

Rut Blees Luxemburg

## LONDINIUM



*Londinium* echoes the Latin *Londinium*, the Empire before the Empire. But it is something else too, something in-between, the *Tudor* font emphasises this temporal split. *Londinium* samples times, aesthetics and signs, creating a fertile confusion where other meanings emerge, where one looks again, where one associates and improvises with possible meanings to come. Another time, another sign, another signature, *Criminal*.

*Londinium* sits in a vertical hierarchy of signs. It is above the *INA STAR Hair & Beauty Salon*, above the shutters, the walkways, the street and the stone. It is an aspiration. But not just that.

*Londinium* deals with immigration. Litigation and family business. With personal injuries. And landlords. These are serious matters that need attending. Today, more than ever.

Rut Blees Luxemburg and Caspar Laing Ebbensgaard, Urban Night Project 2021.



Rut Blees Luxemburg's art deals with the representation of the city.

Her work is in collections including Tate and the Pompidou, Paris. She is a reader in urban aesthetics at the Royal College of Art and created the permanent public installation *Silver Forest* for the façade of Westminster Council.

Ben Walters, aka Dr Duckie

## HOMEMADE MUTANT HOPE MACHINES: REIMAGINING URBAN NIGHTS FROM THE GRASSROOTS

In many cities, pandemic lockdown conditions have led to tight restrictions on nightlife gathering, bringing particular challenges for many queer people.

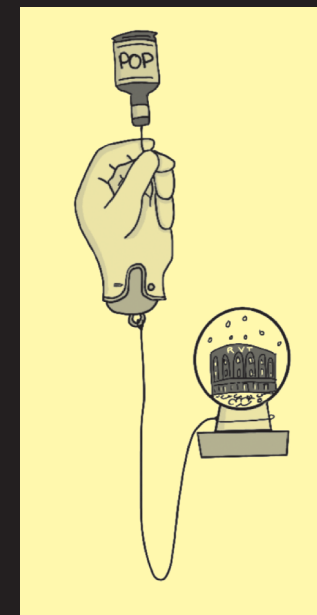
Yet there have been hopeful responses, such as online parties. What conceptual vocabularies might help frame how marginalised communities respond to such challenges?

In 2014, I began doing doctoral research with Duckie, a queer collective that's been running shows and nights in London and elsewhere since 1995. They're best known for putting on small and large piss-ups with good tunes and quick, dirty, arty live turns. But they also do long-running community projects, like an afternoon cabaret for older people without many family or friends, a training camp for young LGBTQ+ performers and an art project working with people living with homelessness and addiction.

Somehow it made perfect sense that Duckie did all these different things and I wanted to try to work out why. In the end, I hit on the idea that, for all their differences, these projects could all be described as 'homemade mutant hope machines': forms and processes that emerge from lived experience, operate relatively autonomously, adapt to changing conditions and routinely generate belief in the possibility of better worlds. In fact, they start to bring those worlds into being.

Critically speaking, I was inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's ideas around queer futurity – the value of marginalised people thinking, feeling and acting together toward imagined better worlds that glimmer on the horizon. But while Muñoz mostly framed hope as fleeting and ephemeral, I was struck by how Duckie's projects made this kind of hope quite concrete and routine, through holding forms that could be reproduced across multiple events and in multiple locations. So I called this 'reproductive queer futurity'. (This is also a bit of a geeky joke, a twist on Lee Edelman's ideas about the normative, oppressive forces of cishet 'reproductive futurism'.)

So reproductive queer futurity is the theory, homemade mutant hope machines the practice. Homemade mutant hope ma-



One of the 'hope machine' illustrations from the Dr Duckie website and zine. Zed @ They Them Studios, 2020.







The key concepts of 'homemade mutant hope machines' on one page (or 'cheat sheet'), Ben Walters, 2020.

**Ben Walters** is a writer, producer, programmer and critic. In 2019 he became Dr Duckie after completing an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded PhD in partnership with Duckie, working at Queen Mary, University of London.

These projects could all be described as 'homemade mutant hope machines': forms and processes that emerge from lived experience, operate relatively autonomously, adapt to changing conditions and routinely generate belief in the possibility of better worlds.

chines come in many different forms, from a private journal or sketchbook to mass legal reform and social justice movements. But whatever the scale, there are certain attributes that seem to work well in making a hope machine more powerful and effective. Using participatory performance, for instance, can be a potent way of strengthening community and modelling agency. It's also worth taking fun seriously: it's a surprisingly powerful technology for both intervening in existing civic structures and creating new ones. And embracing queer family models of belonging and care can facilitate material support and enable the transmission across generations of valuable, hard-won forms of understanding and action.

Some of the finest examples of homemade mutant hope machines take the form of queer urban club nights. The most powerful example of all might

Embracing queer family models of belonging and care can facilitate material support and enable the transmission across generations of valuable, hard-won forms of understanding and action.

be the North American Ballroom community. Duckie's Saturday nights, meanwhile, have been running at London's Royal Vauxhall Tavern for a quarter of a century. And there are so many others – basically anything that offers a vehicle for distinctive, collective queer pleasure, support and

world-making that wasn't there before.

In London, this includes nights created to serve specific racialised or migrant communities, from the Shim Sham Club in the 1930s to Club Kali since 1995 and more recent nights like BBZ, Hungama, Slav 4 U, and Homos and Houmous.

It also includes virtual nights that sprang upon under lockdown conditions, most notably Queer House Party, an online event offering novel spatially distributed, digitally enabled forms of relationality and solidarity, through dance music, drag performance, social interaction and related forms of offline daytime mutual aid. Indeed, the queer value of mutation and material support has been thrown into relief by the pandemic, through the development both of forms enabling short-term support and forms with long-term benefit (for example, the way digital events can expand some kinds of accessibility).

When I finished my research and became 'Dr Duckie', we hoped to find ways to share these ideas beyond the academy. So we adapted my PhD thesis into such forms as an interactive talk and a mini-zine. Both of these use the illustration that accompanies this article – a one-page schema or 'cheat sheet' of the key concepts of homemade mutant hope machines.

There's more (including the thesis itself, if that's your bag) at [duckie.co.uk/dr-duckie](http://duckie.co.uk/dr-duckie).