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**The Tangled Roots of Haunted Queer Publics:
Derek Dunlop’s *PARK***

text by Dunja Kovačević

Ann Cvetkovich asks, within her broader project of uncovering queer, affectively charged archives, “what happens if the histories you want to know have left no records?” (Carland 76). For queer subjects, our collective history has been doubly devastated, both by the erasure of queerness from dominant historical narratives and by the sheer losses occasioned by the advent of AIDS in the late 80s, particularly in communities of men who have sex with men.

In *PARK*, Derek Dunlop, whose theoretically informed practice has been primarily rooted in painting and printmaking techniques, explores a multi-year engagement with various cruising sites across North America where men have gathered to collectively partake in queer behaviours both away from, and still fully in view of, a heteronormative public.

Theorist José Esteban Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia*, turns to the photography of Tony Just to explore how to establish connection with, or render visible, queer spectres that haunt physical sites, as well as our queer collective memory. Just meticulously cleaned public restrooms in New York City known, at some point in time, as gay hookup destinations, and photographed them in this newly sterilized state. Fixing them in a condition of hyper-sanitization only drew attention to their historical queerness through negation, by highlighting the forcible erasure of all remnants of their gay counter-histories.

Making visible this invisibility allows access to, what Muñoz terms, a “hidden queer history of public sex outside the dominant public sphere’s visible historical narratives” (Muñoz, 1996, 6). Dunlop similarly employs negation, the historical lack of the past, to commune with disappearing queer spaces.

A barrier to the formation, and transmission, of queer archives rests in the ephemeral nature of queer acts and performances, as survival was often bound up in the ability to be rendered selectively invisible within heteronormative society and institutions. In response, queer historical evidence must also deviate from a straight path, remaining in “traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things.” (Muñoz, 1996, 10). And, in the open-endedness of these terms – traces, glimmers – possibility resides.

Pulling pieces of metal from the muddy banks of the Assiniboine river – near the Forks – from a previously popular cruising destination, Dunlop materializes the site’s spectral queer history, surfacing through these traces like the objects themselves emerged

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PARK

Derek Dunlop

Exhibition Dates: May 4th - June 16th, 2018

Opening reception: May 4th, 5-8pm

Artist Talk*: May 5th, 3pm

*ASL interpretation available by request

from their resting place over years of slow excavation. Catalogued and arranged in archeological fashion, these warped and softened objects begin to resemble human remains in their oxidized skins and suggestive forms. And, in a sense, they are.

Witness to the “ghosts of public sex” (so-called by Muñoz), these hand-forged objects have hauntingly endured (albeit in slow decay), while their human counterparts moved on, fell to the AIDS epidemic hollowing out queer communities in the 90s, or likewise remain somewhere, also in decay. These objects speak across time, stand in for memories and performances of queer pleasure that disrupted public space by rendering the public *queer*. Each metal tool is a carnal remnant, a gravestone, a proxy body, that reminds: *we have always existed, no matter how covertly*.

Heather Love suggests that “the longing of community across time is a crucial feature of queer historical experience,” affirming that the archival impulse is also located in a desire to speak back to, or dialogue, with a shared past (Love 37). Dunlop attempts a spiritual communication with his queer ancestors through the preparation of a series of mono prints.

Using flora plucked from a popular cruising trail in Stanley Park, in Vancouver, Dunlop performs a spontaneous and irreproducible queer act via the printing press, connecting him to a legacy of queer activism in the form of printed materials. The magic of alchemy, represented by the oozing pink and lavender repurposed from early queer propaganda, rejoins the past by reactivating it for the present.

Other traces showcased in *PARK* do not so easily offer the promise of repair. This tension is palpable in the photographs taken in Bonnycastle Park, in Winnipeg. In “Graffiti” the word “gay” is barely visible on the restored limestone barricade/planter, its faint imprint the only reminder of what once transpired here, in this place. As public spaces are renovated to serve revisionist, sanitized, historical narratives, even the glimmers of their seedy, raucous, queer counter-histories disappear.

To be queer is to be alienated from, and displaced within, a heteronormative structured public. It is also to be haunted by a painful awareness of an absent historical archive and an inability to repair, reconstruct, or even fully know, what has been lost. Our archives then, too, follow a twisted path, like the tangled root system Dunlop photographs in Bonnycastle Park with his camera: bound up together, not easily trailed, folding in on itself in a series of indistinguishable and interconnected knots.

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(references on reverse side)

Thank You!

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detail of *Study for Garden* by Derek Dunlop,digital print, 2016

Dunja Kovačević holds a BA Hons in English and an MA in Cultural Studies from the University of Winnipeg. She is an editor, co-founder of feminist print anthology *Dear Journal*, and an emerging cultural critic. Lately, her work explores the formation (and inheritance) of alternative, affective archives for displaced queer individuals and communities.

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References:

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Derek Dunlop is an artist, writer and curator whose research focuses on the history of abstraction as it relates to theories of identity and the process of subject formation. He is particularly interested in questions dealing with form and materiality in the mediums of painting, drawing, and printmaking. He has participated in numerous residencies and programs including the inaugural Open Sessions program at The Drawing Center in New York City; the thematic residency, *Are We Looking at Dead Birds?* at the Banff Centre; as well as the studio artist residency program at the International Studio & Curatorial Program in Brooklyn. The recipient of numerous grants and awards, Dunlop's work has been exhibited in art galleries throughout North America including the UCLA New Wight Gallery in Los Angeles, Artspeak in Vancouver, and the Drawing Center in New York City. He completed his MFA at the University of British Columbia and is pursuing his PhD in Art history at the University of Toronto.

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