The Nodal Closet

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ABSTRACT

The synthesis of this text comes from a contemporary appraisal of the term “the closet” and its current place in culture since the advent of cybernetics. The authors’ assertion is that this metaphor, one that is rooted in the iconography of the late-capitalist home, is in a moment of transition and constant redefinition. In this paper, the authors explore and assess three basic modern manifestations of the homosexual rite of passage and how they have been rendered obsolete, adapted, or in some respects, catalyzed by new media and mobile technology. The charting of these changes is evaluated as a ‘nodal’ phenomenon within queer culture and is paired with Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia to better explore the spatial qualities of this shifting circumstance. The closet term is part of a continuum; one marked by intersecting moments of connectivity. In this article, the authors assess the term mainly in relation to a pre-computer era, a personal computer era and a mobile computer/smartphone era.

Keywords: Cyberspace, Mobile Technology, Queer Space, Queer Theory, Social Networking, Technology

INTRODUCTION

“Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (Foucault, 1984, p. 47).

This communication grows from understanding the transformation of spatial metaphors since the advent of cybernetics. Attending particularly to the metaphors of “the closet” as placement for a transition between personal/public status, our aim is to look upon the move from a metaphor of outing, an accepted signifier for gay identity accordingly to hetero-normative expectations, to a metaphor of log-in, a distinct metaphor based on profile updating.

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The new possibilities of logging-in as an identity generator are conveyed in different means and metaphors that antiquate our old ideas about the need for outing the closet as a ‘personal-shaping’ rite of passage. It is our aim here to eschew that the understanding of such process of identity shaping is not locked in the transition of personal- to public alone but that it also pertains to a contemporary move between solid spaces and virtual ones. The concept of the node will be used here as a metaphor for a conversation between ideas regarding online sociality and the impact that such cultural shifts have brought to personal identity politics.

Realizing how relations are formed and established is perhaps much more observable - and in a certain sense, more quantifiable - through the incremental spread of an online sociality. It is not to say that this is possible
solely due to algorithm tracking but because decision-making seems to have a much more deliberate, affirmative nature. This relation of extension and intersections from a source recalls the idea of the node. We will use such terminology to observe how certain devices privilege a “nodal space”—a field in which the signifier of multiple nodes relies mainly on the type or amount of intersections established with other nodes. In this new field, the metaphor of outing still prevails; however it is transmuted from a metaphor of location to a metaphor of action and time. It is in this context that according to Foucault (1984) notion of heterotopia as a space that defines itself, as permanently open to crisis in redefinition is useful. Applying this definition of heterotopia to our concept of the node establishes as a premise, the non-static nature and dismissal of normative cultural rites that tend to happen at the expenditure of personal anguish. This trope activates and emphasizes continuity against isolation, beyond the limits of a physical closet, beyond the existence of a closet in a house and the subjects trapped inside.

THE PROMISE NODE

The notion of “the closet” is an antiquated crypt-spatial concept that exists in relation to the concepts of house/home. It activates origin as a signifier for mapping personal identity. The idea of house/home has been in transit, its meaning dispersed and decentralized. A new contemporary person exists within this lineage where intimacy implies the activation of a multiplicity of social signifiers, filtered throughout many technologies, social settings, and theoretical spaces. The contemporary person finds itself in a condition of dispersal, with identity scattered among a multiplicity of objects, situations, and sites.

The Western publicity of homosexual culture confines it to status of otherness, as a subculture. In this line of thought, the understanding of homosexuality as cultural space is produced in three noteworthy ways: as emerging from the closet, an antiquated restrictive location for the sexual inversion; the role of the bar scene and its replacement by online-dating formats; and finally, mediums created by new development of mobile technology, the most relevant example being the Mobile Dating Site.

The move into the public, initiates a discourse from identity politics, personal ethics and community ethos to a discussion of the transformations of self and self-image. We are rather interested in focusing the “behavior” of the concept of space during these shifts. It seems valuable that in this instance, nodes act as best-fitting terminology to conceptualize the apparition of the connected, intersected and dialogical quality of the social.

From the closet space, it is important to retain the idea of a personal gestation from the intimacy of the “private” to the social. For that matter, the nodal quality functions here in terms of a promise to effectively activate relations with others. This movement beyond the closet is a metaphorical construct working as a confiscation of sexual identity, sequestered and reduced to the metaphor of an object existing in a traditional, “hetero-normative bedroom”. Perhaps the most important insight at use here is that the migration of intimacy from private to public space only happens once, inaugurating developments of personal ontology by means of extroverted space.

THE RELATIONAL NODE

The “coming-out of the closet” - or promise node - is marked by the passage from an intrapersonal level to a strongly socialized exteriorization fixed by the gesture of asserting and accounting for one’s sexual identity. It is rather a realization for the individual that does not further ignore the extent of its own selfhood nor maintains or fosters a passing-for-straight strategy.

What defines the relational node is precisely what follows the materialization and externalization of the promise node. From the anticipation to belong and the projection of desire of intimacy, there is a real chance to become an agent of shared intimacy. The gay bar
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