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I, Marissa R Campos, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

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Queering Architecture: Appropriating Space and Process

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Queering Architecture: Appropriating Space and Process

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

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by

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This thesis supports the philosophy that queer spaces are spaces of appropriation and spaces of empowerment while exploring and challenging the assertion that queer space cannot be designed. Understanding queerness requires an appreciation of the relationship between identity and the intricacies of biological sex, gender, and sexuality.

While the heteronormative functions with the assumption that sex, gender, sexuality and gender roles align, queerness embodies a fluidity that allows for operation outside of this norm.

This project addresses queer youth homelessness in Chicago, Illinois where there is an estimated 1,448-3,000 LGBTQ homeless youth. The issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness is not unique to Chicago; however, as the largest city in the Midwest, it attracts more throwaway and runaway youth than any other city in the region. Although Chicago has a strong queer community and identity, there are a lack of resources and spaces that cater specifically to queer homeless youth. This project provides a place for youth to access integrated services as well as housing. Through spaces designed to reflect and respect the diversity of queer identities, the goal of the project is to empower and enable.

Aaron Betsky’s book, Queer Space (1997), addresses the history and meaning of the notion of queer space and those who occupy it. However, the scope of his work is limited and excludes many issues regarding gender identity, race, and class. Building on Betsky’s definition and discussion of queer space, this project expands the definition to include a more diverse group of queer individuals as well as explores how one designs queer space with the understanding that it has traditionally been established through the act of appropriation. The discussion on constructing and subsequently deconstructing social constructs plays a pivotal role in understanding how one occupies a space.

The queering of architecture must focus on reflecting the fluidity of the various layers of identity we all express or repress.

Thus, the queering of space requires the appropriation and queering of the architectural process itself and current modes of representation. The goal of this thesis is to engage in this leap from queer and feminist theory into the realms of design in order to address current and critical issues, through the operation of queering both the architectural process and space.
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Queer

n. colloq. (freq. derogatory). A homosexual; esp. a male homosexual.
a. Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric.
Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious.
v. trans. Originally: to make a fool of, ridicule; to swindle, cheat; to get the better of. Later also: to puzzle, flummox, confound, baffle, to put out of order; to spoil.

Gender

n. a. gen. Males or females viewed as a group
n. b. Psychol. and Sociol. (orig. U.S.). The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one’s sex. Also: a (male or female) group characterized in this way.

Gender Queer

adj. Designating a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions, but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders; (also occas.) of or relating to such a person; n. a genderqueer person.

Gender Fuck

n. coarse slang. Subversion or defiance of traditional conventions or expectations of gender difference.

Conqueer

adj. Designating a person who identifies with their born gender, that term is used rather than non-trans so that emphasis isn’t placed on either as normal.
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A NEED:

Queer
Homeless
Youth in Crisis

1.1 Homeless youth in the United States.
1.2 Reaction from family, family demographics.

The architect acts as the key agent of the establishment, sustaining a mechanism of political order by both representing the possibility of order itself and enforcing specific orders. - Mark Wigley

In 1992, Wigley recognized the centrality of architecture to the literal creation of order and establishment—paying homage to the necessary and vital role played by architecture in the definition of spaces both personal and private. By contrast, Goethe said, “architecture was music frozen in time.” Both Wigley and Goethe state eloquently that the core of architecture is the act of creation. The description of architecture as some static art within the confines of a set of highly delineated parameters has offered a conception of


architecture for its practitioners that make reference to the fluidity of architectural concepts. Too often, architecture has been reduced to merely the sum of its parts: brick, wood, mortar, and beams while missing the art—the music as it were, within architectural ambitions. From its earliest inception, architecture has been utilized as a unique solution to some of the most intimate, lofty, common, and rare problems confronting human populations—namely how and where we live or work or play. Architecture situates human populations within the natural and built world by creating practical solutions for the necessities of the human experience.
One recurring question throughout known architectural history is how best to design living spaces, the very homes for us to live within. However, not all populations have been equally served by architectural advancements.

Despite some improvements in conditions for the homeless populations in the United States, significant homeless populations exist in nearly every major US metropolitan area. Not all segments of the US population are equally represented within the numbers of homeless individuals. Estimates place the percentage of the overall homeless population who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning/queer (LGBTQ) as between 20 and 40%—hugely disproportionate from the percentage of LGBTQ individuals within the general US population where LGBTQ individuals account for only around 10% of the population. Within this overrepresentation among homeless individuals, an even more troubling statistic has emerged. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce 2007 report, “Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness”, an estimated 1.6 to 2.8 million homeless youth, and of those 320,000 to 400,000 identify as LGBTQ—thus identifying LGBTQ youth as one of the largest single statistical segments within the total homeless population.

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Unfortunately, a further problem has emerged for LGBTQ homeless youth; expert study into housing for homeless youth has found that “the majority of existing shelters and other care systems are not providing safe and effective services to LGBT homeless youth.”8 Until recently, little concerted research had explored the connection between LGBTQ identity and homelessness. Researchers have found that the specific issues facing the LGBTQ population at large may also contribute to the higher incidence of homelessness among LGBTQ youth, for example “according to one study, 50 percent of gay males experienced a negative parental reaction when they came out and 26 percent of those disclosures were met with a demand that the youth leave home.”9

Such statistics suggest that negative parental reactions to sexual or gender identity are the direct cause of homelessness for some LGBTQ youth. Even among the general homeless youth population research into homelessness has concluded that: “homeless LGBT youth are a highly vulnerable population, susceptible to risky behavior much like their heterosexual peers. Lesbian and gay youth are more likely to run away from home as a result of conflict with parents over sexual orientation than bisexual or heterosexual youth. Oftentimes, homophobic families kick LGBT youth out of their homes, creating a subgroup of homeless youth dubbed “throwaways” who have been rejected by their caregivers and are thus even more vulnerable to negative outcomes.”10

Given the documented need for housing among the homeless youth population generally and among LGBTQ youth specifically, one would expect a targeted response from shelters to address the unique needs of homeless LGBTQ youth, sadly the LGBTQ homeless youth population remains woefully underserved.

Even a brief survey of existing facilities reveals that “a limited number of health care facilities for LGBT youth do exist in the United States...such programs are rare, and for those unable to access such services the ongoing risks are extraordinarily high.”11 Specific deficiencies are found in shelter facilities throughout the country which reflect larger societal misconceptions about gender, sexuality and identity."12
From all accounts, it appears that the current shelter housing for LGBTQ homeless youth is inadequate to meet the needs of the LGBTQ population.

This project addresses current shelter inadequacies by exploring the roots of the architectural design process itself. The understandings of how queer space is created or built have not yet been fully explored, even among architectural design theorists. My thesis is that the current definitions of queer space lack a connection to the concrete question of how queer space can be designed or erected. A failure of process thus exists where a space may require a queer identity but theoretical design process literature has not clearly identified specific methods by which queer space can be made. Research into the theory underlying queer identity generally and the identities of queer homeless youth specifically has revealed two main currents which act as the linking threads between process and design for this project, specifically the need for safety or a safe space in which identity may be expressed and secondly the distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity. As identified by one writer, “regardless of their specific identity, gender non-conforming people require similar protections of privacy and safety...sexual orientation is completely distinct from their gender identity.”

Thus, this project will attempt two equally bold results. First to identify and overcome the deficiencies found in current definitions of queer space by proposing a new definition through which a queering process may then be described. Secondly, this project will take the definition of queer space with its attendant ‘queered’ design process and test that theory within the concrete parameters of a specific client- the homeless LGBTQ youth of Chicago’s Boystown. This thesis suggests that the architectural design process lacks a queer approach to designing queer space. The project concludes that it is not enough for a space to be occupied by queer identified individuals or use a queer identified designer as the basis for queering a space or locating gender or sexual identity; instead the design process itself may be queered in a way that will also better serve queer clients by recognizing that queering strategies based on appropriation, fluidity, and layering are vital to the creation of gender and sexual identity for both spaces and individuals.

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A THEORY:

Queer Space as Self-Determinative Space

The very study of queer space is evolving at a rapid pace almost unknown to the study of architecture. Until the very late 20th century, queer scholarship was not recognized as a major field of study, nor were concerted efforts made to unify existing theories of queer writings across specialties. As a result, the theory behind any understanding of queer space remains murky at best, often full of contradictions within each field and formulations which sit uneasily against one another when applied outside very narrow formulations of gender. For example, Aaron Betsky, as a student of architecture and expert on some highly specialized queer spaces in the late 1990’s, approached the theory of queer spaces from the specific standpoint of a queer space as one reserved for the middle class gay white male. Although his work remains highly relevant to discussions of gay white middle class males, the reduction of all queer space to the middle class gay white male is far too narrow to use as the blueprint for a general theory of queer design because it does not address enough of the differences within the queer population due to gender, class, race or ethnicity. Similarly a survey of writing from queer experts in related fields also fails to identify a dominant set of principles by which one could build the analytic framework necessary to design for generic or unknown queer users as I attempt with this project for users from the homeless youth.
The seminal work of Judith Butler in Gender Trouble rigorously defines the philosophical underpinnings of queer theory with an emphasis on incorporating 20th century feminism into a broader discussion of the construction of gender identity to clearly delineate between sex and gender.17

Also of note are the essay collections, the major writers of queer theory have articulated theories of queer space and gender identity which do not adequately address the needs of designing queer spaces. Current theorists fall generally into two main camps. First, what I call the definitive theorists of which Betsky would be the central question in designing queer space remains, how may one define a queer design process? What lessons of gender theory can be applied to the literal construction of purposefully gendered or gender neutral space? And how can this process remain open to changes necessitated by the unique characteristics of the queer population in Boystown Chicago.14

Butler's distinction between sex and gender draws heavily from earlier work in feminist and queer studies. For example, Betsky wrote movingly that...this body of scholarship has been produced spaces with characteristics of the queer population at that time, they experienced by homosexual men in the Western world in the twentieth century. It is my contention that this group was a queer space. In this book, I will try to contextualize what I mean by that term and to suggest that the category of women is a necessary attribute of queer space, a space that is much more than a cultural category. Rather it is a space of pure artifice...All of these writers attempt to define what makes a particular space queer and isolate those elements as having innate queerness which could be then reconstituted to create new or different queer spaces. For example, Betsky's seminal architectural treatment of queer space in the 1997 book 'Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire', offered several definitions of queer space which isolating specific elements used to construct queer space. Betsky wrote that

“The goal of queer space is orgasm. There is a space of orgasm. It is the space in which your body dissolves into the void and your senses smooth all reality into continuous waves of pleasure...Organismic space leaves you vulnerable and happy in that vulnerability, because you are at the center of your experiences. It is an unreal most well known architectural example. These writers attempt to define what makes a particular space queer and isolate those elements as having innate queerness which could be then reconstituted to create new or different queer spaces. For example, Betsky's seminal architectural treatment of queer space in the 1997 book 'Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire', offered several definitions of queer space which isolating specific elements used to construct queer space. Betsky wrote that

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space with no endurance, and yet is very real... Queer space is built out of [the] three elements. Out of the recesses of the self it constructs a mirror in which you appear, then dissolves into orgasm.”

By contrast, those writers I identify as constructivists prominently championed by modern feminist writer Judith Butler, instead break down gender as a societal or personal construct which can be ever changing and based in performative or repetitive acts. Butler theorizes that “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts...a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality.”

Thus, for Butler and similar constructivists, gender is by nature only a snapshot in time bound to the acts which serve as its evidence- not a single stable definition. Butler goes on to explain that “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative- that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing...”

Both queer theories have admirably addressed a huge range and multiplicity of fields but -both theories are incomplete. The field of architecture requires not just academic or theoretical construction of gendered space but literal brick and mortar buildings for real live gendered and queer people. Indeed, some definitive theorists would even argue that “Queer space is not about building homes, which are some of the simplest building blocks of our physical environment. That does not mean that queers do not or did not live in homes, but the notion of a retreat toward an incubator of values that perpetuate themselves in children has never been a central part of the queer experience.”

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Not only do these limited approaches fail to incorporate the entirety of the queer experience into their definitions, both theories also offer little in the way of solid processes to construct queer space.

To take the definitive theorists at face value, a combination of queer attributes should, a queer space make. However, practice has shown this approach to be woefully inadequate as the users of, for example a queer homeless shelter represent such a diversity of backgrounds that a focus on historically gay components, such as the characteristics favored by a single audience have limited the queer experience to a viewpoint that is almost uniformly gay and male(and white middle class!). According to the definitive writers “the core of queer community-building is the notion of ‘gentrification.’ The very word implies that a wealthy class is making its own space, and in many cases this is exactly what the ‘gay invasion’ has been: the occupation of working-class or industrial areas by middle-

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class white men.” By its very definition, this conception of queer community building would explicitly displace any queer individuals who were not middle class or white or men. For example, in this project the target queer population of homeless youth within Boystown includes a large non-white population.

Constructivists offer a different approach which unfortunately also falls short for use as design guidelines for queer space. The constructivist writers hold that “Whether it is a bar, casino, or home sexual politics permeate the space. There are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics. Sex and space cannot be ‘decoupled’...Sexuality has a profound effect on the way people live in, and interact with, space and place. In turn, space and place affect people’s sexuality.”

The clear implication from constructivist theory is that the gendering and sexualizing of spaces is so innate and pervasive that any and all spaces must by nature include a gendered and sexual dimension. As Jane Garrity wrote, “to examine the complexity of queer space is to show how spaces that appear asexual are actually inflected by a range of consequences attendant upon heteronormative ideologies.” Thus, constructivists create an unexamined paradox where constructivist theory falls short, because all spaces will by definition be both gendered and sexualized while the gender identity of all individuals cannot be or remain static. The fluidity studied in such depth by Columina and Butler leads to definitions of gender which characterize gender as unfixed, this constructivist approach does not address the problem of gender fixation within a space- indeed, there is some suggestion by these authors that a self evident gendering of space would be mere performance or artifice instead of a true representation of gender itself. As Mark Wigley wrote, “spaces literally produce the effect of gender, transforming the mental and physical character of those who occupy the wrong place.” How then to design a space to be queer when gender could be ever changing? The constructivists fail to solve the concrete problem of architectural design for queer spaces by glossing over what acts or performance can gender a space, to what degree, and how queerness can be purposely constructed or designed.

Thus, a third path must be made to bridge the theoretical gap between queer identity and physical constructed spaces. I propose instead that both process and product must reflect queer identity- not through a rote copying of other successful queer spaces or attempting to create ever changing space but instead to properly locate queer space as space used by a queer population which retains some queer identity outside mere occupation of the space by its users. The
act of self-definition forms the basis for this project’s third path. Self-definition is an extremely powerful act (or performance, to borrow the parlance from Gender Trouble), echoes of the importance of self-definition can be found throughout queer literature and academic study of queer identity, the freedom to choose a space as queer or to ‘queer’ an existing space must be the heart of the architectural design process for queer space. My thesis is that gender, sexuality and sex are self-identified, thus designing queer space must give queer users the freedom of choice to honor the deep connection between self-expression and the occupation of spaces.

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can neither be true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. –Judith Butler

The precedent research for this project in Chicago came not just from factual investigation into architectural projects but also included research on themes of queerness. This search for definitions of queer identity creation led me into the sophisticated artistic vision of artists who used layering, fluidity and sexual identity to explore the boundaries of individuality and societal constructions of gender identity. The different approaches of representing queerness incorporated a variety of mediums including photography, the tattooed human body, physical buildings, and more ephemeral yet targeted LGBTQ outreach. I scrutinized the models of effective shelters and support for the LGBTQ community for usable best-practices among homeless shelters aimed specifically at LGBTQ homeless populations. Finally, I looked at the particular pre-existing LGBTQ homeless youth population services in and around the Chicago site to see what gaps in services still remained.

3
A CATALYST:
Reactions to Gender Identity

28 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999), 186.
Photographs

The idea of gender construction and non-normative gender identity has been discussed at length in a variety of literary, philosophical, and scientific writings. Although theoretical discussions on gender identity have been well established through these and a variety of related academic disciplines, gender identity has been less examined in works of architecture. The artist Sophia Wallace explores non-normative gender presentation through her body of work, On Beauty (2010), Girls Will Be Bois (2002-2007), and Berlin Lookbook (2009). Wallace photographs subjects with non-normative gender identity to examine the connection between non-traditional gender presentation and overt violence. She specifically addresses the effect of such violence on women but similar violence has been found to affect a large percentage of the LGBTQ community—particularly LGBTQ homeless youth.

For Sophia Wallace, the use of model and context is key to understandings of gender identity. She describes the focus of her work as “how otherness is constructed visually on the gendered, sexualized, racialized body” through the taking of portraits which allow her to explore and comment on the fluidity and construction of gender. Her most direct series is the 2010 exploration of societal constructions of gender, On Beauty (2010).

In the series On Beauty (2010) she explores the tension caused by photographing male models, or what she considers “living representations of idealized masculinity” in traditionally feminine poses, challenging the audience to process the juxtaposition of masculinity to femininity and strength to vulnerability within the same portrait. The male subjects in On Beauty are posed and presented as a packaged contradiction to their normal appearance. The key alteration from the male models’ normal appearance in On Beauty, stems from the feminized posing of their male bodies in so-called “feminine” poses. This posing draws attention to the societal roots of feminine and masculine gender presentation while
challenging the viewer to examine why the simple dropping of a shoulder or draping of a headscarf can render a male body less masculine in appearance to the audience.

Gender can include more than just societal expectation, Wallace used more subtle representations of gender in her series Girls Will Be Bois (2002-2007) where she documents images of butch lesbians who “present a non normative femininity.” These women are photographed as their normal selves, yet are still outside gender norm. Unable to pass as heterosexual women, Wallace explains that her subjects “do not experience sexism and homophobia as separate events; instead, the two forms of harassment are mutually reinforcing.”

The breaking of social and gender norms creates a situation of vulnerability and exposure to violence for presentation outside of sexual gender. Wallace’s statement on her collection references a 15 year murdered lesbian, Sakia Gunn, whose death explicitly links the combined sexism and homophobia to extreme violence. Girls Will Be Bois (2002-2007), challenges viewers to understand the deep societal links between safety and gender presentation: how dangerous the world can be to an individual who exists and presents gender outside societal expectations.

Wallace further explores the notion of non normative femininity or feminine masculinity in the series Berlin Lookbook (2009). She uses her portraiture of genderqueer subjects to lead her audience through the typical representation of femininity in advertisements. Wallace cast and photographed genderqueer individuals asserting “the notion that broadening the narrow confines of conventional femininity is aesthetically compelling and desirable.”

Similar to her approach in On Beauty, Wallace plays with the viewer by presenting conflicting cues regarding the gender of the subjects. Girls Will Be Bois (2002-2007), Wallace underscores that societal notice of feminine masculinity provokes violent reactions more often than any other emotion.

Sophia Wallace’s work is extremely relevant to the discussion of queer space and queer masculinity.
3.10 - 3.16 Berlin Lookbook.
identities. While she focuses primarily on the perception of non normative femininity, her body of work questions the larger societal role within gender construction. For LGBTQ individuals, it is the misalignment of sex, gender, or orientation that causes points of friction within the presentation of the individual to society at large which remains deeply heteronormative and in many cases hostile towards such misalignment.

Prints
French tattoo artist Xoïl’s canvas is the human body. The highly original, elongated tattoos are best described as a woodcut-screen print-tattoo hybrid. Layers upon layers of ink are used to portray fields of geometric figures, newspaper-esque imagery, and ribbons of color unique to a Xoïl tattoo. He explores the layering of images to create a piece that has multiple readings. Much like the layers of identity, his work playfully emphasizes certain layers that seem to jump to the foreground and then eventually recede upon further examination by the viewer. The tattoos’ dense layering suggests interpretation of the tattoos as a work of art, acting as a foil to personal identity where an individual may choose to present some ‘layers’ of identity more prominently than others.
3.21 Xoil. Tattoo on arm and torso.

The tattoos are also sexualized without necessarily resorting to interpretations based on gender. Xoil's pieces tend to follow sensual lines along the human body. Any photography of his pieces thus requires that his subjects appear in the nude, creating a portfolio of his work that is both archival and sexual.
Haven for Hope is the largest comprehensive homeless shelter in the United States. At its location in downtown San Antonio, the shelter sits nestled between the tourist centered Riverwalk shopping area and a low income residential neighborhood on an old industrial site. San Antonio based architects, Overland Partners, designed the campus with a “one-stop-shop approach” to the shelter with a focus on not only providing a safe space to live, but also access to a variety of different ‘wrap-around services’ to help address and treat “the root causes of chronic homelessness.”

Projects

Haven for Hope

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The campus is organized around a series of courtyards and pedestrian streets. Housing is divided by gender (married couples with children may apply for a family room to house the couple with their children.) The shelter has large mixed gender courtyards as well as smaller gender specific courtyards. Although the majority of the organization of its housing is standard for a shelter, Haven for Hope offers a unique sleeping option for those who choose not to become an official member of the campus community; the shelter offers an outdoor, partially-lit covered area which may be used for sleeping and resting by its non-official members. The area is located outside of the walls of the housing units, but inside the gates of the campus, providing a safer alternative to non-official members who may otherwise resort to sleeping under the nearby freeway intersection. Bathrooms and showers are available to both official and non-official users as well as access to food and basic hygiene supplies.
Broadway Youth Center

The Broadway Youth Center is a drop in center for queer youth. The Center offers services to LGBTQ youth such as STD/ HIV testing, counseling, food, hygiene supplies, and job training. The Center has plans to relocate the physical location to make their services more accessible to a larger client base using a larger building within Boys Town. Boys Town is the largest and most visible gay neighborhood in Chicago.41

Although not designed as a homeless shelter, the Center is considered by many of its users and its leadership to act as one of the only ‘safe spaces’ for the LGBTQ youth population of both Chicago and nearby midwestern cities. Anecdotally, the Center director believes that many users travel hundreds of miles for services like counseling because so few resources exist in other midwestern cities for LGBTQ youth.42

Currently, the Center’s interior furnishings and colors resemble the inside of an upscale salon, with a flashy and chic feel that ultimately proves sterile to its repeat clients. The Center received a 2011 Designs for Dignity Grant that provided the makeover, but despite the new furnishings and paint job, some of the youth who visit the Center preferred the older, worn in feel of the previous interior. According to the Center’s


42 Scott Chyna (social worker) in discussion with the author, September 23, 2012.
The Center on Halsted

Just a few blocks away from the modest Broadway Youth Center is The Center on Halsted, the most comprehensive LGBTQ community center in the Midwest. 30 The 3-story building is a strong presence on North Halsted, the main street artery that runs through Boystown in Chicago. The building, designed by the Gensler architecture firm, is situated on the northern more residential end of Boystown. Whole Foods partnered with the Center, becoming its anchor tenant to lease the ground floor of its building along with the building’s lobby.

The Center on Halsted offers STD/HIV testing, counseling, meeting space, internet

counselors, the youth preferred the older furnishings because they liked the feel of home. The makeover of and response to the Broadway Youth Center raises critical questions regarding the notion of home. When one describes a space as homely or cozy, the description conjures visions of gently used furnishings and warm colors rather than the sterile, clean lines of an IKEA showroom-like interior of the current Center. The connection between the longed for former home-like space, suggests that for some youth a safe space is one that feels like a home.
access, a library, gymnasium, theater and rooftop patio. There is youth programming, but the limited space intended for the youth consists of a single generic room that could be easily mistaken for any youth room anywhere. Ironically, it is the Center’s youth room that is most homey - it provides a stark contrast to the rest of the Center’s ultra-modern glass and concrete palette prevalent throughout the rest of the space. The building itself is beautiful and clean, but lacks spaces geared towards youth, specifically homeless youth. While the efforts of the Center are admirable and affect the lives of thousands of people in the LGBTQ community, the Center on Halsted does not directly address the lack of housing for
LGBTQ Senior Housing
The site chosen for this thesis design is slated to become future LGBTQ senior housing. Gensler, the architects of the Center on Halsted, are designing this LGBTQ senior housing project, with an expected completion date of June of 2014. Gensler generously provided construction drawings and renderings of the project for the sake of this thesis research and analysis.

LGBTQ seniors sometimes face difficulties in securing housing; however, there are more far more options for senior housing than for queer homeless youth, (as discussed in Chapter 1) and unfortunately the LGBTQ senior housing project site does not address...
3.42 LGBTQ Senior Housing, Entrance

The design of the proposed LGBTQ senior housing building is underwhelming. The senior housing project functions adequately as housing but nothing demarcates this project as LGBTQ-specific in either the spaces or the design process instead the queer nature of the project stems solely from the proposed occupation of its future tenants. Notably, a visitor to the site, unless he or she was informed otherwise could mistake the housing for any apartments anywhere. The project lacks any meaningful connection to either the specific physical location of the building within Boystown and any connection to a queer identity. A queer building should not be vulnerable to becoming less queer in the absence of its tenants, rather queer building should ideally reflect a process as part of its design that fundamentally identifies the structure as queer. This thesis attempts to locate that queer process.

The provided drawings and renderings show that the Town Hall Police Station is to be repurposed as a lobby space with other small communal and administrative functions. A 6-story housing bar connects the police station to the driveway just left of the Whole Foods. The façade of the housing bar meets the edge of the sidewalk, maintaining the boundary between private and public space and the interior of the building consists of typical one-bedroom apartments on a double-loaded corridor.

The crises of youth LGBTQ homelessness. The project is underwhelming. The senior housing project functions adequately as housing but nothing demarcates this project as LGBTQ-specific in either the spaces or the design process instead the queer nature of the project stems solely from the proposed occupation of its future tenants. Notably, a visitor to the site, unless he or she was informed otherwise could mistake the housing for any apartments anywhere. The project lacks any meaningful connection to either the specific physical location of the building within Boystown and any connection to a queer identity. A queer building should not be vulnerable to becoming less queer in the absence of its tenants, rather queer building should ideally reflect a process as part of its design that fundamentally identifies the structure as queer. This thesis attempts to locate that queer process.
A SITE: The Creation of a Gayborhood Superblock

The Chicago-based outreach organization, Night Ministry estimates that between 12,000 and 15,000 homeless youth live without permanent housing in Chicago. This homeless youth population includes between 1,448 and 3,000 LGBTQ youth.\(^4\) While all homeless individuals are susceptible to danger while living on the street, homeless youth are particularly vulnerable. A survey of straight and LGBTQ homeless youth by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless indicated that 33% of the youth had been physically assaulted, 20% had been raped or sexually assaulted while living on the streets or in shelters, and 12% had engaged in prostitution.\(^4\) The National Runaway Switchboard suggests that a homeless youth is seven times more likely to be a victim of a violent or sexual crime simply because of their LGBTQ status.\(^4\) Despite the demonstrated need for youth shelters due to the persistent dangers caused by lack of a permanent home, the city of Chicago, with a population of 2.7 million (9.5 million metro), has a mere 119 shelter beds for homeless youth.\(^4\) This thesis does not aim to solve the housing crisis for the entire LGBTQ youth population in Chicago; instead this thesis will begin to address the crucial LGBTQ homeless youth population within the context of the intersection of queer theory and architecture. The intersection of queer theory and architecture may not be the most obvious location for

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residential area of North Halsted.

Boystown’s identity has revolved around not just the acceptance of the queer population and lifestyle, but the belief that this area of Chicago was destined to be a mecca for the queer community. In A Field Guide to Gay and Lesbian Chicago, the author notes “Lakeview is entertainment central for the city, with a dizzying array of choices in dining, clubs, theater, live music, cafes, and shops. Lucky for us the gay gods above created the street known as Halsted and granted us the area from Belmont to Grace and east to Broadway to call our own. They named it Boystown and exclaimed, ‘Ooo, gurl, this place is going on!’”51 Boystown has been known, historically, for its queer-friendly commercial endeavors although the building of the Center on Halsted signaled a shift in focus to social and community-based services from purely commercial LGBTQ ventures such as the more well-known cluster of bars and cafes.52

The chosen site for this thesis design is the Boystown neighborhood of Lakeview on the north side of Chicago. The gay and lesbian population of Chicago, specifically in the Loop, has been a visible, yet marginalized community since as early as 1911.49 However, by the 1920s, the gay and lesbian community had established themselves as a sizable population on the north side of the city in tea rooms and clubs such as the Dill Pickle Club and the Bully Hoo café.50 Since then, the queer population has maintained a steady presence in Boys Town, with N. Halsted as the central artery. The boundaries of Boys Town are unofficial and have changed slightly over the years, but are generally recognized as Irving Park Road and Wellington to the north and south and Broadway Avenue and Sheffield on the east and west. On the southern end of Boys Town, there are numerous bars, clubs, sex shops, and the occasional bathhouse, typical markers of a gayborhood. However, the density of commercial endeavors thins out on the northern end, shifting to a more

51 Kathie Bergquist and Robert McDonald, A Field Guide to Gay and Lesbian Chicago (Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2006)
The remainder of the block comprising the west side of N. Halsted between Addison and Waveland sits unoccupied. The Town Hall Police station sits on the corner of N. Halsted and Addison, while several small auxiliary buildings sit between it and the Center on Halsted. Across from the Center on Halsted is the Howard Brown Elephant Resale shop, which uses the profits from its stores to help fund uninsured clients who visit the Howard Brown Health Center.

This community-oriented block in Boystown has the potential to be an overwhelming force in the community through the addition of a community center and housing project.

This thesis proposes to create a community-centered ‘super block’ within Boys Town by adding an LGBTQ youth-focused community center and housing project in place of the current unoccupied lot to complement the existing programs that are offered by the Center on Halsted. The perception of gay neighborhoods mirrors some key misperceptions about the LGBTQ community generally—namely that the identity of a gay neighborhood must be tied to overtly sexualized spaces such as gay bars, sex clubs, or adult entertainment.

Writer-activist and founder of the Trans Oral History Project, Andre Perez, questions the sexualized perception of Boys Town stating emphatically, “I want to challenge the assumption that Boystown in specific, or bars in general, are the be-all-end-all of queer socializing.”53 The creation of a community-services oriented section of Boys Town will complement the existing commercialized and sexualized spaces for queer socializing within the Lakeview neighborhood, as well as provide a venue for the creation of a more accurate perception of what a queer neighborhood can be.

4.1 Location Map, city. Cincinnati to Chicago, 295 miles.

4.2 Location Map, neighborhood.
4.4 Location Map, project site. The project site is located on the northern end of Boystown.

6.5 Location Map, neighborhood. The neighborhood of Boystown is located 6.5 miles north of the Loop.
4.8 Open Space Analysis. Boystown consists of mainly 2-4 story buildings, giving the neighborhood a residential feel. There is very little accessible open space within the neighborhood. There is a cemetery to the north and a private soccer field 2 blocks away. There is a public park along the lake that is accessible from a 3-minute walk. However, this particular part of the park includes functions such as public, but not free, tennis courts and a golf course.

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4.10 Public Transportation Analysis. The proposed site is accessible by bus lines the red line, which is one of two "el" lines that runs 24 hours a day.

4.9 Walking Distance Analysis. The proposed site is located within walking distance of many amenities, including several modes of public transportation, a grocery store, and several parks.
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Strengths:
1. Vacant police station is culturally and historically significant.
2. Boystown’s history as the first gay village in the country has established it as an accepting community which attracts a diverse population.
3. The northern end of Halstead is more residential than the lower end of Boystown.
4. Public transportation is easily accessible as are the lake front and shops.
5. Boystown, as a part of Chicago, has all the benefits of a major city, but the neighborhood character is much smaller.

Weaknesses
1. Lack of neighborhood scale open space.
2. Small southern facade.
3. Eye sores to the east and south.
4. Height restriction limits views beyond immediate streets.
5. Walls from parking garage to the west and existing whole foods create awkward boundaries.

Opportunities:
1. Reappropriating the police station provides a chance to challenge the relationship between both the police and the youth as well as the youth and the spaces within the old station.
2. Reallocating police station provides a chance to challenge the relationship between both the police and the youth as well as the youth and the spaces within the old station.

Threats
1. Recent trend of youth violence has created friction between the neighborhood and the youth that frequent the area. Much of the focus has been on the racial divide between the two groups.
2. The neighborhood has become gentrified and homogenous. There is little socio-economic and racial diversity.
3. Eye sores to the east and south.
4. Providing housing for homeless youth without opportunities for community engagement or addressing issues relating to employment, education, and transitioning to independence could create a gay ghetto.
2. Filling in the block with housing will strengthen the northern side of Boystown while creating a hub for community services and housing. This hub will hopefully challenge the view of Boystown as strictly a hub for gay nightlife.

3. Solid walls from parking garage and existing Whole Foods provide obvious placement opportunities for organization of back of house functions such as mechanical and storage rooms.

4. Reprogramming portions of the center on Halsted in conjunction with new building construction allows for more efficient use of the entire block.

5. Providing housing for youth provides a chance for investment in the neighborhood.

Threats:

1. Recent trend of youth violence has created friction between the neighborhood and the youth that frequent the area. Much of the focus has been on the racial divide between the two groups.

2. The neighborhood has become gentrified and homogenous. There is little socio-economic and racial diversity.

3. Eye sores to the east and south.

4. Providing housing for homeless youth without opportunities for community engagement or addressing issues relating to employment, education, and transitioning to independence could create a gay ghetto.
Town Hall Police Station

As discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of appropriation is essential to the establishment of queer space. Historically, the interactions between the police on the north side of Chicago and the LGBTQ population were fractious. Physically, Boys Town is located amongst relatively affluent neighborhoods with a majority white heterosexual population. By contrast, the commercial and nightlife activities along the North Halstead Boys Town corridor, attracted patrons from across Chicago’s poorer South and West side which included ethnically non-white majorities. Researcher, John R. Thompson in his commentary from Homogenous Territories: Queer Youth and the Struggle for Public Space in Chicago’s Boystown, characterized the tensions between the populations of Boys Town in his 2009 piece, stating:

“Boystown has developed into a consumer oriented business district. This has given rise to a powerful gay elite that has claimed ownership to the neighborhood while embarking on a campaign against the queer youth of color who frequently assemble in Boystown’s streets.”

Thompson goes on to write that “the commercial development that Boystown has undergone since the 1990’s can be described as a gentrification process and has, arguably, been for the purposes of generating profit and encouraging consumerism.” The treatment of public space within Boys Town has thus increasingly become focused on the

4.16 Site Panorama. In between Town Hall Police Station and small addition.

The commoditization of the gay neighborhood to the detriment of the vulnerable queer homeless youth population:

“The youth, some of whom come to Boystown to utilize the services of the Center on Halsted or Broadway Youth Center, have been accused of bringing ‘crime’ to the neighborhood (in the form of drug dealing, theft, vandalism, and sex work), increasing the noise level on the street at all hours of the night and intimidating residents and patrons of Boystown businesses. What makes these complaints suspect is the fact that throngs of white gay men drunkenly rove from bar to bar on any given night in Boystown, creating noise and drawing attention to themselves. However, they are rarely seen as a threat, and even more rarely stopped by the police...The claim that youth come to Boystown to solicit older men for sex in exchange for money is often used to justify the forced removal of these youth off of the street.”

The Town Hall Police Station is a historic building owned by the city of Chicago (application pending for inclusion on the National Historic Registry), which operated as the local point of police intervention within the Boys Town neighborhood from 1907 to 2010 as the 42nd Precinct Police Station. Often the subject of police intervention within Boys Town were members of the queer youth homeless population—thus creating a special relationship of identity based police intervention between the city of Chicago and the queer youth homeless population. As explained in greater detail within Chapter 2, the queering of a process or space often relies on the appropriation of a location where queers were made unwelcome.

For hundreds of years, small LGBTQ...
4.17 Site Panorama. View of site between Center on Halsted and small addition from street.
groups had to hide their gender and sexual identities for fear of persecution which led to the appropriation of heterosexual spaces as hidden locations for queer populations. This thesis argues that the Town Hall Police Station, since its closing in 2010 represents a unique opportunity to reclaim a space of similar persecution against queer homeless youth and turn the Town Hall Police Station into a safe space, even a home for Chicago's queer homeless youth.
In the one interview Foucault gave on homosexuality, James O’Higgins, the interviewer, remarks that there is a growing tendency in American intellectual circles particularly among radical feminists, to distinguish between male and female homosexuality,” a position he argues, that claims that very different things happen physically in the two sorts of encounters and that lesbians tend to prefer monogamy and the like while gay men generally do not. Foucault responds by laughing, suggested by the bracketed “[Laughs],” and he says, “All I can do is explode with laughter.”

As part of any architectural design process, the identity of users is key as a method of designing to meet the needs of the expected architectural clients. Theoretically however, many scholars in the vein of constructivists like Judith Butler have embraced the theory that gender identity cannot be identified as a fixed or known singularity. By its nature, the design of physical queer space, as opposed to the ephemeral, episodic spaces that Betsy describes, will have for its intended users, a recurring or constant queer population.

Thus, a basic problem occurs—when the fluidity of gender and sexuality is presumed, how can architecture address the basic needs of that population within a fixed building site or space? This project proposes a fundamental break from the traditional design process to shift the focus away from questioning and identifying users and their needs to instead attempt a queering of the design process and thus the space itself.

The necessity for a different process stems from the fluidity of gender identity and
5.1 Service-Oriented vs Space-Oriented Functions: Typical to Shelters and Community Centers.

5.2 Activities vs Spaces Analysis.
sexually experienced by queer users. The traditional mode of architectural design currently focuses on gendered spaces with an emphasis that does not fully address the ‘being’ of gender, the possible movement along a spectrum of femininity and masculinity and into other possible configurations. As Butler explains,

“Consider not only that the ambiguities and incoherences within and among heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual practices are suppressed and redescribed within the reified framework of the disruptive and asymmetrical binary of masculine/feminine, but that these cultural configurations of gender confusion operate as sites for intervention, exposure, and displacement of the reifications. In other words, the “unity” of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heteronormativity.”


5.3 Butler and Community Center Services Analysis
5.4 Public vs. Private Programming Diagram
5.5 Public vs Private Programming Diagram

\[ ... \]
In a word, queer space requires recognition of the need for possibility in spaces, the availability of flexibility to mirror the self expression of the users. The definitional approach of traditional architectural design cannot adequately answer this need because it remains focused on fixing users within a moment in time and then querying their needs to create an ideal space. A queer method of design must instead look to the basis of flexibility itself as the inspiration for design.

Some theorists have similarly located the queering of design space within the design process. Scholar, Colomina, closely examined the queer nature of the architect Loos in designing the Ruder house. Her research found that Loos made use of unconventional design techniques to model flexibility within his work. She wrote:

“The suggestion that the exterior is merely a mask which clads some preexisting interior is misleading, for the interior and exterior are constructed simultaneously. When he was designing the Ruder house, for example, Loos used a dismountable model that would allow the internal and external distributions to be worked out simultaneously. The interior is not simply the space which is enclosed by the facades. A multiplicity of boundaries is established...the displacement of drawing conventions in Loos’ four pencil drawings of the elevations of the Ruder house. Each one shows not only the outlines of the facade but also in dotted lines, the horizontal and vertical divisions of the interior, the position of the rooms, the thickness of the floors and the walls... These are drawings of neither the inside nor the outside but the membrane between them: between the representation of habitation and the mask is the wall.”


5.6 Malleable Model, soap mold.
5.7 Malleable Model, form.
5.8 Malleable Model, adjusting form.
5.9 Malleable Model, malleable forms with right curves.
Loos’ ‘dismountable model’ and use of dense strata of drawing lines, hints at a connection from flexibility of identity to flexibility in process in creating queer space. Thus, this thesis proposed that queering a space should use a queered, i.e. flexible process. Here, this project focused on conceptual aspects of the design process and attempted to give full reign to the flexibility required for queering. The flexibility in modeling led to a hybrid use of drawing, printmaking and modeling. A spectrum of malleable materials were used to explore flexibility in modeling.

Conventionally, architecture design first formulates a plan then executes the building of that plan. Instead this process was centered on making then remaking and adaptation of a model to site requirements through the use of a variety of materials.

Three distinct materials were chosen for experimentation in modeling: glycerin which was the most malleable, wax which had attributes of being partially malleable, and resin and acrylic which was an extremely rigid fixed material. A variety of models were then created with these three materials. As the requirements of the site dictated changes to the models those models were purposely remade into new depictions. The most malleable material, glycerin proved to be the simplest material with which to move forward and backward within the process and encouraged experimentation. By
5.14 Semi-Malleable Model, forms.
5.15 Semi-Malleable Model, mold.
5.16 Semi-Malleable Model, form in process.
5.17 Semi-Malleable Model, form in process.
5.18 Semi-Malleable Model, form.

Contrast, the wax easily molded to a shape but was also more fragile than the glycerin and less able to be made into new shapes without literally reconstituting the identity of the material from a solid to a liquid and then hardening it into a solid again. Finally, the resin worked similarly to the glycerin and wax in its ability to be molded. However, once the resin dried the molded shape could not be remade, even by changing its state of matter (as was possible with the wax). The fixed nature of the resin did not allow for even the simplest of modifications to be made, instead the model fundamentally resisted change and any needed additions had to be superimposed upon it as entirely new layers.

If Judith Butler is correct and “that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” then a queer process must be open to a wide variety of performative acts to constitute reality. Such a queered process indeed has to create self-consciously a space for identities to be formed, reformed, and altered again. Residential space has traditionally been bound to decidedly non-queer ideals, scholars have noted that “still today many houses are designed and built for nuclear families. Often, however, homes are occupied by Others such as gay couples, single mothers, roommates, polygamists, or polyamorists, all of who imbue homes with different social relations. Homes therefore can be spaces of relaxation, havens, and sites of oppression.
danger, subversion, and resistance.” 62

As discussed at greater length in Chapter 1 of this thesis, housing for queer homeless youth conflits head on some of the greatest inadequacies in modern housing design because use of the designed spaces must offer safety to the vulnerable population of queer homeless youth. Social geographer Sue Kentlyn characterizes the relationship between safety and a queered home, she wrote in her 2008 article on ‘The Radically Subversive Space of the Queer Home’ that “[the] queer home provides a safe space where people can cast off the constraints of heteronormativity and do varieties of gender and sexuality which would be sanctioned in other contexts; thus the queer home becomes a subversive space.” 62

Thus, above all a queer process must honor the need for safety by vulnerable queer populations while casting off the usual methodology of design in search for a more fundamentally fluid space.
5.19 Floor plate sketch, freehand.
5.20 Floor plate sketch, AutoCAD.
5.21 Site plan, digital collage.
5.22 Conceptual perspective, digital collage.
5.23 Conceptual idea, digital collage.
5.24 Conceptual idea, digital collage.
5.25 Conceptual idea, digital layout.
5.26 Conceptual idea, layers of photos printed on transparent paper.
Commentators on queer identity have written pointedly that “Sexuality is not fixed” and even the most theoretical of writers would state emphatically that “the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing.”

Queer space has thus been described in a simple way as an unfixed or flexible identity. This thesis proposes that a seeming change in identity can come also from three distinct sources: layering, appropriation, and fluidity.

The true nature of a sexual or gender based identity cuts to the very heart of what it means to self-identify as queer. This project found that the sophisticated theory and art created around exploring queer identity has identified the three sources of queer space distinctly and in a variety of forums. The location of this thesis and project aimed to incorporate the theory into practice.

The three conceptual bases of layering, appropriation and fluidity provided a means to bridge the gap between theoretical queer space and actual designed and constructed space for queer user populations.

LAYERING

Multiple authors and scholars who have studied queer space and queer identity have focused on the so-called ‘closet’ as the original queer space. Architect-theorist
6.1 Delayered Collages. Photos transferred onto clear acrylic panels.

For the architectural process, layering thus presupposes a dialogue between designer and user whereby multiple readings of a space are possible because meanings will necessarily be attributed to the location. Specifically this project, incorporated a design process with multiple phases of conceptualization. Using the medium of digital collages, this thesis explored mood, space, and the human body. A secondary collage then explored the more intimate and sexual connotations of printing on the human body. This exploration of layer occurred through the building of layers in digital photo imagery in Photoshop—naturally, the architectural design process at its final stage requires of such digital images that they be printed. The printing of such images compresses and flattens the multiplicity of layers into one single image. The process of printing, native to the architectural process, inadvertently erased some of the nuance found in the original digital layers. Like the personal layering of identity, this thesis aimed to be as rigorously flexible as research has shown human identity to be. Thus, a new process was applied to the presentation of the digital collages which consisted of the separation of each layer within the digital collage, followed by the printing of the individual layer on photo paper and

6.1 Delayered Collages: Photos transferred onto clear acrylic panels.


6.3 Mark Wigley, “Centralized: The Housing of Identity” in Architecture and Space, ed. Karen E. Kobet, New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, 330. Wigley writes that “institutional limits are defined by its capacity to mask its complicity in the construction of the concepts its employs. Gender is such a concept, underpinned by a spatial logic that is defined by the element of pre- architectural given. The question of sexuality and space here is that of the structure of this mask.”

Queer identity always involves a fundamental connection to an audience for whom one’s performative gender identity can either be revealed or hidden. The ‘coming out’ experience for queer individuals can itself be construed as the revelation of a previously unknown trait—a layer of identity. Layering can thus be the unveiling of a hidden part or

Queer space finds its origin in the closet, the place of hiding and constructing one’s own identity. It creates itself in darkness, in the obscure, in the hidden...Second, it uses mirrors...If queer space establishes itself at all, it surrounds us in a space that is often as invisible or as thin as the surface of a mirror.”

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6.2 Delayered Collage #1. Photos transferred onto clear acrylic panels.
6.3 Delayered Collage #2. Photos transferred onto clear acrylic panels.
6.4 Site Plan Model. Layered laser etched and laser cut chip board and acrylic mounted on etched pine panel.
6.5 Site Plan Model. Acrylic etching.
6.6 Site Plan Model. Pine Panel etching.
6.7 Site Plan Model Detail.
6.8 Site Plan Model Detail.
finally the transference of the photo print to sheets of acrylic. The final viewable product was mounted so that the curator was able to showcase the layers as an entirety while still allowing viewers to directly interact with the layers and physically rearrange, eliminate, re-orientate, or add to them within the mounted presentation medium.

The viewers process of interacting with the collages allowed the users to read the collage in multiple ways and simultaneously apply multiple meanings to the collage. The process of allowing direct viewer interaction and editing power was carried over into the creation of the site plan drawing/model hybrid. In short, because architects work with both physical and digital models and drawings, this project attempted to incorporate flexibility into architectural representation by creating a series of hybrid models and drawings.

**APPROPRIATION**

Historically appropriation has been closely tied to public perception of queer space. The basic definitional approach of reclaiming a formerly hostile or unwelcome space into one ‘owned’ by another population has been recognized as a strong statement of queer identity. For example, writer Christopher Reed analyzes queer space within the terms of “claiming” physical space. He writes “In short, no space is totally queer or completely unqueerable, but some spaces are queerer...”

67 As Betsky argues, “I will propose queer space as a kind of third scene, a third place for the third sex, that functions as a counterarchitecture, appropriating, subverting, mirroring, and choreographing the orders of everyday life. Space and Housing” from Betsky’s Queer Space: Architecture and Home. (New York, HarperCollins, 1997).
than others. The term I propose for queer space is imminent: rooted in the Latin imminere, to loom over or threaten, it means ready to take place. For both advocates and opponents, the notion of queerness is threatening indeed. More fundamentally, queer space is space in the process of, literally, taking place, or claiming territory.68

For the purposes of architectural design, two levels of appropriation were used—one to take over the process of design (discussed at greater length under the subchapter on Layering) and the other to reclaim to physically appropriate a place of former hostility to the population.

Although some scholars have argued that

UNITS
VARIOUS SIZES TO ACCOMMODATE DIVERSE LIVING SITUATIONS (I.E. ROOMMATES, COUPLES, INDIVIDUALS) ORGANIZED AROUND LARGER VARIOUS LEVELS OF PRIVACY LOUNGES VARIETY OF SIZES TO PROMOTE DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERACTIONS ORGANIZED AROUND SMALLER Voids KITCHEN AND DINING COMMUNITY KITCHENS EATING AREAS ARE PROVIDED TO ACTIVATE ADJACENT COMMON AREAS
all non-queer space is heteronormative in nature and thus hostile on its face to vulnerable queer populations such as queer homeless youth there are also spaces of particular importance to the queer homeless youth population. For this project, one such space was the Town Hall Police Station which had been the nexus of a series of legal actions taken against the queer homeless youth of the Boystown area in Chicago. A second act of physical appropriation undertaken by this project was the breaking of the grid along North Halsted. Traditionally city streets have a strict demarcating line between public street areas and privately owned homes or commercial enterprises. The design of this project plays with the blurring of that strict line by altering the line of building profiles along North Halsted so that youth of the shelter can reclaim part of the formerly private space into a softened line of quasi-public space which is simultaneously a place of safety for the youth. In effect the shelter welcomes the public into shelter space by moving the line of the street far back into the owned space of the shelter. Thus, the 'counterconstruction' of street space into shelter space accomplishes a two sided appropriation of the location for the queer homeless youth as users of the shelter and the public at large.

6.17 Housing, sections.

69 Per Betsky, "What I am calling queer space is that which appropriates certain aspects of the material world in which we all live to symbolize, and can be conceptualized as, the counterconstruction to create the free space of queer desire."

FLUIDITY

The very concept of a shelter for queer homeless youth requires a space to perform two very different propositions which are seemingly at odds with one another: first to provide a literal shelter, a place of safety, and second to give the users the needed freedom to empower the youth by giving them some choice in how they live. As referenced throughout this thesis, queer identity can be best understood as a self-determinative identity. The action or performance of queer identity can only exist safely in a place where space has been consciously given to allow for gender and sexual identity to be expressed. According to commentators Gianni and Weir, “Sexuality exceeds the purview of the architect,” they say: queerness “is more a strategy than a space.”

For this project, the strategy adopted to mesh the requirements of the architect’s design parameters and the user’s needs was to reframe personal choice within the space. The designed space for the shelter in Boystown gave the queer homeless youth population choices in what kind of space they could live. The shelter was designed around two courtyards. Users had a choice of rooms overlooking two courtyards. The first courtyard had a presence on the street along North Halsted. The second courtyard did not have any street presence and had interior boundaries along the wall of the
shelter and a private parking garage. Users also had a choice of rooming on a social floor with communal living spaces and kitchens or housing on a floor with private rooms. Users could choose to room alone or with roommates on communal floors. The interior of the shelter incorporating two story voids which allowed users to watch or be watched—thus bringing some elements of queer street life into the safe environment of the shelter community. The self identification of shelter occupants was integrated into the very construction of the building facade by using semi-transparent and transparent materials which could be rearranged by the users who could reveal as much or as little of their space to the outside world as they so chose.
This project began as a solution to two distinct problems. The first was wide in scope, how best to understand and utilize process in the conscious creation of queer space. The second was much smaller but became ultimately a more detailed analysis of how to take a queered process and apply its use to the real world necessities of designing for a physical site. The power and privilege applied by architects in the creation of space cannot be overstated. It was such power that this thesis aimed to tap into and use as fuel to minutely examine the corners of the traditional architecture design process as it related to a population of users who could be defined but whose identity remained unfixed. The original intention of this thesis was to fully design a queer space for youth but the journey taken by this project eventually led to an understanding that the mode of design itself must be questioned. Despite the unfixed nature of queer identity, the commonalities of layering, appropriation, and fluidity remained constant in the creation of queer identity. In sum, the final product of this thesis required that self identification be honored through those elements above any hard and fast definition of what every queer space should share.

Continued study into the design of queer space remains important because so little of the mechanics of how gender and sexuality
is communicated through a space are fully established. For the specifics of this thesis, groundwork from related architects, artists and scholars was combined and reimagined to better compile a working method of design for both a singular specific queer space for queer homeless youth in Boystown Chicago and also develop a set of guiding principles which could be applied to a multiplicity of projects related only by their queer identity.

It is the hope of this project that the alchemical process by which queer space is created can be accepted, replicated and even created out of whole cloth in new and unknown spaces. Although this project represents only one small step in the direction of bridging the work of giants in the fields of architecture and queer scholarship, the need for similar study also cannot be understated. 100 years ago, criminalization of queer identity occurred at all levels of society, 50 years ago closeted queer populations outnumbered ‘out’ individuals by a huge magnitude; today the queer movement although poised to consolidate large gains in visibility remains breathtakingly vulnerable to violence for some of its least visible populations—queer homeless youth.

This project attempted to imagine a space that would provide the safety and self-determinative choice so greatly needed by queer homeless youth in Boystown and in doing so shed a light on the work that still must be done to understand construction of queer space among other populations. This thesis has found that the core of queering space and process lies not at the sole purview of the architect/designer or even within the architectural and theoretical community but instead must be find its basis in the constructions of identity made by queer individuals.


Scott Chyna (social worker) in discussion with the author, September 2012.


