

Feeling Queer Together: Identity, Community, and the Work of Affect in the Pre-
Stonewall Lesbian Magazine, The *Ladder*

by

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A thesis

presented to the University Of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This project examines the emergence of lesbian identity and community through the work of queer feeling, specifically as it was produced in the American magazine, the *Ladder* (1956-1972). The *Ladder* was published by the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first national lesbian organization, whose politics of respectability called for lesbians to conform with and adjust to normative gender and class ideals. While such strategies of assimilation responded to the traumatic discourses of disease and deviance that framed lesbian life in the 1950s and 1960s, they further marginalized women who could not easily or legitimately occupy normative categories of gender and class. As an extension of DOB, the *Ladder* has been treated as a largely conformist text; however, I argue that its short fiction, poetry, and readers' letters engage differently with the push towards normativity. By reading the *Ladder* as an affective archive, I show that the movements and currents of this community in progress open up this historical moment for more complex readings.

My affective and discursive framework isolates affective currents in the short stories and poetry published in the *Ladder*, and it reads them alongside and against the more political or community-oriented articles published in the magazine. I examine how value was ascribed to the lesbian through happy alignment with normative models of gender and homonormative couplings, and then I show how (un)happiness and pleasure interrupt alignment and create space for alternative ways of doing lesbianism. I examine the workings of strange feeling in poetry and fiction to show how strangeness produces inter-subjectivity, various belongings, and a sense of community responsibility. Finally, I excavate the workings of romantic affect to

show how it navigates the spaces between beginnings and endings, love and death to produce queer futurity.

By examining the *Ladder*'s literary texts and letters for the ways in which they invoke feeling and affectively produce different ways of being and doing queerness, I explore the ways that queer feeling opens up everyday spaces for lesbian possibility. In reading the *Ladder* as a complex affective archive of this period of early lesbian identity and community, I show how a community's texts during critical historical moments can reveal the workings and movements of, what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feelings," the affective currents that constitute a community's becomings and changes before and as they coalesce into a static history.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Victoria Lamont, for inspiring my scholarly imagination from the start. Your friendship, mentorship, and unfailing patience have been invaluable. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Kevin McGuirk and Dr. Alice Kuzniar, for your helpful feedback, support, and ongoing generosity. Thank you to my external examiner, Dr. Michael Cobb, and my internal-external examiner, Dr. Shannon Dea, for your thoughtful questions and comments. All of your feedback will guide this project forward from here.

To the faculty and staff in the English Department at the University of Waterloo, thank you for your many acts of support and kindness over the years. I am particularly grateful to Margaret Ulbrick, Tina Davidson, Julie-Ann Desrochers, and Maha Eid for your exceptional coordination and administrative magic.

I would like to thank Dr. Mario Coniglio for supporting me professionally and for generously giving me the time I needed to finish this project and a space to write in. Thank you, too, to my friend and mentor, Katrina Di Gravio, for your encouragement and moral support, all the coffee, and the soon-to-come wine.

To my colleagues at the Writing and Communication Centre, thank you for your cheerleading, for innumerable conversations in hallways, and for enabling me to find the time to write. Thanks especially to Dr. Nadine Fladd and Chao Yang for your leadership of the WCC during my four-month leave. Thanks, too, to John Vardon for your keen proofreading eyes on that first chapter when I was too close to see it clearly.

A very special thank you to my friend and colleague, Dr. Jordana Garbati, for giving so much of your time to be my coach and taskmaster. Your daily emails,

gentle reminders, and not-so-gentle pushes were just what I needed to sustain my writing schedule. As well, your thoughtful feedback motivated me to keep going.

Thank you to my friend, Dr. Shana MacDonald, for generously reading some of this dissertation and sharing your feedback and encouragement.

This journey has coincided with numerous life events, and I am eternally grateful to Adrienne Barker for standing beside me through everything. You have always believed in me and encouraged me. No matter how tight time was with children, laundry, or grocery shopping, we managed to carve out time for me to write. I am so very lucky to share my love and my life with you. To our very special children, Adair and Desmond, thank you for teaching me patience and reminding me to laugh. To Adair, who arrived fourteen weeks early, you taught me the art of breathing, one breath at a time, and you showed me what it means to outrun expectations. To Desmond, you have taught me to let go, laugh louder, play harder, and how to turn anything into a game. Thank you to my parents, Margaret and Derek, and my siblings, Pam, Grace, Philip, and Anna. Your love and friendship sustain me.

Thank you to the San Francisco Public Library, ONE Archives in Los Angeles, and Gale's *Archives Unbound* for helping me access the research records I needed for this work. Thanks to Phyllis Lyon and the late Barbara Grier for generously giving their time to be interviewed, especially when time was so precious.

Finally, this project and my PhD studies were made possible by a SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

Dedication

For Adair and Desmond who are my whole heart.
For Adrienne who makes me possible.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Again unwillingly, she found herself taking the seat from which she could best see the girl with the red hair. And there she sat; miserable, confused, one moment near tears, the next near laughter, eyes straight ahead, with a terrible feeling of flushed excitement.”

- “Homeward” by Jean Ray, *The Ladder*, December 1956

“We must be fed through our hearts with occasional booting in the rear. So keep up the fiction and poetry.”

- Barbara Grier, letter to Del Martin, Friday Eve, July 31, [1958]¹

This project is concerned with how the work of feeling in and between individuals produces the bonds that construct a community and with the making of queer female subjects in a particular historical moment. In the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, small groups of women were beginning to work collectively to establish links across a national lesbian community and to resist the constraints placed on their lives and identities by dominant American society. The publication, the *Ladder*, a newsletter cum magazine that ran from 1956 to 1972, was the mouthpiece of the first national lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, and its textual circulations were critical to the affective and discursive construction of a nationally identified lesbian community. This community was produced against mainstream medical, psychological, and criminal discourses of deviance and perversion, certainly. However, it was also created through a sense of felt commonality, shared perspectives, values and beliefs that went beyond the simple conventions of sexual difference and alterity. These feelings and beliefs, ways of

¹ There is no year attached to the date of this letter; however, I estimate the year as 1958 because the letter refers to articles from 1957 and early 1958. The paper size and form are unusual, and they are the same as another letter dated August 15, which references the film, *Vertigo*, released in May 1958.

perceiving their own bodies and experiences, ways of valuing certain choices and life narratives, and ways of knowing that resisted the official and legitimated multifarious “knowledges” about their lives were constructed through texts and the readers’ imagined understanding of themselves in relation to alike others. A shared affective epistemology, produced over time and across geographical place, contributed to feelings of potential, to futurity, to a series of critical shifts that marked the before and the now of political emergence and self-authored social re-inscription.

Following from thinkers like Raymond Williams, Sara Ahmed, Anne Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant, and Michael Warner, I examine the workings of affect in social movements, literally in the moving of the social, as series of sub-level tremors and resonances that contribute to ways of thinking and knowing, valuing and believing. Williams describes this interrelationship between affect and conscious social belief as “not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (132). He argues that it is useful to establish the affective components of the social and conscious world as a “structure,” which functions like a system with interconnected internal movements, balanced but under tension, and always something moving and shifting, a thing that is in progress. For Williams, this “structure of feeling” is a way of trying to identify the affective pieces and workings of social change and social process, normally hidden or invisible until such time as they become “hardened” or reified into identifiable and intelligible categories and institutions (132). Affect should be examined as it moves and works and shifts in formative historical moments. A study of this often overlooked period of queer

organizing and resistance, before the broader groundswells of gay and women's liberation took hold in the 1970s, provides insight into the ways that identities and communities are formed in certain ways despite or because of affective and textual circulations. Textual and discursive examinations are critical to a methodology of affect particularly when the contexts of their production are politically and emotionally charged. Literature is marked by and generative of its moment of production, and it produces affective movements that are bound up with ideology, oppressions, resistances, and crises. In the literature and literary discussions of the nascent lesbian community of the 1950s and 1960s, there are traces of these affective shifts, places where new ways of feeling, and thus knowing, surface, build tension, push and are pushed, resisting dominant discursive impositions and producing potential spaces for alternative identifications, community connections, and ways of social and cultural being.

The *Ladder* was a critical text during this period because it was the only publication produced by lesbian-identified women for an audience of other lesbians. Gay publications from the same era, including the *Mattachine Review* and *ONE*, were targeted to gay men whose issues and concerns differed from women's. Other contemporary literature, such as popular lesbian pulp novels, which were cheap paperbacks with salacious cover images and narratives, were primarily written by men and intended for a male audience. Despite some subversion by lesbian-identified writers, their depictions mostly confirmed contemporary stereotypes by featuring cruel lesbian predators and their feminine converts, the latter typically rescued by a male hero from a life of depravity. In contrast, the *Ladder* presented

more sympathetic portrayals, which were constructed by lesbians, and which could be negotiated and discussed by readers. The magazine directly addressed issues concerning lesbians and intentionally produced a framework for lesbian identity associated with health, strength, and social respectability. Through social and political commentary and reportage, and through literary articles, fiction, and poetry, the magazine was a point of connection for many women who were beginning to self-identify as lesbians and who imagined themselves as part of a broader community. Ann Cvetkovich and Michael Warner each discuss the ways that communities or publics are formed through texts, their production, circulation, and reception, emphasizing that these communities are not pre-formed and then defined through shared readership, but are constituted by shared texts and by readers' imagined associations and identifications with other readers. Affect is central to Cvetkovich's work on queer histories, which are bound up with loss, sexuality, sexual communities, intimacy, desire, love, neglect, oppression, exclusion, and fragmentation. She argues that these affective experiences must be preserved as part of queer history (*Archive* 241), and that queer archives are "repositories of feeling and emotions," which are encoded in textual contexts and the practices of their production and reception (7). The shared experiences of readers of the *Ladder* in their time and place produced affective negotiations that constituted their identities as lesbians and formed the bonds of their imagined community. In what Warner calls a textually-constituted "public," or more accurately here a "counterpublic," the collective engagement and interaction of members are what is constitutive, including members' struggles against the conditions that bind them as a public. Acts of reading

shared texts are always reflexive, and texts are read against the background of other circulating texts, which are integrated into the reflexive network (Warner 12). As reader discussion pages from the magazine show, the *Ladder* was read with and against its contemporary alternative publications noted above, but also with and against mainstream publications, which reproduced versions of female sexuality and gender that were emphatically heterosexual, and associated with marriage, child rearing, and domestic life. The magazine can be read as a kind of discursive nexus point, a place where beliefs, values, and feelings about becoming and being lesbian collided in an historical moment.

Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder

In 1956, the *Ladder* was launched as the newsletter of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a new social and political organization. The DOB had formed one year earlier in 1955, emerging out of a casual gathering of four lesbian couples in San Francisco. Because there were few safe options for lesbians to meet and socialize in the city, the women were initially looking to meet other lesbian couples, and to dance and talk beyond the reach of law enforcement and curious tourists. Two of the original eight women, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who would later become lesbian leaders and activists, were central to the formation of the group. Lyon recalls that she and Martin had recently moved to a new house in San Francisco. They had been “trolling all the gay, lesbian bars” looking for other women with whom they could form friendships and socialize, and they had given their phone number to a few women (Lyon n.p.). One of these women, possibly Rose Bamburger (Gallo 1), called them with the idea of gathering a group of women for a party, so Lyon and Martin

offered their house. From there, the decision to turn the social group into a club with a formal purpose and structure came about almost accidentally, partly as a result of the positive impact of meeting other lesbian women:

And, but nobody really knew what we were trying to do, and I don't know that we did either, but we were just meeting more lesbians, and that was the greatest thing yet. And eventually, [...] somebody [...] decided that we oughta, maybe we should organize as a group, as a organization. We could start a lesbian club. And well, that sounded pretty good, so that's how that all got started. (Lyon n.p.)

The first planning meeting took place on September 21, 1955. According to Martin and Lyon, two members suggested the Daughters of Bilitis as the group's name based on the fictional author of an obscure book of lesbian-themed poems, *Songs of Bilitis*, created by Pierre Luoy. The group chose Bilitis because she was fashioned as a contemporary of Sappho's who lived on the island of Lesbos, and yet her name was unlikely to be recognized by anyone outside of a limited group (Martin and Lyon 212).² The first official meeting of the DOB took place on October 5, 1955, where the members elected officers, passed a new constitution and set of by-laws, and selected club colours, a logo, and a motto (Gallo 4-5). America's first lesbian organization was born.

² This version of events is different from the one told to me by Phyllis Lyon in a personal interview when Lyon remembered that she and Martin suggested the name, the Daughters of Bilitis, because they owned Pierre Luoy's book of lesbian-themed poems, *Songs of Bilitis*: "And we said why don't we call it the Daughters of Bilitis. And they didn't know what the Daughters of Bilitis was. And we said, well, she was a lesbian. So, that's how the name came about." (Lyon n.p.)

From these impromptu, almost accidental beginnings, the DOB moved forward with energy and tenacity. Although they lost some of the original group members, there were fifteen members by the end of the first year (Lyon n.p.; Gallo 8). The first issue of the *Ladder* was published in October 1956, primarily as a method of reaching more women and communicating the DOB's work. In 1958, the DOB launched its first massive readers' survey, and, in 1960, it held its first national convention. At the beginning, the DOB leadership took many cues from the two other mostly-male homophile organizations, the Mattachine Society and ONE Incorporated, by focusing on education campaigns for and of their members. DOB understood that the problems facing women were different than those confronting men, and they wanted to serve women's unique interests and concerns with the hope that they could persuade more women to participate:

We offer, however, that so-called "feminine viewpoint" which [ONE and Mattachine Society] have had so much difficulty obtaining. It is to be hoped that our venture will encourage the women to take an ever-increasing part in the steadily-growing fight for understanding of the homophile minority.

("Once Upon A Time")

At first, they focused on political, social, and religious issues primarily by organizing public meetings and discussion groups with any professionals, sympathetic or not, who were willing to speak about the homophile situation. A research committee was formed in 1958, headed by Florence "Conrad" Jaffy who believed in the possibility of change through research, as long as it was properly framed. She reviewed all external research requests and provided leadership for the DOB-led questionnaires

(Gallo 45; Soares 35). As projects developed and membership grew, the DOB quickly established itself as the voice of the early lesbian movement. Local chapters were organized in cities outside of San Francisco: in 1958, the second and third chapters were established in Los Angeles and New York, respectively (Gallo 41-2). Over a decade later, the December 1969/January 1970 issue of the *Ladder* reported the existence of four chapters, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and San Diego, plus the formation of six groups on their way to becoming chapters in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Miami, and Portland (Damon, “Year” 3-4). While this was the height of the DOB, the movement soon shifted. The gay liberation movement transformed and replaced the homophile movement, and as the women’s liberation movement gained momentum, the lesbian community was torn between their gay brothers and their feminist sisters (Soares 42; Gallo 169-173). Ultimately in 1970, the *Ladder* was pulled from the divided organization by then-President, Rita LaPorte, and then-Editor, Barbara Grier, and the organization, as a national group, did not survive.³

The *Ladder* was central to the DOB’s organizational work, primarily responsible for constructing the member and reader network that extended from San Francisco across the country. It was the first truly national lesbian periodical,⁴ connecting women in urban centers with women in rural communities and

³ A DOB chapter in San Francisco lasted until 1978, while the last chapter in Massachusetts, Boston disbanded in the early 2000s (Gallo 192-195).

⁴ The first lesbian periodical was a magazine called *Vice Versa* that was produced in 1947 by Edythe Eyde, using the pseudonym Lisa Ben. Eyde produced nine monthly issues on her own by typing two copies and surreptitiously reproducing eight more on her office’s mimeograph machine. She distributed the copies through friends in the Los Angeles area (Gallo xxxii-xxxiv; Faderman, *Gay L.A.* 106-105).

facilitating a shared textual conversation between them (Grier, Interview n.p.; Martin and Lyon 55). While readership grew steadily over the tenure of the publication, accurately calculating readership numbers is difficult. Paid subscriptions were easily calculated, but the nature of the magazine's content meant that many copies of the magazine were shared among informal networks of women (Gallo 41; Soares 35). One woman, for example, recounts her practice of leaving a hidden copy of the *Ladder* in her workplace's darkroom where it was shared with between thirty and fifty women each month (Soares 35). In the mid-1960s the *Ladder* appeared on select newsstands and bookstores in several major American cities. By the early 1970s, subscriptions to the *Ladder* had grown to more than three thousand; in spite of these numbers, the *Ladder* concluded publication with a final issue in August/September 1972. Perhaps surprisingly, the end of the *Ladder* was the result of publishing costs exceeding subscription revenues (Gallo 181; Soares 47). Grier blames this on her own lack of business sense, as well as the termination of financial supplementation from a long-time anonymous donor who disliked the editorial changes in the magazine after it split from the DOB. According to Grier, the unknown Florida supporter cut off her regular financial contributions because the magazine began to focus more heavily on literature over politics (Grier, Interview n.p.). Supplementing production with advertising revenue was not an option because the kinds of ads that they could get for a lesbian magazine were limited and likely unsuitable to their readers (Gallo 181; Grier, Interview n.p.). However, when the *Ladder* disappeared, it was replaced by a wave of new gay and lesbian publications,

including *The Lesbian Tide*, a re-launch of the Los Angeles chapter's newsletter and a result of the *Ladder's* critical community-building work (Gallo 180-181).

For most of its tenure, the *Ladder* was the cement that held the DOB together by connecting women to the organization's work and keeping readers up-to-date on the issues that were important to them. Over the course of the magazine's publication tenure, five editors brought their individual focus and style to its content and pages, growing and developing it from its beginnings as a hand-typed and mimeographed newsletter to a polished and widely distributed magazine. Reports of speakers, public meetings, and conventions featured frequently in the magazine, especially in the first five to seven years when the organization regularly invited medical and legal experts and religious leaders to meet and speak to members. The magazine also covered key issues for the community, such as raids, legal issues and rights, censorship, and coverage of homosexuality by mainstream media. Opinion pieces that discussed ways of being lesbian, including raising children, choosing heterosexual marriage, self-acceptance, morality, and dress, were popular with readers and elicited much discussion in the readers' letters section. Phyllis Lyon served as first editor, a task she took seriously for its import to the DOB's work. As one of the founders of the organization, she saw the *Ladder* as a recruiting tool and treated any non-DOB related material as supplementation to keep the publication interesting for readers (Lyon n.p.). Lyon focused on the work of the DOB, its meetings, public discussion groups and forums, and events. Poetry and fiction appeared in the magazine under her leadership, but it was primarily driven by reader submissions, and items were printed based on available space (Lyon n.p.). The first twelve issues of the *Ladder*

had the same hand-drawn cover that depicted two women at the base of a ladder looking up into the clouds (see fig. 1). After this, each cover featured a different drawing and an occasional photograph (see fig. 2). Del Martin, partner of Phyllis Lyon, took over the editorship in 1960. Martin had served as President of DOB from the beginning, and the *Ladder* continued as a mouthpiece of the organization. Many of Martin's editorials covered political issues such as elections and local politics in San Francisco, as well as topics arising from the work of homophile organizations, such as the "Homosexual Bill of Rights" proposed by ONE Inc. Vigiletti refers to this era of the magazine, from 1956 to 1963 as its "first movement," heavily influenced by Lyon and Martin's goals and values and remaining consistent in its approach and outlook until Barbara Gittings took over in 1963 (48-49).



Fig. 1. First cover of the *Ladder* used for issues 1.1 to 1.12. Reprinted in Vigiletti 54.



Fig. 2. Sample covers of the *Ladder*, clockwise from top left: October 1957, April 1958, January 1959, and April 1959. Arno Press, 1975.

Under Gittings, who served as editor from 1963 to 1966, cover images were often photographs of DOB members, a radical move during a time when homosexuality was generally repudiated. These photographs were a valuable means of building visibility and connection that supported the work of the magazine's contents, and they represented a major shift for the magazine. In another bold move in 1964, the text, "A Lesbian Review" was added to the masthead. Gittings improved the magazine's layout and printing quality, which was noticed and praised by readers who viewed the changes as part of the increased legitimacy of the organization (J.N. 26). Perhaps most critically, Gittings was an activist who was connected to the wider homophile movement. The magazine reflected this by soliciting more political content, by including more men's voices, and by pushing for stronger connections with gay men and the homophile movement. The change in content had an impact on the amount of literary content published; while poetry was often still included, few short stories were published during Gittings' tenure. The political bent of the magazine, particularly its associations with men's issues began to conflict with the DOB leadership's early feminism. Pinning the issue on her editorial tardiness with materials, the DOB asked Gittings to step down in August 1966 (Gallo 131). Helen Sandoz (pseudonym, Helen Sanders) took over the editorship in November of that year and produced a magazine that, while not depoliticized, was more of a "house organ" (qtd. Soares 40). During her tenure, there were reports on conventions and coverage of topical issues, but overall the magazine had a homey and lightly fun feel. Sandoz thought that poems and "sweet stories" appealed most to readers (qtd. Soares

40), and the number of short stories increased. She also included drawings and light columns, such as a series of editorial columns from the perspective of Ben the Cat.

The final editor, Barbara Grier, took over in 1968 and transformed the magazine again, re-creating it as a feminist literary review. Although it remained a lesbian magazine, many articles like “Lesbianism and Feminism,” “We Need This Now,” and “Women’s Liberation Catches Up To The Ladder” focused on women’s liberation and prioritized the bonds of feminist sisterhood over connections to the homophile community. Grier also dedicated a significant amount of space to fiction and poetry, recruiting writers such as Jane Rule, Rita Mae Brown, Isabel Miller, and Judy Grahn. Grier’s vision for the magazine included increasing the number of pages to 48, publishing it on a bi-monthly basis, and turning it into a more professional publication. However, Grier lived in Kansas City, and final control over the magazine was held by the originating San Francisco chapter of the DOB, who expected that items related to DOB business, including reports and announcements, would be a priority, and who printed and mailed the magazine from San Francisco (Soares 41). It was an unsettled period; the DOB had been looking at wide organizational changes since their 1968 convention, and division between the early gay liberation movement and the feminist movement created conflict. While Grier felt that the DOB never made the *Ladder* a priority, Rita LaPorte, then president of DOB, worried that political divisions would end her presidency at the August 1970 DOB convention. As a result, she and Grier decided to take control of the magazine (42). LaPorte took both copies of the mailing list, one from the DOB offices and one from the addressograph company, and by the August 1970 issue, the magazine

displayed no sign of its connection to DOB. Unfortunately, their actions resulted in the cessation of publication after August 1972 due to a lack of financial support; while subscriptions continued to grow, advertising revenue was nearly impossible to secure (47), and without the support of the DOB, the magazine could not continue.

The *Ladder* was a vehicle for visibility, for disseminating information and establishing a dialogue between readers and the organization and editors, and it was also fundamental to the production of a shared and participatory set of values and ideas. The DOB understood this to a large extent; they included a statement of purpose for the Daughters of Bilitis at the front of almost all issues of the *Ladder*, from its inception to the April/May 1970 issue:

1. Education of the variant, with particular emphasis on the psychological and sociological aspects, to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic and economic implications by establishing and maintaining a library of both fiction and non-fiction on the sex deviant theme; by sponsoring public discussions on pertinent subjects to be conducted by leading members of the legal, psychiatric, religious and other professions; by advocating a mode of behaviour and dress acceptable to society.
2. Education of the public through acceptance first of the individual, leading to an eventual breakdown of erroneous conceptions, taboos and prejudices; through public discussion meetings; through dissemination of educational literature on the homosexual theme.

3. Participation in research projects by duly authorized and responsible psychology, sociology and other such experts directed towards further knowledge of the homosexual.
4. Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in the state legislature. (“Daughters of Bilitis – Purpose”)

Highlighting the core values of the DOB, the statement was a means of propagating those values to a wider group. It focused on helping the lesbian to adjust or assimilate to society and sought to normalize the lesbian for mainstream society so that people would see her as a regular person. Lesbians, and homosexuality more generally, had been associated with mental and physical illness and criminality, and the DOB wanted to redeem that image, to focus on the ways that lesbians lived healthy and professional lives. They hoped that their efforts would help individual women overcome the feelings of shame and fear associated with their lesbian desires, so they could “adjust” to living in society. To this end, they focused on issues of individual representation and respectability, and on dress and behaviour, singling out the butch dress and rough mannerisms typically associated with working-class bar lesbians. They fought representations of the wrong kind of lesbian, as in their repeated censure of Ann Aldrich for her portrayals of lesbians in *We Walk Alone* (1955) and *We Too Must Love* (1958). Ultimately, the DOB believed that individual self-confidence and self-acceptance, represented in outward dress, manners and behaviour, were keys to social change.

The DOB was formed by a small group of women who were somewhat diverse in race and class. However, the DOB's pursuit of lesbian legitimacy marginalized values and identities that were incompatible with the discourse and framework of "normal" that permeated society during the 1950s and early 1960s (Creadick 4-6). White, professional, middle class, and gender-normative values dominated society and contributed to the "politics of respectability" that was advanced by the DOB. Martin and Lyon recall that, from the beginning, class differences created conflict, and that working- and professional-class members of the original group had differing opinions about what the organization's goals should be (Lyon and Martin 222). On one occasion in 1955, three butch-appearing newcomers arrived at a planning meeting and made the established group uncomfortable. As a result, the DOB later held a special meeting to compose new rules for membership, one of which was that women's pants were the only trousers permitted for women (Gallo 6-7), effectively eliminating the "contamination" that such butch presentations brought. While Black women and other women of colour participated in the organization, they were in the minority. Pat "Dubby" Walker served as president of the San Francisco chapter in 1960 and, although she remembers that her blindness was a bigger challenge than being a woman of colour, she also recalls that the only other Black woman in the DOB at the time was Cleo "Glenn" Bonner, with whom she ran the book and record service through the *Ladder* (Gallo 59). Barbara Gittings recruited the involvement of Ernestine Eckstein in the mid 1960s after meeting her at a public protest, and a 1966 cover photo (see fig. 3) and interview with her explored the intersections of lesbian and Black identity. The *Ladder* also

established communications with Ger Van Braam, a lesbian in Indonesia. From 1963 to 1965, Von Braam made multiple contributions to the *Ladder*, including two short stories and an account of her life in Indonesia, and her portrait was featured on the cover later in 1964 (see fig. 4). Despite these instances of leadership and visibility, racial diversity in the DOB was more of an ideal than a reality (Vigiletti 63; Gallo xxiii). In 1959, Florence Conrad's results of the organization's membership survey classify members as "almost entirely Caucasian" ("DOB Questionnaire" 5), explaining that "only one of the [...] group reported being non-white" (6). The survey results also put members well above the national average in terms of education, income, and rates of professional careers (5-7). White, professional, middle-class women dominated, and their values and articulations of identity were textually reproduced and circulated as the point of imaginative connection for a geographically dispersed population. A mean age of 32 suggests that the majority of readers had begun their careers and were likely invested enough to instil some conservatism in their personal and political will. One reader writes: "The part about 'Come out of hiding'. What a delicious invitation, but oh, so impractical. I should lose my job, a marvellous heterosexual roommate, and all chance of finding work... I would be blackballed all over the city" (J.M., November 1956 14). Race and class privilege ensured that there was much at stake for women who read the *Ladder*, so they advocated an approach where they could leverage that privilege and social capital into a conservative kind of social change, one that sought to extend access to social legitimacy without necessarily overturning existing social stratifications.



Fig. 3. Photo of Ernestine Eckstein on cover of the *Ladder*, June 1966. Arno Press, 1975.



Fig. 4. Photo of Ger Von Braam on the cover of the *Ladder*, November 1964. Arno Press 1975.

The DOB social and political philosophy aimed for the social inclusion of lesbians, which meant that socially-disparaged types of lesbians were either repudiated or ignored, while those who advocated respectability viewed their efforts as important to redeeming lesbians as a whole. On occasion, readers drew parallels between the homophile experience and the experiences of other minorities, specifically examining how the actions or appearances of outlying individuals could affect the mainstream group: “We have to face the fact that some of our homosexual kin do get out of line [...] These actions of one individual cast a shadow on the lot of any minority group... whether it be homosexuals, Jews, Negroes, or any other minority group” (A.T. 11). Lorraine Hansberry, in a 1957 letter to the editors, states that she has some trouble with the way Black people are criticized for their poverty or clothing and argues that, ultimately, a person’s appearance or credentials does not exempt them from discrimination; however, she reasons that the image of the “butch” is unsettling enough to be a barrier to advancing the lesbian cause and creates only problems for the group. Her letter proposes that it is necessary for the DOB to promote lesbian respectability to further their political agenda and engage potential allies (Hansberry, May 1957 27). Another reader describes the benefits of acceptance achieved when minorities focus on making a “first impression,” including dressing and behaving in a proper manner. She frames this work as an effort in support of the larger good:

It pays to make this small concession. [M]y loved one and I [...] have been accepted by heterosexuals and later informed by them that this acceptance, in its initial stage, was based entirely on upon appearance and behavior. It gives

us a measure of satisfaction to know that, as a couple, we have done something in this way toward establishing a better understanding of the homosexual. (Z.N., October 1958 30)

Care in appearance was a noble act for some; one reader rejects the butch-femme construction as imitative and unnecessary (G.D. 22-23), and yet another describes it as simply misguided and rude. In an early letter to the editor, Marion Zimmer Bradley writes: “[M]any Lesbians feel that it is their ‘right’ to dress and act in a masculine manner, while many others honestly feel that they are wiser and more courteous to keep their differences to themselves” (May 1957 21). The questions of appearance, dress, and behaviour are addressed repeatedly in the pages of the *Ladder*, especially in the first half of its run. However, while the magazine was emphatically supportive of social acceptance as a means of change-making, there were places where this emphatic message was subverted.

Poems and stories in the magazine offer alternative constructions of lesbianism, often undermining and undoing the privileged perspectives represented in the magazine’s content and editorial opinion. They represent a valuable source of material for lesbian representations and the construction of lesbian experiences, emphasizing multiplicity and diversity over singularity of purpose. As noted, fiction and poetry were not the primary contents of the magazine during most of its publication history; however, literature and discussions about literature made ways of doing lesbian identity, relationships, and community explicit, transforming ideas and theories into concretely imagined forms. The existence of fiction and poetry in the magazine has received little attention from those scholars and historians who

discuss the DOB and their activities. This may be partly due to the fact that most of the literature was submitted by readers who, with some exceptions, were not professional or known writers, and that literature was not the magazine's central concern for most of its publication history. Even when literature did become a focus of the *Ladder*, the predominant view of literature as distinct and separate from "real" political work may render that focus unimportant or make it seem a departure from what was the fundamental work of the magazine. Yet, literature was part of the magazine from the start, beginning with three unassuming paragraphs buried at the back of the magazine. Titled "LESBIANA LITERATURE," the short text promises a bibliography of lesbian literature in the future, asks for donations of books, and calls for fiction and non-fiction manuscripts on the topic of lesbianism (10). This foreshadows a focus on literature that would become of central concern to the *Ladder* over its sixteen-year history. Throughout most of the *Ladder*'s publication history, a literary review column by Barbara Grier established itself as the arbiter of fiction and non-fiction with lesbian themes. And, by the end of its tenure in 1972, the magazine had developed into a sophisticated and polished literary review that attracted high-calibre writers and writers on the cutting edge of the new women's movement. While the overall quality of literary content in the *Ladder* has been criticized as inconsistent (Soares 32, 34), the reflective nature of poetry and short fiction and its diverse depictions of lesbians produced complex counter-narratives to the narrow profile endorsed by the DOB in its set of published values. These counter-narratives operate as what Warner describes as counterpublics -- publics that are defined by their position against and within a larger public (*Publics* 57).

Counterpublics construct a space for discussion and critique through networks of print or media, producing and re-producing subcultural identities in the process (Warner, *Publics* 57). For example, while the social and political reportage in the *Ladder* produces a discourse of respectability that marginalizes butch lesbians, stories engage with this discourse. Rather than directly constructing a counter-narrative that elevates the butch lesbian, however, a number of stories re-value butchness by incorporating various perspectives on and by the butch into the ordinariness of everyday lives lived. Such stories demonstrate that lesbian identity and representation were under constant negotiation by a textual community. This is borne out by the reader discussions about literature in the *Ladder*, the majority of which address the literary content of the magazine, as well as by Grier's assessments of lesbian literary value. The overlaps and interactions between readers and writers demonstrate that the *Ladder* was a nexus of negotiations of identity and community. As reader-submitted texts, stories and poems in the *Ladder* are unique and rich texts for analysis, especially for a method of analysis that seeks to contextualize texts within the larger shifts and movements of a developing community and mainstream society. Stories, poems, and literary discussions construct multiple versions, perspectives, and possibilities of being and doing lesbianism that, in their intersections with the internal discourse of the DOB and with dominant discourse on homosexuality, resonate and translate into an expanded framework for lesbian existence. The literature intersects with, supports, and pushes back against the *Ladder's* social and political reportage, as well as other textual representations of

lesbianism in mainstream circulation. These mainstream textual representations form an important context for the *Ladder* and for the work that its literature does.

Resisting Dominant Discourses

The DOB and the *Ladder* emerge out of a wider context in which lesbianism, and homosexuality more generally, were treated as deviant manifestations of a diseased social body. Dominant medical and criminal discourses of the post-war era are embedded in a longer history of gender inversion theory and, mixed with society's conservative and xenophobic tendencies, created an insidious discourse that permeated dominant culture at all levels. A shift towards increased conservatism at the end of the Second World War produced a climate of persecution and constraint for those whose beliefs and behaviours did not align with a particular national ideal. While homosexuality was tacitly tolerated and even accepted during the war, the late 1940s and the 1950s were characterized by emphatic heterosexuality, an insistence on sexual difference and normative gender roles, and concern about protecting the institution of the heterosexual family. Homosexuality and socialism/communism were particular targets, and the two were often linked. Conflating homosexuality with communism was a discursively strategic move; by suggesting that the strength of the nation was tied up with the health of the family unit, politicians could capitalize on and localize fears about security and take advantage of the post-war desire for the protection of domestic stability. It was productive for Republicans to undermine the Truman administration, then, by promoting the danger of "sexual perverts" (D'Emilio 41). Similarly, Kenneth Wherry, Nebraskan senator and the minority party whip, conflated homosexuals and subversives (Lerner 313), and stated

that America's ports and cities needed protection from a homosexual-Communist conspiracy (Johnson 80). In the post-war period, Eisenhower excluded gays and lesbians from federal service through Executive Order 10450, and political and military campaigns against homosexuality resulted in the dismissal of thousands of civilians and military personnel (Terry 343). Lesbians and gay men were considered threats to national security and social integrity. Seen as more vulnerable to blackmail, as more likely to betray national security, and as sympathetic to communist ideals, they were also viewed as sources of internal moral corruption, representing threats of sickness, deviancy, and perversion that undermined sexual normalcy and the heterosexual family (D'Emilio 28-31; Faderman 126-129). Just as communism was constructed as the covert infiltrator of America's borders, homosexuality was the surreptitious force that permeated the familiar and intimate fields of neighbourhood, home, and family.

Political rhetoric drew on medical and psychiatric texts to construct credibility and support its claims about the nature of homosexuals and homosexual activity. Because psychiatry is a deeply intimate subject concerned with how people think and feel, this relationship enabled government to insert itself into the daily and personal lives of citizens and, to not only concern itself with personal, intimate, and family matters, but also to construct those matters as politically and publicly relevant. In particular, the adoption of medical and psychiatric discourse authorized officials to construct homosexuality as a matter of public health, a potential spread of sickness from which ordinary citizens needed protection. Associations of homosexuality with deviance and disease arose from the gender inversion model of

homosexuality, which was derived from such late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century sexologists as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Elis. This model was re-theorized by mid-century experts, including psychological researcher Dr. G.W. Henry in his books, *Sex Variants* (1949) and *All The Sexes* (1955), and Dr. Frank Caprio in *Female Homosexuality* (1954). Henry pathologizes homosexuality by presenting a large number of case studies of homosexual individuals and medical photographs of their bodies and genitalia, in order to physiologically demonstrate abnormality, or what he elsewhere calls “sexual maladjustment” (“Preface” vi). Henry locates homosexuality in the body as a physical manifestation of a psychological deviation, but also as a deviation that moves out of the bounds of the individual body to impact society:

When [the sex urge] is thwarted or dissipated, it exerts a disorganizing influence on both the individual and society. Sexual adjustment is an important factor in practically all human relations – in friendship, courtship and marriage; in neurosis and psychosis; in suicide and murder and in lesser crimes. (*All the Sexes* xii)

By drawing the line from the sexual irregularity associated with homosexuality through social relationships and into criminality, Henry argues that same-sex desire contributes to social dysfunction and depravity. He blames feminism for erasing sex differences and argues that it will cause the collapse of civilization (Minton 117). Like Henry, Caprio’s work foregrounds the link between political subversion and homosexuality by focusing on latency as a key characteristic of lesbianism. According to Caprio, latent lesbianism is linked to “defeminization” and to female-

to-male relationships that are “competitive [...] rather than [...] submissive” (132). He further suggests that any resistance to male power, including feminism, “serves as fertile soil for the seeds of sexual inversion” (132). Focusing primarily on women’s familial roles of wife and mother, he argues that any kind of unusual sexual preference or activity indicates potential homosexuality in women. This includes the “frigid” wife, the “promiscuous” or overly sexual wife, “the wife who prefers to lie on top and assume the active role” in sex, and the woman who remains single (306). Latency suggests that homosexuality is a continually present potential, requiring only the right environment to emerge from dormancy. Caprio’s work on lesbianism constructs connections between women’s personal choices and their intimate behaviours with political and social beliefs. It further suggests that the ripeness of the environment and the right triggers are enough to activate homosexuality or political subversion in otherwise normal heterosexual Americans. Caprio and Henry participated in a discourse that overtly linked the national anxiety about communism and anti-American political activities with the threat of lesbianism and homosexuality to the familial and domestic fields.

As a result, vigilance and scrutiny intensified in the post-war period. Without a clear and identifiable enemy, the citizenry’s watchful gaze turned inward towards citizens, neighbours, family members, and themselves. Numerous texts supported the need for this level of fear and self-preservation by suggesting that homosexuality had infiltrated American society at levels greater than imagined and that it posed a threat of continued contagion. At the official level, one government report drew upon medical literature to warn about recruitment and susceptibility: “[Homosexuals]

frequently attempt to entice normal individuals to engage in perverted practices. This is particularly true in the case of young and impressionable people who might come under the influence of a pervert” (qtd. in D’Emilio 42). Other authors fuelled anxiety by popularizing government and medical literature and further exaggerating their contents. For example, Lee Mortimer and Jack Lait produced a series of popular books, including *Washington Confidential* (1951), *New York Confidential* (1951), and *U.S.A. Confidential* (1952), in which they sensationalize and expose the sordid so-called truths about life in major cities to suggest that deviance and corruption abound. *Washington Confidential*, for instance, reports that there were large numbers of homosexuals and lesbians in Washington, occupying positions in upper administration and public office (11), and it stresses the risk this poses: “With more than 6,000 fairies in government offices, you may be concerned about the security of the country” (95). It portrays homosexuals as vulnerable to blackmail by communist forces because of the special intensity of their relationships and their propensity for extreme jealousy (96). One psychiatrist is cited as counting the number of homosexuals in Washington as reaching the tens of thousands (91), while estimates of the number of lesbians exceeded that: “Psychiatrists and sociologists who have made a study of the problem in Washington think there are at least twice as many Sapphic lovers as fairies” (94). The authors succeed in turning these reported numbers into portraits of vice and moral decay, invoking anxieties about race, gender, and sexual excess. They note that there “is free crossing of racial lines among fairies and lesbians,” and that one party they attended was “an inter-racial, inter-middle-sex mélange, with long-haired, made-up Negro and white boys

simpering while females of both races mingled in unmistakable exaltation” (94). In *U.S.A. Confidential*, the authors are more brutal about lesbianism, reporting that lesbian cells exist in high schools, colleges, and universities, as well as the military auxiliaries, WACS [Women’s Army Corps] and WAVES [Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, a division of the U.S. Navy], all of which are described as “paradise” for lesbians who quickly seduce newcomers, and rape the “uncooperative girls” (43). Such reports of lesbian and homosexual activity raised fears about the presence of lesbians and gay men in various social spheres, and associated homosexuality with a proclivity for predatory aggression, excessive sexual promiscuity, and sexually-extreme appetites.

In this harsh climate, the *Ladder* was a welcome change in the discourse about homosexuality for many. The *Ladder* sought to normalize lesbianism by taking it out of the field of sensationalism and into a space of shared experiences and dialogue about relevant topics. But to accomplish this, the magazine privileged certain performances of lesbianism while marginalizing others that did not fit their normalization strategies. This is not to say that the space was uncontested; the *Ladder* contains multiple contradictions and inconsistencies typical of the discussions of a diverse and heterogeneous community, often played out in letters from readers or in articles that responded to each other to produce a dialogue. As well, the magazine content offers insights into how ideas, values, and ways of thinking shifted over time. For example, the magazine’s response to society’s privileging of medical and psychiatric discourse changed over the years. In its early days, many in the community trusted the authority and merit of medical experts.

They believed that inaccurate information and a limited choice of research subjects resulted in skewed conclusions, but with better and fuller participation, a higher quality of data could emerge. In the first issue of the *Ladder*, a memorial for Dr. Kinsey honours him for his work and its advancement of “human freedom” (“Dr. Alfred Kinsey” 11). Directly below, an announcement states: “The Daughters of Bilitis is anxious to hear from any professional people desiring further information regarding our activities. [...] We wish to cooperate in any way possible to further knowledge of the Lesbian” (11). And many members did participate eagerly and with great persistence. Billie Tallmij, a pseudonymous member of the Daughters of Bilitis, remembers their efforts: “We thought it was very important for the women to be studied, so we banged at the door of the Kinsey Institute to try to get some kind of involvement, and we got it. They interviewed us as couples and individuals... Many of the women volunteered. That took real courage” (qtd. in Minton 175). However, by May 1958, members of the Daughters of Bilitis were showing their scepticism of the medical field. While still trusting in the ability of research evidence to do the work of progress, they decided to produce their own data. Florence “Conrad” Jaffy formed the research committee and they launched a survey of readers:

There has been much bitter comment that all the published data on Lesbians comes either from badly maladjusted women who have sought psychiatric help or from women in prison. It is high time information was collected and published covering all Lesbians, not just a few. *And apparently the only way to make sure this is done is to do it ourselves.* (“A Lesbian Questionnaire;” emphasis added)

Tired of waiting for studies that included a more representative sample of subjects, the leaders of the DOB and the *Ladder* used their internal expertise to launch their own study, the results of which were published in the September 1959 issue. A second study was launched in September 1963, this time with scientific validity, because it was led by New York psychiatrist, Dr. Ralph H. Gundlach. In 1965, a debate over the usefulness of research to the lesbian/homophile community took place between Conrad and Dr. Franklin Kameny of the Mattachine Society. In a series of lengthy articles over three magazine issues, Conrad supports the pursuit of research to make a case for the acceptance of homosexuality, while Kameny argues that research simply extends the sickness model of homosexuality and proposes the need for clear and “militant” social and political activism. These two viewpoints capture the evolving relationship of the lesbian and gay community to medical and psychiatric research studies, encompassing assent, acquiescence, resistance, and rejection.

Although the previous interactions demonstrate how members of the DOB had a sense of agency over how to frame and construct a dialogue with mainstream society, the same medical discourses and the repressive climate of the 1950s and 1960s produced anxiety, isolation, and a fear of discovery for lesbian-identifying women. Many writers and readers engaged in self-scrutiny about their lesbianism, including how it impacted them psychologically, and this was manifested in their preferences, tastes, and physical appearances. Personal accounts and stories represent individuals’ anxieties about their internal feelings and desires, which were often crushing and silencing, especially for those in places without a physically local

community. In literary submissions, themes of isolation and loneliness were prominent, and letters from readers emphasized both their seclusion and their excitement at finding the *Ladder* and the community it implied. Privacy and anonymity were also seen as a necessity. Del Martin, one of the founders of the DOB and the *Ladder*, described the atmosphere at the first discussion groups organized by the DOB:

Everybody was scared. They were afraid. They could be arrested, they could lose their jobs, they could be picked up by their families and if they were still underage, parents would, if they found out about them, send them to a shrink immediately or institutionalize them. And there was a lot to be afraid of-it wasn't just paranoia. It was just after the time of the McCarthy hearings and a purge of homosexuals from the State Department, and of course, there were all these purges of the Armed Services. (qtd. in Soares 31)

With so much at stake, the majority of writers for the *Ladder* protected their identities through the use of pseudonyms. In announcements and editorials, the magazine regularly assured readers that their names were safe and that the mailing list was protected ("Your Name" 4-6). Although the magazine did appear on some public newsstands in the mid-1960s, mail-order copies were sent out in plain brown wrapping to shield the contents from prying eyes and to protect the magazine from the mail censors, a practice that would later prompt Rita Mae Brown to title her 1976 collection of essays *A Plain Brown Rapper* [sic] (Soares 34). This was a period of acute constraint and crisis for gays and lesbians; except for those fortunate individuals who had accepting families or employers, discovery of one's

homosexuality could result in the loss of one's job and destruction of one's career, ostracism from family and friends, loss of parental rights, psychiatric evaluation, and hospitalization. The constant threat of discovery produced this historical moment as one of crisis, constrained by external pressures, and marked by fear and the potential for loss.

Affect and Emotion

It is this sense of pressure and crisis that contributes to the extraordinariness of the fiction and poetry in the *Ladder*, to the ways that it operated to expand understandings of identity, romance, friendship. Just as depictions of ordinary people were central to the textual work of early European print culture (Hunt 30), the ordinariness of lesbians in the *Ladder's* literature creates a sense of intimacy for readers. Fiction and poetry focus extensively on the ways that the narrators and characters feel, often highlighting internal emotional landscapes as settings for the unfolding narratives. Frequently, these poems and stories contrast intense feelings and emotions with backdrops of quotidian activities, emphasizing the extraordinariness of queer emotional struggle in the everyday. Two quotations open this introductory chapter; one is taken from a short story published in 1956 and the other from a letter to Del Martin from Barbara Grier. Together they foreground emotion in two ways: in the first, a protagonist's emotional turmoil articulates the experience of lesbian attraction; and, in the second, emotion is figured as nourishment and a reason to continue publishing stories and poems in the *Ladder*. In both cases, emotion is constructed as a private and individual experience. The character in the story experiences a rush of conflicting feelings and bodily responses

as a result of her attraction to another woman. The hearts of the magazine's readers are imagined as fulfilled through the individual and intimate act of reading lesbian literature. However, affect is also felt publicly; it operates as an organizing system or structure within the social, permeating all aspects of how we think, move, value, and know things, both inside and outside ourselves. In the cases above, affect slides out of the personal and intimate settings into which it is cast and circulates in very public ways. Emotional representations in literature and affective resonances of literature impact readers in terms of how they think about themselves, their bodies, their responses, and in how they know and engage with the world. Affective circulations engage with public discourses that produce certain kinds of knowledge to construct a space of negotiation and the (re)production of other *kinds* of knowledge and other *ways* of knowing that move outside and across the legitimated pathways of knowledge production. For a nascent community that was emerging into social and political being and for individuals who were navigating the fraught territory of sexual identity in a politically and socially conservative era, these critical movements of affect and emotion are not limited to personal and individual self-knowledges and re-constructions of identity but are attached to and intersect with questions of belonging and the intensely affective concepts of citizenship and nation, home, and family.

Affect in literature has been important in discussions of certain groups of texts, such as late-nineteenth century sensation fiction, in which scholars have generally considered how emotional evocations in readers through literature have produced shifts in thinking about politically contentious issues like slavery and

racism, the condition of women, and women's rights. For example, in *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argues that the "cultural work" of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* moved readers, through structural repetitions and character-types, to perceive the sufferings caused by slavery and to take a stand against its wrongs (xv; 130-135). Faye Halpern notes that Stowe was intent on producing pictures through her writing, images that would impact the hearts of readers much more directly than words could (40). Relying primarily on the influential power of morally good women located in domestic spaces, the goal of sensationalism was to bring abstract and distant political discussion into the homes, bodies, and hearts of fictional characters and their readers. Lynne Hunt argues that the explosion of print culture in the late eighteenth century, and particularly the proliferation of stories about ordinary people, produced "imagined empathy," the ability to imagine that another person is like you (30-31). Drawing on Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined community," Hunt credits new experiences of reading with constructing a new social context and understanding of political and social life. In particular, she notes that epistolary novels, such as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747/8), and Rousseau's *Julia* (1761), were critical to this process because they foregrounded inner feeling and produced the possibility of identification across class and gender by "creating a sense of equality and empathy through passionate involvement in the narrative" (39). As these scholars demonstrate, emotional appeals to readers produce connection, understanding, and empathy, particularly in cases where certain groups or categories of people have been marginalized or dehumanized, by compressing and distilling complex political issues into concrete

fictional and autobiographical embodiments that are relatable and familiar (Cvetkovich, *Mixed* 33). However, the affective construction (and self-construction) of certain bodies appeals to already-legitimate and socially dominant subjects. These acts of synecdoche do the critical work necessary to translate subordinated bodies into legible forms, to shape them as *alike* or *the same as*, at least in certain ways. They enable those with power to feel on behalf of others, to connect through emotional pathways, even to “go slumming” in order to read and interpret others’ experiences as familiar. Of course, the vicariousness of “slumming” brings a host of issues, including further subordination, subjection, and the reinforcement of the unequal power dynamic that is at the centre of this move.

Where sensation fiction produces the possibility for empathy and legitimization in certain contexts, the fiction and poetry of the *Ladder* engage in a different kind of work. Because these pieces were written by readers for other readers, by and for members of the community that was collectively engaged in a struggle for self-legitimization, the affective work of this fiction and poetry cannot be framed in the same way. The writing and textual circulations of the *Ladder* can be better understood as constituting particular ways of being, the enacting of an affective community. Produced by and for readers, and negotiated by those same readers in printed discussions, affect is not engaged in the work of changing the hearts and minds of dominant society, but rather in enabling new ways of being and doing lesbianism and queerness that produced hope and futurity for a community constrained by hegemonic social structures and dominant medical discourses. Michael Warner describes the reflexivity and circularity that is critical to the

production of discursive networks, what he calls publics and counterpublics. Publics as “social entities” are self-organized; they are constituted by members’ recognitions of themselves in certain texts, and by their engagement and interaction with those texts (12, 67). The formation of a public is always an act of becoming; members are unknown to each other, but come to identify with each other, or to identify in common ways, as they recognize themselves in specific texts and discourses, which are always read against a background of other texts and discourses (12). Although the text addresses an imagined public or “autotelic” public, the public is, in fact, produced or constituted by the text(s) that imagine it (67). Similar to Althusser’s hail, members of the public turn in response to the address they recognize themselves in. Unlike Althusser’s example, however, the address is neither specific nor individual; rather, it is indefinite and the members of the public must find themselves within it. This opens up a plurality of subject positions or relationships within the public network (77). In this sense, the public is also performative; its collective action is a form of “world-making” wherein it articulates the world it intends to construct and circulate within (Warner, *Publics* 122).

Publics belong to the larger social world, but counterpublics are defined by their position against a larger public. They provide a place where discussion and critique occur through networks of print or media, and through which subcultural identities are formed and reformed (57). The readers of the *Ladder* can be read as a counterpublic, as a network of people who were resisting and pushing against the dominant discourses of homosexuality and lesbianism that constructed them as sick and socially deviant. Warner describes publics and counterpublics as constituted by

and through discourse, but he also notes the ways that they mediate affective relations by constructing a space where meanings and values associated with gender and sexuality can be navigated and negotiated in order to (re)construct social relationships and cultural engagement. A counterpublic can produce new ways of doing or living gender and sexuality; it can create new worlds that re-make “intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy,” ultimately making possible “new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship” (57). Part of the work of the *Ladder*, particularly its fiction and poetry, was to imaginatively construct possibilities of lesbian friendship and intimate relationships against the constraints imposed by the dominant American social and political landscape. Many stories and poems open up pathways and spaces within existing and socially constrained locations of home, family, and the workplace for doing lesbianism as a set of future-oriented practices that include flirtation, romance, intimacy, passion, cruising, companionship, friendship, love, genderplay, and butch-femme dress and enactment.

Cvetkovich argues that the historical archive of lesbian knowledge is an affective archive. Lesbian texts provide access to a history of feeling that is coded into their contexts and into the practices that constitute their production and reception (*Archive 7*). Specifically, the lesbian archive is marked by the trauma of failed or denied citizenship, by the marginalization of lesbian bodies, by loss and oppression, by exclusion and omission, and by isolation and fragmentation (15, 241). However, this trauma can be productive and non-pathological, marking potential points of entry into the affective domain, which is critical to discussions of queer

subjectivity, queer relations, queer networks, and queer communities (3-7). Trauma provides access to the daily and lived experiences of lesbians functioning under the pressures and constraints of the closet, of homophobia, and of heteronormativity. Texts from the 1950s and 1960s are marked by intense pressures of discovery, of lost livelihood, of forced psychiatric treatment, of violence, and of ostracization. And yet, as Cvetkovich argues in *Mixed Feelings*, we must be cautious about framing writing of and about these feelings and affects as release valves in the way that Radway and Showalter do in their work on women's romance fiction and nineteenth-century sensation novels, respectively (36-39). Constructing affective liberation as political liberation can reframe political activity as talk therapy. This reframing shifts the goals of political action from transformation to articulation, thus making affective expression the end in itself rather than creating momentum for political activity (2, 39). In contrast, the insistent work of the *Ladder*, both its literature and its reportage, is movement. The *Ladder* moves the community forward through iterative constructions of identity and community, through heteroglossic discussions and negotiations of values and meaning, and by (re)producing affect as consciously queer and specifically lesbian.

It is critical to understand affect as a historical construction, linked with particular bodies in particular ways. This is Cvetkovich's project in *Mixed Feelings*; she shows how the historicity of affect is erased through its embodiment and naturalization, particularly in relation to gender, class, marriage, and social function. (2-7). And, just as the sensation novels of the 1860s and 1870s constructed affect as integral to middle-class femininity (2), the post-World War Two period re-

emphasized white, middle-class women as naturally caring and nurturing, most suited to the roles of wives and mothers (Vigiletti 61). When affect is constructed as natural, one of the implications is that some bodies are seen as closer to nature or more natural (Cvetkovich 35). To emphasize the home and family as central to American society, women were framed as the more emotional, more feeling sex, suited to the home instead of the workplace in roles where their natural proclivities for nurturing and caring could be fulfilled (D'Emilio 52). At the same time, however, women's passions, especially their sexual urges, could be quite potent once released. If not funnelled into legitimate outlets, they could become destructive to the woman and to society in general (Henry xii). The lesbian stands as a key example of the thwarting of women's natural instincts. In contrast to the normal woman, she is constructed as predatory, explicitly sexual, and violent (Caprio 303). While still linked to nature, the lesbian body is uncontrolled and uncontrollable. She is part of nature, but as a kind of destructive pestilence. Framed through discourses of disease and contamination, she is a contagion that must be halted and excised by the social in order to protect the "normal" woman, the family unit, and society as a whole. Lesbian-produced texts from the 1950s and 1960s engage with this construction by appealing to the very feeling and emotion that were integral to the constructions they were trying to dismantle. While there were attempts to speak back to power by asserting scientific and intellectual arguments, the fiction and poetry of the *Ladder* construct affective knowledge as a means of re-constituting the lesbian body as naturally occurring and *legitimate*. Examining what gets constructed as natural and

in what ways is critical to understanding the work of the *Ladder* and how its textual work constituted social movement.

If citizenship is traumatic for certain bodies when they are failed by the political public sphere, then the subsequent inadequacy of the private intimate sphere, described by Lauren Berlant as the compensation for this failure (Cvetkovich, *Archive* 15; Berlant, *Cruel* 2-3), compels marginalized subjects to establish themselves in counter relation to the dominant social domain (Cvetkovich, *Archive* 15). In other words, the trauma of exclusion and failed citizenship produces the forces that coalesce as a counterpublic. Remembering that trauma is not an extraordinary or extreme event, but instead is experienced in multiple quotidian moments and events (3-4), the counterpublic is, thus, always located in the ordinary and common everyday. Specifically, counterpublics are located in the time and place of their becoming; they are explicitly historical and social because they require attention and action from their members, which are then constituted as engagement and interaction with the social and textual landscape. Their temporalities are also constructed through the circularity of their textual networks and the unfolding of their intertextuality, so they produce their own organization of time, or a temporal framework, which contributes to their historicity (Warner 90, 96). To examine the lesbian counterpublic of the 1950s and 1960s that was constituted through a series of lesbian texts, primarily the *Ladder* and lesbian pulp novels, a large part of that examination must focus on the ways that affect or feeling constituted knowledge and self-knowledge, and how that knowledge was wielded against the dominant circulations of power and the legitimized knowledge fields of medicine, psychiatry,

and criminality. Under the acts or threats of marginalization and ostracism, lesbians produced multiple knowledges and (re)negotiated meanings, and they did this by asserting lesbian affect, feeling, and emotion as legitimate ways of being and knowing in the world. In their 1972 text, *Lesbian/Woman*, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon describe this: “For no book on the Lesbian can overlook the feelings, the thoughts, the self-image, the *beingness* of the woman who has adopted this as her life style” (9; emphasis added). Beingness is an act of perpetual becoming, a way of moving through the world, one that comprises both feeling and thought.

Similarly, it is helpful to recognize history as the continual movement of forces and counterforces, a series of interrelationships and moving parts. Rather than a still snapshot of a moment, history is a process of unfolding. Williams and Warner are unequivocal about this. For Williams, feeling organizes a social experience that is “in process” (132). He is interested in the historical moment as open and dynamic, structured through feelings and relationships that form and reform, always in reference to each other. This historical moment may not be recognizable later when it is fossilized or cemented into known structures; in other words, its workings may be elided and must be uncovered and unburied through textual evidence (132-133). Warner argues that publics and counterpublics are always engaged in acts of becoming. They move in a circular pattern with the discourse constituting the very publics they imagine, which interact with and enable that discourse. This circularity is critical to the creation of possibility for the public or counterpublic; to resolve the circularity is to close down that possibility (70). Whereas publics replicate the social order, counterpublics are transformative spaces; they are engaged in a process of

world-making that is inherent to their becoming process (122). Berlant and Warner recognize that, in world-making, the potentiality is not restricted to what is possible and concrete but is expansive in its constructions: it “includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright” (322). There are therefore two forces at play: a counterpublic is rooted in the ordinariness of everyday experience while it simultaneously reaches towards the unarticulated, the uncharted, the not seen and the not yet.

This sense of potentiality is critical to the work of the *Ladder* and the community of women who interacted with it as producers and readers. Historians have traditionally discounted the work of gay men and lesbians who organized during this period, attributing the spark of political will to the years following 1969, the era begun by New York’s Stonewall riots. Veronika Koller, for example, argues that lesbian texts of the 1950s demonstrate an uncritical adoption of dominant society’s beliefs about lesbian sexuality (4). She begins her study with texts of the 1970s, arguing that they renegotiated and redefined the definitions of lesbianism and heralded the lesbian community’s split from the gay community (37-38). However, Koller’s claims negate the critical acts of negotiation and subversion that writers of lesbian pulps and writers for the *Ladder* engaged in, while also ignoring the push against the gay male community that precipitated and sustained the organizing efforts of the Daughters of Bilitis and the work of the *Ladder* throughout the 1950s and 1960s. To locate the emergence of gay and lesbian political feeling and will solely in the gay liberation movements of the 1970s is to underestimate the

contributions of earlier queer organizing and community creation. It is also to treat history as bookended events instead of a chaotic network of forces that coalesce into a progression, not necessarily linear, but an unfolding web of linkages and effects. While the *Ladder* certainly promoted middle-class values and tried to police or control excessive or “deviant” behaviour, readers of the magazine spoke back to it in disagreement and dissent (D’Emilio 113-14). The magazine created a space for negotiation; it fostered the emergence of political consciousness, dissent, and resistance, and it made room for multiple voices and viewpoints. The *Ladder*, in other words, is the textual transcript of a community in process, recording discursive impulses and affective urges, documenting the becoming political.

Affect Theory

Affect studies constitute a broad and multidisciplinary field, one that is generally concerned with the ways that humans experience, physiologically and intellectually, the movements of feeling that are materially manifested in unconscious bodily responses. While there has been discussion about an “affective turn” in theoretical conversations since the turn of the twenty-first century, both Ann Cvetkovich and Sara Ahmed talk about their reluctance to adopt the phrase, and have each argued that thinking and writing about emotion has been part of feminist and queer theory for some time (Cvetkovich, *Depression* 3-4; Ahmed, *Cultural* 205). However, the turn towards affect in queer theory has been partially attributed to Eve Sedgwick’s taking up of Silvan Tompkins biological and psychological theories of affect in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader* (Leys 439). For

Tompkins, affect and emotion are distinct; affect is understood as non-conscious and asocial, while emotion is constructed as the interpretation or signification of that bodily experience. In other words, feelings that are experienced in the body are translated into emotion, which is framed as the act of interpretation, the conscious sense-making of the embodied subject in relationship to the world. Tomkins is interested in the body as a system and in the role that affect plays in a feedback system of pleasure and pain to produce decision-making pathways at the individual level (Sedgwick and Frank 34-36). He proposes an individual-universal body in order to establish the role of nine basic affects in human functioning. According to Tomkins, these affects are inherent; they are either self-rewarding or self-punishing (41), but the person can select to act or not act on their bodily responses (45). What the body experiences as sensation are “the aesthetic characteristics of the affective responses,” which cannot be reduced beyond their base, elemental qualities (41). Like the inherent qualities of colour – the redness or blueness of the colours red and blue – the specific qualities of any affect, such as anger, joy, fear, and excitement, cannot be described beyond how they are viscerally experienced (41-42). Tomkins’ work suggests that, at a basic level, all bodies operate in the same way regardless of their situatedness in social contexts. He discusses freedom as freedom of the body’s feedback system, which is generated by people’s ability to satisfy their wants (36), or more accurately, to feel things about anything and to be governed by those feelings (45-6), to accept or reject the self-rewarding / self-punishing feedback system.

Without reference to social order or context, Tomkins’ work constructs the individual as a self-determining creature who can learn to choose how to respond to

their body's affective responses. Addiction, for example, becomes a simply framed issue of "preference" for one object over all others (59). The individual's responses are connected to the social only at the place where they touch against external stimuli: a hot stove, a crying baby, the idea of Hell, a poem. Tomkins proposes a set of four "Images" or guiding principles that direct individual responses to external stimuli, which ultimately guide the individual's responses to stimuli, but which can be constrained by "interferences." So, for example, the first Image is that positive affect must be maximized, but it is constrained by two interferences: one, positive affects can be linked to negative affects through the threat of a negative consequence such as Hell; and two, the maximization of positive affect is self-punishing so that "the overly-hedonistic or narcissistic individual is necessarily doomed to failure and misery" (68). However, as these examples demonstrate, completely divorcing affect from the social is impossible; the social creates the very conditions that affect operates within. It constructs an affect like shame or fear in a particular and embedded context, such as in a Christian society where Hell is constructed as a real place or at least an overarching concept with realistic elements. Hedonism, also mentioned above, is itself based upon the moralizing of pleasure and sex, a moralizing that changes drastically across time and space so that the threat of "self-punishment" that constrains it can never stay the same. If the limitations or interferences of an Image are context-specific and socially constructed, can the primary affects Tomkins describes ever fully exist before or outside those same cultural frameworks? If joy is joy and fear is fear, regardless of place and time, then the very experience of those affects impacts how the individual reads, experiences,

and lives culture. Indeed, culture impacts how that individual reads, experiences, and lives the affective experience.

Tomkins' research elucidates the workings of affect at the individual bodily and subconscious levels. Although he does not frame it in this way, his description of affect as an internal feedback system functions is a useful explanation of how individuals internalize the rules of the social and cultural sphere, either by accepting or resisting the internalized rewards or punishments that are felt below or before language. Lauren Berlant describes the attachment of individuals to the fantasy of the "good life," a fantasy that promises social advancement, financial reward, romantic fulfillment, and familial happiness (*Cruel Optimism 2*). However, when the "good life" fails to materialize, its pursuit does a disservice to the individual by substituting the pleasure of the optimistic pursuit for the cruelty of its impossibility. This obstinate pursuit of the "good life" is an affective pursuit. The attachment to and striving towards the ideals and objects of the "good life" are self-rewarding in a way that cannot be easily explained, especially when the pursuit causes injury to the individual and produces their unhappiness in other ways. In part, because the ideals and objects of the "good life" are conflated with concepts of gender, sexuality, class, family, and belonging, the pleasure of their promise sustains the attachment despite its negative affect. Ultimately, the inculcation of the individual into normative structures, into what Williams calls "structures of feeling," results in the individual adopting, absorbing, and internalizing the values and priorities of the social field. The social, then, exercises power over the individual through the affective feedback system, transforming its regulatory machinations into bodily sensations that

reward/motivate and punish/constrain the individual *as though they were* innate, biological, and distinct from those same cultural and social structures of power.

Located in the social, affect is bound up with time and place, experienced in particular lived bodies and in relationships between subjects. For Bertelsen and Murphie, affect is critical to the very manifestation of the social. They define two types of affects: “categorical affects” and “vitality affects” (139). While the former are closely aligned with Tomkin’s version, with those affects that we have named as primarily unconscious bodily surges or responses, the latter are subjective; they represent changes in what the individual subject feels and so are both temporal and social. Changes in affect take up time; they are movement from one affective state to another, as in the real-time transition from tears to a smile (146). Changes in affect are also the result of relations between subjects (147): a comment that creates levity moves the recipient out of sadness and provokes a smile, which in turn affects the person who made the comment. The affective loop moves subjects, and it moves between subjects. Subjects literally move through various states of feeling and being, compelled towards action or pulled from it. At the same time, affect opens and closes the distance between subjects, bringing them closer together and moving them apart. The subject is connected to the social through lived affective experiences that are located in time and embedded in specific social contexts. Affect, therefore, constitutes and is constitutive of social relationships, forming the very material of relationships between embodied subjects.

The tension between the individual and the collective is important to theorizing the ways that affect produces social change. Individual subjects who are

addressed by and respond to the discourse of a counterpublic constitute its very structure. But, while individual response and engagement are critical, it is the movement of the membership as a collective that enables the counterpublic to be read. Similarly, affect and feeling are individually experienced sensations, but they collect and pool into a collective movement that engages social structures and discourses. Seigworth and Gregg suggest that affect collects as a record of interrelatedness, a record of the ways that bodies interact and engage with other bodies or fail to do so. This record is the body's response to the social, and even though it cannot be fed back to the social through conscious articulation, affect is produced in the body as a result of its social interactions (2). Affect internalizes the social but in a way that is inaccessible to the subject's conscious knowing. What is often described as *common sense* is feeling as knowledge. The feeling is common, shared among many, and is typically aligned with dominant social ways of doing, feeling, and thinking, giving this affective knowledge greater credence and legitimacy. Evidence is not required beyond "*this is just the way it is*" and "*everyone knows it.*" On the other hand, "gut feeling" that runs contrary to common sense is also known in the body and *felt to be true*. This knowledge is framed as suspect, described as intuition or sense because it runs contrary to accepted evidence or knowledge. Usually, it also pushes against the grain or runs contrary to normative social operations, values, and beliefs. Feeling as knowledge – or felt knowledge – is knowing something to be true because of the ways that a body and a subject has interacted with other bodies and subjects in the world. Felt as embodied, as detached from the social field, it is in fact the opposite: an internalization of social

relationships, interactions, rituals, discourses, oppressions, freedoms, values, and beliefs.

While felt truth can become entrenched by virtue of its embodiment and non-discursive existence, because it is felt rather than consciously acquired, it can also produce change across individuals and communities. If the social is internalized within the individual as affect, likewise the individual feeds back into and affects the social. Individual departures from and resistances to normative structures can be read as the individual's resistance to elements of the reward/punishment feedback system, as a pushing back against power structures, and as shifts or fissures in the social that are felt in the individual. In queer communities, the materiality of this affective record traces and documents the ways that queerness manifests in physical, emotional, and intellectual relationships between bodies both within and without those communities or counter-publics. Cvetkovich acknowledges the centrality of affect to queer archives, describing the ways that feeling is part of queer history and must be uncovered and preserved. Queer history is affective history, written through bodily experiences of loss, love, oppression, violence, desire, and sex (*Archive* 241). The ways in which bodies are affected by emotion is taken up in various ways by Sara Ahmed over a number of texts, beginning with *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Ahmed considers the ways that emotion works to constitute the surfaces of bodies, both through repeated actions and through how we are turned toward and away from each other by different feelings (4). Rather than theorizing what emotions are, she is interested in the work that they do, and she conceptualizes emotions as moving between and across bodies, sometimes sticky and sticking, moving and

shaping those bodies through and within cultural spaces (4-5). Ahmed's work on affective relations is critical to my project; emotion is bound up with discourse, embedded in the relation between signs and bodies. She argues that affect is not produced rhetorically, but rather through the ways that certain words and terms become "sticky" or "saturated" with affect so that "language works as a form of power in which emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way they move us" (194-195). Emotions operate as kinds of bonds that attach us in varying degrees to values, ideas, other bodies, and spaces, constituting "affective relations" (196) and requiring work to re-constitute those relations, such as, for example, in social justice work or in producing the bonds of queer community against the normative framework of a dominant society.

Over the next several chapters, this dissertation will uncover and examine the affective record inscribed in the *Ladder*, a text that represents the early political and social movement of a group of lesbian-identified women whose affective relations and affective productions constituted the values and constructions that both rooted and fuelled their early political beliefs and activities. The *Ladder* offers two lenses into lesbian history of this period. Its reportage documents the political activities and discourse of the Daughters of Bilitis, some of the activities of the male homophile movement represented through One Inc. and the Mattachine Society, as well as key events affecting queer individuals and groups in the wider community. These events and activities, and the language that represents them, are affective, encompassing the injuries, frustrations, fears, hopes, successes, and triumphs of queer work and activism. However, the fiction, poetry, and literary discussions in the magazine offer

a different record, one that primarily registers intimate and personal physical and emotional relations, affective shifts and movements, and impulses and urges that indicate queer hope and potentiality. While the former is a record of things that happened, the latter documents ways of knowing and doing queerness, experiments in relations and emotions, representations of lived experience, and dreams of alternate realities.

In chapter two, I examine the way that value and the “good lesbian” is produced in relation to dominant social norms by the DOB in the social and political work of the *Ladder* in its early years, from 1956 to 1962. Using Ahmed’s discussion of happiness and Barthes’ theory of textual pleasure, I demonstrate the ways that poems and stories resisted normative pressures by producing space in the “queer cruise.”

Chapter three engages with feelings of strangeness and it considers the figure of the stranger as both a figure of identification and a figure of interruption. By examining two groups of texts, one group from the first years of the *Ladder* (1956-1958) and another group from its later years (1968-1972), I show how feeling strange both produced the intersubjective recognition necessary for lesbian identity and produced the queer bonds that are necessary for lesbian community.

In chapter four, I explore romance stories in the *Ladder* across the tenure of the magazine to show how the production of queer romantic affect is always bound up with feelings of death, loss, and ending. I argue that these attendant feelings are generative of the “failure” that enables queerness (Halberstam), and they offer connections to queer community in the present and into the future.

Chapter Two: Happiness and Pleasure: Constructing Value in Lesbian Lives

“What happens to the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?” – Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 5.

As the publishers of the *Ladder*, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) were deeply concerned with how lesbians were represented in mainstream society. To push back against dominant discourses of deviance, disease, and criminality, they established value in lesbian bodies by engaging medical, psychiatric, and legal experts in public discussion groups, by inviting them as speakers, and by critically reviewing their books. From September 1956 to January 1963, the editorship of the *Ladder* was split between Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, respectively, who were partners and two of DOB’s founders. Under their leadership and across the first seventy-six issues of the *Ladder*, the DOB’s values of education and acceptance were particularly prominent, and issues of representation were seen as significant to how lesbians would be treated by the heterosexual community. Lyon and Martin routinely rely on “objective” evidence of lesbian health and stability by turning to medical and psychiatric experts who share part or all of their views. Research projects, produced independently and in partnership, aim to support their assertions that the majority of lesbians lived perfectly ordinary American lives. Editorials and articles re-frame lesbian bodies as normative, emphasizing female appearance in dress, hair, and behaviour. Extended commentary about accurate portrayals of lesbians in the magazine often sounds like regulation, a policing of lesbian representation that establishes what is and is not acceptable to drive the community’s goals and pursue a lesbian public good. Writers who are often speaking as representatives of the DOB assume a level of authority for determining value, for arbitrating what will produce

the most *good*, and for defining what that *good* looks like for lesbians in the United States.

To claim lesbian bodies and lives against the assertions of a medical and political system that insisted on their denigration and repression, the DOB find and inscribe value in lesbian love and lesbian lives. In the *Ladder*, the question of value emerges and circulates through multiple, sometimes contradictory, conversations, and it is expressed in several critical ways. One key strategy is to make visible the ways that lesbian lives meet standards of dominant social value – where they work, how they live, the longevity of their relationships, their health and mental stability, and their normal appearance. Aligned and sometimes integrated with this strategy, the *Ladder* also produces rhetorical and affective linkages with American values such as family, productive work ethic, and individualism. These moves counter the notion that lesbians are maladjusted and disruptive members of society and attach markers of validity and legitimacy to their lives. Value is not a neutral concept, but is constructed through integrated economic, social, cultural, and ideological frameworks. To move lesbians towards social acceptance, the *Ladder* draws heavily on the dominant values of mid-century America as a way of claiming space and legitimacy within the nation. The DOB knew the realities facing homosexuals in American life: discrimination in housing and hiring, dismissal from military service and employment, and arrests and prosecution for various coded charges like “presence in a disorderly house” (D.S. 21). Del Martin, for example, received a letter from a friend, Terry, dated January 2, 1957, which reads:

[...] please do all you can to keep the next issue of the magazine from being sent to Marion [redacted]. There is a big investigation going on at the Fort and she is quite involved. [I]t is possible also, that she and others may be ousted from the army. I need not add the charge. (Terry n.p.)

This letter demonstrates that investigations and purges were so familiar that Terry did not need to explain the investigation or name the charge for Del, and it suggests that there might even be a danger for Marion in her doing so. And yet, in spite of such threats and pressures from the authorities, the DOB reference and claim American mainstream values to advance the lesbian movement. Martin ends her editorial in the *Ladder's* first issue with this rallying of readers: “Why not discard the hermitage for the heritage that awaits any red-blooded American woman who dares to claim it?” (7). Her question connects back to an earlier paragraph in her essay in which she credits the “courageous crusade of the Suffragettes and the influx of women into the business world” for winning “the right to vote and the right to a job and economic security” thereby “attain[ing] this heritage” (7). She suggests that, as American women, they must fight for what is rightfully theirs, for their full civic participation in society, and that being American women is what makes them “courageous,” daring, and “red-blooded,” and also what connects them to this legacy of sisterhood. Alignment with the suffrage movement is particularly significant since women campaigning for the vote were often cast in opposition to ‘normal’ women who were naturalized as wives and mothers in the domestic sphere. (Davis; Allen). The pervasiveness of ‘normal’ characterized much of American life in the 1950s and 60s and helped to establish the values of that period related to gender, family,

productivity, and health. The *Ladder* adopted these values, as Elyse Vigiletti argues, to produce a framework of normality that operates like a kind of “lesbian how-to manual” (61). But they also adapted these values to their own purposes, using them to invest lesbians with value, and to re-cast them as legitimate and legible subjects in America.

It is important to frame these discursive moves in the context of the period, produced in response to and under the traumas imposed by a system that denied, silenced, and threatened lesbian existence. The recovery of positive feeling and possibility by individuals under such constraints constitutes the essential work of survival and resistance; good feeling and feeling good can be acts of quiet revolution. And yet, good feeling is filled with contradictions. Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed write about the complicity of happiness in preserving normative social structures that privilege certain bodies and deny others. In this chapter, I build on the work of Ahmed, Berlant, Michael Warner, and Roland Barthes to contrast *happiness* with *pleasure*, arguing that the former is closely associated with the drive towards normativity and social integration, and the latter is produced out of the contradictions and fissures of the specific historical moment as captured in the textual complexities of the *Ladder*. I argue that good feeling is produced through various strategies as the necessary work of the *Ladder*, but it more regularly emerges as a push toward happiness, a desire to be in line with or visible within dominant social structures, a position more easily available to some than others. Pleasure, however, also emerges through the *Ladder*, and it performs the work of creating spaces for lesbian possibility and the opening of the constrained present into a space of transformation.

Producing value and the “good lesbian”

The question of value helps establish why and how certain lives and bodies matter over others, and what is important for people in a particular moment and place. Value is naturalized, embedded in objects and people so that their value or lack of value is rarely critically examined or questioned, and often not even consciously acknowledged. Drawing on the extensive work of Sara Ahmed, I argue here that value is affectively produced by our attachments to certain ideals or objects out of our alignments with or orientations to those objects. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed describes the ways that emotions attach to objects and bodies to create proximity and distance in how we feel about and relate to certain people and things. In her examination of how emotions move and function politically, she questions the “inside-out” and “outside-in” theories of emotions that have produced historical understandings of how feelings and emotions move (*Cultural* 9). In critiquing the “inside-out” psychological framework, she argues that emotions do not belong to us; they are not produced out of our interior selves and then delivered outwards towards others (9). Nor are they created by and in the social body and entering us in such a way that we become affected by them, and are thereby bound to the social body and to each other (9-10). Instead, Ahmed suggests that emotions create the very sense of boundaries and surfaces that establish or help produce what is inside and outside. In other words, emotions produce surfaces of people and things in the sense of their relationality or contact-points, how they impress upon each other, and how they are seen and read by each other. As objects circulate, emotions attach to them; the stickiness of emotion helps to generate how people and things

interact by moving people towards certain things and away from others, and by putting things in relation to each other. (10-11). For example, emotions can draw people towards us, even almost into us in our most intimate of relationships like those of parent and child, or lover and lover. Emotions also turn us away from people, creating distance and hardening our boundaries.

The production of value through the stickiness of emotion emerges when objects of cultural or social focus “become sticky, or saturated with affect [because they are] sites of personal and social tension” (11). Consider Williams’ work on structures of feeling, where sites of affective concentration move and shift in social and historical moments, becoming fixed or fossilized retrospectively. In the same vein, Ahmed draws on Marx to discuss how “emotions accumulate over time, as a form of affective value” (11). The histories of the activity and work of emotional production and accumulation are erased or glossed over, leaving only the concentration or fossilization of emotion as something fixed or naturalized in the object (11). Value appears to “belong” to some things and some bodies more than others. When Del Martin, in her first message to the readership, invokes the suffragettes, she relies on their reified value in American society, particularly among women, to establish value by association for lesbians and their fight for acceptance. The contemporary valuing of the work of the suffrage movement, however, elides the ways in which the suffrage movement frequently relied on discourses of race to advance the rights of white women (Beer 2-4). Similarly, Martin constructs a hopeful future space against other bodies by creating distance from bodies without value. She asserts that “[h]omosexuality is not the dirty word it used to be” (7), and she directly

attacks negative traits associated with lesbianism that come from medical and pathological models of homosexuality, such as masculinity. Through the concept of “solidarity,” she discards the image of the lonely lesbian who is afraid of discovery and, in its place, establishes a sense of a connected and supportive network of lesbians who are engaged in an active and positive program for improvement. In the final paragraph, her question is intended to be rousing: “Why not discard the hermitage for the heritage that awaits any red-blooded American woman who dares to claim it?” (7). The word “heritage” comes from “inheritance” and connotes a passing down of culture and history and ownership through birthright (OED), suggesting that there is an already existing history and chain of succession that lesbians can and should access. Placing this imagery of tradition and succession within the historical moment of the United States when the civil rights and full citizenship of Black Americans were being denied can be read as a reinforcement of the privileges attained through the historical and “legitimate” inheritance of citizenship. This is reinforced by the term “red-blooded American,” which has multiple racist associations in American history (Fleegler; Lizzi), and which evokes American historical definitions of race through the “one-drop rule” (Hickman; Washington). Investments of value have specific histories that are elided in their inherence or naturalization; therefore, investigating how value was constructed for the lesbian body requires excavation of the contexts and associations of value that are taken for granted as part of this process.

In the *Ladder*, the investment of value in lesbian bodies becomes either amplified or diminished depending on their associations with particular social norms.

Writers in the magazine often refer to “types” of lesbians to describe those they see as “other” to themselves, for example: “objectionable types” (B.G 12) and “obvious types” (“Aldrich Walks” 16). This classifying language establishes a dichotomy between “two classes of homosexuals – the well behaved and stable, and the exhibitionist and unstable” (Hales 12), with the latter typically represented as “bar-hoppers” (D.G. 9) and “mixed-up kids who look like men and aren’t” (G.K. 30), and the former represented as respectable and well-adjusted: “I’m a healthy citizen who contributes to the welfare of the community” (A.T. 11). As the *Ladder* pieces together, through various articles and editorials, a composite portrait of the lesbian it calls readers to aspire to, it also sketches out a picture of her opposite, the lesbian the DOB hopes to convert or leave behind, one who taints and troubles what they are working to achieve.

In his book, *The Trouble with Normal*, Michael Warner draws on a 1984 essay by Gayle Rubin in which she diagrams the hierarchy of sex to describe how certain conditions of sexual activity produce that activity as either bad or good. Two lists labelled, respectively, “The Charmed Circle: Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexuality” and “The Outer Limits: Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned Sexuality” contain two contrasting series of adjectives:

Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed

Heterosexual
 Married
 Monogamous
 Procreative
 Noncommercial
 In pairs
 In a relationship
 Same generation

Bad, Abnormal, Unnatural, Damned

Homosexual
 Unmarried
 Promiscuous
 Nonprocreative
 Commercial
 Alone or in groups
 Casual
 Cross-generational

In private
No pornography
Bodies only
Vanilla

In public
Pornography
With manufactured objects
Sadomasochistic

(Rubin 160)

While Rubin lists these characteristics in two distinct columns, she notes that many of the “bad” characteristics can be enough to push a sex act into the territory of the damned. She argues that a firm line is typically drawn and enforced between good kinds and bad kinds of sex, and it appears to stand between “sexual order and chaos.” However, she also acknowledges that there can be contested spaces in between that emerge from the influence of “good” characteristics over “bad” (161). When her essay was written in the 1980s, she listed “long-term, stable lesbian and gay male couples,” “unmarried heterosexuals,” and “promiscuous heterosexuals” as existing within this contested space (161). Warner produces two figures—“the good gay” and “the bad queer”—from Rubin’s schematic, arguing that the good gay is never free of its darker shadow, the bad queer (*Trouble* 114). Embedded in these two figures is the move to separate gay identity from sexual activity, and Warner extends Rubin’s argument by showing that the distinction between “being” and “doing” has been critical to the establishment and progression of gay and lesbian identity politics as an attempt to reduce the stigma of homosexuality (28-29; 31). The tension between the “good gay” and the “bad queer” troubles the work of the DOB and the *Ladder*. The DOB focus on ways of being lesbian, distancing the lesbian from sexual activity by constructing her as a respectable figure in common with mid-century heterosexual women, and by enacting a series of moves to attach lesbianism to values that were central to mid-century American culture. Although these moves attempt to push

lesbianism into Rubin's concept of contested space, the "good lesbian" remains haunted by the "bad dyke" who exerts pressure from two directions, from the sexologist's constructions of bodily difference and disease, and from contemporary lesbians who refused conformity in a variety of ways. The "good lesbian" is invested with a great deal of emotional tension; as she circulates through the pages of the *Ladder*, she is accompanied by and invested with rhetorics of nationhood and citizenship, domesticity, normativity, and, ironically, heterosexuality. Each of these holds affective weight in 1950s and 1960s America and are key to the production of value in and for the lesbian.

Sketching the "common, garden-variety Lesbian"⁵: Research as a corrective

In 1965, a duel over the usefulness of research to the homophile community took place through a series of articles written by Florence Conrad of DOB⁶ and Dr. Franklin Kameny⁷ of the Mattachine Society of Washington. Three articles, two by Kameny and one by Conrad, appear in the *Ladder* addressing homosexuality as a disease and questioning the degree to which research can help the homophile movement. Kameny agrees that research has been and can continue to be beneficial, but he argues that those benefits are limited, and instead, it is time for the movement

⁵ From a notice for "Lesbian Questionnaire," *The Ladder* 2.9, June 1958.

⁶ Florence Conrad had served as the DOB's Director of Research since 1957, and she believed that that research could be instrumental in driving social change. She focused her efforts on promoting unbiased research and vetting potential researchers who wanted access to the membership of the Daughters of Bilitis (Gallo 45).

⁷ Dr. Kameny was a physicist and astronomer who had been fired from his position with the U.S. Government's Army Map Service in 1957. He petitioned that decision all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1961 and then directly to the Kennedy administration. The refusal of those bodies to hear his case transformed Kameny into a lifelong gay activist (Kameny and Long 9-18).

to “move away from the comfortingly detached respectability of research into the often less pleasant rough-and-tumble of political and social activism” (20). Conrad defends research as a critical activity, one that must be pursued to correct people’s perceptions of homosexuals as sick and to advance the movement (21). While Kameny proposed that most people think with their emotions when it comes to issues related to sex and sexuality (14), Conrad argues that they must have “SERIOUS, SOLID, DISCUSSION OF ISSUES, RATHER THAN EMPTY PROPAGANDA” (17; capitalization in original), and that “the homophile movement is not like a new brand of toothpaste which may be “sold” to the public by superficial promotion techniques” (18). Conrad’s assertion that research, grounded in science and objectivity, is in contrast with the emotional charlatanry of direct activism is a skewed one. As head of research initiatives for DOB, Conrad’s pursuit of and presentation of critical research projects draws on America’s attraction to the apparent solidity of research and science during this period, witnessed in the American middle-classes’ reliance on experts to hold steady the lines of normativity (May 29-30). As responses to the chaos of the war years and to the potential destruction inherent in the cold war, this dependence on research is more affectively motivated than rationally produced, arising out of fear and attachment to feelings of belonging and sameness (May 17, 104-105, 140-142; Creadick 9). The DOB’s attention to research, as outlined in its Statement of Purpose, is motivated by the same general aims of professional experts during this period: to enable people to cope with and adapt to their position and role in the world and to promote personal adjustment and adaptation to social problems or issues (May 17). Articles in the

Ladder referencing research pick up on the affective tensions surrounding the desire for normativity and the white middle class embrace of home and family as keys to stability and happiness (May 13, 16-17).

Research was a critical component of the DOB's mission, and in the first few years of the *Ladder*, the DOB invited a number of experts from the fields of medicine and psychiatry to speak on topics related to homosexuality. Within the first few years, it uncovered experts who advocated for the acceptance and integration of homosexuals. In a 1957 article, Dr. Blanche M. Baker advocates self-acceptance and self-improvement to readers, advising that "the homosexual will sometime be recognized" and that it is up to the lesbian to begin making a place for herself in the world (6). Dr. Baker became a friend to the DOB, writing multiple features for the *Ladder* until her death in 1961⁸. Another expert, Alice LaVere, who is described as a "personal adjustment counsellor," argues that the lesbian is only different from "the so-called normal heterosexual woman [...] in the choice of her love object" (8). LaVere criticizes the diagnosis of mental illness assigned to homosexuals, and she also condemns the range of treatments inflicted as both "crippling" and "practically useless" (8). Significantly, and perhaps because she is not a doctor but is reproving of dominant psychiatric views and practices, LaVere's credentials are highlighted in the centre of the article, inset within a bold black box. Her short biography notes her heterosexuality, which marks her as an objective outsider to the homophile community, as well as her international reputation and twenty-two years' experience,

⁸ Following her death in 1961, Dr. Baker was mourned in the magazine with a two-page memorial and tribute ("In Memoriam" 14-15).

which demonstrate that she has a solid background in psychiatric matters (8; see also Cutler 240-41). The majority of experts were not so well received, however. Carol Hales' review of Dr. Edmund Bergler's book, *Homosexuality: A Disease or Way of Life*, treats the book as an intensely unfortunate text which can only reinforce the views of "bigots and the prejudiced" (12). Hales encourages readers to see Bergler's views as a challenge to "renew and redouble their efforts in such a way as to completely disprove the things that Dr. Bergler has said about them" (13; emphasis in original). The limited recourse available to readers is to prove Bergler wrong by dressing and acting in ways counter to what he describes.

While other accounts of panel talks and speakers show that experts often met audience resistance, articles portray medical, psychiatric, and religious professionals stubbornly attached to the idea of the sick homosexual. Frustrated by the lack of resistance options available and in response to biases in research and textual records, the DOB moved to producing their own research. The first of their research initiatives was a survey of *Ladder* readers that was published in September 1959. Florence Conrad distributed the questionnaire to readers through 1958 and 1959, sending out 500 in total. She received a 160 in return, of which 157 were valid ("DOB Questionnaire" 4). The questionnaire is framed as a critical response to the circulations of misinformed and biased research about lesbians, and as an instrument that will establish a set of data that is more fully representative. An announcement for the coming questionnaire in the May 1958 edition of the *Ladder* declares: "It is high time information was collected and published covering all Lesbians, not just a few. And apparently the only way to make sure this is done is to do it ourselves" ("A

Lesbian Questionnaire” 9; emphasis in original). The exigency expressed in this phrase speaks to the DOB’s frustration with the data record to this point, and the announcement positions the DOB’s work as equal to that of researchers who had, they argue, gotten it wrong. Through scientific research, framed as objective and neutral, the DOB re-positions the lesbian from shamed deviant subject to an empowered and expert agent of (self)knowledge.

Topics for questions in the survey provide some insight into what aspects of women’s lives are seen to matter in the context of lesbian identity; these areas of inquiry establish what is valued and what can produce value. There are three groupings of responses in the survey report: “Type of Group Represented” (“DOB Questionnaire” 5), “Family Background” (9), and “Personal History” (13). The first set of responses report on age, race, education, profession, and income, and they paint a picture of a group of established and financially independent women, almost entirely white, well-educated, and working primarily in professional and clerical roles. 82% had completed high school and 46% had four years of college, compared to 45% and 6%, respectively, of white American women overall, drawn from the 1957 Census Bureau figures for white females (6-7). On average, respondents were socially stable, displaying longevity in residence and employment, possessing good credit ratings, and holding memberships in professional, fraternal, and social organizations (8-9). The second set of results reference current psychoanalytic literature by delving into respondent’s family backgrounds. Most respondents disclosed “happy” upbringings and happy family lives in the present. About 40% of families were aware of respondents’ homosexuality, and 75% of this group accepted

this fact (12). The report found “surprising little [of] the disturbance usually thought to be associated with deviant personality development” (13). The final set of responses describe the group’s personal lives, specifically their homosexual/heterosexual identification (based on the Alfred Kinsey scale), friends and social lives, social habits, sexual lives, and adjustment. Answers indicate that over 90% of respondents identified as exclusively or mostly homosexual. Responses that pertained to emotional stability indicate that the group is generally at ease with and accept their sexuality, have relatively stable and durable relationships, tend to keep their sexuality private from co-workers, and are not interested in having psychotherapy (13-26). On the use of alcohol and narcotics, frequency of attendance at gay bars, and to what degree respondents identified as feminine, masculine, or neither, the report summarizes: “The group as a whole does not conform to the stereotype with respect to heavy drinking and continuous attendance at ‘gay’ bars. Their sex identification lends some, but not much, support to the stereotyped ‘butch’ picture” (26). The section concludes that this is “a group whose members consider themselves, on the whole, to be well-adjusted, a large majority of whom have not had, and do not want, psychotherapy,” adding that “durable relations, while not the rule in the group, are certainly not uncommon” (26).

The DOB questionnaire uses these indicators to construct a picture of the “real” lesbian against the flawed one in circulation. It celebrates qualities of Americanness that appear antithetical to the group it represents, but which were foundational to its work of pursuing general acceptance. Readers praised the DOB in the *Ladder* for completing the questionnaire project with a significant number of

responses, and for the quality of the reported results. B.G. of Kansas wrote a long response in the October 1959 *Ladder* that applauds the number of participants, happily notes the maturity of the median age of respondents (32 years), and comments in amazement on the level of parental acceptance reported. On the stability of lesbians, she writes: “So much nonsense has been written on the so-called ‘drifting’ characteristics of lesbians. Your study tends to show exceedingly high percentage (sic) of rooted people. [...] This partially dispels the myth of the sad lonely little queer who ‘knows’ her relationships will be brief and furtive” (B.G. 23; emphasis in original). This response, along with others, confirms that readers were invested in representing themselves as accomplished, healthy, happy, and stable. However, not all were convinced. J.W. of New York responds in the January 1960 issue:

I believe that these findings [...] are not conclusive. We know that this is only a small section of the Lesbian population of the United States. Not only is it a small percentage, but those answering the questionnaire sent to them are obviously of the higher type Lesbian [*sic*]. The alcoholics and the narcotic addicts were too busy doing other things to reply; that is why your findings are limited. (J.W. 26)

J.W.’s somewhat humorous response highlights a division within the emergent lesbian community. The DOB, and to a slightly lesser extent, the *Ladder*, resonated with middle-class readers who were interested in maintaining or increasing their places in society by exercising discretion and by advancing adjustment and acceptance. Language like “higher type Lesbian” asserted a sense of superiority over

“bar dykes” and those who “flaunt their homosexuality at society” (Bell 5). J.W. reminds us that outside the world created by the DOB, that of meetings and discussion groups, research surveys and book discussions, were a large group of “other” women whom the DOB frequently disparaged and generally viewed either as a cause to be taken up or as a lost cause to be hidden from public view.

The promise of the family

From the survey results, two key themes emerge: there is, first, a celebration of social productivity through education, career, and income; and, second, a celebration of social and sexual normativity, performed through positive familial relations, stable home situations, and secure romantic and platonic relationships. Although these two themes are somewhat distinct, together they construct a framework of value that links economic and social productivity to family and emotional relationships. Social productivity manifests the American mid-century capitalist ethos that defined itself against communism and established the comfortably prosperous middle-classes as the group to aspire to. Historian Elaine Tyler May draws important parallels between the middle-class family and capitalist American identity during this period, demonstrating how the domestic spaces of home and family were produced in response to the tensions of the cold war, as a way to create stability from chaos (24). She notes the high degree to which young married couples relied on family and psychological experts (30) who typically emphasized the family as the site where the psychological and sexual health of the family’s members was established (16). A healthy family was a productive family: the male

breadwinner provided economic stability, and the female housewife maintained the emotional and mental health of the family (86-87). Together, they composed the backbone of the American nation. The importance of the domestic and its associated gender roles to the strength of the American nation was evident in the 1959 American National Exhibit held in Moscow. There, Vice-President Richard Nixon and the President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Eric Johnston, displayed American domestic life to demonstrate American national superiority. In their depictions, the housewife, well looked after by her breadwinning husband, was supported in her duties by the wealth of consumer goods available to her, enabling her to maintain both her family and her femininity (22). American nationalism and citizenship are bound up with the family's capitalist productivity, purchasing power, and performances of gender normativity.

In addition to correcting the research record and laying a foundation for future research, the DOB questionnaire aimed to show that the kind of lesbian represented in the results was quite similar to the established "normal" American. In *Perfectly Average: The pursuit of normality in postwar America*, Anna Creadick states that the concept of normal was essential to and resonated within American discourse following the war and into the early 1960s. Normality was produced as the ideal reality that all Americans desired and aspired to, but it remained impossible and well beyond reach for everyone, even those who seemed to embody it (2). It is not the embodiment of normality that matters, however; aspiration towards and approximation of normality are what counts in producing the kinds of legitimacy that normal promises. In the 1950s and early 1960s, social legitimacy was closely linked

to one's Americanness. The intense nationalism that pervaded American society during the Cold War produced an intimate alignment between the American nation and the American person, including their home and family life. Creadick describes how American Studies departments enjoyed a golden age from 1945 to 1960 and helped to articulate the "American way of life" as part of the discourse battle of the Cold War (63-65). She writes: "Normalizing the nation meant that to be American was to be normal; to be normal was to be American" (65). The attachment to normality is to be drawn towards comfort, alignment, and fit. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed speaks about how the normative makes us feel. Heterosexuality, for example, is constructed affectively through the pervasive narrative that is told and retold in ordinary everyday activities and events (147). Consider the reproductions of heterosexuality in dating; in family structures; in the constructions of president/first-lady, king/queen, Santa Claus/Mrs. Claus; in figure-skating and ballroom dancing; in boy/girl line-ups in elementary schools; in celebrations of mother's and father's days; etc. To be comfortable is to fit into these narratives, to be at ease inside them because their spaces extend in ways that fit your body (148). Heterosexuality becomes "heteronormativity" as other norms begin to line up together, as heterosexuality overlaps with gender, class, race, ability, etc. (149). To be normal is to occupy heterosexuality in particular ways that are in line with social and cultural norms, which together produce and preserve social legitimacy and social structures.

The alignment of the personal and the social through normativity is elucidated in Lauren Berlant's discussion of the overlap between family and nation

in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*. She describes citizenship, a signifier of legitimacy in the eyes of the nation, as the national and personal that is performed in everyday personal spaces, transforming the “political public sphere” into the “intimate public sphere” (4). Rather than the troubled division of public and private, the “political public” and the “intimate public” name the incursions of the public into all areas of life. The “intimate public” sphere is a particularly apt description for how the family functioned in America during the Cold War as it draws attention to the layers of surveillance it was bound by: surveillance by the self, by relatives, by neighbours, and by the community that represented surveillance by authorities and by government. Berlant writes that citizenship is “a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere” (5). In the 1950s and 1960s, the conflation of family-member and citizen is produced from the ways that both are prescribed and enacted in the performance of family. Citizenship is produced in daily moments through gender performance, through the iterative production of the varied and overlapping roles of man/husband/father/son and woman/wife/mother/daughter. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed discusses Adrienne Rich’s work on “compulsory heterosexuality” and explicates “compulsory” to mean that “to become a subject under the law one is made subject to a law that decides what forms lives must take in order to be counted as lives ‘worth living.’ To be subjected is in this way to ‘become straight,’ to be brought under the rule of law” (84). Ahmed is talking here about the naturalization of heterosexuality rather than any force of law (84), what she calls elsewhere the “accumulative effect of the narrative of heterosexuality” where the

work of repetition conceals labour as nature (*Cultural* 145; Butler, *Gender* 191). To be a good citizen, to have value as an American, then, is to (re)produce a particular kind of family life by performing one's gender as a woman or a man in line with what is legible and legitimate.

The weight of normative enforcement and affective attachments that bring people in line with heteronormative family structures and accompanying gender performance demonstrates why literature and reportage in the *Ladder* frequently engages with constructions of family. The 1958 questionnaire celebrates the proximity of the lesbian to normality when it reports on the high numbers of lesbians who enjoyed good and happy family upbringings and on the relatively high numbers of families who know about and accept their lesbian members. These results respond to the experts who produce deviant homosexuality out of inadequate parenting and suggest that homosexuality is a result of a dysfunctional childhood home life (Terry 215-217). Beyond these mentions of family normalcy, the questionnaire alludes to the structure of heterosexuality in its framework. Its two themes – economic/social productivity and family/emotional relationships – blend masculine and feminine characteristics to produce a composite portrait of the lesbian. This connects to a set of rhetorical strategies illustrated by Marianne Cutler in her analysis of editorials and DOB-authored materials in the magazine. Cutler argues that DOB writers engage in three claim-making rhetorical strategies to establish legitimacy for the lesbian. The first two are “normalization,” which cast lesbians as heterosexual women, and “status-elevation,” which cast lesbians as men. In each strategy, DOB writers emphasize normative characteristics of women and men that produce the effects of

either normalizing lesbians to be like heterosexual women or showing them to be operating successfully in spheres normally dominated by men. Cutler suggests that these strategies were contradictory and ended up cancelling each other out, giving way to a third strategy, “individualization,” which cast lesbians as political citizens by emphasizing civil activities like voting and civic responsibility. Cutler’s paper is a valuable parsing of how awareness of normativity enabled a group of lesbians to construct lesbianism in ways that would produce value. Her focus on DOB-authored texts enables her to assign a level of rhetorical awareness to the writers, but it prevents an understanding of how well the strategies were received or how they operated alongside other material in the magazine. Because these texts were published with a number of other articles, stories, poems, and letters, which interacted monthly by prompting and responding to each other, it is important to consider how the *Ladder* as a whole engaged and projected normativity to construct value in the lesbian.

The *Ladder* featured a range of discussions that referenced different aspects of family: the couple at its centre, parents, and children. In each of these elements, the construction of a lesbian relationship replaces a heterosexual pairing in some form, producing a sense of sameness and parallelism that shifts the sense of the normal. However, in the relationships between parents and children, the expectations of heterosexuality are often at their most intense. Happiness becomes a condition of parental love that produces obligation in the child. The daughter’s happiness is what will make her parents happy, but her happiness is possible only through narrow, conventional means: the right husband, a good home, and children will produce the

kind of fulfilment that enables parental comfort (Ahmed, *Promise* 90-95). In these pieces from the *Ladder*, happiness is still expected as something expected by or owed to the parent(s), but substitutions for heterosexuality are possible. What are substituted, and the frameworks in which these substitutions are acceptable, say a great deal about what forms / performances of lesbianism are valued. In one article, “My Daughter is a Lesbian,” a contribution by Doris Lyles in the July 1958 issue of the *Ladder*, Lyles critiques the framework of normal directly. In a key paragraph, she describes the relationship her daughter has cultivated:

I will be very frank in saying that I am lucky in that she found a congenial, intelligent, loving and kind “mate” in this association of which I am aware but do not understand completely as a normal mother and wife. I do not like that word “normal” applied here, for there are no two more normal persons alive than my daughter and her charming associate. (4)

Lyles repeats the word “normal” in this short paragraph three times. First, she uses it as a self-descriptor so that she claims the credibility of being a wife and mother, of occupying normality, to enhance her position as speaker. But, she very quickly critiques the word as problematic by enclosing it in scare quotes and referring to it as “that word.” Her justification, that her daughter and partner are the most normal people alive, opens the word up to a radical new meaning for this era. At the same time the radicalness is tempered by her descriptions of both her daughter and her daughter’s associate. Her daughter is described in slightly more masculine terms. As a child she was “above average mentally and had very strong will power and determination” and is now “an intelligent, serious-minded daughter who holds a fine

position in a respected professional field” (4). On the other hand, her mate is “congenial, intelligent, loving and kind” as well as “charming” (4). The difference in adjectives is striking: the first set frame the daughter with descriptors that reference her solely, without any marker of her relations with others, aligning her with positive traits independent of lesbian relations. Along with the mention of her career, this description suggests the kind of status markers typically associated with men during this period. The second set of adjectives that describe her daughter’s partner are all, with the exception of intelligence, gendered female because they are framed in relationship with others: adjectives such as “congenial” and “charming” suggest that she makes efforts to put others at ease, to accommodate others in the way expected of women.

Despite her selection of feminine adjectives, Lyles never refers to the “mate” and “associate” as a woman nor does she refer to her with female pronouns. If this is to render the discussion more palatable for the nervous reader, the opening sentence of the essay seems to contradict that notion by being unambiguously direct: “My daughter is a Lesbian” (4). However, “lesbian” remains theoretical until it is brought into action with the materiality of two distinct women. By holding gendered pronouns back, the ambiguity of the pair, masked in masculine and feminine adjectives, produces the trace of heterosexuality without the stigma of butch and femme. The possibility of attaching stigma is further curtailed by Lyles’ gesture towards middle-class respectability: “I knew she would find someone of kindred tastes and lead a very circumspect life no matter what path she chose, for I knew my child and understood she could not be cheap and promiscuous, whether Lesbian or

heterosexual. This thought was a great comfort [...]” (4). Taste and watchful discretion are established as more important than the choice of love object.

Normativity is invoked in the certainty that Lyle’s daughter will exercise care in her relations, regardless of gender, that she will stay in line and not stand out so as to draw either shame or risk. Normativity is further invoked in the certainty of the mother’s knowledge of her child, in the intimate relationship that evolves from the mother’s role as nurturer and manager of the family’s emotional health.

Finally, in a move that is echoed in other writing in the *Ladder*, Lyles compares her life to her daughter’s to show that her daughter’s path was ultimately a superior one. Due to a domineering mother, Lyles says she made a foolish marriage and spent twenty years with a “congenital liar” and serial cheater (5). Because she gave her daughter independence as a child, her daughter is now self-reliant, and she has her “daughter’s love and loyalty---even to a greater degree than most mothers” (5). She describes later that when she “learned of her daughter’s ‘difference’,” again a word placed inside scare quotes to suggest that the difference is overstated, she “could think of a great many worse things, such as the unhappy twenty years of marriage” (5). The loss of self-respect she endured as a result of this unhappy marriage is “a fate far worse for a girl” (5). This paragraph produces a series of comparisons: of mothers, of marriages, of mother/daughter relationships, of happy lives. Lyles assigns value to the mother-daughter bond, which is, itself, an effect of heterosexuality, and she assigns value to making a good marriage match. However, she privileges her daughter’s happiness and health over the consequences to a woman in making a bad match with a man and ending up in a damaging heterosexual

marriage. The versions of normativity circulating in society elided such instances of broken ideals, but Lyles recovers the potential for harm in the failure of heterosexuality to fulfil its promises in mother-daughter and husband-wife relationships. In place of this failure, she produces the possibility of relations that support elements of normativity and which align with heterosexuality without fully fitting its frame.

In Ahmed's work on happiness, the happy family is an exemplar of a happy object; happy affects circulate around the happy object, affecting and moving people towards it, drawing them in with its promise of happiness (*Promise* 45). Especially in the 1950s, the family is a happy object associated with happiness, fulfilment, the good life. People are oriented towards it, and it orients people into happy heterosexual lines. These lines produce happiness as inheritance: "we are asked to reproduce what we inherit by being affected in the right way by the right things" (45). Doris Lyles' contribution to the *Ladder* is, in many ways, astounding for 1958: a mother writes a frank account of her daughter's lesbianism, stating her acceptance of both her daughter and her partner, calling herself "lucky" (4) for her daughter's choices and decisions, and arguing that her daughter is better off as a lesbian than she was as a heterosexual wife. Lyles' message is that homosexuality has not impeded their happiness as a family and has instead helped to enhance it: her happiness with her daughter's life and decisions matches her daughter's happiness with her own "full, rounded-out life of contentment and security" (4), and it matches the happiness in the relationship between them. Not only does their happiness as a family emerge from their proximity to the family as a happy object, as the thing that

represents the good life, but Lyles' daughter has been instrumental in producing that proximity after the failed promise of heterosexuality to do so. The inheritance that has passed from mother to daughter is not the reproduction of heterosexuality, but the reproduction of middle-class tastes and values that prevent her from being "cheap and promiscuous" (4). Instead, she is a respectable professional who exercises discernment in choice of partner, discretion in life, and whose relationship exemplifies normality in its alignment with heterosexuality.

The inheritance expectations of the happy family are explicitly queered in the short story, "The Yanks Are Coming" by Jay Wallace, who was a regular contributor of short fiction to the *Ladder*. Published in June 1961, it is set in the context of the first world war, and it describes the situation of Geraldine Daniels, her friend Louise Anderson, and the man pursuing Geraldine for marriage, Mr. Harwood. When the story opens, Louise is arriving for her annual visit and Harwood is heading off for war. It quickly becomes clear to the reader that Geraldine and Louise are lovers who wait ten months each year to be together for two. Louise asks Geraldine to join her in New York where she has just secured a position at a newspaper. Geraldine declines at first because her mother would not allow it, but she changes her mind when her mother directs her to begin working on her hope chest by saying, "Papa and I have decided that you should encourage [Mr. Harwood], and perhaps marry in another year or two" (9). The story does not portray Geraldine's immediate reaction to this instruction, but the instruction of parents to child is a transparent example of the reproduction of heterosexuality as a type of inheritance. How Geraldine responds is revealed in the next two scenes when an older, more confident, and well-dressed

Harwood returns to the Daniels' household after the war. Here, he encounters Mr. and Mrs. Daniels alone, and they provide a sequence of details about Geraldine's life now:

“And our little girl sends home money every single week...” [...]

“Yessir, our little girl doesn't forget the old folks; far away working on a big newspaper in New York City, but our little girl sends home money to her old folks every single week! Yessir!” [...]

“Never misses a week, Harwood, no sir! Every single week we get a letter and money from Geraldine; don't we Mama?” [...]

“[...] She's working for an executive you know, Mr. Harwood. She's secretary to this big newspaper man in New York City.” [...]

“Yes, Mr. Harwood, Geraldine has a fine position now. She started in the office, then went to some school there in the city; now she makes twenty-five dollars a week!” [...]

“Yes, Mr. Harwood, our little Geraldine is a career girl now. She shares an apartment with her old childhood friend, Louise Anderson.” [...]

“Oh, my, yes, they live together, sharing a very fine apartment in New York City; and they have a wicker set in the parlor... that's the very latest fashion, you know. And they own an automobile, a Ford.” [...]

“Why, yes. You've heard of Ford, haven't you, Mr. Harwood?” [...]

“Oh, yes, Geraldine and Louise own an automobile.” (11)

This rather lengthy series of quotes illustrates Geraldine's parents engaging in a kind of compensatory dialogue with the man they had hoped would be their daughter's

husband. Their emphasis on the details of her success – her weekly salary, fine apartment, wicker furniture, and Ford vehicle – suggests that they are invoking markers of social success to compensate for the loss of heterosexual inheritance promised by the family as happy object. Instead, other happy objects – a good car, a fine apartment, and a set of fashionable furniture – stand in for the loss of heterosexual reproduction by marking the reproduction of class status. Compensation is enacted through the parents' pride in Geraldine's accomplishments and behaviours; she takes care of her parents and meets their conditions of happiness by faithfully sending a letter and money home each week, thereby demonstrating her commitment to the family unit. And in her pairing with Louise, she produces all of the signifiers of middle-class domestic success.

Along with Lyles' narrative, this story's focus on the parental relationship with a lesbian daughter demonstrates how heterosexual expectations might be overturned with little disruption to the parent/child relationship. Publication of these types of biographical and fictional narratives in the *Ladder* contributed to the feelings of comfort and hope for readers and mapped onto their own experiences. Letters from readers regularly discussed markers of normativity as evidence against the kinds of depictions they were treated to in the mainstream presses. M.L. from Rhode Island voiced such a complaint: "My friend and I have lived together for less than five years, but as far as we are concerned, it's for life. We own our furniture and car jointly, and just signed a mortgage for a home of our own. Well, it will be our own in 15 years!" (22). Her letter emphasizes her monogamous commitment along with material signifiers of middle-class respectability that shapes her and her friend

as a family. With investment in the ideal of the family and its happiness at peak levels during the 1950s and early 1960s, these narratives allow for the possibility that lesbianism can be congruous with family and social life. They foreground adherence to middle-class norms as a pathway to maintaining family happiness by assimilating into heteronormativity. These kinds of stories stand in line with the philosophy of the DOB that is extended through such articles in the *Ladder* as “More Alike Than Different,” which asserts: “As long as the outward forms of propriety are observed, the personal life of any individual should be his own” (11). The *Ladder* promoted the idea that lesbians could be and mostly were just like everyone else, aside for the choice of who they loved, and even this could be managed as long as they maintained discretion and conformed to social standards of behaviour.

A series of articles and letters about married lesbians appeared in the *Ladder* in 1957, revealing and discussing situations of women who married despite awareness of their attraction to women, or who discovered their attraction to women after they were married and perhaps already had children. In a 1957 article, Nancy Osbourne lays out two choices available to such women: “She can keep her secret, treading a tightrope which leaves her vulnerable to blackmail and the danger of losing her home should her husband’s revulsion upon ‘finding out’ be too great. Or she can ‘confess’ to him, thereby risking dissolution of her marriage at once” (7). Such an impossible choice illustrates the difficulties inherent in living openly as a lesbian during this period. However, Lorraine Hansberry Nemiroff writes in a letter to the *Ladder* about a problem she calls the “social trap,” which is specific to female homosexuals:

This is because the estate of woman being what it is, how could we ever begin to guess the numbers of women who are not prepared to risk a life alien to what they have been taught all their lives to believe was their ‘natural’ destiny – AND – their only expectation for ECONOMIC security. It seems to me that this is why the question has an immensity that it does not have for male homosexuals. (28; emphasis in original).

The imperative to marry is how compulsory heterosexuality manifests its effects on the individual *and* produces those effects as affective. Marriage, as a marker of legitimate femininity translated through the lens of romance and love, becomes the thing desired, not because it promises economic security and social status, but because it promises romance, intimacy and care with the “love of one’s life” and the happy pride of a growing family. The iterative effect of gender performativity produces this path as an expectation elided (Butler, *Gender* 190); orientations towards the bonds of marriage feel natural and internal, and are (re)produced as a desire for happiness and fulfilment.

In the same issue as Hansberry’s letter, a short story, “The Eleventh Hour” by Jo Allyn, contrasts heterosexuality against homosexuality to reveal a contradiction in how the former is legitimized as the producer of domestic and women’s happiness. The narrative of the main character, Hazel, fits typical lesbian narratives from this period; after her mother discovered Hazel’s relationship with Tommy, the tomboy next door, she pushed her into marrying Jim. At the time of the story, their marriage is less than a year old, and Hazel is dissatisfied and unhappy. Jim is in the Navy, so he is often away, and when he is home, “his rough demands and careless neglect

[leave] her nervous and unhappy” (11). In his absence, Hazel has met and enjoyed a growing friendship with Patricia, also recognizing “the questing look in Pat’s brown eyes” for her romantic interest (13). At the same time that Hazel receives a letter from Jim asking her to join him for a ten-day leave and promising to make up for not being a good husband, Hazel and Pat’s relationship peaks emotionally:

Only last night, saying goodnight at the apartment, she had sensed the trembling urgency struggling for release in Pat. And the answering response in her own blood had left her weak and filled with longing. Not by any word between them, but by something electric and unspoken. (15)

This swell of emotion in the text connects back to Hazel’s re-telling of her relationship with Tommy, privileging lesbian experiences as more meaningful in that they move Hazel in ways that “her lack of response” (13) to Jim do not. The embodiment of feelings as forces that are produced internally and move outwards to seek fulfilment, presents the women’s attraction as more authentic than Hazel’s attempts to manufacture feelings for Jim. When a telegraph from Jim advises her not to come down because his bad behaviour has restricted him to the ship for his ten-day leave, Hazel’s relief enables her to admit that her marriage has been a failure and to tell Pat how she feels about her. Pat’s response is unexpected. She prioritizes Hazel’s marriage over her newly-admitted feelings, making Hazel promise to give Jim a proper chance for a while, and even to go to a marriage counsellor if that is what it takes:

“You’re still young and you owe it to yourself to make your marriage work. Believe me, I know what I’m talking about. [...] But remember this. If, after

six months trial... or even a year's trial, it doesn't work...I'll...I'll be waiting right here [...] I'd wait forever for you, my dearest."

And Hazel knew she was speaking the truth. (17)

These are the final lines of the short story. In spite of Pat's promise to wait for Hazel, her insistence and implied reference to a previous personal experience appears to place the value of heterosexual marriage, regardless of its potential harm to Hazel, ahead of the fulfilment that their lesbian relationship might bring. The self-sacrifice of this act alludes to the figure of Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness*, in which Stephen, the tragic invert lead character, essentially gives her feminine lover, Mary, up for the possibility that she might access happiness with a male friend and suitor, Martin. In both cases, the happiness of heterosexuality is asserted against the unhappiness of homosexuality, where happiness denotes both a feeling and alignment with social normativity (Ahmed, *Promise* 90).

For the reader of "The Eleventh Hour," Jim's immaturity, brutishness, and selfishness produce the continuation of his marriage to Hazel as an impossibility. Because the story ends with Pat's promise to wait and Hazel's acknowledgement that she is speaking the truth, Pat's act of giving away seems temporary, weighted with the promise of Hazel's return. A reader shares her thoughts on the ending in a letter published in the October 1957 issue: "Although Pat was trying to be big and noble, some readers felt she was out of character in not being more shrewd. Not, that is, viewing the picture in its entirety. After all, Pat was not committing the unpardonable: Breaking up a happy marriage!" (F.L. 28; emphasis in original). This letter creates a distinction between two kinds of heterosexual marriages: happy and

unhappy. While the former is to be left alone and even protected because it fulfils the promise of happiness inherent to it, the latter holds no value despite its framework of normativity. And yet, in this story, it contains enough value so that it is worthwhile for Hazel to make another attempt. Hazel has vacillated throughout the narrative, as she feels both drawn to and concerned about the nature of her friendship with Pat. Knowing it will hurt both her and Pat, she thinks about her “duty” (15) to Jim and knows “she must go” (14) to him. Heterosexuality still holds the possibility of happiness for her, and she holds out hope that “[m]aybe this time it really would be different. Maybe he’d made up his mind to make a success of their marriage after all. To love, honor and cherish her, as their wedding vows had said” (15). Hazel’s attachment to heterosexuality is a form of “cruel optimism,” wherein her marriage sustains her relation to the social and to what is supposed to bring happiness and future possibilities in spite of the harm it does to her (Berlant, *Cruel* 24). Her self-deception is recognized by the reader and by Pat, who has had a similar experience. Until Hazel can release her attachment from Jim and what their marriage represents, she can never accept queer (un)happiness with Pat. The work of the parentheses in (un)happiness is the undoing of happiness in its alignments with normativity, and the rejection of queer unhappiness as legacy.⁹ To embrace queerness against heterosexuality and heteronormativity is a recognition of one’s choice to not fit, an acceptance of continued discomfort within the world. Hazel has to return to Jim in order to be with Pat, in order to recognize the cruel conditions of her attachment to

⁹ My framework of happiness and (un)happiness references Sara Ahmed’s discussion of Molly Bolt in *Rubyfruit Jungle* (*Promise* 117).

the life heterosexuality has promised. The unhappiness of Hazel's marriage is what will make her (un)happiness with Pat possible.

The work of happiness, as described by Ahmed, comes in part from J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*, in which he describes certain speech acts as performatives because they perform an action through the utterance of typically conventional words: "I now pronounce you husband and wife" in a marriage ceremony, or "You're fired" in the context of a workplace. For these utterances to be valid, the conditions surrounding them must be right or happy. In a marriage ceremony, for example, the person speaking the words must have the power of the state to wed people, and the people they are marrying must have met the legal requirements to wed. As long as the required conditions are met, then the performative is considered "happy." An "unhappy" performative is one where the conditions are not met; so, for example, when a co-worker jokes, "You're fired," the action is not performed, and there is either no result or else any perceived result is void (105-109;149-161). Ahmed uses the example of the promise to illustrate the happy speech act. The action here is that of the promise ("I promise to..."), and the performative's happiness can only be determined when the promise is fulfilled. When Ahmed theorizes the promise of happiness, she underlines the importance of the promise as the thing that sustains the expectation of happiness in the future. The promise is, in a way, happiness deferred, but its anticipation brings a kind of happiness that is sustaining (*Promise* 29-30). I want to extend from Ahmed's argument to suggest that there are two possible outcomes when the conditions of happiness are not met. The first is the *unhappy* performative: the promise is

unfulfilled, perhaps even false. While the attachment to the promise may remain in the general ideal sense, in the local and immediate moment, unhappiness prevails. The second is the *(un)happy* performative: it is an undoing of happiness, a rejection of the conditions that define happiness and unhappiness, a defiant occupation of the “unhappy.” Defiant occupation of the unhappy is related to Halberstam’s concept of queer failure, which is “a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique” (88), and particularly a queer refusal to participate in the logics of capitalism and heteronormativity (110). (Un)happiness and queer refusal are potential sites of resistance to the conformity advocated by the *Ladder*, but before they can be explored further, I need to take a brief detour away from romance and marriage and into sex.

Sex, butch lesbians, and injustice

In 1961, the *Ladder* responded to a plan by ONE Inc., a contemporary homophile organization composed primarily of men, to draft a “Homosexual Bill of Rights” at their Mid-Winter Institute. Del Martin’s response, in an editorial entitled, “How Far Out Can We Go?” is condemning:

Such a ‘Bill of Rights’ is unnecessary, irrelevant and likely to set the homophile movement back into oblivion. [It] implies that this document would be a statement representative of this entire minority group. Nothing could be further from the truth. It further implies a demanding attitude toward society. [...] It carries the flavor of an ultimatum, which of course we would

be powerless to enforce. It implies that we want exclusive rights – yet we want no rights for ourselves which we would not extend to others (4)

Representing the viewpoint of the DOB, Martin is concerned that the proposed document would undo all of the work that the homophile movement had been doing to earn societal acceptance and the respect of professionals whose opinions they counted on. It was simply far too radical a proposal for the DOB to support. Instead, she recommends that homophile organizations together draft a statement that outlines that homosexuals are equally entitled to the same rights as everyone else, and she also recommends that all activity conducted in private between consenting adults be decriminalized, adding: “The statement must devote as much space to spelling out the obligations of homosexuals to society as it does to describing society’s obligations to the homosexual.” (5) Martin and others shied away from the early militancy of gay men, preferring to seek a place within society rather than trying to change society. Letters from readers commended Martin for her words and echoed them, but with a twist:

I’m sorry to have to write this, but any two adults of any sex who live together quietly confining their sex life to their own bedroom and not the public latrines run into very damned little trouble. We simply cannot ask a highly puritanic [*sic*] society that gathers its collective skirts and screams at the mention of sex to validate a ‘Homosexual Bill of Rights’ now or ever. We have enough to concentrate on just getting constitutional rights. (B.G., June 1961 23)

B.G. turns the question about homosexual rights into a question of sexual activity in private places versus public places. Without directly implicating and condemning men for behaving inappropriately, the suggestion is present, as women were unlikely to be arrested for same-sex activities in public spaces. B.G.'s message essentially advises men to keep their sex activities private. As a community and movement, lesbians were having difficulty getting the police and other authorities to respect their constitutional rights, and therefore it seemed unwise to draw attention to other issues, especially those related to sex. Another writer was more direct in her refusal:

Somehow I find it a little difficult to take up the banner in a 'crusade for cruising' or do battle to make legal latrine lechery and passion in our public parks. If the Lesbian recognizes the bounds of good taste and common courtesy, so be it. If the male refuses to, then let him assume the responsibility for his actions. (M.D. 26).

M.D. positions lesbians and gay men on opposite sides of a sexual battlefield, with lesbians respecting social bounds and gay men contravening them. This is not a fight M.D. is willing to participate in, and her refusal suggests that she finds the issue of public sex quite distasteful.

A "Homosexual Bill of Rights" was perceived by *Ladder* writers as a demand for rights above and beyond what other Americans were granted. By conflating the publicizing of active homosexual demands with the stereotype of men's public sexual activities, they demonstrate their high level of discomfort with public vocalizations about homosexuality in general. Making these issues public contravened the code of discreetness and respectability practiced by the DOB, a code

that was rooted in middle-class values and, to a significant degree, in gender expectations during this period. When the first letter writer blames the “puritanic [*sic*] society,” she feminizes it, depicting it as gathering its skirts and screaming at the mere mention of sex. The second letter writer, ironically, illustrates this prudishness by referring to “the bounds of good taste and common courtesy” and by calling same-sex activities “lechery,” a term that suggests excessiveness and sinfulness. Martin and the two letter writers distance themselves from the male homosexual community and their dual insistences towards public displays/demands of homosexuality, a sort of political “flaunting,” and towards public displays of sex. Their discomfort interrupts the façade of comfort carefully created and curated by the *Ladder* and the DOB in which the work of normalizing the lesbian depended on associating her with ideals of intimacy centred on heteronormative models – the couple, monogamy, longevity, domesticity, and family – and associated with middle-class values of respectability, discretion, and privacy. In her introduction to *Intimacy*, Berlant discusses the attachment of minoritized subjects to the kind of life granted to the privileged majority: “To live as if threatening contexts are merely elsewhere might well neutralize the ghostly image of one’s own social negativity: and the constant energy of public self-protectiveness can be sublimated into personal relations of passion, care, and good intention” (5-6). The *Ladder* foregrounds personal relations and individual change as the path to community recognition, and it also foregrounds personal acceptance and intimate relations as the core of lesbian identity. In these early years of the magazine, social and systemic pressures and

traumas are translated into problems of individuals against individuals and are rarely discussed as larger concerns affecting many and requiring action.

By focusing on the individual and the personal, the *Ladder* achieved a kind of detachment from larger social contexts that enabled them to assume and sustain a level of comfort that made their work possible. Writers and readers, concerned with producing a space that offered hope, were invested in the *Ladder* producing ‘good feeling’ as part of its work. Good feeling can be interpreted in two overlapping ways: *good feeling*, where the adjective, “good” describes “feeling” to connote the positive affects of happiness, fulfilment, love, etc.; and *good-feeling* as a compound-adjective to describe the person who possesses it, suggesting virtue or obedience or morality. When these two meanings are conflated, “good feeling” is happiness and goodness combined: the pursuit of moral or virtuous goodness produces the affect of happiness, or, in close reference to the extensive work of Ahmed and Berlant, the pursuit of happiness promised is in itself a virtuous act. It is relevant here to connect back to the work of Warner and Rubin on the dichotomy of good sex/bad sex and good gay/bad queer. The urge to create distance and distinction between the “private” and “courteous” behaviour of lesbians and the “public” and “lecherous” sexual activities of gay men is a move to place lesbians on higher ground. It constitutes lesbians as more palatable to the wider community because it conceals their sexual activities and aligns with dominant norms. The distinction here between public and private sex is a construct, one that implies that lesbians and gay men who removed their relations to apartments, houses, and bedrooms were safer and less public than those who carried on in bars and bathrooms. In terms of immediate

visibility and police access, this may be correct, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the conflation of the familial and the national, and dispersions of power in the Foucauldian panoptical sense, ensured that vigilance against and scrutiny of the abnormal was exercised across the citizenry and across layers of authority. Berlant and Warner demonstrate that queer spaces, in particular, are subject to the moral imperatives of heterosexual power and privilege, at the same time that heteronormativity cloaks the immense public-ness of heterosexual institutions in the guises of intimacy (315-16, 318-319). And yet, the *Ladder* sustains attachment to the hope that access to the safety of “private” spaces will enable legitimacy. Its production of “good feeling,” combining happiness and virtuousness, enables writers and readers to determine the acceptability of how lesbians were seen, described and understood.

For lesbians, parks and public bathrooms were unlikely sites for sexual activity. However, lesbians were at risk for harassment and arrest in lesbian bars, which were sites of semi-public performances of lesbian sexuality. As Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis have demonstrated in their oral history of 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s lesbian bar culture, lesbian bars were associated with a distinct and active sub-culture. Bar communities were typically constructed through butch and femme relationships, which displayed the kinds of outward representations of lesbianism that many readers and writers in the *Ladder* despised. Butch personas, in particular, were condemned for what were seen as their imitative qualities of men and masculinity. Letter-writer, J.M, describes her experiences after visiting a range of bars across America:

But each and everyone [*sic*] possessed the one type of clientele which lowers our standards and places a black ugly mark against the true life we seek. [...]

Some of the gay people claim to hate men; yet they cut their hair short, put on men's clothing and strut around thinking that their attire can change their sex. No wonder we are treated as such when every day is like hallowe'en! (J.M., June 1961 25)

This letter, and others like it, disparaged butch lesbians for trying to be men or to be like men, and for drawing public attention to their lesbianism in this way, for flaunting it. Lynda Hart argues that the very threat of the lesbian is her masculinity; as she moves into male territory, she becomes a threat to masculinity (8). The image of the lesbian-as-invert closely precedes mid-century lesbianism, and the butch lesbian resurrected this image and stood as a reminder of it. The middle-class politics of respectability embraced by the DOB and the *Ladder* attempted to separate lesbian identity from lesbian sexuality to minimize the stigma of queerness. Creating a distance between sexual orientation and the sex act makes a distinction between “being and doing” (Warner *Trouble* 28-29). Lesbian butch identity returns to or re-emphasizes the sexual act, the doing of queerness because it is connected to the body, to the masculine. The butch body reminds us of the acts of lesbianism because there is an apparent occupation of the male body and the active sex.

Reactions in the *Ladder* to butch lesbians and other kinds of flaunting assume a stance of virtue, and they seek to occupy a higher ground as a way of sustaining the good feeling and the goodness of lesbians. One letter-writer describes her own transformation from butch identity:

I was once a part of the mixed-up kids who look like men and aren't – who look for trouble and get it. The closest I came to opening a book was a cigar box. [...] One day I met someone who stripped me of my precious clothing and replaced it with eight years of schooling. My first lesson was – I am a woman and that's something to be proud of. Later came books, music, and all the arts.” (G.K. 30)

Education, books, and the arts replace the writer's former ignorance, and her embrace of her feminine identity is represented as a move from youth (“kids”) to maturity (“woman”), and from outlaw status to an occupation of middle-class taste. These markers of status are automatically assumed as good, as goods to pursue, and as markers of a good life. Goodness and virtue are asserted in another letter-writer's criticism of the *Ladder*:

Your April issue of The Ladder [*sic*] was appalling. What particularly nauseated and caused me to blush for my fellow-readers were the references to lesbians as ‘Lez's’, ‘butches’ (‘office butch’), and the like. Such things as ‘Lesbian love-crush’ smack of low brow heterosexual bar-talk [...] Many people, irrespective of their sexuality, enjoy reading intelligently written magazines. Do you want The Ladder to grow and be accepted? Do you want to act out the stereotype in the mind of John Q. Public? It is up to you – and me. (Anonymous Sister 23)

The writer's reactions to the language she problematizes are visceral in their disgust and shame. Her affects are constituted as unconscious bodily experiences, produced from her proximity to articulations associated with tastelessness (“low brow”) and

with low class expressions of lesbian stereotypes. Interestingly, the combination of shame and disgust represent a simultaneous pulling away from and connection to the other. Shame occupies a space between the personal and the social; in feeling shame, we are deeply aware of ourselves at the same time that we are intensely aware of others (Sedgwick, *Touching* 36-37). Disgust, especially as experienced through being nauseated, is associated with contamination and proximity as though the object of disgust came too close and needs to be expelled (Ahmed, *Cultural* 84-86). Too close, in this case, may not be physical. Perhaps the implications of the lowbrow language got “under her skin.” It seems that through shame and disgust, the “anonymous sister” conveys her deep fear that she might be associated with the kinds of people who would use such language, who would represent the stereotype that “John Q. Public” would find so horribly unappealing. She urges the *Ladder* to restore good feeling by discarding this kind of language and returning to good language, to language that reflects the goodness of lesbians.

As shown, articles and letters focused on ways of being lesbian by distancing the lesbian from sexual activity and by constructing her as a respectable normative figure, thereby urging and pushing lesbianism towards Rubin’s concept of contested space. However, the “good lesbian” remains haunted by the “bad dyke” who exerts pressure and interrupts the careful production of good feeling. In the *Ladder*, the bad dyke is spectre-like; she is not always a fully fleshed out figure, but she appears in a variety of forms: in denials and protests against her, and in letters and short fiction that complicate constructions of the good lesbian and produce a more complex picture of lesbianism overall. The bad dyke, though upsetting, does not upset; she

pokes holes in the work of the *Ladder*, but she does not overturn its activities or work. Contained in the pages of the magazine, she is often just a moment of disagreement, a moment of (un)happiness that pushes back. The framework of the good lesbian and bad dyke should not produce a false dichotomy for the *Ladder* and suggest that it was one thing against the another. The magazine was a site of multiple voices and discourses, and though there was general movement towards normativity and conformity, the speed and direction were not uniform nor consistent.

The following questioning and opposing voices should be seen within this context as expressions of resistance within a wide and clamorous conversation.

Writing in 1957, quite early in the magazine's tenure, one letter-writer states:

I consider myself (and my roommate also considers herself) a mild transvestite – that is, we wear slacks almost always on our off-work hours.

We are comfortable in them and we have no problems adjusting to the stares of the passersby. We consider dresses, high heels and stocking holders the most uncomfortable contraptions men have invented to restrict the movements of women so they cannot walk very far, lift many things, or sit with their legs apart in warm weather. (A.C. 27-28)

A.C.'s letter stands out because of the writer's willingness, not just to share her preference of clothes, but to express the publicness of her actions. She teases the seriousness of the DOB and the *Ladder* and their focus on helping lesbians make "her adjustment to society" when she states that she has no problems "adjusting" to the stares of strangers, and she treats the question of pants versus dresses as a practical and proto-feminist issue ("Daughters" 4). Earlier in her letter, she expresses

a wish that the *Ladder* would drop its preference for “homophile” over “homosexual,” which she views as “a neurotic attempt to conform and integrate into heterosexuality” (27). Her resistance to assimilation is shared by few other letter writers to the magazine. One of this minority sees the push towards conformity as symptomatic of a broader problem: “I prefer to see the problem of the Lesbian as an aspect of the larger problem of society today: Conformity – the neglect of the individualistic impulse that alone leads to creativity and the ultimate enrichment of culture.” (21). She attributes to lesbians, by virtue of their position as outsiders, the ability to observe the mainstream with some objectivity, and she suggests that “[...] instead of pleading, ‘Please, world, accept us – we’re really very nice and not a bit different’ we should say, ‘Look , world, we understand the agony of losing what each of you finds best in yourself and we can help you to be unafraid of your uniqueness!’” (R.L. 22). The lesbian, she argues, is better positioned to improve society than to seek the kinds of improvements that make her more acceptable to it. In 1961, another writer takes a more militant tack after fifty-two women, selected from a larger bar crowd for wearing fly-front pants, were arrested for presence in a disorderly house. She addresses both the lesbian individual’s and the lesbian community’s refusal to stand up for gay civil rights because of fear:

Gay people have let their fears overpower their conscience. They’re afraid of publicity and newspapers, of public condemnation and the loss of their families’ love. They’re afraid of the big black, threatening cloud that hangs above each and every one. Gay people, like most Americans, think in terms of jobs, money, reputation, and prestige. [...] If we ever hope to win our

battle, we must fight. First, we must unshackle ourselves from fear, for it alone is our omnipresent enemy. We fear sacrifice, though sacrifice is called for. [...] If we do not fight, we will continue in ever-increasing numbers to be made the target of society's and the police's blows. (D.S. 21-22)

These three writers, their letters crossing the years, 1957 to 1961, refuse the integrationist direction of the DOB and the *Ladder*. In their letters, they also demonstrate their corresponding refusal of the everyday pulls of normativity, from clothing to the frameworks of employment and reputation that define American success. In their suggestions and demands, they locate the concept of "good" elsewhere, not in the "good feeling" of promised happiness, but in a future good that requires "sacrifice" before it can be brought into being.

In concert with the letters above, short stories in the *Ladder* work to produce feelings of unhappiness and (un)happiness that push back against good feelings that circulate in the magazine. By featuring lesbians who do not fit the image or behaviour preferred by the DOB and advocated for in the magazine, these stories produce the "bad dyke," not as a completely unhappy figure, but as a figure unjustly treated. In one such story, "Pipe Dream" by Jacqueline Lawson, the self-image of the main character, Jimmie, opens the narrative: "Jimmie stood square in front of the glass and minutely inspected her splendid image. She saw shiny, black shoes, knife-creased pants, a narrow leather and silver belt, and a neat white shirt with a colorful insert down the front that, at a quick glance, almost resembled a tie" (12).

Immediately, the reader recognizes the butch lesbian, a woman whose image is, to herself, "splendid" in its crispness, neatness, and precision. The next line overturns

her self-image: “She knew she looked her best, but she certainly didn’t feel it” (12). Jimmie works at a lesbian bar called the Onion, and the long nights exhausted her, from the smoke that hurt her throat to the efforts of serving customers all night: “... running, always running to do the bidding of girls, girls, girls. What a way to butter her bread” (12). Instead of the imagined butch as fraternizer and womanizer, Jimmie finds the effort of being surrounded by so many gay women not so much enjoyable as exhausting. She longs to leave the Onion for a better situation, but her choice of clothing always prevents these opportunities from becoming a reality. Her clothing is not masquerade nor mimicry, but her own truth:

One good thing about the Onion though, was being able to dress comfortably. She didn’t have to wear stockings or heels or paint her face with goo. How she hated doing that! Long ago she had determined never to go where feminine fripperies were part of a job requirement. Sticking to the rule had kept her in the lower income brackets, but she had been true to herself, which mattered most. (12)

This excerpt parallels the opening line as, again, “Jimmie stands square in the glass.” Her frank self-reflection and self-acceptance is both physical and moral; she chooses to live her truth regardless of its consequences, and regardless of the discomforts and negatives it brings. And the remainder of the story emphasizes what this means. She is on her way to reply to an ad for a messenger at a Fifth Avenue florist, and she dreams about her future working environment with excitement. Despite all her preparations and early arrival, the clerk hesitates when he hears of her intent and disappears into the back of the shop to check with an unseen superior. On his return,

Jimmie receives a halting and embarrassed response: “I’m afraid, Miss – ah – that you wouldn’t be quite suitable. You see, being on Fifth Avenue – well, we do have to be rather – that is, a girl isn’t exactly – um – do you think? [...] You do know what I mean, don’t you?” (13). Jimmie’s hopefulness is dashed, and the story ends as she exits the flower shop. This rather simple tale offers a counter-narrative to the *Ladder*’s typical constructions of butch lives. Instead of her queerness not fitting into the world, she is depicted as “squared” and the world as queer or crooked. It refuses her in an exchange that seems unjust: she is rejected by a concealed authority figure with elided reasons delivered by proxy in ellipses and questions. Although Jimmie is unhappy at the conclusion of the story, it is the world that apologizes to her, embodied in the clerk’s “small apologetic voice” as she walks away. Jimmie’s squareness, her truth, her (un)happiness continue “as she open[s] the door and [leaves] Paradise behind” (13). “Pipe Dream” and other short stories like it, are interjections. “Pipe Dream” disrupts narratives of normative happiness by bringing the realities of the dominant social world into play, and by portraying a defiant life in the face of those realities.

Queer pleasure and the cruise

The short story, “No Exit” by Colleen Stein, was published in the *Ladder* in 1961, and it describes a derelict area of town, which the police and the municipal authorities are determined to “clean up.” Like many rundown areas, it is home to an assortment of businesses catering to people on the edges of society. One of these, The Cove, deemed “the queerest place in town,” (6) has a tavern in front, a beatnik coffee shop in the rear, and a gay bar called The Attic on a hidden mezzanine just

above the first floor that is accessible by a wooden staircase from the tavern. When the police plan and execute a raid in the area, The Attic is left untouched because police are unable to find their way into the bar. The staircase has somehow disappeared, and, although a number of butch women exit through a door labelled “Rest Rooms,” investigation yields nothing but a regular set of washrooms and broom closet. At city hall, the mayor is increasingly frustrated and decides on an urban renewal plan that will see four blocks, which include The Cove, torn down for new development. Curious about the place after the failure of the police raid, the mayor goes to The Cove on its last night and watches butches entering and exiting through the door to the bathrooms, but he is unable to figure out where they go. On the night before demolition, he drives down to the building to watch items from the premises being removed, and when the movers leave, he decides to check the place out. He had overheard the movers talking about a dumb-waiter in the broom closet, and although the police had checked that room numerous times and found nothing, the mayor indeed finds one lowered and waiting. He takes it up to the now-empty bar and looks around for a little while, but when he turns to leave, the trap-door leading back to the dumb-waiter has disappeared. The mayor is stuck: “He pried over the linoleum floor covering, trying in vain to locate a trap door, becoming more terrified by the minute as the realization gradually dawned upon him that there clearly was no exit from The Attic, at least not for Mayor Wren” (9). I describe this somewhat odd short story because, in its quirkiness, it delivers a kind of wish-fulfilment pleasure. The story responds to the threat of authorities to gay bars and their patrons, and it responds to the voyeurism that was frequently part of gay bars. The authorities of a

city, the police and the mayor, are foiled in their efforts to enter and raid queer space by the space itself, which eventually exacts its revenge upon the mayor by giving him what he wants – a look in. The story is pure fantasy, but it provides a sense of the kinds of pleasure that are possible in queer texts that employ radical re-tellings of oppressive realities.

Pleasure, as an affective experience, diverges from happiness in its intensity, in its temporal framework, and in the spaces of potentiality it opens up. While happiness keeps one in line by sustaining attachments to the good life, pleasure is experienced as cracks and fissures in those attachments. Ahmed writes about queer pleasure as acts that can disrupt the dominance of heteronormativity by producing discomfort, by “mak[ing] the comforts of heterosexuality less comfortable” (*Cultural* 165). For this reason, the exercise of queer pleasure can be a political act; the presence of queer sexuality or queer bodies in primarily heterosexual spaces can function as acts of resistance or reclamation (165). She writes that queer pleasure impacts and changes bodies:

“Queer pleasures put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality [...] However[,] queer pleasures in the enjoyment of forbidden or barred contact engender the possibility of different kinds of impressions. When bodies touch and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped. The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been barred can ‘impress’ differently upon the surfaces of social space,

creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 165).

Queer pleasure is the enactment of queer sexuality against the prescriptions of heterosexuality. Pleasure, in this sense, could be read into many of the short stories in the *Ladder*, and indeed, I would argue that it should be. The workings of queer pleasure in these stories occur in their insistences that lesbian connection, romance, and happiness exist in spite of the constraints and pressures of heteronormativity; even in their strongest urgings towards normativity and the possibilities of happiness offered by it, the simple existence of queer love, the acknowledgement of its possibility, are acts of resistance and defiance. Queer pleasure and happiness exist simultaneously, twisting and pushing and pulling, but existing together nonetheless.

Without departing from Ahmed, I want to explore pleasure as an affect produced by queer texts in moments that open up new ways of knowing and feeling outside of the social, but still connected to it. Here, pleasure acknowledges the threats, pressures, and traumas of a social reality, and, while pushing to open space for pleasure through connection, the possibility that these threats will collapse that space is present. As per Cvetkovich this kind of pleasure registers affectively within the specificity of the historical moment (*Archive 7; Mixed 14*); it both elides and makes real the political and social perils of being queer in 1950s and 1960s America. A useful point of approach is through Roland Barthes’ discussion of *textual pleasure*, in which he describes the act of reading as something both social and intimate, located in the place of identification between the writer and the reader. Using the queer and visual term, “cruising,” he takes the perspective of the writer:

I must seek out this reader (must ‘cruise’ him) *without knowing where he is*.

A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader’s person that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an

unpredictability of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game. (4)

Seeking and cruising are important for their unpredictability and, in that unpredictability, for creating the possibility of connection and, concurrently, its loss.

The cruise implies a search for erotic connection in the pursuant glances that seek identification and acknowledgement, and the point of connection is pleasurable in

that it is constructed through potentiality without predictability. The reader is

“cruised,” sized up, sought out, tested, teased, invited. The outcome is not

determined, but the outcome is mostly irrelevant. What matters is the sense of

possibility that is fundamental to the flirtatious exchange, and even the danger of its collapse. An example of such a moment comes in the 1957 short story, “Chanson du

Konallis”:

The eyes! Konnie shifted in her seat and looked quickly to the table. What a strange moment. It had happened before in life. On the street; parties; in

classes in school years back; the thing of being surrounded by many people

and suddenly finding another girl’s or woman’s eyes, commanding one,

holding one’s own. It was extraordinary. Pleasant, she thought. No, not

pleasant. Terrifying because of the kind of pleasure it brought. Pleasant was

wrong to describe it, but pleasure, ah!” (Jones 9; emphasis in original)

Konnie is the recipient of the cruise, and in the moment of discomfort and

strangeness, she is brought back to similar moments all threaded together in their

extraordinariness. Not pleasant, she realizes, but both terrifying and pleasurable all at the same time. The duality of the moment and its contradictory nature is affectively intense, but it marks both the pleasure of queer contact and the terror of disruption of the normative.

Barthes, in speaking about the kinds of texts that produce textual pleasure, says that pleasure is created when two contradictory edges come in contact with one another. He characterizes these contradictions using a few examples, which can be summarized as: noble / trivial; canonical language / a glimpse of the death of language; culture / subversion. He writes: “what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (7). Note how these contradictions map onto the queerness of the cruise. In its very queerness, the cruise is both possibility and impossibility, the possibility of recognition and connection with another queer subject when both subject and desire are impossible, illegitimate, and illegible in a heteronormative social order. The space opened up by the act of cruising is pleasurable because it is always under threat of collapse and of violence at the same time that it is itself a threat to the inviolability of the heteronormative social order. Barthes was not speaking specifically of queer texts in his discussion of textual pleasure. Indeed, the tension, the point of dissolve he speaks of might appear differently in various kinds of texts as pleasure is made possible. However, in queer texts, that point of tension between safety and death and between culture and destruction has particular resonance and is bound up with the tensions and conflicts that exist between dominant culture and marginalized lives. Possibility and impossibility, legitimacy and illegitimacy literally

rub up against each other. In the midst of this, dancing on the edge of the seam, is the public intimacy of the cruise, the glance and the long look that may produce either potential bliss or the risk of violence. It is a dangerous flirtation that is risked for the chance of mutual recognition, and so, in the midst of desire and danger, is the potential for queer pleasure.

I want to extend the cruise as a way of thinking about the *Ladder* as a producer of queer pleasure under the social and political constraints of the moment. Heteronormative imperatives are reproduced through the sameness of bodily orientations, the ways in which bodies that fit blend into spaces that are shaped for them, while ill-fitting and mis-oriented bodies stand out and are surveilled as such. Outside of spaces created by groups like DOB, public encounters between lesbians were fraught with the dangers and consequences of mistaken identity, so that even the briefest moments of queer recognition and secret touches while in public could produce an intensity of pleasure. “Essay on a Lesbian,” printed in 1957, demonstrates the feelings of welcome and pleasure that accompanied such encounters and connections:

For me there is the strange feeling on entering a room full of unknown people that someone is a friend, and suddenly a casual smile from across the room confirms that feeling and you are welcome there. I don't believe I would give up that kind of third eye for the little piece of chalk and sidewalk. The exquisite pain of holding hands when you know it must be a secret. ‘To kiss in a shadow’ has real advantages, even merits. (B.G. 20)

Cracks in the heteronormativity of public space produce this “exquisite pain,” a contradictory intensity of feeling that is associated with the pleasure of the cruise. These moments interrupt the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality and produce the possibility of queer existence. The *Ladder*, I argue, produced similar queer interruptions in people’s everyday lives. Its arrival in brown paper packaging was like a secret passed along under the noses of unsuspecting family members, roommates, and landlords. Its arrival each month allowed that critical interstice of connection with a lesbian counterpublic, a textual community that both constituted and was constituted by its membership through the *Ladder* as critical text (Warner *Publics* 67). A letter from Niki from Minnesota captures the feeling of relief that receiving the *Ladder* brought:

I, like most others, live two lives, one for the benefit of the public and the other for myself. The majority of the so-called ‘normals’ will not accept us on any basis and so we live in a sort of make believe world, a secret, exciting world, but a bit frightening too. When the Ladder comes to my door once a month I live in that secret world for approximately 20 or 25 minutes while I read each and every word and marvel at the work that is being done to alleviate the pain of falseness that most of us endure just for the sake of not being called queer. (23)

Niki’s letter describes the contradiction she lives in her ordinary life, one which produces a safe, public, false self and a dangerous, private, lesbian self. Her contradictory world is both “exciting” and “frightening,” a description that suggests that it is a world under pressure and in danger of collapse through discovery. But

within this contradiction, the *Ladder* provides access to her secret world for the briefest of escapes. For less than thirty minutes, she can escape into a world in which she can see others like herself and feel seen in return, a constrained opening of time and space that produces the painful pleasure of the cruise—the pleasure of being seen and known against a world that insists upon the impossibility of queerness.

While Niki uses the word, “queer,” as a stigmatized epithet, I am, of course, using it in its contemporary usage as a reclaimed term to signify queerness as both a valid and defiant sexuality. Ahmed argues that queerness is not transcendence over nor freedom from heteronormativity and its associated social norms. Instead queers are affected by their failure in not reproducing normative scripts, and this failure is “queer feeling,” a sign of what queer can do, of how it can affect the heteronormative: “The failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer” (*Cultural* 155). With Niki and with all of its other readers, the *Ladder* opened spaces where their failure to be non-normative was not hidden away, but instead was occupied as a space of pleasure and possibility, a space that produced queer feeling. The work of affect in producing queer community is located both in the personal space of emotion, and in this wider affective production, in non-normative movements that constitute queer feeling.

Chapter Three: Feeling Strange: Affective Possibility for Lesbian Identity and Community

“Abject and unthinkable bodies don’t just become ‘other’ and unthinkable. They go on living, animated by possibilities at work in the necessary and serendipitous” - Kathleen Stewart, Ordinary Affects, 117.

Over the course of its sixteen-year run, the *Ladder* witnessed and documented a rapidly-changing political and social landscape. Terms like “female variant” and “homophile” were replaced with “homosexual,” “lesbian,” and “gay.” Moving from a focus on assimilation and acceptance, the magazine began supporting publicly-oriented political activities such as picketing and leafleting beginning in the mid-1960s. The end of the 1960s brought a critical divide between gay liberation and women’s liberation, which had an enormous impact on the *Ladder* by re-orienting it away from the homophile movement. Amidst all of this change, discussions about lesbian identity and the individual’s relationship to the community are constant, from questions of inclusion and exclusion, to questions about responsibility or obligation to other parts and to the whole. This chapter brings these questions to an examination of two sets of texts, one from the beginning of the magazine (1956-1958) and another from its end (1968-1972). As the magazine became increasingly public-oriented and political, content shifted from a focus on and examination of the self towards public orientations and community responsibility. I am wary here of creating a false linear narrative of community growth; however, there are commonalities among each of these groups of texts that make them useful as groupings and distinct from each other in a way that suggests the contexts of their production. The first set of texts, consisting of two poems and two short stories, focus on the lesbian as an

individual contending with isolation and identity and the commensurate feelings of oddness and strangeness. In seeking connection, these lone figures prefigure the bonds of community. The second set of texts consist of two stories by the author Jane Rule whose total contributions to the *Ladder* comprise six short stories and an excerpt of a novel in progress. Rule's fiction registers reverberations of the political climate in which lesbians were torn between two communities – the women's movement and the gay movement – and were feeling subordinated in both. Themes of community, home, and family persisted as important territory for lesbians who continued to negotiate and re-define spaces of belonging, and Rule's stories provide an opportunity to re-examine domestic and familial spaces against earlier constructions in the *Ladder*. Taken together, these two groups of texts are opportunities to examine the affective constructions of identity and community from the late 1950s to the early 1960s as they were inscribed in reader-produced literary texts and to look at how affective relations sustain individual connection to a community. At the centre of this chapter, I offer an alien interlude to both interrupt and extend my meditation on strangeness. In it, I consider the operations of exclusion that were constituting acts by and for the *Ladder* and the DOB, and I dip briefly into two stories that use strangeness to complicate conceptions of the normal and the strange.

This chapter begins by considering isolation and recognition and the movement from feeling alone and strange to finding a place with another or because of another through likeness. Loneliness connotes a sense of disconnection, of being physically without others in a space, or of being emotionally detached from others

despite their proximity. Feelings of strangeness are often associated with geography; to feel strange is connected to a sense of being out of place, of not fitting in the place where you are. In both cases, the presence/absence of others, and any exchanges of looks and words with others, matters to how the subject feels over time. The proximity of other bodies, and interactions with them, can either intensify loneliness and strangeness or else produce the possibility of relations. The individual lesbians who wander through the poems and narratives examined in the first part of this chapter engage in negotiations between loneliness and relations, between isolation and community, between self and other. Their public wanderings evoke the *flâneurs* of the late 19th and 20th centuries, but their wanderings and observations are not so much mappings of and reflections on the cities they inhabit; rather, they are observations and reflections on themselves in relation to others. Their self-constructed strangeness positions them as strangers in the worlds they inhabit, and yet their search for connection suggests the kind of “queer worldmaking” that Berlant and Warner argue is a necessary counterpart to the textual constitutions of a counterpublic (322).

“I walk alone:” Feelings of strangeness and early lesbian identity

“I walk alone the San Francisco streets” (Allyn 7) begins the poem “Strangers,” published in the third issue of the *Ladder* in December 1956. This line resonates with a number of other stories and poems printed in the first few years of the magazine that centre on the solitary experiences of a speaker/narrator in the public spaces of a large city. Typically narrating the interior experiences of proto-

lesbian or lesbian characters through either a first-person narrator or a closely focalized third-person narrator, such texts focus on feelings of disconnection and connection, alienation and recognition. The publicness of the spaces occupied by these speakers suggests both anonymity and vulnerability, but most of all, a sense of being out in the world. By this, I mean to contrast their publicness with the closed and private-seeming nature of home and home-like spaces, houses, apartments, schools, and workplaces, which are often constructed as both familiar and familial. Streets and public places position the main characters in spaces that are first seen as strange or estranging, spaces not typically linked to women's bodies or experiences. The characters are "off the track" or out of line (Ahmed, *Queer* 71), and so these spaces, despite their strangeness or because of it, offer the possibility of queer connection. As each speaker or character struggles to make sense of her queer feelings, the texts underscore how the production of feeling or affect becomes a means of re-imagining their current reality.

In Jo Allyn's "Strangers," the first-person speaker wanders the streets of San Francisco, blending observations about the exterior world and about her internal sense of self into a fragmented commentary that draws attention to being and feeling strange. Knowing/not knowing and seeing/not seeing are linked and foregrounded to produce feelings of dislocation, of being an unseen observer in a strange place. In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker chooses to move from a place of knowledge into a place of not-knowing. The poem opens with firm familiarity: "I walk alone the San Francisco streets / The fog-muffled, rain-wet thoroughfares / And know my own particular pleasure" (7). The city is named. "Thoroughfares" situate her on main

streets, easily locatable. Her self-knowledge is firm, even as it exists as something private and internally-constructed through both her solitariness and the weather that envelopes her. Although her known pleasure is not spoken, a clue to it in the next line, “There is beauty in bracing the opposite-rushing crowd,” (7) suggests that it positions her against the normative flow of the crowd, against the majority of people. If her pleasure is lesbianism, it remains unnamed, just one of the proliferation of negatives and elisions throughout the poem as she shifts to embrace the feeling of “not-knowing”:

Adventure is in the *not*-knowing and in
Looking upon narrow *un*familiar streets,
Passing *un*known dimly perceived doors
Leading to adventures *un*savored. (7; emphasis added)

These multiple negatives create absence and a lack of certainty, dislocating the speaker from what is familiar. And yet, the word “adventure” is repeated twice, as something found in the place where knowledge and familiarity are absent in the speaker’s estrangement from her surroundings and in her refusal of the doors that might lead to other “unsavored” adventures. While the repetition at first looks like adventure found and then lost, it is her refusal of adventures behind these doors that sustains the adventure of the unknown in the streets. If the doors offer any possibility of locating her, they are hard to “perceive,” a word that means both to see and to understand. The speaker is both visually and cognitively, though purposely, lost.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed discusses the spatiality of orientations; with reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” and Judith Butler’s theory

of performativity, she explores how bodies become oriented in spaces and how spaces become shaped and naturalized through the historical accumulation of repeated actions, producing some objects as more reachable, some spaces as better fitting, and some paths as the right and easier ones to take (53-58). To be queer is to be disoriented, a misfit, to be “off the track” and away from the “straight line” of heterosexuality (71). The doors in the poem and their adventures are read as the pull of heterosexuality and its associated domesticity; they offer passages away from the public space of unknown and unfamiliar streets, and the speaker’s refusal of their pull sustains her adventure into unknown territory. Later in the poem, the speaker hears bells: “I hear the bells that ring, but / Ring not for me” (7). The ringing evokes wedding bells, and again indicate her refusal of the heterosexual imperative. By turning away from heterosexuality, she is produced as an invisible and unintelligible body who haunts the edges of mainstream society:

No one knows when I pass their world
For I am outside, unseen, anonymous
As a ghost under the mist-rimmed lights. (7)

The speaker is without body, without identity. By constructing herself as a ghost, she pushes herself outside of perception and knowledge and makes herself invisible to “their world.”

At this particular historical moment and location, women’s queer feelings of invisibility and unintelligibility can be traced to a lack of available history and community. Over the course of publication, the *Ladder* was instrumental in helping to construct one way of performing lesbianism, but at the start of its publication it

was naming a community barely formed. One indication of this was *Ladder* writers' and DOB members' reliance on the figure of Sappho and the mythology of a lesbian culture that surrounded her, which they adapted to serve as a legitimating lesbian history and culture (Valentine 146). Aside from inaccessible medical and psychiatric tomes, there was a dearth of information about lesbianism available to women at this time. Author Lee Lynch describes her early desperate and fruitless searches for self-images in books and media in her youth, only eventually growing up into a world where the *Ladder* and lesbian pulp paperbacks provided some hope (40-43). Lynch's experience was not unique; romantic and sexual relations between women have been a largely invisible undercurrent in western culture, circulating below official records, disguised, and unacknowledged. In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Terry Castle examines the invisibility of the lesbian in the historical record, including the dismissal and silencing of lesbian works, lesbian figures, and lesbian acts in culture and in law (2-6). She discusses, for example, an historical unwillingness of legal authorities to name these kinds of relations as a means of protecting women from the knowledge-contagion of such acts (6). Similarly, Lynda Hart describes the "invention and circulation of 'lesbians' as a haunting secret [...] a discursive act performed by the hierarchical ideology that systematically reconstructs the homo/hetero binary [...] to keep [the lesbian] under erasure" (ix). She demonstrates how the masculinization of the lesbian functions to elide same-sex relations between women in order to continuously re-establish the heterosexual imperative, discussing the construction of the lesbian, through the inversion model, as a male figure who seduces her partner – the womanly victim – as a means of re-asserting heterosexuality and re-inscribing

desire as male (7-9). These historical interpretations help to contextualize the speaker's feelings of ghostliness; she has no real sense of identity beyond the negations that surround her. Her appearance in this poem at the inception of the homophile movement means that she emerges into a multifarious series of identities: lesbian, butch, invert, female variant, femme. She knows her "particular pleasure," but it is particular by being only hers in isolation from others like her.

In her nighttime wanderings, lost and unseen, the speaker becomes an observer, the only one who sees in the poem. But instead of finding likeness in the misty San Francisco back streets, she observes othered others who serve as figures for her further estrangement. Invisible, she does not encounter these people in a mutual act of meeting, but rather "sees" them while remaining unseen:

I see the woman beckoning beside the open doors

And I see the stranger who answers,

I pass the golden-skinned women

Who slide on slippered feet

And the bright-eyed brown men

Who walk in pride as in their own land.

I see the handsome boys who walk

Hand linked to hand and

I see the girls with blank eyes

Who walk unseeing in the night. (7)

The people she sees and names are the liminal citizens of a metropolitan city: sex-workers and johns, gay men, and drug addicts who occupy the doorways and sidewalks. Orientalised figures, marked by their skin colour and their displacement from home, represent the non-western ‘other’ whose strangeness makes them strangers in the United States. Their presence invokes national and cultural borders, which are defining contemporary issues, raising questions of nation and belonging. She observes all of these bodies and names them because they are the nameable others; they exist on the borders of the legitimate city, producing that legitimacy by their illegitimacy. As Kristeva’s *abject*, they are the expulsion of society that constitutes its threatening border (2-6). The emphasis on the “I” of the speaker and her act of seeing (the “eye” of the speaker) positions her as the active agent in this section of the poem; the others are the objects of her observations, and in her descriptions of them, she conjures up Baudelaire and images of his Paris inhabitants. Baudelaire’s snapshots of people as remnants of a transitory city, in poems like “The Seven Old Men” and “The Swan,” are portraits of the observed. The flâneurial speaker maintains his distance, using their abjection to serve his purposes: the right-angled limbs of the old men and the image of the “some black woman, starving / and consumptive” (91) are static images used to symbolize the edges of a changing city. However, unlike Baudelaire’s wanderer, the speaker of “Strangers” observes the city and its inhabitants, not to render the city itself readable or knowable, but to produce a reading of herself. The unknown and unfamiliar streets with their strange and abject inhabitants serve to produce her own strangeness. She concludes: “[...] I see the stranger / And the lost who look but see me not, / For I am stranger yet than all of

these” (7). She positions herself as more strange than those who occupy the borders of the city, and yet she occupies this position with agency, maintaining power by speaking, seeing, and acting. Her strangeness enables her freedom and adventure; without history, without shape, name or form, she feels able to constitute a self whose only references are her differences from the “opposite-rushing crowd” (7) and from the expelled “others.” Out of the specificity of its historical moment, this poem moves the lesbian from a constrained world to an imagined existence beyond the edges of the strange. It gives voice to a desire to transform strangeness and invisibility into possibility and freedom. However, feelings of loneliness and isolations persist at the end of the poem; the speaker remains as a singular figure who shares neither identity or pleasures with another like her.

Feeling Strange Together: Recognition, Intersubjectivity, and Identity

While the speaker of “Strangers” engages in a self-conscious turning of feelings of strangeness into feelings of possibility for the self, other texts from this period rely on interactive encounters with others to imagine possibility for the self. In a second poem by Jo Allyn called “Rain,” the speaker walks the streets enveloped in rain and mist, which provide her with the anonymity she needs to find another like herself: “Hiding my face as I search / For another face that is hidden” (13). Similar themes from Allyn’s previous poem are present as the speaker wonders:

Shall we pass each other
Nameless in the night?
Perhaps within a sheltering door

Rain will lend us conversation

And we will find a new world

Together in the rain. (13)

The speaker wanders the streets in isolation, but she sees the doorways, not as passages to conformity, but as places at the edges of public space that provide the privacy needed for recognition and connection. In the public streets, strangers become passers-by, missing each other's hidden faces. Yet, the threshold of the doorway provides the possibility for connection with a hidden stranger and opens into world-making opportunities of that connection. The doorway is the in-between space between public and private, providing the public intimacy of a queer encounter and the space-making potential of the cruise, that feeling of recognizing another who is alike in the midst of a normative and potentially hostile space. However, the conditions of recognition are left unsaid; the only description of likeness comes in the speaker's reference to "another face that is hidden" (13). Instead, recognition is made possible through the title of the poem: the speaker is enveloped in darkness and rain; the rain urges them into the shelter of the doorway; it lends them conversation; and it is the location for their finding a new world: "[t]ogether in the rain" (13).

Instead of pushing the speaker beyond borders, this poem locates the speaker on the borders of things and blurs the edges. Rain participates in this blurring and softening. It makes our vision less sharp as mists and droplets confound our eyes, making them bleary, diluting borders and letting them run together. In this blurriness, connections between strangers become possible because connection requires the blurring of bodily borders, the ability of bodies to open up to each other in mutual recognition.

In discussing how we recognize strangers, Ahmed reminds us that to recognize means to know someone again: “To recognise means: to know again, to acknowledge and to admit” (*Strange* 22). In this construction, the stranger is already constituted; we know them as what is different by their outsideness, their not-belonging which is already constituted through the boundaries of what defines the inside, the familiar, the us. Already constituted. The recognition of strangers defines and hardens two kinds of borders: the spatial borders that define the inside/outside of house, neighbourhood, city, and nation, and which cement the stranger in place as out of place, as outsider; and the bodily borders which retreat and harden in the encounter, in the pulling away of one body from an-other in fear or disgust or difference (Ahmed *Cultural* 87). But what of the stranger, herself? In discussing the experience of the stranger, the one made strange, Ahmed recounts the story of Audre Lorde experiencing racism as a child on a subway car (*Strange* 38). Seated beside a white woman, Lorde sees the woman first staring at her with a look of disgust and then quickly pulling the edge of her coat up away from where it touches Lorde. The child sees the woman’s look, her nostrils flared in disgust, so she looks down and wonders if a cockroach has passed between them. When the woman stands to move away from her, Lorde looks down at her snow pants to see if there is something on them that would create such disgust and hate, only then realizing that the hate the woman projected was directed towards Lorde’s own body; she is the stranger. The racist’s self-preservation, her removal of the edges of herself from Lorde’s body cements the borders of each body into place, transforming the subject, Lorde, into an object and preserving her as an imaginary object of disgust, and also pulling the body

of the racist away and shutting its borders in “self-preservation” against further contact. Preservation kills in the sense that only dead objects are preserved. If affect is movement, moving subjects towards and away from each other, rubbing up against and affecting each other in ways that constitute and re-constitute bodily borders (Ahmed, *Cultural* 24), then preservation pulls the body out of the possibility of being affected, in effect killing it by cutting it off from the other. For the one made strange by the violence of such an encounter, the wound may initially pierce those borders, making the wounded feel exposed or vulnerable, and then harden them against further injury. Or else, and perhaps simultaneously, allow, through vulnerability and sadness, another to move in to provide recognition and comfort. In Lorde’s story, she as a child shifts over into the now-vacated seat to make room for her mother who sits beside her: “No word has been spoken. I’m afraid to say anything to my mother because I don’t know what I’ve done” (Lorde 148). She feels responsible for the racist response, a feeling that returns to haunt her in her future relationships with other Black women. But before going there, I want to stay here for a minute. I want to imagine, in the wake of this racist injury, Audre Lorde and her mother seated together on the train, their two bodies touching, swaying slightly together on the train, pressing into each other, and feeling strange together.

In the remainder of Lorde’s essay, “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” she talks about the shared experiences of racist hate that bonds mothers and daughters (157-159) but seemed to alienate Black women from each other as they reflected back all of the racism and hate they had absorbed and internalized from childhood, closing themselves off from each other (153-157). This alienation is the

problem she tackles at the centre of her essay and as she comes to teasing out a solution, she writes: “We will begin to see each other as we dare to begin to see ourselves; we will begin to see ourselves as we begin to see each other [...]” (173). There is a crossing of one self into another, a connection between two selves on which both depend. *Sister Outsider*, the title of Lorde’s book from which this essay is drawn, identifies a bond between subjects who are outsiders together. The title operates as a kind of recognition, a hail that constitutes the reader in relation to the writer, and identifies the conditions of their recognition, their outsideness, as a bond between them. Recognition demands that we see both ourselves and the other person at the same time; I have to see myself in order to see myself in you, and you in myself, in order to establish likeness. Jessica Benjamin discusses the importance of mutual recognition in intersubjectivity theory, the psychoanalytic theory of individual development which recognizes that the subject develops within a social world, surrounded by others (34). Intersubjectivity requires the self to recognize the other as a subject in order for them to subsequently realize their own subjectivity (35). In this way, our own subjectivity is dependent on us both being recognized and recognizing another, and these recognitions are constituting activities. While psychoanalysis hones in on formative development, I expand Benjamin’s work to discuss the iterative (re)constitution of the subject, as the Butlerian subject encounters multiple other subjects in the process of her continual becoming. In *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed returns to Althusser’s theory of how the subject is interpellated through the hail, arguing that the (mis)recognition of the hail serves to differentiate and constitute subjects simultaneously, since the hail, as representation

of the law, prefigures some subjects as already strange and suspect (Black, queer, homeless, etc.) (23). Ahmed also names the importance of “inter-subjective encounters in public life [that] continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces” (23). These intersubjective reinterpellations are not only verbal or interlocutionary; Ahmed describes the “visual economy” that differentiates subjects and enables subjects to differentiate other subjects (24), so an exchange of looks or a glance or a stare is equally constitutive and constituting. In Butler’s theory of performativity, she describes the sedimentation of repeated social actions which produce and naturalize social concepts and categories, such as gender, and to which the subject’s iterative, constitutive performative acts continually refer, either felicitously or subversively (*Gender* 190-191). And so, interpellations are also felt, bound up with the anxieties or pleasures of doing “it” – whether gender, sexuality, age, or class – right.

Anxiety pervades Jean Ray’s short story, “Homeward,” printed in the December 1956 issue of the *Ladder*, as the unnamed main character grapples with her identity and her feelings of strangeness and belonging. Here again, the main character inhabits public spaces – the streets and a city bus – where she engages in a number of visual exchanges with others as she travels between the familiar spaces of work and home. Walking from work, she reflects on the will power and control it has taken her to maintain a normal exterior at work as “doubts and indecisions of the past week had nagged the edges of her consciousness” (8). The reference to “edges” foregrounds the importance of borders in questions of strangeness and identity; when

we as subjects are interpellated and affected by other subjects, our borders, our bodily boundaries are in play, as places where our sense of “me” verges on the social and against other bodies. The main character is brought out of her internal debate of “am I, am I not” by the sudden appearance of “a girl with gorgeous red-gold cropped hair” who rushes onto the bus ahead of her (8). As if compelled by this sight, the main character dashes after her onto the bus “[a]lmost against her will,” and then, “again, unwillingly” sits where she can most easily see the girl (8). Her intense feelings towards the girl have the power to compel her into action; indeed, the main character appears at the mercy of a range of intense and conflicting emotions: “And there she sat; miserable, confused, one moment near tears, the next near laughter, eyes straight ahead, with a terrible feeling of flushed excitement” (8). This affective chaos arises from the combination of the pleasure of queer contact and the attendant fears about normative disruption that characterizes the cruise and which produces queer possibility. Queer recognition marks the moment of the queer cruise, and recognition or re-cognition – to know again – marks the moment of interpellation. These two kinds of recognition function together, either in opposition to produce the feeling of estrangement, or as a doubling to produce the feeling of becoming strange together.

In the narrative, the main character engages in multiple encounters which are mediated both through reality and her imagination. These intersubjective moments are brief; however, they begin to make explicit the surveillance of the self that is enacted in the moments of queer recognition and interpellation. In the first moment,

the main character gathers the courage to look at the red-haired girl, only to discover her looking in return, an exchange which has the potential to contain recognition:

Great God! She was looking straight at her! Oh dear, she thought, is it that obvious? Everyone on this bus must know what I am – but am I? Furtively she surveyed the girl again. Beautiful skin – not pretty – but that wonderful hair. She looks so young, so sure, so poised. And I am all flustered and must look like a lecher. (8)

Intersubjective interpellation is felt as the main character scrutinizes herself in response to the girl's looking, both responding to the hail and rejecting it. She refuses recognition here by casting herself imaginatively into the eyes of the others on the bus. And so, instead of finding likeness, she questions it and produces her difference in contrasting descriptions of how she and the girl look, a strategy that distances them. In the next moment, she sees that she's being scrutinized by someone else: "A woman across the aisle was staring at her with marked disapproval. Does it show, she wondered. Surely they can't read my thoughts – and I have been very careful not to give any clues in my actions – but have I?" (8-9). The main character responds to the stare of the disapproving other by turning back to herself in self-scrutiny; in the stare, she constitutes herself as the stranger, as one who has unknowingly written her strangeness on her body despite her carefulness against acting wrongly. In feeling strange, she realizes that she has no understanding of how to produce the recognition she simultaneously seeks and avoids. And she considers this using distancing pronouns of "they" and "you":

Good heavens, she suddenly realized – I don't know how they act – I've never observed that closely. I've seen the obvious ones whom anyone could spot, but I should think it would be something like a fraternity handshake – if you were discreet only one of your own kind could recognize you. (9)

This created distance and the imagined secrecy of queer recognition brings her briefly to a feeling of normative comfort. She reminds herself that once she used to admire beauty for its own sake without reading desire into it and without feeling read by others. Feelings of normativity, of being in line and acting in line, produce feelings of belonging that are comfortable and homelike. However, for the character, her brief glimpse into a past place of comfort does not last; her self-awareness of queer feeling suddenly changes what is homelike into *unheimlich*, into the uncanny that brings the familiar and the strange into play together (Freud 124): “Why must everything be so suddenly changed and terrifying?” (9). She recognizes that what was once normal and enjoyable has suddenly become fraught with fear and anxiety, and this collision of belonging and estrangement produces an interior crisis:

I must get out of this – I'll ring the buzzer right now. I Can't [*sic*] stand this any longer. What if she gets off at my stop? I can imagine myself being forced to follow her if she gets off first. Oh, God, I hope she rides past my stop. In this mood I'm perfectly capable of following her – and then what would I say? Is this your stop, too? My, you have beautiful hair – are you one of us? Am I one of you? O, merciful God, what has happened to me? (9)

She is frantic and panicked, feeling simultaneously compelled to leave and compelled towards the other girl. In imagining their confused conversation towards

finding sameness, she inserts the pronoun “us,” exchanging it for the “they” and “you” of her earlier reflections, which produces an imagined interpellation: “[...] can I refuse to recognize myself?” (9). The character’s desire to see herself, to re-cognize herself can only be achieved through her desire for the other stranger, the one who can also recognize and be recognized. Through the mutual recognition of intersubjectivity, the subject is (re)constituted through an experience of likeness with another. This likeness produces a bond between subjects, which, through intersubjectivity, constitutes our social relationships. When that bond is infrequent or rare, when the likeness is a recognition of strangeness running counter to what is normal or dominant, the bond between subjects can be fraught with the tensions of difference, as with Lorde’s encounters with other Black women during the 1950s, or saturated with other kinds and combinations of affective tension, from solidarity to love to fear to confusion. The intensity of these bonds, as knowingly connecting subordinated or estranged subjects, produces the necessary engagement that produces counter-cultures and counter-publics.

Queer Belongings: productive images and queer moments

In the final paragraph of “Homeward,” the main character, having stumbled off the bus, then turns back towards it: “[...] she turned, overwhelmed with the sorrow of her loss. She ran after it a few steps, yearning for the girl with the red hair. She stood gazing into the darkness for a time” (9). After her self-questioning and internal chaos, the character’s sorrow at the end of the story reminds us of the potency of desire. But in her experience of loss for the girl with the red hair, is she

truly mourning her as a lost love object, or is she mourning the loss of recognition and belonging that the girl represents? In her essay, "Queer Belongings," Elspeth Probyn explores a framework for thinking about gay and lesbian belonging beyond attachment to a love object (6-7). Writing at a particular moment of queer theory, she is interested in moving beyond or departing from the tendency to fix desire in one place by attaching it or reducing it to the singularity of the love object, to the individualized specificity of one body desiring another body and the sexual act that completes that desire (7). Citing Sedgwick in *Tendencies* that queer is "a continuing movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant. ... Keenly, it is relational, and strange" (qtd. Probyn 9), she proposes queer desire as what makes strange the relationship between the image and the body, as what unfixes the image from the body, enabling it to move and signify in a multitude of ways (9-10). Probyn links queer desire to the image, which freed from a singular attachment to the body, "causes different ripples and affects, effects of desire and desirous affects" (12). The image is linked to affect, to the undercurrents of emotion and feeling that move bodies towards and away from each other. Queer desire, located in the image, frees it from the singularity of one kind of connection between two bodies, a connection that simply replaces the different love object of heterosexuality with the same love object of lesbianism / queerness. As Probyn says, it is to recognize "that the movement between us is queer cannot be reduced to two individual elements: me as lesbian and possibly you. While, of course, the identification of and as lesbian is important, the movement does not stop there; or rather, that recognition is not automatically desire" (12). Instead, the image circulates affectively and productively, moving us in

different ways at different times, carrying nostalgia, hope, sadness, loss, lust, desire, linking us backwards and forwards in time. The red-hair of the girl in the story operates as this kind of image; connected and disconnected from the individual body of the girl, it moves through the story almost independently: “a girl with gorgeous red-gold cropped hair” (8); “see the girl with the red hair” (8); “beautiful skin – not pretty – but that wonderful hair” (8); “to gaze at the girl with the red hair” (9); “My, you have beautiful hair” (9); “yearning for the girl with the red hair” (9). Like the “the coursing vein that pops out on the inside of Martina’s [Navratalova] forearm,” that Probyn references (14), the red hair is both part of the girl’s body and separate from it, signifying beyond her individual and specific body to the queerness that she represents, linking further outwards to the main character’s confusion, her desire for intersubjective recognition, her fear of discovery, her need for certainty, and her search for belonging. In this queer encounter, the resonance of the image of red hair multiplies the reading of queer desire as a yearning for all of those things that constitute queerness, including and beyond the love object. Probyn writes that “belonging is always constituted in images, not in a golden past nor in a pristine future. The path is not teleological, there is no going home, there is only the temporary structuring of our various belongings” (15). Belonging, like strangeness, is contingent and dispersed, constituted affectively through connection and recognition with others alike and different.

Strangeness extends from people into spaces. Like the unfamiliar streets that represented adventure to the speaker in the poem, “Strangers,” strange spaces are unanticipated corners of the world, unexpectedly encountered and disorienting.

Dominant spaces can be estranging for outsiders, being, as Ahmed describes, the production of sedimented norms – of gender, culture, race, sexuality, abledness, et cetera. This means that for othered bodies, dominant spaces can shift bodies off-kilter, make them feel slanted, or produce strange encounters with their inhabitants (*Queer* 66-67). Queer or strange spaces, on the other hand, are tunnelled out between and behind legitimate spaces, and because of their illegitimacy, they can feel contingent, precarious, improvisational, and liminal. Halberstam generates the concept of queer time and space in one of his first studies on transgender bodies, locating it around the AIDS crisis and examining it through the frame of postmodernity at the end of the twentieth and start of the twenty-first centuries. I want to apply his work backwards, to consider it in the context of the 1950s and 1960s when the pressures of normativity in the United States produced an intense hegemony of what he frames as reproductive and capitalist time. Reproductive time refers to the ways that heteronormativity organizes lives and daily living, how it assigns value to certain life events and accomplishments, and how it preserves the heterosexual family (as well as dominances of race and class) through generational inheritance, linking the family to the stability of society and nation (5). Temporality influences how space is made, and so, although Halberstam focuses on queer time, he explains the concept of queer space as “the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage” and as “the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (6). Queer time and space are productive because they open up outside of the constraints of heteronormative time at the same time that they are heightened by a context of crisis that emphasizes

the present. By refusing to postpone happiness or desire, the here and the now is produced as the time of potentiality and productivity. Space is carved out behind the proper and the legitimate; it is unhinged from institutional and structural spaces and claimed in the moment of its occupation.

Queer time and place operate in the story “Dark Before Dawn” by Theresa Cordella to make strange the heteronormative expectations that the narrator feels bound to, and to produce possibility for desire and love outside of compulsory heterosexuality. When the narrator finds herself unable to sleep at 3:30 in the morning, she takes a walk through the empty city streets. She is in the midst of a queer crisis in that she and her friend Peg find their “need” for each other “undeniable” (8). However, under the pressures of heteronormativity, they are both trying to resist their mutual attraction. At the same time, the narrator is resisting multiple requests for marriage from her boyfriend, Andy, the idea of which leaves her “cold” and “uneasy” (10). Lost in thought, she wanders into a small bar: “It was closed, of course, after hours, but the door was ajar and there was a light inside” (9). Most of the light comes from a jukebox, and the tables and chairs are stacked to the side of the room. At the back, near a doorway, “[a] man in white coveralls was bent over a mop [...] ‘Cantch ya see?’ he said, ‘sclosed.’” (9). The narrator nods, but suddenly a blonde woman, quite drunk, appears from the rear doorway:

She danced up to me extending simultaneously a hiccup and a smile. I wasn’t exactly prepared for her sudden encounter but I didn’t mind either. “Hello, pretty,” she said in a husky blonde voice, “I want to dance with you.” In view of the fact that she’d just contributed to the juke box, I accepted. (9)

The strange encounter is reciprocal. The narrator finds herself suddenly dancing with a strange woman in a strange place, but she is also the stranger, the one who has wandered into a place unasked and unexpected: mid-dance the woman pulls back to look at the narrator's face and asks, "How'n hell you get in here?" (9). Though this bar is not marked as a specifically queer space within the narrative, it is queered through their dance. The bar is a heterotopic space and it verges on the strange; as a public house, it occupies the border of both private and public space. The lesbian bar was a crucial community space in the 1950s and 1960s, often carved out through loose arrangements with owners who offered protection from the public and police while remaining under pressure from both groups (Faderman 164-166). Spaces shifted and moved, were closed down and popped up, usually at the whim of politicians, police, and the public who targeted these spaces as distasteful and offensive. Nonetheless, they maintained faithful followings of lesbians for whom bars were often their sole meeting place (162). This particular bar is closed, literally after-hours, and so the narrator is there outside of its legitimate time when the public-privacy of the space should no longer be available to her. Its strangeness extends to the disjointed exchange she has with the woman as they dance:

"You look like something fell on you," I said, evading further questioning.

"It did," she said. "The sky. The whole damnit sky fell on me." The "it" was a hiccup. "Miles and miles." [...]

"Miles of what?" I asked.

"Just miles. I'nt that enough? And le'me tell you right now, she is too!" [...]

"Who?"

“Was why she left me. And le’me tell you right now, I won’t see her again if she wants to act that way.” [...]

“What way?” I said.

She began to cry, her head slumped on my shoulder. Under the insulated layers of drunkness [*sic*] I was aware of a deep sorrow. “Many’s the time I...” she stopped, not heeding me. “Watch out you don’t get boozled.”

“No chance,” I said.

“Just watch out you don’t” she said squinting an eye. (10; emphasis in original)

The blonde woman’s train of thought is fragmented and difficult to follow, but as she confides her queerness and shares her sorrow at the loss of a lover, it becomes apparent that, embedded in this strange intimate encounter, is a kind of queer recognition. The woman is mourning the end of a relationship, and the narrator appears to provide comfort. However, the blonde woman’s warning to not get “boozled” is followed by the appearance of a man whose command, “Hey, baby, com’ere!” makes her stiffen in the narrator’s arms. The woman describes him as Lou: “Lou for Louie. [...] Makes you think of Louise, don’t it? Or Lou Ann? I tease him sometimes and call him Lousy Lou.” (10). The man’s roughness, the woman’s stiffening response and her nickname for him suggest that this heterosexual relationship is not a happy one. Her queering of his name suggests her desire for a different body to be in place of his, but she is trapped here, between his body and that of the narrator who can offer nothing except a promise not to be “boozled” like she did, as a sort of transfer of possibility from one queer life to another.

In thinking about how queer time and space operate in this story, I also want to think about that moment of the cruise, in which the space of a look or a glance opens, slowing time down, freeze framing everything except that moment of connection, a moment of intense affect that expands into something bigger but always unstable, constantly in danger of collapsing, fringed with the intensities of both desire and danger. The affective moment, as I will call it, happens in critical moments of affective intensity, as time or space expands beyond the space of the moment and out of proportion with the surrounding time and space in order to contain the enormity of the moment. “Dark Before Dawn” opens with the narrator remembering how, as a youth, she felt trapped in a small world, but was able to see in her small bedroom mirror the possibility of something bigger: “I remember thinking that maybe in the mirror I was in a place by myself. My better side maybe” (8). The same mirror showed her the vastness of the sky and space captured in a “crescent moon and its scintillating subordinates splashed on the black surface like frozen sparks” (8). Like the expansiveness of the affective moment, the expanse of the world in her mirror offered an imagined place for the narrator to be a better version of herself, a place to be as big as she felt she could be and to escape the constriction and smallness of the place she could not leave: “And how else does one, just passing adolescence, think when bound in a place smaller than he feels?” (8). In her current situation, this constriction and smallness translate into the pressure to live a heterosexual existence, to marry Andy, and to ignore her feelings for Peg. The space of the bar then, like the sky in the mirror, opens up to offer a transformative vision of her future as the blonde woman becomes, not a better version of the

narrator, but a nightmarish or uncanny one. The narrator's first words to the blonde are, "You look like something fell on you." And the other woman answers, "It did. [...] The sky. The whole dammit sky fell on me. [...] Miles and miles" (10). Instead of finding possibility in the vastness of the sky, its collapse is linked directly to the loss of her relationship with a woman and her obligation to Lou. Significantly, the introduction of Lou into the scene produces a key affective moment for the narrator, when the woman's name for her husband, "Lousy Lou" strikes the narrator as funny: "[F]or the first time in over a month I laughed. The Blonde [*sic*] put her head on my shoulder and laughed too – a laugh that staggered drunkenly on a voice close to tears. I knew it was time to leave" (11). The laugh, caused by nothing especially funny, and functioning as a release of mixed, contradictory emotion for both women, marks the point of decision and transformation for narrator. She leaves the strange night-time bar, and turns homeward, where again the sky appears as an image of possibility: "I can still remember the dawn as I turned the corner and up the street toward Mrs. Murphy's house where Peg was. The dawn was a pink coldness, young and exhilarant, stretched tight across the sky; I felt like a vital hand in it" (11). The sky reflects the possibility of the future now open to her; she chooses Peg over Andy and the story's conclusion iterates that she made the right choice: "[A]lthough Andy never quite understood, he's happy now the way things turned out. He married a superb woman. They have two of the loveliest [*sic*] children I know. And, of course, Peg and I have been happy ever since" (11). The narrator has avoided the heterosexual imperative and the enforced legitimacy of reproductive and family time that is represented in the mention of Andy's marriage and children.

Strangeness multiplies in the early literature of the *Ladder*, intervening in narratives of identity and relationship to frame and impact the ways that characters move through the world and interact with others. As borderline figures, strangers occupy the edges of the social. They produce and affect subjects' bodily borders through recognition and differentiation, by invoking sameness and connection, and by provoking disgust and rage. As the *Ladder* encouraged closer conformity to gender, race, and class normativity, strangeness appears to be pushed out of the pages of the magazine, confined to dark corners of large cities and their underground bars, or proliferating in lesbian pulp novel titles that occupied newsstand and drugstore shelves. With names like *Strange Sisters*, *The Strange Path*, *Strange Passions*, *Strange Thirsts*, and *Stranger on Lesbos*, these novels publicly signified a kind of sordid fascination with lesbian sexuality, at the same time that they operated as an underground literature that lesbians both contributed to and consumed (Zimet 20-21). And yet, despite proscriptions against queer strangeness and an insistence on representations of the lesbian as normal, strangeness continues to circulate through the literature of the *Ladder*, representing feelings of otherness and difference, and providing spaces for lesbianism to resist both heteronormativity and homonormativity¹⁰.

INTERLUDE – Defamiliarizing strangeness

Belongings – pluralized, contingent, and dispersed – are a useful way of thinking about the kind of lesbian community constituted by the *Ladder* during its

¹⁰ “Homonormativity” is a term coined by Lisa Duggan.

early years. There is no question that the magazine produced and consolidated a counterpublic as it published issues and engaged audiences – readers and writers – in the production of textual interactions with other texts and publics. Frameworks of belonging are described through various bonds of feeling and articulated through reader letters, such as this one, which describes the sentimental and nostalgic feeling of home: “Getting The Ladder up here is almost like a letter from home” (N.J.C. 22). In another letter, the discovery that one’s private feelings are in common with a large group of people brings happiness and relief: “I cannot express the joy I felt when I read your September issue. I simply had no idea as to the enormity of the subject or its widespread implications, but the knowledge that my feelings are shared by so many has eased my burden considerably” (J.M., April 1960 25). Similarly, another letter-writer is glad to know that she is part of a group of people who see and approach the world as she and her friend do: “It gives us a genuine and exhilarating sense of pride to be among those who subscribe not only to the magazine itself but to its goals and ideals as well. The Ladder gives us a strong sense of identification with all the others like us who share a common world.” (26) – M.B.K., New York. However, alongside expressions of community and belonging, the *Ladder* also articulated reader’s differences and divergences from each other and from other lesbians beyond the ones forming through its pages. As the *Ladder* gained a readership who shared things in common, it produced an outside to its bonds of community, making strange a group of people who it did not recognize as belonging. As discussed previously, those who were rejected typically wore their strangeness openly, dressing and acting in ways that were described as demonstrating a lack of

courtesy (Bradley 21), “poor judgement” (Z.N., January 1960 23-24), and social “defiance” (Bell 5).

In 1958, however, Barbara Stephens published two short stories in the *Ladder* that wielded the idea of strangeness as a means of exposing the close-mindedness of discourses of exclusion and showed how strangeness operates to expose internal fears and prejudices. Published in the April and May issues, respectively, “A Martian View” and “The Coming Out of Martos,” depict the arrival of an anthropologist alien to earth and its interactions with the lesbian patrons in a bar called Riley’s. Using a Brechtian-style technique of defamiliarization, the stories re-imagine our world from the alien’s perspective as a strange place that makes little sense. After landing, the alien reads its guidebook, which tells it that “[t]he male of the species is rough, tough and burly; the females slender, tender and adorable. Should these characters be indeterminate it is well-known that one is garbed in pants, the other in skirts” (7). But despite the Martian’s readiness and effort to interact with humans, it is rejected with fear and panic. Instead, it snoops about at night, exploring the city, and wandering into increasingly narrower, rougher streets where there is a “general squalor and deadening silence” so that its “Martian heart felt all the melancholy and despair of an unloved creature” (8). Here, however, it suddenly hears laughter and music from a bar called “Riley’s,” a lesbian bar, where it is seen as strange but still easily accepted. It realizes that despite the variation of human body types present in the bar, all were wearing pants and all used the female pronoun. One of the patrons attempts to solve its confusion:

“Martos, we’re all of us women here. But there’s many kinds of women, and people, on this earth. Now to make things fall into a pattern we classify them into a type and give it a name. Simplifies things, see. Here at Riley’s we’re Butch an’ Fem, but whatever that means is up to the individual” (9).

Other patrons chime in, and some have more rigid definitions of these categories, but at the end of this first story, the martian uses his “X-ray eye” to discover that one of these butches is “in the kitchen now, wearing a dainty white apron, she’s cooking” and her partner, the femme, is “in her coveralls; I think she’s been under the car” (23). These two stories, and one other written by Stephens, are some of the only stories in the *Ladder* to explicitly address butch and femme bar culture. While they represent humorous and slightly heavy-handed pedantic takes, they succeed in portraying the fear that meets difference and in complicating butch/femme roles and categories, which were often seen as inflexible. In the subsequent story, “The Coming Out of Martos,” the patrons of Riley’s succeed in disguising their new friend, Martos, as a man – quite a feat with a winged and many-tentacled creature. And, as their adventure gets underway, a conversation between Pete and the now-named Martos critiques the discourse of difference and exclusion often seen in the *Ladder*:

“In Mars, we’d feel guilty if we didn’t stand up for you. We have a religion of a sort out there and one of our commandments is: ‘Thou shalt be tolerant; thou shalt never let a stranger suffer in thy midst.’” [...]

“It’s not only that, Mart, but some people consider it a breech of good manners to be radically different, and propriety counts out here.”

“Ah, propriety—it’s nice, but what happens when propriety clashes with decency? Is it best to punish thy neighbor for disagreeing with you, or is it better to be humane?”

“I’ll tell you, Mart, most people don’t know the difference; ethics and convention are one and the same.” (15)

The “some people” and “most people” of this exchange was directed at those writers and readers of the magazine who disparaged others for their failure to conform to societal expectations, at the same time that the alien, the ultimate stranger, makes the case for humaneness. While Ahmed notes that the difference of the alien in popular culture produces us as more human by coalescing our humanity, producing our human skin against its alien slime (*Strange 2*), the alien of Stephens’ stories is more human even than us. At the beginning of the first story, he is called “The Thing” (7), and by the end of the second story, he is Martos, and his pronouns have shifted from “it” to “he.” He experiences a wide range of emotion as he struggles to understand the conventions and beliefs of society and as he finds acceptance and friendship. As he moves through the lesbian underworld, he provides an unbiased view of the butches and femmes of Riley’s Bar, complicating their identifications, and showing them to be flawed, admirable, and human. His strangeness defamiliarizes the strange.

Dividing Politics: The *Ladder* at the end of the 1960s

By the later years of the *Ladder*, the political landscape had shifted significantly. Members of the DOB and contributors to the *Ladder* had to make a decision about whether their affiliations lay with the homosexual community and the

fight for gay rights, or with the feminist movement and their fight for women's liberation. In 1965, during the same year that Florence Conrad argued about the value of research with Frank Kameny, a debate about public picketing for gay rights divided the DOB. Members of the DOB, including then-editor of the *Ladder*, Barbara Gittings, and founders, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, began joining picketing actions in various cities across the United States, such as New York, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and San Francisco (Gallo 112-115). Not everyone supported these public actions, however; the DOB issued a policy against picketing in June 1965, and Del Shearer, the vice-president of the DOB's national board resigned out of her strong opposition to the picketing issue (Gallo 117-118). Nevertheless, such publicly-oriented actions galvanized a group of DOB members who viewed picketing and protests as a valuable way forward for homophile activism. In addition to participating in picketing protests, Gittings used her position as editor of the *Ladder* to increase the visibility of lesbians and to connect their issues with the wider homophile community. She understood that many issues were shared and connected across various communities. In the June 1966 issue, for example, she and Kay Tobin profiled a young Black woman, Ernestine Eckstein, putting her photograph on the cover of that month's issue and printing a full-length interview with her that shared her experiences as a Black lesbian and discussed the need for public action in the fights for Black and gay rights. Through Gitting's activism, she created stronger links between the *Ladder* and members of other homophile groups like ECHO (East Coast Homophile Organization) and Mattachine, and under her leadership, the magazine often featured articles and some fiction by

men. However, the DOB did not see this as a positive direction for the magazine, and because Gittings was also frequently late getting *Ladder* materials from Philadelphia, where she lived, to the DOB in San Francisco, she was asked to resign in August 1966 (Gallo 131). But the greater politicization of the *Ladder* had begun, and in the late 1960s, the magazine continued to respond to a readership that was more politically aware and actively engaged than ever before.

In 1968, the editorship of the *Ladder* changed hands for the last time. Barbara Grier had been a prolific contributor to the magazine for many years, primarily as the editor of the “Lesbiana” literary review column, but also as writer of articles, fiction, poetry, and an enormous number of letters. She took over as editor beginning with the September 1968 issue, and implemented immediate changes: “A Lesbian Review” disappeared from the masthead, and her first editorial announced that the magazine would be greatly expanded but published bi-monthly beginning with the forthcoming October/November issue. As Gallo notes, Grier’s involvement over the years had been limited to the *Ladder*; she was uninterested in the workings and political movements of the DOB (146). Writing under her pseudonym, Gene Damon, in a letter to the magazine in February 1967, she writes: “[W]e do need to hear less and less about meetings and gatherings and more and more about people. What they do and say and feel and fear and love and want” (Damon 21). Grier saw the *Ladder* as a critical connection point for lesbians who had no way of connecting with other lesbians. In my interview with her, she says:

Lots and lots of women, just simply, could literally live their whole lives never actively knowing that they ever met another lesbian. I know that also

sounds, in today's world, just a bit weird, but it wasn't uncommon. And, lots and lots of women never thought of coming out. Even though they knew at 15 that they were lesbians, they wouldn't think of doing anything about it for another 15 years. [...] And that's actually what a lot of people saw in the *Ladder*. It was their only touch with what they saw as their real life. (n.p.)

For Grier, the experiences of ordinary everyday lesbians, those for whom the internal workings and politicizing of the DOB were largely irrelevant, mattered as an audience. She explains that connections to books and other literature were lifelines for those who had no other means for connecting to other lesbians (n.p.). For them, and for herself as a lover of literature, she sought to make the magazine much more of a literary endeavor under her leadership: "I saw the magazine in an entirely different light from the beginning, and [...] when I took over, I immediately started filling it with nothing but literature" (Grier n.p.). Grier looked to Jane Rule, the American author living in Canada, for her support and assistance, and she credits Rule with bringing numerous established writers to the *Ladder*:

I tapped my best friend, Jane Rule, for all the help I could get from her, and to get a piece or two from Jane Rule was like being God [...] at that point she was a pretty important player, and she was such a wonderful writer, so it was such a treat. And she gave me everybody else. [...] Helen, I think it's Helen Rosenthal [and Lorita Whitehead and Judy Grahn.] And a lot of these people were in it because Jane Rule told them to be in it. I mean, that isn't exactly true, but it's very close. [She] approved of the idea of turning it into a magazine that had literature in it. (n.p)

With Rule's help, the *Ladder* began expanding its page count and increasing the quantity of fiction and poetry it printed. The character of the fiction and poetry also changed; more complex and more polished, much of it reads like the prose of more experienced authors. It is less constrained by categories of lesbianism, and of representing things in the "right" way. And some of it is sexually and erotically explicit in ways that the earlier *Ladder* would never have permitted.

An increase in literature, however, did not mean the end of other content. Articles dealing with political issues continued, and until 1970 when LaPorte and Grier removed the magazine from the control of the DOB, such reportage included the activities of the DOB and other issues related to homosexuality. Women's liberation articles also began trickling in. The first, in December 1968, was an article by Dorothy L. Martin called "The Lesbian's Other Identity," which encouraged lesbians to think about their political identities beyond the homophile movement by introducing the work of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to *Ladder* readers. In the August/September 1969 and December/January 1969/1970 issues, two articles, "Men are the second sex!" and "Out from under the rocks – with guns!" shows the increasing militancy of feminism, but also demonstrates that questions of identity were becoming quite complicated. Framing their arguments against men, the authors of these articles call on their fellow lesbians to think about their identities as women first, and to set aside their lesbianism for the sake of a larger sisterhood (Chase 34-35; Springvine 10). Rita Mae Brown criticizes NOW and its avoidance of lesbian issues in a June/July 1970 article reprinted from *Rat Magazine*, an underground leftist magazine that was taken over by feminists in early 1970 (Brown;

Antliff 157). And finally, an editorial by Grier (pseud. Gene Damon) in the August/September 1970 issue, “Women’s Liberation Catches Up To The Ladder” solidifies the magazine’s alignment with the feminist movement. In it, Grier imagines that the women’s liberation movement will open the door to civil rights for all minorities:

A number of far-reaching sociologists have predicted women’s liberation to be the first successful revolutionary force in the world today, and predicted that following this will be freedom for blacks and for homosexuals. We feel this is probably true, with the specific addition of freedom and full citizenship for all minorities of all types carried along in the sweeping changes. True human civil rights for all. (Damon 4)

After this issue, political reportage in the *Ladder* centres on issues of women’s liberation, including problems and tensions with NOW and intersections with Black civil rights activism, and the magazine, more generally, reflects a new political consciousness of its writers and readers. Even though lesbians occupied a subordinated position in the feminist community, the women’s movement offered a new discourse and new frameworks for lesbian personal and political aims.

Jane Rule and the *Ladder*

In addition to supporting Grier’s editorial aims, Rule made numerous contributions to the *Ladder* between 1968 and 1972, including letters and reviews, six short stories, and an excerpt of a novel in progress, which was published as *Against the Seasons* in 1971. At the time of her contributions to the *Ladder*, Rule had

published her first novel, *Desert of the Heart* in 1964, which she would follow up with *This Is Not For You* in 1970. What is striking about her short fiction contributions to the *Ladder* is the way they register many of the current political and social themes from gender relations to the Vietnam War to consciousness-raising. At the same time, however, her stories typically focus on people's intimate relationships inside their homes or in other people's homes. Four of her six stories contain the word "house" in their title, and they are all concerned with intimacy, familial relations, and such borderline roles as a live-in babysitter, a full-time housekeeper, and student boarders. In Rule's stories, the figure of the stranger or guest intervenes in domestic and intimate spaces to interrupt and disrupt their affective closure. Again, I consider domestic space here in terms of its sedimentation of affect and performance, its layers of gender, race, and class performances, that, by extension, signal privileges of heteronormative belonging and citizenship, especially in American culture. I look to Sara Ahmed's work on orientations of bodies in domestic space, and the proximity of objects in those spaces. Practices and tendencies across time make certain things, "happy objects," reachable and accessible for some bodies and not for others, or make some kinds of orientations more possible, more easily inhabited than others. There are rewards for fitting in; things are within reach and the "good life" is more easily achieved (Ahmed, *Queer* 65-88). In Rule's stories, the guest is a stranger; she acts strangely, and her strangeness produces affective disturbances through a kind of haunting, a generation of echoes of past times and places that upsets the familial and familiar qualities of the home. Ultimately, the presence of the stranger-guest produces a re-orientation in domestic spaces, a

queering of those spaces that turns their occupants away from the privileged intimacy of the home and its valence of protection, and toward a set of communal affective bonds, which can also be troubled and troubling.

Making strange: the violence of hospitality

Hospitality is burdensome in Jane Rule's short story, "House Guest," which was published in the December 1968/January 1969 issue of *The Ladder*. In it, the guest, Mackie Benson, is unknown to her hosts, Kate and Sarah, but is welcomed into their home as the friend of an old friend. While hospitality is typically cast as a customary relationship associated with kindness, generosity, and friendliness, there are other affective bonds at work. Reciprocal community obligations frame the traditional Greek concept of hospitality, called *xenia* or guest-friendship, placing responsibility on households to feed and house travellers from friendly lands and to treat them with the respect one would extend to a friend (Westmoreland 2). Mackie arrives on Sarah and Kate's doorstep as a stranger, but as a stranger who is made known through the community bonds of a lesbian network, which extends between cities and back into their university years. The conditions of her arrival emphasize the responsibility of the lesbian community to attend to their own. Sarah and Kate are differently inclined towards company. Sarah prefers to avoid it as much as possible, but she defers to what she calls Kate's "persistent hospitality" (23). Kate's motives, however, are also complicated:

If she was honest about it, she liked their uninterrupted ritual as much as Sarah did. But so lucky and sweet a peace had to be shared occasionally, not

so much out of an appetite for company – though sometimes it was as simple as that – as out of a sense of requirement: a looney, guilty notion about community that in practice more often illuminated the motives for murder than for love. (23-4)

Despite her desire to maintain the comfortable habits of their home life, she opens their household up to the needs of the community out of guilt and a feeling of obligation. Guilty feeling is important here. Kate looks backward and outward away from the quiet domestic life that she and Sarah have created, towards publicly-oriented lesbian communities whose labour at the subversive edges of the public enables and supports their privilege. However, Kate's looking is also a turning away, a simultaneous welcoming and rejection. She accepts Mackie into their home but with conditions, with expectations about the length of her visit and with expectations that she will act in a certain way while she is a guest in their home. Derrida's portmanteau, "hostipitality," which combines hostility with hospitality, exposes the violence that is embedded in the exchanges between host and guest. Hospitality is always conditional on the host maintaining their authority in the home, which in turn is based on the guest behaving in a particular way and observing household conventions. "It does not seem to me," he writes, "that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home [...]" (14). The very act of hospitality asserts the dominance of the host and the privileged space of the home, and one only achieves entry by consenting to that authority. The guest gives her consent through her

behaviour, by staying in line, by not acting strangely or queerly, and by not upsetting the order of the home.

In Rule's story, Mackie does not behave. When she first arrives, she offers a paper bag as Kate is making drinks. "I've brought some gin," she says, but Kate finds that that the bag contains a bottle each of gin and whiskey: "Kate minded at the same time that it pleased her. It was the sort of mistake she was apt to make herself when she was a guest, nervous to do more than was necessary. She knew in her own generosity the fear of being indebted" (25). The excessiveness of the gift is a reminder of the debt of hospitality that the guest feels, a debt that casts a shadow on the generosity of the host by surfacing what is tacit in the host-guest exchange, that there are conditions to be met and debts to be paid. Shortly afterwards, Mackie breaks off mid-conversation without explanation and walks out of the house. When Kate finds her, she is standing on the lawn with her face averted, pretending cheerfulness but clearly emotional. The act irritates Sarah, and it also undoes the couple's normal operations wherein Kate cooks while Sarah handles the initial small talk. Unable to handle Mackie's strangeness, Sarah instead retreats to the kitchen and leaves Kate to manage their guest. Throughout the evening of her stay, Mackie also makes comments about Sarah and Kate's relationship that Kate finds odd and slightly inappropriate, and she occasionally uses words like "dyke" and "queer" in conversation, which Kate dislikes because she views them as vulgar. By being spoken, they produce resentment: "Kate answered, forcing the coldness out of her voice, for, though it was a vocabulary she hated and an attitude she found both embarrassing and degrading, there was a person in her living-room who required her

courtesy and attention” (27). Kate is shamed by Mackie’s vulgarity; it contaminates her and her space. Such words are associated with lower and working-class bar culture, referencing the butch-femme dynamic that middle-class white lesbians wrestled with, and Mackie’s use of them operates as a kind of violence. In her strangeness, Mackie is out of orientation in Sarah and Kate’s home. Her body does not fit; she is out of line. In addition to acting strangely and speaking wrongly, Mackie makes Kate and Sarah uncomfortable by being, as Kate thinks of her, a “nearly unforgiveable lonely woman” (26). On her way to Seattle for a new job, Mackie has invested all of her hopes in the possibility of a new life and of finding someone to be with, a hope she reiterates, as if saying it will make it so:

[...] Mackie started up again, faded out again, took strength from more encouragement, went on—or went round, for she said essentially the same things over and over again: the new job was going to be ideal; she’d find someone to live with; it was not good to live alone; she was bad with money. (26)

The distance between the guest and her hosts is gaping; while Mackie has been financially fragile, Kate and Sarah are safely nested in middle-class comforts. When Mackie wonders about how much their house would be to rent, she quickly realizes her error: “You own this house? [...] Well, that’s different, of course. I’d never be able to do that” (26). Later, when she offers to wash the dishes, and Kate responds, “We just stick them in the dishwasher,” Mackie simply repeats “A dishwasher” (26). The disparity in their lives is obvious, and Mackie’s clumsy realization of the gap produces discomfort for the three of them. Ultimately, then, Mackie’s strangeness

does not stem from a rejection of what Kate and Sarah value, but from her attachment to the homonormative ideals that they seem to possess: intimacy, stability, and a shared home, the “happy objects” of domestic affect and the markers of the good life. What should be hospitality, understood as openness and generosity, turns into *hostipitality*, a violence extending from the place of authority that the hosts occupy, a position that reinforces their privilege and their guest’s lack.

However, Mackie’s failures disrupt the homonormative domestic space that Kate and Sarah have constructed around them. The disruption comes from two places, from Mackie’s past and from Kate’s guilt about that past and its implications for her present. Mackie’s financial instability and general precarity is the consequence of injustices related to her lesbianism. She shares that when she was young, she had been released from the Women’s Army Corps with a medical discharge in a barracks-wide purge, accused of lesbianism without cause, and before she even knew how to identify the feelings she was experiencing. This led to guilt and self-hate and a series of unhealthy relationships with women, which, along with financial marginalization as a result of her discharge, extended her feelings of worthlessness. Her story was not an unusual one: Kate “wished she didn’t believe, but it was too familiar a story not to” (28). And Kate cannot help absorbing her pain and loneliness, empathizing with the woman she has welcomed into her home:

She resented the emotional blackmail as much as Sarah did, the self pity and envy intended to make other people feel guilty. But, if you were asked to care, somehow you had to try to push down the resentment, to refuse the

guilt, to understand the pain and be at least some temporary comfort [...]

“[T]here but for the grace of you go I”. (27)

As Sarah, from her study, hears the indecipherable murmurs of their conversation, she thinks, “Mackie would go off untouched by, or a little the worse, for Kate’s kindness; and Kate would carry Mackie’s misery around for days without knowing it wasn’t her own” (27). In a reversal of the violence done by host to guest, the imposition of Mackie’s emotional need is another kind of violence. Kate accepts this violence as a kind of social responsibility even as she keeps Mackie at a distance. However, when its weight increases across the length of the evening as Mackie shares more and more of her story, Kate finds relief in turning towards Mackie in the sublimation of pain into desire: “Then they were lying together on the couch in a long kissing, for Kate so sweet a relief that she wanted nothing but to go on and on kissing into opening desire, the longing of body for body, there was finally an answer for, brief but absolute, against all ugly and grieving loneliness” (28). Kate’s turn towards Mackie is a submission to the emotional weight of the past and its implications for the present. Her surrender to the grief and the loneliness is a brief re-orientation of her body away from the closed-off domestic intimacy shared with Sarah, and towards the stranger and the community and history she represents. Mackie, however, pulls away, and with the statement, “It’s never any different, is it?” associates Kate with her other negative experiences, to implicate Kate as a cause, not a salve, of her pain (29). Mackie then takes control of the evening, sending Kate to bed and closing up the house. In the morning, she departs early and leaves behind a note that reads, “Thank you and you’re welcome” (29), suggesting that the couple

are as indebted to her as she is to them. Their indebtedness refers backwards and outwards, not to the moment with Kate and the preservation of her relationship with Sarah, but to the context of their relationship in a wider history and community in which the visibility, chosen or imposed, and sanction of many Mackies sustains the fiction of their homonormativity. The half-welcome intrusion of the guest upsets the taken-for-grantedness of Kate and Sarah's home life and makes it strange. It acts as a reminder that their domestic intimacy is a fragile construction, an unreliable facade easily dismantled by the same violence that produced Mackie and all of the others like her.

Generous Hospitality: Turning towards community

The disintegration of hetero- and homo-normative domestic fictions is emphasized in Jane Rule's story, "My Country Wrong," which was published in August 1968. The concept of home circulates throughout this text in many different forms, and the narrator figures as the stranger-guest who unsettles and disrupts the reader's sense of what home is. To use stranger or guest is perhaps somewhat inaccurate; this is a kind of homecoming. It is three days before Christmas, and the self-exiled narrator has returned home to visit San Francisco with the plan to see friends for a few days and then to return to her familial home south of the city. Narrated in the first person, the opening section of the story provides a framework for thinking about homes at the same time that it unsettles the reader's sense of at-homeness in the text:

I don't want to talk about the death of friends, failures of domestic courage, the negative guilt of an ex-patriot. It is probably better to be grieving, tired and guilty in a familiar place. San Francisco is familiar enough, home city as much as I ever had one, growing up American. (8)

Despite the construction of the sentence in the negative, the narrator does talk about these three things, the death of friends, domestic failure, and national guilt, and she connects them with a sense of home extended from a domestic setting across city and nation. The conflation of home with nation is confirmed in the phrase, "growing up American," and in the title of the piece, "My Country Wrong." As Marilyn Schuster points out, the title echoes the militaristic and patriotic phrase, "my country, right or wrong," but is rendered grammatically uncertain through the elision of the comma after "my country" and the words "right or" (124-6). The result is either that my country is wrong or has been wronged, or perhaps both. Elisions and negatives multiply through the text, leaving holes, spaces, and gaps of non-closure, unsettling and dislocating the reader, and constructing the narrator as a stranger in her own narrative. It is useful then to think about the narrator as an "affect alien" to use Sarah Ahmed's phrase (*Promise* 168), one who is always affectively out of place, who experiences a gap between how one is supposed to feel and how one actually feels. The affect alien is out of line; she is unsettled and she is unsettling. The narrator resists uncomplicated attachments to such things as Christmas, country, romance, and family. By not feeling right, or by not feeling rightly, she opens up the possibility of re-orientation of those concepts or frameworks for feeling.

Towards the end of the story, the narrator gets a long-distance phone call from an undisclosed caller. She responds to the un-narrated statement or question at the other end with, “That isn’t what ‘homesick’ means exactly” (18). The provoking question can be guessed at: Are you sick of home? A “yet” might even be tagged on, an accusation of abandonment. Or the question could be one of commiseration, an empathy extended across distance to one who is known to be out of place. To be sick of home is not what homesickness means exactly, but it is one connotation of the word. The original meaning is linked with nostalgia, a medical condition ascribed to sailors who physically suffered with homesickness, the visceral longing for home (OED). A third meaning comes out of the German, *unheimlich*, un-homelike, what is uncanny or strange (OED). All three meanings are useful for thinking about the hospitability of home and of the ways that homes function in this narrative. Despite her correction of the unknown speaker on the phone, the narrator *is* sick of home, both her home of exile, and her originary family home. There are affective breakdowns in both places, and she is between both of them, residing in a hotel throughout the story. She has returned to her home city, or to a city that she can most accurately call home, a place that holds memories of her childhood. However, she resists nostalgia, recounting memories in a factual and disjointed way, and avoiding easy connections between elements:

I had a godmother who sold shoes at the White House because she was divorced. For the same reason my great aunt had a boarding house somewhere out on a street that ran toward the park, where once I spent a

whole terrified night pulling paper off the wall next to my bed. Grandfather had a pass through the restricted areas all during the war. (8)

There is an absence of nostalgia about the past and there is no nostalgia in the present. Christmas, a time of affective and ideological intensity, associated with family, belonging, generosity, and happiness, is noted but not marked. She remarks at one point that someone has delivered a little planted Christmas tree and a bottle of whiskey to her hotel room: “No card,” she says, “but it was an unthreatening discreet kindness” (9). Christmas, extended in this way, with no associations with friends or family, without expectations, is a kindness. In the present, the nation is at war, both with another nation, Vietnam, and with itself, which creates a sense of the *unheimlich*, the final type of homesickness where the home is made uncanny or strange; the familiar is itself but different. The city is filled with soldiers, young men, uncomfortable in their uniforms. At the same time, it is empty of her friends, many of whom have been jailed for protesting against the war. The nation, charged with raising its youth, is either sending them to war or throwing them in jail, causing one character to comment that the country is a jail, and another to defend himself against the charge of disturbing the peace with the argument that he was “trying to disturb the war” (8). Reverse discourses and reversed roles produce a country that is made strange and inhospitable to the very people who are calling it home.

How then, in this unsettled narrative, do we begin to find space for hospitality? Unlike in the first story, hospitality is not edged with violence. Instead, it emerges out of unlikely spaces to produce a turn towards community unencumbered by expectations, guilt, and conditions of behaviour. In one scene, the narrator visits

Michael and Jessica in their home, an old house that seems to refuse closure, with paintings nailed to exposed lathe and an unfinished walkway to the door. She is connected to them through Michael, who is an old professional friend, but their connection is also through a shared political community. “We were glad to see each other in this kindness they were offering me” (10), she says, suggesting a traditional notion of hospitality, but also an ease in its extension. There are no Derridean conditions imposed. Behaviour, in this household, is varied and fluid; there are several other people present who may be visiting or may be living there, but how they belong is left undefined. None are given context by the narrator; they are mentioned by name only at the moment when they act or speak. The only introduction given is a non-introduction: “I keep not mentioning Alice” (11). Jessica and Michael’s children are of an ambiguous age, and their behaviour is unconstrained but open: “They are not so much badly brought up children as unbrought up. What manners they use have the charm of their own invention” (10). Similarly, Alice moves through the company, kissing various people, and appearing without explanation in photographs that are circulated. It is with ease, then, that the narrator also moves into and through this domestic space, carrying odd chairs like the rest of the company to place haphazardly around a dining room table for a communal meal. Politics are forefront, with the conversation circling around what people will do and should do. “Is it embarrassing to be out of jail?” the narrator asks Michael (11). He replies that it is, but it is obvious that his age is what keeps him out, and a later reference to the days of the McCarthy purges suggests that he and Jessica were politically active during that earlier period. “They’re building concentration

camps for Negroes and draft dodgers,” one of the children says, and the other replies, “We’re going with them [...] when the time comes” (11). Community responsibility is at the centre of this household, which opens up the domestic space to the needs and injustices of the outside community.

In contrast to the narrator’s ease in the makeshift domesticity of Michael and Jessica’s house, she visits a lesbian bar a day later, on Christmas Eve, in the company of a friend. It is not an unfamiliar space, but one she has not been to for many years, and she is uncomfortable in both the clothes she is wearing and in her body, feeling out of place and out of sorts: “I was not properly dressed, being properly dressed, in navy silk with a green silk coat. I have other kinds of clothes, even a pair of modest boots, which I would have been glad of, but in whatever costume I would have to carry my age” (13). Despite her resistance, she meets Ann, a much younger woman who stands beside her silently while her friend dances with another woman, and then generously throws an arm around her when they are approached by a “motorcycle rider, almost as tall as the bouncer,” managing the situation with tact and care (14). Ann invites her to dance: “I could dance the way I was being asked to,” the narrator describes, “The novelty of it for me, the grace and protectiveness of my partner were new pleasures” (15). This dance marks a kind of hospitality of the moment, an ease of exchange that is pleasurable in the giving and the receiving. This intimate hospitality is echoed later in their sexual exchange:

[I wanted] not simply to be good in bed out of thoughtful habit but to be marvelous at once. But she was as understated and as graceful as she had been on the dance floor, leading only to invite being led, if I had noticed, if I

had wanted to notice. She came to me perfectly at the moment I wanted her to. (17)

Their sexual meeting is a generous choreography, a free exchange that is unmarked by guilt or obligation. Although the narrator has begun the evening in the company of her old friend, her encounters with Ann eases the discomfort of her friend's abandonment, as well as the discomfort of feeling both out of place and out of time. In this story, moments of hospitality emerge from community and are turns toward community, both a political community like the one gathered at Michael and Jessica's, and a lesbian community constituted through the bar rituals of attraction and belonging. Each of these communities is positioned within the larger framework of a dysfunctional nation, which is exercising violence against its citizens: imprisoning them, sending them to war, and denying their rights. Despite the national violence without, there is care and generous hospitality at work within small affective non-familial groups. Without replacing the idealism of happy domestic normativity with another kind of communal idealism, I suggest that, through the concept of hospitality, Rule offers readings of belonging and community that critique normative affective bonds and suggest possibilities for moments of chosen community and connection.

Feeling strange: The critical work of strangers in the *Ladder*

The strangeness of lesbians is a critical project. While writing this chapter, I have returned repeatedly to a quotation from Kathleen Stewart in her book, *Ordinary Affects*: "Abject and unthinkable bodies don't just become 'other' and unthinkable.

They go on living, animated by possibilities at work in the necessary and serendipitous” (Stewart 117). Lesbian performances interrupt and move against normative inscriptions of gender and sexuality. Refusals by western societies to make lesbian bodies legible, to inscribe them in some way, even as against the law, have not eliminated their existence, their desires, their unsettling strangeness. Acting strange, looking strange, being strange, even in the tiniest of moments or movements, produces possibility by unsettling the sedimentations of normativity. Strangeness was, of course, not a concept embraced by lesbians of the *Ladder*; and yet, strangeness appears in a significant number of narratives as a feeling or a space or an interaction that operates productively to produce lesbian self-understanding, bonds of recognition, and possibilities for desire and relationship. By invoking strangeness, these poems and stories consider how exclusion from discourses and frameworks of normativity can produce feelings of belonging and inclusion among the estranged as community. Instead of turning away from strangeness and its stigma, poems and stories embrace strangeness, constructing it as place where generosity and hospitality can be extended without obligation or hostility. To feel strange as an individual can be isolating, producing a sense of distance and removal from others, or perhaps producing a lack of fit, a chafing against other bodies that rubs you raw. To share strange feeling with others, however, can produce movement of the strange in productive ways; it can generate further recognition, it can impact space and the possibilities for how bodies are oriented in space, and it can produce a generous hospitality within a traumatic system. Strangeness interrupts daily goings

on to defamiliarize them, to generate a new way of looking that leads to questions and the possibility of transformation.

Chapter Four: Beginnings and Endings: Potentiality in Romance and the Promise of Endings

“They stood there a moment longer and then walked back to the store with their hands nearly touching and a fine, wild sweet singing rising inside them.”

– Vern Niven, “Will Call,” *Ladder*, May 1959, 20

Romance is the beginning of something. With its narrative intensities of encounter, desire, and fulfillment, romance produces feelings of hope, a sense that this moment leads to more moments, that something is blossoming. Romantic short stories were common in the *Ladder*, particularly in the first half of its tenure. In their narrative settings, they produce feelings of potentiality for lesbian connection and love within the constraints of their historical moments. This potentiality operates as a type of promise, but one that differs both from the promise of happiness that is constructed in the shape of the heteronormative family structure, and from the pleasure of recognition experienced in the expanded moment of the cruise. Instead, the romance promises an extended intimacy, one which can take a variety of forms. As a lesbian narrative, the romance imagines a future for the performance of lesbianism as both intimate and public practice. However, beginnings are also endings. By beginning a lesbian romance, narratives in the *Ladder* also gesture towards death. These deaths are various: the death of another way of living, the death of a normative attachment, or the death of a previous relationship. By starting something new, the lovers sever an attachment to something else, and so the death is enacted in service of the production of queerness. But death can in and of itself be productive; some of the most poignant romantic stories in the *Ladder* are told from places of loss and grief. The loss of love can intensify what made that love

transformative, and it can also demonstrate the ways that intimate relationships produce bonds beyond the couple that stretch across lovers and friends to weave community relations.

In thinking about queer bonds in this way, as connected to both beginnings and endings, love and death, I reference the stellar work of Weiner and Young in interrogating and dismantling the binary that has shaped recent queer theory and which polarized anti-social theories of queerness against theories of the queer as social (224-226). As they write:

The most prominent debates in queer theory of recent years have located the political promise of queerness in the espousal of one of two positions: one must be “for” (a queer version of) the social or one must be, as queer, “against” the social (as we know it). [...] Such a binary, we argue, presents a false choice, as if queer social negativity engendered no bonds and queer collectivities did not take shape precisely in relation to some negation or incommensurability within the social (224).

I have been arguing throughout this project that lesbian community in the 1950s and 1960s emerges from traumas of erasure and illegibility. However, queer romantic affect relies on the subject as social and intersubjective, on community bonds that produce visible models of queerness, on failed relationships as foundations to successful ones, and on friendship as a support network. And so, I want to bring attention to the ways that queer romantic affect also emerges from conditions of impossibility, from conditions that estrange and erase the subject individually, that construct barriers against queer desire and relations, and that render queer romance

invisible either by writing over it with compulsory heterosexuality or by shaping it into heteronormative molds. Just as the queer cruise is the opening of space under and between the pressures and dangers of heterosexism and homophobia, queer romance is always under compression, and its own death always hovers at its edges. To begin queer romance under conditions of impossibility and denial is not, however, to begin softly or tentatively in recognition of those conditions, but rather to claim love with fierce intensity.

And so, this chapter reads narratives of love's beginnings and endings to consider how romantic affect produces movements in the social. By examining four short stories published in the *Ladder*, stretching from 1957 and 1958 to 1967, including a short novel published across six issues of the *Ladder* in 1967, I consider how the production of romantic affect in the *Ladder* shifted ways of thinking about normative life and queer relations. As demonstrated through reader letters, romantic affect was fulfilling in that it engaged readers' senses of hope and optimism under the constraints and pressures of their contemporary social reality. It opened up a space for queer potentiality that made ordinary life bearable by imagining the possibility of queer love and also imagining the possibility of queer bonds extending beyond the couple. Romantic bonds between lesbians are a kind of manifestation or fulfilment of lesbianism; to do lesbianism as a romantic, erotic, and/or sexual practice is fundamental to constituting lesbianism as a social category and identity. Warner states that the "doing" of queerness is always embedded in its "being," and in fact, that queer practices are the "deviant" referents that "respectable" homonormative queerness unsuccessfully seeks to escape and disavow in its self-

constructions (*Trouble* 30-32). This is not to say that there are not multiple ways of performing lesbianism, but rather that intimate exchanges of words, gestures, and touches are at the root of those performances, as anticipations and as reminiscences. Although, as a product of their time, all of the stories foreground the couple form, my readings are not intended to privilege intimacy in the form of the couple, and so I read these romantic beginnings and endings outward. Romance stories in the *Ladder* look forward and look backward to intimate relationships between women, demonstrating by their transformative impacts, the potency of those intimacies. If it seems odd that a chapter that promises to talk about the potentiality of romance and love also looks to the loss and grief in love's endings, it is because, through our attachments to heteronormative and homonormative family structures that support social institutions extending out towards nations, we are committed to a vision of love that lasts, that ages well, and whose longevity signifies success.

Happy Endings: investments in closure and romantic fulfillment

Readers of the *Ladder* discuss lesbian romance stories as part of a larger conversation about the importance of story endings for individuals in the lesbian community. In some ways, these discussions are connected to issues of representation, but they are less concerned with the representation of the individual lesbian, and instead deal with the degree to which they are "good" representations of lesbian life, and ultimately, whether endings of stories should be hopeful or realistic. In this concern, they mirror discussions by Grier in her "Lesbiana" column, where endings of novels are often noted for readers as either positive or negative but are

usually weighed against the depictions of lesbians throughout: “The main supporting characters in this delightful mystery are a lesbian and her love. In the course of the book they nearly adopt a child. The affair is happy and permanent at the novel’s conclusion” (September 1958 15). And so, a novel could be worthwhile in spite of its negative ending: “It has an ending to satisfy censors but nevertheless is worth reading” (September 1957 15). In the *Ladder*, where censors were not an issue when it came to story endings, conclusions of romances often end with the couple finding each other and discovering happiness together. For many readers, such as F.L in Rhode Island, the happy ending provides an important service to their growing community: “If readers of general magazines want ‘happy conclusions’, [sic] how much more so does the homosexual need the encouragement, the satisfaction, that is to be found with a story which closes with a promise” (26-7). And, in another letter a year later, F.L. writes: I think that most readers of THE LADDER are not in search of the ‘strong unhappy ending’, but rather, a story that leaves us with a feeling of bright hopefulness” (25; emphasis in original). Her last letter, however, drew a strong response from Marion Zimmer Bradley, who asks if the *Ladder* was to become a “mutual admiration society” (July 1958 19): should we not “really want self-understanding [...] and a realistic approach which admits that a happy ending is rare in real life, not only for the Lesbian but for any person with strong convictions which are out of step with the pattern of the world in which he, or she, must live?” (July 1958 19). She goes on to argue that life for lesbians is difficult, and lesbians must be armed with this knowledge: “If anything, she needs more rugged honesty, stronger armor [sic] against the world, and above all a total absence of any self-pity

or self-deception” (21). Other letter writers support Bradley’s views, with one arguing that discrimination is what produces unhappiness: “[We are] member[s] of a very particular and completely distinctive minority that is DISCRIMINATED against in a unique manner. And with discrimination – [...] there’s your unhappy ending” (K.O.N. 17; emphasis in original). However, readers also aligned themselves with F.L.’s view of the importance of happy endings. Niki from Minnesota articulated that endings produce hopefulness for the possibility of a life:

I have fully enjoyed the short stories, especially those with the happy ending. We all know full well that life is not a bowl of cherries and that all relationships, normal and otherwise, do not always end up happily. But why not have stories end that way. They give a person hope for the future, for a life, for happiness. (24)

Her naming of “future,” “life,” and “happiness” links these concepts together to help define what is entailed in the feeling of possibility and the construction of potentiality. I want to be cautious here with the word “happiness.” I have previously described the kind of homonormative promise of happiness that the word can signify as well as the space of queer (un)happiness that can be created and claimed beside it. However, I want to turn back to F.L. to bring in another reading of happiness that connects to my discussion about hospitality in chapter three. F.L. responded to Bradley with a three-page letter arguing that happiness is not so rare as Bradley suggests (July 1958 19), and that the young gay woman does not need stories to tell her that life is hard since her own experiences and society will do that for her (18). She continues:

[W]e need to know that life is good. That though we many have to fight nail and tooth to make and to keep it so, still, there is a reward for those who can face the sober facts with balanced thinking and active doing. Maybe the reward isn't just what we'd order. Maybe it's no more than merely seeing the other fellow get the reward. But if we've helped him get it, we've something to be happy about, yes? (20; emphasis in original)

F.L.'s insistence that the young lesbian needs a "feeling of bright hopefulness" (21) is tied to the idea that life is made good by the very fighting she does to make and keep it that way. And the reward for the struggle is not always a personal benefit, but the possibility that someone else will benefit. In this section of her letter, F.L. gestures towards a community responsibility to prepare a way forward for oneself and the one beside or behind oneself, and she argues that such actions produce happiness.

The discussion about story endings describes a conflict between what readers saw as the "reality" of lesbian existence and the possibility embedded in romantic fulfillment. While examples of stable and apparently happy lesbian couples filled the meeting rooms of the DOB, with the most visible examples being Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, Helen Sandoz and Stella Rush, and Cleo Bonner and Helen Cushman, the idea that women could meet and fall in love in spite of discrimination and external pressures was somehow seen as unrealistic. More importantly, the rather intense focus by readers and writers on "happy endings," whether in *Ladder* stories or in reviewed novels, speaks to the dominance of narrative closure as the place from which the reader sees the fiction as either "happy" or "unhappy." In Frye's definition

of the romance as described by Frederic Jameson, romance is “wish fulfillment or utopian fantasy, which aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday reality,” not to completely transcend the everyday, but to achieve freedom from the anxieties of that reality (138). The “libido or desiring self” (138) seeks to overcome the problems of the existing reality and, by the end of the narrative, this has either been accomplished or not, producing either a happy or unhappy ending. In the case of lesbian romances, the anxieties of reality are pressures of heteronormativity and overt discrimination that throw up barriers to the fulfillment of lesbian relationships. However, in the happy endings of short stories in which the romance is fulfilled, social limits and problems have not disappeared. Instead, the romance story ends with a romance just beginning, one that unfolds in defiance of social strictures and the limits that are imposed on the characters. In Nancy Booth’s examination of the role of gender in the endings of novels, she notes that narrative endings were traditionally limited for female characters, particularly in novels up to the 1900s; they either married or died, and they did so happily and unhappily (3-5). Questions to ask, then, are what is possible to be narrated within the social and ideological constraints of this period (4), and whether what is narrated produces complete closure or whether it remains open to alternate readings.

In her important article “Zero Degree Deviancy,” Catherine Stimpson argues that lesbian novels from the 1920s to the 1970s follow one of two distinct patterns, the “dying fall” and the “enabling escape,” which are the result of the pervasiveness of the link between homosexuality and deviancy in the twentieth century (364). Stimpson describes these two types of narratives in this way:

[There are] two repetitive patterns: the dying fall, a narrative of damnation, of the lesbian's suffering as a lonely outcast attracted to a psychological lower caste; and the enabling escape, a narrative of the reversal of such descending trajectories, of the lesbian's rebellion against social stigma and self-contempt. (364)

Stimpson addresses the invisibility of and the coded silence around lesbianism that produced the impossibility of lesbian intelligibility, and she argues that novels like *The Well of Loneliness* agreed to a narrative of damnation in exchange for being able to explicitly name the lesbian in writing (367). *The Well of Loneliness* is Stimpson's exemplar of this "dying fall" structure, and against it, as diverse examples of the "enabling escape" narrative, she names novels of the 1970s including Isabel Miller's *Patience and Sarah* (1972)¹¹, Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), and Bertha Harris' *Lover* (1976). Notably, Stimpson's examination collects texts into two periods, 1920 to 1930 and 1960 to 1970; she leaves out the 1940s and 1950s during which a range of lesbian-authored novels were published as pulp fiction, including Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (1952) and Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker Chronicles* (1957-1962), which produce the possibility of lesbian love against very present narratives of damnation. She also overlooks novels from the 1930s that do not easily fit the category of the "dying fall," particularly Gale Wilhelm's *We Too Are Drifting* (1935) and *Torchlight to Valhalla* (1938). Stimpson collects all novels that are not damnation narratives into the category of the "enabling escape," calling

¹¹ As Stimpson notes, *Patience and Sarah* was first published privately in 1969 as *A Place of Our Own* (375).

them “hopeful,” and arguing that they are “confident about the lesbian’s power to name her experience and experiment with the literary form” (374). She further notes that such narratives are consciously erotic and assert the lesbian’s independence from men (376).

While Stimpson’s work has been valuable to understanding the arc of western lesbian fiction, I would argue that her category of “enabling escape,” as it stands, is now too broad to be of value beyond naming novels that reject the damnation narrative. The existence of 1950’s narratives further complicates her categorizations and suggests that “enabling escape” narratives pre-date the 1960s women’s movement she credits with helping to produce them (374). Outlying 1950s novels and romance stories in the *Ladder* all follow Stimpson’s characterizations: they name the lesbian experience, contain or gesture towards eroticism, and assert romantic independence from men. Despite these similarities, their narratives are different from such stories as *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *Love*. Specifically, they produce lesbian romance within the bounds of heteronormative hegemony, quietly making space and accepting the consequences for doing so. The story of the brazen and powerful Molly Bolt of *Rubyfruit Jungle* is a very different one than the story of the relationship between Therese Belivet and Carol Aird in *The Price of Salt*, for example. Bolt daringly throws off social constraints; she refuses labels and even reclaims perversion when she calls herself “polymorphous and perverse” (107). On the other hand, in the *Price of Salt*, Belivet and Aird are introspective about their attraction and their love, and they forge a path together despite being constrained by the social proscriptions against homosexuality that are articulated by their respective male ex-

partners. They name their lesbianism and claim the right to love under surveillance and threat. While their escape narrative rejects damnation, damnation haunts its edges as a perilous constant. Stories in the *Ladder*, especially those from its early years, are similarly constrained by social proscriptions. It is helpful, therefore, to differentiate among “enabling escape” narratives and identify how they depict the degree of social pressures, make possible lesbian relations, and construct beginnings and endings in order to understand what constitutes “escape” and how it positions lesbians as autonomous and connected subjects.

“Within the twinkling of an eye”: Extending the moment of the cruise

Two stories from the first years of the *Ladder*, published between 1957 and 1959, demonstrate how lesbian romance narratives open up heteronormative sites to the possibility of queer love. In this definition of heteronormative, I am drawing on Halberstam’s use of the word in *The Queer Art of Failure* in which he delimits it from the couple/family form and links it to the goals of capitalism, family, and normative ethics or morals (89). In each of these stories, romance extends from the queer cruise, that site of recognition in which pleasure and terror exist simultaneously. The seam of the cruise holds two contradictions together so that the destruction of the social embedded in the pleasure and desire of the queer subject is in always in tension with the destruction of the queer subject to restore the order of the social. The cruise is always, then, hidden from public view, constituted in a knowing look and smile exchanged across a crowded room or in the lingering stare on a public street. If lesbian romance stories begin with this moment, the cruise must at some point be transformed for those relations to be sustained. Its tensions must

dissolve into a new kind of relationship, one that can be articulated and acknowledged so that the lesbian subjects are legible beyond the instant of recognition. If queer legibility is possible only through the destruction of the social, some kind of violence or death must be enacted that enables resolution. The cruise is, of course, typically associated with the sexual encounter in the histories of gay men. The sexual encounter that extends from the gay cruise is not a required outcome, however, nor even always a desired one. The cruise remains a distinct activity with its own pleasures: “Sex may be the point of cruising for some, but cruising and having sex are different interactions. [...] There are many levels of erotic investment and fantasy that exist in the idea of the possible, the potential, and the wholly unrealized encounter” (Turner 60-61). If and when a sexual encounter does extend from the cruise, it typically occurs as an anonymous and singular experience that is carried out in a hidden or tucked away public location: a toilet, a bathhouse, a backroom, or a park. Its incursions into these public spaces and, thus, the publicness of the sexual act disrupts and turns public space into queer and emphatically non-heteronormative sexual space, which enacts the violence against the social that is necessary to disrupt the tension of the cruise and produce the legibility of gay men. The impact of this violence is apparent in its counter-violence, in the vocal outrage of good citizens and families that gets channelled into gay-bashings, sting operations, and bathhouse raids. The coinciding legibility of gay men is inscribed in injunctions, zoning by-laws, park curfews, and bar rules. Think, too, of the failed cruise, and if it resolves, how it resolves – often in homophobic violence against the body of the queer who cruised.

A comparison of lesbian romances with gay sexual encounters is not to suggest a gendered differentiation of tensions occurring and resolving from queer cruises as they play out in historical moments. Instead, these are scenes that unfold in textual representations, and which enable readings of how the possibility for queer love is produced out of social proscriptions against queer bodies and bonds. Lesbian romance stories in the *Ladder* are situated in contexts where lesbian lives are invisible if not impossible. Love between characters is forged in and extends from the recognition that is embedded the visual exchange of the cruise. Unlike the sexual encounter, these romances anticipate a long future and they are located within sight, constructed in everyday spaces. The degree to which they remain within sight, however, is left unanswered by the truncated narratives that end just as romance begins. They do not emerge fully and publicly within sight, but they come into sight as an “open secret,” to use Sedgwick’s phrase for the operations of the closet (*Epistemology* 22). The construct of the “open secret” draws attention to silence and to the ways that things are unsaid. Sedgwick quotes from Foucault: “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (qtd. 3). Romance narratives produce possibility for lesbian love by (re)producing silence at the same time that they produce romance, and by relying on that silence as a site of possibility. The contradictions of the cruise are extended even as they are dismantled. These lesbian romances do not situate queer love in another place outside of the hegemony of heteronormativity, but instead they construct alternative space inside the ordinary and the everyday. To escape to this space, characters must embrace death as they find queer love.

In the story, “A Clasp Hand,” written by Frances LeSalle and published in the *Ladder* in 1957, the narrative is a series of fragments strung together as a non-linear unfolding. It begins with its ending:

It happened so quickly. But then, don't all miracles happen within the twinkling of an eye? At least, Marcia thought so. And she was certainly right about the twinkling. It was that sudden dance of stars in those deep, rich-brown eyes which caught at her heart. And which in some strange way danced right into that heart, only to spill over and flood all through Marcia's body in a miracle of delight. (12)

The story opens with the affective intensity experienced in the expansive moment of the cruise, in which the bodily sensations of recognition and desire seem to overflow the capacity of the instant in which they occur, their largeness being impossible to contain. Marcia's life is recounted; she is a twenty-five-year-old woman who has stayed in her small town to look after her unwell father instead of moving to the city where other unmarried young women from her town go. Her loneliness is emphasized; Marcia feels detached from her “uninteresting” surroundings (12) and has only magazines from her Boston aunt “who understands loneliness” (12), and her old dog to keep her company. Also mentioned, but as an afterthought, is a heterosexual relationship: “Though for a year and a half now, the minister's son Don had been dating Marcia, and that had helped ease the loneliness a trifle. The loneliness, I say; not the emptiness” (14). Don is the active agent; the text emphasizes he is dating Marcia, and Marcia seems to accept this fact with no real interest. Instead, excitement dances in Marcia's memory of two previous life events

when she had “glimpsed happiness [...] from the outside looking in” (12). Twice, at ages twelve and sixteen, she had grown close to other girls, but both times the friendships were too short-lived, with the other girls called away by duties to their respective families. Don, however, facilitates Marcia’s third encounter with happiness when he brings news that his cousin, Enid, is coming to visit and asks Marcia to befriend her. On the day of Enid’s arrival, Don’s mother telephones to ask if she can send Enid over to borrow some clothes, as her luggage has gone missing. Marcia finds Enid at her door, bent over petting the dog, and when she rises at the sound of Marcia’s voice, her eyes look “long and levelly” (15) into Marcia’s, and then:

Just as Marcia felt the warm sure clasp of the offered hand, she saw the twinkle in the eyes. As suddenly as that, she knew. And even more than that, she knew. For intuition, which sometimes draws breath from the occult, assured her that here was a happiness which would last...

Marcia smiled, and still holding the hand, led her new friend into the house.

(15)

At its end, the text returns to its beginning, narrating the scene that took place around the cruise’s “miracle of delight” (12). It emphasizes, in the double repetition of “she knew,” the knowledge that comes with queer recognition; knowledge of the self and the other is obtained in the intersubjective encounter as both are re-constituted (Ahmed *Strange* 23; Benjamin 35). However, her knowledge is unspoken, conveyed only through her smile, her holding of Enid’s hand, and her leading Enid into the house, at which point the narrative ends.

The silence that accompanies these final actions is one of a series of silences that thread through the text. The Boston aunt who sends Marcia magazines and who “understands loneliness” implies a lesbian genealogy; Boston marriages were code for lesbian relationships (Faderman 15) and this, combined with her shared understanding of loneliness, suggests that the mailed magazine(s) may refer to the *Ladder*. Likewise, when girls from Marcia’s town either marry or move to the big city, the note that Marcia would have been one of the latter group implies a link to urban lesbian community. The text, in other words, operates as an “open secret,” providing clues to lesbian existence beyond the heteronormative framework of Marcia’s life without claiming them explicitly as queer. The negation of the closet is a kind of violence, one that Marcia has accepted in the convenience of her relationship with Don and even in the constraint of her familial duty to her father. In the open ending of the story, there is the possibility that, by leading Enid into her father’s house, she will continue to accept the violence and safety of heteronormativity in order to somehow also preserve this space for romantic happiness with Enid. However, Marcia’s silence suggests otherwise. After Enid stands and after she exchanges the long look with Marcia, she holds out her hand to her and says, “I’m Enid, Don’s cousin. You’re his friend, Marcia, of course?” (15). Marcia’s silence is her answer; she is no longer Don’s friend but will exchange that relationship for the pleasure and desire that marks her encounter with Enid. This exchange and her choice of “a happiness which would last” (15) means the death of the heterosexual imperative for Marcia and her own partial death as a legible subject through her rejection of heterosexuality’s social inscription.

In the *Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam discusses how rejection of the prescriptions of hegemonic social institutions, particularly their constructions of success and the means to its achievement, can constitute a form of resistance and produce alternative ways of living that assert different goals and meanings of success. What is essential to keep in mind when talking about Halberstam's thesis is that "[the] queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being" (88). So, although Halberstam talks about queer failure in terms of enormous hegemonic systems, the practices that he describes are enacted at the level of the subject or person, in relatively small disengagements from the social. His work cites James C. Scott's definition of "weapons of the weak," which are used by those with little social capital and power to resist power through purposeful, though disguised, action or inaction. In "A Clasp Hand," Marcia's apparent passive disinterest in her relationship with "boring" and "nice dependable Don" (14) operates as a kind of heterosexual feet-dragging failure, a means of staving off loneliness and acquiescing to heteronormativity in manner equivalent to treading water. In the anticipated dissolution of that relationship, she will be seen as failing to comply with the heterosexual script while she pursues lesbian happiness with Enid. This future happiness refers backward to her youthful dalliances which were cut short by the demands of parents and family obligations. While this represents one kind of failure, other lesbian romances from the *Ladder* make explicit how the work of failure, not in any grand sense, but practiced in ordinary ways in

ordinary lives can produce resistance to the norms of heterosexuality and can create space for queer romantic relations.

“Perfect Control” by Vern Niven was published in the November 1958 issue of the *Ladder*, and it opens by describing the professional achievements of Jackie Marguiles, the only woman accountant in her office. At age thirty-eight, she has “achieved a safe and sane life” (9) by carefully managing her emotions: “Amiable and untouchable, she moved through the Certified Public Accountants office where she was top accountant: smiling, in her cool quiet way, but never joining in, never belonging, only conforming” (9). While “far too masculine in looks and manner to deceive anyone at all perceptive” (9), her intelligence and professionalism quickly quell rumours, and she avoids women staff entirely. Jackie is always first to arrive at the office in the morning and last to leave at night, and her schedule is so consistent and regimented that she “probably even walked in her own footprints into the office each morning” (10). In this sense, Jackie’s life revolves around the capitalist ordering of time, the logic or framework that determines when business is to be done, and which rewards the “early birds” and those who work late or take their work home (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 5). Jackie only breaks from her self-imposed schedule and emotional effacement by buying a fast car and “[taking] some of her emotions out on the highway” (10). Her parents, to a degree dependent on her financial support, do not question her solitariness; though her father worries about her, he “put[s] her oddities from his mind” (10). These oddities and the short-lived office rumours mark Jackie’s heterosexual failure; however, by achieving professional success and supporting her parents, including by occupying a room in

their house, Jackie substitutes the quite-acceptable scripts of professional success and good daughter.

Jackie's professional life, however, is interrupted by a secretary, Carol Morgen, who begins appearing at the office before Jackie each morning, so that they have thirty minutes alone in the office before others arrive. At first, Jackie ignores her, and Carol appears to do the same in return. But on the fourth or fifth morning, Jackie finally breaks the silence: she speaks "almost involuntarily" when she arrives: 'Good morning, Miss Morgen.' The girl stopped shuffling the papers before her and smiled directly into Jackie's eyes" (11). While attempting the visual exchange of the cruise, Carol's effort is cut short by Jackie's refusal to hold it and return it as she moves quickly past Carol's desk to her own. After two months of verbal exchanges each morning, Jackie encounters Carol at a lunch restaurant, and spends an uncomfortable meal listening to her talk nervously. She secretly reads Carol's personnel file that evening and then drives by her apartment wondering about her. The encounter has an impact:

For the first time in years Jackie could not sleep that night and between thoughts of Carol, her compact body and fine blond hair, grey eyes and warm face, Jackie thought of earlier years: the years in the service and the parties and Darrell and her conditional discharge and the fear, the fear, the fear."

(12)

This mention of Darrell is the first in the story, but the tale would have been a familiar one for *Ladder* readers, alluding to a discovery of lesbian relations while in the army and some sort of accusation against Jackie that resulted in a conditional

discharge. The fear she describes is that of being caught again and of facing public consequences, and it resonates; the next morning, she ignores Carol's greeting and goes straight to work. Carol sits upright clearly fighting tears, and Jackie is suddenly ashamed. She goes to Carol's desk and invites her to coffee to talk. They leave, but Jackie changes her mind about coffee and leads Carol towards her car:

Carol hesitated momentarily and said in a whisper, "We'll be late."

Jackie smiled at her and said, "We'll be very late and for me that will be the same as a declaration of death. We'll be very late but not too late for us."

The streets were silver in the morning light as they sped out of the city toward their first talk – Jackie quick and sure at the wheel, Carol silent and happy beside her, half turned toward Jackie to watch her face. (12)

Similar to the final scene of "A Clasp Hand," where the couple slips into the house, the final scene ends with the couple driving into the horizon, and these open endings leave the reader with a sense of promise and possibility. But this possibility demands some sort of death, which is here enacted through failure. For Jackie, being late will act like "a declaration of death" (12), the end to what she has worked for in her professional life. By choosing to be seen with Carol and by setting aside her professional reputation to do so, she is practicing the kind of failure that recognizes the incongruity between the heteronormative capitalist world and the illegitimate queer world. Rather than forming a relationship with Carol outside of work time and making a boundary between the two worlds, Jackie invokes failure to assert queer love. She refuses to conform to the false division between work and home, public and private that characterizes heteronormative time, and which is always an

impossibility for queer subjects for whom intimacy in public and private is always under surveillance and always a public concern.

These narratives provoke a re-thinking of the scripts of normativity produced through the philosophy of the DOB and articulated in the *Ladder*, which insisted that, by acting respectably and leading a respectable life, one could have it all: private lesbian intimacy in a stable relationship in addition to happy professional relations and an extended family life. The stories acknowledge the impossibility that lesbian love and social legibility could exist together, and they argue queer love requires some sacrifice, some kind of death, but that the death is worth it. Death is required in order to do things differently. Readers of the *Ladder* were both right and wrong; happy endings in short stories do provide hopefulness and a sense of optimism for the future, but they do so by acknowledging the constraints that discrimination places on queer lives, and by demanding that queer lives give up on definitions of heteronormative success and begin engaging in the queer practice of failure. It is the acceptance of failure that enables Jackie to resolve “the fear, the fear, the fear” (12) which has paralyzed her, and to instead pursue her desire for Carol; by letting go of the fear of discovery, by announcing herself and her sexuality, she surrenders what she might lose so as to have nothing to lose.

Undone By Love: Love, death, and unsettling endings

All love is bound up with death. When we are reconstituted as subjects in the hail of a lover, we are changed, and that change results in the loss of something and the gain of something else. We are not who we were a moment ago. Death is also

bound up with love; in death, we feel our connection to others intensely, not only to the person we are losing or have lost, but to those who are still with us. In *Precarious Life*, Butler thinks about how death affects us:

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. (22)

The loss of someone or something exposes the ways in which we are bound to those people or things. Intersubjectivity, our connections to others through which we are (re)made, is revealed as we experience loss and mourning. The short story, “Hail and Farewell,” asks readers to think differently about death and endings. It unmoors the concept of the happy ending, turning the lesbian romance upside down at the same time that it reveals the almost desperate importance of story and fiction to lesbians during the 1950s. Written by Jan Addison, the story was published in November 1957. It hovers at the centre of Stimpson’s categories by simultaneously representing the “dying fall” and the “enabling escape” narrative, enabling us, as readers, to dismantle the happiness in the happy ending, and for that matter, the unhappiness of the unhappy ending.

Agnes Dawes is a professional working woman. Having just turned fifty, she has acquired a new position as Associate Director in her office, a position she has

aimed for and prepared for. The story opens with her walking up the stairs slowly as per her doctor's orders, orders that are based on the health of Agnes' heart. These are not new orders, but she is obeying them now only because her new position permits her to: "(And Dr. Eleanor [said], not joking: 'Want to finish that half-century?' And she: 'Not much, if it means having to die by inches.') Well, yesterday, she'd finished it, fifty years at her own pace. Today she was ready to lean back, begin letting her juniors do the running" (7). But while this position is an achievement, it is the highest career point she can reach since "no board in a city this size would ever appoint a woman as Director" (8), and the victory feels like a dead end. And as she looks over to her old desk and the bustle surrounding it, she feels a "wave of nostalgia sharp as panic" (7). She turns to her work, but there is no work to do since she has already completed everything pending:

Now it was real panic. What had she let herself in for? Where was she headed now? This office had been the goal for so long. The top of a hill beyond which one couldn't see. Well, she was up there now. No farther to climb. [...]
So this was it... Nowhere to go from here. Fifteen years of these glass walls ahead, certain as a prison cell. (8)

Agnes' success, the achievement of all her professional goals, feels empty now that she has reached it. The glass walls with her name printed on them in black and gold become the bars of a prison as she imagines the years ahead to retirement. The emptiness of her achievement speaks to the artificiality of normative success, its cruelty in binding people to ideals of advancement and achievement that are, at the centre, meaningless (Berlant and Warner 320).

Agnes turns to a professional journal and is startled to see an obituary for a novelist, (Mary) Lynne Currier, who was only a few years older than she is. Agnes is intimately familiar with Currier's work and has felt a strange but close affiliation with her through her life. Although Currier published five novels, only three are mentioned in the obituary, as the remaining two are left out for being lesbian texts: "But not Quicksand nor Odd Body, Agnes Dawes raged in silent bitterness. Oh no! Never say one good word, anybody, for either of those 'queers'. Though they happen to be the best things she ever wrote. Because in them she wrote what she knew, she'd been there!" (8; emphasis in original). Having experienced a connection with Currier through her books, Agnes is furious at the injustice of the elision, recognizing in it the homophobic proscriptions against publicly acknowledging the truth of the author's life and, by extension, her own. These negations of queerness are imposed like an extra death, and they move Agnes to remember her feverish experiences of finding Currier's first book and reading it in a single session, and then feeling "blind drunk on no more than discovering at last that one other person completely understood..." (9). Agnes had imagined writing to Currier for years, a possibility now foreclosed:

Why didn't I write her then? Again a kind of choking panic. Now I never can. ...Always going to someday, when I found the time – and courage enough to say what had to be said. ...Always seemed there was all the time in the world for it. A sort of treat, saved for the future. And now – you never will. (9; emphasis in original)

At home after work, Agnes sets herself up for “her tardy rendezvous with Lynn Currier. Her night watch for the stranger now dead whom she’d known and loved for nearly thirty years” (10); she takes *Quicksands* from her bookshelf and prepares to read it in the company of a bottle of scotch and a fresh package of cigarettes. From when Agnes learns of Currier’s death in the story, the text has woven in excerpts from the novel, *Quicksands*. These fragments construct the story of Honora and Cy, a “dying fall” narrative, in which the former ultimately sacrifices herself for the latter by walking into a marshy area followed by a detective, who was poised to expose and destroy Cy. As Agnes reads, the text of the novel further melds with the text of the short story; Agnes becomes Cy and Lynn is Honora, and the unspoken love between them is as much of a tragedy as Honora/Lynn’s too early death. Slowly the life of the novel takes over Agnes and renders her surroundings, the near-empty bottle and the crumpled package of cigarettes, as “a dull one-dimensional mural, an irrelevance, behind Cy’s searing agony” (11). The narrative of the book opens up into a new ending, instead of Honora’s death and Cy’s desperate mourning, the two are re-united as Honora returns to Cy. In Agnes’ reading, the figure of Lynn replaces Honora, and stands, life-like before her:

Lynn, Lynn, I love you. I’ve loved you thirty years. If we’d met you’d have been the only one, forever, you must understand that... Don’t leave me...

Colour was fading from even the dull one-dimensional mural now, its grays running together in a dim blur. But Lynn stood clear... a thin color-slide projected faintly on a mottling grey wall...

With unmoving lips Lynn said: I know, I've always known. There'll be no one else for either of us now...

The transparent strong brown hand reached out for her fingers.

Suddenly all the lights were out and it was incredibly, deathly cold... But

Agnes Dawes was happier than she had ever been... in life. (11)

Death permeates this short story that is both a love story and a tragedy, from the doctor's warning to look after her health or risk death, to Agnes' own realization that her new position represents a kind of professional death, to the death notice she reads in the journal, and then, finally, to her own death. At the same time, it is a story of love, a love imagined and private, a love of fiction, and a fictional love that is requited at the end. Agnes' only connection to her lesbian self is a textual one. When the author of the novels she has forged a connection to dies, her grief is her own undoing, the final death that is bound up with her final and most intensely felt love. The un/happy ending, which is both and neither, reveals both Agnes' isolation and the intensity of her intersubjective connection to a queer (imagined) other. As Butler writes: "I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must" (*Prearious* 23). As Agnes clings to memory, she falls apart; she remembers the feelings of finding the book, of reading it in a single afternoon in the University Women's Club, facing the wall, cut off from the world, of discovering traces of Lynn Currier in its pages and in the pages of all her other novels. Her love is revealed as she mourns. Its strangeness and its intensity enables an imagining of lesbian possibility that departs from normative frameworks, producing a queer

“counterintimac[y]” (Berlant and Warner 326), one that deconstructs queer attachment to heterosexual models of love and desire.

Love’s Ending: Constructing queer bonds through love and grief

Butler writes that grief is deeply politicizing because it foregrounds “relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (*Precarious* 22). In considering what it means to “have” friends and lovers, she writes that this operates as a kind of detachment from what “sustains [us] fundamentally,” which is the way that the “I” of myself is always enmeshed with the other: “the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations” (23). To be gripped and undone is to recognize the ways we are attached to and deconstructed by the relations we pay attention to in our grief. Grief foregrounds these bonds, but they are always a part of ourselves, developed through our encounters, recognitions, loves, and feelings with and for each other. Grief, the emotion that is a response to loss, makes us pay attention to who we are because of others, and makes us attend to those others at the same time that we feel vacated by an other. But grief depends on desire. Butler continues: “This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire. ...[D]espite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel” (23). “Prospect” and “memory” point towards the temporality of these experiences, reminding us that desire and grief are not just of the moment, but that they are also always in front of us and behind us. The connection between desire and grief helps

make clear how the intensity of love's beginning is echoed in its ending. In these beginnings and endings, in love and in grief, we are turned outward towards others, reminded of who we are to each other and of our "interdependence" (27).

Love rarely ends cleanly or equally; those bonds that reconstitute me and you into an us cannot be easily undone; rather, we must be changed again through loss and grief. The journey through grief and the ways in which it emphasizes the ties of community and our mutual responsibilities to each other are explored in Jody Shotwell's novella, "The Shape of Love." The short novel was published across six issues of the *Ladder* from May to November 1967. Shotwell was a fairly frequent contributor to the *Ladder*, contributing a number of short stories, poems and reports beginning in 1959, and ending with this contribution, which was published just before her death in January 1968 at age 50 (Passet 67). While the *Ladder* had published short stories in two parts before, this was the first long work that was serialized across a number of issues. The first installment of her short novel is preceded with an editorial note to readers, reassuring them that "THE LADDER has not gone the way of 'Bedbook' or 'The Ladies Home Journal' with the everlasting 'continued-next-month' thing," but that the work was so impressive that the editors felt they had no choice but to publish it ("Part One" 2). The novella took up a lot of space as it was published; at sixty-seven pages in total, it averaged more than eleven pages out of each twenty-four-page issue, although eight of these total pages were printed twice, likely accidentally. Also unusual is that the story is told in the second person, a narrative choice that is rare because it is so often difficult, but which here produces the feeling of both an intimate witnessing and a close identification with

the main character. The “you” of the narrative is Julia, who lives with her nine-year old son, Scotty and her twenty-two-year-old lover, Angel. Events take place over the course of a single day—Saturday from six in the morning to nine at night—the day that Julia and Angel’s relationship ends. Julia knows the relationship will be over by the end of the day, and throughout the day she reflects on her history with Angel and on their past relationships and friendships, opening the narrative into a reflection on love, grief, queer bonds, and community connection. The linear structure of the day, with subtitles marking the day and the hour as the narrative progresses, belies the way in which the narrative moves as Julia’s memory creates links and spirals, connecting the present moment to the past and moving backwards and forwards through time. Like time, the title of the story, “The Shape of Love,” suggests to the reader that they consider how love takes shape over the course of a relationship. But in the story, the shape of love extends past the boundaries of distinguishable shapes, connecting and bridging people, places, and feelings. In the grief of love’s ending, the story emphasizes the circularity of love and, in the web of love and friendship woven through love, the ways that these bonds of feeling produce the “relationality” of community that extends into the future (Butler, *Precarious* 27).

While this is the story of Julia and Angel’s relationship, it is also the story of Julia and Ron, and, to a lesser extent, Julia and Kay, Julia and Miles, Joan and Ron, Ron and Viv, and Viv and Angel. All of their lives wind together, so much so that it is difficult to pick the narrative apart and to find the individual shapes of their stories. Ron, now dead, was Julia’s greatest and most painful love, and her memory haunts Julia and Angel. At the same time, her memory ties Julia to Joan and to Viv,

both previous lovers to Ron. Viv was also Angel's past lover, and Ron's ghost had been felt there too. The story begins with Julia facing the end of her relationship with Angel. At first it seems simple: Angel seems to have fallen in love with someone else, Ilga, a Danish newcomer who Julia was helping to socialize and acclimatize. Angel's infatuation is a betrayal, and although Julia never anticipated the relationship lasting, she had not imagined an ending like this one. Julia's age is unsaid, but at twenty-two, Angel is much younger than she is and this has been a factor in their relationship. Their relationship had begun with Julia feeling sorry for her and looking after her. Angel pursued her, cast her into the role of caregiver and teacher, seduced her and convinced her that they could work. They made a promise at their beginning, in which Angel said she would be honest at the end:

“Remember what I say please. Someday you will find someone younger and you will leave me.”

“I promise. I promise, Julia. If that ever happens I'll tell you—right away.”

But, so far, she had not told you. Not in words. But she must, because there can't be another day like this one. You will be sure of that. (“Part Two” 20)

This is the pact that they have made, and so, although Julia knows that Angel has fallen for Ilga, she gives her this day to keep her promise, to tell her the truth and to walk away. In Julia's remembrances, it is clear that the sometime-end of their relationship has been part of their story from the beginning. Even though they have fallen into the habit of each other, they never intended to last and so their ending has always been their present. They began in mutual loss, almost accidentally, four days after Angel had left Viv and two months after Julia left Ron:

And that was how it happened. Without thought, without reason. Except for the reason of the raw wound inside you and the silent need for someone close to you. Something of and for the moment, something without a tomorrow. But it had a tomorrow, and a tomorrow and a tomorrow. Enough tomorrows to make you forget the random beginning. Until now. Now you understand that such an end as this was inevitable, and why are you surprised? (“Part Two” 16)

The raw wound inside Julia is the pain of leaving Ron, the hurt that Ron’s alcoholism had produced, and the jealousy about Ron’s infidelities. Angel, herself injured by Viv, insinuates herself into Julia’s life, and ends up changing Julia more than Julia imagined she would or could. And now, at the end of their tomorrows, Julia is undone by Angel’s betrayal. As she tries to process their relationship, she finds Ron and Viv and Joan and all of the others knotted together, as much part of her as she is of them.

Julia’s past is linked together through a series of relationships that forms a chain to Ron and then to Angel. On this Saturday morning, she leaves Scotty and Angel sleeping and takes a walk through town. Long walks are her refuge and recourse during emotional times and she thinks about her past relationships by connecting this walk with other important walks:

It started a long time ago, when Kay said, “I can’t see you anymore, Julia.” And wouldn’t tell you why and left you with a heart full of frustrated questions. You took a long walk that day, and brought back from it the necessary resignation. Plus a fear that sent you scurrying for cover when any

woman looked at you. Sent you back to maybe the right world for the wrong reasons. Including the marriage to Miles that might or might not have worked, had he lived past the experimental years. Then the big walk that ended in that first decision against Ron. That time it was you who did the leaving. (“Part one” 27)

Kay, Miles, Ron, and Angel have been the four central relationships of her life, and each has changed her in fundamental ways. Kay had been Julia’s first love affair with a woman, and she “altered the entire rhythm of [her] existence,” her departure leaving “scar tissue” that kept her from loving women for a long time (“Part five” 31). The hurt that Kay created in Julia left her reeling, so Julia married Miles for stability, and it was this marriage that produced Scotty: “You were drifting, chartless and there was Miles, and you grabbed hold. You married Miles and you became another Julia” (“Part two” 27). With Miles, Julia stopped writing and turned away from the friends and the artistic poverty of her old crowd. She became a wife and mother. Her longing for the love of women never stopped, however, and after Miles died and her mourning ended, Julia met Ron. Ron changed her the most. “How do you know doom when you meet it first?” (“Part two” 29) she asks as she remembers the pull towards Ron that she fought briefly before succumbing to its inevitability. With Ron, she was both at home and in hell. Home was “bounded east and west by her wide shoulders, north by her lips, and south by the long, strong length of her body” (“Part two” 29). But home was also poisonous: “Ron-sickness,” the “disease,” the “malignancy in [her] bloodstream” that left her “almost fatally hooked” (“Part

three” 21). Julia left Ron twice. The first time she lasted a year without her, a year that was like a death:

So, surely as Ron chose you, you had chosen her. By whatever processes are called into action, you had made a choice. And one not so easily revoked. Even when you took that last big walk and made that first big decision. The one that lasted for less than a year. During which time you nearly died, but you didn't. You stayed alive in a million tiny aching pieces, living with pain and with ghosts. (“Part two” 30)

Love with Ron was a kind of addiction, one that made Julia whole and tore her apart. Ron and the memory of Ron reappear through her relationship with Angel, a figure and then a ghost that both have to contend with, even as falling in love with Angel helps her to let Ron go.

As Julia is made and re-made through her relationships with her lovers, the bonds that run through her life extend beyond these intimate couplings and out into a wider community. Shared love and shared grief tie together a community of people who know each other's joys, injuries, and vulnerabilities. Ron kills herself during Julia's relationship with Angel, and the scene of her funeral delineates their queer community's bonds as outside the constructions of heterosexuality. Julia and Angel are greeted at the door of the funeral home:

“Friends and neighbors sit in there,” the old woman said, indicating a room across the hall. “Others are in here...”

Suddenly you didn't know what you were to her. You know what she had been to you. But what were you to her, other than one small mark on the

panorama of her unbelievable life? You and Angel went into the room for friends, out of sight of the casket. (“Part six” 20)

After five years with Ron, after Ron loving Scotty, Julia’s son, and caring for him, and after Julia looking after Ron through her alcoholism and her recovery from an accident, despite all of their mutual loving and injuring, Julia is immobilized by her not knowing who she was to Ron. The structures that define heterosexual society into in-laws and out-laws, spouses and ex-spouses, do not apply and she feels illegible. And so, the question of who she was to Ron turns into a deeper and more intimate uncertainty. Her friend, Philip, had called her one of Ron’s “satellites”: “Ron has to keep her satellites. [...] She’ll never let go of any of them” (“Part three” 21). And they have mostly all come to grieve Ron’s death. As Julia and Angel wait for the service to be broadcast by intercom, Viv arrives tear-stained and swollen. At the graveyard, Julia stands behind Steffi who had stood by Ron when everyone else abandoned her, always hoping that Ron would love her. And, on their way home, they stop in to see Joan, who was too ill to attend the funeral. Julia and Joan share their grief with each other, and Julia confesses privately to her: “She died without knowing that I never stopped loving her” (“Part six” 22).

Before you left, Joan said, “No one person in the world could give Ron all the love she needed.”

“Not all of us together could,” you said.

We are all the same, you thought. We all tried, in the same way, and failed.

Now we are all feeling the same guilt. (“Part six” 22)

There is community in the gathering and bonding of Ron's lovers, in their shared love, vulnerability, and failure. Their interconnections are strengthened through their loss.

In times of loss, people are drawn together into community places where they feel connected and supported. For the gay and lesbian community, this is often the gay bar. When Julia faces life after Miles' death, she remembers a bar, a former meeting place, and returns to it. There, she reconnects with an old friend, Clinton, who insists that she join him and his friends: "And so was formed the first link in the chain that led you to Ron. New people, parties, and a reaching out again for love. Reaching out—or reaching back into the shadows of the past for something you had lost and wanted to regain" ("Part two" 28). In this space, Julia is surrounded by people who remind her who she was, and who help her to look backwards and to move forwards simultaneously. When she sees Angel again, after she has left Ron and Angel has left Viv, she is the one positioned as advisor and friend. Julia is at a table with some old friends when she sees Angel sitting at the bar looking dishevelled and pale, so she goes to her. Angel declines to join her group but she asks if she can buy her a drink later, and Julia agrees, but she also keeps an eye on her: "[Y]our eyes wander to Angel across the room and you see that she is talking with Tracy and Ginger. You feel less anxiety then, because you have noticed Viv on the dance floor and you were afraid" ("Part one" 31). The couple, Tracy and Ginger, are mutual friends, and like Julia, they are concerned for Angel and stay with her until Julia joins them. Present here near the beginning of Julia and Angel's relationship, they are also there near its end. On the day of the narrative, it is

Saturday evening, Angel has still not spoken up about Ilga, and they have arranged to meet Tracy and Ginger at a bar called the Sparrow. Their party is dismal, however, with too many silences and too little laughter. Ginger asks Julia to dance and then inquires how she is: “Her arms feels [*sic*] warm around you and her shoulder soft and comforting. You want to put your head down and weep. But you merely say, “Not so very good, Ginger.” (“Part six” 24). Ginger and Tracy’s presence is a comfort, a distraction from Julia’s sadness and the impending confrontation that Julia is dreading. While Ginger and Tracy play small parts in this narrative, their presence in these bars at the beginning and the end of Julia and Angel’s relationship as providers of support are a reminder that these intimate romantic scenes are constructed within and through a wider community, and that gay bars are places of connection to this community.

Julia thinks about the gay bar when they arrive, and she refuses to construct it idealistically in her imagination. Initially, she questions the draw that the gay bar has and exposes the community she supposedly shares affiliations with. But as she reflects on this bar, the bar of her younger days comes to mind and the connection of youth to these sacred spaces emerges as a kind of community circularity:

The Sparrow is a crumby place. But then, most of them are crumby. You wonder why you come. Why you leave the comfort of your home to sit for hours on a lumpy bar-stool. Exchange the music on your F.M. or your record player for the shrieking sounds from the juke-box. Travel miles to this dirty-walled rat hole, when you could relax in a plush booth at Leonardo’s down the street from your apartment. You don’t come often, but its

incomprehensible that you come at all. For who is there you want to see? And when you tell each other you want to be with those who are like you, you look at them and know they are nothing like you. (“Part six” 22)

Julia’s comparison is a falsehood, constructed in view of the truth. Although the people she thinks of as alike are not at all alike, they are more similar than the patrons of her neighbourhood bar. Here, Julia can dance with Ginger and no one will bat an eye. No one will intrude on Julia’s and Angel’s sadness because their coupled status is obvious and they will be left alone to be sad together, drinking watered down whiskey at the bar. Regardless of the strength of her affiliations with its patrons, the bar is a shared queer space which gives Julia and Angel the legibility they will not receive elsewhere. This bar is like other bars, and though Julia may not feel completely at home here, it provokes her to reminisce about the bar she used to go to as a younger woman: “Will these young ones feel, in years to come, the same nostalgia for The Sparrow you have never ceased to feel for Ye Olde Bridge? Could they? You can’t imagine it. The Tavern *was* glamorous” (23). Julia’s memories invoke a circularity in the community as each group of young people claims and invests importance and glamour in the places that constitute them, that they attach to and attach to their community through. Julia remembers the poverty, the people she knew to stay away from, the sacrifices she would make during the week in order to afford a good Friday night, the police who would wait outside to make sure that everyone left by midnight. She imagines that the young people here would laugh at the “murky” place she holds in her memory, and she wonders about her people from those days:

What has become of your enchanted city, and those who with you inhabited it? Scattered, dead, grown old—failed or succeeded, found happiness or are still trying. On some few rare occasions you meet someone from that time. And if you hardly knew them long ago, still you greet each other now like countrymen in a foreign land joyoee [*sic*: joyous] and reminiscent” (23)

Despite her earlier feeling that the people in the bar are nothing like her, here she speaks of her attachment to the community that helped to form her, as familiar to her in the sense of being like family. The gay bar is produced out of political constraints and the potential for violence that is represented in the police who wait outside the door of the bar in Julia’s memory. All gay bars are “crumby;” they are pushed to the outside edges of society, inhabited by a loyal clientele regardless of the lack in their physical comforts. The comfort of the gay bar is in being with people who understand, even if they are not exactly the same, of going and knowing that there will be friends to comfort you, to help you grieve loss and to look ahead again.

Love and joy, grief and loss wind through Shotwell’s novella to construct the shape of love as a circle that repeats, and in which beginnings and endings are tied together. Beginnings open out of death, or they require some kind death in order to become. Endings are cherished, the grief held for as long as possible in order to hold onto love:

Dearly-held grief. It’s true, it’s true. Grief is something hot and strong among the ashes of a lost love. When we begin to feel the ashes cool, we hold tighter to the grief, so that everything is not lost. So that we are not buried, with our love. Then, when a new love, or something that passes for love, rises out of

those ashes, we may surrender the grief. On that night at Jimmie's, you said to Angel, for the first time, "I love you." You said it with a kind of wonder. They are the magic words that roll away the seal upon your tomb. Behold, you seem to say, I breathe and live again! ("Part four" 28)

By telling her love story backwards, by beginning at its end, and by infusing the narrative with multiple griefs, Shotwell foregrounds the ways that we are constructed—reconstituted as subjects—through these experiences of love and grief, in the openings and closings of our borders to each other. But these openings and closings are not altogether private. A web of lovers and friends intensifies the porosity of these borders, enabling love and grief to be shared, to be celebrated and mourned together, producing a kind of community of love that is sustaining. And it is critical that the community is formed within and against a heterosexual society. The webs of love and community make possible what is otherwise illegible. The recognition that Joan offers Julia, her understanding about what love with Ron gave her and cost her, helps her to understand and hold the weight of her grief after she is de-positioned by the heterosexual framing of relations in the funeral home. The gay bar, constructed through bonds of community and against threats of loss, holds value as a space for shared relationality and understanding, and the possibility for familiarity that is "joyous" ("Part six" 23). Julia eventually tells Angel that she has to leave, that she cannot begin something with Ilga while she is living in Julia's home. But she recognizes that Angel has re-made her, has given Julia a new part of herself: "With the insistence of her youthful passion, she sloughed off your shackles and opened a whole new world. [...] You think now, do I lose this too? When Angel

goes, does she take with her your new free self?” (“Part five” 32). Angel has changed her as she as changed Angel, and they will carry each other forward into new relations as love begins again.

In Desire and in Grief: Love as a defiant practice of “queer futurity”

The short stories read in this chapter use the framework of romance to examine the ways that love begins, and they each, in their own way, draw upon the imagery and closures of death in order to make love possible. With death comes grief, and Butler invests grief with the possibility for self-interruption that enables community relationality:

What grief displays [...] is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. (*Precarious* 23)

Butler advances the idea that, through grief (and desire), we are “undone” (23), “beside ourselves” (24), that in grief and desire, we become more intensely aware of our relationality, how we are “constituted” and “dispossessed” (24) by our relations with others. This awareness of relationality positions us to understand the ways in which we are linked to others in the everyday, the ways that we are interdependent. Her hope is that this awareness helps to frame quotidian social and political engagements in which we recognize each other’s vulnerability and susceptibility to violence. Grief and desire open us up, expose the ways in which we are always re-

constituted through our encounters and recognitions with each other so that the bonds between us are strengthened. These ordinary bonds are critical for queer community which is always constructed against erasure, loss, violence, and their traumas. For Cvetkovich, trauma marks places in lesbian textual culture where it is possible to access the everyday life of lesbian experience as well as to think about trauma in non-pathological ways (*Archive* 3-4). The romantic stories published in the *Ladder* enable this access. Romantic affect is constructed as lesbian possibility; it opens out of the constraining realities of familial duties and professional isolation, out of the traumas of past exposure and judgment. It transforms these constraints into romantic possibility at the same time that it closes out those constraints, enabling the characters to exchange their social conditions by wielding social failure as a means of finding lesbian community. This is a kind of political work.

In the afterword for the book, *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, Butler writes about communities that have endured violence and loss, suggesting that the losses endured by these communities structure their present, particularly feelings and places of belonging: “Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as a community” (468; emphasis in original). Lesbian community is constructed from loss, from the violence of imposed invisibility that refused to inscribe lesbian existence and from the traumas of imposed deviance, contagion, illness, disease. It holds onto these losses, embedding them in narratives of desire and love. From the time of the *Ladder* and onward, lesbian community is constructed through backwardness, a looking and

feeling backwards, which Heather Love describes as a way of connecting to the past, but moreover, as a way of keeping the violence and the loss of the past alive as a constituting reminder (27-30). While Love focuses on failed or impossible love, I suggest that the romantic affect produced through these romance stories keep the possibility of queer love alive, but always in concert with pain.

The soaring romantic affect that ends some of the early stories in the *Ladder* is not love as a denial of the social and political conditions that frame it, but it is loving as an act or practice of defiance and resistance. It operates as the “not-yet-conscious” aspect of affect, which José Muñoz says is always in operation as possibility in the ordinary and everyday (21). He argues that utopia is not found in the rejection of the here and now, but it is found in the moments of the everyday: “This impulse is to be glimpsed as something that is extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism. The quotidian example of the utopian can be glimpsed in utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment” (22-23). In other words, queer romance and desire enacted amid heteronormative time and space produces what Muñoz calls “queer futurity” by enacting “becoming,” by self-consciously performing queerness in spite of the constraints and pressures of compulsory heterosexuality (25-28). Ahmed makes a similar claim when she talks about what happens when queer bodies perform desire against the compulsions of heteronormativity: “The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been barred can ‘impress’ differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple”

(Ahmed, *Cultural* 165). The textual performances of queer couples engaged in the work of romance is work that transforms the oppressions of heteronormativity into “ecstatic” (Muñoz 25) queerness. In another story, “Will Call” from 1959, two women return to work after a transformative coffee break during which they discover their attraction to each other. The story ends with an account of their emotions as they return to work: “They stood there a moment longer and then walked back to the store with their hands nearly touching and a fine, wild sweet singing rising inside them” (Niven 20). Mutual knowledge, near-touching, and coffee-break trysts are strategies that interrupt and defy heteronormativity within its constraints. And so, we return to endings. The endings of these stories are neither happy nor unhappy; rather, they demand an answer to the question, what is happiness? How do we create joy amid grief? How do we assert queer bonds and queer feeling when our bodies, genders, and words refer elsewhere? The “enabling escape” narrative defined by Stimpson is insufficient to describe these romance narratives because there is no escape. There is no elsewhere utopia. There is only here, the moments that are claimed in the everyday, in the ways we affect each other, opening up to each other in the love and in the grief that are part of all queer relations.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this dissertation project, I have examined the magazine, the *Ladder*, as an archive of queer, and specifically lesbian, feeling. In particular, I have argued that its stories and poetry constitute the heteroglossic narrative of a counterpublic that was itself constituted by those same narratives as written, read, and debated between its members (Warner, *Publics* 67). The *Ladder* has been read as a text that articulated the DOB's politics of respectability by calling for lesbians to conform and adjust to the society in which they lived, to exercise discretion in behaviour and appearance, to appear like "normal" heterosexuals in all ways except in their choice of who they love (Chasin 64; Soares 33; Valentine 146; Vigelletti 47-48). This is particularly true of the magazine until the end of the 1960s when, distanced from the DOB, it became more radical as a lesbian-feminist publication. While strategies of conformity and adjustment responded to the deeply traumatic discourses of disease and deviance that framed lesbian existence through the 1950s and 1960s, they resulted in the articulation of a lesbian identity and community that was narrowly defined. Such strategies were more easily accessible to white, middle-class women who could occupy class and gender categories more legitimately, and so, women who did not want to or could not engage these strategies as effectively were either kept to the minority or marginalized and excluded. However, readers' letters, short fiction, and poetry participated differently within the push towards gender- and social-normative behaviours by resisting and playing with ideas of gender, happiness, outsideness, love, family, and relationality. By examining these letters and literary pieces for the ways in which they engage feeling and affectively produce different ways of being

and doing queerness, I argue that the *Ladder* can be read against itself, and that it offers new understandings about ways that grassroots literatures participate in building “structure[s] of feelings” (Williams 132) before and during history’s process of coalescing and cementing into a past. In other words, examining works created in the moment of a community’s becoming in order to trace affective currents – ways of feeling that are held in common – opens up the archive of a community to new interpretations of its historical moment of being.

In the case of the lesbian community in the 1950s and 1960s, I argue that the affective work of the *Ladder* pushes beyond the cultivation of normativity and its “promise of happiness” (Ahmed), but that it also collects feelings of inadequacy, (un)happiness, strangeness, failure, loss, and grief as it imagines possibilities for performing lesbianism and creating a broader lesbian community. The collection of these “negative” affects is not to suggest that queer lives must be lived as melancholic, hopeless, or failed (Love 6-7). Rather, queer feelings of joy, pleasure, happiness, love, recognition, commonality, and at-homeness are felt in concert with feelings of trauma and loss as a kind of deep tap rootedness to the tenuousness of queer existence. To abandon or displace feelings of trauma and loss is to forget, at our own peril, the work and danger involved in producing queer feelings that create and enlarge spaces for queer being and doing. Heather Love, in an interview with Sarah E. Chinn, describes the importance of this project in current political contexts:

My sense of urgency about recognizing the parts of queer life we might like to ignore has only increased recently in light of the gay marriage decisions and the headlong rush to integration and assimilation in mainstream LGBT

politics. There's a deep desire to see a lot of the old bad feelings we associate with being gay or lesbian disappear, but I think they are still very much with us. (127)

Politics of respectability have not disappeared from queer political work. The relatively recent actions of groups like BLM (Black Lives Matter) in Toronto's 2016 and 2017 Pride Parades during which they demanded the removal of organized uniformed police contingents from Pride events (Connor; Gray), and the significant and ongoing backlash against BLM and its supporters as a result (CBC; Levy; Paterson), demonstrates the ways that queer spaces and events have become aligned with dominant institutions to the detriment of the most marginalized members of its community. However, as events in the U.S. and Bermuda, and more recently, Ontario, also show, queer lives, queer families, and queer sex still exist under threats of containment and erasure, whether it is the possibility of reversing gay marriage decisions (Allen; Embury-Dennis; Stack and Dias) or the elision of content related to gender and sexuality from sexual education curriculum in public schools (Ferguson and Benzie). Politics of respectability insist on gay and lesbian normativity and they excise elements of the broader queer community that do not fit its homonormative narratives. But not only do these strategies further marginalize bodies already on the margins, for example, trans, racialized, and poor bodies, and bodies who centre perverse and polyvalent sexualities, but they also are failing in the face of conservative, religious rhetorics and politics.

As Warner reminds us, politics of respectability focus on the "being" rather than the "doing" of queer sexualities by attempting to remove or disguise the sex act

in the construction of gay and lesbian identities (*Trouble* 28-29; 31). But the perverseness of queer sexual acts always haunts performances of homonormativity, attaching to queer identity the shame and stigma that is assigned to queer acts by their very removal, and conflating the two (*Trouble* 31). The paradox, as Warner points out, is that “only when this indignity of sex is spread around the room, leaving no one out, and in fact binding people together, that it begins to resemble the dignity of the human” (36). There is no escape from the stigma and shame that is attached to sex, and to queer sex in particular. And so, the work of queer feeling is to bring repudiated elements of queerness into play, to acknowledge the history of oppression and trauma that accompanies queer sex and queer love, to remind us that beneath the veneer of normativity is shame and struggle, injury and resistance. Cvetkovich argues that “[a]llowing a place for trauma within sexuality is consistent with efforts to keep sexuality queer, to maintain a space for shame and perversion within public discourse rather than purging them of their messiness in order to make them acceptable” (63). That word, “messiness,” works well as a description of what queer feeling is, and of what the work of queer feeling in the *Ladder* produces. The archive is a messy one. To define the magazine as producing lesbian normativity is both to question what where the implications of such politics of conformity while also to argue that this work was radical in its own way for pushing back against discourses of sickness and disease. To then read the magazine as an affective archive in which the primary discourse of normativity is disrupted by the currents of queer feeling that insert trauma by producing (un)happiness, failure, strangeness, and loss is to introduce additional and crucial messiness.

My project began the process of uncovering queer feeling by exploring the work of happiness and pleasure in the *Ladder* in its first years up to 1963. I discuss how certain performances of lesbianism were affectively charged with value as a strategy of rehabilitation by the DOB in the *Ladder*. Introducing Warner's dichotomy of the "good gay" and the "bad queer" (*Trouble* 114). I show how this strategy aligns with the kinds of happiness that Ahmed and Berlant each argue is the promise of the normative that extends from family to nation, the easy feeling of being in line with dominant social structures and norms as enacted in family, gender, race, and class. Stories in the *Ladder* both use and disrupt these ideals of heterosexual family structures and gender norms, constructing feelings of (un)happiness that recognize and accept queer oppression alongside queer happiness. Moving beyond happiness, I explore how the "bad queer," the butch lesbian, asserts lesbian sexuality and produces pleasurable spaces of resistance to heteronormativity. Extending Barthes' description of textual pleasure, I theorize the site of the queer cruise as a crucial site of pleasure in this historical moment of the *Ladder*, produced from the collision of queer connection/recognition with the threat of violence from the dominant social world. Reading the site of the cruise in fiction and in the work of the magazine itself is a method of reconciling the oppression and trauma of this period with the radical work of building lesbian identities and communities through moments of connection and recognition.

Intersubjective recognition is an important component in the performative re-constitution of the lesbian subject and in the building of lesbian community during this period. It plays an important role in examining how feelings of strangeness

operate in poems and stories to produce lesbian identity and community across the tenure of the magazine. I pursue this investigation through two groups of texts: one group of poems and stories from the earliest years of the *Ladder* and another group of stories from its final years. The first group of texts are typical of early stories and poems in the *Ladder*, in that they emphasize isolation and aloneness, creating distance between the lesbian and normative society. Feelings of strangeness are foregrounded, operating across social and bodily borders to locate lesbian bodies on social margins where recognitions with estranged others produces possibilities of recognition and identity, and thus enables contingent feelings of belonging. In the second group of texts, feelings of strangeness are read through the framework of hospitality and the social obligations that hospitality's customs create. The stranger and strangeness operate here to resist the pull towards normativity, and instead they gesture towards issues of injustice and political engagement, which circulate as reminders of the bonds of community and its members' responsibilities to it.

Finally, I return to good feeling by reading romance stories in the *Ladder* for the ways in which they promise the possibility of queer happiness in spite of the difficulty of living openly as lesbians. I argue that romantic affect in these lesbian stories is made possible through death and failure, by the loss of heteronormative attachments and by relinquishing attachments to normative notions of capitalist success. By twinning love with death, by acknowledging the undoing of one's self that happens in both desire and in grief (Butler, *Precarious* 23), lesbian romance stories extend outwards towards the queer bonds of community that connect around and between lovers as the cycle of love begins, ends, and begins again. By holding

love alongside death and loss, these romance narratives feel backwards and forwards, bringing the past traumas of queer possibility into contact with the hopes of queer love, and producing queer futurity as everyday spaces of constraint, struggle, and resistance.

Queer feeling, Ahmed states, does not emerge from overcoming heteronormativity, but from affecting it, by opening it up to queerness and by making it uncomfortable (*Cultural* 155). The affective productions of the *Ladder* discomforted heteronormativity and homonormativity. Queer pleasure, strangeness, and romance formed as affective currents in the magazine, flowing beneath, against, between, and through the DOB's and the *Ladder's* push towards assimilation through respectability. The magazine itself disrupted the discourses of heteronormativity that pervaded everyday life in the 1950s and 1960s, and it constituted lesbian identities and communities against the insidiousness of compulsory heterosexuality. However, its affective productions interrupted the magazine's cohesiveness, producing ways of feeling queer that did not fall in easy line with articulations of lesbian middle-class normativity. Instead, these queer feelings as affective movements collect the traumas of erasure, illegitimacy, violence, and injury and bind them to the feelings of hopefulness that underscore new connections, community growth, political action, friendship, romance, desire, and sex. Cvetkovich argues that trauma creates "counterpublic spheres" (*Archive* 15), and so by creating them, trauma is preserved within them, as necessary to their future as their past.

Western queer history has reified into a narrative of progressive gay liberation emerging from a moment of protest in New York that began on June 28th 1969. The Stonewall riots are constructed as a singular igniting event where a group of people, tired of police harassment and legal persecution, finally fight back against injustices enacted by police and the law, thus sparking a gay revolution, which has resolved into the modern LGBTQ+ movement. Though pivotal, the events of Stonewall are often misrepresented (as in the 2015 film, *Stonewall*, directed by Roland Emmerich), and the narrative of a gay movement begun by these protests elides the crucial work that preceded them. The discourse and actions of the DOB, the Mattachine Society, and One Inc. were political and radical in their own ways, and they engendered a sense of public identity and community that created space for a variety of ways of doing and being gay and lesbian. In addition to imagining ways of being lesbian, and cultivating a broad textual network, the *Ladder* constructed ways of feeling lesbian that gesture towards, rather than fully articulate, a sense of individual and communal becoming in this critical historical moment. By reading the *Ladder* as an affective archival text, my work complicates the historical constructions of lesbian organizing during this period as conservative and assimilationist, and it produces a more complex understanding of how lesbians were thinking and feeling about themselves and the world during this period.

The *Ladder* is a critical archive for this period of lesbian emergence because it articulates the official position of the DOB alongside reader-submitted articles, letters, fiction, and poetry. The latter are important records of what lesbians were feeling as they were beginning to imagine themselves as a distinct individual and

collective identity. Reader letters of the *Ladder*, in particular, offer pertinent insights into lesbian life during this period and are a potential site for further study. It may also be beneficial to examine other publications from this period, specifically ONE magazine and the *Mattachine Review*, through an affective theoretical lens to discover how they align with and diverge from the *Ladder*.

Reading texts for their affective productions, for the work of affect and the affective currents that run through them, is particularly valuable when considering points of community formation or movement. This kind of analysis, as a method of uncovering how values, beliefs, and ways of knowing are shifting and coalescing, can produce new understandings about communities and about what they hold in common. While affect has resonated in queer theory in recent years, it has begun to be used in other fields, such as to offer insights into theories and experiences of race and racism. For example, in the *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed, theorizes how the affects of hate, disgust, shame, and love come into play in the constructions and discourses of race and racism. In *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon Patricia Holland looks to affect theory to help elucidate the everyday workings of racism, and a 2014 dissertation by James M. Estrella posits that affect theory enables readings of cultural texts to understand the emergence of queer Latina@ identity and community. These examples demonstrate that affect theory and readings of affective production in critical community and cultural texts can enrich theoretical analyses in fields other than queer studies. My work offers one way of thinking through affective movements in the early, constitutive texts of a counterpublic in its process of becoming. It provides a way of reading history as a “structure of feelings” (Williams

132), in which feeling operates as an affective epistemology, a way of creating knowledge as it is felt by those who are experiencing an historical moment in its unfolding.

Affect is movement. To feel is to be moved. To affect another engages feeling between and across bodies, moving bodies towards and away from each other, and opening up or closing down bodily borders. Feeling moves through circulations of affectively-sticky objects, in the ways that meanings, values, and beliefs shift and re-form as people start to feel differently. Reading affect as movement enables us to think in new ways about historical and present moments. If, as cultural and literary scholars, we understand feeling, not just as personal and internal responses to the stimuli of the external world, but as modes of knowledge and engagement grounded in the social and moving through the public bodies, we have access to rich and complex archives of the swirling entwined movements of the social and its subjects.

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