

Unfinished Business: Haunting and Affect in AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs's *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*

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*This essay explores the productiveness of “haunting” as a metaphor for articulating how affects of trauma and history saturate space through *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*, a book and performance-based project by AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs. *Queer Spirits* saw the artists performing a variety of (private) queer séances throughout North America and documenting their experiences in a book format. Reading *Queer Spirits* through texts by Tim Edensor, Ann Cvetkovich, and José Esteban Muñoz, I consider how Bronson and Hobbs’s performative figures both create utopian pasts and futures for accessing queer spirits, and I also evaluate their effectiveness for doing justice to these lost figures.*

I have a white candle burning, my sage is at hand. I have a little vodka, and a cigar. The rain is relentless. I have set myself the task of writing this brief text over the next 24 hours. The writing of the text is itself a kind of invocation: a reminder to myself of the deep sense of queer being that inhabits me; and of the invisibility of queer narrative in the written history of the world about us (Bronson, 6).

Almost immediately in the introduction to *Queer Spirits*, AA Bronson works to set the affective stage for his extended project with Peter Hobbs. Using romanticized ritual and sensorial language, he situates his own body (as artist/recluse/shaman) as the locus for a vast network of specifically “queer” affects that have otherwise gone unnoticed. Every subsequent act of the *Queer Spirits* project is subsumed into the larger supernatural ethos of Bronson and Hobbs’s performative practice. Having developed the concept during a residency in Banff, Alberta, the artists organized a series of queer séances, each with highly different parameters and manifestations. The séances occurred throughout various sites in the United States and Canada, including Banff, New Orleans, Winnipeg, Governors Island, and Fire Island. In each location, the artists attempted to call forth the spirits of the queer and otherwise marginalized through a complex series of ritualistic practices, invocatory chants, and the accumulation of various queer totems and tools, including Ouija boards, Tarot cards, herbs, candles, crystals, butt plugs, lube, chocolate, incense, and whiskey. None of the rituals were formally documented; instead, all the research, ephemera, and ancillary evidence were compiled in *Queer Spirits*, a book published by Plug In Editions and Creative Time. The book also includes material sourced from archives of paranormal phenomena, speculative photographs and drawings of what “might have happened” (96) at various séances, and “The Art of Drifting: 43 Lessons from a Naked Cocktail Party,” a text by Hobbs that acts as a potential manifesto for queer shamans and other seekers of the supernatural. The accumulation of these various rituals, including their

traces, texts, totems, and residues, helps to imbue the multi-staged and complicated practice of Bronson and Hobbs with a sense of the romantic, the hyperbolic, and the seemingly endless potential of understanding affect through haunting.

As Bronson considered his introductory text an invocation, I hope to make use of the following essay as an exploration by examining how haunting operates as a productive (or counterproductive) mode of reading the affects of history as they saturate space. Reading site-specific affect works to bring the accumulative histories and memories of a place into the present, perhaps by imagining how the material traces of the site absorb these histories and become somehow “legible” to a new visitor or outsider. I am equating affect and ghosts, however provisionally in this essay, in order to speak to their similar shapes: both are invisible yet tangibly present both connected to the bodies of the living, yet (perhaps eerily) able to circulate beyond them. For instance, deliberately misreading the introductory line to Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* as a ghost story does not require a large stretch of the imagination: “is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere?’” (Brennan, 1). If Brennan’s affect-soaked room is a haunted room, then the authors who engage with affect studies are perhaps enacting invocatory rituals, channeling spectral forces that circulate beyond their immediate bodies. Thinking about the affects of history as ghosts or hauntings, especially as counter-hegemonic histories of the marginalized, feminist, or queer, is particularly salient. Ghosts are often understood as outsiders: mournful, forgotten, even vengeful figures, left behind in spaces where they have been dealt injustice. If the traces of marginalized histories also enact a ghostly presence within space, do they ever grow tangible, or even malevolent, in turn threatening bodies in the present with their spectral influence, demanding recognition in the face of total erasure? Perhaps a deliberate conflation (or welcome confusion?) of ghosts and affect within historical space can help to affirm the feminist project of recuperating lost women, queers, and other marginalized figures from the forces of hegemonic history-making.

In order to push these ideas further, I will read various aspects of Bronson and Hobbs’s performative project¹ through three main texts, each of which negotiates with ghosts, haunting, and its ephemeral or archival traces in different ways: Tim Edensor’s cultural geographies of ruinous space in the article “The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space” and the chapter “The Spaces of Memory and the Ghosts of Dereliction” from *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality* (2005); Ann Cvetkovich’s consideration of the affective weight of archives in “In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings” from *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003); and José Esteban Muñoz’s discussions of queer space and utopic nostalgia in the chapters “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories” and “Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative” in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009). Additionally, I would like to consider how the rituals of accessing ghosts equate with the rituals of accessing affect. When are ghosts/affects invoked to

commune with the bodies of the living and when do their spectral presences become threatening? Or, if Bronson's artist-as-shaman persona acts as a conduit for queer spirits, how do the writers discussed also situate their own bodies as vulnerable or open to the circulation of affect and what kind of performative rituals become implicit in their research? Lastly, throughout this essay I will consider how the "haunting" metaphor incorporates trauma into its logic. As folklore and popular culture tell us, it is tragedy and the threat of "unfinished business" that leave ghosts to wander in the physical world. As such, I will consider whether the "haunting" metaphor remains productive for representing trauma and its specific resonances, while discussing how Bronson and Hobbs access and mobilize the accumulated traumas that imbue each séance site. I will question whether their rituals do justice for the ghostly queer victims they attempt to call forth. In accordance with (and deference to) Hobbs's guidelines for future shamans, I will organize my thoughts around five of his key lessons.

"Lesson 1: Allow yourself to be tricked" (131) or Reading Ghosts Reparatively

I begin by establishing a methodological framework for reading affective hauntings around what Bronson and Hobbs have identified as the most common question they received regarding their performative project: did they *really* see any ghosts? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the artists find these persistent questions counterproductive for their shamanic practices:

To the shaman's ears, the question of how many ghosts we have seen is bureaucratic and dull. It is in the wrong spirit. Concrete proof is more appropriate to the tasks of a bookkeeper or a lab technician (neither would make a good shaman) (169).

Despite the hyperbolic, and perhaps oversimplified, binary that divides the romanticized shaman from his so-called "dull" counterparts, Hobbs indicates how the epistemological emphasis placed on "concrete proof" in supernatural or artistic processes works to overdetermine their affective outcome. Instead of attempting to uncover what affect *produces*, Bronson and Hobbs are concerned with how it *circulates*, creating a suitable environment for accessing haunting in their ritualistic performances.

In accordance with these ideas, I assert a reparative mode of reading the *Queer Spirits* project, borrowing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's distinction between paranoid and reparative epistemologies in her essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You." As Sedgwick argues, paranoid epistemologies, or "hermeneutics of suspicion," (138) rely heavily on critical debunking or forms of exposure in order to build knowledge (138-39). This automatically defensive position places the writer/critic at an immediate distance

from the subjects discussed, presuming an inherent truth-value that, once unearthed, will solve all identifiable issues, “as though to make something visible as a problem were, if not a mere hop, skip, and jump away from getting it solved, at least self-evidently a step in that direction” (139). A paranoid epistemology takes knowledge as a given, as something that simply needs to be arranged anew in order to uncover some underlying critical truth. At the risk of sounding glib, a paranoid reading of the *Queer Spirits* project would make this essay considerably shorter. The “failures” in Bronson and Hobbs’s performative rituals are immediately obvious: there is no “proof” of the spirits they encounter and no formal documentation to confirm that their rituals even took place. Both the posturing of their shamanic personas and the expository style of the *Queer Spirits* project frequently veer toward hyperbole, idealization, and fantasy, almost soliciting a paranoid or skeptical reaction in return; however, remaining paranoid while considering Bronson and Hobbs’s queer séances diverts attention away from a consideration of how affective forms of knowledge circulate, create sensorial experience, and become emotionally resonant within their project. As Sedgwick writes, a reparative epistemology is “additive and accretive” over-destructive and skeptical (149). Reading ghosts reparatively allows me to consider *how* affect produces knowledge instead of fixating on what gets produced. As Sedgwick writes:

[...] moving [away] from the rather fixated question[:] Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do* – the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it [...]? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects? (124)

Like Bronson and Hobbs’s project, my analysis here verges on the performative as well. It involves a speculative conflation of two separate terms (ghosts/affect) in order to consider what they can offer one another. My reading chooses to follow along, to be seduced by Bronson and Hobbs’s process, in order to understand how the affects they invoke offer knowledge of lost histories. I continually assert a well-worn adage familiar to all seekers of the supernatural and extraterrestrial: “I want to believe.” Reparative reading through the supernatural, in this sense, is perhaps a uniquely productive strategy for exploring the traces of memory and affect in historical space: dislodging us from the skeptic’s burden of proof, in order to create a space where the body of the author and/or reader is open to (and actively welcomes or seeks out) the affective residues of lost histories. Relying upon reparative modes of reading when considering *Queer Spirits*, then, opens the project up to a considerably wider scope of inquiry, without creating an overemphasis upon whether or not the séances truly “worked.”

Through a reparative mode of reading, the *Queer Spirits* project involves understanding *intuition* as a valuable epistemological tool. Tentatively defining intuition as a “faculty of immediate knowing without the process of reasoning,” (Fisher, 11) Jennifer Fisher has discussed the capacities of intuition to exceed

representational logic and produce synesthetic and extra-sensory experience, indicating that “intuition, then, pertains simultaneously to both embodied perception and to awareness that extends further than the five senses” (12). Intuition provides an appropriate conduit for reading ghosts or affect in this context, emphasizing a mode of experience that is open to the non-representational and the indeterminate. Intuitive forms of knowledge, then, offer an expanded vocabulary for engaging reparatively with the traces of history, supplying this supernatural-inflected analysis with a scope of inquiry that extends beyond what is perceptually immediate and obvious. By deliberately turning towards the intuitive, relying on forms of knowing that many are quick to denounce as “new-agey” hoaxes, Bronson and Hobbs are able to build a form of artistic production that calls attention to the ways that affect circulates in space and impresses upon bodies, often through a performative relinquishing of individual control. Fisher indicates that intuitive practices often work to destabilize concrete notions of individuality (i.e., “the self becomes another as it is possessed,” 13) and throughout the *Queer Spirits* project Bronson and Hobbs advocate methods that render the self vulnerable to affect: “I soon realized that a ghost couldn’t be hunted down like a fugitive or an animal. If anyone is hunting, it is the ghost. They do the hunting/haunting” (149) In this sense, Hobbs’s first lesson takes on a dual meaning. He writes that novice shamans need to allow themselves to be tricked in order to invoke ghosts and experience spiritual transformation (130-131). Yet additionally, as a reader/spectator to the *Queer Spirits* project, a voluntary move away from the paranoid desire to expose the “truth” of each séance can create a space where I am able to enjoy the experience of being “tricked” by Bronson and Hobbs, while still remaining cognizant of the evident shortcomings in their work. Ultimately, I hope that this destabilized and reparative critical position will allow me to further consider how affect saturates space throughout the *Queer Spirits* project. In short, I too want to believe.

"Lesson 20: Some buildings are unintentional beacons and archives that hold the history of a city long after they have fallen out of use" (150) or
Affect and Ruinous Space

Understanding how affect is experienced as a ghostly presence or trace is ultimately an exercise in understanding how affect saturates specific sites, becoming legible as visitors, whether familiar to the site or not, are exposed to its spatial resonances. Bronson and Hobbs’s project relies on the affective potentialities of certain spaces, as the artists chose specific séance locations based on their significance to the narratives of a distinctly queer history they wish to establish. For instance, three of the séances were located in national parks, spaces that, as Bronson indicates, were “all-male colonies for much of their recorded histories” (6), and each séance included research into the queer interests of the local community and history it attempted to invoke. Each localized invocation was written as a calling-forth of the historical traces of the queer and marginalized. For instance, the New Orleans invocation spoke to the

“witches, prophets, seers, priests, and Vodou practitioners,” alongside “the thirty-two men and women killed in the 1972 fire at a gay nightclub in the French Quarter called the Upstairs Lounge[...]” (26). The invocation in Winnipeg called forth some figures from the margins of Canadian history as well, including Louis Riel, the Freemasons, and the queer members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (36)² (see appendix). Following this logic of site-specificity, the chosen Winnipeg séance site was an abandoned army surplus store that Bronson remembered from his youth (4). The building was about to be transformed into the new location of Winnipeg’s Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, and Bronson and Hobbs wished to acknowledge “the contribution of queers to the city’s rich history and [they] invited these spirits to occupy the future home of Plug In” (149). The artists, accompanied by three other men, scoured the abandoned site for useful materials to build the cubic structure that housed the ritual. They also took extensive photographs of the ruinous space, many of which are contained in the book. According to Bronson, the affective charge of the site was palpable: “spirit seeped in all directions,” (38) and Hobbs echoed his sentiment regarding the accumulated memories that permeated its leftover objects: “the gas masks, army boots, flight jackets and blankets lining the shelves, all tell ghost stories of their former owners and the changing technologies of war” (150). Evidently, the abandoned United Army Surplus Sales building was chosen with its ghostly and affective capacities in mind.

The cultural-geography-based research of Tim Edensor similarly hinges upon the phenomenological and affective experiences of ruinous space. Edensor frequently writes about his experiences exploring abandoned factories and other industrial spaces left in decay. His writing offers one method for exploring how affect becomes understood as a ghostly presence in spaces that are deemed ruinous or materially and sensorially excessive. Arguing for an understanding of how memory becomes spatialized, he explains that ghostly traces of routine behaviour can become embedded in the residues and debris that remain after years of repeated use and activity (Edensor, 148). As he writes in “The Spaces of Memory and the Ghosts of Dereliction,” visitors to industrial ruins engage with its sensuous, decaying spaces in new ways, accumulated forms of affect infiltrate their bodies and memories, evoking associations with a past that seems intuitively legible yet remains indecipherable by normative modes of history-making:

Refusing the false securities of a stable and linear past, such an approach celebrates heterogeneous sensations and surprising associations, random connections, the ongoing construction of meaning, and also admits into its orbit the mysterious agency of artifacts, spaces, and non-humans from the past (138).

Edensor frequently refers to the affective capacities of excessive space as ghostly traces, a helpful mode of inquiry for my consideration of Bronson and Hobbs’s performative project. Imagining the accumulation of memory in space creates a

framework for understanding how the *stuff* of ghosts, or the absent-present material quality of affect, becomes accessible to the performative rituals of the *Queer Spirits* project. Through this logic, the specificity of Winnipeg's abandoned army surplus store, with the strange assemblages of decaying and neglected items that generate "sensual affordances of matter" (139) perceptible to the shamanistic bodies of Bronson and Hobbs, becomes a rich location for accessing a queer spirit world.

While Edensor's methodology provides a helpful vocabulary for reading ghosts/affect in ruinous spaces, his analysis falls short when faced with the ghostly model explored here. Edensor describes his own experiences as he walks through abandoned factories and industrial sites, encountering the ghosts of dereliction and being stricken with "involuntary memories" (143) that are not necessarily linked to his own experience or subjectivity. His writing tends to promote a romanticized vision of ruinous space that gestures towards these affective traces of the past, but only as they offer themselves up to his exploring body in the present. The sources of trauma, decay, destruction, and loss that imbue his industrial sites are given little mention in his writing: they are only useful as they provide him with the fodder for transformative or radically altered perceptual and affective experiences. Perhaps using the haunting model in an analysis of Edensor's work exposes these shortcomings because it demands *more* from his exploratory approach. As a model, it recognizes the affective influence of history on the body of the researcher; in short, it solicits an otherworldly response. Edensor channels the affective intensities of the "ghosts of dereliction" in his abandoned sites, yet his ghosts are given little space to haunt back, to grow malevolent, to expose their traumas to the bodies of the living. Additionally, his writing also presupposes that all who enter these environments have equal capacities for (and inclinations to) basking in the radical new physical and sensorial affordances they offer. Only peripherally does he discuss how uneven relationships of power operate in ruinous factories, their ghostly traces left in "the banal signs which regulated bodies, in the hierarchies of offices and the divisions between skilled and unskilled work, in the apparatus of routine such as clocking off devices [...]" (154). As a new visitor to these ruins, it is evident that Edensor would have no access to the specificities of power and trauma in their histories; yet it begs the question of how to *make use* of these affective hauntings once we are exposed to them. Once ghostly contact is made, what happens next?

Reading the ambiguous interplay between the specificity of trauma or power and its affective intensities in site-specific ways remains a large question in the *Queer Spirits* project as well. In some ways, Bronson and Hobbs remain inexact with these ideas, relying on a language of spirits and haunting that embraces the vague, speculative, and potentially homogenizing (e.g., "What is it about Winnipeg, what special spirit life inhabits its strange, harsh ecology?," 40) yet their work also involves a vast array of dedicated archival research into the local community that attempts to *name* the spiritual context they seek. Therefore, a consideration of the archive could supply a helpful step in this conceptual bridge from affect to haunting, operating between some generalized notion of trauma and its lived specificities.

“Lesson 15: Collecting lists, inventories, maps, and anecdotes are effective ways of shadowing spirits” (145) or

Archiving, Ephemera, and the Material Culture of Intuition

In “In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings,” Ann Cvetkovich writes that archives are extremely valuable for the preservation of queer histories, acting as spaces “which must preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling” (Cvetkovich, 241). While Cvetkovich’s text does not deal specifically with ghosts or haunting, her discussions of how the affect of queer trauma circulates through archives is relevant to my examination of affective haunting. Archives are a valuable source of otherworldly power for Bronson and Hobbs; indeed, as Hobbs explains, “[m]agic has much in common with archival research” (138) and the *Queer Spirits* book itself acts as a literal archive of their practices, including of photographs, drawings, handwritten lists, and images of ritualistic items and other ephemera. Bronson and Hobbs also visited institutionalized archives for their research, including the Hamilton Family fonds at the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections in Winnipeg, where they sourced several photographs of early-20th-century paranormal phenomena and séances for their book. As my only access to their performative work is through reading the *Queer Spirits* book, which situates me as something of an outsider-archivist, piecing together the events of these séances through the ephemeral tools, traces, and research left behind: items that Fisher has referred to as the “technology” or “material culture of intuition” (14). Referring to Raymond Williams’ oft-cited understanding of the “structures of feeling” that circulate within the art and culture of a particular social era, José Esteban Muñoz writes that the ephemeral is “firmly anchored *within* the social. Ephemera includes traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feeling have been lived” (Muñoz 1996, 10). As evidence of the specificities of lived experience—the trace or residues of a performance or action—ephemeral objects carry associative capacities that extend beyond their brute materiality.

Cvetkovich’s argument in *An Archive of Feelings* centers on the notion that an archive could be used for emotional or affective needs, rather than simply intellectual purposes (249). For queer and marginalized communities, building grassroots archives becomes a way of asserting or legitimating a heritage that has otherwise been forgotten by hegemonic modes of history-making. Towards the end of her chapter on lesbian archives, she discusses how, in the absence of evidence, fantasy and imagination become powerful tools for building an affectively resonant archive, writing that “the importance of fantasy as a way of creating history from absences, so evident in queer documentary and other cultural genres, demands creative and alternative archives” (271). The communication of trauma in particular requires an archive that does “emotional justice” (269) to those who experienced it. These archives could create a space of accumulated affect, fantasy, and ephemera that recalls the specificities of a past traumatic moment: safeguarding against forgetting

without threatening to overwhelm the archivist-researcher. The accumulation of different traces of history in an archive could also build a sense of accumulated haunting, bringing a community of ghostly affects together under one shared focus. Unconventional or fantastical archives also provide spaces to implement alternative structures of mourning for those lost or forgotten; for the performative practice of Bronson and Hobbs, archiving functions to “pin down” traces of those long-dead, ghostly queer presences that have disappeared from the cultural landscapes of Winnipeg, Banff, and the other invocation sites. As Cvetkovich writes, “The specter of literal death serves as a pointed reminder of the social death of losing one’s history” (270).

Nevertheless, archives require structure and categorization: be it rational and sequential, or intuitive and haphazard. Without proper categorization or attention, certain voices can get lost in the dusty corners of archives. While archiving the traces of marginalized or traumatic histories, this loss could be understood as a doubled displacement, the dual violence of being cast out of hegemonic history, then lost or neglected in the archive meant to recuperate that voice. Cvetkovich touches on this issue in relation to trauma archives, indicating that “it is not enough simply to accumulate archival materials; great care must be taken with how they are exhibited and displayed” (271)—yet Bronson and Hobbs’s project embodies this problem in a new way. In calling forth the “spirits of the queer and otherwise marginalized,” the artists run the risk of homogenizing those they wish to memorialize. The invocation written for each site acts as a form of textual archive of the specific bodies that have been wronged in that location (see appendix); however, these massive, undifferentiated lists threaten to oversaturate their readers, promoting a mode of encounter that favours a cursory skim over attentive engagement. For instance, I glanced at these lists a few times before realizing that they rarely mention women. Another reviewer pointed to the problems in equating both the spirits of lost First Nations communities and the very colonizers who exterminated them in the same invocation, arguing that “the indifference shown to this dangerous (a)historical misstep is striking” (Morgenstern). How do these omissions alter our understanding of which ghosts are accessible in certain spaces and which remain worthy of contact? In this way, while accumulative, intuitive, and lateral forms of archival organization are helpful for creating a space where non-normative affects can assert a powerful presence, it can become difficult if their counter-hegemonic tactics distract from the further displacement of those left neglected in their midst.

“Lesson 31: At night the park is haunted by witches and perverts”(161) or
Ghosts and Queer Futurity

Examining modes of cultural production that he sees as conducive to creating “transformative queer political possibility,” (Muñoz 2009, 38) Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* also provides an alternative

framework for doing justice to queer voices left neglected by hegemonic forms of history-making. In “Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories,” Muñoz refers to the nostalgic affects that circulate in former sites of gay male sex, acting as ghostly traces which imply a connection with a utopic queerworld of sexual possibility (42). For Muñoz, queer politics require visions of utopic space, despite the exclusions and discriminations that these visions potentially support (34),³ for utopias provide “a critique of the present, of what it is, by casting a picture of what *can and perhaps will be*” (35). Like Bronson and Hobbs, Muñoz sees productivity in embracing the romantic, the ideal, and the utopian and uses this space as a platform to enact social change to provide queers with a future unavailable to them through heteronormative discourse. Examining what he calls “public-sex-mimetic cultural production,” (35) Muñoz then examines the ghostly auras that circulate in Tony Just’s photographs of men’s public restrooms in New York City (40-46). As sites that seem imbued with the affective remainders of sustained public sex between gay men, Muñoz argues that these images offer up a ghostly materiality that is neither visible nor tactile yet remains wholly resonant (42).

Bronson and Hobbs’s performances rely on the work of Muñoz in a number of ways. For instance, they also remain nostalgically drawn to the sites of public sex, understanding these liminal spaces as rich sources for queer haunting. The Fire Island séance involved an extensive photographic intervention into the winding paths of the Magic Forest or Meat Rack, a wooded area between two gay beach communities near the performance site, which operates as a well-known site for clandestine sexual encounters (113). The photographs – which glimmer on each page with a silver sheen – attempt to offer up what Muñoz has referred to as the “visual frequencies that render specific distillations of lived experience and ground-level history accessible[...],” (42) documenting the ways in which queer affects (or haunting) remain resonant in these sites. The very name (Magic Forest) evokes a utopian or fantastical landscape, and Bronson and Hobbs work to further emphasize these romantic associations by rhapsodizing that “through this moist and misty universe float the spirits of the past, the many men who died here, and who came here to die” (113). Through their photographic and textual myth-making, Bronson and Hobbs create an alternative geography of queer utopias, asserting what Muñoz understands as the idealized, yet productive, transformative potential of public sex (34).

Additionally, Muñoz’s chapter on stages and the promise of queer futurity resonates with Bronson and Hobbs’s work at the Governors Island séance site. In “Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative,” Muñoz considers the utopian quality in the “moment of hope and potential transformation” (103) that resonates through an empty stage prior to a performance, as exemplified by the photographic series *The Chameleon Club* by Kevin McCarty (101-113). These photographs of empty stages in queer bars, many of which Muñoz himself had frequented, operate as potential utopias of queer futurity, implying the possibility of an alternative performative temporality, and promoting community-building through transgressive subcultures.

Bronson and Hobbs situate their performative work through techniques of display that operate within a similar logic. At the Governors Island séance site (the officer's house of a seventeenth-century military base) the ephemeral remains of this invocation were left intact and partially accessible to the public. A wall in the foyer provided peepholes (or glory holes, to borrow Bronson and Hobbs's phrasing) (71) through which visitors could peer inwards to examine leftover fragments of the ritual. Like the potential futurity of Muñoz's empty stages, do similar affective potentialities saturate a séance space *after* the invocation is complete? Muñoz argues for the affective charge of performative traces in "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," considering how ephemeral material implies a non-normative temporality which implies the transpiring of a performance while remaining open to alternative pasts and futures:

Ephemera [...] is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things (10).

Through this model, the ephemeral materiality of queer ghosts mixes together with the other performative residues of the Governors Island séance site. Understanding the site as a stage for potentially alternative queer pasts and futures informs my consideration of how Bronson and Hobbs's project acts as a form of queer history-making that encourages "participants to embrace the fiction of a queer family" (162). However, how are Bronson and Hobbs situating themselves as facilitators for the sedimentation of this deliberately utopian and fantastical queer family of the living and dead? Does their performative posturing as queer shaman-artists alter the structure and outcome of this ghostly community?

"Lesson 17: The shaman-artist doesn't just make art, he is art" (147) or
Locating Affect in Ritualized Art-making and Ritualized Research

A photographic portrait of Bronson in his séance regalia (leather cap and butt plug with rooster feathers) appears in the Winnipeg section of the *Queer Spirits* text, marked with the caption, "With my cap, sweetgrass, and rooster feathers, I am a hybrid of shaman, leather daddy, and Voodoo priestess. Gender has vanished. I am AA Bronson, gay priestess of Winnipeg, shaman daddy, trans medicine woman, man on the street" (47). Relying on hyperbole, fantasy, and the aggregation of various spiritual traditions and gendered/sexual identities, Bronson constructs a performative persona that, in its indeterminate and hybrid nature, allows him to act as a conduit for different types of queer affect. Elsewhere, Bronson has equally espoused the value of his "hybrid shaman" persona, emphasizing how it accumulates various spiritual traditions under one body:

It is the tradition of the shaman that interests me, not in isolation, but as a tradition that can be hybridized – with Freudian psychotherapy, for example. I have done quite a lot of research into specific traditions, mostly the pre-Buddhist Tibetan and Siberian, with a little dabbling in North American aboriginal practices (Bronson, 2003, 54).

However, like the textual archives of marginalized groups included in the invocations discussed above, does Bronson's enthusiastic accumulation of spiritualities and identities threaten to efface the specificities of each? The ghostly presences of bodies of colour (from aboriginal peoples, to black slaves, to migrant workers) act as guiding forces throughout the *Queer Spirits* project: their spiritual and cultural practices are even mapped onto the bodies of Bronson and Hobbs as artist-shamans. Nevertheless, as once-living bodies with agency, they remain strangely absent from the project at large. This performative accumulation of spiritualities and identities is ultimately meant to assert a utopian view, an alternative archive of queer affects that embraces fantasy at its very core. Yet, it does so at the risk of a loss of precision and criticality, allowing the specificities of queerness, race, spirituality, and trauma to become indeterminate and vague, like ghostly presences of their own. For researchers attempting to channel these spectral figures and give them new tangibility in the present, this additional invisibility is perhaps too great a loss.

While it is clear that Bronson and Hobbs have developed their performative rituals around a romantic, hybridized, and seductive persona that acts as the appropriate conduit for the spirits they wish to attract, Edensor, Cvetkovich, and Muñoz's work each requires its author to situate his or her body as vulnerable to affective forces in equally performative and ritualized ways. A consideration of how these authors ritualize their own research on affect could offer up some congruencies with and alternatives to the personas donned by Bronson and Hobbs. For instance, Edensor's body is omnipresent in his writing yet it remains generalized: a nonspecific, abled body that has perfect access to the sensual affordances the ruins offer up to him. As mentioned earlier, Edensor does not allow himself to be *haunted* in turn. Much of "The Spaces of Materiality and the Ruins of Dereliction" sees Edensor describing his own corporeal experiences as he walks, jumps, climbs, crawls, and tiptoes through precarious ruins. He speaks at length about the "involuntary memories" (143) generated by ruinous space, yet rarely names how these affects impress upon his *actual* body, providing him with specific memories and associations. In a way, Edensor's approach has congruencies with Bronson and Hobbs: both posit their own bodies as able to accumulate the affects and specificities of other spaces and spirits with ease and able to negotiate with complex affective and sensory experiences with little to no resistance or influence from their own bodies or subjectivities.

Cvetkovich's approach to investigating the affective pull of archives does not involve neutrality, but is deeply invested in the love, attention, or care provided by the archivist or researcher. Interviewing the volunteers of Brooklyn's Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), Cvetkovich asserts that archival security and stability is not simply

supplied by financial or institutional forces; she quotes Maxine Wolfe, a longtime LHA volunteer: “let me tell you about security—it means that when there is a fire, someone wants to save your papers. At LHA, there are twenty-five women who would put lives on the line to save that stuff” (quoted on 248). Similarly, Cvetkovich writes that in archiving ephemera or pieces of pop culture, queer archivists often take on strategies inspired by fan culture: “I take the fan as a model for the archivist. The archivist of queer culture must proceed like the fan or collector whose attachment to objects is often fetishistic, idiosyncratic, or obsessional” (253). Implicit in these discussions is Cvetkovich’s own position as the archivist/researcher of her text, supplying the same love, devotion, and emotional investment to her objects of study as her interviewees in their archives. While Bronson and Hobbs also enact a ritualistic level of love, investment, and care for the spirits they seek to contact, Cvetkovich’s model complicates the performance of devotion they supply in *Queer Spirits*. Bronson and Hobbs seem ultimately more concerned with building the romantic and sumptuous ritualized landscape of their shamanistic characters than with investigating the specificities of their queer spirits in depth. On the other hand, Cvetkovich’s interview with the LHA volunteers leads me to wonder: is love a different form of haunting? Like a form of possession, the love the LHA volunteers felt for their archives imbues them with the history they wish to preserve, as they become mediums or conduits for those otherwise lost queer voices.

Lastly, Muñoz follows in Cvetkovich’s direction by exploring his own queer memories, intimacies, and friendships as they intertwine with the photographs he studies, supplying the pictured spaces with a personalized affective charge. Throughout the “Stages” chapter, Muñoz relies on his own experiences in the gay bars McCarty photographs, while remaining transparent about how his friendship with the artist has informed his own work:

Queer intimacies underwrite much of the critical work I do. Yet I reject the phrase “advocacy criticism” and instead embrace the idea of the performative collaboration between artist and writer (101).

Muñoz situates himself as a member of a community; his investments in his written archive of ghostly affect are both intellectual and deeply personal. Yet do his experiences resonate beyond his own subjectivity and are these affects still valuable to those who do not have the same associations with these queer spaces? Muñoz imagines, in his deliberately utopian way, how the felt affects within these images can reverberate beyond his own personal accounts. As he explains how the various texts and images discussed relate to his own experiences, his vocabulary privileges a form of lateral or associative interconnectedness, emphasizing that McCarty’s images and statements resonate “alongside” and “beyond” his own biography (105). Refusing to close down these associations through a reliance on his personal experience, Muñoz affirms that it is the temporal and spatial indeterminacy of the images discussed that leave them open to alternate readings and resonances: “[McCarty] is narrating a stage of in-between-ness, a spatiality that is aligned with a temporality that is on the

threshold between identifications, lifeworlds, and potentialities” (105). Like Bronson and Hobbs, Muñoz remains willing to assert the liminal or ambiguous nature of the affects he explores; however, like Cvetkovich, his effort to name his own investments, intimacies, and memories throughout his affective reading of queer ghosts and utopias adds emotional weight to his project.

Many aspects of the *Queer Spirits* project remain enticing, enthralling, and romantic; for instance, the sumptuous photographs, extensive archival research, and mysterious and playful rituals enacted by Bronson and Hobbs. As a result, my approach to their work has involved a desire to critique and a willingness to be seduced in equal measure. However, the content of the performances remains inaccessible: once readers start to seek out the artists' own personal attachments or the specific voices of the ghosts they claim to contact, we are met with impressions equally as spectral and diffuse. Perhaps appropriately, while the performative séances of Bronson and Hobbs resonate as transgressive and powerful, they remain like vocal invocations in the air, ultimately fading like the ghosts they hope to access.

Conclusion

Considering affect as a form of ghostly presence or haunting is a deeply seductive and evocative idea; however, when we seek the specificities of trauma and loss through its logic, its insufficiencies as a model begin to emerge. Perhaps what both entices and disappoints readers who seek out hauntings in order to recuperate traumatic affects is that ghosts seem to promise a connection to the marginalized or queer dead without guaranteeing its emergence. AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs's performative project *Invocation of the Queer Spirits* makes evident both the possibilities and problems inherent in the haunting model, providing readers with a framework for considering where ghosts are helpful for reading affect, and indicating where the metaphor falls short. Through this paper I have considered work by Tim Edensor, Ann Cvetkovich, and José Esteban Muñoz to build my own archive of ghostly writing alongside Bronson and Hobbs's project, exploring where the *Queer Spirits* model for ghosts is met with congruencies and helpful alternatives in other texts. Ultimately, when engaging with the *Queer Spirits* project, it remains important to consider both its shortcomings and the ways in which it seduces, endears, and appeals to readers as a utopian vision of a queer history and queer future. Like the ghosts it claims to seek out, *Queer Spirits* remains mystifying and difficult to pin down.

Notes

1. It should be noted here that given the size and scope of *Queer Spirits*, I will not be able to engage with every facet of the project here. Instead, I hope to focus my analysis on a few key séances that best exemplify the conceptual connections between haunting and affect that I am attempting to describe.

2. It should be noted that the invocation for Banff is not included in the *Queer Spirits* book.
3. Here Muñoz discusses Leo Bersani's critique of the idealizing of bathhouses in a pre-AIDS era as sites of total sexual liberation: he "rightly brings to light the fact that those pre-AIDS days of glory were also elitist, exclusionary, and savagely hierarchized libidinal economies."

Appendix

Invocation from Winnipeg séance. In Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits* (Winnipeg: Creative Time and Plug In Editions, 2011): 36.

INVOCATION:

We invite into this circle the queer spirits of Winnipeg, those who have been marginalized or excised from the official history of Winnipeg. We invite you to join us in constructing this collective memory of a queer community of the quick and the dead:

The First Nations shamans and medicine men who recognized the magical and magnetic pull of the Forks and their geographic location as the geographical center of North America; the French, English, Scottish, and Irish explorers, trappers, traders, coureurs de bois, and other adventurers of an all-male life; the Métis under Louis Riel, whose rebellion and persecution marked the early days of Canada as a harsh environment of military rule, intolerance, corruption and greed; the Chinese railroad workers who built the Grand Trunk, the Canadian Pacific, and the Canadian Northern Railways that converged in Winnipeg; the loggers, miners, and cattlemen whose camps constituted all-male communities; the missionaries, priests, reverends, and rabbis; the homesteaders, farmers, and ranchers who came from the Ukraine, Poland, Iceland and Scandinavia – those who settled here and those who pushed west; the Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites who espoused universal brotherhood and settled here so that they could freely practice their beliefs; the queers working in the hotels, taverns, gambling houses, and brothels of frontier Red River; the queers of Winnipeg's First Nations and Métis; the musicians of Winnipeg's Philharmonic Orchestra, established in 1880; the dancers of the Winnipeg Royal Ballet, North America's oldest running ballet; the queer professors, teachers, and students of the city's schools; the mistreated workers who took to the streets in the General Strike of 1919; the queer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; the brotherhood of Freemasons who built many of Winnipeg's landmarks, including Manitoba's Parliament Building with its Golden Boy and sacred geometry; those who dedicated their lives to psychic research and pioneered psychic photography, turning Winnipeg into a spiritualist hotbed in the 1920's and 1930's; the artists of the Manitoba Theatre Centre; the men and women who frequented Happenings, Giovanni's Room, the Office Bathhouse, and the Campus Gay Club at the University of Winnipeg, and in doing so homesteaded a queer community;

Also:

Those who were persecuted for their difference and murdered; those who suffered from abuse as children and adults; those who committed suicide; those who died of disease, including the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the encephalitis epidemic of 1922; those who died of HIV and AIDS.

To all those dispossessed and abandoned, to all those who have died but cannot leave this place, we invite each of you to join us in this queer community of the quick and the dead.

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