55</sup> Ree, C. and Eve Tuck. "A Glossary of Haunting." *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Left Coast Press (2013), 655.



lingering traces of his partner's last fleeting signs of life. Not only is Gonzalez-Torres photographing a moment in which traces of his lover linger and therefore provide proof of his having existed outside of the heteronormative of the always-painful queer death, Gonzalez-Torres is also preserving his own personal feelings of desire and joys of having been in love. At the same time, the nature of the installation work means that this suspended image is always decaying and disappearing, remaking itself, reconfiguring, and recasting. Therefore, when a spectator interacts with the image on a billboard, they are entering into an experience of something that is frozen in time and also always disappearing, remaking, and extinguishing itself—the spectator becomes entangled in the rhizomatic temporal existence of the installation and becomes aware of the possibilities of non-linear timelines.

I think that it is important to note that all the images analyzed in my thesis are of bodies that have been, or currently are, occupying beds. While I did not actually realize this during my selections of artworks to analyze, this unintended continuity built by the presence of beds in all of the images analyzed for my thesis seems meaningful precisely because of the ability of the bed to produce feelings of pleasure, desire, and security. While I do not have the space in this thesis to fully flesh out what this constant repetition of the use of beds within queer art could mean, I still do believe there is something interesting happening that I want to briefly dwell on. Perhaps this constant presence of a bed within these photographs is because our beds are places in which we are vulnerable, whether in moments of sleep or in the intimacies of sex. There is a pleasure and comfort of shelter that is produced in a bed space that exists for both queer and straight bodies. A person's bed can be seen as a very personal and individual space, and the act of opening it up to share with someone else is to share a certain level of trust. It is also a space in which a person's experience of time is altered through the entering of an unconscious dream-

state. I believe that the photographers acknowledged this discontinuity of time and productions of vulnerability and comfort that come from the space of the bed when choosing to photograph their own feelings of loss and desires surrounding the death of their loved ones because it provided them with a space to turn the spectators of their works into their confidants and coconspirators.

Within the photograph, the sheets and the walls surrounding the bed are void of color, which further pushes the photograph into a scene of ambiguousness that is empty of motion or life. The audience's gaze is directed by these subtle nuances within the image to feel the void left behind by the lack of bodies within the image, and through that acknowledgement of the photograph and the artist's loss, the audience becomes transfixed within that moment of suspended time within the photograph. Therefore, this residual trace of the bodies left within the image is significant because it marks an alternative experience of temporality in which whoever participates in the photograph is forced into this frozen alternate time that is shared by the audience, the artist, and the artist's dead lover—a temporality that is excluded from the realm of chronobiopolitical productivity and progress. As Chambers-Letson goes on to describe:

The spectator's body takes on an epidemiological dimension here... Anti-art rhetoric has long presumed that the spectator's encounter with seemingly subversive or seditious artwork will infect an otherwise normative or healthy political subject. Once dangerous ideas are attached to the spectator through the art encounter, anti-art advocates have argued that this disease will continue to spread as the spectator moves throughout the body politic.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Chambers-Letson, Josh Takano, 562.

The politics of fear and rage circulating around AIDS-related deaths of queer bodies within heteronormative communities during the AIDS crisis depended heavily on the promise of incommunicability and containment of pain and contagion—both of queer bodies and the AIDS virus—to maintain itself. By being straight and far removed from queer bodies, the proper heteronormative citizen is supposed to be free from the risk of infection and death. However, by becoming an active spectator and participant of this photograph, the heteronormative audience must contend with the fact that this photograph brings the hidden, the private spheres of desire, sexuality, and loss of queerness into their bodies. They are no longer able to separate themselves from the pain and desires present within the billboard.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In many ways, this project is a product of my personal desires and pleasures. As a Woman of Color who grew up poor working class, my relationship with futurity has always been tenuous, at best. While I knew that a secure future was not something promised to Asian American women by the American dream, as an only child of immigrants, I was also hyperaware of my parents' expectations of me to prove that their sacrifices were worth it through my own success. Perhaps because of these conflicting messages, from a very young age, I felt at odds with the linear model of temporality. I knew that time worked differently for me, and I knew it was partially due to my identity and my inability to fit into the mold of the ideal docile-bodied subject. Then, I stumbled into the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at Georgia State University after moving back home to Atlanta, Georgia with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and a distaste for academia, which I understood only to be a suffocating canonical world of white, Eurocentric male-dominated field of theories that were irrelevant and unrelatable to me. Feminist theory was the first time that I was exposed to the validity and weight of trauma's affective productions, and this exposure to WoC thought and literature was also the first time that I experienced pleasure and rage that mirrored my own in academia and research. These two extreme emotions were intoxicating and empowering in a way that had me exploring my own relationship to theory and pleasure.

Because pleasure rooted in resistance has been central to my discovery of self-love and survival within a system of chronobiopolitics, I have found myself focusing my research specifically in areas that I feel help to disrupt heteronormative discourses that police emotion culture. Perhaps it is because of this that in my thesis I explore the significance of the subjectivity of death within photography and installation art through a reparative reading of the

artworks as it decenters linear temporality in an effort to open up alternative instantiations of temporality and existence as they pertain to subaltern bodies. Therefore, while I might have been led to this project by desire and desperation, ultimately through the process I have been touched by the works I analyzed in ways that have radically changed the way I interact with time and feeling. I felt, I desired, and I explored my own relations to the feeling states that surround me. Through this research, I found a futurity unbounded by an oppressive society within the alternative spaces carved out through art.

I am not naïve enough to believe that the dismal experiences that I had as an immigrant WoC in a heteronormative, chronobiopolitical world were something that only I encountered. Rather, I am convinced that marginalized bodies within our culture are faced with the same disorienting relations with futurity that resulted in my depression and ultimate search for pleasure and desire. While I find it important to acknowledge that locating oneself in art's alternative temporalities as a tool of resistance is not always an adequate strategy of survival for all oppressed bodies, I believe that it can be one of many strategies in which we othered bodies find the languages that voice (im)possibilities. It is my hope that this research will open up just one more method through which subaltern bodies can find resistance against the constraints of chrononormativity and heteronormativity while at the same time providing those bodies deeply imbedded within the system a means of spotting alternative modes of being. I hope to locate these alternate instantiations of existences by engaging in an effective and significant analysis of artworks, specifically in the modes of photography and performance art.

Ultimately, I was and still am most curious about parsing through the exchange between the loss/grief/absence that comes along with the chronobiopolitical regime of truth that is linear temporality formulated around the subject of death and the ultimate finality of progress, and how

the inappropriate affective productions of desire and pleasure mixed with grief and mourning in art's temporality decenters this dominant ideology. Through participating in and experiencing art that captures the beauty of transience blurred with the tragedy of death, the interlocutors—the artists, the curators, the audience members—are ejected into an othered space of broken temporality that provides proof of the possibility of alternate modes of being that exist outside of the self-regulating neoliberal subject. Therefore, the analysis of these artworks and their disruption of linear time challenges the limits of the “possible” and creates alternative instantiations of humanity that allow for spaces of abjection in which subaltern bodies can find reprieve from the colonizer. Specifically, I believe that a push into reading art as significant to feminist theory development is a powerful direction in which impossibility and the fantastic imaginary can carve out desirable existence outside of regulatory chronobiopolitical narratives.

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