

# (HOMO)TOPIA! QUEER NIGHTCLUBS AS ECOSYSTEMS OF DESIRE AND DISPOSSESSION

*STEP INTO A KALEIDOSCOPIC VORTEX OF SOUND, LIGHT, AND DESIGN WHERE QUEER NIGHTCLUBS PULSE AS UNTAMED ECOSYSTEMS OF DESIRE, DEFIANCE, AND DISPOSSESSION.*

What if architecture isn't just built, but performed? What happens when it is constructed from desire, rebellion, and fleeting moments rather than concrete and glass? My experiences over the last few years have been transformative for me in understanding and celebrating my queer identity. I will never forget stepping onto the crowded, exuberant floor of London's iconic Heaven nightclub and feeling the intoxicating and undeniably gay energy around me. For the night, I was transported to another world, a place where normative gender and sexuality are erased.

After five years designing community centers, food halls, pavilions, and libraries, I can confidently say that gay nightclubs are the most powerful architecture I know. They resist permanence. They defy order. They are mutable, living architectures triggered not by structure, but by presence, by performance, by the flicker of a strobe light or the rise of a beat. They are an architecture that is "turned on," only activated when in use; an architecture where the ground and ceiling tend to disappear in a haze of bodies and booze; an architecture made of sounds and smells; and an architecture whose minor elements, a dark corridor or a bathroom, are just as significant as the dancefloor. They construct atmospheric worlds that are freeing, memorable, transformative, and rebellious, allowing individuals to perform a more aspirational, or hedonistic, or confident, version of themselves.

This installation explores how queer nightclubs function as performative environments, where architectural elements, sensory triggers, and live performances converge to create a visceral and interactive space. Projection becomes a medium to fracture time, and sound becomes a device for disruption. Architecture acts as a porous canvas, with projections, soundscapes, and even objects in the space acting as props for performance. These contrasting and mingling narratives destabilize what we think of as a "stage" and a "spectator," creating an immersive environment where viewers are drawn into the action, encouraged to perform along with the installation, or witness moments of self-revelation that break from expectation.

This project has lived with me for two and a half years as I have had the opportunity to study abroad for three semesters. The opportunity to travel has allowed me to experience queer nightlife from a variety of cultures as an insider, outsider, and somewhere in between. In New York, London, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Mexico, I have recorded my personal experiences through film and audio recordings, visiting venues at night and returning during the day to observe the ephemeral relics. Each of these places provide their own unique political contexts and societal attitudes toward queer people that create a multi-layered comparison. (HOMO)topia fractures sonic geographies that layer these global and temporal conditions in new and unexpected ways, paying equal attention to mundane relics of the night; graffitied signs, stacked glasses, old performance flyers, and subtle glances; as to interviews and spatial conditions.

Early into my research, I came across a clubbing film of Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable in New York City. Multiple strips of film were superimposed on top of one another with a low framerate that creates a feeling of intense speed and slowness simultaneously: raw, disjointed, and alive. That visual language became a compass. I spliced together my own recordings with Eisenstein-inspired montage, using dissonance and juxtaposition to provoke meaning. I conducted extensive research into some of the most important clubs in the past and was inspired by some of the disco architecture of Italian radical groups and American radicals in the 60's who created sensorial, projection filled, ephemeral club experiences. Additionally, I studied architectural theories and queer histories to see what links can be drawn. One of my first connections was with theorist Michel Foucault, who coined the term "Heterotopia," which, in contrast to an unreal utopia, is an existent space that embodies the idea of "Other." Another interesting term he coined is "heterochrony," or "time sliver" in which multiple times exist simultaneously on top of one another in a space. They are not linear nor synchronized, but they offer subtle clues about a place. In each of these terms, "hetero" as a prefix connotes "difference—" queer nightclubs have constantly existed on the margins of the urban; hidden, underground, and insular. It's no accident that this installation takes place in my basement rather than in Slocum. Queer clubs have always existed on the margins, underground, hidden, self-protective. The basement, with its ducts, grime, and leftover infrastructure, holds time differently. It is uncomfortable and imperfect. It holds memory like dust.

The title, (HOMO)topia, suggests a shift not just in prefix, but in power. As queer spaces are increasingly co-opted by mainstream visibility, from RuPaul to rainbow capitalism, there is a danger of flattening their radical potential. Nightlife becomes brunch. Dissent becomes branding. But neither homo or hetero is quite right; both exist as a constant push and pull within these spaces. My project centers around the concept of “dispossession” as a form of performing and enacting liberation. Dispossession in this sense can be understood as a refusal or an undoing of the normative structures that govern how people live, love, and express their identities. It becomes not only a spatial and sensory condition but also a performative one. But this undoing is not easy, and the pressures of a heteronormative, capitalist world looms over these dark spaces. As you will see when you enter, my research footage is overlaid with archival and contemporary footage and sounds that animate this struggle, appearing and disappearing as the films unfold.

So how does all of this manifest in a fleeting, 15 minute experience in my basement? The installation is episodic but with blurry boundaries between each episode, as they all play simultaneously. Through careful coding of hours of recorded and found footage, I created storyboards for six films which each have their own moods, atmospheres, and soundscapes. From the beginning of this project, I wanted to spatialize the experience of my short films. While the six films have unique content, they all “sync up” at key moments and are connected by Julius Eastman’s Gay Guerilla, which jumps from speaker to speaker continuously. The existing space necessitated some creative means to create a circulatory loop in a dirty environment full of ducts, columns, and mechanical equipment. First, curtains were placed on the windows to create a clean slate of darkness. I surveyed the existing surfaces of the basement; concrete blocks, bricks, and reflective surfaces; to determine what would be an adequate projection surface. From here, a system of curtains created a series of spaces for each film. You enter through the “Introduction,” descending into darkness. The “Stage” opens like a breath – wide, open, alive. A flashing red light lures you into the “Rebellion” corridor, a claustrophobic maze that finally gives way to the dreamlike chaos of “Immersive Fantasy.” There, everything collides. Noise, color, stillness. But this is also the quietest space, a place where viewer becomes performer or simply drifts through. In the final zone, “Fleeting,” projections scatter across pipes and heaters, looping endlessly. When you exit, you find yourself where you began – but changed, if only a little. Each loop reshuffles what you see, hear, and feel.



(HOMO)topia can exist outside too. In a moment of contrast, I projected a combined cut of the films onto the brutalist facade of the Everson Museum, a public claim on a space often reserved for sanctioned culture. For one night, the hidden world of queer nightlife was made visible. The private became public. The underground became monumental. It was a reminder that these spaces, though often tucked in the shadows, are integral to the city's cultural fabric. They deserve to be seen.

So (HOMO)topia is not just a space; it is an insistence. A fleeting, pulsating, looping world where architecture dissolves into rhythm, rebellion, and revelation. This project has been an act of dispossession in itself: a letting go of rigid structures, a refusal of the daylight expectations of what design should be. From a damp basement in Syracuse to the glowing face of the Everson Museum, this installation bridges the intimate and the public, the underground and the exposed. It honors queer nightclubs not as relics of past rebellion, but as living, mutating ecosystems: never static, always shimmering with the potential for transformation. It is a reclaiming of architecture as embodied, ephemeral, and queer. Here, the dancefloor becomes archive, the projection becomes protest, and every flickering frame is a fragment of queer futurity. In the end, (HOMO)topia is a space to get lost, and found, again and again.