

POTENTIALS, CURRENTS, POWER AND RESISTANCE:  
A QUEER LOOK AT THE CIRCUIT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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JOHN FRANCIS EDWARD DROVER









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POTENTIALS, CURRENTS, POWER AND RESISTANCE:

A QUEER LOOK AT THE CIRCUIT

by

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School of Graduate Studies

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requirements for the degree of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis applies queer theory to the gay, festival circuit of all-night, dance parties. The use of costume, music, dance, and constructions of the body on the circuit highlights its transgressive nature along axes of not only sexuality, but race, class and gender. In addition, the confluence of subculture(s), politics and economics on the gay circuit point to an inherent resistance within the circuit movement.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Flipping the Switch**

The physics of the electrical circuit provides useful metaphors for the study of the gay, all-night dance party, festival circuit. A simple electric circuit contains a number of basic elements. Among them: “potentials” that drive currents, and “resistances” that transform these currents into various kinds of energy. The following thesis posits an expanded approach to queer theory that looks beyond sexuality to include transgressive social behaviour related to gender, class and race. The potential of this broader approach to queer theory highlights currents, or trends on the gay, all-night dance party, festival circuit that are a direct result of intersections of sexuality, gender, class and race and the transgression of social norms along these axes. The use of music, dance, costume and constructions of the body on the circuit illustrate the queer nature of the gay festival circuit and demonstrate the power of a confluence of subculture, politics and economics. While the social paradigm does not follow the strict laws of electromagnetism, concepts such as potential, currents, power and resistance provide useful starting points for the study of the gay, all-night dance party, festival circuit.



It is from a background in the physical sciences that I derive these metaphors. I discovered the social sciences and the circuit quite by accident. After several years in the Chemistry Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland, it was time for a hiatus from academe. The length of time was determined by University regulations and was due to a serious lack of commitment on my part. At any rate, the situation provided me with a prolonged break from my studies which included a period of extended travel throughout Canada and around the world. My travels took me to Whistler, British Columbia for the winter of 1994-95. Whistler is a large, world-class ski resort located approximately 100 km north of Vancouver. During the ski season, tens of thousands of young people, mainly from Canada, Australia and New Zealand converge on Whistler to ski and snowboard, and to staff the numerous shops, cafes, restaurants, bars and hotels and, of course, the two mountains Whistler and Blackcomb.

Whistler is a great place to spend the winter months. If one must live in Canada during this much maligned season and contend with the high annual snowfall common to most areas of the country, it is much easier to do so with two 2500 metre ski hills out one's backdoor. The gay nightlife in Whistler, however, is severely lacking to the point of being non-existent, even though the majority of the transient workers are male. However, it is not impossible to find a queer snowboarder or two with whom to keep warm in front of a fire. Imagine my delight when in February Whistler hosted Gay Ski Week. It was quite a topic of conversation around Whistler Village when a thousand or more muscular, gay men arrived at the resort for a week of skiing and parties. All the more so since the Texas Ski Council held their annual convention in Whistler during that

same week and stories emerged of disputes between the conservative Texans and flamboyant gays, particularly as they related to shared hot tubs common in Whistler's condominiums. Gay Ski Week was perhaps the best of that winter season. Each day, more and more gay men arrived and at the end of the week there was a huge, all-night dance party at the Whistler Convention Centre called "Altitude."

It did not occur to me that this event was a recurrent one, or that it was linked to any larger subcultural trend. I left Whistler at the end of the ski season and travelled across Asia, spent a prolonged period of time in Co. Donegal, Ireland, and finally settled in Victoria, British Columbia in spring 1996. In the autumn of that year, I felt an urge to return to the mountains and headed to Whistler once again for a second ski season. The gay nightlife in Victoria is no more exciting than in Whistler and the travel time from Victoria to Vancouver is about the same as that from Whistler to Vancouver where there is abundant gay life. The winter season in Whistler was much the same as it was two years before, but Whistler Village had grown quite a bit with more condos, shops, restaurants and the sorts of things needed to sustain growth in a tourist economy. In February, at the same time as two years prior, gay men once again congregated in Whistler for a week of fun in the snow. Just like the Village, Gay Ski Week had also grown in size.

Even though I participated serendipitously in two Gay Ski Weeks in Whistler, and attended the festival's finale parties, I still had no idea that there were similar events anywhere else. It was not until a year after I returned to Newfoundland and resumed my studies at Memorial University that I made a connection between my experiences in

Whistler and the larger, gay subcultural context. In November of 1998, I travelled to Toronto during Memorial's reading break to visit my friend Patrick, an ex-patriot Newfoundlander. One month beforehand, on Canada's Thanksgiving Weekend, Patrick and some friends attended the Black & Blue Festival in Montreal. It was the first time any of them attended such an event and it was, of course, the topic of conversation amongst that group. They described a long weekend filled with all-night dance parties that culminated in an all-night dance event at the Montreal Convention Centre with thousands upon thousands of gay men. Their descriptions were reminiscent of the Altitude parties and sounded like so much fun I planned to meet them in Montreal for the 1999 Black & Blue Festival, and convinced four friends from St. John's to join me.

That fall semester in 1999, I took an undergraduate folklore course in Ritual, Spectacle and the Body with Giovanna Del Negro. The annual Black & Blue Festival made an excellent term paper topic with its: ritual-like dance; the spectacle of the stage shows with lavish costumes, elaborate dance routines, and gifted vocalists; and the overwhelming mass of thousands and thousands of topless, muscular bodies dancing feverishly to the pounding 4/4 beat of house music. I set to work learning what exactly the Black & Blue was all about. In the course of that research, I discovered that Montreal's Black & Blue Festival is not only similar to Whistler's Gay Ski Week, but part of a larger network of similar parties. These events grew out of earlier forms of gay celebration and existing institutions within gay subculture. Celebration is an important form of cultural expression within gay subculture, yet historically gays have not been afforded conventional forms of association such as churches, kinship and traditional

residences in which to develop and maintain these cultural forms. Instead, the evolution of Western gay subculture has depended almost exclusively on market-based institutions (Warner xvii). Nightclubs, arguably the most prevalent of these institutions, provide the model for a collection of celebrations or festivals referred to as “the circuit” of which Gay Ski Week and the Black & Blue Festival are but two examples. In all, the circuit is a series of 70 to 100 festivals and dance parties held annually, mainly in North America with the usual exceptions of Ibiza, Spain; Mikonos, Greece; and Sydney, Australia. Jose Torrealba’s video documentary Got 2b There: A History of the Circuit identifies 90 parties throughout 11 countries. These events feature performers from a list of 80 DJs with 20,000 regular participants or circuit boys. A circuit boy’s appearance follows a particular aesthetic. His hairstyle is short, his skin is well-tanned, and his body is exceptionally muscular and void of hair, but often not naturally.

The circuit is a fascinating topic for folklore research in that it is rich in cultural forms, even though my undergraduate research project revealed to me that only a few academics have so far studied circuit parties. An exception is Jonathan Bollen whose article “Sexing the Dance” describes the now-defunct annual Sleaze Ball in Sydney, Australia. It was the second largest of two Australian parties with the other being the long-running Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Bollen’s article gave me a sense of circuit events outside Montreal and Whistler and provided useful starting points for bibliographic research. Upon completion of my undergraduate degree, I entered Memorial’s folklore graduate program and took up the exploration of circuit parties as a thesis topic.

I soon discovered that the history of the circuit is difficult to piece together with any accuracy. This is a function of its relatively underground nature, at least in relation to mainstream society, the ephemeral quality of the experience, particularly when it involves illicit drug use, and the lack of structures within gay subculture as described by Warner (vii) that might serve to propagate cultural forms and their histories through successive generations. Certainly, the written record is scant. In the summer of 2000, I spent some time at the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives (CLGA) in Toronto hoping to find materials related to the circuit. Apart from a few short articles and a couple of advertisements in gay magazines, I uncovered few mentions of these very large and widespread festivals.

Torrealba's documentary claims to be a history of the circuit, but is more an ethnographic introduction to the usual topics of costume, music, dance, drugs and sex. It contains very little in the way of facts regarding the emergence of the circuit leaving the who? what? where? when? and why? of its beginnings unanswered. However, Torrealba does consult two of the few individuals to document the history of the circuit. Steve Kammon, editor of Circuit Noize, a magazine dedicated to the circuit and academic Esther Newton. Kammon states that:

The circuit really had its foundations in a kind of trans-continental migration between the two gay Meccas in the 1970s. There were two clubs: The Saint in New York City and The Probe in Los Angeles. In New York, The Saint was a huge space. The dancefloor was a full-scale planetarium that could show star shows and have complete entertainment for all the senses. They started off with two major parties: The White Party and the Black Party... When it became a full-fledged circuit was when a third location was added to the circuit. That was probably the

Hotlanta party in Atlanta which started out as a rafting expedition down the river and they had a tea dance afterward. And from there, [the circuit] just exploded (Torrealba).

Kammon's description of the emergence of the circuit in the United States represents just a small part of Torrealba's work, yet accounts for most of the historical information found in the documentary. Well-known Gay and Lesbian Studies scholar Esther Newton also appears in Got 2b There and comments on the early circuit. She says:

The circuit party is a natural development of many trends that were there in gay male culture before... There were the balls that George Chauncey talks about in his book Gay New York. Drag balls. That was part of it too. The tradition is there. Theme parties that started in the 1930s. Then there is the whole disco movement that took off in the 1970s which was a commercialization of something that before that had pretty much been private parties (Torrealba).

Kammon and Newton provide some insight into the origin of the circuit party, but in all likelihood, considering my experience at the CLGA with its limited record of the early circuit and its predecessors, any future history will have to be pieced together from oral accounts, promotional materials, and sporadic magazine articles.

The circuit in Canada was undoubtedly influenced by events in the United States such as those described above. It also appeared at much the same time as, and shares historical similarities with all night dance parties known as "raves," and evolved from official and unofficial dance parties organized by gay community groups, and private and commercial interests. In all probability, Canadian gay cultural tourists attended circuit events in the United States, or even Europe and Australia and returned to their home



cities with these models in mind. The rave parties that took hold in Britain and worldwide in the mid- to late-1980s also display linkages with the circuit. Tara McCall, authour of This Is Not A Rave: In the Shadow of a Subculture, cites two major influences on early rave subculture. The first is the English Northern Soul movement of the late 1960s with its attendant all-night, alcohol-free, amphetamine-driven dance parties. The second is the gay disco scene. She writes:

The disco Era actually began as a rebellion. In New York City in the early 1970s there was a burgeoning gay pride movement which had been sparked by the Stonewall Riot of 1969 after the brutal police invasion of a gay cafe and disco club. Disco became the anthem of this pride movement and promised a haven where Blacks and gays could be free from public scrutiny and stereotypes. Disco was the music of social change and freedom from heterosexist mainstream society... [All-night disco clubs] offered a community atmosphere where gay patrons could be out comfortably (McCall 25).

It is clear that North American gay subculture influenced British rave. It is also true that British rave in turn influenced the all-night dance party scene in North America. McCall traces the development of various types of electronic and remixed musics that inspired and created all-night dance scenes, and follows rave culture from its beginnings in Britain and areas of continental Europe through its spread to the United States and Canada.

In Toronto, McCall cites Exodus in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the first regular, all-night, club party to feature techno DJs and later "Rave On" in 1991, produced by Exodus Promotions, as the first one-off rave event (42). A second production company called Chemistry became the largest promoter of raves in Toronto. A collection of 155 advertising flyers provided to me by Michael Schwartz of Toronto contains four

examples of Chemistry promotional materials (MUNFLA 2001-363, Items 12-14, 91).

Schwartz is the owner of Fab Magazine, Ontario's largest gay periodical, owner of a bar and restaurant in Toronto's gay village, and long-time promoter of gay parties in Toronto. While the Schwartz collection, now housed in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, deals primarily with gay events in Toronto, from house parties and nightclub sponsored events to large one-offs, there are several examples from events such as those produced by Chemistry thus demonstrating a cross-over between rave and the circuit, at least in terms party attendees. Within the gay community of Toronto, dance events not associated with nightclubs were held several years before the first rave in August 1991. Minutes from the general meeting of the Gay Community Dance Committee in Toronto, uncovered at the CLGA, are evidence of earlier organization of a similar type of party. The minutes read:

Fact: For several years now, there have not been regular community-oriented con-commercial social events in Toronto.

Fact: Most lesbian and gay organizations in Toronto are being faced with a growing need for operating funds, and many groups do not have the resources or skills available for major fund-raising.

The Gay Community Dance Committee is a new co-operative group being formed with the idea of pooling resources and skills from as many local lesbian and gay non-profit organizations as possible. GCDC would hold a large dance once a month, the proceeds of which would be divided among participating groups. (GCDC General Meeting, April 12, 1984)

GCDC events were not all-night parties like raves and circuit parties, but they were organized outside the commercial framework of nightclubs and demonstrate the historical

significance of dance to Toronto's gay community as well as the early recognition of the usefulness of such events for fundraising.

Gay Pride events are arguably the largest and most prevalent of gay festivals in North America. At this point, practically every major city across Canada holds Pride celebrations at some time throughout the summer months. Toronto boasts one of the largest and well-attended "Prides" on the continent, rivalling cities like New York and San Francisco that have long been considered bastions of gay subculture. Kerwin McLeister states that Toronto's first incorporated Pride was held in 1981 and came within weeks of police raids on the city's bathhouses where hundreds of gay men were arrested and property destroyed. McLeister describes how Pride had its "roots in activism" and grew into a "gathering of the tribes: bears, SM lesbians, transgendered people, corporate fags and club kids... Pride has become a celebration of diversity within a minority group" (5). Although 1981 marked the first official Pride event for Toronto's gay community, prior unsanctioned events served the same purpose. Jeffrey Christian of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives compiled a history of Toronto Pride for Fab Magazine and describes events as far back as 1971 (26). In August of that year, the first Gay Day Picnic was held at Hanlan's Point on Toronto Island and was organized by the University of Toronto Homophile Association, Toronto Gay Action and the Community Homophile Association of Toronto. The purpose of this event was to raise funds to send activists to Ottawa where they participated in a march to mark the second anniversary of the decriminalization of homosexual acts by the federal government. The picnic was held again in subsequent years, and the celebrations grew in 1973 and 1974 to encompass an

entire week of events, although Toronto City Council refused to recognize Pride as an official celebration. During the years 1975-77 and 1979-80, there were no official Pride events organized in the city. As described above, Toronto's Gay Pride was officially incorporated in 1981, yet city council did not proclaim Gay Pride Day until 1991 despite numerous court battles by the Pride Committee to have the city do so.

Dance has always been an important form of celebration within gay subculture. It follows logically that dance events were an integral part of Pride celebrations in cities such as Toronto. Within the Schwartz collection of club and party flyers are numerous examples of all-night dance parties held during Pride Week (MUNFLA 2001-363, Items 6, 10, 35, 60, 95, 96, 110 and 116). The Unified Parties are currently the showcase of circuit events within the city of Toronto. In 2000, the Unified Parties included a Thursday night kick-off party, Friday "Unified Military" party, Saturday afternoon "Squirt" outdoor watergun party, Saturday night "Unity" party and Sunday night "Victory" party. The growth of Pride created a parallel growth in Unified Weekend as the influx of gay tourists made Toronto a destination on the circuit. Other large parties in Toronto include the annual "Leatherball" and the summer series "Big Gay Boat Cruise," organized by promoters Boost Boys, among others, with numerous weekly events such as Sunday night's "It's a boy's Life" that can run for weeks, months or even years. There is a range of all-night dance celebration from local, short-lived parties to well established, week-long festivals that attract thousands of international visitors. Long-time city councillor and gay activist Kyle Rae recognizes how this incredible growth shifts the meaning of gay celebration making it no longer a local, community event, but a regional

one (MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 212) and, I would argue, national and even international. Unified Weekend is an example of how several modest, local parties came together to create a circuit weekend within the larger festival context of Toronto Gay Pride.

Montreal has a long history as a circuit destination not only because of its huge street parties and performances in the parks during Pride weekend, but in large part due to the Bad Boys Club of Montreal (BBCM). Elements of rave, combined with existing gay dance celebrations including Pride, helped bridge the gap between local and regional in Montreal, just as in Toronto, but the BBCM is arguably the greatest force in making Montreal one of the world's pre-eminent circuit destinations. The BBCM is a registered charity group established by a group of young professionals including a lawyer, public relations consultant and individuals in business and marketing. The result is a group that in 1991 hosted its first annual Black & Blue festival that has grown from a single, small warehouse event into a week of all-night dance parties and an array of other socio-cultural events from gay film and art exhibitions to an annual health symposium. The 10th edition souvenir program points out how Black & Blue has grown from a small party of 600 to more than 80,000 participants throughout the entire festival. The main purpose of this event, like many circuit parties, is to raise money for community groups. There are currently more than 55 organizations that benefit from the BBCM (Chateauvert 18).

In documenting the circuit, I faced some unique hurdles in terms of ethnographic fieldwork. First of all, as with many commercialized performances such as rock concerts and other stage shows, recording is strictly prohibited. Participants are not permitted to bring cameras, tape recorders or video recorders and are searched by security before

entering the party. This essentially eliminates the fieldworker's ability to document the event with the accuracy afforded by modern recording technology and therefore lends to the ephemeral nature of circuit events. In the absence of recording equipment, participant observation and oral accounts become the only tools available to the folklorist in his ethnographic research. Given the ubiquitous use of illicit drugs on the circuit, any reliance on participants' accounts of their personal experience poses a problem since these accounts are likely coloured by a cocktail of recreational drugs. It also raises questions as to the extent of participant observation to which the fieldworker should go in order to deliver an accurate description of the circuit. Would my own drug use taint the research? Or is it a legitimate form of participant observation necessary to a more in-depth and complete understanding of the circuit party? The issues I encountered in my fieldwork are no doubt common to work with urban and underground subcultures. I could easily write a complete expose of my experiences on the circuit, but I believe it sufficient to say that I did not overindulge while carrying out my participant observation, nor did I abstain from any aspect of the circuit experience in order to maintain an image as the sober and celibate academic.

Memorial has an ethics review committee to oversee all research involving human and animal subjects. Therefore, it was necessary to submit my thesis proposal to the committee before proceeding with my fieldwork. As expected, the issues of public sex and illegal drugs associated with circuit parties caused some concern for the committee members. Their response to my proposal was to inquire how I might handle information pertaining to illegal activities and whether I was obliged to report these activities to the



authorities. In order to satisfy the committee and have my proposal pass the ethics review, I contacted a senior bureaucrat with the provincial justice department. He informed me that the only crimes one must report to police are those that involve children. Since circuit parties in Canada are licensed events, there are no minors and hence no reason for concern. The ethics review committee passed the proposal without any changes.

Research on the circuit posed problems for me not only in terms of fieldwork, but in regards to theoretical approach as well. Perhaps it was my unconventional participant observation that led me to queer theory with its emphasis on the transgression of social norms as they relate to sexuality. Ethnography-under-the-influence is certainly a transgression of norms of academic research and so I call this an example of queer ethnography. Illicit drug use is not equivalent to sexuality, but it does foreground pleasure and the importance of desire which are tenets of queer theory. In fact, the idea that drug-inflected ethnography is a queer form of research led me to the idea that queer is most useful when applied to other socio-cultural axes, and not limited to sexuality. These axes include class, race and gender among others. Suzanne de Castell and Mary Bryson approach queer ethnography as a subject position rather than an object of study. They refer to queer ethnography as “a repositioning from a hegemonic to a queer-centred frame..., challenged by queers researching and writing as queers, not about them” (98). They describe queer as being “about the deliberate enactment of an endless series of transgressions” (108). It is with these ideas in mind that I take the position of queer ethnographer and transgress not only social norms, but academic norms as well. In the

next chapter, I explore queer theory and attempt to extend its boundaries to incorporate elements of race, gender, class and social behaviour in order to examine queer aspects of the circuit.

In Chapter Three, I detail the historical factors and influences that gave rise to (a) gay subculture(s) in Western urban centres and, therefore, laid the groundwork for cultural forms such as the circuit. There are competing theories as to when and why distinctly gay subculture(s) emerged, but most deal with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century urbanization, industrialization, medicine, psychology and the justice system. Chapter Four highlights two important aspects of the circuit when it draws links between economics and the aesthetic known as “camp” in order to investigate the political nature of market-based, gay subcultural forms. The parallels between camp and certain economic theories highlight the hybrid nature of gay as it exists alongside mainstream society. Chapter Five explores cultural expressions such as drag and house music in an examination of the circuit’s queer links to other male homo-social and marginalized groups. Connections to these groups illustrate a historical association with the groups and, in some cases, a long-standing eroticism of them. The final chapter examines bodybuilding and recreational drug use as queer health practices and the impact of HIV/AIDS on the construction of risk and of the body within gay men’s health. While there is some research into the long term effects of illicit drugs, they are often inconclusive and contradictory. Assessments of the health risks associated with drug use become a personal issue in much the same way as safer sex practices, or decisions to undergo mainstream drug therapies for HIV/AIDS which often involve highly toxic

medications. While there is a relation between constructions of the body through recreational and orthodox drugs, muscle masks the unhealthy connotations of HIV/AIDS and illicit drugs. In conclusion, I look at criticisms of the circuit as a homo-normative process and the anti-gay critiques of much queer theory. However, I begin first with an introduction to queer theory, from its beginnings in gay and lesbian theory, through its intersections with post-modernism and post-structuralism, to its expansion to include axes of identification outside sexuality.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Queer Potential**

In this chapter, I explore the fundamentals of queer theory and make a case for an expanded approach to queer theory that includes transgressions of social norms along axes such as gender, class and race as they intersect with sexuality. Queer theory itself emerged in the academy with the arrival of post-structuralism and post-modernism. As with all post-modern stances, queer theory reflects on its primary subject matter, sexuality, and sees it as mutable, autonomous, desire-driven and disconnected from such conceptualist notions as history, society, and culture (Morton 371). Discursive approaches to same-sex desire that pre-date queer theory investigate how sexuality is experienced and performed by an individual or group and explore the effects of social norms and expectations that are enacted in culturally and temporally specific ways. Post-modernism resists limiting its subject through classificatory systems and recognizes its own theoretical viewpoint as formulated and open to scrutiny. In this sense, queer theory is self-reflexive and difficult to define precisely. The premises themselves are questionable in such a way that the theoretical framework itself becomes amorphous.

The problem often distils down to: What exactly is queer? From there it is possible to see queer's relation to the mainstream or dominant culture, and also to gay subculture(s).

Queer theory is sometimes understood in relation to its predecessors. This approach assumes that an awareness of established models for the exploration of same-sex behaviour, politics, and identities will allow one to more easily comprehend the seeming contradictions of queer theory. Annamarie Jagose traces the emergence and evolution of the categorization and politics of same-sex desire in her book Queer Theory. On the basis of her historical account of homosexual, gay, and lesbian, she outlines the development of queer and its implications for future scholarship and activism. Donna Penn employs essentialism and constructionism to build a foundation for her introduction of queer. Penn's "Queer Theorizing" discusses queer's challenge to historical projects that prescribe or presuppose strict sexual identities. Other understandings of queer come directly from post-structuralist and post-modernist viewpoints. Donald Morton draws on prominent (post-)theorists to present a Marxist critique of queer theory. Morton's essay also introduces the idea of queer space, something that is further elaborated by Joseph Goodwin and others.

As mentioned, post-structuralism and post-modernism are the progenitors of queer theory. It is also important to view queer in its historical relation to previous notions or constructs of sexual desire for as Annamarie Jagose suggests "queer effects a rupture which, far from being absolute, is meaningful only in the context of its historical development" (75). The concepts of the queer self, queer theory and queer politics are often delineated through a discussion of the appearance of homosexuality as a pathology

in late-nineteenth century psychology, the solidification in the west of distinct urban subculture(s) in subsequent decades and the materialization of gay liberation and lesbian feminism toward the 1970s. More attention will be given in the next chapter to several factors credited with the appearance modern gay subculture(s). For now, it is only important to note that queer is a more recent theorization of same-sex desire debated in current discourse mainly through its (un)relation to lesbian and gay studies. It is deemed the successor of gay and lesbian as a theory, but a predecessor as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Jagose credits its appearance as theory to two major factors.

First, or at least most dramatically, the AIDS crisis shifted attention away from categories of sexual identification and refocused it on sexual practices. In the early 1980s when the health industry first identified HIV/AIDS, it was concentrated in urban gay communities and therefore came to be identified as a gay disease. As public health campaigns directed attention to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, it became apparent that HIV/AIDS might afflict anyone, and so it became necessary to shift focus away from high risk groups such as gays, sex-trade workers and IV drug users, and to centre it on the particular sexual and other practices responsible for the transmission of HIV. Susan Hayes writes, "Then there was AIDS, which, through the intense discussion of sexual practices (as opposed to sexual identities), spawned the Queer movement in America" (Hayes 14). The foregrounding of sexual practice over categories of self-identification led to a profound change in thinking that served to destabilize gay identity. Through queer, it is possible to realize that sexual desire and acts need not categorise an individual.



Although the men's health crisis jelled the idea of queer and led to its theoretical exploration in academic discourse while giving rise to a new political movement as espoused by such groups as Queer Nation in the United States, one should not assume that HIV/AIDS was solely responsible for the emergence of queer. Individuals and groups exist in all societies who adopt sexual practices that are not only outside straight norms but also contradict accepted standards of gay and lesbianism. Such practices include bisexuality, group sex, inter-generational sex, inter-racial sex, sadomasochism, transvestism, transsexualism and a host of others. If one can imagine a Venn diagram, all these practices intersect entirely with queer while sharing little or none of the same space with one another. Unlike gay and lesbian, the sexual practices listed above do not always, if ever, foster an identity while others may self-identify with categories one might not expect. A propensity toward inter-generational sex, for example, need not be the practitioners' defining characteristic. Although there are groups that contest laws against such sexual practices within the realm of same-sex desire, these groups can hardly be equated with the lifestyles and complex subcultures inherent in gay or lesbian identities. The recognition of a multitude of sex acts that are not straight but are also not gay or lesbian has further decentred and destabilized identity categories.

The foregrounding of sexual practice in the face of HIV/AIDS and a break from traditional gay liberationist politics by those it disaffects, both of which contribute to the current interest in queer, places the emergence of queer within the last two decades. Joagose supports this timeframe in writing:

While the mobilisation of queer in its most recent sense cannot be dated exactly, it is generally understood to have been popularly adopted in the early 1990s. Queer is a product of specific cultural and theoretical pressures which increasingly structured debates (both within and outside the academy) about questions of lesbian and gay identity. Perhaps most significant in this regard has been the problematizing by post-structuralism of gay liberationist and lesbian feminist understandings of identity and the operations of power (Jagose 76).

In the decade following Stonewall, gay politics centred mainly on the liberation of gays to the benefit of society as a whole. The sexual freedom fought for by gays translated into an openness that allowed individuals more scope to explore their sexuality outside the constraints of the heterosexual hegemony. Increasingly, however, gay politics moved toward the recognition of gays as a distinct minority within the larger society and therefore entitled to the civil rights afforded other minorities, particularly racial and ethnic groups. This same-but-different wing of gay politics does not challenge the dominant culture as did liberationist politics but sought to assimilate gay subculture(s) into the existing political and social framework. In this manner, only those who self-identify as gay and participate willingly in its lifestyles and subculture(s) as defined by dominant gay political organizations may stake a claim to gay minority rights. The argument is that these are everyone's rights and so should not be seen as forwarding a gay agenda. However, this shift in attitude toward integration disenfranchises many who do not subscribe to a strict sexual identity or do not self-identify with any established sexual identity group. Queer attempts to reconcile these situations by emphasizing the ubiquity of deviance from all sets of norms.

Unlike gay liberationism which presupposes a unified and homogeneous identity, queer is based on a politics of difference. Jagose describes how “in identifying difference as a crucial term for queer knowledges and modes of organization, [queer] theorists map a change which is not specific to queer but characteristic of post-structuralism in general” (77). Queer theory denaturalizes essentialist viewpoints of homosexuality which purport that same-sex desire is for some an innate and unchangeable aspect of one’s person. It destabilizes gay and lesbian identities by revealing the inherent differences within these supposed identities and further decentralizes them by recognizing a multitude of other non-mainstream sexual realities. It is this denaturalization, destabilization and decentralization which are tenets of post-structuralist thought. Not only is queer a product of its historical relation to modern lesbian and gay political movements, and HIV/AIDS activism, it is also most importantly a product of post-structuralism and post-modernism. Queer then becomes an infinitely multi-generic sexual category to the point of bursting for “within post-structuralism, the very notion of identity as a coherent and abiding sense of self is perceived as a cultural fantasy rather than a demonstrable fact” (Jagose 82).

The amorphous nature of queer theory makes it an extremely useful tool for deconstructing sexual identities, yet it can be unwieldy in its excessively broad applications. Jagose writes, “Given the extent of its commitment to denaturalization, queer itself can neither have a foundational logic nor a consistent set of characteristics” (96). It is possible to view gay subculture(s) through a queer lens. However, it is important not to do so in a manner that simply outlines the accepted parameters of gay

subculture(s) and then mobilises queer to debunk them. Although queer is often used as a convenient shorthand for lesbian and gay (Jagose 97) with the frequent inclusion of bisexual and even transsexual, queer is much more than the sum of these categories. If it is to be used effectively in relation to gay identity, it is to "indicate a critical distance from the identity politics that underpin traditional notions of... community" (Jagose 98). In this respect, a queer approach to gay subculture uncovers the individual differences inherent in members of a group in regard to their presupposed commonalities. Queer also tackles the issue of homonormativity by which dominant ideals of gay come to represent all gays. That is to say, "queer may be used to describe an open-ended constituency, whose shared characteristic is not identity itself but an anti-normative positioning with regard to sexuality" (Jagose 98). One should not assume that all normative pressures on gay identity come from outside. Many of these forces originate from within the community and serve to normalize gay so that it may be accepted as a legitimate minority within the larger mainstream society. Queer theory pictures gay in a much broader context than its relationship to hetero-culture. It shows gay subculture(s) in relation to itself and to all other sexual possibilities.

The expansion of queer theory into other modes of identification is particularly interesting. Although gay subculture(s) is based primarily on male same-sex desire, it is possible to see how gay subculture(s) intersect(s) with other marginalized cultures such as ethnic communities, the working class, outlaw cultures and male homo-social groups such as military and sport. As Jagose points out, "Recent signs indicate that [queer's] denaturalising project is being brought to bear on other axes of identification than sex and

gender" (99). Rosemary Hennessey describes how queer "unpacks monolithic identities" and includes the ways in which lesbian and gay "are inflected by heterosexuality, race, gender and ethnicity" (qtd. in Jagose 99). Eve Sedgwick speaks of these "and *other* [not my italics] identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses" that have "spun outward" from queer theory (qtd. in Jagose 99). It is possible that queer's multi-generic quality in respect to sexualities is equally represented in its inclusion of all other modes of identification that necessarily intersect with and impact sexuality.

Many discussions of queer begin with previous understandings of same-sex desire. Just as Jagose introduces us to queer through homosexual, gay and lesbian, and the effect of HIV/AIDS, Donna Penn initiates her discussion of queer at the most basic level. Essentialism and constructionism are two of the first theories that deal with homosexuality and radically changed not only academic discourse on the subject but affected political movements as well. Essentialism asserts that homosexuality is an inborn characteristic which is not subject to change or the will of the individual. Penn points out how this idea "reframed the so-called problem of homosexuality" which now "resided with the society that deemed him or her unnatural" (25). If in fact homosexuality is a congenital condition as essentialism would have us believe, then society's ill treatment of homosexuals is the main issue and not homosexuals themselves. It is not difficult to see how essentialist notions of homosexuality are easily mobilised for the political gain of a community defined by such sexual behaviour. This is the minoritizing view wherein homosexuals must be granted the same rights as other groups

marginalized by race, ethnicity, physical disability, gender or a host of other congenital characteristics.

Although often used within a single argument, essentialism and constructionism are not binary opposites. They may certainly be used to argue one against the other, but can also be used in conjunction with one another to forward the same point. Penn tells how “construction theory posits sexuality as a product of social relations... Divorced from a particular cultural context that ascribes meaning to same-sex acts, homosexuality merely describes a particular set or choreography of sexual acts, a gymnastics of orgasm” (26-7). Although constructionists have “been viewed as traitors whose arguments threaten the movement” (Penn 26), constructionism does not negate the essentialist claim that same-sex desire is innate. In fact it simply furthers the essentialist claim that it is the treatment of homosexuality by society that is the problem and not the acts or individuals themselves. After all, the dominant society’s beliefs about homosexuality and its handling of individuals who engage in same-sex acts are socially and culturally constructed. Essentialism and constructionism thus can be seen as two theoretical devices that can work together to create an understanding of same-sex desire.

These theories of essential character and social construction attempt to answer the questions “Who is a homosexual and why?” The answers to these questions led scholars to subjects who self-identify as gay and lesbian. The problem here is that this field of inquiry is exclusionary. That is, it takes into account only certain types of individuals who belong to what is increasingly becoming a normalized group within our society. As Penn writes:

In privileging identity over behaviour, we inadvertently narrow our scope to a largely white, relatively urban, North American [context]. Applying homosexual identity as the determining feature of homosexuality uncritically to other peoples and cultural contexts may level differences in the interest of deriving a theoretically coherent unifying principle (29).

It is these limitations created by rigid definitions of sexual identity that queer theory attempts to undo. Queer focuses on marginalized sexual behaviours in order to highlight differences even within the relatively fixed categories gay, lesbian and straight.

Allan Berube and Jeffrey Escoffier describe queer as “confrontational -- opposed to gay assimilationists and straight oppressors while inclusive of people who have been marginalized by anyone in power” (qtd. in Penn 30-31). Berube and Escoffier do not talk of the marginalization of sexuality as such, but of marginalization in general as an instrument that maintains the status quo. Just as Jagose suggests above, it is possible through Berube and Escoffier to extend the latitude of queer to include other axes of identification wherein behavioural differences exist, particularly at the peripheries. A broader approach to queer demonstrates the importance of difference in (self)identification categories and denaturalizes those very categories that hitherto have stood to marginalize individuals whose behaviour is seen as counter-hegemonic and therefore dangerous in relation to the maintenance of normal whether it is European, white, Asian, male, female, old, young, or a host of other identifications. Penn writes, “Queer aims to destabilize boundaries that divide the normal from the deviant” (32). Without these partitions, normal becomes redundant and all behaviours can be seen as ordinary and/or deviant. That is to say, categories are no longer relevant. The dismissal of categories as a point of investigation is, after all, a guiding principle of post-

modernism and post-structuralism. Therefore, queer as a postmodernist and post-structuralist product should apply to areas outside sexuality, and to limit queer to the realm of sexuality opposes its very nature. However, since queer is a distinct result of scholarly interest and political activism in the area of sexuality, it betrays its origin to omit sexuality entirely when employing queer theory. In this way, queer focuses on sexuality while exploring its intersections with other axes of identification and so-called deviant behaviours.

As stated, queer's interest lies in the foregrounding of difference and not in categories of sexual identity which often attempt to portray a set of unifying characteristics. Penn describes how queer shifts "the scholarly lens off of homosexuality per se -- its invention, discovery, subcultural formations -- thereby scrutinizing the production, construction, and investment in the so-called normal" (32). The normal of which Penn speaks does not refer solely to the hegemony of hetero-society, but also the homonormativity which guides gay assimilationist politics. However, Penn is quick to say that "to indulge the presumption that lesbian and gay has somehow become mainstreamed and assimilated is, at best, wishful thinking" (33). Although it may be true that lesbian and gay still reside on the periphery of western society, many civil rights advances for gays and lesbians over the past decade make Penn's statement less true as with the decision by the Prime Minister not to appeal court decisions that allow gay marriage (CBC, "Ottawa Will Not Appeal"). Undoubtedly, there are many places in the west where gay rights have not evolved as quickly as in others. However, the trend seems to be toward a society in which lesbians and gays are treated as equal citizens. This



direction in gay politics is what I refer to as homonormativity -- a sense that if gays behave like their oppressors, they will have a better chance at equal rights. It is precisely this normalizing of deviant sexual subcultures that queer rebukes.

The problematization of normal in the form of the scrutinization of gay and lesbian is a source of much concern for many scholars and activists. As Penn admits, "My fear is that queer might flatten the social, cultural, and material distinctions and liabilities confronting each type of queer and the different stakes for each" (33). This statement is legitimate in its concern for the differences amongst what Penn describes as types of queers and the consequences these differences may have in the political arena. However, the basis of queer theory is in fact these differences and an arrangement arrived at through the celebration of deviance in all its forms. For Penn to speak of "types of queers" is to once again participate in categorization which is antithetic to the queer project. Although, as Penn writes, "queer promises to refocus the lens of politics, foregrounding hetero-normativity over homophobia" (34), it is also true that the queer lens heightens the awareness of homo-normative processes as well.

The expressions and experiences of queer sexuality must be vast when one considers the multitude of differences inherent in sexually deviant individuals. However, gay and lesbian mark only a narrow array of sexual and cultural expressions. Whether or not homosexuality is an essential trait, or whether its social and cultural construction is enacted from within or by the hegemony, there exist distinctly visible gay and lesbian subcultures in western society. However, circumstances do not always allow homosexual individuals to participate in them. Penn reminds us that "particular racial, social,

economic, and cultural factors permit, inhibit, and otherwise shape the choices available for living socially and/or sexually deviant lives” (35). The effects of these factors contribute greatly to the differences that help define queer. It is worthy to note that Penn talks not only of sexual deviance but of social deviance as well. This once again lends support to the expansion of queer into realms outside sexuality. As an example of different ideals and experiences of lesbianism, Penn uses inmates of a women’s penitentiary. It is not the differences in lesbianisms that are of primary concern to my purpose, but Penn’s discussion of social deviance when she writes “crime indicates the perpetration of some kind of rebellion from the socially prescribed dictates of and standards of proper womanhood... failing to measure up to the dominant cultural norm” (36). In this instance, the queer sexual behaviour of many of the incarcerated women intersects with their queer social behaviour in the form of crime. Other intersections will shed light on the true nature of queer and lead to a better understanding of deviance.

The contrasts between queer theory and its well-established counterparts as outlined above define queer by demonstrating what it is not. Others approach queer theory by presenting it in the terms of its own theoretical genre. Donald Morton builds on such well known post-structuralist thinkers as Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard in order to expound his own Marxist critique of queer. In doing so, Morton provides an understanding of queer that does not come from outside but stems from its theoretical roots in post-structuralism and post-modernism. Morton describes queer as:

The result, in the domain of sexuality, of the (post)modern encounter with -- and rejection of -- Enlightenment views concerning the role of the conceptual, rational, systematic, structural, normative, progressive,

liberatory, revolutionary, and so forth, in social change... It fetishizes desire by rendering it autonomous (370).

If desire is autonomous, it is not affected by notions such as those listed above. This in turn “produces an atmosphere of sexual deregulation” (Morton 370) since, through queer, desire is no longer governed from outside the individual. Just as queer replaces gay in this post-modernist sense, so too the signifier replaces the signified and desire replaces need. The signified, the conceptual part of the sign is decentered by a ludic post-modern play with the polysemic. The constraints of need are displaced by a multitude of possible desires. Queer displaces need with desire such that there is no longer a connection between signifier and signified (Morton 370-72). Commitment to same-sex desire displaces a need to be defined as gay. According to Morton, “gayness [is] nothing more than a gay effect, a mirage of signification” (72).

In order to illustrate that queer is in fact tied to material history, Morton’s Marxist critique highlights parallels between queer and cyberspace. He writes:

Queer theory -- like ludic (post)modernism in general -- can be understood as a part of the confluence of elements that constitute late, multinational capitalism sharing fundamental features with the hyperspace, cyberspace, and cyberpunk of technoculture. Cybercized queer theory... envisions a decentred, Interneted, normless society (Morton 375).

Queer’s connections to cyberspace are of interest for they introduce here queer space.

Morton describes cyberspace as an “ahistorical space supposedly disconnected from actuality” (376) which in turn parallels queer’s ahistoricity and provides each with an ability to write its own amorphous history. He further comments on queer’s relation to space:

Frank sexuality results from the (post)modern erasure of the distinction between the public and the private, the outside and the inside... Nothing is hidden any longer; the outside is the inside and vice versa... Consciousness and unconsciousness are written on the surface of the body, which is a text. (Morton 378-79).

According to Morton, queer space is a denaturalized one that does not conform to normalized ideals of space. Given that queer theory highlights difference and questions normalcy, it follows that queer space operates through blurred boundaries and decentered spatial norms.

Morton is not the only scholar to describe cyberspace as queer. Randal Woodland discusses queer/cyberspace in a detailed ethnography of on-line communities. Randal suggests "the importance of claiming place as a central trope of gay activism" (223). For Randal, cyberspace is a third place that is neither public nor private that provides a safe place for queers because of its anonymity and fluid identities. Cyberspace is also a point of discussion in Joseph Goodwin's "Let's Get Physical," where he describes cyberspace as conceptual and non-contiguous with no physicality (1). Goodwin's article is a look at not only queer space but queer time during which queer behaviour is foregrounded. He underlines the importance of space and time to folkloristics through notions of tradition and continuity which he describes as temporal and spatial concepts. On the relation between queer space and time Goodwin writes:

Queer space frames queer time, and queer space-time frames queer behaviour. In that, it is analogous to festival. Festivals are generally temporal entities... Yet festival time defines its own space. Attributes of festival include inversion, crossdressing and the reversal of the relationship between the sacred and the profane... We see all these strategies at work in queer space-time. In fact, in queer space-time, the profane becomes sacred ("Physical" 3)

This is parallel to queer's inversion of signification and its reversal of the individual's relation to need and desire. Festival space is then postmodern space. Goodwin also describes how festivals "encourage a blurring of the distinctions between public and private" ("Physical" 3) -- something to which Morton and Randal point in their discussion of cyberspace. As mentioned, blurred boundaries are a prominent feature of queer space.

Festivals display inversion, reversal and liminality by bringing the margins to the center. They blur public/private distinctions and exhibit interplay between freedom and constraint (Goodwin "Physical" 3). They are both a display of consumption (Turner 85) and one of production. They magnify, distort, expand, contract, condense, and disperse all at once to produce a play that is "often deeply serious" (Abrahams 165). Festivals are a blend of contradictory messages that create an experience which is juxtaposed to the normal and mundane. As Roger Abrahams suggests, they produce "extreme experiences through contrast" (167). Queer theory displays many of the features listed above that include a destabilization and decentralization brought on by a focus on margins, contradictions and contrasts. Frank Manning calls festival tenuous, subjunctive and paradoxical and comments, "These qualities have so far not lent themselves to social analysis, which has been pre-occupied with normality and predictability" (4). For these reasons queer theory lends itself particularly well to the ethnographic study of festival.

While queer and festival share a number of fundamental characteristics that point to the usefulness of queer theory in examinations of festivals from a folkloristic point of

view, queer also presents itself as a potential danger. Although folkloristics concerns itself with the multiple meanings available to both performers and audiences within given cultural contexts, folklorists are also interested in the concept of genre. The construction of genre in folkloristics is one means by which scholars attempt to place modes of cultural expression into categories and subcategories based on an array of characteristics in order to deal with them more effectively and efficiently. Folksongs, ballads, folktales, proverbs, jokes, material culture including folk art and folk craft, custom, belief and others allow the folklorist to focus on specific texts in accordance with previously developed theories regarding the specific type of cultural form in question. Upon closer inspection, it is not difficult to see how these genres can and often do overlap. For example, the subject of a folksong may be the same as a folktale. The same song may contain elements of belief, involve customary forms of dance or inspire a craftsman to portray elements of the song in material form. Admittedly, these imply separate yet related texts that belong to specific genres, but a non-categorized analysis is most comprehensive in this case and even brings into question the efficacy of folklore genres. Festivals have their own generic challenges for these events are arguably the most multi-generic cultural form. Festivals simultaneously exhibit numerous genres described by folkloristics as these various components work together to create a single, large scale, public display event that is experienced as a singular occasion. As described above, festivals blur the boundaries of mundane space and time. In presenting so many cultural forms simultaneously, festivals blur the distinctions between folkloristic genres through an overwhelming web of intertextuality. While queer theory seems to contradict

folkloristics in that queer theory as postmodernism rejects both categorization and universal meaning, this need not be the case. Contemporary folkloristics has recognized the limits of genre classification so that many folklorists now rely on folklore genres not used in a manner that limits inquiry, but rather expedites it by focusing the scholar's attention.

From the exploration of queer above, one can see how queer is itself tenuous, subjunctive and paradoxical and therefore is analogous to festival in very important ways. As such, queer provides an excellent opportunity for an ethnographic exploration of festivals, especially when the festivals in question are built around gay sexuality and incorporate elements that go against norms of race, gender, class and the body.

Based on this understanding of queer theory, Chapter Two turns our attention to the circuit party. It outlines the historical factors that contributed to the emergence of gay subculture(s) and to the appearance of the circuit as a gay cultural form. Detailed descriptions of the 2002 Black & Blue Festival and Toronto's 2000 Unified Weekend offer examples of a stand alone circuit party and a festival within a festival. I also include briefer descriptions of other Canadian parties in an attempt to familiarize the reader with the structure of the circuit party and the cultural expressions that comprise them.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Cultural and Political Currents**

The Black & Blue Festival occurs annually on Canada's Thanksgiving weekend in Montreal. The inaugural festival in 1991 was little more than a singular, all-night warehouse party with a few hundred in attendance. Since then, the Bad Boys Club of Montreal (BBCM) worked diligently to create one of North America's biggest circuit parties that runs for an entire week. The following description is based on the twelfth annual Black & Blue Festival staged in October 2002; it was my fourth consecutive Black & Blue.

The Black & Blue follows the same basic format each year. It officially kicks off with a cocktail reception launch on Wednesday before Thanksgiving. Thursday marks the beginning of a series of all-night dance events that are the focal point of circuit parties such as the Black & Blue. Thursday night, Unity traditionally hosts the Jock Ball. Unity is a large nightclub on Rue Ste. Catherine E. in the gay neighbourhood. The main club has three separate dancefloors with a mezzanine over the main one. The other two are located above that and there is a patio on the roof. The theme of the Jock Ball is of



course sport. Circuit boys dress themselves in sport motifs from football jerseys, baseball caps and Ts, short-shorts with white sport stripes, striped tube socks and sometimes only jockstraps. Perhaps surprisingly, jockstraps are uncommon, at least without pants. The sexual appropriation of sportwear at the Jock Ball eroticizes sports teams and athletes. The Jock Ball differs from a regular Saturday night at Unity in that it is sponsored by the BBCM as part of the Black & Blue Festival, has a definite theme displayed through costume on both the go-go dancers and the party-goers, and occurs on Thursday night when the club is rarely filled to capacity. The Jock Ball does not generally stage shows or other entertainment, but in 2000 the event served as a launch for a gay porn video where the film's actors made guest appearances.

The Jock Ball is more or less a warm-up party and ends relatively early at 6:00 am; parties last longer as the weekend gears up. The somewhat early end to the Jock Ball actually allows circuit boys to get some rest for the weekend ahead. On Friday night is the Leather Ball which is held at various nightclubs, but lately has taken place at the Medley near the Gay Village. The Medley is a single, long room with a full stage with proscenium to one side. The 2002 Black & Blue was the first Leather Ball I attended. I thought my large tattoos and quadruple nipple piercing suit the leather aesthetic well enough that I could get away without any leather, especially since my only leather clothing is limited to a small pair of briefs and some accessories like collars and wrist bands. Other party-goers wore varying amounts of leather and different types of accessories. Chaps, studded jocks, leather biker caps and harnesses were quite common. One type of harness in particular caught my attention. On the dancefloor, I met a guy

from Seattle who wore a harness that was secured around his chest and back, and had a long piece of leather about the thickness of a dog leash that disappeared into the front of his denim jeans. An identical piece of leather descended from the back of the harness. I thought for a little while about where those straps went and what purpose they served. I assumed they had something to do with some speciality underwear and asked him how this particular accessory functioned. He pulled out the waistband of his jeans and I peered inside. There were no underwear. The straps attached from above and below to his cockring. He offered me to give the straps a hard tug in order to fully understand how the piece worked. It wasn't long before I met another young American wearing a similar harness. This time I didn't need to ask about the straps.

The Leather Ball featured a bondage barber shop sponsored by a local barber where, for a few dollars, one could have one's head shaved or get a mohawk while bound to the wall with chains around the wrists and ankles. Next to the bondage barber was a shoe shine stand with a large chair and an attendant wearing a collar and very little else. These activities incorporate elements of domination and submission and are clearly in line with the S-M theme of a leather party. The stage show at the Leather Ball also displayed the S-M leather theme. It was sponsored by Priape, a store in the Village with locations in Toronto and Calgary that deal in club clothing, underwear, sex toys, pornography and novelty items. Most notably, Priape Montreal has a very large workshop and retail space downstairs that specializes in leather clothing and accessories such as the harnesses described above and a host of other items whose functions I do not completely understand. The stage show featured a costumed performer as Priape, the

Roman fertility god. His head was that of a black ram with big, curled horns and between his legs was a penis so large it could only belong to a minor deity. All about him were leather clad dancers and bound men being whipped and beaten. From the ceiling, two dark angels with huge black, feathered wings descended as a massive pyrotechnics show erupted from the stage. The show was very impressive and charged the crowd for a night of dancing. The other show that night was a vocal performance by Carol Pope who performed several numbers including her 1980s hit "High School Confidential" recently featured on the hugely popular gay television series "Queer As Folk." Parties often feature appearances by vocal performers who are popular at the time within the gay scene for one reason or another.

The Leather Party ended at 7:00 am Saturday morning. My friends and I were still feeling quite energetic and headed to Club Stereo on Rue Ste. Catherine E. for the Leather After-Party. Most all-night events during the Black & Blue Festival feature a pre-party and an after party. Combined with the main parties and unofficial parties at nightclubs throughout the Village, it is virtually possible to dance twenty-four hours around the clock for the entire weekend. There were no stage shows or other performances at the Leather After-Party which ended sometime around lunch. My friends and I ran out of steam before then and headed back to our hotel room to get cleaned up and go out for brunch and shopping. For many participants, the daytime hours are spent sleeping in order to conserve energy for the late night and early morning partying. That Saturday afternoon was so sunny and warm that I thought it would be a shame to sleep it away. At

any rate, I did not plan to attend Saturday night's Military Ball and could go to bed at a reasonable hour.

Black & Blue 2002 was the first time in my four years attending the festival that I did not go to the Military Ball at Club Stereo so my description of the event is based on my experience of previous years. However, the Military Ball was a staple of Black & Blue for me during the three earlier years and I doubt much changed in the 2002 event. The Military Ball is so popular that it is held in at least two different venues. In years when there are just two parties, they are at Club Stereo in the Village and Metropolis just a little west of the Village on Ste. Catherine. Club Stereo is a very large cube-shaped room whose centrepiece is what is arguably the largest mirror ball in Canada. Around the perimeter of the club are small stages for go-go dancers or whatever circuit boys want to perform as unofficial go-go dancers. Metropolis is a converted theatre complete with a multi-level balcony and a large stage with proscenium. The combined capacity of Club Stereo and Metropolis is several thousand. In recent years, the BBCM has added as many as two other venues to accommodate demand for the Military Ball, although the 2002 festival used only the two nightclubs mentioned above.

Costume at the Military Ball draws on a wide range from all branches of the armed services from many countries and normally includes police-type uniforms. On Saturday afternoon, the military surplus shops along Rue St. Laurent are filled with circuit boys buying various items for the Military Balls. The most common costume is a simple pair of combat pants, but can be as elaborate as full-dress US Marine uniforms and Russian naval uniforms complete with rounded caps and insignia. As with the Jock Ball,

the eroticization of the military and the resultant sexualized costume is a function of both experience and fantasy related to the male homo-social environment of the military.

While many of the world's armed forces recruit female personnel, they are overwhelmingly composed of young males, and it is the male homo-social environment of the military, like the sport theme of the Jock Ball, that leads to its eroticization.

As stated earlier, parties end later as the weekend goes on. The Military Ball normally ends at 8:00 a.m.. Of course, there are after-parties and unofficial events that run throughout the morning and afternoon. Sunday night is the Main Event which, in three of the past four years, happened on the field of Montreal's Olympic Stadium. In 2000, the Main Event was held in the large backrooms behind the field which can easily accommodate tens of thousands of people. However, these rooms do not have the same spectacular space of the field and, after the 2000 Main Event, the BBCM moved the party back to the field. Each year, the Main Event has a different theme. The 2002 theme was "*Humanite*" and claimed to explore the qualities that make us human. As with many of the Main Event themes over the past years, its display was not completely obvious either in the stage shows or in the costumes of participants. Perhaps the most theme-related aspect of the 2002 Main Event was a performance by the 80s pop group Human League. In other years, the theme was "Space 1999" after the popular 60s television show, a year with a James Bond-style theme, and "Origin" with a Stonehenge-like set-up. None of these themes carry the erotic effect of sport, leather or military, however, the Main Event is more about spectacle than eroticization.

The BBCM spares no expense and employs the greatest expertise in setting up the field for the Main Event. In 2002, the field was surrounded by a perimeter of speaker stacks, bass bins, and steel girders common to rock concerts from which a huge array of club lighting was suspended. Along one side of the perimeter, there was bleacher-style stadium seating. Outside the perimeter were concessions, a large number of portable toilets and water refill stations. In the centre was a large square stage with several smaller stages distributed round about. At one end of the perimeter, next to the bleachers was a large stage backed by a white cloth curtain. Several dance shows happened on that stage throughout the night. The Main Event begins with stage shows at 10:00 p.m. and becomes a full-fledged dance party just after midnight. Two lengths of steel girder ran from the main stage to the large square stage in the centre of the field. At several times throughout the night, the white curtain backing the main stage dropped and a large square stage suspended from the steel girders emerged. The girders acted as a track along which the stage moved about 3 metres above the crowd and came to rest on the large square stage in the centre. Each time the curtain dropped, there was a different show with dancers, drag queens or vocalists. Once a show ended, the movable stage went back over the crowd and returned to its hiding place behind the curtain only to emerge a few hours later with a new show to entertain the partiers.

The Main Event is by far the largest party of the festival and BBCM claims it is the largest indoor, all-night dance event in North America. Attendance is between 25 and 30,000 (see [www.bbcm.org](http://www.bbcm.org)). Some estimates are that upwards of fifty per cent of the participants are gay men with the remainder made up of their friends and straight party-

goers from Montreal and other cities looking to attend the most spectacular party of the year. Other parties throughout the weekend are nearly one hundred per cent gay. In fact, it is uncommon to see women in attendance at the Jock Ball, Leather Ball or Military Balls.

The Main Event runs until noon Monday. At a total of fourteen hours, it is not only the largest, but also the longest party of the entire Black & Blue Festival. It is not, however, the end of the festival. Monday night is the Recovery Party at Metropolis. As the name suggests, the idea of this event is to wind down after a long weekend of heavy partying. Its format is similar to other parties with stage shows of various sorts throughout the night, although there is no theme. That said, some party-goers wear theme costumes from previous nights. The Recovery Party fills up soon after the doors open and is just as full at 6:00 a.m. when it ends. Some describe the Recovery Party as the most "hardcore" of the weekend meaning that the circuit boys party just a little bit harder than they have all weekend because there is no need to rest for upcoming events which is ironic given the Recovery Party's title. The following days are normally filled with travel for those from outside Montreal, and rest for everyone.

Intermixed with the all-night dance parties are official brunches, lunches and cocktail parties; featured local gyms at which to work out; a swim-a-thon; dinner on the St. Lawrence; film showings; an art exhibition and auction; a gay travel expo; and a health summit. Throughout the Village, restaurants, cafes, clubs and shops bustle. The Black & Blue and its all-night parties are the focal point of the week, and official and unofficial events and activities of all types and for all interests occur around the clock,

certainly from Thursday to Tuesday. The festival environment of the Black & Blue spills over into the Village and beyond in much the same way as Pride events in major centres. While BBCM organizes "Twist" and "Twist Encore" during Montreal's Pride in early August, these parties do not draw large numbers of travellers to Montreal. Rather, they depend on the influx of Pride tourists already in the city. Alternatively, the Black & Blue is a stand-alone event. It attracts circuit boys from all over the world to Montreal and the result is much bigger and grander than the BBCM Pride events, or any other Montreal Pride or BBCM event.

On the other hand, the largest parties in cities like Vancouver and Toronto occur during their respective Pride Week celebrations. In Vancouver, "Rocket" is a large party held at the Collessium-esque pubic library. In August 2000, Kim English performed at "Rocket." Her song "Unspeakable Joy" was a big club hit at the time, and English's appearance is reminiscent of the Human League, Carol Pope, porn stars and other celebrity appearances at circuit parties. Toronto's "Unified Weekend" 2000 featured popular 80s entertainer Cindi Lauper singing "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." The event and set-up was similar to Black & Blue's on a smaller scale. A perimeter surrounded the dancefloor with screens showing slides like Edward Myerberg photos and shattering lightbulbs. Go-go dancers performed on pedestals located throughout the dancefloor and at one end was a large stage where Cindi Lauper performed with dancers and one of Toronto's longest standing drag queens, Madame duBarry. As with the main event of the Black & Blue Festival, Unity was held at a city-owned facility: the Automotive Building at the Canadian National Exhibition.



It is interesting to note that at the time of Unity 2000, Toronto City Council had a ban in place prohibiting raves and related events from city-owned facilities. Michael Schwartz, board member with the Unified Group, stated the Unified Weekend was officially sanctioned by the Toronto Pride Committee and so was a recognised cultural event as far as the city was concerned. This in no way changes the fact Unity was very much a rave related event. An inexperienced observer would see very few differences that were not entirely demographic or thematic. Both are all-night, drug-inflected dance parties. The city's ban followed a drug-related death at a rave and so its intention was to avoid liability and crack down on drug use.

The city's apparent ignorance of the nature of Unity highlights the politics of gay urban subculture(s). I would argue that city council allowed Unity to go ahead several months into its ban because it did not want a showdown with a subculture whose tradition since Stonewall is to take to the streets when faced with opposition. Pride parades are one such example since many were not sanctioned by city councils until recently, and many more cities refuse to recognize them at all. In a recent debate on gay marriage, Member of Parliament Elsie Wayne asked in Question Period, "Why do they have to be out here in public, always debating that they want to call it marriage? Why are they in parades? Why are men dressed up as women on floats? If they are going to live together, go live together and shut up about it" (CBC, "Tory MP"). Similarly, a Toronto City Councillor might ask, "Why do they have to dance topless until sunrise?" One reason is that Pride parades and circuit parties are a huge amount of fun and they are unlikely to disappear. Another reason is that protest and celebration are staples of gay subculture(s).

The scale of gay subcultural expressions such as the circuit is enormous which is particularly interesting since most scholarly research only posits the coalescence of this group around the mid-nineteenth century.

A number of events and developments in theory, social policy and cultural practice led to the emergence of a distinctly gay subculture(s) in modern Western society. In turn, the rise of this politico-cultural group gave way to the creation and evolution of cultural expressions such as the circuit. As discussed in the last chapter, homosexuality has been presented most basically as an inherent part of one's personhood, or as a set of historically specific, socio-cultural phenomena, or as both simultaneously.

Professional interest in homosexuality involves itself with both essentialist and constructionist standpoints and dates back at least to late-nineteenth century sexology. This concern coincides with a time of heavy industrialization and urbanization which allowed individuals to exist outside the traditional family structure and provided physical contexts for anonymous, same-sex encounters between men. Medico-scientific discourse of the time provided a basis for lawmakers to control the emerging homosexual subculture. What in all likelihood was common, private practice amongst men, became public within the urban setting through dominant discourse and increased policing. The marginalization of homosexuality and attempts to relegate it to the private realm resulted in a politicized subculture that is founded on sexual orientation and relies on a strategy of visibility to exert power in the public sphere exhibited in circuit events and Pride parades. Denial of same-sex desire within society virtually purged homosexual subcultures from the written record and created a situation in which gay history must be (re)imagined and

(re)invented. As Jennifer Terry writes, “At best we can map the techniques by which homosexuality has been marked as different and pathological, and then locate subjective resistances” (qtd. in Francis 78). A politics of gay visibility attempts to end this erasure. Through cultural forms like the circuit, gays celebrate and (re)imagine/invent their (re)imagined/invented past.

Scholars point to the first uses of the term “homosexual” as an important date in the formation of modern sexualities. Gary Kinsman describes how it was “first constructed in forensic psychiatry and then in sex psychology and then sexology as a form of congenital inversion” (“Inverts” 9). Jonathan Katz suggests the term homosexual was coined by writer Karl Maria Kertbeny in an 1868 letter to sex reformer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and first used publicly in an 1869 petition against German criminalization of homosexuality (Katz 177). Michel Foucault cites an 1870 essay by German psychiatry professor Dr. Karl Westphal as the genesis of homosexual (qtd. in Jagose 10-11). Indeed, Westphal was a contemporary of both Ulrichs and Kertbeny, and Ulrichs hoped Westphal’s work would lend support to his cause. However, Westphal’s *die Urning* is not a German language equivalent to homosexual per se. Instead, it is a word that identifies and categorizes a particular type of individual. *Die Urning* referred to physiological males who were psychologically female. Sexuality was first arranged along gender lines probably because, as Kinsman suggests it “was constructed through respectable middle-class sexuality and gender and family life” (“Inverts” 10).

Since the inception of homosexual as a distinct classification, there have been a number of theories regarding the nature of same-sex desire. The idea that homosexuality

was a form of congenital gender inversion persisted at least into the 1920s when there emerged “theories of individual deviance attributing more power to sexuality as a singular force shaping human personalities” (Mumford 401). This change can be ascribed to the work of Sigmund Freud who “detached gender from sexuality and privileged sexuality as a discrete, fundamentally determinative aspect of the human psyche” (Mumford 409). In Canada, the homosexual as gender invert endured into the 1930s during which time the federal government developed psychological tests to measure femininity and masculinity in subjects in order to determine sexual orientation (Kinsman, “Inverts” 11). As theories of deviance took hold, homosexuality came to be viewed more as a mental illness and the homosexual was often reclassified as a psychopath which Kinsman describes as “a collecting category for people who caused social problems who could not be classified in any other fashion” (“Inverts” 11). The competing theories of gender inversion and mental illness persist today in popular notions regarding homosexuality. Later medico-scientific research in the field supports these notions to some extent since genetics describes a predisposition as does gender inversion, and current theories of mental illness often concern themselves with abnormalities in biochemical processes or brain structure.

The appearance of official medico-scientific discourse on homosexuality beginning circa 1870 suggests an emerging subculture in Western urban centres. Prior to this time, there is little or no evidence to support the existence of homosexual enclaves. This is not to suppose that none existed. Goodwin cites reports of homosexual, male cross dressers in London from as early as 1709 (More Man 54). As well, Alan Bray suggests that an urban, homosexual subculture existed in late-seventeenth century London

and was organized around “molly houses.” These were meeting places where “men with sexual interests in other men gathered,” and provided a “context for homosexual identity and community” (qtd. in Jagose 11-12).

Certainly, urbanization and later industrialization played a significant role in the formation of homosexual subcultures. John D’Emilio argues that the development of the capital market led to a situation where individuals no longer depended on the family as the primary unit of production and that the advent of the wage labour system allowed one to pursue the homosexual lifestyle (qtd. in Jagose 12-13). He writes, “the emergence of capitalism opened up new spaces for same-sex desire by accelerating the process of urbanization” (D’Emilio qtd. in Mumford 397). Other scholars support D’Emilio’s position. Steven Maynard points out that the appearance of distinct homosexual subcultures were intimately linked to the growth of the city and the status of men as wage earners (208-9). Kinsman agrees when he asserts that these subcultures “occur in the social context of the emergence of industrial capitalism” adding the evolution of the ruling state, professional and bureaucratic relations as significant forces (“Inverts” 9). Margot Francis also points to material and economic factors that threatened the traditional family such as wage labour and urbanization. Women’s paid work and first wave feminism both challenged gender construction (87).

It is worthwhile to note the late-nineteenth century did not mark the beginning of regulation of same-sex acts. Louis Crompton outlines numerous attempts to outlaw homosexual behaviour from the introduction of Jewish anti-sodomy laws in 550 BCE to Hitler’s genocide. The control of queer behaviour prior to the late-nineteenth century

then suggests that until recent times participation in same-sex acts was deemed a pitfall into which anyone might fall and did not belong to a particular group within society.

Maynard highlights the “need to view subcultural and discursive formations as existing in a reciprocal relationship” (239). It is certainly true that discourse and social change are interrelated and reciprocal (Mumford 398) and it is therefore necessary to locate points of influence between the two. Maynard notes that “medical reports, city council minutes, newspapers, and the intertextual linkages between them constituted one of the discursive frameworks within which sex between men existed” (Maynard 215) while the courtroom, doctor’s office and police station have been other important locales for the dissemination of dominant discourse (Maynard 239). Kinsman describes how homosexuality was “made into a social problem by dominant social institutions and professional disciplines... shaped within dominant power/knowledge relations” (“Inverts” 9). This is to say that medico-scientific literature played a major role in positioning homosexuality as deviant and created a perceived need on the part of governments to introduce and enforce legislation to regulate emerging homosexual subculture(s). In this manner, Maynard argues that:

Police did more than simply clamp down on men engaged in criminalized sexual activity, they played an active role in stirring these things up... A productive regulation of sex through various technologies of surveillance and through the production of sexual knowledge... Police operations were one of the modes through which a homosexual subculture was brought into existence (Maynard 209).

Maynard continues, “Medical discourse played little or no role in the shaping of working-class sexual identities and categories by World War I” (239). Instead, new legislation,

increased policing and growing media attention served to bring homosexuality into the spotlight and influence popular conceptions.

The pathology of homosexuality created through medico-scientific discourse and the foregrounding of same-sex behaviour through legislation, policing and the media created a belief within society that there existed a particular type of individual defined by these acts. This in turn provided a point to which individuals who participated in same-sex acts could cathect and a subsequent recognition that others existed with similar sexual interests. Whereas these acts were once seen as a moral peril facing all of society, the conditions described above relegated them to a small percentage of the population. As more and more people came together to share their experiences and expressions of same-sex desire, a distinctly gay subculture(s) appeared. Paradoxically, increased legislation and hyper-policing led to what is generally recognised as the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement.

Homophile and lesbian feminist groups existed in the early and mid-twentieth century with the purpose of promoting freedom from persecution for homosexuals. However, the Stonewall Riots of 1969 are generally taken as the pivotal moment in modern gay politics. Gay, lesbian and transgendered patrons of New York City's Stonewall Inn grew tired of constant harassment by the city's police force. When the New York City Police Department raided the Stonewall Inn in the Summer of 1969, on June 27, the day of Judy Garland's funeral, the patrons fought back sparking riots that lasted several days and saw members of the force trapped inside the bar as gays, lesbians and drag queens rioted in the streets outside, joined by university students and supporters

from the local community. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy explores the importance of Stonewall in her article "Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History." She writes:

In the mythology of gay and lesbian history, before Stonewall, gays lived furtive, closeted, miserable lives, while after Stonewall gays could be free and open. Stonewall is quintessentially about being out of the closet, of fighting back, about refusing to be mistreated anymore (187).

While Kennedy recognizes the drawbacks of creating an official history based on competing oral accounts of exactly what set off the chain of events at the Stonewall Inn, she points out that "unquestionably, Stonewall is a key moment for lesbian and gay history... and also became the turning point for the spread of a new kind of gay and lesbian politics and movement" (Kennedy 193). This created an atmosphere in North America in which cultural forms such as the circuit developed and flourished. If the police shut down a party like Black & Blue or Unity, the response in the gay community would undoubtedly resemble Stonewall and this is what Toronto City council avoided in its official recognition of Unity as a gay cultural event.

Stonewall was a cultural site for gays prior to the riots by which it became a site of political activism. Some scholars argue that gay politics is in fact a cultural politics, that culture must be the focal point of any gay movement. Richard Dyer in "Getting Over the Rainbow: Identity and Pleasure in Gay Cultural Politics" argues that the gay movement has a special role "in showing how a politics of culture can be rooted in, and grow out of, the already existing culture of an oppressed group" (159). The notion of subculture(s) based on gay sexuality presumes that the act of being gay is expressed



mainly in leisure-time, and that the cultural forms participated in during one's leisure-time in turn inform one's participation in the political arena. He writes:

The case of lesbians and gay men is exemplary but also extreme, in the sense that culture is the situation of gay people. Gays are defined and structurally placed in the sphere of culture -- there are the circumstances that are not of their own choosing. Having been so placed, gays have sought to gain control over these conditions and in the process have produced a wealth of new cultural forms, new definitions of identity. ("Rainbow" 159)

For Dyer, the construction of and participation in gay cultural forms by those who self-identify as such creates an understanding of what it means to be gay and, therefore, provides a basis for a politics of common experience. While queer theory shows that there can be no unified gay identity, there is definitely a gay effect in the political arena. The conceptualization that there exists a unified subculture affects political decisions made in reference to gay subculture(s). Circuit parties are just one form of gay cultural expression and there is only a small segment of gays who one might call circuit boys. Yet Toronto City Council's decision was influenced by the much broader notion of a coherent gay subculture that incorporates many differences including the circuit. Here, a cultural expression becomes a political one.

Culture refers to the ways in which a society thinks and feels about itself through ideas, representations and forms available to individuals within that society. According to Dyer, it is "grounded in the interests of people who produce it" and "insists on the material and affective dimension" as well as the cognitive in making sense of one's own culture ("Rainbow" 162). It is through gay subculture(s) that the concept and understanding of gay are produced. Culture also "designates that sphere of life that is left

over when the realm of necessity has been filled. It is the realm of feelings, pleasure, reflection, leisure” although it “permeates every aspect of human existence” (Dyer, “Rainbow” 162). Since, as Dyer suggests, gay is antithetical to both production and reproduction, “the space [gays] occupy and the space in which [they] must struggle is primarily the space outside of necessity, the space of culture” (“Rainbow” 162-3). Gay subculture(s) are produced, commodified and consumed in leisure.

The consumption of culture can create a profound sense of pleasure since one is happy to share common experiences of self-understanding with others of like mind. Joseph Bristow picks up the idea of a politics of pleasure when he writes, “to be gay accentuates not only a demand for political representation on our own terms but also an identification in search of pleasure” (66). If pleasure is experienced through cultural participation, through making sense of one’s place in society, then Bristow’s politics of pleasure is in some ways equivalent to Dyer’s politics of culture. After all, pleasure is the satisfaction of desire and it is accomplished in leisure time, mainly because of capital’s dichotomy of work and play. In other words, these are the pleasures inherent in participating in one’s own culture. This includes self-identifying as gay and participating in the circuit.

An ethnography of the circuit is a description of a distinctly gay cultural form. While this might appear a matter for gay studies and not the realm of queer inquiry, the study of culture is inherently post-modern regardless of elements of history and the identities that imply categorization. Bristow writes that, “Leisure-time pleasure is often rejected as a commodified hedonism revelling in the aesthetic superficialities of what is

increasingly recognised as a post-modern culture” (66). The circuit is a terrific example of commodified hedonism in that it mobilizes huge amounts of wealth through the sexualized pleasures of music and dance. This politicization of desire through cultural forms such as the circuit point to a queer political project. Queer’s interests lie in the erasure of categories and the liberation of individual desire. The confluence of gay politics and culture rooted in pleasure and desire queers the relationship between politics and modes of production since subcultural participation is nonproductive, yet it is the basis of gay politics. This queer nexus between gay politics and subculture in relation to expressions such as the circuit party is also intertwined with economics. The following chapter looks at the gay aesthetic known as camp and its parallels to economic theory. The introduction of economics into the mixture of politics and culture further queers the nature of the circuit party.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Political Power of Camp Economics**

The circuit, like most gay cultural forms, is undeniably a commercial venture. As Michael Warner points out, gays have not been afforded normative kinship and family structures, traditional residences, churches or many of the other forms of association granted the hegemony. As a result, gay subculture has expressed itself mainly through market-based institutions (Warner xvii), and participation in gay subculture(s) is displayed through consumption. However, as argued in the last chapter, the gay movement is a politics of culture. The politics and economics of expressing gayness then become equivalent ideologies in that participation in gay subculture means the production and consumption of cultural forms, hence patterns of economic behaviour that can lead to political organization. Events such as Montreal's Black & Blue Festival and Toronto's Unified Weekend are not overtly political movements in the sense that there is no specific political organization associated with these circuit parties. However, the vast capital mobilized through the production of these events and the enormous wealth generated in their consumption make circuit parties important cultural sites with a definite political

influence. The example, cited in Chapter One of this thesis, of Toronto City Council's decision to allow Unity, a rave related activity, to use a city-owned facility in the midst of a ban on similar activities highlights the political nature of the circuit and points to its potential as a formidable political force if governments and law enforcement attempted to outlaw the events. The feigned innocence of the circuit compared to the actual nature of activities involved such as public homo-sex and pervasive, illicit drug use, the rebellion inherent therein, and the irony of its portrayal as a cultural event for gays while raves hold no such distinction for youth subculture, demonstrate how circuit parties exhibit elements of camp with important links to economics.

Michael Schwartz is a Toronto entrepreneur who operates several businesses in Toronto's gay neighbourhood. Schwartz is also a longtime promoter of gay events in Toronto and one of five board members of the Unified Group, organizers of Unified Weekend. Schwartz defines circuit parties based on the scale of the event and, hence, the large scale of their economic impact. In terms of the Unified Weekend and its relationship to the Toronto all-night party scene and to the larger circuit, Schwartz says:

[Unity is the result of a] group of promoters who got together a few years ago and decided the Toronto party scene wasn't living up to its full potential. All the promoters were doing their own events and there wasn't any unity. So we decided to join together to do big events and really promote Toronto as a circuit destination. Prior to that there were small events but nothing on the scale that Unity is now. Really there was a long-term plan for what we were trying to accomplish.

Indeed, attendance at Unity grew by 400% in its first five years, most of which was the result of the Unified Group's effective marketing campaign that garnered interest from circuit boys outside the metropolitan Toronto area.

The grand scale of Unity and the entire Unified Weekend is definitive of circuit parties in general, according to Michael Schwartz. He defines circuit parties by their size and their ability to attract participants from outside the host city. Schwartz comments:

A lot of it has to do with the scale of the party. I think that's one of the biggest determining factors whether it's a circuit event or not. I know we do events here in Toronto [like] Leather Ball. They're Circuit-type events but they're not destination parties. So the scale of it is what really determines if it is labelled as a circuit party. You know: 5,000 plus. Usually they tend to fall on a holiday or holiday time period allowing people to travel or make a longer time commitment than just one day. And so that's what determines a circuit party.

Further, as Schwartz describes, the circuit involves more than just parties. He says:

[Circuit boys] make a whole all-encompassing event or experience. They decide where they're going to eat, what drugs they're going to do. What they're going to wear. Sunday they've made brunch plans. Sunday night they have recovery party plans. It's this whole sort of environment they're creating for that one circuit event. That's the ones I would consider circuit boys... The aesthetics in terms of body and things like that is important to them, clothes and hair. The whole look.

The economics of events of this scale should be obvious. Single tickets for the Unity party alone were \$75, with weekend and VIP weekend passes costing hundreds of dollars. The price of passes for the Black & Blue Festival is marginally higher. Add concessions, sales of souvenir programs and T-shirts, and CDs featuring festival DJs and the direct revenue to the organizers is quite substantial.

Beyond profit made by the Unified Group, BBCM and others, airlines, hotels, restaurants and bars, and retailers also experience a significant increase in business. The circuit produces a very important economic boon for businesses within the cities in which the circuit operates. These businesses do not necessarily have any investment in the

circuit itself. I would argue that the businesses which benefit most are those located in the respective citys' gay villages. This is a direct result of conscious choices made by gays in relation to consumer spending. These choices in turn constitute gay subcultural and political involvement. Finally, the black market economy, particularly the sex and drug trades, undoubtedly benefits from circuit parties.

Economics is a complicated field and involves both production and consumption. M. V. Lee Badgett, in the essay "Thinking Homo/Economically," explores the various roles and choices facing gays, lesbians and transgenders in today's economy and the types of positions that affect the political sphere. As Badgett states, "The idea that economic decisions made by gay people will be influenced by their sexual orientation is not a new idea," as she cites 1950s bathhouses and the commercialization of desire as earlier examples of a gay economy (467). Building on this, it is possible to demonstrate how the circuit represents a particular mode of consumption and how this consumption parallels the profoundly gay sensibility of camp.

Badgett suggests that gays have roles as producers, consumers and investors and that decisions within each role affect political change and create an economic identity. As producers, Badgett focuses on union organization of workers, the condition of the workplace and the fight therein for fair treatment. She suggests that building coalitions with other marginalized groups within the workplace is beneficial for everyone. The example of Microsoft's "Diversity Coalition" formed between gays and lesbians, African Americans, Hispanics, Jews and Aborigines shows how such co-operation is effective in reducing discrimination and improving the workplace. (Badgett 469-70) This economic

association between gays and other marginalized groups, those also in a position to question dominant ideals, to destabilize and denaturalize norms, demonstrates an intertextuality between race and/or ethnicity and sexuality and shows queer economics as that which opposes the mainstream not only through the social reality of differing sexualities, but along other axes as well. The production of cultural forms is integral to a sense of gayness since it allows for patterns of cultural consumption. The economics of which Badgett writes is dependent on the availability and therefore production of subcultural forms of which the circuit is one example.

The particular manner in which gays act as not only producers and workers, but as consumers is also important. Badgett focuses on the relationship between politics and consumption as they relate to the creation and promotion of gay subculture(s), targeting consumer choices and developing a "queer capitalism" (Badgett 470). The political power of gay consumer choices is a matter of both representation and visibility. Consumerism is extremely important in today's market economy and the acceptance of gays, or at least their money, is often due to the "portrayal of gay people as being well educated and having high incomes" (Badgett 471). This image is often dismissed as the result of skewed samples taken from surveys of magazine readers or those attending gay events (Badgett 471). Indeed, I would argue the BBCM as organizers of gay events disseminate just such information. In an article titled "Guess What? It's Good for the Economy, Too..." published in the 10th Edition B&B Souvenir Program, Matthew Hays writes of the Black & Blue Festival, "The economic benefits can be felt beyond the gay village and throughout the entire city of Montreal. The global economic impact of [the



1999] event was approximately \$35M” (20) Accompanying pie charts and bar graphs show that the average participant spent around \$1800 and had a mean income between \$88,000 and \$100,000. Badgett refutes such claims and says surveys such as these favour people with high incomes (471). It is, after all, possible to survey only those participants who pay by gold or platinum credit cards; survey households composed of several gay roommates who may have much lower individual incomes. Perhaps *les Montrealaises* are not part of the data, thereby inflating numbers with airfare, hotels and meals. Given that BBCM are experts in public relations and marketing, it is possible and desirable for them to represent themselves positively. This in no way changes the fact that the Black & Blue Festival generates a gargantuan amount of wealth and is economically important to the city, and to the more than fifty charities it helps. Black & Blue is undoubtedly responsible for tens of millions of dollars in the global economy, centred around Montreal. It is also certain that the impact on the underground economy is quite significant.

As a market-based institution, the circuit has many links to the larger mainstream economy. Gay events enjoy large sponsorships from major corporations directing their advertising toward the lucrative market described by Badgett and reaffirmed by things such as circuit promotional material. The queer capitalism of which Badgett writes is imagined both within and outside the gay community. It manifests itself in beer advertising, product boycotts, gay owned/operated/supported business, and cultural products like the circuit. Although a separate market economy is unrealistic, Badgett points out that:

We have long had explicitly gay- and lesbian- owned businesses around, such as bookstores, bars, cafes, magazines and newspapers, providing much needed social and cultural bases for gay lives and organizing... Those businesses created meeting places that facilitated political organization and the spread of important ideas, news, and information to gay people making the further development of... culture and politics possible (473).

This supports Warner's contention that gay culture is rooted in the market system, and that market-based institutions are at the heart of gay subculture(s) (xvii). In turn, consumption patterns create and maintain gay subculture(s) and inform the political sphere. In a queer sense, Western gay subculture, politics and economics are equivalent ideologies rife with the complexities and differences of the mainstream culture, politics and economy under which it operates.

Participation in the capitalist system as producers, consumers and investors affords a certain amount of visibility to gay subculture(s). It is this visibility as a growing and perceived coherent group within society and the power brought about by the wielding of capital that provides gay subculture(s) with much of its political clout and has done so since the the turn of the twentieth century. Rosemary Hennessy looks at the relation between capitalism and the construction and maintenance of the public, queer self. She writes:

How visibility is conceptualized matters. Like queer, visibility is a struggle term in gay and lesbian circles now -- for some simply a matter of display, for others the effect of discourses or of complex social conditions... for those of us caught up in the circuits of late capitalist consumption, the visibility of sexual identity is a matter of commodification (31).

The importance of commodification, and of capitalism in visibility highlights the connection between culture, economics and politics in the same way that Badgett sees economics as central to gay subcultural (re)production and participation. Just as Badgett points to the recent marketing of mainstream companies to the gay demographic, Hennessey writes, "much recent gay visibility is aimed at producing new and potentially lucrative markets, but as in most marketing strategies, money, not liberation, is the bottom line" (32). What Badgett and Hennessey seem to miss is how gays use corporate sponsorship money. For instance, Molson and Labatt sponsorships of the circuit promote all-night, homo-sexualized, amphetamine-driven parties attended by thousands of sculpted, muscular bodies. It is probably not the Superbowl demographic to which beer companies normally direct advertising dollars. In terms of profit, Molson and Labatt's greatest concern, this is a good investment, despite the paradoxes.

While consumerism is a site of potential political engagement for gays through informed decisions regarding spending and the nature of the corporate interests involved, it is the consumption and production of distinct cultural forms that is most important to gay politics. Economics is in no way divorced from everyday life. According to Hennessey, "Drawing attention to the operations of commodity capitalism... can be misconstrued to mean that the material processes of commodification are only economic, and that they are all determining and impossible to oppose" (32-3). In fact, as Hennessey says, "the materiality of social life consists of an ensemble of human practices" and "the processes of commodification pervade all social structures" (33). In the case of gay subculture(s) and its reliance on market-based institutions, I would argue that

commodification and patterns of consumption based therein are central. Indeed, Hennessey supports this statement when she points out that “sexuality is a material practice that shapes and is shaped by social totalities” and “as social practice, sexuality includes lesbian, gay, and queer resistance movements that have built social and political networks, often by way of capitalist commercial venues” (33). Hennessey’s statement is further modified by Warner in a manner whereby capitalist commercial venues are equivalent to cultural commercial venues.

The particular type of consumerism practiced by gays and marketing ploys by companies to reach them are central to both Badgett’s and Hennessey’s analysis. Others, such as Lisa Penaloza take a similar look at recent marketing trends in the US targeting gays, lesbians and queers in general. Peneloza recognizes “the important intersection of market segments and social movements” (10). Indeed, she emphasizes the “development of identity, subjectivity, and agency both within and outside the movement” and how this is integral in considerations of gay marketing “because these aspects of individual and collective behaviour contribute to our understanding of how gays and lesbians constitute themselves and their relations toward others..., i.e. how gays and lesbians think of themselves” (17). How gays constitute themselves culturally and poilitcally, and how they think of themselves is informed by their participation in a distinct subculture(s) inextricably bound with the market system.

Gay subculture(s) is constituted more through alternate modes production and consumption, and less through the mainstream marketplace. In terms of marketing campaigns, Penaloza describes how a gay “aesthetic or sensibility becomes visible

through advertising codes and conventions” (32). In fact, this gay aesthetic or sensibility is constructed and realized through participation in a market-based subculture(s) and reveals itself in many forms. Penaloza sees “a valuable affirmation for gays and lesbians to be able to go to any major city in the world and locate gay/lesbian clubs, media, bookstores, and hotlines” (33). In this manner, gay economics maintains and reaffirms the subculture(s), both of which inform gay politics in a queer blurring of these three spheres.

Economists who work in broader theories also support the intersection of subculture(s), politics and capitalist economics demonstrated above. For example, Michael Piore draws on two economists, Kenneth Galbraith and Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman to illustrate competing theories of diversification and conformity. Galbraith argues capitalism results in general homogeneity. Mass production of standardized goods increases the price of speciality items and discourages many consumers from specialized patterns of consumption. In this manner, consumers are “pulled toward the centre, and there is less and less tolerance in the economy for diversity and heterogeneity around the edges” (504). Mass production in turn creates homogenization of the workforce. Hence, capitalist economies, according to Galbraith, are intolerant of difference in both consumption and production since “the logic of mass production requires uniformity in the labour market as well” (Piore 503-4). While this homogenizing force of capitalism is logical, Galbraith ignores the reality of difference espoused by queer. While there can be a tendency toward fewer products and an increasingly homogenous work environment,

post-modern, ludic play with meaning does allow for diversity in production, consumption and general economic participation.

Opposite Galbraith's theory of normalization and homogenization is Milton Friedman's theory that "a capitalist economy was the kind of world, among all worlds, most tolerant of diversity and heterogeneity" (Piore 502). According to Friedman, capitalism is about the decentralization of both political and economic power since within a free market system, "everyone could pursue his or her own particular pattern of consumption." Through this choice, the "capitalist economy produced all sorts of pockets of economic power, which could then be converted into spheres of political power resistant to control by the government" (Piore 503). It is possible to apply Friedman's theory to gay subculture(s) if one views gay as a particular mode of both production and consumption of meaningful subcultural forms. These patterns then developed in the environment of the capitalist economy whose tolerance of diversity and heterogeneity allowed for the emergence of a distinct subculture(s) as pockets of economic power and later spheres of political power.

Gay likens itself to a function of capitalism with Friedman's underlying democratizing trend that allows individuals with similar sexual interests to develop a market-based subculture(s) intermingled with economics and politics. Beyond the economics and politics of gay subcultural expressions, there should be recognizable traits, an aesthetic or a sensibility just as Penaloza suggests above. This gay sensibility is most often described as *camp*, "that characteristically gay repertoire of parody, with put-up and send-up (Dyer 166)." In her now classic essay "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag describes

camp as a taste, "Taste has no system and no proofs. But there is something like a logic of taste: the consistent sensibility which underlies and gives rise to taste" (276). Because her work is important, I quote her at length:

Camp has a degree of stylization; 'is disengaged and depoliticized -- or at least apolitical; has a vision... Not everything can be seen as camp;' Camp has a canon of texts; 'is often a decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content;' Camp is artifice and generally urban; it is 'the love of the exaggerated, the off, of things-being-what-they-are-not;' It is androgynous; 'the metaphor of life as theatre;' the triumph of the epicene style; sentimental; relies on double entendre; To camp is a mode of seduction. It is unintentional and contains a 'delicate relation between parody and self-parody... Camp discloses innocence, but also, when it can, corrupts it... The essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Camp contains a spirit of extravagance. It is 'extraordinary in the sense, often, of being special, glamorous.' It relates to the past to foster detachment. 'Camp is the glorification of character... understood as a continual state of incandescence.' Camp is the antithesis of tragedy, 'it proposes a comic vision of the world.' It transcends the 'nausea of replica' and sees an 'equivalence of all objects' and encourages a 'democratic esprit.' It is 'a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness.' Camp 'supervenes upon good taste as a daring and witty hedonism..., a mode of enjoyment... What it does is to find success in certain passionate failures' (Sontag 277-291).

Sontag acknowledges the "peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuality" (290), but qualifies it with the statement: "One feels that if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would" (291). David and Harold Galef do not expressly link camp and gays but they do recognize that "camp is by many claims a homosexual invention..., [and] is more a male domain than female" (16-17). Galef and Galef are interested in the rebellious nature of camp and tell how "it involves the twin sexual and aggressive drives that inevitably conflict with reality, then with authority, and

finally what becomes introjected authority" (12). This concern with the marginal, and the socially and culturally rebellious is indicative in many ways of gay subculture(s).

The circuit as a pattern of production and consumption within gay subculture(s) displays many features of camp. Circuit parties are certainly stylized events with specific elements common to each including sexualized themes and costume, a particular style of house music and dance, and a space that incorporates the stylistic elements of the disco club. The circuit is a disengagement from reality and is depoliticized to the extent that it is not aligned with any organized political movement. The circuit is artifice and sensual art. It centres around throngs of dancing, topless, muscular circuit boys each displaying the individual art of dance in an environment created for that purpose. The circuit is an urban phenomenon and exaggerates gay life as theatre through the performances of entertainers and participants. It is both extravagant and glamorous and a self-parody of gay subculture through a conspicuous display of stereotypes surrounding wealth and body fascism. While circuit events feign innocence by portraying themselves as simple dance parties, the reality of public sex and drug use corrupts this innocence. In this sense, the circuit is a solvent of morality achieved through playful hedonism.

According to David and Harold Galef, the main features of camp are artificiality and ambiguity (11). Galef and Galef show that camp is a defence mechanism that employs pseudo-sophistication, repression, displacement of affect or content, and forms of reversal that "serve to ward off the experience of anxiety by altering its effect" (12). Camp is a "guard against sentiment by actually embracing the sentimental. Sentiment here may be defined as an overflow of feelings, the avoidance of which stems back to the



aversion to the natural, or one's own inferiority. The mechanism of avoidance is perhaps most salient" (Galef and Galef 12). The authors posit that camp pretends to be something it is not in order that the marginalized camper can ignore his social status through an unconscious behaviour that feigns disengagement with reality. Camp deals "with an anxiety-producing situation by compartmentalizing it -- and shutting the compartment" (Galef and Galef 13), hence the sense of disengagement. Although camp is about anxiety created through one's socio-cultural position as marginal, it is also about control of the situation.

Camp, as explored by Galef and Galef, is mainly a defensive strategy for those estranged from the mainstream. In the case of gays, this alienation is the result of the oppression of same-sex desire within the greater society. Marginality is at the root of camp, as it is a tenet of gay subculture(s) and of queer theory. The acceptance of a marginal position by marginal subjects represents a starting point for cultural development and consequent political change. As Galef and Galef write, "One deals with the anxiety of being excluded by ambiguously embracing the marginal, but, as with any prolonged pattern of behaviour, the defence mechanism eventually becomes incorporated into the personality" (16). In this manner, camp as an embrace of the marginal by the marginal has incorporated itself into the gay subcultural psyche so as to position itself as arguably the dominant gay sensibility. As camp developed within and along with gay subculture, it became "no longer a subtle type of protest but a definite form of affiliation" (Galef et. al. 21). Camp is not only a form of affiliation, but of affirmation for a subculture denied full access to and participation in the hegemony.

Circuit parties emerged in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in gay community in the 1980s. While some are now for-profit events, many still adhere to their original purpose of raising funds for HIV/AIDS awareness and support groups. The celebration of gay life inherent in circuit events masks the anxiety and marginalization created by HIV/AIDS, while the muscular bodies are a rebellion against images of the wasting syndrome associated with AIDS. This celebration of life in the face of death, and the foregrounding of the healthy, muscular circuit body in opposition to the disease and wasting display many elements of camp such as reversal, exaggeration and artifice. The ambiguity contained in these juxtapositions provides the defence mechanism of which Galef and Galef write, thereby allowing gays through the circuit to distance themselves from the anxiety of HIV/AIDS.

The gay subcultural affiliation and affirmation furnished by camp is reminiscent of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of "camp-recognition" as described and expanded upon by Kim Michasiw. As Michasiw describes it, camp-recognition "designates a specific function of the gay male (or gay male-identified) gaze... [which] shifts our attention from camp as a mode of performance and turns it to comprehending camp as a modality of perception" (150). Camp recognition becomes the basis of coming-out in a gay sense. It is "not the registration of established codes; rather it is a sudden fracture and expansion of those codes, an opening onto something outside the pales of the parole each subject has framed within the langue of the socio-symbolic order" (Michasiw 151). Through this recognition of a different way of viewing the world, the viewer recognizes both his similarities to the creator and to other like-minded individuals who read a text

with the same camp eye. Camp is a subversive view whose recognition ignites in the viewer a realization of his own marginality while affirming that he is not alone. As Michasiw tells us, the subject is de-centered through camp-recognition and then re-constituted first at the level of identity and then at the level of community (152). This affiliation and affirmation through the recognition of a particular aesthetic parallels cultural production and consumption that constitute gay and have links to economics and politics.

Both camp and the gay economy operate to foster both affiliation and affirmation. From a Marxist perspective, democratizing social forms exhibit "use value" while forms involving capital exhibit "exchange value." The production and consumption of camp as espoused by Sontag (291) and Michasiw (152) resonate with Friedman's description of the democratic nature of capitalist economics. Galbraith insists that the effect of mass production is to limit choice, yet camp shows how artifice and parody can create new uses and meanings that confound limits. Friedman believes that a capitalist economy creates an environment in which common patterns of consumption evolve into subcultural and political movements. Camp-recognition supports Friedman's theory to the extent that common patterns of cultural consumption arise through a camp modality of perception that abets counter-hegemonic consumption. The relation between gay subculture, politics and economics is one of camp.

The displacement and reversal of camp displayed on the circuit is reminiscent of major features of the festival described in Chapter One. Camp shares similarities with festival, and consequently post-modernism and queer theory. At the same time, camp is

the aesthetic of gay cultural forms such as the circuit and, as such, is linked to gay economics and politics. Camp as means of cultural, economic and political affirmation depends on gay subculture(s)' links to the mainstream. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at camp on the circuit. I will also highlight gay's links to other mainstream and marginalized groups as evidenced on the circuit. In doing so, I hope to further support the expansion of queer theory into other axes of identification and to better emphasize the hybrid nature of gay subculture(s) that underlines camp.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Queer Connections to Class, Gender and Race**

An examination of some aspects of the circuit such as costume, music and dance provides a useful means of exploring its connections to other marginalized or subordinated groups, and to mainstream society as a whole. The circuit utilizes the democratizing effects of the capitalist system to further its own cultural-political ends by demonstrating its important relationship to the economic mainstream through wealth generation. At the same time, that revenue is a direct product of a desire-driven festival circuit that transgresses norms of the body and society along axes of race, gender and class while it eroticizes and sexualizes its relation to the heterosexual mainstream. A look at the sexualized costumes of drag and male homosocial groups, the house music, and eroticized dance of the circuit illuminate the gendered, racial and class transgressiveness and often camp nature of the circuit.

#### **5.1 Sexualized, Masculine Costume**

Much use of theme costume on the circuit relates directly to gay eroticization of the dominant society. Gay subculture(s) are intimately linked to heterosexual culture and that

intimacy often manifests itself at circuit parties as a sexualized relationship of subversion. Cowboys, sailors, collegiate wrestlers, motorcycle outlaws and police officers regularly appear in the crowds of various events. These groups are central to gay fantasy because of their maleness. A history of gay pornography further illustrates this fantasy of queer possibilities in male homo-social environments. The circuit's costume queers the relationship between gays and their straight brethren by showing homosexual potential everywhere. The creation of clear distinctions between gay and straight attempt to proscribe this behaviour to a particular group. However, it is a group that springs from mainstream society. Although there is a degree of separation, gay subculture(s) are invested in the hegemony. It is a description of this investment that most politics address.

The political relationship between gay and mainstream is often expressed as an ethnicity model wherein gay is simply another minority deserving equal rights. However, Alan Sinfield's essay refutes the validity of this perspective. Through his considerations of ethnicity and diaspora, he shows how subcultures are constructed and "contaminated," or hybrid. Hybridity then becomes a vantage point from which to view gay subculture(s) and envision new political and cultural possibilities. The queer possibilities of costumes that sexualize mainstream masculinity are a cultural expression of gay's unique ability to operate within mainstream culture while feeling quite separate. From a political perspective, it shows how gays enjoy a unique position as the enemy within.

Costumes that sexualize the working class, male sport and military are an expression of historical linkages between gay subculture(s) and these groups, and a celebration of the historical nature of male same-sex desire. Intersections of

homosexuality and the working class are illustrated by Steven Maynard in his work on Toronto from 1890 to 1930. Maynard shows how urbanization, the status of men as wage earners, and policing and surveillance techniques aided the production of sexual knowledges. In terms of the working class, Maynard writes, "The sexual use of the Ward's streets must have done much to reinforce middle class Torontonians' view that the Ward's teeming backstreets and lanes were breeding grounds for immoral activity" (213). The reason for homosexual use of working-class neighbourhoods is clear since such activity in these neighbourhoods by middle-class men was likely to happen outside the prying eyes of families or neighbours and these "sexual relations between middle-class and working-class men were a major component of the subculture" (Jeffrey Weeks qtd. in Maynard 220). It is not clear from Maynard's exploration to what extent historical sexual relations amongst working class men occurred. However, for gay fantasy, actual occurrence is unimportant. Unlike the middle class, working-class men had great access to male homo-social work environments such as mining and lumber camps, merchant shipping or cattle driving, and these types of homo-social environments inform gay fantasy. Thus, the working-class male is a site of desire within gay subculture(s). Costumes worn to circuit events that incorporate hard hats and plaid shirts are testimony to this.

The military is another type of homo-social environment from which gay fantasy draws inspiration. Unlike sex between the working class which is not well documented, there is ample documentation of sex with/in the military. Records of prosecutions of perpetrators are one type of documentation. Works by Steven Zeeland contain

ethnographic accounts and interviews with US servicemen who regularly participate in same-sex behaviour and describe their experiences in great detail. Maynard points out how prosecutions for male same-sex acts in Toronto peaked during World War I as "the presence of large numbers of soldiers in training in the city... [created a] corresponding increase in the opportunities for sex between men" (235). The diary of J. S. Barrington, early British gay pornographer, details numerous accounts from World War II London (see Smith).

Themes common to the circuit -- such as working-class lifestyle, military and sport -- are also staples of gay pornography. Thomas Waugh describes how "straight-identified institutional setting[s], e.g., ranch, hospital, school, military, construction site... [are] especially common" (321) themes in gay video pornography. As with the sexualized costume of circuit boys, gay pornography, according to Waugh, "subverts the patriarchal order by challenging masculinist values, providing a protected space for... sexuality" (324). Micael Bronski writes of gay pornography that "it blurs the lines between fantasy and reality" ("Spirits" 25). The eroticization of straight masculinity through costume also blurs this reality as gays become the objects of their desire, creating their own, albeit queer, male homo-social environment of the circuit.

While the appropriation of straight masculinity through costume subverts hegemonic ideals of manhood, gays have in no way divorced themselves from associations with the feminine. Drag is perhaps the most ubiquitous and longest-running costume associated with gay men. Although it is not the most common form of costume on the circuit, it is central. Drag queens act as performers and spokespersons on the



official end of circuit events, and appear amongst the participants with regularity. Drag highlights the connection between gay subculture(s) and the dominant heterosexual culture through its association of gay as gender inversion, and shows the camp nature of this relationship. Drag also has links to folk drama, and in the following pages I consider drag as a folk dramatic form within the subculture that acts as a means of subversion similar to the use of hyper-masculine costume.

## 5.2 Drag

Cross dressing is by no means a phenomenon relegated to the twentieth century (Holmberg 169). Nor is it a product of Western civilization. Cross dressing has been well documented since ancient times, across diverse cultures. Cross dressing, because of its erotic appeal, was often a mainstay of fertility rites in the ancient world (Talimini 2). For other cultural groups, cross dressing was a religious taboo. The Old Testament strictly prohibits cross dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5). The ancient Greeks were familiar with cross dressing through fertility rites, wedding feasts and funerals. There are numerous accounts of cross dressing amongst gods and heroes in Greek mythology, and its use by cults (Talimini 2-5). Cross dressing was also common in Roman drama (Goodwin, More Man 54; Talimini 5) and Roman priests cross dressed to bring themselves closer to the divine (Talimini 5-6).

Cross dressing took place in medieval Europe. According to Talimini, many female saints of the medieval period were in fact men who dressed as women (6). The Catholic church encouraged women to dress as men because it believed women were inferior to men. Males, on the other hand, could be executed as witches for cross

dressings. There were, however, special occasions during which it was sanctioned. The English Feast of Fools and the Swiss Fasnacht Carnival are two examples (Talimini 6-7). Shakespeare's plays, like those of Roman times, also featured males in female roles (Goodwin, More Man 54; Holmberg 169; Talimini 7; Thompson 53).

Cross dressing was popular in the dramatic traditions of the Near and Far East. The Hsing-ku actors of second century B.C. China were a class of young boys who practiced their dramatic arts until a ban was placed on transvestism toward the end of the eighteenth century (Goodwin 54; Talimini 9). Islamic countries from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries featured male singers who dressed as women (Talimini 9). In Japan, Kabuki theatre traditionally features males in female roles (Abel 194; Goodwin 54; Holmberg 169; Talimini 10; Thompson 53). This is also the case in the Japanese Noh dramatic tradition (Holmberg 169).

The historical, cross-cultural examples of cross dressing listed above do not necessarily fall under the rubric of "drag." Carl Holmberg provides the following taxonomy which might prove useful in constructing a proper definition: "A transvestite... assume[s] the look of the opposite sex more as a statement of personhood. An illusionist... creates the illusion of being of the opposite sex. A female impersonator... mimics every sartorial and gestural detail" (170). According to Holmberg, a drag queen is a "man masquerading as a woman" (169). This appears to relate to all three definitions he provides above and, therefore, creates ambiguity as to an actual definition of drag which is most often understood through its relationship with gay subculture(s). This association is, more or less, a development of the late nineteenth century and the rise of a

distinct subculture(s) as the result of several discursive, social and economic factors.

Goodwin cites reports of homosexual, male cross dressers in London from as early as 1709 (More Man 54). If, in fact, homosexual subculture(s) existed in London around the turn of the eighteenth century, it seems an isolated case and most likely related to prostitution which is as prevalent throughout the historical record as cross-dressing and male homo-sex.

### 5.3 Camp

In order to dispel confusion as to the exact nature of drag and to understand its role on the circuit, it is useful to examine the camp aesthetic in drag tradition. Jack Babuscio asserts that camp arises in response to the polarization inherent in a hetero/homosexual dichotomy wherein homosexuality is deemed abhorrent and unnatural: "Camp describes those elements in a person, situation, or activity that express or are created by a gay sensibility" (20). Judith Grahn suggests that camp is one of the primary shaping forces behind gay sensibility and is "defined through certain acts and artifacts arising from... engagement with the consciousness of difference" (3-4). In either case, camp is the relationship between people, situations and activities, and gayness (Babuscio 20). Drag's parody of gender norms destabilizes the male/female dichotomy and denaturalizes constructions of sexuality imagined along gender lines.

Babuscio lists four main elements of camp: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour. Camp's irony emerges in its opposition and incongruous contrasts to mainstream culture (Abel 197; Babuscio 20). There is no consensus on its aestheticism, and that its (non)presence "resides largely in the eye of the beholder" (Babuscio 20). In

fact, this attitude toward camp dominates the scholarship in the area. In his introduction to Camp Grounds, David Bergman writes, “most of the authors in the book have supposed that readers will recognize camp when they see it without its being defined” (4). The aesthetic of camp rests in the artistic shaping of its irony and relies on arrangement, timing and tone (Abel 197; Babuscio 21). Theatricality relates to the idea of “life-as-theatre” particularly in the realm of social roles (Babuscio 24). The irony and aesthetics of camp play themselves out in the dramatic representation of everyday social roles. Humour is the strategy of camp and is manifested in a “strong incongruity between an object, person, or situation and its context... coupled with a real or pretended innocence” (Thompson 53; Babuscio 26-27). Goodwin describes camp humour as “play[ing] with stereotypes and carrying them to the extreme, flouting heterosexual values. Camp shows the world “as it could be... It is a metacultural statement, an aspect of culture commenting on culture” (More Man 39). In essence, camp combines fun and earnest as a reaction to, and subversion of hegemonic forces.

Drag relates directly to camp. The camp of drag is “a concept defined as ironic overstatement, particularly in style, attire, makeup, gesture and dialogue” (Holmberg 171). Drag performance embodies the essence of camp irony, as defined above, by revealing a constructedness of gender which is in direct opposition and, incongruous to notions of gender in mainstream culture. As Shiller notes, “The ironic overstatement of drag embraces, and embraces and embraces the dominant culture’s prescription for gender until it finally explodes and splatters itself all over the performer and spectator” (25). The camp aesthetic of drag rests in the over-the-top construction of femininity

exhibited by the performers. As previously discussed, the aestheticism of camp is the artistic reification of its irony. The excessive femininity of drag, through its mocking and parodic tone, holds femininity up to ridicule and highlights the unnaturalness and constructedness of gender (Shingler 186). It has been suggested that modern drag performers are “symptomatic of an entire generation flipping out on popular culture... with a budding gay sensibility” (Thompson 51), and that drag represents a “nexus between popular entertainment and the social construction of gender” (Senelick 26).

In light of a thorough understanding of camp, Holmberg’s “female impersonator” most resembles the drag queen. In fact, Goodwin uses the terms female impersonator and drag queen synonymously (More Man 53). He elaborates on these terms from an emic perspective:

Female impersonators refer to themselves as drag queens only in the presence of other impersonators or close friends. For them a drag queen is untalented; wears too much makeup... ; wears tacky, unflattering clothes; and could never convince anyone she is real. A female impersonator, on the other hand, is... professional, glamorous, and believable. (Goodwin, More Man 73)

It is important to note that gay men who do not do drag make little distinction between these two categories. Selenick writes, “Glamour drag was introduced from minstrelsy and the homosexual subculture in the 1870s” (31). Female impersonation acts were extremely popular in the Frontier West during the 1860s and 70s (Senelick 33), while the time period from 1890 to World War II marks the height of popularity of female impersonators (Ullman 577). The first trade drag club, The Howdy Club opened in New York City in the early 1930s (Jeffreys 185). Holmberg suggests three reasons for the

public's fascination with drag: First, it disorders societal roles. Second, it confuses the signs upon which we depend. Finally, it raises questions about what makes females different from males (175). These points are particularly true for a subculture subordinated by dominant notions of homosexuality as gender inversion. Drag represents a feigned acceptance and parodic re-evaluation of these ideas through camp.

Following the end of World War II in the United States, America attempted to reassert the traditional economic, sexual and gender roles thrown askew by the War (Bronski, "Reform" 11). Along with this condemnation of homosexuality came a suppression of cultural expressions associated with the subculture. Holmberg's reasons for audience's enjoyment of drag became the State's reasons for its abolishment. In fact, it was against the law in New York City for a man to wear women's clothing and it was permitted on stage only through payoffs (Jeffreys 194). The audience's enjoyment of drag shows, in this case, derived from a participation in a prohibited pleasure: the performers were doing something which audience members were not permitted (Jeffreys 200). This is once again reminiscent of gays and homo-sex behaviour.

The American government failed in its attempts to suppress homosexual subculture(s) and transvestism. The Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 that sparked the modern gay liberation movement were, by some reports, initiated by drag queens frustrated by the incessant intimidation of the gay community by New York City police. For this reason, drag queens are often viewed as holding leadership roles within the gay community (Goodwin 54, 73; Hilbert 464, 465; Holmberg 174; Thompson 55). The gay liberation movement resulted in a resurgence of drag clubs in the 1970s and early

80s (Hilbert 464). Today, almost no nightclub or circuit event is without a featured drag performance which points to the importance of drag in gay subculture(s) as a folk dramatic tradition

#### **5.4 Drag as Folk Drama**

While it is debatable as to whether or not drag constitutes folk drama, within folklore scholarship, there is much debate about the genre itself. Anne Burson suggests an approach based on traditional models that centre on “creativity, innovation, and the interaction of the person, community, and event” (309). In Burson’s conception of folk drama, script and performance style are based on a traditional model relevant to the particular group (309-310). In “Forms and Functions of Folk Theater,” Peter Bogatryev approaches Burson’s model-based conception of folk drama. As with Burson, Bogatryev notes the effects of socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms of the group on dramatic forms (55). Steve Tillis argues that many of the forms of folk drama “have an apparent relationship of one kind or another to ritual” (93). He explores relationships between religiosity and secularity and, efficacy and entertainment through scholarship in the area and outlines the apparent intersections of ritual and drama in a six item typology that incorporates drama-like ritual, ritual-like drama, and intersections between the two. Edmund Leach draws similar parallels between ritual and drama. Drama, in this sense, refers more to dramatic behaviours exhibited in formality, masquerade and role reversal (Leach 136). The dramatic behaviours discussed by Leach are seen as part of calendric festivals or rites of passage which serve to measure time in the life of the community or of the individual. The circuit conforms to Leach’s notion since it is a calendric event that

employs reversal and other elements common to festivals. Drag, as part of that festival, constitutes folk drama.

Drag performances are an integral part of nightclub contexts and festivals like the circuit. In February 1998, Fly, one of Toronto's largest and most popular gay nightclubs, and described as the place where Toronto's circuit boys spend regular, non-circuit weekends, featured such a performance. The show began at around 4 am. The performer wore a floor-length, red vinyl, tight dress with slits on both sides to show the entire length of her smooth, muscular legs. The strapless dress revealed broad shoulders and large pectorals. This Drag Queen did not attempt to create a complete illusion of femininity, but certainly toyed with societal constructs of gender. Over her face, she wore a red veil topped off with an unkempt, blonde wig and a black, leather, biker cap.

The show was completely unexpected. She walked quickly to the rail overlooking the dance floor and flicked a lit cigarette into the crowd. This quickly caught everybody's attention, especially those who quickly jumped aside to avoid the burning cigarette. Then, she lip-synched and danced to a heavy, house mix with the lyrics "Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who's the biggest queen of them all," interchanged with "Make the bitch work harder." The entire performance was very aggressive owing to the leather-like quality of the costume and its association with sado-masochist sexual practices, and the driving beat of the music. At the end, she slowly removed the dress to reveal a very muscular male form. Now, he wore only a pair of silver, spandex short-shorts with a bright spotlight built into the crotch. The club filled with artificial fog to accentuate the spotlight's beam. As he walked to the stairs and descended onto the dance floor, the light



cut through the fog and played off the crowd. The music pumped harder and excitement overtook the dancers.

This particular show, although unexpected by customers, was planned by the operators of that particular nightclub. Other performances occur spontaneously as with a case in early August, 1999 at Sky Bar in Montreal, Quebec. Sky Bar is a gay nightclub located in Montreal's gay ghetto. In 1999, the club was comprised of three large dance floors specializing in different sub-genres of remixed, dance music, as well as a lounge area for relaxing. Each dance area had one or more raised platforms which dancers used at their leisure. One of Sky Bar's three rooms featured pop music from the early- to mid-1980s. Whether or not they are scheduled to perform, drag queens are a salient feature in the gay nightclubs and parties of major, urban centres. On the night I was there, the DJ played "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" by Cindi Lauper, and a drag queen from the audience got up on one of the platforms and began lip-synching and dancing to the song. Two men from the crowd joined her and acted as backup singers and dancers.

Both of the examples above involve only music and dance. This is the typical form of drag shows (Goodwin, More Man 55) but is by no means the only one. Sometimes drag shows involve the use of comedic scripts in which the performer interacts with audience members. One such show was featured for two nights in the Spring of 1999 at Zone 216, a gay nightclub on Water Street in downtown St. John's. The show was called "Viva Diva Glamour" and starred Pam Brown in the title role. While it may seem odd that a drag show should feature a female performer given the previous discussion of drag as a particular form of cross dressing, it need not involve

cross dressing. The most important feature is the subversion of gender stereotypes through extreme and excessive femininity. Romy Shiller states, "A [woman] dragging as femme heightens feminine qualities in a self-referential way through the use of irony, parody, and kitsch, foregrounding the construction of femininity" (25). This rejects the notion that one is only in drag if one dresses as the opposite gender (Shiller 25). In this sense, Brown can be seen as a drag artist.

Brown lip-synched three musical numbers including one Broadway show tune which is a staple of drag performance (Jeffreys 188). Between songs, Brown performed a text written by herself and Steve O'Brien -- who also appeared as a backup singer and dancer. The text dealt with issues stereotypically associated with women and often considered trivial. Brown talked mainly about difficulties she has encountered in her dealings with men, concerns about fashion and beauty and the appeal of nightclubs. Since this was a drag performance and the audience was composed almost entirely of gay men, the text was viewed by the audience as relating to the concerns of the gay community and not to women at all.

Circuit parties and clubs hosting official and unofficial during festival weekends almost invariably feature drag shows with formats similar to those described above. An example of drag featured at circuit parties was the main event of Black & Blue 1999, dance party titled "Space 1999" held on the field of Montreal's Olympic Stadium with 20 to 30,000 people in attendance. Throughout the night, the party featured dance numbers, singers and drag queens. The premier drag queen at Space 1999 was Montreal's "Mad-

Donna” who specializes in impersonating the American pop star and gay icon Madonna.<sup>1</sup> That weekend, a rumour circulated among circuit participants that the true Madonna was to make an appearance. In fact, it was the hype surrounding Mad-Donna’s performance that created this rumour.

The examples of drag performance above may be seen as folk drama according to the definitions above. As discussed above, drag reveals the constructed nature of gender and, in doing so, subverts hegemonic notions of gender. The nature of homosexual acts themselves are in direct opposition to the ideals of gender held by the dominant culture. In this manner, drag reflects the subversion of gender construction inherent in homosexuality. Drag is certainly theatrical in that it is a “performance activity ... simultaneously delivered by the performers and received by the audience... It is ephemeral and unrepeatable... [and an] intentional communicative action” (Tillis 76), but there are traditional components such as the structure of the performance routine, costume, etc. The action is mimetic or make-believe. Drag incorporates “practices of design, movement, speech and/or music, engenders and/or enhances a sense of communal identity among those who participate in its delivery and reception” (Tillis 140). The leadership role of drag queens has already been mentioned, and drag is sometimes seen as a cohesive force within the gay community (Goodwin, More Man 54) because of its

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<sup>1</sup> Certain gay festivals are devoted entirely to drag. New York’s Wigstock, held annually on Labour Day, is arguably the most prominent example of such a festival. Wigstock began in 1984 and is an “end-of-the-summer gay love-in” (Hilbert 465). The purpose of Wigstock is similar to the circuit in that it draws attention to, and raise funds for the gay men’s health crisis (i.e. HIV/AIDS). Once again, this highlights the leadership role of drag performers within gay subculture. The 1999 Wigstock festival featured more than 60 performers from New York’s drag scene (ATBEAM).

uniqueness within and, strong association with the subculture (Goodwin, More Man 53).

Drag creates a site of affiliation and affirmation for gay subculture.

Drag as folk drama is an important aspect of gay subculture that has a long historical association with the group. Through drag, performers communicate the aesthetics and values of their subculture to their audiences. As well, the use of drag and its camp nature point to the purpose of drag in both incorporating and rejecting through humorous parody of the hegemonic conception of homosexuality as gender inversion. The camp, hyper-femininity of drag as folk drama and costume parallels the camp use of hyper-masculine costume exhibited in working-class, military and sport themes. Both drag and masculine costume show a queer linkage of gender and sexuality. Further queer connections displayed in the cultural forms of the circuit stem from other axes of identification. One notable instance is gay's connection to race manifested in the music and dance of the circuit.

### **5.5 Music and Dance**

Kevin Mumford examines the evolution of gay identity in the early-twentieth century as it relates to intersections between race and sexuality through discursive texts, subculture(s) and urban geography. He writes, "borders between black and homosexual geographic spaces were blurred by clandestine crossings" (396). This parallels gay use of working-class neighbourhoods for sexual purposes discussed above by Maynard. It is useful to view intersections between race and homosexuality because blacks and gays are traditionally ostracized from the mainstream, urban culture. In his discussion of late-nineteenth century invert dance halls, Mumford illuminates the associations made by

sexologists between gender inversion (i.e. homosexuality) and inter-racial same-sex behaviours. In the case of inter-racial relationships, sexologists believed colour difference substituted for perceived gender difference wherein blacks assumed the submissive or female role. Those who engaged in this same-sex, inter-racial behaviour were known as "homosexual complexion perverts" (Mumford 399). Mumford points out how this understanding was similar to the contemporary understanding of black-white opposition in the late-nineteenth century. Instead of concentrating on medico-scientific definitions, Mumford is interested in mapping the transformation of sexualities through a historiographic exploration of gay subculture(s) in New York City and Chicago.

In his essay, Mumford demonstrates how gay subculture(s) coalesced through the intermingling of blacks and whites in speakeasies through the 1920s and 30s. Police reports portray these speakeasies as sites of fluid sexuality between men, women, and races. Mumford asserts that the racial, gender, sexual, and ethnic fluidity of these establishments contrasted heavily with rigid norms of gender and racial dichotomies (404). In addition to changes in the discursive understanding of homosexuality, the speakeasy provided a context for cultural exchange between African Americans and emerging white, middle-class gays illustrated in reports of turn-of-the-century gay parties incorporating black dance, music and language (Mumford 408-9). The music and dance of the circuit still illustrates the influence of the intermingling of black and homosexual subcultures.

The most powerful image on the circuit is the mass of thousands of gay men dancing topless to an incessant house beat. It is not just the throng of skin, muscle and

eroticized costume, but the sexualized dance that contributes to the spectacle. While the relative freedom of post-Stonewall society allows BBCM to rent Olympic Stadium for the largest, indoor display of gay sexuality in North America, sexualized dance is a result of the early twentieth century, gay/black cultural mixing. As Mumford writes, it was, "African-American cultural practices, especially dance, [that] shaped homosexuality not in some abstract, indistinct way, but directly through the communal molding of dance forms that were often indistinguishable from sexual intercourse" (Mumford 407). Dance on the circuit is arguably little different than that described in 1920s police reports.

Dance is the reason for the circuit party. The themes, elaborately constructed settings, performers, and costumes all act to enhance the all-night, dance party environment. Where there is dance, there is logically music. The house music that drives the circuit shares its heritage with the dance it inspires. House music is the anthem of the circuit, it is the music of the circuit folk. Some may challenge this description of house as folk music since folk music scholars have sometimes regarded performance that relies entirely on technology as suspect. However, house exhibits many of the elements of vernacular song through its tradition, performance and enjoyment.

The nexus between popular culture and folklore is one long recognized by folklorists. Early explorations in this area focused relationships between print and oral cultures. With the spread of recording technology, music scholars looked to the effects of sound recordings on local song repertoire and performance. More recently, ethnographers have concentrated on the contextual use of popular culture. Martin Laba highlights the "social reference context" in which individuals and groups attribute meaning to pop

culture products" (9). Popular culture also serves as inspiration for the individual performer or provides elements for the creation of completely new performances. In this manner, (re)production and consumption of house music exhibits qualities of vernacular song from the perspective of both the DJ and dancers.

Those unfamiliar with club musics sometimes fail to attribute characteristics of performance, creativity or specialized skill to the DJ, or consider the investment of the audience. Club musics are fleeting in their dance floor contexts, and too static, overproduced or void of real meaning in commercial recordings to warrant serious consideration by scholars and music critics. These points are evidence of an underlying belief system associated with what Peter Narváez calls "media lore" in which "technological media occur as significant elements of content" (131).

While remixed musics might be associated with the most modern of technologies, dancing to disks probably began in the first days of phonographs. The 1920s gay parties described above by Mumford are early evidence. It was also a staple form of entertainment in British town hall and youth clubs of the 1940s and 50s (Thornton 89). Disco itself emerged during the 1960s in New York City's, gay African-American subculture. As both black and white gays came together on the dancefloors of New York in 1972, disco began to cross over into heterosexual culture. Mumford demonstrates that blacks and whites shared dancefloors quite a while longer than 1972. Nevertheless, in 1973, Billboard used the term "disco-hit" for the first time. I would argue that the cross over of disco into the mainstream was largely a result of white, gay mens' ability to pass in straight contexts and thereby exert cultural influence. The mainstreaming of gay

subculture has been ongoing for more than a century and is a means whereby gays can achieve upward mobility, and through which mainstream culture can diffuse the threat of gay subculture (Bronski, "Reform" 12). This is yet another example of the hybridity of gay. The apogee of disco music in the dominant culture came with the huge success of the film *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977, and ended with a mass demonstration and the burning of disco records by baseball fans at Yankee Stadium in 1981.

It was at disco's peak that house music was born to producer Frankie Knuckles at the Warehouse in Chicago -- a gay, African-American dance club. From there, it disseminated to the gay club scenes of other Western, urban centres. House is related to disco in that it is most often seen as having evolved from it. House is "built around the sounds and styles of disco" (Currid 173). It is:

recognized by its strong 4/4 drum machine kick, usually at a tempo of 125-135 beats per minute... [The] producer overlays treble keyboard riffs often composed of simple triads or major or minor seventh chords. This keyboard riff is often designed in two-bar segments, where the beginning of the two bars starts on the beat, followed by an increasing move toward syncopation... Over this basis is layered 'the song' (Currid 170).

House differs from disco in that its emphasis is clearly on the repetitive, heavy bassline with less regard for disco's highly structured vocal texts. One Chicago DJ describes house as having "a real driving bassline to keep the groove. Not a lot of lyrics -- just a sample of some sort" (Chip E. qtd. in Thomas 442-43). In disco remixes, a break in the vocals is a site for percussive improvisation. The house track then is the "disco break writ large (Currid 174)." The house DJ's concern is the driving rhythm.



Robert Kenney is a house DJ with some experience on the circuit. His relationship with house music highlights the significance of house music to gay subculture(s), nightclubs and the circuit. Kenney, or DJ Bluefish, grew up in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and, as a high school student in the early 1980s, began mixing records using what he calls "bedroom mixers." The set-up was quite basic with no pitch control to manipulate beats, and no board to adjust frequency outputs. Still, it was through this rudimentary system that Kenney acquired the basic DJ skill of beat mixing.

In 1985, Kenney left Mount Pearl for Toronto to pursue employment and explore urban life, particularly that of Toronto's large gay community. It was there, at a club called Twilight Zone that Kenney was introduced to house and decided to pursue DJing as at least a secondary, if not primary occupation. Twilight Zone was a warehouse-style club with a capacity near 2,000. Its clientele was predominantly gay. Kenney recalls:

At that point in Toronto, house music hadn't even travelled up from Chicago. So there'd be one bar, the Twilight Zone... The bass bins were bigger than your average fucking duplex. You would just stand on the floor and vibrate. And kickin' ass. And Twilight Zone started bringing the feel to Canada.

The impact of this environment caused an epiphany for Kenney. The term epiphany refers to a revelatory experience that normally carries religious connotations.

There is in fact a para-religious aspect to the circuit experience. Walter Hughes describes disco dancing for gay men as religious discipline meant to refashion the conventional self (150). Frankie Knuckles describes the Warehouse "like a pagan party, people screaming and dancing -- it was scary and joyous at the same time" (qtd. in Ross 68). Others cite the ecstatic expression of house culture (Ross 68) which bears similarity

to the ecstasy of religious tradition. British journalist Sheryl Garrat quotes one informant as saying, "I couldn't begin to tell you what house is. You have to go to the clubs and see how people react when they hear it. It's more like a feeling that runs through, like old time religion" (qtd. in Thomas 437). Kenney's own narrative has a similar para-religious vein. He says:

The epiphany for me was, like I said, the Twilight Zone in Toronto. Stoned out of my face on acid and getting my ass kicked by a [Roland Drum Machine] 909 beat and a major fucking bass drum. And realizing I could solve the world's problems. Something opened up and something went in and I said, 'I have to go out and inform the masses.'

The heightened sense of being created at Twilight Zone (perhaps in combination with the LSD) and the religious discipline of the music transformed Kenney. In this sense, his own DJ performances becomes a form of preaching through which to convert the uninitiated.

Kenney left Toronto in 1989 for South Beach in Miami, Florida to work as a style consultant for several fashion houses. It was here that Kenney was introduced to the circuit through the annual White Party. He found his major musical inspirations on the circuit and in the accompanying American house movements, particularly those of the Afro-American gay communities from which both disco and house emerged. He says:

There is that undercurrent... [in] America to find that less processed, tribal, drumming, soul, black music. That is quintessentially what the better part of house music has always been was the rhythm and blues... [It was] Black culture, historically, that produced some of the best music in America. The influence that it had in my life came from the tribal sound of drums.

These influences are heard in the prominent basslines of Kenney's remixes with their syncopated rhythm and sponge-like quality reminiscent of the sound of traditional African drumming. The complexity of the rhythm and its significance over harmony and melody, as evidenced in Kenney's mixes, is characteristic of African music (Thomas 442). House highlights rhythm and beat to power the dance of its audience.

The complexity of house music produced on the circuit requires much advanced technology. While Kenney's interaction with basic digital CD mixers in the early 90s was indicative of the state of technology at the time, DJ booths at today's circuit parties contain masses of computer and digital equipment and complex mixing boards in addition to the pioneering turntable. This equipment allows the DJ to produce ever more complex and layered rhythms and sounds. The current production of highly digitized music evolved from the advent of CD mixers, developments in computer CD technology, and improvements in broadband Internet access.

Kenney's own performance happened on the margins of the circuit scene. While he had no official association with organizers of South Beach's parties, Kenney did operate a travelling chill-out room called the Lava Lounge. A chill-out room is a small space at a club or circuit party, away from the pounding bass of the dance floor where one can relax in armchairs and on couches to down-tempo music. Kenney refers to it as a travelling room because it was associated with no particular club, but went by the same name in its various manifestations. In the Lava Lounge, Kenney mixed predominantly Ambient Dub -- a form of music that incorporates high-end, ethereal sounds with the

electronically reproduced rhythm similar to that of Reggae. Kenney cites Ambient Dub as another of his influences.

Through the Lava Lounge, Kenney realized the potential of DJ performance. He recalls, "When I started to create my own music and work bridges and drum solos, and sequences through a computer and play, and found that I could burn it off, I had to incorporate CD into my playability." In fact, Kenney relates a second epiphany, this time with regard to digital technology:

There was this little cathartic change in me that said, "I'm not going to be able to manipulate to the degree that I want, the sound that I want unless I go electronic." And then come back and be able to mix the old house... So that's where the whole digital turnover came from. I eventually abandoned the turntables and got set up electronically.

Kenney believed CDs provided more layers of sound and greater creativity, essentially incorporating more of his own style into his mixes rather than beat mixing disks produced in recording studios by other DJs. Instead, he was able to approach the level of performance of circuit DJs with their masses of high-end equipment.

Live DJ mixes of popular songs at nightclubs and circuit parties are arguably the most common examples of local house production. It is possible to recognize the underlying, original tracks, but the mixes also incorporate the individual style of the DJ.

Kenney describes this aspect performance:

These [DJs] were doing it live every night in clubs when the Pet Shop boys were travelling around the world and doing fabulous fucking parties and playing over backing tracks. The electronic art form that was out there being commercial was not being half as creative as the one individual manipulating the Pet Shop boys recording, maybe, with some really fucking heavy Kraftwerk and building bridges on top of that so they created another genre of electronic music.

Brian Currid affirms Kenney's statement when he writes, "As [house] records gained in popularity, the localized aspect of house consumption was retained in that the real art of house music remained in the hands of the DJ (172)." The DJ booth becomes a live studio in which to (re)create music according to individual aesthetics and interactions with audiences.

Andrew Ross suggests that this localization has "regionally decentralized" the dance music scene in North America and has prevented a mass movement associated with it (68). The circuit must present a peculiarity that runs counter to this statement. Contrary to Ross's assertion that there is no "mass movement organized around dance music", the circuit presents itself as a roving festival venue for house performers complete with traveling audiences. As Kenney describes it:

Resident DJs became so popular, and well known, and weren't home anymore, so the parties would happen everywhere. They're all travelling around in packs. So people were like, "I can't stand this DJ. Where did Danny Tanaglia go?" So they would go up to Chicago. And such and such is going to be in Montreal. So you get this circuit happening. When Victor Calderone is on the West Coast and Junior Vasquez is on the East Coast, which party do you go to?

The circuit's popularity is dependent on a fact of gay life; gays are much more mobile than their heterosexual peers because they are unburdened by the stability required by parenthood (Kilhefner 127). The circuit allows for a wider dissemination of house styles and contributes to the creation and maintenance of a gay musical aesthetic. It also connects vernacular locals such that the circuit itself represents a widely dispersed local

within the North American gay subculture(s). This logic affirms Ross's regionally decentralized view, but denies the regional characteristics.

Individuals affiliated with subcultural politics, Thomas suggests, are most likely to be involved in vernacular theory and practice (7). Within the melange of North American gay subculture(s) are a number of sub-groups including circuit boys. If one thinks of an aesthetic opposed in many ways to the circuit boy, it would be the Bear. As the word bear should suggest in the description of a physical aesthetic, these men tend to be large and hairy. While the smooth, chiselled circuit boy may get his name from the festival circuit, bears are regular participants. They are often associated with leather, S-M, and biker cultures and are therefore a regular feature at leather parties, and at other events as well. Kenney is not only a self-identified Bear, he is an icon.

In the autumn of 1999, Kenney and his partner vacationed in San Francisco. While there, a scout from Brush Creek Media approached him to pose for Bear, a popular pornographic magazine in the Bear community. Kenney gracefully declined, but reconsidered after returning to St. John's. He contacted Brush Creek and proposed that St. John's photographer Sheilagh O'Leary shoot the spread. The publishers agreed and Kenney appeared on the cover of the November-December issue. This in turn led to Kenney's nomination for the title International Grizzly Bear 2000. In February, Kenney attended the International Bear Rendezvous organized by the Bears of San Francisco and participated as one of twenty-five contestants in the pageant. To his surprise, he won. Kenney jokingly calls the International Bear Rendezvous "a hairy circuit party." As a

Bear, Kenney sees himself on the periphery of the circuit scene while he sees his music as deeply entrenched in it.

The interaction between DJ and audience is fundamental to an ethnographic exploration of Kenney's performance of house, and to the importance of house music to the circuit. A track is marked as house through its use on the dance floor (Currid 171), and the redesigning of clubs to move the DJ booth from upstairs and to put it on the floor with the dancers was a major step in reordering the performer-audience relationship (Ross 73). A constant connection is necessary in order for the DJ's mixes to have their full, desired effect. The biggest problem facing a DJ is a dead dance floor. On the floor, circuit DJs are able to gauge the dancers' reaction to his mixes and respond accordingly. House music is generally structured in sixteen bar segments. Toward the end of a segment, the DJ sometimes builds to a crescendo at which point he may decide to incorporate a vocal track in the next segment, increase the syncopation or complexity of the rhythm, or simply let the bassline lapse to foreground the high-end, ethereal keyboard riffs. The DJ bases his decision on what he feels the audience will most enjoy, what will make them dance hardest. A DJ is often judged by dancers on his ability to determine the appropriate time to increase the intensity of the mix. If it is too soon, the dancers are not ready and may leave the floor in frustration. If it is too late, the dancers may have already left out of boredom.

We can see in the performer/audience relationship, and the performer's relationship to his craft, aspects of vernacular performance. Folklore and popular culture enjoy an association in which one is often a source for the other. Local, everyday uses of

popular culture products represent one way by which the popular becomes the vernacular. DJs are expert practitioners who use commercial sound recordings to (re)create music that communicates personal aesthetic. In doing so, they establish themselves in a performer-audience relationship through which they contribute to a communal sense of identity. This relationship bears many similarities to other contexts of musical performance. When produced by a competent DJ, house music is indeed vernacular and points to historical associations of gay and black urban subcultures

The transgressive nature of the circuit is exemplified in the vernacular quality of performance, whether music, dance or costume. The focus of queer is the transgression of norms of sexuality. The costume, music and dance of the circuit represent intersections of sexuality with class, gender and race and highlight the hybrid nature of gay subculture. Eroticized subcultural expressions highlight the queer nature of other forms of social transgression. The eroticization of male homo-social environments and of the relationship between gays and straights, the subversion in the camp of drag, and the inter-racial mixing that created the sexualized dance and music of the circuit illustrate queer connections to other social axes. Costume includes associations with outlaw cultures marginalized by social behaviour. The fantasy of the male homo-social environment shows a queer connection through gender. The homo-sociality of sports clubs and the military is also eroticized through costume which is suggestive of the often hidden nature of male homo-eroticism. Drag approaches the gender axes from a queer orientation. Racial transgressions are best illustrated through house music since it is primarily derived from African-American musical forms. The prominence of this black



cultural form on the circuit highlights the historical relationship between white gays and black urban cultures at a time when such associations went against the mainstream.

Queerness exists not only in sexuality, but also in other social axes such as gender, race, class and group association. The body is another example of the queerness of the circuit and is the subject of the next chapter. Through health practices, from musclebuilding to recreational drugs, participants on the circuit demonstrate queer resistance to the hegemony.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Queer Resistance through the Body**

The body is a final site for a queer exploration of the circuit. The circuit body is constructed on the outside through disciplined regimes of diet and exercise, and on the inside through recreational drug use. The sculpted muscle of the circuit boy transgresses norms of gender while it attempts to portray an image of perfect masculinity. The toned bodies of thousands of topless circuit boys produce resistance to the mainstream in its camp exaggeration of manliness. Camp abounds in the irony of a healthy outer body coupled with a drug-fuelled inner body. Society regards the legitimate use of drugs as something that is condoned, prescribed and monitored by the health and pharmacy industries. Outside this accepted framework, drugs are unproductive and dangerous. Hence, there is risk in the use of street drugs for leisure and recreational purpose. The HIV/AIDS crisis positions gays as a high risk group in public health campaigns and, therefore, risk is part of the gay lexicon and an ingrained part of the gay psyche in many senses. In this manner, gays are better able, through an incorporation of health risk management as a cultural trait, to deal with issues surrounding illicit substances. The

conspicuous display of muscle, and the conspicuous use of recreational drugs represent a queer intersection of the circuit and health systems. Inside and outside constructions of the body are queer resistances to the hegemony in that they transgress norms of the body.

It is not surprising that physique culture developed in the late nineteenth century, approximately at the same time as the emergence of gay subculture(s). With urbanization and industrialization, the new economics of the wage labour system contributed to the solidification of gay and also created leisure time in which individuals could pursue activities such as bodybuilding. Sam Fussell calls bodybuilding “deeper than sport. It’s spectacle. And its roots are really in the Big Top. It was Florenz Ziegfeld who promoted the world’s first bodybuilder, Eugene Sandow, in the 1890s” (44). The muscled bodies of circuit boys are a long way from the circus sideshow, yet bodybuilding has been “known for forty years in the gay ghetto... and is another in a long line of appropriation from gay subculture” (52). It is of interest to note that two of the key portrayals of gender on the circuit, drag and muscle, developed from the minstrelsy and the fringe entertainment of the circus sideshow. Perhaps this is another point of queer connection. Just as drag, muscle is ubiquitous on the circuit.

Many of the 221 Club and party promotional items housed in Memorial University’s Folklore and Language Archives illustrate the importance of muscle on the circuit. Several examples (see Appendix A) include promotional flyers for Toronto’s White Ball, both 1997 and 1993, and three for events at 5ive [sic], a nightclub on St. Joseph Street near Toronto’s gay village. A final example is a full page advertisement from the 2001 Black & Blue Souvenir Program for Atlanta’s Hotlanta party. These items

depict muscled men wearing little or no clothing. These parties range from local events that one may or may not consider part of the circuit depending on one's idea of a circuit party in terms of scale and number of out-of-city partiers. Within the examples from 5ive, one is a pre-party for Leather Ball IV and another an after-party for a Boost Boys Big Gay Boat Cruise. In any case, the style of these promotional flyers is the same as those for the largest and longest-running parties as seen in the Hotlanta advertisement. In each example, the models possess beautiful, muscular bodies from exceptionally toned to naturally plump, smooth to hirsute. The importance of muscle is further highlighted by the Hot Body Contest at 5ive's Pimp and the sexualized gym scene featured on the flyer for White Ball 1993 with the words "Get Pumped." This phrase refers as much to the excitement building to the party as it does to the bodybuilding to prepare for the party. Images of the muscular male form depicted in circuit promotional materials are reminiscent of the physique magazines that first appeared in the late 1890s with the advent of physique culture itself. These images have a direct impact on the body discipline employed by circuit boys. The muscular bodies on club and party flyers set the standard for the circuit body.

Tom Brown of Toronto is intimately familiar with the importance of muscle on the circuit. Brown is a thirty-eight year old IT professional and long time circuit boy who has attended numerous parties across Canada and the United States. Brown's own body is an ideal of musculature and the result of discipline, dedication and determination, the purpose of which is partly to display the fruits of his labours on the dancefloor. On the importance of muscle to circuit boys, Brown comments:

It's definitely a very body-oriented type of people. A lot of people are concerned with looking good and there are two directions these people take. There's the type that just work-out all the time, use steroids, watch what they eat. They're fanatical about what they eat. Absolutely 100% perfect, two per cent body fat. Then there's the other people who instead of doing it through their bodies, they do it through their clothes. They go out and get get-ups made everytime they go to a party... I would define myself more along the lines of a body person when I go to these parties... I'm not really into the costumes

Brown recognizes the centrality of muscle on the circuit. Indeed, it would be impossible for anyone attending a circuit event to ignore the sea of muscle all around. Brown also sees a role for sexualized costume as discussed in Chapter Five. However, as Fussell points out, "clothes are only a second-skin to the pumped-up flesh" (47).

The muscle display on the circuit is in part a combination of the visual orientation of male sexuality, and the auto-eroticism of the muscled body. Fussell notes of bodybuilding, "This auto-eroticism is a fetishism of form... The sensation is masturbatory..., the roots are homosex past and present" (47). The lustful attraction of muscle is directed both internally and externally toward the self and the other. Brown also recognizes the male sexual gaze in reference to the circuit body. He comments:

Males by nature are a lot more visual when it comes to sex than females. When you have males with males, it becomes very visual and it's only natural that you run into this problem, and gay men especially... You have to be exceptional to stand out. You've got to have it all -- body, looks, clothes, dance, personality

The anxiety produced by the circuit boy's bodily aspirations demonstrates a function of not only masculine sexuality, but also of "a reversal of sex roles, with the bodybuilder taking a traditionally female role: body as object" (Fussell 45). The simultaneous

masculinity and femininity of the muscular circuit boy confounds norms of gender and queers the circuit body.

The strength and power associated with muscle are undoubtedly male. However, there are many aspects of bodybuilding and, consequently, the circuit body that are traditionally female. Sam Fussell writes:

It's so deeply androgynous. It's somehow simultaneously bully and sissy, butch and femme... Bodybuilders blur the distinction between He-men and Girly-girls. He shares her obsession with the scales ('Oh my God! I'm retaining water!' is their mutual lament). Both invest food with moral properties... His testosterone tizzies or 'roid rages are her hormonal mood swings of PMS. His joy in cleavage, accentuated by the tank-top..., is her joy in cleavage, accentuated by the push-up bustier. Both bodies are testament to physical passion (44-46).

The femininity of the muscled body is not just the result of academic gendered analyses.

Brown's comments parallel those of Fussell:

The problem with the circuit parties, with guys, it's become, it's almost like women and wanting to be a model. The pursuit of beauty has become almost an unhealthy obsession. People keep pushing and pushing themselves, especially in the circuit world. You have to keep going to the gym. You have to keep watching what you eat. You have to do the steroids just to keep up and I'm sure it creates a lot of anxiety.

The feminine nature of an excessively masculine form highlights the queer guise of the circuit body. It points to a further queerness of gay subculture(s), and of the circuit along the gender axes.

The gay aesthetic of camp also appears in the muscle of the circuit. The irony, artifice and self-parody of this confused gender is indicative of a camp resistance to norms of the body. Fussell describes bodybuilding as "quintessentially urban, [it] is inextricably intertwined with homosexual camp" (45). The camp elements of

excessiveness and exaggeration appear in the thousands of similarly sculpted bodies dancing together at all-night circuit events. It is another instance of the “gay clone” conceived of in the 1970s. Michael Bronski writes, “Gay ‘clones’ sported slim, but well-built bodies, short masculine haircuts, tight jeans, work boots, tee shirts, and a denim or leather jacket. The clone made his way into the mainstream” (“Spirits” 27). The over-the-top portrayal of healthy gay bodies on the circuit is a matter of self-esteem. Gay subculture is positively defined in this manner because “it has to do with self-image” (Dyer, “A Conversation” 210). Bronski further supports this claim when he writes, “There is an old joke that gay men look like clones. But it’s also true that if the clones can fall in love with each other, they must like themselves” (“Viewer” 31). The heavy stylization of the circuit boy’s muscle, the exaggerated form and its over-abundance on the dancefloor are a camp representation of masculine stereotypes.

Some insist the prevalence of muscular bodies on the circuit is a direct result of HIV/AIDS. Bodybuilding, in this sense, is a means to distance oneself from the images of wasting and disease associated with full blown AIDS. Michael Schwartz of Toronto’s Unified Group supports this assertion:

AIDS did that. I don’t think the circuit scene did that at all. I think that’s a direct result of wasting syndrome. People wanted to be on the other extreme of the wasting syndrome. So they hit the gym and wanted to be pumped and not want to look skinny and anorexic cause everyone thought you had AIDS.

While HIV/AIDS may have shifted the meaning of muscle on the circuit, well-hewn bodies have been a staple of gay subculture(s) since the 1940s and 50s when magazines such as Physique Pictorial were sold as thinly veiled mediums for the dissemination of

gay pornography. The models in these magazines were undeniably muscled like the modern circuit boy and point to an early obsession with muscle in gay subculture.

HIV/AIDS certainly made a deep impact on gay men's images and ideals of health. Muscle can become an armour that shields the bearer from the stigma of illness. The circuit body is the result of queer health practices; of illusion and artifice. The HIV/AIDS crisis is the reason for the massive fundraising efforts of the circuit and, by some accounts, behind the drugs use that fuels it. The circuit's ritualized behaviours that center around dance, sex and drugs are the result of gay experience with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Lynette Lewis and Michael Ross write, "Many people in crisis, develop life-reinforcing celebrations often involving the use of consciousness-transforming media such as music, dance and intoxicants" (128). Lewis and Ross explore the various rituals displayed in the Sydney, Australia all-night dance scene. These rituals centre primarily around HIV/AIDS and its effects on the Sydney gay community. The point of Lewis and Ross's work is to show how:

The group's survival usually depends on members' adherence to its social prescriptions, in this case, the use of drugs and sexual behaviour within the context of the dance party milieu. Paradoxically, these behaviours were likely to increase the risks of HIV infection among patrons (145).

The construction of risk and its relation to sex and drugs on the circuit represents another facet of queer health practice.

Inherent in decisions are probabilities and consequences. When facing options, one draws upon an array of information sources of which some carry more weight than others. Through these channels, one develops a system of knowledge by which to



establish premises, make inferences, formulate possibilities and probabilities, and come to rational conclusions. Individual, shared and ideal belief systems contribute not only to the formation of resources, they construct a perception of risk. Through vernacular theory, people “devise a language and strategy appropriate to their own concerns” (McLaughlin 6). Local ideas and actions are characteristic of the traditional health systems by which perceived risks to individuals and groups are affected in accordance with folk belief. An examination of risk and its communication in reference to recreational drug use on the circuit illustrates dynamic processes implicit in traditional health systems and illustrates another facet of queer health practice on the circuit.

The use of the word “risk” has changed over the last several centuries. It has its origins in seventeenth century gambling theory and referred to the “probability of an event occurring, combined with the magnitude of the losses or gains entailed” (Douglas 23). In the eighteenth century, risk theory in reference to economics looked at choices made according to what was best (Douglas 24). This is similar to a fundamental principle in electromagnetic physics of the same time which states the current in an electrical circuit will follow a path of lowest resistance. Risk theory was later adopted by marine insurance brokers to calculate rates and payments. Currently, risk often refers to negative outcomes and has come to mean unacceptable danger (Douglas 22-24, 39).

Recreational drug use can be seen as risk behaviour in the contemporary use of the word. In current discourse, recreational drug use connotes danger for the individual and society. For the user, drugs present: a threat to physical and mental health; the maintenance of normal social relationships; and the possibility of punishment for

possession or trafficking. The social implications of recreational drug use are numerous. The drug trade is linked to organized crime, epidemic disease and low productivity. In addition, health concerns related to prolonged recreational drug use are seen as a future pressure on ailing health care systems. Given this cursory list of risks, one might assume that a risk-averse public would avoid the use of recreational drugs. Yet, it appears recreational drug use is not experiencing a wane in popularity, particularly among young, urban professionals -- a demographic not traditionally associated with this facet of cultural activity -- while the justice system continues to adhere to a prohibitionist agenda. What is apparent is that circuit participants make their own decisions regarding this issue.

There a number of information sources available to circuit participants in reference to recreational drugs. These include news media, popular media, medical studies, Internet websites and usenet discussions, and that produced by special interest groups such as AIDS Committee of Toronto for Unity and Bad Boys Club of Montreal for Black & Blue. Collectively, they represent channels of risk communication. That is to say, "the process of exchanges about how best to assess and manage risks among academics, regulatory practitioners, interest groups, and the general public" (Powell and Leiss 33). Here, risk is defined similarly to Douglas' twentieth century usage as the probability of harm in any given situation determined by the nature of the hazard and the extent of exposure (Powell and Leiss 33). Risks that arise from lifestyle choices are deemed legitimate and unquestionable, whereas risks involuntarily imposed are suspect (Powell and Leiss 26). This does not seem to fit the pattern of recreational drug use on the circuit since such use relates to lifestyle, yet it is not a legitimate choice because of

prohibition. Therefore, individual decisions concerning recreational drugs are not valid because the dominant culture has instituted laws which negate the choice. Still, the dominant discourse on recreational drug risks, including that produced by the justice system and law enforcement agencies, is just one part of a larger network of risk communication.

There are essentially two forms of language used in risk communication: the technical and statistical language of experts, and the intuitively grounded language of the public (Powell and Leiss 26). Expert assessment of risk situations in the case at hand normally comes from orthodox medicine, most often interpreted by government regulatory bodies to uphold the status quo. Orthodox medicine is characterized by a belief in the authority of objective experience wherein truth resides in the accurate description of material reality rooted in scientific tradition (Goldstein). In drug risk communication, medical discourse is often least trusted since “experts employed by government and industry cannot be trusted to be forthright about risks (Powell and Leiss 27).” As well, scientific data is frequently open to interpretation, and competing reports or readings of the same report are often employed.

Public assessment of risk situations “means that people are referring to risk issues in ordinary language and in the context of their own everyday experiences, without necessarily being aware of the results of specialized knowledge” (Powell and Leiss 26). This process is best described by Thomas McLaughlin’s vernacular theory which “refers to the practices of those who lack cultural power and who speak a critical language grounded in local concerns” (5-6). That is to say, average individuals formulate ideas

concerning the constructed nature of society and see themselves in relation to that structure. McLaughlin defines vernacular theory in relation to Michel Foucault's "subjugated knowledge ... an autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say who's validity is not dependent on the established regimes of thought" (qtd. in McLaughlin 7). There is a clear link between McLaughlin's vernacular theory and the public's understanding of risk situations wherein the public's subjective experience of recreational drug issues is often subjugated by a hegemonic adherence to the presumed objectivity of scientific practice. The position of detractors of drug use, on the other hand, is usually supported by dominant discourse.

Since recreational drug use is prohibited, there does not tend to be a bi-directional exchange of information concerning inherent risk issues. That is, there has been a failure to implement good risk communication practices which give rise to a risk information vacuum (Powell and Leiss 31). Social paradigms operate in a similar manner as the natural order. Since nature abhors a vacuum, empty space is filled from other sources -- usually whatever comes along. In the case of risk information vacuums, media reports become the substantial basis of the public framing of risk. Interest groups and political discourse also mobilize to fill this vacuum and intuitively based fears grow to become general consensus (Powell and Leiss 31-32). From what fills the risk information vacuum, individuals acquire evidence with which to construct their own local understanding of recreational drug related issues.

Many interest groups have a stake in harm reduction for various reasons. The Bad Boys Club of Montreal is one such group. With a total of 65,000 participants throughout

the 1999 Black & Blue Festival, it is in the best interest of BBCM to ensure there are no major incidents involving drug use. For this reason, BBCM produces a free pamphlet for participants outlining the effects of a number of popular club drugs and the dangers associated with their individual use, in combination with one another, or with HIV/AIDS treatments. The pamphlet contains many obvious warnings in bold type, set apart from the regular text such as "Warning: Ecstasy and Protease Inhibitors May Cause Deadly Interactions" (MUNFLA 99-542). Several examples of these harm reduction pamphlets from various years are housed at Memorial's Folklore Archives (MUNFLA 99-542 and 2001-363, Items 194 and 195). Apart from pamphlets distributed to participants, BBCM uses numerous posters displayed throughout party venues. These include one example that reads, "G Can Be Good... When It's a Spot" (see Appendix B) and refers to the popular club drug GHB which is arguably responsible for most drug related incidents at circuit parties. The poster depicts a circuit boy presumably vomiting uncontrollably which is a primary symptom of even a mild GHB overdose. In this image, the vomiting is not as prominent as the circuit boy's exposed buttocks while he leans over to vomit. The position provides a map to the male G-Spot while it exposes another risk of GHB. GHB increases the libido while all but annihilating inhibitions, and sometimes consciousness, creating a situation for unsafe sex practices and even sexual assault (McCall "Appendix 6.a," 106.06). In Toronto, the Unified Group partners with the AIDS Committee of Toronto to produce similar posters with harm reduction information on ecstasy, ketamine, GHB and drug interactions (MUNFLA 2001-363, Items 155-158).

Participants are aware of BBCM's and the Unified Group's desire to protect their health and safety and are, therefore, likely to accept the information provided as fact.

The very notion of risk is aligned with HIV/AIDS and unsafe sex practices within gay subculture(s). As Gary Kinsman writes, "In the 1980s the construction of popular narratives regarding 'risk' often centred on AIDS and HIV. It was around AIDS that there was the generation, dissemination and popularization of 'high-risk groups, [and] 'risky activities'" ("Responsibility" 395). HIV/AIDS is the basis for understanding risk for gay subculture(s). This understanding has dominated the community for the past twenty years and, as such, I believe there is an ingrained cultural mechanism within gay subculture(s) to deal with risk such as that of recreational drug use. Responsibility is the preferred means of dealing with the risks of both AIDS and drug use. Kinsman writes, "[There is] an increasing transformation of community based groups and activism into sites of service provision, a transformation in part emphasizing the individual responsibility of people to manage major aspects of their own health" ("Responsibility" 399). The individual translates to the group in the case of circuit parties. Circuit organizers like the BBCM and Unified Group take the responsibility of drug risk management upon themselves through the dissemination of harm reduction material.

The circuit body is a site of resistance through its construction inside and out. Through illicit drug use and bodybuilding, the circuit boy wrestles control of his body from the hegemony and constructs himself in transgressive ways. While muscle has become a symbol of masculinity, it exemplifies traditionally feminine qualities associated with concern for body image. The circuit body is a conflation of masculinity and

femininity that queers gay subculture(s) along the gender axes similar to the eroticized and sexualized costume displayed at circuit parties. The exaggerated form and excessiveness of muscle on the dancefloor demonstrates a camp resistance to gay stereotypes. The construction of the circuit body draws a queer link between gay subculture(s) and health systems. HIV/AIDS is the *raison d'être* of the circuit party. The gay men's health crisis gave rise to these events and is, by some accounts, a major influence on the muscular style of circuit boys. The HIV/AIDS pandemic also influenced gay perception of risk and responsibility, and forms the basis for risk management of illicit drug use on the circuit.

In conclusion to this thesis, I will provide an overview of the research presented and address queer criticism of gay subculture(s) and criticism of the circuit from within the gay community. Queer often positions itself as anti-gay. In this manner, gay exists on the periphery of queer. At the same time, the circuit is marginalized within the gay movement as being too extreme in its care free approach to sex, drugs and all-night partying. Through cultural expressions on the circuit, it is possible to position gay as more queer than it is given credit for if one accepts an expanded notion of queer theory that looks at intersections of sexuality with race, class and gender. The cultural forms on the circuit provide evidence of queer behaviour along these axes. I believe it is the queerness of the circuit that poses a threat to homo-normative influences from within the subculture(s) and, therefore, is the reason for its marginalization within gay subculture(s).

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Closing the Circuit**

A simple electric circuit contains several basic elements. There is a source of potential energy that drives the electric current through the circuit. Various resistances transform this current into different forms of energy specific to the type of resistor. Circuitry becomes more complex as elements are added. If one links a single circuit through one or more connections, the potentials, power, currents and resistances of all the connected circuits influence one another depending on the nature of each element and the type of connections. Although the all-night, gay party scene is an area of investigation within the social sciences, it is useful to borrow these metaphors from physics in order to map a path for ethnographic exploration. The circuit's connections to the larger complex of gay subculture(s), and to the mainstream highlights the complex circuitry of social life and the usefulness of an expanded approach to queer theory.

The circuit, as an independent entity, exhibits queer potential through its festival nature. Festivals bring the margins to the centre through displays of inversion, reversal and liminality. They blur distinctions between time and space, the mundane and profane,



and public and private. Through these and other important qualities, festivals appear inherently queer. Queer theory focuses on sexual margins in an attempt to destabilize the status quo. An expanded version of queer theory that looks beyond sexuality to other social axes such as gender, class and race further destabilizes the centre by demonstrating important circuit connections between sexuality and these other axes. A broad queer approach with its parallels to festival provide an excellent foundation for an examination of the festival circuit.

Gay subculture(s) coalesced in the late nineteenth century through a number of economic, social and medico-scientific factors. The emergence of gay subculture(s) in the West allowed for the creation of specific forms of cultural expressions that are largely market-based. Patterns of consumption through these market-based subcultural forms create and maintain cultural affiliation and affirmation. The circuit is one example of a pattern of consumption within gay market-based subculture. Patterns of consumption in turn lend themselves to subcultural politics. The economics of the circuit with its enormous power of wealth generation inform the political sphere. In this sense, boundaries between gay subculture(s), politics and economics become a single ideology.

Cultural expressions such as costume, music and dance highlight the queer nature of the circuit along lines of gender, class and race. Hyper-masculine costume such as that of the military and sport queer the relationship between gay and mainstream masculinity along gender lines and point to the historical association between gay fantasy and these and other male, homo-social groups. The working class also provides a subject for gay fantasy, and the queer sexual history of working-class neighbourhoods such as Toronto's

Ward demonstrates through costume a queer connection along the class axis. While working class and male homo-social groups illustrate a queer gender connection between gay and mainstream from a masculine viewpoint, drag approaches the same axis from the feminine side. The use of drag by both organizers and participants in circuit parties is part of a long tradition of drag within gay subculture(s) that dates back to the height of minstrelsy and vaudeville. Drag queers gender by destabilizing and denaturalizing accepted norms of gender.

The dance and music of the circuit is a development from African-American traditions. The mixing of gay subculture(s) with urban black subculture is reminiscent of the mixing of gay and working-class subcultures as described by Maynard. In the case of gay and black mixing, the result was not eroticization of blacks by gays, but a transfer of the dance and music popular within black speakeasies in early twentieth century cities like New York and Chicago. The sexualized dance and remixed house music of the circuit comes from this early subcultural association. The mixing of gays and blacks at a time when such inter-racial mixing was considered taboo is indicative of the queer nature of the circuit in terms of the axis of race.

The body presents one last instance of the queer nature of the circuit along an axis apart from sexuality. The construction of the body both inside and out are examples of queer health practices. The muscular body of the circuit boy is the result of a discipline of diet and exercise that transgresses norms of behaviour in relation to the body. The excessive concern with body image is a feminine quality that opposes the hyper-masculinity of the muscled body. The healthy image of the circuit boy counteracts

images of disease and wasting associated with HIV/AIDS. It is also set against the unhealthy connotations of drug use which is rampant on the circuit. While the circuit boy constructs himself on the outside through diet and exercise, he constructs his body on the inside through a cocktail of illicit drugs. There is an inherent health risk involved in recreational drug use. Through the HIV/AIDS pandemic, gays have learned to accommodate health risks. For this reason, I believe the risks associated with recreational drug use are dealt with in a manner that suggests queer health practice. Informal avenues of information as well as official discourse in the form of harm reduction material produced and distributed by party organizers provide circuit boys with the necessary tools to make informed decisions about their own health. This in many ways parallels intense public health campaigns aimed at reducing infection rates of HIV/AIDS within the gay community.

The circuit is undoubtedly queer not only through sexuality, but also through connections to the mainstream and other marginalized groups through gender, class and race. However, it is sexuality in which queer is most interested and much queer criticism of gay originates through it. Queer is often positioned as anti-gay. It attempts to erase categories in an effort to denaturalize, destabilize and decentralize dominant ideals of sexuality. Gay politics, on the other hand, depends largely on its distinction as an equal but different group within society that deserves the same basic rights afforded others. The queer erasure of this distinction threatens to reverse rights won by the gay political movement. However, as the queer nature of the circuit suggests, gay subculture(s) are

inherently more queer than the concept of a monolithic, same-but-different, gay subculture suggests.

In fact, the circuit itself is often criticised within the gay community as being too extreme in its involvement in sex and drugs. Many of those within the gay political movement fight for equal rights on the premise that gays are no different than anyone else and should enjoy the right to marriage, children and protection from discrimination. Images of thousands of topless, muscular circuit boys dancing until noon, high on a mixture of amphetamines and other illicit drugs, and participating in public, anonymous and group sex does little to further the claim that gays do not pose a threat to the hegemony. While the circuit is lumped together with the idea of a monolithic gay subculture, it is in fact on the fringe and can be considered a subculture unto itself. The circuit may be a gay subcultural form and, therefore, a target of criticism by queer. Through an expansion of queer theory that looks at intersections of sexuality, gender, class and race, however, the circuit is indeed queer.

## Appendix A

*I'll Meet You At...*

THE  
**WHITE BALL**

**TORONTO**  
S A T U R D A Y  
NOVEMBER 29TH, 1997  
THE CONCERT HALL


*Home of Signature Events*

PRESENTED BY

**fab**  
magazine

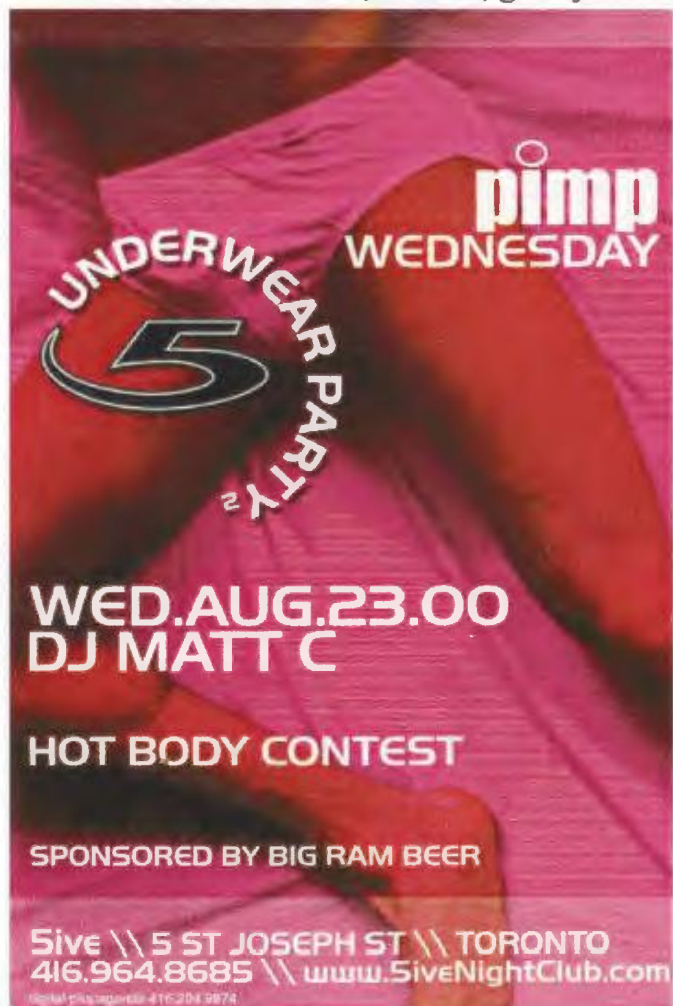


**Sunday July 16 / 2000** 5:00pm



**Corona Beach Party**  
The Official After Party For BoostBoys Big Gay Boat Cruise  
DJ Chris Sirovich  
Sponsored by: BoostBoys, Corona Beer, Sirovich's, and the City of Toronto  
www.boostboys.com Check Out www.BoostBoys.com  
Sirovich's: 416-964-8685, Sirovich's: 416-964-8685

MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 173  
101mm x 124mm, 2 sided, glossy



**pimp**  
**WEDNESDAY**

**5 UNDERWEAR PARTY**

**WED.AUG.23.00**  
**DJ MATT C**

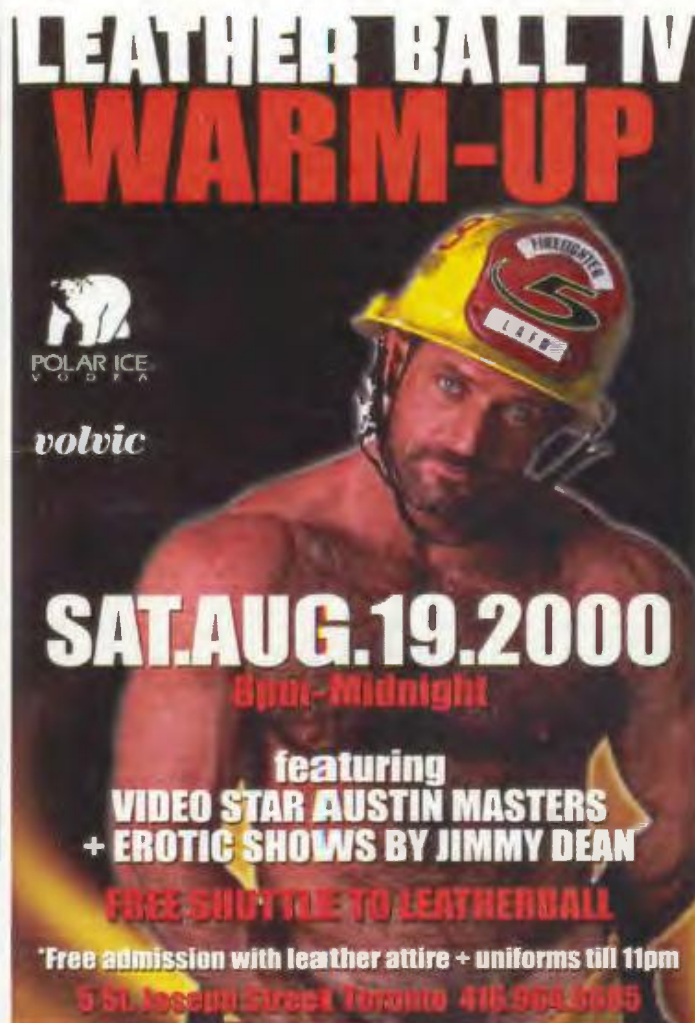
**HOT BODY CONTEST**

**SPONSORED BY BIG RAM BEER**

**Sive \ 5 ST JOSEPH ST \ TORONTO**  
**416.964.8685 \ www.SiveNightClub.com**  
Digital photo: 416-204-2874

MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 197  
100mm x 74mm, 2 sided, glossy

**LEATHER BALL IV**  
**WARM-UP**



**POLAR ICE**  
**VODKA**

**volvic**

**SAT.AUG.19.2000**  
**8pm-Midnight**

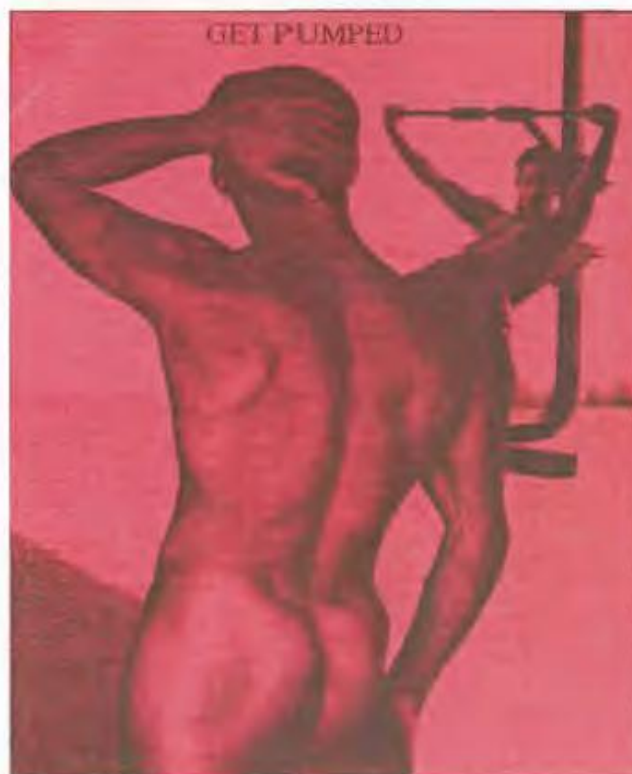
**featuring**  
**VIDEO STAR AUSTIN MASTERS**  
**+ EROTIC SHOWS BY JIMMY DEAN**

**FREE SHUTTLE TO LEATHERBALL**

**\*Free admission with leather attire + uniforms till 11pm**  
**5 St. Joseph Street Toronto 416.964.8685**

MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 184  
85mm x 132mm, 2 sided, glossy

**GET PUMPED**



MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 148, "The White Ball (1993)"  
107mm x 138mm, 2 sided (reverse)



AUGUST, 2002

year  
24

404-874-3976

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# HOTLANTA RIVER EXPO

Still "FEELING THE ENERGY"  
from **VOLTAGE?**  
...just wait until next year.



The "Original" Circuit Party  
featuring a different theme  
year after year...

1979 - N. Ga. Assoc. of Watersportsmen  
1980 - Hoedown  
1981 - Chattahoochee High School Reunion  
1982 - Tropical Fruits  
1983 - All American Boys  
1984 - Eclipse  
1985 - Spectrum  
1986 - Fusion  
1987 - Hotlantis - The Lost City Rises  
1988 - Decagon - 10th Anniversary  
1989 - Lights, Camera, Action  
1990 - Dream 90 - The Future  
1991 - Birds of a Feather  
1992 - Hotlanta Beach - Remember When  
1993 - "Magic" Believe in It  
1994 - Winter Colours  
1995 - World Party  
1996 - Games, Gods and Goddesses  
1997 - Renaissance  
1998 - Platinum - 20th Anniversary  
1999 - Rites of Passage  
2000 - Year of the Dragon  
2001 - Voltage

## Events

Thursday - Miss Hotlanta Pageant  
Friday - Mr. Hotlanta Contest and Dance  
Saturday - "Raft Race" River Adventure  
Main Dance Event  
Sunday - Afternoon T-Dance  
Closing Party

Photo by Tim Wilkerson Photography  
Styl. Mark Miller

HRE is proud to be an Associate Promotor of Bad Boy Club Montreal  
and the phenomenal event known as Black and Blue.  
YOU, the participants ARE and WILL ALWAYS BE THE PARTY.  
Please party and play safely and responsibly.


From BBCM, "Black & Blue 2001: Souvenir Program." Pg 79.

MUNFLA 2001-363, Item 165


Full Page Advertisement


133mm x 210mm, glossy

## Appendix B


	<b>BAD BOY CLUB MONTRÉAL</b>
<b>Lady Rita</b> Porte-parole // Spokesperson	<b>PROMOTION DE LA SANTÉ HEALTH PROMOTION</b>  Souvenez-vous que les drogues sont illégales au Canada Please remember : drugs are illegal in Canada



<b>LE SEUL BON «G» EST LE «POINT G»          "G" CAN BE GOOD... WHEN IT'S A SPOT</b>
<div data-bbox="224 1495 860 1938">  </div> <div data-bbox="867 1495 1354 1938"> <p><b>AVEZ-VOUS TROUVEZ LE VOTRE ? HAVE YOU FOUND YOURS ?</b></p> </div>

\*DITES NON AU GHB  
 \*SAY NO TO GHB  
 DANGER !





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