LISTENING, ELSEWHERE: ENACTING AFFECTIVE EXODUS IN GAY AZERBAIJAN

by

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For gay men living in Azerbaijan, listening is a primary tactic for identity preservation under a violently heteronormative state. The consumption of music is moved beyond passive entertainment, and becomes a purposeful practice for eliciting specific emotions and affects. Music listening is used alongside dating applications, particularly Hornet and Grindr, as a way of reorienting the body in space, creating a new sonic representation of the city while situating oneself proximal to other gay bodies. One’s perception of space through the physiological body is easily altered, and this directed alteration is a key tool for living a gay life in Azerbaijan.

For four young gay men in Baku, Azerbaijan’s capital, their sense of being is continually constructed through the city, sound, and one another. As they attempt to live gay lives, they look elsewhere in the world for sonic markers of their gay identity, for music with which they most closely identify. This thesis shows how, for some, American music achieves this. Black femininity and white gayness, consumed through genres such as rap and pop, are incorporated into the listeners’ lives and bodies through sound and affective experience. For others, Italian pop music, films, and language act as an affective marker of gay liberation. Sexual orientation, however, is not always taken as identity, negating the need to look elsewhere in the world for freedom. By examining such disidentification from homosexuality, the others’ entanglement in Azerbaijani nationalism and identity politics crystallizes.

Turning elsewhere and situating themselves in new sonic environments, the interlocutors introduced here enact what I call affective exodus. Through directed engagement with sounds
they identity as comfortable, familiar, or liberating, and reorientation towards bodies identified as gay on dating applications, these men become different situated in space, sonically and sexually knowing the city differently. This serves as their method of differently being and continually becoming. Through affective exodus, they critically engage the space around them to create a gay Azerbaijan.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis asks, broadly, how listening to music can be employed as a tactic of identity preservation for young gay men living in Azerbaijan. I draw on Michael Bull’s work on iPods and urban culture, wherein he asserts that the iPod creates a bubble for the individual in the city. This project continues such a line of inquiry, asking how listening devices might operate not to create a bubble, but to functionally alter how the individual is specifically situated within, rather than separated from, the city through listening.¹ This approach relies on Steven Feld’s notion of acoustemology and the acousteme, or the sonic world as we come to know it through listening. One’s sense of hearing, assuming that capacity, allows them to know their surroundings and understand the world in which they live through sound, as opposed to sight.² As Jonathan Sterne notes in his audiovisual litany, seeing has been privileged as the primary sense for living-in-the-world, but hearing and sound are equally as important to locating our bodies in space.³ I make use of Bull, Feld, and Sterne in conjunction with the phenomenology of Sara Ahmed, whose work shows that the body’s orientation is relative to proximal objects, and in some cases,

subsumes objects as the body itself.\textsuperscript{4} In this thesis, the object-becoming-body is the cell phone, a critical tool for gay men in Azerbaijan. Through Jason Farman’s mobile interface theory, I interrogate the cell phone’s use for dating and music applications, each of which work towards the cell phone’s embodiment as human sensory material.\textsuperscript{5} Entering a reciprocal relationship wherein one’s touch creates a sensory change—hearing music, seeing proximal gay bodies—the cell phone becomes the body. This all comes together to form affective exodus: the intentional (re)creation of particular affects and emotions as a tool for withdrawal from pathological conditions and the preservation of non-normative identity. I assert that one can purposefully alter their orientation within and towards space by altering their sensorium. For my interlocutors, this is done through directed music listening.

This constant \textit{becoming}, an ever-changing relation between that which we call our body and objects we call other, is here understood through Karen Barad’s agential realist ontology, which establishes phenomena as the primary ontological unit of academic inquiry, and allows discussion of the cell phone-as-body, as well as the body-in-space.\textsuperscript{6} Drawing on interviews with four young men, I assert that affective exodus, in the case of Azerbaijan, alters how gay men’s bodies feel in aggressively heteronormative and violent spaces, and acts as a tool for the creation of a gay Azerbaijan.

At the beginning of my two months in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, I was struck by the simultaneity of physical affection between heterosexual males, and the aggressive

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
heteronormativity I feel pushing against me: as becomes apparent in Chapter 2, my ‘surfaces,’
my body and being, felt distinct, visible, and vulnerable. As an openly queer-identified
individual engaged to a cisgender man, the emotional burden of stepping back into the proverbial
closet is immense. It is for this reason, as self-therapy and through unimaginable empathy that I
seek to tell the stories below. In many ways, I tell the story of my own experience in Azerbaijan
through my four interlocutors. But I cannot claim to come close to their experiences: the violence
and isolation they feel, the emotional and physiological toll that non-normative sexuality and
identity has on an individual living in Azerbaijan. Perhaps this makes their stories even more
powerful, more important to those that may not be able to find Azerbaijan on a map, certainly
more important to me when I returned to my partner and reflected from afar. While these issues
of ethics and emotion will be taken up in the conclusion, I must mention them here as the
perspective from which I write.

On my second morning in Azerbaijan, I boarded a small, cramped bus with my host
father. Having never before commuted from my host family’s home in the Yeni Yasamal
neighborhood to the center of the city, he showed me the route. We boarded the bus numbered
77, finding it empty, as our neighborhood was the beginning (and the end) of the route. Only a
few stops later the bus was packed, bodies pressed against one another as stop after stop of
people defied all spatial reasoning and crammed into the small bus. Ten minutes later, the bus
emptied out as everyone, my host father and I included, got off at the metro station nearest our
neighborhood: İnşaatçiler. Descending deep below the streets, the same faces from the bus
waited inside the beautiful stone subway station for the next train headed towards the city center.
When the train arrived and its doors opened, I once again bore witness to the different physical
capacities of transportation and space in Baku, forcing myself into the train, watching as
strangers pulled one another by the arm into the car and used their bodies to protect others from becoming caught in the automatic-closing door.

I got to know these trains and buses well, spending two or more hours a day commuting from home, to the university, to meet friends, and home again. I often found myself in the back of the buses (the only place Azerbaijani men sit rather than stand) or the metro. Being several inches taller than the average Azerbaijani with a considerably lighter skin tone, I attracted significant attention on these long commutes. And as I stood there, strangers’ eyes trained on the surfaces of my body, I wondered about those who stare. I asked myself, “How will I possibly find a non-heterosexual person in this country? With whom will I commiserate?”

Topics such as homosexuality are ayip (taboo, inappropriate), and I had no local connections with Azerbaijanis my age. In this moment, I asked, “How do college students in the United States meet?” The answer: Tinder.

A popular dating application in the United States, Tinder matches mutually interested persons to talk and meet. At this juncture, I had no conception of what my master’s thesis would be. I originally had no intent of searching for interlocutors on dating applications, but rather, simply sought to meet and befriend someone to whom I needn’t lie on a daily basis. To my host family, their friends, and others I meet, I was straight and single. It was demoralizing to deny the existence of the man to whom I was engaged, to deny the identity I spent years coming to terms with and negotiating. Without acknowledging these parts of myself, it is difficult to be in any one place, fully. A dating app such as Tinder offered the solution to that problem. Through proximity to others, I could fully be in Baku.

My privilege as a White, presenting-male American, despite my queerness, would resound loudly in every conversation I came to have with my interlocutors.
I then met Fazil, and through him, Anar, Samad, and Elxan. Over the next two months, each spoke openly and honestly with me, told me their life stories, and expressed their appreciation for someone that cares enough to listen. Despite their mutual entanglements in Azerbaijani nationalism and identity politics, they speak to each other very little about these issues. It is from their stories, from long nights sipping coffee or beer, of laughing together and sharing moments of deep self-reflection, that this project emerges. And it is in these moments that I was in Azerbaijan. Through my time with interlocutors, each of us reoriented the other within the city, our worlds folding one another in and becoming new and full. Our being anywhere is continually becoming, continually shifting to accommodate new people, new experiences, and new senses. Our sense of place, our relationships with objects and others, is likewise contingent.

I do my best to recount my interlocutors’ experiences honestly and completely, contextualizing each while protecting their identities. Each of them was initially concerned about my writing. Assurance that they would not be photographed, their names would be changed, and identifiable personal details would be altered put them all at ease. I am continually grateful for each of their interventions in my life, and while their stories, as presented here, are often of pain and sorrow, I also show the moments of joy we shared, the moments of friendship and caring they exhibited towards one another and towards me, and they hope they each have for their future lives as gay, as living elsewhere, as Azerbaijani.
1.1 HOMOSEXUALITY IN AZERBAIJAN

The state of affairs for LGBT+ individuals in Azerbaijan has been static since the institution of a new Penal Code in 2001. Prior to Azerbaijan’s independence in 1991, it was a state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and subjected to union-wide legal administration. According to the Penal Code that was in place from 1960-2000, consensual sexual acts between two men were criminalized, punishable by up to three years in prison. No such laws existed for sexual acts between women, and non-binary conceptions of gender were not considered. According to the country’s primary LGBT rights organization, AZAD LGBT Azerbaijan, it is widely considered that the Penal Code was changed 9 years after independence only in order to gain access to the Council of Europe, whose requirements dictate certain legal reforms, such as the eradication of anti-sodomy laws.

Such reform has not changed public opinion, however. In 2010, it was reported that two members of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Council of Europe refused to engage in discussions of LGBT discrimination, asserting that “national and culture values” must be upheld, despite their desired integration into Europe. As such, Azerbaijan has no legal protections for same-sex couples—whose marriages not recognized under the Family Code of Azerbaijan—nor for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace. Further, Azerbaijani law differentiates between ‘rape’ and ‘violent acts of sexual nature,’ with the prior requiring vaginal penetration. It is thus considered not legally possible for men to be ‘raped,’ only victim of a ‘violent act of sexual

9 Ibid.
nature.’ Azerbaijani legislation is vague in its criteria for these categorical decisions, and thus many sexual assaults go unreported or uninvestigated.

The Azerbaijani legislature and president maintain significant power and influence over public opinion. The dire social circumstances, combined with widespread nationalism channeled through the presidency, causes for few dissenting voices. Azad LGBT Azerbaijani has been relatively inactive since the 2014 suicide of its chair İsa Şahmarlı, who hung himself with a rainbow flag. Only twenty years old, Şahmarlı was the center of the LGBT rights movement in Azerbaijan, and his death brought much public work to a halt. While Azad LGBT Azerbaijani is still active, little political advocacy takes place in the public sphere due to fear of shame, ostracization, and violence.

1.2 THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

As I recount the lives of four gay men living in Baku, Azerbaijan, four primary threads of scholarship emerge: philosophy of space/place, sound studies/listening, affect theory, and agential realist ontology. It is through each of these theoretical lenses, applied to ethnographic material gathered over two months in Baku, Azerbaijan, as well as interviews and other communication online since, that I posit affective exodus as a response to heteronormativity and a process for reorienting the gay male body towards the material world. This reorientation deals directly with the body in space, and requires positioning within the significant literature on space and place. Drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Casey, this thesis centers bodily experience and perception in order to understand how our material conditions become known. While Tuan privileges sight and seeing space, Casey allows the recognition of our being in space, of our
situatedness. Building upon Casey’s understanding of space, then, affective exodus understands space as tied to the body and continually becoming.

This relationship shifts through the act of listening to music as not only entertainment but also as a tactic of self-preservation and reorientation. My theorization of listening draws upon work concerning the technologies of listening, theories of sound as knowledge, and the history of audio culture in order to position my interlocutor’s experiences, as I have come to understand them. In conjunction, Bull, Feld, and Sterne provide a solid theoretical basis for the model of affective exodus, which relies upon sound and listening as a primary sense for the body’s perception of the world, as well as the ability to use sound technology for restructuring the world around us.

This thesis relies on affect as a principle mode of sensorial experience. Taking affect to refer to the necessarily unnamable, extra-cognitive sensorial excess we feel as both interior and exterior, I assert that the individual can tap into affect as an omnipresent potential and coopt its effects for a prescribed use. Rather than attempting to create a uniform, singular theory of affect and its uses in ethnomusicology or sound studies, I name its existence and uses, and incorporate it into my discussion of listening as a goal or end result of directed listening practices. This is to say that my interlocutors are continually aware of and tap into affect’s potential in order to reorient their bodies and dissolve their surfaces. Ethnographic material remains primary here, drawing on interviews and field notes. The discussion of in-depth emotions is often difficult with interlocutors, and writing such experiences even more so. However, affect exists within these interviews, both in speech and in bodies. We have affective responses as we revisit transcripts and recordings from fieldwork. These affective moments are critical ethnographic material.
Affect theory and ethnomusicology/sound studies seem a logical pairing, given our disciplinary assumption of music’s affective potential. Yet significant time has been spent theorizing our potential uses of affect theory without corresponding commitments to use it in ethnography. During the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, two well-attended sessions were convened on the topic, each exploring its possible uses in ethnographic work, as well as the challenges it presents. The first, a roundtable sponsored by the Sound Studies Special Interest Group, was titled “Ethnomusicology and Affect Theory: Disciplinary Implications,” and the discussion broadly addressed affect theory’s potential challenges to ethnomusicological assumptions of identity, embodiment, and agency, and select case studies were presented. The next day, a second roundtable was convened. Titled “Synthesizing Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives of Musical Experience and Affect/Emotion/Sentiment/Feeling,” this session made limited use of ethnographic case studies, instead favoring disciplinary interrogation. The work continues through this thesis, attempting to place disciplinary interrogation and affective application side-by-side.

As I outline the theory of affective exodus, its technical manifestation as outlined in Chapter 2 is best understood through Karen Barad’s notion of agential realist ontology, which proposes an understanding of the world as continually becoming, comprised of not discrete, inherently separating objects, but rather of phenomena. By enacting what Barad refers to as an “agential cut,” the human observer “enacts a resolution within the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy. In other words, relata do not preexist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions.”12 Barad uses the term ‘intra-action’ to refer to phenomena as the primary unit of analysis, that objects “intra-act” as agentially

12 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 140. Emphasis in original.
differentiated objects of a singular phenomenon. Viewing the world in this way allows for visual and haptic distinction—our perception of objects as being ontologically separate by nature—to disintegrate, making way for phenomena and intra-action as the unit of analysis.

The following sections address each of these theoretical frames, respectively.

1.2.1 Space and Place

Yi-Fu Tuan’s seminal 1977 text *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* has come to be known as a hallmark of the sociological canon. Tuan names ‘experience’ as a singular perspective for the development of space and place as separate categories of material perception. While Tuan notes the complexities of human perception, he explicates space and place as absolute ontological realities, clearly defined and recognizable. Tuan writes the following in the first paragraph of his book:

> Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other…Geographers study places. Planners would like to evoke “a sense of place.” These are unexceptional ways of speaking. Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted.13

According to Tuan’s broad opening assertions, a notion of ‘space’ is an a priori reality. Before and after human intervention and intellectual demarcation, ‘space’ exists. Philosopher Edward Casey takes this point to task in his essay “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena.” According to Casey, ‘space’ is often assumed to be absolute in nature and infinite in scope—empty, neutral, and omnipresent. He writes that “by ‘space’ is meant a neutral, pre-given medium, a tabula rasa onto which the particularities of

culture and history come to be inscribed, with place as the presumed result.”

Defining space as it is commonly used (here citing the ethnographies of James F. Weiner and Fred R. Myers), Casey critiques the notion of unconditional space, a space that exists as such regardless of its contents, asserting that such a notion falls victim to a social constructivism that ultimately ignores the material realities of the world in which we live.

Of these material conditions, the body must be primary. The body is the site of experience, of perception. The world is met at, and interactive with, the body. Tuan writes, “space is experienced directly as having room in which to move…Space assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposeful self.”

Such a formulation of space assumes complete emptiness and the ability not only to move freely as one wishes, but also to move at all. According to Tuan, then, the immobile individual, either without the bodily capacity or the sociopolitical access required for movement, is not able to experience space. As Tuan notes in the extended quote above, “space is freedom,” but we must ask: freedom for whom? Freedom from whom? Freedom granted by whom? If space is to be conceptualized in such broad terms, as being fundamental in our world and ‘taken for granted,’ it cannot be partitioned off from those lacking both physical and social mobility. For such a conceptualization quickly becomes complicit in human eugenics, oppression, and colonialism, through the process of deciding for whom space exists, to whom freedom to use space is granted, and to whose life such basic spatialities will permit the right of existence. In the case of Azerbaijan, ‘space as freedom’

15 Tuan, Space and Place, 12.
would necessarily include equal rights and protections for queer individuals, and as seen in section 1.1, the conditions are not as such.

Where does this leave ‘place’ then? If space is empty and experienced only through movement as Tuan suggests, what can we know of place? Tuan writes, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.”16 He later continues that “place is a type of object. Places and objects define space, giving it a geometric personality…Objects and places are centers of value.”17 If space is empty, then places are full, both materially and abstractly. If space is felt through movement, then place is understood only through stasis. Tuan notes early on that space and place each require the other for definition, yet remain strictly delineated. We can move in space only because place is still. And to move from place puts us back into space. The word “transformed,” as in the quote above, appears quite frequently throughout the text to denote movement from space to place. That is to say that we do not move between a space and a place, but that in the moment of action, that is, coming to a halt or moving from a standstill, the space becomes the place—one ceases to exist in favor of the other. Space and place, despite the connectivity Tuan emphasizes, cannot exist simultaneously. Places cease to be spaces, and space is merely space until it becomes place. If places and spaces give way so easily to one another, if each both requires the other’s existence yet refuses its simultaneity, is this model useful? What can this do for the application of an affective exodus epistemology?

Affective exodus, as a phenomenologically inclined model, is primarily concerned with experience as the central site of inquiry. Tuan’s models for space and place, as mentioned above,

16 Tuan, *Space and Place*. 6.
17 Ibid., 18.
are likewise based upon an experiential perspective, and thus require a brief explanation of Tuan’s ‘experience.’ Tuan defines his use of ‘experience’ as “a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality.” He offers us the following model: experience can be broken into sensation, perception, and conception, which arguably occur in that sequence through time. As one moves from sensation through perception towards conception, Tuan argues that we move from a primarily emotional state of processing towards a more rational sense of thought. This model, while functioning as a sliding scale between emotion and thought, prohibits one’s full realization within the other. We cannot fully experience an emotion, according to Tuan, while also fully engaged in rational thought. This conflation of emotion with irrationality—or pre-rationality—is the very premise upon which structures of misogyny and homophobia prevail. Masculinity-qua-rationality cannot function as the measuring stick for experiential analysis, nor can an all-encompassing teleology from sensory perception to cognitive conception. Rather, sensation, perception, and conception collapse in upon one another, neither necessitating nor implicating one another in cognitive-sensory processes.

I am particularly concerned here with sensation, or the stimulus of any one or combination of the five human senses. As will be seen in Chapter 3, our being-in-the-world is entirely dependent upon our ability to sense and interact with our material surroundings. Yet Tuan privileges sight above all, saying “taste, smell, skin sensitivity, and hearing cannot individually (not perhaps even together) make us aware of a spacious external world inhabited by objects.” Tuan is certainly not alone in his privileging of sight as the primary sensorial perception of the world. Sterne describes the process of this privileging, which “renders the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\text{Ibid., 8.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\text{Ibid., 12.}\]
history of the senses a zero-sum game, where the dominance of one sense by necessity leads to the decline of another sense.”20 A general model for experiential analysis on the construction of place should not privilege sight over hearing, over touch, smell, and taste.

1.2.2 Listening

Listening has been the topic of substantial scholarly inquiry in the past three decades. In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Jonathan Sterne systematically deconstructs what he calls the *audiovisual litany*, or a list of others’ assertions about hearing versus seeing, about the primacy of sight and the supposed interiority of hearing. Throughout *The Audible Past*, Sterne advocates for sound’s exteriority as well: “sound in itself is always shaped by and through its exteriors, even as it acts on and within them. Sound reproduction as we know it depends on a whole set of phenomena that we would not necessarily assume to have anything to do with sound.”21 By situating sound and technology within history, economics, and social change, Sterne dismantles the human as the center of hearing. Sound, space, and flesh become equal parts in the study of listening, and our sense of hearing gains status as a mode of knowing the world equal to sight.

Steven Feld, writing several decades before Sterne, coined the terms *acoustemology* and *acoustememe* to refer to one’s ability to know the world around them sonically rather than just visually.22 When such privilege is given to hearing rather than sight, and taken in conjunction with Sterne’s displacement of the human and deep cultural contextualization of sound and

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hearing, we grant significant agency to sound, and thus deepen our scholarly inquiry into sound as not specifically a human phenomenon, but rather one rich with cultural, political, and affective implications. Feld’s notion of the acousteme is thus central to my theory of affective exodus, which assumes that the subject’s knowledge of the world can be learned aurally. Enacting an affective exodus for my interlocutors involves the alteration of their acousteme via sound technologies—in this case, the cell phone. Bringing Sterne’s account of sound’s cultural embeddedness together with Feld’s acoustemology, affective exodus asks how sound’s agency might be purposefully harnessed and directed towards an affective response that differently situates the gay Azerbaijani man in the world.

In order to discuss the cell phone as listening technology, I turn to Bull’s book *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*. Writing on the iPod, Bull asserts, “with its enveloping acoustics iPod users move through space in their auditory bubble, on the street, in their automobiles, on public transport. In tune with their body, their world becomes one with their ‘soundtracked’ movements; *moving to the rhythm of their music rather than to the rhythm of the street*.” Bull gestures towards Feld’s notion of the acousteme—of hearing as knowing—asserting that the iPod as a privatized sound space allows the listener to reconstruct space. While I rely on Bull’s assertion in making my own, I diverge from his understanding of the iPod as creating a private space “coupled with a denial of the physicality of the city.” Affective exodus does not refer to individual withdrawal into soliditude from a given reality—it is not a

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23 The term agency is often conflated with sentience or intent. Here, I use agency instead to denote the capacity to affect bodies, human and nonhuman.


25 Ibid., 4-5.

26 Ibid., 9.
denial. Rather, I assert listening can help the individual to become reoriented towards space and relate to others differently through an altered acousteme. Listening does not serve to privatize the body. It engages with the individual’s affective potential in order to be differently in the world.

1.2.3 Affect Theory

That college students spend much time listening to music seems commonsensical, but as I spoke with my interlocutors—all college aged—their listening practices seemed purposeful and directed, as though listening as a process was intended to effect a specific result, a specific affect or emotion. Yet, the words ‘specific result’ seem contrary to Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg’s conception of affect, as presented in their edited volume *The Affect Theory Reader*. They write,

[A]ffect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.27

Many theorists of affect might disagree with my seeming willingness to name affects, as I refer to those such as familiarity and comfort throughout. But these names, often emotions or orientations, might evoke something more. The word ‘familiarity’ may bring up warmth or closeness. ‘Comfort’ might remind of your favorite armchair, a soft sweater, or an ease of being near a certain person. Each affect or emotion named here has the potential to evoke visceral feelings and bodily memories that transcend language. Seigworth and Gregg refer here to affect

as being a sensorial excess that is unnamable, is beyond ‘conscious knowing.’ This visceral force can push us into action, both physical and cognitive, but exists as the manifestation of phenomena, as will be explained below. Affect is both cause and effect.

My argument here is that my interlocutors tap into their affective potential in order to achieve a certain result. But a distinction must be made: my references throughout to ‘affects of familiarity and comfort’ refer not to affect itself, but rather the end result of affect’s ‘visceral forces’ which drive one towards a specific thought or emotion, as Seigworth and Gregg write above. Affect remains unknowable and unnamable, and for this reason is a slippery term that the discipline of ethnomusicology has only begun to grapple with. But rather than working from beginning to end, from the source of music and sound towards affective evocation, I propose we work backwards, from affect’s very result (named emotion), in order to begin understanding the power of affect as a way of knowing and being in the world.

For some, leaving music and sound to be dealt with later seems to conflict with our discipline’s basis. In the edited volume *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, editors Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle frame the study of music and affect as a movement from the former to the latter—as music evokes affect, so too must our inquiry follow this trajectory. They write, “one way to begin [our study of affect]…is to think sound and music as offering ways of manifesting affect: music is thus imagined in this volume as facilitating acoustic entry into affective fields, as offering a way to both abstract and particularize affective states and as furnishing a reflective medium for imagining affect ‘itself’, if only figuratively or strategically.”

28 Perhaps affect can only be known figuratively, as it evades being pinned down.

And it seems redundant to focus our inquiry upon music’s power to manifest affect or to evoke emotion, as both are incomplete movements. Taken in conjunction with Seigworth and Gregg, approaching affect from music might be made better by first considering what affect does, where affect takes the subject. This is not to say affect merely transports the subject from sonic experience to emotional experience, but rather that affect cannot be the end goal of our scholarship, for it will forever evade our attempts at knowing. If we begin with the conscious remnants of affective experiences—feelings and emotion—as our interlocutors recount, we might move from what is knowable towards the music in order to find affect between them.

1.2.4 Agential Realism

In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad takes representationism to task, claiming that it is founded upon an inherent separation between object and representation. She proposes instead *agential realism*, establishing phenomena as the primary ontological unit of scholarly inquiry. “Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena,” Barad writes, “but of things-in-phenomena. The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries.” This notion of ‘intra-activity,’ compared to ‘interactivity,’ refers to objects’ mutual engagement, their co-constitution of reality prior to our perception of them as separate—intra, within one. Agential realism is a phenomenally focused ontology, compared to Bruno Latour’s oft-cited Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

29 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 137.
30 Ibid., 140.
ANT, used often throughout the humanities and social sciences, is an epistemological tool for examining the connections between a priori objects. While ANT encompasses the fluidity of reality, as well as objects’ agential potential to act upon one another, agential realism negates the assumed ontological difference between objects—they do not exist prior to their relation. Barad’s agential realism discusses agency and power using the language of the scientific apparatus. The apparatus, which Barad defines as material-discursive practices “through which matter is iteratively and differentially articulated,” considers both causality and the observer as constitutive of the phenomena. This is to say that objective observation, whether it is in a university laboratory or in the ethnomusicological “field,” fundamentally does not exist. Rather, as Gregory Barz writes, “ethnomusicologists have the responsibility to become entangled—if not embedded—within the ‘politics of knowledge.’”

31 Of course, the contemporary ethnomusicologist is well of aware of his, her, or their entanglement, to use Barz’s word, but it stands to be reiterated. One’s entire fieldwork experience can be understood as a series of ongoing phenomena, each spurring on the next, every interaction—or, intra-action—contributing to the continual becoming of the fieldwork experience. On the nights the ethnographer retreats into solidarity, pouring thoughts, feelings, and observations into a notebook and drawing connections (both literally and figuratively), this entanglement becomes even more prominent, or perhaps, problematic. One’s retreat into private contemplation contributes to the continual becoming of the fieldwork phenomenon, and must be considered within the apparatus. That is, fieldwork doesn’t simply happen in the streets, at the café, in the music hall, but also alone in bed, writing and crying. These moments significantly shape the apparatus of fieldwork intra-

actively, and are phenomenal themselves. Barad writes, “apparatuses are not bound objects or structures; they are open-ended practices. The reconfiguring of the world continues without end. Matter’s dynamism is inexhaustible, exuberant, and prolific.” Once initiated, fieldwork is continually becoming. It comes home, it goes to class, and it lies in bed at night. The notion of the “field” as elsewhere collapses and comes to lie beneath one’s feet, anywhere in the world. My fieldwork, begun in Azerbaijan, continues at my desk in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The fieldwork apparatus has simply shifted to include a new locale and its “condensation,”—“the workings of other apparatuses, including class, nationalism, economics, and gender.”

Comprised, then, of multiple apparatuses, my fieldwork and this thesis use agential realism to understand my role as ethnographer in the phenomena of fieldwork while simultaneously decentering human bodies—ANT permits only the latter. The human body is, of course, present in the following thesis. My interlocutors have/are bodies, and these bodies are important as I introduce affective exodus, a model that is explicitly concerned with the body’s constitution. This constitution is comprised of both flesh and metal, as noted in Chapter 2, wherein the cell phone, dating apps, and YouTube act as sensory material. If the human body were to remain at the center, ontologically separate from space and objects surrounding it, it would remain static and unchanging. But bodies move, bodies age. They break, and they love. The body is continually becoming, and such a becoming demands a phenomenal, intra-active approach. Barad writes, “bodies do not simply take their places in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather, ‘environments’ and ‘bodies’ are intra-actively co-constituted. Bodies (‘human,’ ‘environmental,’ or otherwise), are integral ‘parts’ of,

32 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 170.
33 Ibid., 167.
or dynamic reconfigurations of, what is.” 34 As will be explicated in the second chapter, the human body does not end at its flesh, but rather, is delineated only through agential cuts. Phenomena are what is.

1.3 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This thesis is comprised of two ethnographic chapters, each of which elucidates the theoretical model of affective exodus through an ethnographic account of the lives of four gay men living in Baku, Azerbaijan. The interviews from which I draw were conducted both during my two months in Baku and on Skype thereafter. Continuing my fieldwork after returning to the United States has been integral to the development of this thesis, as well as my relationships with my interlocutors. Communication across Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram has been instrumental in gathering information and deepening my ethnographic material. As will be seen below, cell phones and mobile applications are crucial to the formation of a gay identity in Baku, and thus, have proven to be a revealing media for communication.35

Chapter 2, titled “Technical Manifestations of Affective Exodus” examines the technology used by my interlocutors in enacting an affective exodus. Barad’s agential realism is central here, undermining human essentialism and ontological separation. Instead, the body’s intra-action with other objects as a singular phenomenon begins the analysis. The cell phone’s

34 Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 170.
35 This thesis specifically discusses the formation of a gay-Azerbaijani identity for those living in the capital city of Baku. This project does not encompass those living outside of Baku, and I do not attempt to make generalizations about all gay men in Azerbaijan. However, I refer to Azerbaijan at large throughout in order to state how my interlocutors understand themselves in relation to the nation.
primacy in the lives of gay men in Azerbaijan might be misread as consistent with millennials’ supposed degradation of inter-personal relationships—we might change this to intra-personal—but such an argument does not capture the nuanced uses of the cell phone. Through discussion of dating apps and YouTube, as well as conversations with Fazil and Samad, I assert that the cell phone becomes embodied—that is, it becomes an added appendage and additional sense—through its reciprocal relationship to the user. The use of dating apps such as Hornet or Grindr reorient the body in space as proximity to other gay men is made apparent—certain bodies feel closer, others feel further. Such a reorientation evokes familiarity and comfort, affects which, according to Sara Ahmed, dissolve the surfaces of the body and allow for one to be in space without stark contrast between exterior and interior, straight and gay, they and I. Such reorientations are reified through YouTube, where a touch of the flesh on a screen triggers an acoustic alternative, the sounds of a comfortable ‘elsewhere’ altering the individual relationship to ‘here.’ The cell phone-as-body must be taken seriously as tantamount to identity preservation and emotional survival.

Chapter 3, titled “Affective Exodus and US Music Consumption: Creating a Gay Azerbaijan,” further explicates the model of affective exodus as both a tool of identity preservation and epistemological inquiry. Through the stories of Anar and Elxan, both college-age cisgender gay males studying full-time in Baku, listening directed towards specific musics and languages evokes affects of familiarity and comfort which reorient the gay male body in space. Through listening, spaces that previously carried affective weight of shame and hypervisibility, associated with heteronormativity, become differently perceived by the gay male. By hearing spaces differently, those spaces feel differently, freeing the gay man from the visceral heteronormative shame and discomfort normally cultivated in the Azerbaijani public sphere. This
builds on Bull’s conception of iPod use in sonically creating individual separation from space, asking how listening devices might directly engage the listener with their environment rather than drawing boundaries.

For Anar, American blackness is crucial to enacting this affective exodus. Consuming American music by black artists and watching American television shows starring black actresses become exercises in realizing his own struggle with systemic oppression, self-acceptance, and social empowerment. Azerbaijan is incredibly ethnically homogenous, especially in the capital city of Baku. Small Russian, Talysh, and Armenian populations live most often at the borders of Russia, Iran, and Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh, respectively. As such, social structures in Azerbaijan are not racialized in the same way as the United States, making Anar’s identification with black musical artists and actresses an interesting case study.

1.4 PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

Sound studies has burgeoned in the past decade as a discipline with unique methodologies and theoretical models, and continues to grow in prevalence through ethnomusicology programs and music departments at large. Simultaneously, affect theory continues to grow across the humanities and has begun its assimilation into ethnomusicology, as noted above. This thesis stands between the two.

Theories of sounding and listening, such as those of Bull, Sterne, and Feld mentioned above, have laid significant grounding for scholarly inquiry into our processes of knowing the world through sound. It seems natural that such inquiry would follow these vibrations towards their affective potential in order to ask how sound engages with the body, what it does to and
with the body as phenomena. This thesis, then, discusses them within one another: how is affect evoked during listening, and in what way can listening be directed towards affective potential? I assert that sound studies and affect theory complement one another, and should be used in tandem. Much time has been spent theorizing the potential uses for affect in ethnomusicology in particular, and it is from here that I write. Choosing to begin with affect’s resultant emotions, feelings, and reorientations rather than with music as the tool for evoking affect, I propose one method for how we might begin to take affect seriously, to make use of it beyond theorizing its complications.

Michael Bull has further been particularly influential in his discussion of music technologies such as the iPod and mp3 as a cultural artifact. In engaging with Bull’s work, I ask how the cell phone as the most common contemporary listening device might be understood as not separate from the listener, but rather becomes embodied as an additional sense. Cell phones are ubiquitous in urban life in particular, and my interlocutor’s reliance upon them for not simply listening but engaging with other people and with the city warrants deeper thought. As such this thesis contributes to the growing literature on digital technologies as objects of ethnographic analysis, and assists in developing our understanding of the relationship between flesh and metal.
2.0 THE TECHNICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF AFFECTIVE EXODUS

After my first week in Baku, Azerbaijan, I sit in my bed at my host family’s apartment reflecting on the past seven days. I realize that meeting young Azerbaijanis will be difficult: my host family’s children are grown, and the local conception of public socialization in bars or clubs doesn’t lend itself to meeting new people, especially with very few local connections. The chances of meeting gay men in particular seems even lower. Often catching myself staring at the engagement ring I wear on my left hand, which had already received questions from my host family and others, I wonder how I would go about meeting new people, meeting gay men, in any other part of the world, including at home. The answer seems simple: Tinder. After downloading the popular dating app and creating a profile that indicated my language abilities (EN/TR, as one might write in their dating app biography), as well as my position as a researcher in Baku for the summer, I begin.

Sitting in bed the next evening writing and translating, I have a new ‘match’: Fazil. He excitedly messages me and expresses interest in meeting to talk. It is this message, and the conversations that follow, that establish my place in Azerbaijan. Over the next two months, I rely heavily upon my interlocutors as support in the face of my own precarity. As a queer individual, I exist on the margins of Azerbaijani life, much like my interlocutors. Such marginal existences are incredibly unstable as the individual lives a paradoxical life, participating in society while their very possibility-of-being is erased, or at the very least, ignored. My own arrival in Baku,
then, is predicated upon such precarity; one that is shared between myself, Fazil, and the other interlocutors presented below.

A college student in Ankara, Turkey, Fazil was born and raised in Baku, and spending his summer at home with his family. He has never met an American before, and doesn’t speak English, so we speak in Turkish, though his speech has inflections of an Italian accent—Fazil studies Italian at the university—with a spattering of Azerbaijani vocabulary differences. I get to know Fazil quite well during my time in Baku. We spend several evenings per week together, often with his best friend Samad, amongst others. Fazil refers to Samad as *annem*, “my mother.” A college student in Germany, Samad speaks both German and English fluently. I speak to Samad in English, as he does not speak Turkish.

We frequently meet at a metro station or coffee shop, and wander around the Tarqovu neighborhood. This pedestrian district boasts high-end clothing stores, a large McDonalds, and a Starbucks where we spend many hours per week. While my time spent with another interlocutor, Anar, often involves long, meandering strolls across town as we speak, often walking for miles, the others prefer to sit outside of Starbucks, or in one of the nearby restaurants if they are hungry, sipping coffee or beer and talking. This is especially true of Fazil.

Despite not having an Azerbaijani SIM card in my iPhone—I have a separate Azeri cell phone—my iPhone remains crucial to my fieldwork. My meetings with interlocutors are organized entirely on WhatsApp, the encrypted third-party texting application. This is often difficult if plans change after I leave home and do not have wireless access; I often find myself waiting for twenty minutes or more at a previously agreed-upon location before an out-of-breath Fazil comes running around the corner, apologizing for changing the location while I was en route. While we hang out, Fazil takes numerous photos of himself—or often asks me to take
photos of him posing along the seashore or in front of an ornate door—for him to post to social media. Samad opens dating applications, scrolls through pages of faceless torsos, and responds to messages. Others send texts and share Facebook posts with one another.

The cell phone is omnipresent in the lives of young Azerbaijanis, much in the way it is for American millennials. In addition to being a primary mode of communication for all, the cell phone is perhaps the only tool finding other gay men. LGBT organizations are few and far between, and marginalized as niche interest groups deemed as lacking political merit. And without gay bars and clubs, mobile applications become their only way of meeting one another. This chapter takes the cell phone as an irreducible unit for conducting social analysis in Azerbaijan, and with gay men in particular. Used for dating and music streaming alike, the cell phone is essential to gay identity.

The following work is comprised of two sections. The first of these sections focuses on the technical manifestations of affective exodus. Through a discussion of dating apps (Hornet, Tinder, and Grindr), the video/music streaming site YouTube, and the cell phones used to access such apps, I ask how these technics create the conditions for an affective exodus. By investigating the relationship between technics, the body, and materiality, this chapter explicates the ways in which technics contribute to the preservation of a gay identity under an oppressively heteronormative government. Of course, the ability to enact an affective exodus through such technics requires economic capital and access to expensive electronics, namely the iPhone. My use of affective exodus here reflects only the experience of those with such access. But affective exodus does not require Internet access or an expensive phone/listening device. The alteration of one’s acousteme in favor of an affective exodus does not necessitate technical intervention, but can be achieved through spatial relocation, the dampening of one’s acoustic environment, or
simply singing to oneself. Such directed activities might achieve the same effect/affect. Of course, the use of musical listening technologies is the simplest method for enacting an affective exodus, but this model is not hinged upon a technical reliance.

Affective exodus grants sound itself agency rather than reducing it to the position of passive tool, guided by the human hand without inherent affective capabilities. This “intra-action,” in the Karen Barad’s sense of agential realist ontology, allows for a more nuanced understanding of “listening” as neither a passive force on the body nor as passive action on behalf of sound. Rather, both act with specific agencies that “intra-act”; “Relations do not follow relata, but the other way around.”[^36] This is to say that sound and the body exist together, in constant negotiation: sound requires a body (human or otherwise) to be perceived, while bodies are constantly touched and shaped by sound. Viewed in this way, it is impossible for sound to renounce agency, or rather, have its agency stripped away by human intellectual exceptionalism. Sound demands that it be heard, that it be felt.

The second section examines the body as both a medium and matter. The body is the primary site of affective exodus, as this model does not alter one’s spatial location but rather one’s orientation towards that space. Here I rely upon Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, which theorizes “orientation” as how we reside in space, and how our “bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon”.[^37] I make use of Ahmed’s queer phenomenology in conjunction with Bernadette Wegenstein’s conception of the body as medium. Through a critical reading of

Wegenstein’s definition of the body as medium, I question where and how reality is constructed during affective exodus, exploring the role of the body and its intra-actions with technics.

Technics must be considered not external to the body, but rather, considers technics as bodily prosthetics. I ask what and where the body is, and how cell phones become integral to the body’s negotiation of and orientation within space. By understanding the listening device as embodied rather than additive, I expand upon Michael Bull’s work on the iPod, wherein the device acts upon the body rather than as the body. In combination with the technical analysis from the first section, this section’s discussion of bodily orientation grounds affective exodus as a materialist epistemology. Our flesh, our ears, the plastic and metal of cellphones and headphones, brick walls and streetlights: this is the matter of affective exodus, the convergence of media, technics, and the gay male body.

This line of inquiry seeks to answer how such enactments assist in the (re)creation of reality. “Reality,” of course, becomes slippery and difficult to pin down. I move away from the social constructivism that surrounds “reality” as being both singular and created by the human mind. While spatiality is perceived and processed through mind and body as one, to reduce it to mere constructivism undermines the material (a/e)ffects that reality has on the body. The assumption of a de facto reality undermines the agency of both human bodies in creating reality and of non-human bodies in acting upon the human and one another. Such a formulation falls under Barad’s sense of the posthuman, which references not the death of the human, but rather “taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and differential positioning of the human among other creatures (both
living and nonliving).”38 In this way, affective exodus is a posthumanist epistemology. This is to say that by taking sound and technics as agential beings that intra-act with the body, the human being is displaced, both ontologically and affectively, from its arrogant centrality within the world.

In relation to Feld’s acousteme, affective exodus, as applied here, relies upon the able-bodiedness of my interlocutors. Feld writes that he is “adding to the vocabulary of sensorial-sonic studies to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sound as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences.”39 The acousteme, then, is the world we come to know through experiencing sound. By framing my model of affective exodus within Feld’s notion of the acousteme, I challenge the marginalization of sonic perception and uphold sound as being equal to vision in the human perception and construction of the world.

Throughout the paper, ethnographic material gathered during fieldwork in Baku during the summer of 2016 illuminates my theorizing on the body, cell phone, and affective exodus. This chapter focuses on Fazil and Samad, who study in Turkey and Germany, respectively, during the academic year. Because they spend the majority of the year living in places they perceive to be more gay-friendly, their uses of affective exodus as self-preservation during the summer months are particularly illuminating for the analysis at hand. Further, their families’ wealth, which allows them to study in foreign countries, enables transience unavailable to other interlocutors, such as Anar and Elxan, whose stories I tell in Chapter 3. As such, this chapter

38 Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 136.
presents differentiating uses of affective exodus, or listening-as-preservation, as is broadly discussed in the next chapter.

2.1 TECHNICS AND EMBODIMENT

For gay men living in Azerbaijan, particularly the capital city of Baku, the cell phone is a crucial tool for participation in the gay scene. Many gay men meet through the gay dating app Hornet, while smaller numbers of men use similar apps such as Grindr and Tinder. Each of these apps allow gay men to create a profile and browse those of others nearby, share photos, and send messages. These apps aside, the cell phone is crucial for messaging friends to meet, and for streaming music from websites such as YouTube. Such capabilities are contingent upon one’s having a smartphone, often the ubiquitous iPhone, rather than an inexpensive phone without such capabilities. I take for granted that my interlocutors have access to such phones. It is precisely because of this access, therefore, that the cell phone becomes a prosthetic of the human body—in the sense outlined by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*—through which my

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40 I use the word ‘scene’ as reference to the social lives of gay men living in Azerbaijan. Ethnomusicological scholarship often focuses upon the ‘community’ as a primary network of social and kinship relations that dictate sociocultural conventions. Due to the severe social—and sometimes, physically violent—consequences of outward, visible queer identities, there is not a ‘gay community’ as might be conceived in US gender discourse.

41 During my fieldwork in Baku, nearly everyone I met had a smartphone—often, the iPhone. Many adults have two cell phones: one for work, and one for their personal lives. Work phones were often cheap, plastic phones with traditional keypads capable of calling and texting only, while personal phones were most often smartphones with a touchscreen, capable of using mobile applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Hornet, etc.
interlocutors are capable of making connections with other gay men and enacting affective exodus.

This section will discuss the technical means of affective exodus in two parts. I first examine Hornet and Grindr as locative interfaces, following the work of Jason Farman in his book *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*. The design of Hornet and Grindr’s interfaces provide the user a virtual representation of physical space, ordering profiles according to their distance from the user based upon the cell phone’s GPS. I exclude Tinder here for two reasons. First, it is the least-used app amongst these men because of its restrictions regarding contact (you may only message those with whom you have “matched”) and second, because of its connotation of signifying a desire for relationships rather than casual sex. However, I leave its brief mention here simply to note its use for some men as a primary method of interaction with the gay scene—and notably, because it is how I met Fazil.

The second part will focus on the relationship between user and cell phone. As I examine usage of the music and video streaming site YouTube, the enactment of affective exodus through music played on the cell phone can be understood as an act of haptic reciprocity, as Farman explains. By interrogating the experience of user-interface interaction, the cell phone becomes embodied, and as I argue, a prosthetic of the human body itself, an appendage that facilitates connection to and interaction with the virtual space of such apps.

2.1.1 Dating Apps and Proximity

Hornet and Grindr are the primary dating apps used by gay men living in Azerbaijan. Hornet is primary due to its wide use across the Caucuses, Middle East, and Europe, where many Azerbaijanis travel. Grindr is used in Azerbaijan as well, due to its similarities to Hornet, but
remains secondary due to its ban in Turkey since 2013. Without Grindr in Turkey, most men turn to Hornet, and because many Azerbaijanis travel to Turkey frequently, Grindr’s productivity is not as mobile. Nonetheless, the two are examined side-by-side due to their similar interfaces, location-based mapping, and general connotations of sexual predisposition.

The Hornet and Grindr interfaces are quite simple: upon opening either app, one is greeted by a grid of profiles, containing either a photo uploaded by the user or a gray default square. In the way one reads Turkish and Azerbaijani, one’s own profile appears in the top-left hand corner. As one moves left to right, men are shown emanating outward in distance, one row at a time. The user can click on a profile to enlarge it, viewing details about their identity, their body, and their sexual preferences. On Hornet, users can upload multiple photos for viewers to scroll through, including a private album viewable only with user-granted access. Grindr allows for only one photo, although you can exchange more in the message threads. Both apps include details about the user’s HIV status and most recent test date. 42

Given the design of these apps, the user may assume he occupies two spaces simultaneously: one material and one virtual. Yet, as Farman notes, a real/virtual dichotomy constructs the virtual space as “not real,” despite its material effects on human communication and interaction. No such dichotomy can exist. Any replacement of “real” which attempts to characterize the material spaces in which our bodies move will ultimately unfold upon the

42 According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), there were an estimated 11,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Azerbaijan in 2015, a prevalence rate of approximately 0.2%. While this is rather low, HIV/AIDS is a concern for gay men in Azerbaijan as Baku is a transit city between Russia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and Turkey. Statistics on HIV/AIDS rates in Turkey are not available via UNAIDS, the CIA, or the World Health Organization. Interestingly, the country progress report on Azerbaijan is written in Russian, which is not an official language, but is used occasionally, especially amongst those aged 30 and above. The Cyrillic alphabet is also sometimes employed for writing in Azerbaijani by these generations. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 2015.
virtual, making the two once again synonymous.\textsuperscript{43} But, as Barad writes, “difference cannot be taken for granted; it matters—indeed, it \textit{is} what matters.”\textsuperscript{44} Occupying sameness and difference at once, the virtual and the real must be understood as intertwined, each acting upon and necessitating the other. Farman writes, “the virtual serves as a way to understand the real and as a form of actualization that serves to layer and multiply an experience of that which is already realized.”\textsuperscript{45} The dating app is a layer atop the material world, allowing the user to see only those for whom he looks. Because use of virtual spaces often results in material/corporeal affects—the user sees others like him, which fosters comfort—the dating app serves to facilitate intra-action in the material world.

In what ways then does the dating app, and the cell phone more broadly, become embodied? Farman writes, “…we must simultaneously ask how bodies are enacted in and with space.” Adding that space is constructed in dialogue with our embodiment, this enactment cannot be considered to happen in an a priori reality, as noted above.\textsuperscript{46} Embodiment is a spatial practice; bodies require space, bodies dictate space. Sara Ahmed echoes these sentiments, writing, “the concept of ‘orientation’ allows us then to rethink the phenomenality of space—that is, how space is dependent on bodily inhabitance.”\textsuperscript{47} Constructing space and becoming embodied are contingent upon one’s perception of the material world: their sight, their hearing, their smell, their taste, and perhaps most delicately, their touch. As the skin becomes inscribed through being-in-the-world, through proximity to other bodies, by being touched and touching others, a sense of “here” is created. As Edward Casey argues, one’s sense of “here” requires its

\textsuperscript{43} Farman, \textit{Mobile Interface Theory}, 22.
\textsuperscript{44} Barad, \textit{Meeting the Universe Halfway}, 136.
\textsuperscript{45} Farman, \textit{Mobile Interface Theory}, 22.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., \textit{Mobile Interface Theory}, 18.
\textsuperscript{47} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 6.
differentiation from another’s sense of “here.”” As one becomes embodied in their place, their “here,” it enters a reciprocal relationship with another’s “here,” the first-person’s “there.” Farman concludes that “though ‘here’ and ‘there’ are never the same, the ever-present relationship between the two spaces is what constitutes the intersubjective self as ‘being-in-the-world.’”

As the user scrolls through profiles on Hornet or Grindr, searching those nearby for someone of interest, their sense of “being-in-the-world,” their orientation towards the world around them, becomes shifted through the cell phone. Acting as another sense, the cell phone and dating app extends the user’s perceptive abilities to sense those around him, near and far, according to their distance, know relevant information about them, and contact them. For the gay man in Azerbaijan, such an extra-sensory ability is crucial to remaining connected to any semblance of a gay scene. Without gay spaces in the city or the safety to create one, the dating app becomes central to connecting with other gay men and fostering a sense of belonging that cannot be created in the material city. By being visible in this virtual space, the user’s material visibility (in person) is also increased, but only amongst gay men. This increased visibility towards specific demographics increases connectivity amongst gay men in the city. According to Farman, “people are continually making themselves visible within networks that function as inscribed and inscribing social spaces.” The dating app interface, with rows of faces or torsos interacting on the basis of gay identity, becomes a map for navigating the material world, providing direction toward and familiarity with other gay men. The interface then is not simply

50 Ibid., 57.
digital or virtual, but becomes embodied, directing movement in relation to and interaction with other bodies. Farman defines the interface as “a set of cultural relations that serve as the nexus of the embodied production of social space.” The interface of the dating app can become detached from the virtual and mapped onto the material world, serving as this ‘nexus’ between virtual and physical contact. The interface of gay Azerbaijan is crucial to warding off isolation, and in turn, fostering familiarity.

Familiarity is a primary goal of affective exodus. Spaces cultivated as heterosexual and normative impress upon the gay body, creating affects of distance and discomfort. Through affective exodus, familiarity can be fostered through alteration of the senses (such as hearing), changing that body’s perception of the space. Ahmed describes familiarity in the following way:

[F]amiliarity is shaped by the ‘feel’ of space or by how spaces ‘impress’ upon bodies. The familiarity is not, then, ‘in’ the world as that which is already given. The familiar is an effect of inhabitance; we are not simply in the familiar, but rather the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach.

Familiarity is then an affect created by/within the relationship between the body and space. Because bodies and spaces remain engaged in constant negotiation and recreation, familiarity is dependent upon specific conditions and thus ephemeral in nature for the non-normative body. As spaces remain absolute in their heteronormative orientation, the non-normative body must constantly remain in a state of altered perception to maintain familiarity. Largely impossible, this becomes the primary motivation behind the enactment of affective exodus: an ephemeral sense of being-in-the-right-world.

51 Farman, Mobile Interface Theory, 64.
52 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 7.
As Ahmed notes above, the familiar does not exist ‘in’ the world, but rather in our ability to interact with those objects near us. As such, the dating app must not be considered more familiar than the material world. Rather, these apps act as tools for the creation of familiarity. In this way, the virtual and material are dependent upon one another for creating one’s sense of being-in-the-*familiar*-world.

As noted above, the majority of my time with Fazil, as well as Samad, is spent in the Torquvo neighborhood having a beer or sipping coffee. I conduct several interviews in this area, most often outside Starbucks. Because English is not widely spoken in Azerbaijan, I am unsurprised by Samad’s willingness to speak openly about being gay in such a public space. During one interview, conducted with Samad and Fazil together, Samad speaks quite comfortably in English, but would hush Fazil, who speaks in Turkish, which could be easily overheard and understood. But aside from the linguistic differentiation, Samad’s comfort has to do with Torquvo, the neighborhood where they spend most of their social time. According to Samad, the majority trans individuals in Baku live and work in this area of the city, many of them the owners of jewelry stores and salons. I am taken aback by this initially, surprised at the visibility this must afford.

“You see, no one talks about these things,” Samad says. “People know, but they cannot say things. So this area is very safe, for us to be.”

I ask Fazil if he agrees, if he feels safer here than in other parts of the city.

“Bu mahallede güvenilir olduğunu hissediyor musun?” (“Do you feel that you are safe in this neighborhood?)

“Evet evet, güvenilir oldum. Çok homoseksüel kişiler var, ve her zaman arkadaşlarıyla oldum. Hiç yalnız olmadım. Ama bence Samad’ın evinde olduğumuzu tercih ediyorum.”
“Yes, of course, I am safe,” I later translate as I sit on my bed. “There are many gay people here, and I am always with my friends. I am never here alone. But I do prefer spending time at Samad’s house.”

Unlike Fazil, Samad’s family is aware of his sexual orientation. Coming from a wealthier family that could afford to pay for school in Germany, Samad’s family lives relatively central in Baku, compared to the majority of population who live on the outskirts. For this reason, Fazil, Samad, and their other friends often spent evenings and late nights at Samad’s house, where they did not have to worry about how and about what they spoke.

“So, last year,” Samad tells me, “I didn’t come out. My mom told me, ‘I know you are gay’...She wants to make me comfortable, and then I told my sister, and I told my other sister, but I didn’t tell my dad cus I think its, uh, still weird to talk about sexuality with my dad. Because if I was straight, I wouldn’t tell my dad “oh, I like this girl.”

Samad, always unwavering in his confidence—he often jokes with me, repeating “Steven, tell me I’m pretty! You know I’m pretty, just tell me!”—felt comfortable most anywhere, not considering his sexuality a significant part of his identity. But he is acutely aware of his friends’ occasional discomfort, so they often retreat to his house late in the evening (around 2 or 3 AM) to hang out until they fall asleep in the morning. Rarely changing this pattern, Fazil, Samad, and their other friends spend their lives in Baku cultivating pockets of the city that feel familiar, that they could make familiar. Dating apps such as Hornet orient their bodies within the city differently, fostering familiarity within a specific neighborhood where gay men met.

53 Fazil and Samad, 2016, interview.
54 Samad, 2016, interview.
2.1.2 **YouTube and Haptic Reciprocity**

The dating app is of course not the only—and I would assert, not even the primary—way of fostering familiarity within the city. The listening device is central to altering the listener’s acousteme, and as I assert here, becomes embodied as an appendage for altering the user’s conception of space. It is crucial then that the cell phone-as-listening device be discussed in this way, and more specifically, that music/video streaming apps and website be considered as central to the flesh-technic reciprocal relationship.

YouTube is a primary service used for music consumption in Azerbaijan. While YouTube functions primarily as a video streaming site, artists and record labels use the platform for posting music videos, and will often upload videos containing a still images and audio tracks. Fans make use of the site to share audio as well, although the legality of this practice under copyright law is questionable. In Azerbaijan, YouTube is very important for streaming music and enacting affective exodus. As a free service available in most countries, YouTube does not require a subscription to use. Streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music are not widely used in Azerbaijan, as limited financial means make it difficult to purchase monthly subscriptions.\(^{55}\) Many make use of third-party apps and websites to illegally download audio files from YouTube, which has very little protection against such actions.

\(^{55}\) This statement seems to stand in stark opposition to the ubiquity of the smart phone in Azerbaijan, particularly the iPhone. When asked about this, Anar told me that the iPhone specifically functions as a symbol of European or American modern life, and many will spend the money to purchase the iPhone as a symbol of status (other smart phone models are used by older generations or those who cannot afford the iPhone). Because most music can be illegally downloaded or listened to for free on YouTube, most will not make the financial investment in a streaming service. Further, cell phone data packages are quite cheap in Azerbaijan, which makes streaming music possible without WiFi access.
Fazil frequently would send me messages on WhatsApp—the primary way we communicated—with YouTube links to his favorite Italian artists. He would tell me that I didn’t need to know Italian, that I would enjoy the song anyway.

“İtalyan müziği çok güzel. Sözcükleri anlamamı gerek yok.”

“Italian music is very beautiful. You don’t need to understand the words.” For Fazil, Italian sonority enacted this sort of affective exodus. Carrying Italian music wherever he went, Fazil never failed to smile when the word “Italian” left his mouth. Fazil spends the majority of his free time listening to Italian pop artists and dancing in his room. Italy and its language for him is a signal of freedom, of gay salvation, of beauty and aesthetic value. When I ask Fazil about his love for the Italian language in particular, he is often overcome with adoration, unable to find the words to describe it. He just repeats the word güzel, “beautiful” until I laugh and tell him I understand: anladım. Fazil tells me that from Turkey, it is much easier to travel to Europe than from Azerbaijan, where flights are mostly limited to Germany and England. But in Ankara, he can go to a gay club and dance without feeling threatened. “Bence Ankara daha rahat.” (“For me, Ankara is more comfortable.”) But as school ends for the summer holiday, Fazil must return home and stay with his family. It is during these moments that Italian becomes even closer to his heart. YouTube serves as his primary access to Italian music and what it represents to him, and such access is dependent upon the cell phone.

Using cell phones for most downloading and listening activities, the consumer interacts in a reciprocal relationship with their devices. A touch on the screen is met with a positive or negative reciprocity—that is, something happens, or nothing happens in return. Like the injured neural pathway that can cause loss of a specific body part’s function, the cell phone is essentially just matter, prone to failure; it fails as the body fails. Farman writes,
If successful, the haptic reciprocity engages the users in a feedback loop that produces sensory-inscribed embodiment. When it fails (i.e., when I press the button and there is no response), this again points toward a kind of reciprocity: negative or asymmetrical reciprocity. My touch confirms that I made contact with the device; however, the device refuses to acknowledge my touch. This is still reciprocity.56

The cell phone, touched by flesh and provoked to respond, becomes re-inscribed and embodied with every use, just as the smooth surface of the screen against one’s finger embodies that user.

As Fazil searches YouTube and clicks on Italian videos or songs, his engagement with the virtual interface acts not only to re-inscribe himself and phone as embodied, but makes use of this reciprocal embodiment to enact an affective exodus. Through his interaction with this medium, Fazil enacts an affective exodus as an embodied epistemology—that is, his way of differently being-in-the-world—that begins at the flesh and ends at cognitive perception. YouTube works in service of achieving this differently being as an embodied act of merging the virtual and the material, overlaying the senses with intentionality in order to alter one’s acousteme.

As gay men in Azerbaijan navigate their daily lives, the edges of their body feel particularly apparent. His body does not fit here, his skin pressed upon by heteronormative governmentality and social shame. Ahmed writes, “the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression…Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness of the world around them, given this capacity to be affected.”57 The body’s responsiveness to touch is precisely the granting-power for affective exodus. As one feels the surfaces of their body, capitalizing on this affective openness is exactly how to counteract it. In her earlier book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed describes discomfort as that affect

which brings one’s attention to their surfaces. Comfort then is “to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins.”\textsuperscript{58} The world’s beginning, as a spatial referent, is determined through the embodied subject’s perception. As one changes their perception, that beginning can be moved. For the gay man, the alteration of his orientation towards the heteronormative space through intentional listening and the embodied device can push that beginning away from his flesh, placing the world’s beginning outside of himself. This is the importance of affective exodus. This is the importance of the cell phone as technic and prosthetic.

\section*{2.2 BODY: MEDIUM AND MATTER}

I have outlined above how affective exodus might be considered an embodied posthumanist epistemology. But for a moment we must consider the materiality of the body, of the technics involved in enacting affective exodus, of the end result. Until now, I have used the term “material” to refer to the “real world,” or the physical world. At this point I invite a reconsideration of that materiality/virtual binary in relation to ‘reality’. If we recognize the materiality of virtual spaces, and consider the body—skin and cell phone joined as one—the medium of affective exodus, how might our orientation shift? In what ways must we rethink the body?

Noted above, the body is the primary site of affective exodus—that is, its ‘where’ is the body. A phenomenological perspective asserts that all experience is based in, upon, around the

body. Bernadette Wegenstein writes, “the body is always our most fundamental medium of knowledge and experience.” Experience always refers back to the body: its position, orientation, or lack thereof. Knowledge as a process of knowing refers to the body, as does learning; the body must be present, and if it is not, that is perhaps more significant. The body is centered within affect and phenomenology because it is *fundamental*; it is the site of experience.

The danger of focusing upon the body is biological determinism. Critics of materialism and phenomenology reduce processes such as experience and cognition to mere biological matter. It of course cannot be refuted that our biological body is important here: the eyes are necessary for sight, as the eardrum is for hearing. The difference to be drawn though is the difference between the body and embodiment. Wegenstein explains this in the following way:

> The specificity of human embodiment can thus be expressed via the phenomenological differentiation between “being a body” and “having a body”: the former, insofar as it designates the process of living body, and first-person perspective, coincides with dynamic embodiment; the latter, referencing the body from an external, third person perspective, can be aligned with the static body.

Saying that one ‘has a body’ merely comments on the scientific truth that bodies exist. To describe one as embodied, on the other hand, refers specifically to the experience of that body’s being-in-the-world. Human interaction cannot be biologized. The body’s biology merely enables experience: it doesn’t define it. This is not to say, however, that the body’s materiality does not matter. As Barad uses the term, matter is what *matters*. Matter isn’t, but it *does*.

When we take the body as material, its fusion with the cell phone as appendage *feels* differently. Without the soapbox of human exceptionalism, flesh and metal, the material and

60 Ibid., 21.
virtual merge much more easily. This merge is crucial to the cell phone as sensory ability. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, in his ubiquitous exemplification,

> The blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight...To get used to a hat, a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body.61

Through its repeated use, its embodiment through a reciprocal-touch relationship, the cell phone is incorporated into the body. As mentioned above, engagement with the gay scene is contingent upon possessing a cell phone, especially a smart phone capable of using applications such as Hornet and Grindr. As prosthetic of the body that enables interaction in the world, cell phones warrant consideration as a sense in and of themselves. But to move one step further, I suggest that performing gay identity in Baku is dependent upon the cell phone.

Living in a country without gay spaces, where non-normative identity is grounds for complete social shame and ostracization, cell phones are the primary method for finding other gay men. Very few websites or chatrooms exist for people to share information or discuss gender issues in Azerbaijan, perhaps due to government regulation and surveillance. And while the cell phone is not protected against surveillance, many apps use encryption or location ‘fuzzing’ to hide their users.62 Thus, the cell phone is the only option for find other gay men and is the primary tool for effecting affective exodus. To be gay in Azerbaijan without access to the gay

62 Hoang, Asano, and Yoshikawa show that gay dating apps’ claims about protecting their users can be easily disproven through techniques such as trilateration. However, many users meet on such apps while disclosing few personal details, and switch to communicate via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, both of which are encrypted. Nguyen Phong Hoang, Yasuhiro Asano, Masatoshi Yoshikawa, “Your Neighbors Are My Spies: Location and Other Privacy Concerns in GLBT-Focused Location-Based Dating Applications,” *ICACT Transactions on Advanced Communications Technology* 5, no. 3 (2016).
scene-qua-cell phone is to resign oneself to the heteronormative pressure that reveals one’s edges, making him constantly aware of himself.

As such, the embodied gay male’s cell phone is crucial to his sexual orientation. Ahmed writes, “if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with.” A materialist, posthumanist, phenomenological epistemology, affective exodus relies upon the body and its orientation in space as crucial to its experience and enactment. The body as the primary medium of affective exodus is also the locus of experiencing such an exodus. The medium does not give way to the result, but rather becomes enveloped and reoriented within it. The body matters, constantly and without end, in an endless state of becoming and negotiating with space and proximal objects. For the gay body, this must include the cell phone.

2.3 MOBILITY AND IDENTITY

I am initially quite puzzled by Fazil’s choice to study a foreign language in Turkey rather than Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijan University of Languages, a state-funded university devoted to educating students in foreign languages in order to boost Azerbaijan’s international relations, as well as to train translators, offers several degrees in Western European languages. Azerbaijani translations of European and American books are hard to come by. Unsurprisingly, his move to Ankara was entirely about his sexual identity. In Turkey, he feels more comfortable as a gay man, able to go dance at clubs to European music. A Turkish speaker, he can navigate a culture

63 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 1.
that feels familiar, while studying foreign languages at a relatively low-cost university. But during long summer holidays, Fazil must rely upon Italian music and his cell phone for these ephemeral moments of joy, safety, and familiarity.

Samad differs greatly from Fazil and my other interlocutors. While he speaks a Western European language like the rest, he feels the least detached of them from Azerbaijan. Many told me that they dislike Azerbaijani music, both the classical traditions and popular musics, as they sonically situate the listener in the normative version of Azerbaijan, whereas foreign musics function to alter their orientation. But Samad holds Azerbaijani music closely to his heart, he tells me, because when he is in Germany, it reminds him of home. His desire to leave Azerbaijan, unlike Fazil, is not fueled by his sexual orientation, but rather a simple wanderlust. While he very openly admits that living in Germany allows him to be more sexually active more freely, his own distaste for the publicizing of gender and sexuality makes home more comfortable. Samad often expresses to me that being gay wasn’t an important part of his identity to him. “Just because I sleep with a guy,” he says, “doesn’t make me a different person. It is no one’s business, the people I sleep with.”64 He tells me that in Azerbaijan, he feels everyone wanted to know everyone else’s business. This is why, he says, there is such a social stigma against homosexuality. But because Samad’s family knows that he is gay, he doesn’t worry about it so much. “I am not scared of other people,” he says. “It is just none of their business.”

Samad’s relationship with his sexual orientation vis-à-vis his identity orients him towards Azerbaijan very different than does Fazil’s self-identification. Because of this, neither English nor German languages and music do not hold the same affective potential that Italian does for Fazil. Samad, who travels extensively during the summer and school term, feels at home

64 Samad, 2016, interview.
wherever he is, as his sexual orientation does not seem to follow in Ahmed’s framework. This does not, however, undermine the project Ahmed completes in *Queer Phenomenology*. In order for sexual orientation to hold such power, the individual’s bodily orientation must align with their sexual orientation. For Samad, gayness is not an identity, but a label for his sexual habits. As such, his body fits comfortably in Baku, edges disappearing into the world around him. But in Azerbaijan, Samad’s sexual life—albeit it separate from his social life—is contingent upon the cell phone, omnipresent in contemporary life as both a communicative tool and an entertainment center. For gay men in Azerbaijan, the cell phone has become synonymous with gay identity or sexuality. While it is easy to write the cell phone off as frivolous or as the addiction of the millennial generation, such statements do not engage with *why* the cell phone is so important, nor how the cell phone shapes the individual. I have proposed here a consideration of the cell phone as bodily prosthetic: as an additional sense. Through dating apps, virtual maps of gay men become a layer atop the city, and foster familiarity in a space unfriendly to those who are not heterosexual. This familiarity aligns itself with comfort in Ahmed’s terms, meaning the dissolution of the body’s edges; feeling as though you fit within the physical space and near proximal objects. Such comfort is often created through altering one’s acousteme by listening to music. Using websites such as YouTube to do this listening, flesh and phone engage in a reciprocal, re-inscribing relationship, causing the embodiment of both the individual and his cell phone.

Affective exodus then, achieved through technical prosthetics and alteration of the senses, is a materialist epistemology for scholarly inquiry as well as a tool for self-preservation, for exploring alternative ways of being-in-the-world. For Fazil, Azerbaijan renders their surfaces highly visible and is shaped by aggressive heteronormativity. Samad, however, acts as the
constitutive other, the counterpoint to Fazil’s discomfort. Samad has gay sex, but Fazil is gay. Through ephemeral experience, moments of here-and-elsewhere-at-once, Fazil shows that the gay body can be reoriented as correct, gay, Azerbaijani.
After meeting Fazil, my being-in-Baku felt differently. Fazil and I become reorienting forces in one another’s lives, each fostering familiarity and growing comfort with the other. Of course, Fazil experiences this with Samad and other friends, but our discussions often seem to excite him particularly. My eagerness to hear about his life, about his love for music and all things Italian, never fails to invigorate him. This often happens outside of our more formal, recorded interviews. It happens in the texts he sends me at night, in our times walking together around the city. One warm and windy evening in the early summer, we walk along the bulvar\textsuperscript{65} and talk about Baku and Ankara. Coming to a stop at the end of a concrete walkway that stretches into the Caspian Sea, I lean against the railing and admire the skyline, the famous Flame Towers ablaze with LED lights and moving images. Noting Baku’s architectural beauty, I turn to him. He agrees, but continues to compare it to Turkey. He tells me that while Baku is beautiful, it cannot compete with Istanbul. He loves studying in Turkey because he can travel quite easily from Ankara to Istanbul, or other cities such as Izmir on the Aegean coast. He feels comfortable there, that he can be himself without fear of social repercussions. Turkey feels different, Fazil’s being \textit{feels} differently in such spaces.

\textsuperscript{65} Baku Boulevard, often referred to simply the \textit{bulvar}, comprises Dənizkənəri Milli Park. The \textit{bulvar} was a recurring site throughout my two months in Azerbaijan for conducting interviews and meeting with friends.
For the next seven weeks, my own being-in-Baku felt quite differently as I got to know Fazil and Samad. But for two other young men I came to know, it was my presence that began to alter their sense of being. I met Anar while spending time with Fazil one day in late June. Standing at the Sahil metro station waiting for Fazil, he arrives not alone, but with another young man. After exchanging hellos with Fazil—a handshake and simultaneous kisses on the cheek—I turn to the new arrival who waves and says “Hello, I’m Anar. It is nice to meet you.” Fazil says that he brought Anar along because he studies English at the university, and he would like to meet an American. Spending the rest of the day together and finding our musical tastes to be quite similar—Anar is a devout Nicki Minaj fan—Anar became a close friend and interlocutor for the remainder of my summer in Azerbaijan. We continue to talk frequently after my return to Pittsburgh. For the duration of the summer, my presence in Baku changes the city for him. His relationship to me, a white queer American, serves as an affective exodus in and of itself; our being-together changes how the city feels, how he and I alike are situated within it.

This chapter tells the stories of Anar and Elxan—another young man I met near the end of the summer—in order to demonstrate how affective exodus draws from beyond local experience. Drawing on the discussion of dating applications and bodies’ re/orientation in space from Chapter 2, this chapter examines how affective exodus intersects with the literature on space/place in music studies, cultural geography, and philosophy, as discussed in Chapter 1. The term ‘affective exodus’ is then explicated within spatial and semantic analyses in order to clarify its use for my interlocutors and scholars alike. Using affective exodus as an epistemological method, I recount Anar and Elxan’s uses of American popular music as tools for reorienting their bodies in both local and transnational spaces. Through the purposeful alteration of their acousteme, the musical examples outlined below allow them to sonically know their city-
surroundings differently, thus reorienting themselves towards others, towards material spaces, and towards their own gay-Azerbaijani identities.

3.1 SPACE, PLACE, SOUND

The study of “space” and “place” within music studies—largely following the vast sociological literature on the subject—burgeoned in the 1990s and early 2000s alongside the advent of sound studies. Michael Bull has been a leader in the study of sound’s spatial qualities and ability to form “place” out of “space,” or perhaps to eliminate distinctions. Bull notes that technology such as the iPhone causes “space and place [to] lose their cultural specificity.”66 David Beer notes that as technology advances, especially following the creation of Apple’s iPod and iPhone, the individual holds more power over their auditory sense of place. Much work by Beer and others has specifically focused upon the city and an urban “acoustic ecology,” to use William Mitchell’s term, to discuss how “these devices allow for a more self-aware construction of the virtual mis-en-scene, as we use these technologies to cultivate linkages between the physical city and our thinking of the city.”67 Others such as Nicola Dibben and Anneli B. Haake have examined the uses of music as “a tool by which people reconfigure their auditory environment”

within an office space, bridging work and leisure, nesting a private auditory place within a public space.\(^{68}\)

These analyses of listening practices allude to escapism from public spaces through auditory control. The human body’s spatial perception is equally comprised of visual and auditory capabilities, although we often rely upon and thusly privilege the visual as being our primary mode of making sense of the world. Jonathan Sterne notes—and writes against—the significant differences that have been constructed between seeing and hearing, which he calls the *audiovisual litany*. This litany, as deconstructed by Sterne, “idealizes hearing (and by extension, speech) as manifesting a kind of pure interiority,” asserting that vision takes us out of the world while sound places us within it.\(^{69}\) The sonic acts equally in demarcating space, and acts upon our bodies and minds as a force of locative power. This chapter follows on the trail of this sonic power, and examines the agency of sound and materiality in forming space. As many have argued, the individual makes use of music as a tool for “reflexively stimulating and regulating particular memories and emotions,” that is, shaping and perpetuating one’s own subjectivity through the agential manipulation of the sound environment.\(^{70}\) I assert that queer individuals exercise this agency as a form of affective exodus from the hegemonic ‘hum’ of the city.\(^{71}\) ‘Affective exodus’ refers to the intentional (re)creation of particular affects and emotions as a tool for withdrawal from pathological conditions and the preservation of non-normative identity.


\(^{71}\) This ‘hum,’ according to Rowland Atkinson, is the sonic omnipresence of the city that cannot be escaped, even through what Beer refers to as “the rhetorically conjured sonic screening power of the iPod and other MP3 players” (Atkinson 2005, 3; Beer 2007, 859).
This model draws upon Tobias van Veen’s analysis of exodus in rave culture, which asserts that an “exodus explores alternative unfoldings of being-with-others” (van Veen 2010). His use of exodus as a model for studying raves is particularly helpful in illuminating the ephemerality of this affective exodus. Van Veen writes,

Exodus, though flight, is not to be mislabeled as a phantasmatic escape from a de facto reality. If anything, the ideological imperatives to enjoy and consume are precisely such an escape, serving as the cathartic performance of approved excess that maintain, through consumption and exhaustion, the economic imbalances of the social order. If anything, it is the belief that sovereign forms of political order represent the precarious subject that is fantasy.72

Without falling into the trap of social constructivism, affective exodus helps to reconfigure what this ‘de facto reality’ means for the individual, and one might alter that reality rather than existing within or outside its rigid bounds. I am interested in where these bounds lie, who creates them, and where exodus seeks to take us. Van Veen notes that “exodus abandons assigned destinations; it errs away from wherever it should be; it ends up customizing its place with new customs.”73 His use of words such as ‘assigned’ and ‘should’ seems to further assume a hegemonic power even in exodus—the power exodus seeks to escape—that affective exodus subverts. Further, as van Veen notes, such an exodus highlights the subject’s ongoing precarity, their inability to escape such conditions. As such, affective exodus is an engagement with precarity to recontextualize the self.

73 Ibid., 41.
3.1.1 Listening, Knowing

Through Stephen Feld’s ‘acoustemology’ and corresponding ‘acousteme,’ we find that ‘space’ isn’t merely what we can see. Feld argues for what space to be understood through sound in what he refers to as the ‘acousteme,’ and the study of ‘acoustemology.’ He writes, “I am adding to the vocabulary of sensorial-sonic studies to argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sound as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences,” defining acoustemology as “an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth.” Feld here points to the power of hearing as being equal to that with which Tuan imbues sight. To hear is also to know. As those with vision can see to know, so too can the blind or visually impaired, or those who close their eyes and listen to the space around them.

The acceptance of ‘hearing to know’ is critical to affective exodus. Affective exodus in the case of gay Azerbaijani men refers to a manipulation of the acousteme—here done through directed music listening practice—in order to (re)create affects of safety and comfort, reconfiguring the surroundings saturated with anti-gay rhetoric and threat to physical safety. This affective exodus crosses Tuan’s experiential model (see Chapter 1), imbuing conception with emotion, thought with sensation. It is self-induced, called upon through the agential “tuning out” of the heteronormative hum of Azerbaijan, to use Beer’s terminology. It functions as sensorial excess, or the ‘affect’ of affective exodus, overriding discomfort with what my interlocutors perceive to be the sounds of a more gay-friendly “elsewhere.”

74 Feld, “Waterfalls of Song”, 97.
It is important to begin by considering where affective exodus might take its subject, and from whence they are pulled. Space and place remain volatile terminology, and my critiques leveled against Tuan in the introduction regarding such definitions are inevitable in making semantic distinctions, yet language must prevail, as I write in one moment, as you read in another. The remainder of this essay uses the term ‘space’ singularly to denote all senses of spatiality, material and virtual, tangible and ephemeral. Violence is a real risk for people with non-normative identities in Azerbaijan. It is not uncommon for such people to be thrown onto the street, cast out by their families and friends and socially shamed by those around them. I have chosen the term ‘space’ for its alignment with contemporary discourse around ‘safe spaces.’ These spaces remain crucial for not only physical protection but also the mental and emotional preservation of identity and a sense of self constantly under fire by the biopolitics of the state and heteronormative social standards. As such, affective exodus does not involve space or place as Tuan and others have conceived of it. Affective exodus, rather, refers to the intentional alteration of the individual’s affects and emotions as they exist in a potentially violent space, to the fostering of a virtual space where their sonic sense of knowing reconfigures their body’s being-in-space. In this way, space is defined not by a creator, nor by an objective onlooker. Space is dependent entirely upon one’s orientation towards it. For my interlocutors here, this orientation is determined and manipulated through the consumption of American popular media, and in particular, black femininity and white (male) gayness.
Based on ethnographic material gathered with Anar and Elxan, the following sections examine American Black Femininity and American White Gayness as tools for achieving an affective exodus. The first, regarding Anar, asks not only what music he consumes and why, but how that music is politically and affectively tied to the oppression of black bodies in the US. As such, the politics of blackness, music, and trans sexuality are tantamount to Anar’s affective response. Second, Elxan’s consumption of music associated with American White Male Gayness—or, what he perceives to be such musics—signal an understanding of global LGBT rights discourse as rooted in the US. Elxan’s music consumption is thus driven by gender politics towards the privilege he sees in White Americans, presumably white gay men. The privilege he sees in me.

### 3.2.1 American Black Femininity

As Anar and I walk into Port Baku Mall, I ask him about his musical tastes.

“Well, I like all types of music,” he says to me, seeming to think quite hard as to what answer he should give me. Following a moment of silence, he says “but Nicki Minaj is definitely my favorite.” I cannot help but smile as a Minaj fanatic myself. The rapper dominates conversation between us for the following two months—his posts on social media and messages to me constantly quote her newest album, *The Pinkprint*, but also works as old as her 2007 and 2008 mix-tapes. When I (repeatedly, to this day) ask Anar about this love for Minaj, he often acts surprised by the question; “Why would you even ask this?” he asks, laughingly. “She’s flawless.
Her songs have so much power, they make me feel powerful.” He tells me that he likes the masculine edge of not only her lyrics but also her personality. Despite being born in the Caribbean and raised in the city, despite being a black woman living in the midst of American racism, she demands respect and enacts a power usually held by men. Minaj’s black femininity, accessible sonically through her albums but also gesturally in her videos and live performances, becomes a technology for the enactment of power, and the right to demand respect. The act of listening to Minaj is one of self-empowerment, one that reminds him that while the material conditions around him approach pathology, he can sonically reconfigure the city.

American black femininity can be taken as a tangible cultural artifact that is significant worldwide as capital commodity through the bodies of Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, and Laverne Cox. I find this particular racialized assemblage of gender expression particularly potent in the study of culture broadly, and of other, perhaps more expected artifacts. How is American popular media, especially those including Black female performers, consumed by gay men living in Baku, and how do such consumption practices simultaneously reify spatial distance and create local ephemeral spaces or intimacies? In a world of seemingly infinite readily available media, how do these particular performers become so crucial in the personal lives and identity formation of gay men living in a country these artists have never visited? The following analysis asserts that celebrities such as Beyoncé, Minaj, and Cox embody a specific (commodified) brand of black femininity that, as a tangible artifact for purchase and consumption, evokes abstract notions of and subsequent affective experiences tied to the marginalized individual becoming powerful and self-fulfilled.

75 Anar, 2016a, interview; Fazil, 2016, interview.
76 The additive “American” will be dropped for the remainder of the essay. ‘Blackness’ will be used in reference only to the context of race in the United States.
There is great difficulty in discussing culture as it operates as a discursive frame, as a site of reproduction and labor, an artistic descriptor, and an abstraction of near-hegemonic status at once. Edward B. Tylor, considered by many as the founder of cultural anthropology, defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” 77 Tylor’s definition begins to bring together material and behavior, both tangible and intangible manifestations embedded within the politicizing discourse of culture. Such breadth functions not as defense against a critique, but rather as an acknowledgement of culture’s dynamism, permeability, and political connectedness. Culture acts and is (re)produced in both time and space, and thus, a definition regarding culture as static or object misses the point entirely. Further, a social constructivist perspective might insinuate that through mere deconstruction one could undo or eliminate culture entirely. But it is both here and there, everywhere and nowhere. To undo culture would be to undo politics, to undo the human.

“Artifact” is similarly slippery. Alone, the word sounds with resonances of historicity and stasis. One might imagine an old clay pot, or piece of tarnished metal jewelry, behind a wall of glass with a small placard noting its exorbitant worth and historical significance. Sterne, in describing the mp3 file, defines the term as “a crystallized set of social and material relations. It is an item that ‘works for’ and is ‘worked on’ by a host of people, ideologies, technologies and other social and material elements.” 78 Such a configuration renders the artifact material yet dynamic, embedded within cultural flow yet delineated through differentiating use. This

embeddedness, the artifact’s being-with-others, with culture at large, forces us to consider artifacts “a result of social and technical processes, rather than outside [us] somehow.”

The cultural artifact can be understood as a snapshot or “freeze-frame” of cultural processes as they normally flow. This does not, however, insinuate stasis. Rather, it refers to the temporal differentiation of the tangible artifact as removed from its exact moment of production. Constantly reproduced in new temporal and spatial locations, and in new sociopolitical contexts, the cultural artifact indexes its genesis and each subsequent moment since its abstraction as singular, individual. This is to say artifacts exist both ephemerally—they disappear almost immediately following their creation through cultural flow—and permanently—through differentiation as singular artifact and carried across time—and are thus both tied to and free from temporal bounds.

In studying black femininity as such an artifact, the body is crucial to discussing race and gender as they relate to sound. The surfaces of the body, the skin, are a particularly potent site of examination. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, corporeality and materialism have become central to feminist thought. Scholars such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz composed seminal texts demanding the third-wave of feminism be built upon the body’s fleshy surface. Skin has since continued to be a site for the phenomenological account of not only our own subjectivity, but that of others. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey note, “not only is skin assumed to be a sign of the subject’s interiority…but the skin is also assumed to reflect the truth of the other and give us access to the other’s being.” It is thus through the flesh that we experience the world, know one another, know ourselves.

79 Sterne, “The mp3,” 826.
Beginning a fleshy analysis, the ontologies and technics of race are paramount to conversations about music and race, which remains a complex and contentious topic. Race has become biologized in the west, particularly through the colonization of Africa, since the late eighteenth century. Alexander Weheliye writes,

Consequently, racialization figures as a master code within the genre of the human represented by western Man, because its law-like operations are yoked to species-sustaining physiological mechanisms in the form of a global color line— instituted by cultural laws so as to register in human neural networks—that clearly distinguishes the good/life/fully-human from the bad/death/not-quite-human. This, in turn, authorizes the conflation of racialization with mere biological life, which, one the one hand, enables white subjects to “see” themselves as transcending racialization due to their full embodiment of this particular genre of the human while responding antipathetically to nonwhite subjects as bearers of ontological cum biological lack, and, on the other hand, in those subjects on the other side of the color line, it creates sociogenically instituted physiological reactions against their own existence and reality. (emphasis added)81

This is to say that the category of race is a creation of power that turns phenotype (here, skin tone) into a sociogenic phenomena (race). The function of race, according to Weheliye, is “to create and maintain distinctions between different members of the Homo sapiens species that lend a suprahuman explanatory ground (religious or biological, for example) to these hierarchies.”82 Racism is built into the ontology of race, imbuing skin with social and hierarchical difference.

We cannot thus accept race as biological. In his discussion of race as technics, Julian Gill-Peterson writes that “if race is ‘merely’ a bodily function, it follows that it must eventually be subtracted from the human, that antiracist and postcolonial projects must share the goal of

82 Ibid., 28.
restoring the body to an unraced form.”83 Citing Latour’s understanding of humanism as purified of technology and race, which resonates strongly with Agamben’s notion of ‘bare life,’ Gill-Peterson draws our attention to the technologies of race, and its importance to talking about bodies, skin in particular. “Race as a technology,” he writes, “entails an affirmation of the capacity wielded by all subjects to retool the future of racialization in a less exploitative, less violent, and less racist way than humanism offers in its zero-sum game of subtraction.”84 In discussing race and music, and in this case, blackness, the black body must remain central to scholarship. As Anar makes musical choices, his consumption is inextricably bound to the bodies of the artists, to the way those bodies have been marginalized throughout history. In consuming music by black artists, we consume the history of racism in the United States. Black skin carries the history of African colonialism and American slavery, of the Jim Crow South and lynching. It is imbued with the death administered by police, the poverty dispensed by the state, the anxiety induced by whiteness.

I was interested to find out that Anar does not particularly care for Beyoncé. While he listens to some of her music, particularly those that feature Nicki Minaj such as “Flawless” and “Feelin’ Myself,” she lacks the masculine edge he admires in Minaj, and he conflates this perceived femininity with a lack of politics. Yet her close relationship to Nicki signals, for him, shared beliefs, even if he finds their musics affectively different.85 Because of this relationship, as well as Anar’s own inclination to be up-to-date on the most popular music worldwide, Beyoncé remained a topic of conversation for us, and remains important here.

84 Ibid., 410.
85 Anar, 2016b, interview.
Beyoncé’s newest album *Lemonade*, accompanied by a visual album and followed by the Formation World Tour, centers the black female body within this narrative of Black subjugation by Whiteness, and responds through her own flesh. *Lemonade* attempts to rejuvenate and coopt the rawness of the black body in America, reasserting in the public eye the beauty of black womanhood, the power that women of color hold, and the will of the oppressed to fight the institution. This is to say that Beyoncé’s skin, sexed female and racialized black, carries a black feminine subjectivity that is very much for sale on her album *Lemonade*.

The purchase of such subjectivities includes associated affects of safety and empowerment, of defiance and strength. Consideration of *Lemonade*’s affective capacity addresses how our bodies as listeners are oriented by white cisgender heterosexual patriarchy, and how *Lemonade* forces our reorientation instead toward a black femme politic that we hear, see, feel. Coming to know our own bodies through the sensorium, *Lemonade* evokes a sonic affective experience that reorients the body in space, which penetrates the normative and splits it open, creating space for the flourishing of the oppressed. While conceptions of race differ greatly in Azerbaijan, and the white/black dichotomy of American racial politics does not reflect the realities of Baku (where there is very little diversity), Beyoncé’s black-femme futurity demands an intersectional approach, one that might affectively shatter the heteronormative hum of Azerbaijan. Minaj takes up a similar politic in her music, although perhaps less overt. Thus, for Anar and others, Minaj and Beyoncé’s black femininity remain an important technic in the preservation of gender identity.

Nicki Minaj was signed to Young Money Entertainment, founded by Lil’ Wayne, in 2009 following the success of three mixtapes. Her first two studio albums, *Pink Friday* and *Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded* were huge commercial successes, with radio hits such as “Super Bass”
and “Starships” allowing Minaj to cross the lines of genre and censorship, maintaining residence in both pop and hip hop. “Radio” and “censorship” as used here both reference the politics inherent to the delineation of genre in the American music industry in particular. Such lines are highly racialized, demarcating the music of white musicians as acceptable and viewing that of black musicians with suspicion and caution. Rap and hip hop, born in 1970s and 80s in the Bronx, is largely understood to be a black genre, a music for youth and black audiences. Contrarily, ‘pop’ music remains whitewashed and benign, void of politics (read: race) and is thus considered more radio friendly. Through creative use of genre and tactful writing, Minaj bridges these genres to gain airtime, an exposure that translates directly into economic gain.

Questions regarding ‘black sound,’ or ‘sounding black,’ and inevitably their answers, can risk falling victim to both social constructivist and biologizing arguments, as outlined above in relation to black skin. But scholars such as Nina Eidsheim have noted the reiterative performativity of timbre and style that create the category of black music. Eidsheim refers to the process of vocal timbre’s racial socialization as ‘vocal choreographies.’ She writes, “people seen as belonging to a certain race are thus assigned particular vocal choreographies; and in performing these choreographies, these persons’ voices sonically align with the racial categories that society assigned them.”86 Such studies reveal that black sound, albeit ‘constructed,’ must be taken seriously as a marker of difference and a delineation of genre that results in significant disparities in economic gain between black and white musicians.

If we take Minaj as an example of such differences, particularly her crossover hits such as “Super Bass” or “Starships,” one notices a distinct difference between the fast, heavy-hitting...
flow of the verses and melodiousness of the sung choruses. Vocal style aside, there is a significant timbral and shift in pitch space between the two structures. The rapped verses, especially in Super Bass, play with accent and vocal timbre to create multiple characters and weave a narrative, yet the inflection retains a masculine edge that Minaj fosters later in her career. But this melodious, sing-songy chorus is largely absent from the albums’ tracks not tailored for the radio. Minaj’s other tracks, especially on her newest album The Pinkprint, are representative of her brand of black femininity, a black sound that is dominant, aggressive, and makes claims to masculinity through overt sexual power reserved for the male body.

When I ask Anar about this shift in Minaj’s work, about these distinct stylistic differences, he recalls the first time he heard her music.

“I saw her on the TV at home, the ‘Superbass’ video,” he says. “And I was like…‘who’s this silly bitch out there that’s just about the pink,’ you know, the cute stuff, and I was like ‘yeah, fuck her.’”

I couldn’t help but laugh as I heard this. “So you don’t know the ‘pink’ kind of Nicki Minaj?” I asked.

“I don’t like her pink style,” he replied immediately. “I like her original, like black [style], because it really indicates her as a…true feminist figure.” Anar refers to “Roman’s Revenge,” “Beez in the Trap,” and “Did It On ‘Em,” songs from Minaj’s early career that fit within her ‘masculine’ style, as those which attracted him.

“I was not really aware of [her second album] Roman Reloaded…[but] it was Roman’s Revenge and stuff like that [that I liked.] I was like ‘you know, I like the way she sings,’ because
it was my first time listening to a female rapper, and I was like ‘you know, she’s really better than the male counterparts.”

Minaj’s body of work has progressed steadily towards commercial success, claiming her title as the Queen of Rap, simultaneously reinforcing her own femininity and asserting a masculine/patriarchal power previously unavailable to popular female artists. Minaj’s brand of black femininity, imbued with masculine qualities, resists embodiment by women under normative notions of sex and gender. But Minaj’s use of a black masculine edge disrupts male/female binaries regarding behavior and sexuality, and (re)creates a black femininity that is no longer biologized, but rather acts technically (in the capacity outlined by Gill-Peterson), as an artifact in Sterne’s formulation of the term (“a crystallized set of social and material relations”).

Anar’s association of pink and black with Minaj’s stylistic shifts, as seen above, isn’t rooted necessarily in his own gendered conceptions of color. Rather, on Minaj’s early albums and in public appearances she often wore pink head to toe, sporting brightly colored hair. Her most recent album, The Pinkprint, and its associated videos depict Minaj in darker tones, most often in black. This is not to say the change in wardrobe is not influenced by the shift to a more masculine, hard-hitting style. On the contrary, I find Anar’s perception to be astute. Minaj’s shift towards blackness, broadly construed, raises concerns regarding the masculinization of the black female body, as well as the gendering-male of hip hop. Minaj must fulfill these roles to claim her dominance as a successful rapper.

As Anar and I walked down the bulvar along the Caspian Sea one afternoon, he expressed to me his love for Laverne Cox. He was amazed at her beauty and strength in the

87 Anar, 2017, interview.
face of adversity, and was proud of her success as a trans actress in the mainstream media. Anar told me that during his childhood, he thought that he was transgender. I use the word “thought” rather than “identified” for the following reason: as Anar explored his sexuality and endured the ridicule of classmates, he came to believe that he was not transgender, but in fact, gay.

According to Anar, he simply mistook his own homosexuality for being transgender, believing that his femininity meant he was in fact a woman.

“[When I was young] I was really feminine…and I was always dreaming about, you know, leaving my city one day and going to Baku...But now I see it’s really impossible to live comfortably in Baku [as a trans person]...And when I was sixteen, I just realized that I was born this way. I always wanted to be female, like ‘don’t call me your brother!’ One day I realized just I have to [be a] man.”

Anar told me this story laughingly, as if I should also laugh at what he thought was a comical error in identity. I asked Anar about the process of identifying as gay rather than trans, but his answer confused me more.

“Since my childhood, I always wanted to be, uh, in the spotlight. And I thought that if I did some feminine moves, like behavior, I thought ‘everyone will look at me, and one day I will become famous!’” he said, giggling. “Then I figured out that it was my fault...Some people pointed it out to me that I was really sick. About 90% of the people here know me and bully me, but now, its not like that, because I changed myself. You know, my mannerisms, and you know, just style all that all stuff, and now I’m really cool!” More laughter. Anar loves to laugh.

88 Laverne Cox, the trans female black actress that rocketed to fame on the Netflix series Orange is the New Black in 2013, serves as the primary (likely the only) example of such femininities in American popular media. Cox’s character, Sophia, is a trans female inmate at a women’s prison, and the first mainstream scripted role for a trans woman of color. Sophia’s backstory shows her living life, pre-transition, with a wife and son, and the pain that comes with self-acceptance and sharing one’s identity, especially with a spouse and child. Through the turmoil of hormone therapy and altering her gender presentation to that of her female identity, the character and story of Sophia were groundbreaking for mainstream television.
Anar’s self-reflection strikes me as withholding, and potentially laden with contempt. While Anar’s family knows he is gay, he tells me that he was simply acting, that he feminized his own gender presentation in order to conform with normative ideals of femininity that he thought were expected of him. He recounts the time he spent “masculinizing” himself when this process of feminization for fame failed him, to be more of the man he “ought to be.” But he remains proud of Laverne Cox. “It’s really amazing, what she is doing. I’m very proud for her.”

But what some have called increased visibility for trans communities, especially trans women of color, must not be mistaken for total social acceptance of trans-identified people. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, there were 357 acts of violence committed against transgender individuals, 24 of which were homicides in 2015. Of the total 1,253 violent acts reported against any LGBTQ individual, 49% were committed against African American or LatinX individuals. Trans-identified people, especially women of color, remain largely at risk for violence. Under such violence, we might ask how Cox’s femininity has been co-opted by both liberal and conservative commentators.

For Anar, Cox represents a self-acceptance and self-transformation he sought for himself. He tells me how amazed he is at her confidence, and that she inspires him to be himself. But here seem to be two moves enacted by the commodification of Cox’s black trans femininity. The first, perhaps more optimistic or idealized, is that Cox exemplifies a process of acceptance and success in the face of severe transphobia and violence. This particular black femininity works towards

89 Anar, 2016b, interview.
the re/defining\textsuperscript{91} of what a woman is, and who maintains the agency in such definitions. Second, and less uplifting, the commodification and consumption of Cox’s black trans femininity has served transphobic agendas of reifying the sexual binary, wherein “trans” indicates only male-to-female or female-to-male transition, complete with medical intervention and adherence to normative gender roles. Cox’s body and gender presentation exist within widely accepted conditions of the “woman” as she is construed within a heteronormative framework. Further, her body is open to simultaneous sexualization and masculinization by white cis-heterosexual males in the same way as the normative black female body, but with masculinization compounding upon transphobic rhetoric of the trans woman as masculine.

However, trans women of color (primarily the few that achieve media recognition) are in the position to reformulate the human body, our conceptions of the “originary,” and the technologies of race. Gill-Peterson writes that “a technical politics of transgender and race…affirm originary technicity and mobilize historical technologies to engage the debilitating effects of the contemporary transgender biopolitics…”\textsuperscript{92} Put another way, an understanding of the human body as not inherently, originally whole or complete renders the body plastic, open to change. Further, race as a technology in Gill-Peterson’s formulation creates alternative futures through racial fissures in the Western episteme. Taken in combination, a trans of color epistemology undermines the white-cis hegemony of Enlightenment discourse that remains

\textsuperscript{91} The backslash here indicates a double move, one of definition and redefinition. While such actions might occur simultaneously, it is imperative to notice that definition here functions to reconstitute womanhood, even if the “woman” initially appears identical to prior formulations. While Cox has medically transitioned and might physiologically appear consistent with prior conceptualizations of the woman, ‘trans’ indicates a redefinition through the process of becoming.

\textsuperscript{92} Gill-Peterson, “Technical Capacities,” 414.
foundational to Western academic inquiry. Trans of color femininity might signify a paradigmatic shift in the making.

While Anar verbally acknowledges only her self-acceptance, he also initiates a process of gender normalization upon himself in order to conform to prescribed binary gender roles. Cox might be referred to as “trans binary,” or a trans individual whose identity, sexual orientation, and gender presentation conform to binary conceptions of sex. For Anar, to remain male means to exude normative masculinity. Certainly a tactic for self-preservation in a homophobic country, Anar reiterates through several interviews his cisgender identity, albeit in different terms. While Anar may be drawn to the permeability of sex, as exemplified in Cox’s transition, his conception of gender expression, relative to the masculine-feminine dichotomy, remains rooted in binaries. To perform his gender identity is to conform to the same binary Cox exists within, and thus, her trans black femininity ultimately serves to reinforce Anar’s conceptions of cis-masculinity.

As such, this particular co-optation of Cox’s trans black femininity serves a purpose distinct from that of Beyoncé and Minaj, as outlined above. Through these three women, highly specific artifacts of black femininity are withdrawn, commodified, and consumed. They are especially important for my interlocutors, especially Anar, and their black feminine sounds become Anar’s primary tool for achieving an affective exodus from Azerbaijan.

3.2.2 American White Gayness

Elxan, while not as deeply rooted in the consumption of black femininity as Anar, likewise fantasizes about the United States as a haven for gay men. I meet Elxan late in my time in Azerbaijan, only three weeks before leaving. Having never met an American, Elxan is overcome with excitement, but also shyness and self-consciousness about his English skills. But after
several minutes of me speaking in English to some of his friends and in Turkish/Azerbaijani to others, he feels confident enough to speak up. Elxan tells me he wants us to hang out and talk so he could tell me about his love for American music, knowing that I am asking his friends and classmates similar questions.

Following constant messages from Elxan on WhatsApp, the mobile texting application, we meet for coffee at Starbucks in the Tarqovu neighborhood. Many opt for this spot due to its central location, air conditioning, and often English-language music. However, for this, our primary interview, Elxan is not alone, but accompanied by a close heterosexual friend. Having told Elxan we will be discussing his sexuality, I am shocked by this. Elxan insists it will be okay, because his friend knows no English, and Elxan insists on using English with me (except whenever he is upset, in which case our conversation turns to a mixture of Turkish and Azerbaijani). And while this friend occasionally interjects into our conversation, asking if I have a girlfriend or have accepted Islam as my religion, he largely remains quiet.

Elxan recounts to me the violence he has experienced in the streets near his house, that his parents could not know that he was gay so he didn’t tell them why he was beaten.93

“What happened?” I ask, following his mention of being attacked. His demeanor, usually quite upbeat, shifts completely.

“When I was like girl.”

“When you were like what?”

“Like girl.”

“Like girl…as in the way you were dressed?”

93 Elxan insisted upon our speaking in English during interviews. While he did not speak Turkish, his Azerbaijani and my Turkish were usually intelligible. As noted, however, we used those only when he became upset and could not produce English, at his wish.
“I broke my pelvis. Four or five people hit me in the street…at night. And I broke and I…yatmak, yatmak…[slept] at home for one month.”

I have very little to say. I cannot apologize enough, but I know “I’m sorry” will produce more questions than it will convey empathy. Bed ridden and throbbing with the visceral pain of being gay in Azerbaijan, Elxan says that his favorite thing to do was to listen to music, especially during this time. I ask what music he liked, and with a huge smile, he responds “American music.” Listing solo artists like Beyoncé and Justin Bieber, and bands like One Direction (Elxan associates the band with the United States despite their being British), Elxan tells me, “It is [my] favorite music. It reminds me of America, where you can be safe. I want to live in America.”

“But why America?” I ask. “Why not somewhere else?”

“Because [gay marriage] is legal.”

“It’s legal, but it is legal in other countries too.”

“No, America! I love America…It seems to me that American people [are] better than European people.”

“In what way?”

“About this conversation.”

For Elxan, the US is a beacon of hope for LGBT rights. Same-sex marriage, often critiqued as white gay respectability politics that do little to further a progressive queer agenda, is Elxan’s marker of freedom. He seeks escape from Azerbaijan for a better life in the US—he hopes to attend medical school at Yale—but for now, American music is as close as he can come. I ask Elxan if he listens to anything besides American music. “No,” he quickly replies.

94 Yatmak can be translated to to sleep, although it more nearly means to lie down; Elxan, 2017, interview.
“Azerbaijani music makes me sad, I remember how sad I am here and how bad it is. American music makes me happy. Someday I will live there.” 95

As was the case for Anar, American musics hold the power of self-acceptance for Elxan. It is the English language and association with the United States that makes him happy. As he walks the streets of Baku, sometimes in fear for his physical wellbeing, his headphones produce the sounds of safety, of happiness. American music allows for Elxan’s affective exodus from the violently threatening environment of home, drawing comfort near and protecting his identity from the bombardment of mainstream Azerbaijani heteronormativity.

95 Elxan, 2017, interview.
4.0 CONCLUSION: SEXUALITY, FEAR, ETHICS

One night in the early summer, I sit with Fazil, Samad, and another of their friends in the Tarqovu KFC as they eat. This third friend, whose name I am never told and to whom I never speak again, looks at me with curiosity as Fazil and Samad carry on their normal conversation. He asks me, in English, why I am in Azerbaijan, why I am spending time with his two friends. I respond that I am interested in the music listening habits of gay men living in Azerbaijan, which doesn’t seem to answer his question. Samad and Fazil speak with him in Azerbaijani, attempting to explain my answer further.

Jumping into the conversation, albeit in Turkish, I reiterate that I am a graduate student who studies music and culture. Eyes wide, he says “Türkçe konuşabilirsin!” (You can speak Turkish!) Smiling, I respond that I can, that improving my language skills are another reason I am in Azerbaijan. But then, I ask if he would be willing to speak with me about his own musical tastes for my project. Eyes even wider, he shakes his head and responds, “no.” Samad turns to him and presses the point, saying that they are both doing it, and that I will keep their identities hidden, that their photos will not be taken or shown in the project. Put slightly at ease, he responds that so long as it is completely anonymous, he might be willing. After departing for home, I never see him again, with Samad and Fazil or otherwise. I don’t inquire with either of them about his participation.
This young man’s response isn’t atypical. The fear of his sexual orientation being realized by his family, by his non-gay friends, is visceral and immediate. And while Samad and Anar are out to their families, at least in part, Fazil and Elxan share these fears as they recount their stories to me. It is important to highlight these fears, and that a willingness to speak with me not be conflated with fearlessness. In many ways, their fear drives them to speak with me, someone detached from most of their social and familial network. It is this fear that causes them to seek an affective exodus.

The role of fear within many of these men’s lives dictates how their bodies are oriented towards others, those that cause fear. Ahmed notes that fear is both spatial and temporal: as events unfold in time, our proximity to a feared object (or person) is largely directed towards a futurity we expect or anticipate. She writes,

But the feeling of fear presses us into that future as an intense bodily experience in the present. One sweats, one’s heart races, one’s whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis. So the object we fear is not simply before us, or in front of us, but impresses upon us in the present, as an anticipated pain the future.96

Under an oppressive heteronormative atmosphere, my interlocutors’ bodies are pressed upon from all sides—as Ahmed writes, they become overwhelmed, pushed back, their existence negated. Affective exodus, then, takes place in this moment. Rather than flight, however, these young men find ways to engage differently with the spaces into which they do not fit, carve out affective spaces between their bodies and others’.

In the same way that fear is felt through the body’s senses, felt physiologically, a critical engagement with and reorientation in space occur through the directed alteration of the senses.

As noted in Chapter 2, “the senses” must include the cell phone. For gay Azerbaijani men, the cell phone is critical in enacting an affective exodus. Through the use of dating apps, my interlocutors become oriented towards other precarious bodies: those of other gay men. Through apps like Hornet and Grindr in particular, specific bodies seen on-screen are now seen in public space. Knowing other such bodies’ secrets, their marginalization and discomfort, reorients the individual and begins to foster comfort. Further, the cell phone as a music listening device becomes a tool for hearing spaces differently. Developing a reciprocal relationship with his cell phone, the user’s touch alters his acousteme. Through this touch-hear sequence, the cell phone becomes embodied as sensory material. Taking the cell phone as a sense, as the body, my interlocutors’ responses to fear begins at the flesh and emanates outward, shifting how the body and space, the self and the object of fear, relate to one another.

This relation between the body and space is the topic of Chapter 3. Space can be not only known through sound, but altered. Thus, it is directed listening and use of the cell phone, as noted above, which allows my interlocutors to know space differently through specifically chosen sounds. For Anar, this comes in the form of music and other media by prominent black artists such as Nicki Minaj. Through consumption of not only their music, but also their femininity as a cultural artifact in and of itself, Anar sonically readjusts his being-in-Baku, and spaces become differently known in relation to his directed acoustic environment. For Elxan, white American and British artists index a global LGBT rights discourse. Desiring to live in the US where same-sex marriage is currently legal, Elxan reconfigures space to sonically represent this wish. In both instances, distant places and different people become the models for an altered sense of space and being.
Affective exodus is not a sustainable model for fundamentally changing one’s entire life, but rather allows for ephemeral stability and freedom from marginalization. In telling the story of these moments, I also tell the story of that life they seek to escape. As Will Roscoe writes, “what appears marginal often stands for something that cannot be represented in any other way—yet cannot be left out either.” Roscoe here refers to “the margins of [anthropologists’] publications-[the] dedications and acknowledgments and notes,” but for the gay man in Azerbaijan, their existence exists as a scribble on the bottom of the page, as those who must be named but whose stories cannot be told. It is precisely these stories of marginalization, these precarious lives that I have represented here.

As with all forms of representation, it is crucial to question that which is and is not being told. And further, is such a representation ethical? At what costs are these stories being told, and who might pay? The danger of social ostracization for my interlocutors is always present, even for those whose families know of their sexual orientation. With this danger in mind, I continue to tell their stories anyway, they continue to give me permission and recount their lives.

This might be considered ethnography of precarity, or a queer ethnography—the two seem to collapse in upon one another. Alison Rooke writes that queer ethnography might serve the purpose of “addressing the assumed stability and coherence of the ethnographic self and outlining how this self is performed in writing and doing research. To queer ethnography then, is to curve the established orientation of ethnography in its method, ethics, and reflexive

98 Ibid., 201.
philosophical principles."99 A queer ethnography, one that undermines assumptions about the
authorial “I”’s gender, or about their relation to their interlocutors, is inherently precarious in its
position against traditional paradigms. A queer ethnography positions the researcher alongside
interlocutors as active agents in one-another’s lives. The ethnographer’s agency as author is
reflected in their representation not only of others’ lives, but also of their own.

My own precarity as a queer individual thus drastically shapes my interactions with
interlocutors. Identifying as queer, my interlocutors have difficulty understanding what that
means vis-à-vis homosexuality, their primary identification. The political implications of
queerness, compounded with notions of non-binary gender identification, are non-existent in
Azerbaijan. Throughout this thesis, I have refrained from using the word “queer” in regards to
interlocutors for this reason. Queer is a personal identification with significant social and
political implications, which I cannot inscribe upon them. My gender thus lacks stability in the
field, even amongst these men. I remain a step outside not because of my appearance, nor my
language abilities, nor my temporary residence, but because of how gender is understood for
these men. In writing this precarity, however, it appears only in the first person. Such differences
were considered semantic and largely ignored by my interlocutors.

Emotions are crucial in the writing of this ethnography, and of my fieldwork at large. Of
course, emotion is key in discussing one’s listening to music and the associated affective
experience. But beyond that, I am continually challenged regarding the representation of my
emotional relationship with my interlocutors. For Anar and Fazil in particular, I existed as a key

99 Alison Rooke, “Queer in the Field: On Emotions, Temporality and Performativity in
Ethnography.” In Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social
Science Research, ed. Catherine J. Nash and Kath Browne (Farnham, Surrey, England:
Routledge, 2010), 25.
emotional figure in their lives. Spending hours together each week, and texting quite frequently when apart, we fell into what Mathias Detamore refers to as a ‘politics of intimacy.’ According to Detamore, “a ‘politics of intimacy’ as an outcome and progenitor of research becomes a queer project in its disruption of normative considerations for research relationships, while challenging the conventional regimes of oversight for research methods.”\(^{100}\) The relationship between my interlocutors and myself then becomes the ground of this ethnography, but is difficult to represent. I find text message conversations with Fazil to be particularly affective ethnographic moments, but they are excluded, as their content often seems peripheral. In constructing my argument, does my exclusion of such content, purposeful or otherwise, risk appearing unethical? On one of my last days seeing Anar, he kisses me. We are both in relationships with other men, but this moment comes as little surprise to me, having gotten to know him so intimately. At what moment does this become key to my ethnographic account? How does this physical contact serve as ethnographic material in light of my being a white American researcher?

Continually puzzled by these questions, I maintain a precarious position as ethnographer. In considering Detamore’s queer ethics of fieldwork, it is important to reconsider the ethnographer’s agency not only as the researcher, but as human. I quote Detamore below in order to demonstrate the complex interconnections of politics of intimacies, emotion, and queerness:

> The empathetic sensibilities resulting from these political spaces render a new kind of ethical relationship. A queer ethics as method simultaneously constitutes and enervates these political intimacies. It is in the ability to take ones ethics and methodologically deploy them as a negotiated set of social and intimate interactions toward the constitution

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of these alternative social worlds that holds the potential for a politics of intimacy to merge as a new form of social advocacy.  

A queer ethnography—or, a precarious one—creates space for the ethnographer-interlocutor relationship to take many forms, with each of those forms constituting a unique perspective. Queering the research relationship requires a new ethics founded upon kinship, to use Detamore’s word. A queer kinship extends the relationship beyond platonic or non-sexual connotations and forces our recognition of emotion and sexuality in the field. Such relationships shaped my entire experience. They framed my interactions with each individual interlocutor, his expectations different from the rest. These were not simply a lens through which I viewed my fieldwork: they were the photographs themselves.

“The field was a space where my personal boundaries and my stable sense of self were gradually undone,” writes Rooke. Each word of ethnography crosses time and space, my self-here and my self-there two different people connected through language. Landing in Baku, this project did not exist, conceptually or otherwise. It was through Fazil, Samad, Anar, and Elxan that I was in Baku, that my being became differently alongside theirs. And my being-there likewise impacted them, their ways of knowing the city and themselves, and subsequently, the ethnography presented here. Just as these stories were opened to me, they have once again closed upon themselves, this time, folding me in as well.

101 Detamore, *Queer(ying)*, 181.
102 Rooke, *Queer in the Field*, 34.


———. Interview by Steven Moon, 28 July. Transcript, 2016b.


———. “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in Feld and Basso, *Senses of Place*, 13-52.


Fazil and Samad. Interview by Steven Moon. 6 July. Transcript, 2016.


