Anonymous code: Z0170555

Title of dissertation: The gaybourhood never sleeps: Mapping the intergenerational (re)configurations of queer urban space (Manchester's Gay Village)

Word count: 9,994

Date: 25/4/24

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The gaybourhood never sleeps: Mapping the intergenerational (re)configurations of queer urban space (Manchester's Gay Village)

BA Geography

Abstract:

This dissertation seeks to understand the urban configuration of generational change through the active role LGBTQ+ individuals have played in reconfiguring the space of the gaybourhood (gay neighbourhood) in Manchester, England. Extant analyses which consider the synthesis between generational/gaybourhood change often do so through a series of broad, de-contextualised social and demographic shifts. This forecloses a sensitive understanding of how and why certain generational worldviews have resonance in urban space, and in turn (re)shape the dominant configuration of the gaybourhood. This thesis departs from this approach, taking a situated account by re-narrating gaybourhood change through the body, depicting the gaybourhood as a space around which queer imaginaries continuously attach and (re)configure themselves. Through conducting a historical-geographical analysis this way, something scholars note is limited in current literature, this dissertation argues that Manchester's gaybourhood has continuously been (re)configured not merely through the succession of dominant generational worldviews, but also via the tensions and relations inherent within and between them. My findings insist towards a 'geography of looking back', which emphasises the pertinence of geo-historical context in understanding how and why generational worldviews shape the gaybourhood.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the various Manchester-based LGBTQ+ support groups, charities, and online communities for enabling me to meet and talk with the participants of this study.

Also a massive thank you to my dissertation supervisor who has offered me crucial advice throughout my research process.

I would also like to mention my inspirations behind this project: Atherton-Lin's (2021) cultural memoir, *Gay Bar: Why We Went Out*, along with Jennie Livingston's (1990) documentary on the New York drag-ball scene in the late 1980s, *Paris is Burning*. Both of these works drew me into the history of queerness and underlined the importance for me to document otherwise unheard voices.

List of Figures

Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

The gaybourhood (gay neighbourhood) is perpetually in flux (Ghaziani, 2014). This spatio-temporal mutability is acknowledged in literature as an expression of urban sexuality understood as a geo-historical process (Brown, 2014; Nash, 2005; Oswin, 2008). Generational trends are often cited to explain changes to the gaybourhood's form, demography, and function (Bitterman & Hess, 2016), as generational worldviews, forged by similar social and historical events, (re)shape the gaybourhood each time a new cohort comes of age (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). However, as this project seeks to demonstrate, such deployments of generations, despite acknowledging the heterogeneity within them, often fail to account for how such worldviews take form in multivariate ways in accordance with their specific urban context. Going beyond wider social change, which is constitutive of such worldviews, this project will consider how these perspectives are enacted and reproduced through every day, street-level experiences (Ghaziani, 2021). This embodied and relational approach (something left implicit in studies on sexual spatiality (Coffin, 2021)) disrupts a bounded understanding of this urban form, revealing its plethora of networks and assemblages (Bender, 2012). In turn, we can understand how LGBTQ+ individuals, pertaining to different generational cohorts, reconstitute queer urban space such that the gaybourhood may afford the grounds for queer sociality, politics, and culture (Brown, 2017).

This thesis is distinctly 'intergenerational' in that it not only considers successive configurations across generational change, but also takes seriously past enactments to urban spatiality and how these continue to exert an effect onto present and near-future (re)configurations of the gaybourhood (Coffin, 2021). Therefore, the central argument throughout this thesis is that Manchester's gaybourhood has continuously been (re)configured, not merely through the succession of dominant generational worldviews, but also via the tensions and relations inherent within and between them.

The site for this thesis is 'The Gay Village' in Manchester, England, one of the most visibly and widely recognised gaybourhoods in the U.K (Moran et al., 2003). As there is limited consideration of the historical geography of gaybourhoods (Brown, 2014), I select this site to fill this gap in literature.

1.1. Research Questions

1. How, and under which geo-historical conjunctures, is the gaybourhood (re)configured?
2. What shifting role has the gaybourhood played in the queer urban imaginary?
3. Which aspects of the gaybourhood remain salient across generational change?

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualising Urban Space

With the insertion of Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1999) into urban studies, an alternative ontology of the city emerged. Seen as an assemblage of people, ideas, buildings, and temporalities, the city is understood as necessarily multiple and never stable (Bender, 2012). As these urban entities coalesce or dissolve, new urban realities emerge, not through a fluid, logical process, but via interference and juxtaposition, such that the mediators which link these networks can enact an unpredictable reconfiguration of the city (Bender, 2012; Mol, 2002).

As the city is thus a product of the intermediaries and materialities which constitute it, it follows that we need to understand the social practices and perceptions of its inhabitants. The notion of 'urban imaginary' becomes useful here and pertains to how a city is simultaneously imagined in fragments and as a whole (Bender, 2012). Through habitual use, city dwellers can fill these gaps of the city, finding a place in which to insert themselves. This urban imaginary becomes incorporated into the urban assemblage, provoking a realignment of networks and the reconfiguration of urban space (ibid.). Therefore, through its constant reconceptualisation, the city is continuously in movement and "rich in resources for continuing political intervention" (Amin & Thrift, 2004: 232).

2.2. Urban Space and Sexuality

Since the sub-discipline's emergence in the late 1970s, geographies of sexualities have been concerned with the impact gay communities have on urban socio-spatiality at the neighbourhood level (e.g. Castells & Murphy, 1982; Lauria & Knopp, 1985) (Bell & Valentine, 1995). Early work focused on the identification and mapping of gay spaces in the form of enclaves, ghettos, and neighbourhoods (e.g. Castells, 1983). However, in the early 1990s, as part of a broader cultural and postmodern theoretical turn, geographers problematised such approaches to urban morphology which represented the city as a series of fixed territorial configurations (Crang, 2000).

Increasingly, geographies of sexualities have turned to an alternative vision of the city: one of contestation, irregularity and malleability, as a means of exploring the space-sex couplet (Browne et al., 2007). This was largely on the basis that classical readings of sexual spatiality eclipsed other sexual identities (i.e. non-male gay) and/or framed urban space as a "relatively passive backdrop" (Mort & Nead, 1999: 6) in which sociality and historicity

took place, thus failing to account for the ways in which “cities and sexualities both shape and are shaped by the dynamics of social life” (Knopp, 1995: 149; Houlbrook, 2001).

In turning to the body, post-structuralist feminism has made significant contributions to how sexual urban spatiality is being explored. The insights of Butler (1990), Grosz (1993), and (Rose, 1993) on the body as an active, constantly reworked site of inscription, as well as a legitimate site of knowledge production, have allowed sexual geographic enquiry to transcend masculinist, binary means of conceptualising cityspace, e.g. subject/object, mind/body (Soja, 1998). Ultimately, the body served as a means to unpack the recursive formulation of spaces and (sexual) identities, with theorists beginning to reconceptualise the subject “as relational and contingent.. rather than being a fixed and stable identity which enters into social relations” (McDowell, 1999: 22). In a queer context, Ingram (1997: 29) coined the term ‘queerscape’ to denote how the city has facilitated the emergence of particular sexual subjectivities which leave an imprint on the landscape, perpetually reconfiguring it through a series of dissolution and replacement (Duncan & Duncan, 2010).

2.3. The Gaybourhood

In the past three decades the gaybourhood has become a touchstone of geographies of sexualities (Brown, 2014). Gaybourhoods, gay villages or gay ‘ghettos’, are urban collections comprised on queer residents, businesses, and/or events in which LGBTQ+ identities and political ideologies are produced, lived, and enacted (Lewis, 2013). Ghaziani’s (2014) text, *There Goes the Gayborhood?*, outlines that this urban form is perpetually mobile, in both space and time, and the task for researchers is to understand how and why such spatio-temporal flux occurs.

Attempts to do so have been stunted by a predilection for urban theorists to analyse gaybourhoods through a single lens of economic rationalities and supra-individual patterns (Ghaziani, 2014). In turn, many theorists often cite gentrification as the dominant factor for their formation and why they change, downplaying the crucial interplay between space and sexuality, and thus ignoring how the gaybourhood is more than just a physical place (Coffin, 2021). To ameliorate this, Ghaziani (2021) advocates for a more sensitive approach which entails listening to LGBTQ+ people, and their street level, minutiae experiences. In turn, we can focus on the shifting understanding of sexuality, helping us gauge how and why gaybourhoods retain resonance for certain people at particular geo-historical conjunctures (Ghaziani, 2014). Furthermore, Brown (2014: 462) advocates for

more historical-geographical analyses of gaybourhoods to help understand the "processual nature of urban morphology", with Bitterman (2020) similarly claiming that broader histories of cities offer ample ground for researchers to understand how and why gaybourhoods change.

In what follows, I establish the core theoretical frameworks and concepts which aptly mould to these recent pleas to reconceptualise gaybourhood change.

2.3. Queer Geographies of Gaybourhood Change

Nash (2005, 2006) posited that dominant literature on the emergence of gay urban districts had rested on an understanding of homosexuality which was contained in a particular historical moment. Such analyses thus rested on a fixed understanding of sexual identity, rendering invisible the deeply contested nature of sexual identity and the ways in which it varies and operates within and through urban space over time. In decentring queer space through the body, Nash unveiled a 'battleground' of competing notions of homosexuality, demonstrating how Toronto's Gay Village had been re-shaped in accordance with varying queer discourses, each shaped under different historical and cultural periods. Constituted as such, geographers now understand queer space as a series of highly mobile and 'contested sites' where a multiplicity of competing discourses circulates (Oswin, 2008). In essence, what it means to 'be gay' varies from place to place, across time, and is underscored by a variety of identity indices e.g. age, class, gender, etc (Hubbard, 2000; Probyn, 1996; Rushbrook, 2002).

Gorman-Murray & Nash, (2014) advocate for a mobilities approach (later developed under assemblage thinking (2017)) to understand changing LGBTQ+ topologies. Building upon a relational ontology of space (Massey, 2005), these authors conceptualise Sydney's gaybourhood through a 'politics of (im)obilitity', whereby queer bodies, meanings, and practices coalesce in geo-historically contextual ways, 'mooring' onto the landscape as new queer urban spaces. This approach "open[s] up the analysis of the mobile re-configurations of identify and place" (Jensen, 2009: 144), accounting for how the gaybourhood is constantly (re)made over again through the shifting intersections of entities which do not abide by pre-existing socio-spatial forms (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2014, 2017).

Coffin (2021) builds upon this assemblage thinking, noting how, from a phenomenological perspective, gaybourhoods are 'born' when an entanglement of perceptions and practices distinguish urban space as a meaningful queer place, and then 'die' when this real-and-imagined geography dissolves. This author then uses Deleuze & Guattari's (1988) metaphor of a 'plateau' to denote phenomenon which hold their own distinct arrangements and logics but are nevertheless interconnected to wider topologies. Embedding this in a post-phenomenological approach, Coffin argues that these physical and imagined 'open-to-change becomings' leave their mark upon the landscape, serving as 'afterglows' whereby the meanings, physical buildings, and memories of an erstwhile gaybourhood can continue shape the trajectories of present or near-future ones.

I incorporate these concepts under a generational framework, helping us move beyond a static representation of the space-sex couplet to understand how the coming and going of LGBTQ+ generations reconfigure Manchester's gaybourhood through time.

2.4. Generations and the Gaybourhood

Strauss and Howe (1991), define a generation as the aggregate of all people born over around 20 years. Encountering key historical events and social trends occurring in the same life phase, a generational cohort is said to share common beliefs and behaviours which shape their worldview throughout their life course. Generations have been deployed as a useful mode of inquiry into gaybourhood change. Brown (2014) states that generations can leave a 'resonance', whereby their worldviews become manifest and visible in the gaybourhood. Bitterman & Hess' (2021) work is the most comprehensive account of the relationship between generations and gaybourhood change. These authors argue that through examining "the events in the lives of LGBTQ+, we can better understand the formative factors that helped to support and shape gay neighbourhoods" (314). They conclude that generational worldviews shape the gaybourhood, claiming that whilst early generations nurtured and sustained them, young cohorts now perceive them as a relic of the past (Bitterman & Hess, 2021).

In accordance with Nash's (2013) remark to attune to the 'particularities of place' when analysing generational perspectives, I develop Bitterman & Hess' (2021) approach. Taking a situated, embodied account of generational change, I aim to nuance understandings of how generational worldviews shape the gaybourhood, accounting for geo-historical context, intersectionality, and the agency of queer subjects.

As the “lived experience of social time” (Scott, 2014: 161) generational frameworks can aid historical-geographical analysis. Their ability to make “uneasy the relationship between discrete historical moments and people’s lived experiences of them” serves as testament to this (Marshall et al., 2019: 262). I thus deploy LGBTQ+ generations as simultaneously the subject and mode of my analysis in order to interpret how and why Manchester’s gaybourhood, and its role within the broader queerscape, has been (re)configured around the mutable parameters of queer sociality, culture, and politics.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Dialogues: Semi-structured interviews/oral histories

Lewis (2013: 235) notes how narratives of the gaybourhood are “dependent on the interlocutors that interpret them”. This inspired my overarching approach to (re)narrate gaybourhood change through the body. To do so, qualitative methods which allowed participants to construct accounts of their own experiences in their own terms were essential (Valentine, 2008).

14 semi-structured interviews were conducted across 3 generational cohorts of whom came of age at critical moments in in U.K’s sexual history: Baby Boomer (systemic homophobia), Generation X (emergence of queer social movements), and Generation Z (legalisation of gay marriage). All participants self-identified under LGBTQ+ (Appendix 1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted due to their facilitation of reciprocity between interviewer and interviewee, which allows follow ups to be asked to “encourage and critically question the stories told” (Bailey, 2018; Cook & Crang, 1995: 36). For Gen Z participants, this took the form of a typical interview, as I was concerned with their present accounts of Manchester’s Gay Village. On the other hand, oral histories were used when approaching members from the Baby Boomer and Generation X cohorts. These involved questions encouraging participants to reflect on their past experiences and perspectives from the standpoint in which they emerged i.e. when they came of age. This method, one which is relatively neglected in human geography, provides valuable insight into the changing uses, perceptions, and identities that are tied to places (Andrews et al., 2006). Despite issues such as selective memory recall and shifting interpretations over time, oral histories construct a “rich tapestry of local geographical knowledge” in people’s own words (Robertson, 2006: 2, as cited in George & Stratford, 2010). Such an approach enabled me to explore the otherwise hidden geographies of Manchester’s past gaybourhood, offering nuanced and specific account of human-environment relations that which cannot otherwise be ascertained through archival methods alone (George & Stratford, 2010).

Afterwards, I coded my transcribed conversations (Appendix 2), guided by my research questions, identifying patterns and themes. This process was iterated multiple times, comparing codes between and within generational cohorts. I then utilised this nexus of material to supplement, complement, and/or critique extant literature on gaybourhood change (Hatch, 2002).

3.2. Archival Research

Dialogues were supplemented by other contexts and texts to help co-construct an understanding of gaybourhood change. As Duncan & Duncan (2010: 231) claim, historical geographic analysis of the landscape must be contextualised alongside "other methods that can analyse larger structures and unacknowledged conditions of action." An intertextual approach was thus essential, not merely to aid how I read the landscape, but also to consider the contexts in which the landscape was read by participants (ibid.). I predominantly analysed newspaper archives of the *Pink Paper* and *Mancunium Gay,* as these were indicative of popular, and competing, queer discourses at the time.

3.3. Sampling and Ethics

Participants were selected under the rubric of theoretical/snowball sampling (Cook & Crang, 2007). I utilised a range of social media platforms, as well as personal connections, to gain selective access of groups of people who were relevant to my research topic. This involved finding LGBTQ+ participants who were part of one of the 3 generational cohorts and lived (for Baby Boomer-Gen X)/were living in Manchester.

In publicising my study, I clearly stated my intentions by explaining who I was, what I was interested in, how long the interview would last, and where and when it would ideally take place (Valentine, 2008). Snowball sampling was not only practical here, but a "sensitive and ethical way to recruit sexual dissidents" (Valentine, 2008: 117). Sexual minorities, especially if they are elderly, are often more unwilling to engage in research due to anxieties about their personal safety. Thus, it is more ethical in this context to approach groups, rather than individuals, which may put you in contact with potential participants (ibid). In line with this, I encountered a support group for over-50 LGBTQ+ based in Manchester, as well as multiple Manchester-based Facebook groups which reflect on the queer rave-scene from late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

Upon receiving a potential participant, I sent them a copy of the consent form (Appendix 3) to read which acknowledged the potentially triggering topics that could arise in conversation (Bailey, 2018). I also made participants aware that they would be made anonymous and that the findings of the study may be sent to them if they so requested. The location of each interview was based on the personalised preference on behalf of the interviewee to allow for maximum convenience, comfort, and rapport (Valentine, 2008). For instance many older participants, due to their unfamiliarity with video calling, chose to

meet in a familiar space in-person whilst younger participants, many of which were pre-occupied with university study, opted for zoom calls which they had become all too familiar with. Prior to the conduction of the interview, I gained informed consent to record the interview for later transcription (Bailey, 2018).

I was reflexive as possible before, during, and after the interview to scrutinise how my positionality as a researcher shaped my interactions and how I interpreted them (England, 1994). Dyck (1993: 54) remarks that sharing a "similar identity to your informant can have a positive effect" in the interview process as it can build rapport, facilitating richer conversations built on mutual trust and empathy. As a white, cis-gendered, gay man this certainly aided in my ability to respond to comments and maintain the flow of conversation. However, as the interview is a deeply power-laden encounter, my positionality was limited in my ability to address issues I have never experienced (Valentine, 2008). For instance the topics of queer-bashing, familial neglect, and gendered, racialised, and sexualised stigma were brought up by participants. I had to navigate such topics with exceptional care by reading the participants body language and tone to determine whether to probe further, topic shift, or terminate the interview altogether (Bailey, 2018). In the case of oral histories, my navigation of sensitive issues was even more pertinent due to the large age-gap which restricted potential rapport (Valentine, 2008). To address this, a preliminary discussion over phone or text was conducted to ensure the participant was aware of their ability withdraw from the interview at any point, the topics discussed, and their confidentiality (George & Stratford, 2010).

When analysing my transcripts, I was careful to not make the false assertion that an account which contradicted wider historical accounts, or the majority of other participants, was a result of false recollection (Davis & Kennedy, 1986). Rather, this was reflective of the empirics of the gaybourhood in which "the perspectives of one person will contradict what someone else says" and was thus considered legitimate geographic knowledge (Ghaziani 2014: 6).

I was conscious of the politics of the archive throughout the research process, acknowledging whose voices had been muted in the historical record as well as the positionality from which these sources had been constituted (Moore, 2010). Cameron (2001) notes that distinguishing what is/is not relevant to a research topic is a key issue in archival research. In turn, I employed a pragmatic approach, seeking out the archive as a

secondary source of information to build upon concepts and objects which emerged in conversation. This has the ethico-political benefit of ensuring the undocumented histories of participants were not rendered further marginalised and overshadowed by the dominant historical record (George & Stratford, 2010).

4. Discussion

4.1: Chapter 1. Gaybourhood as shield, queerness as stigma (‘closet era’: -late 1980s)

Up to the late-1980s, queer socio-spatiality in Manchester occurred at the margins of urban life. Reflecting on Figure 1, an imaginary of dilapidation can certainly be drawn, be it from the debris in the foreground or the use of black and white colouring. However, as with all forms of secondary data, this is a cultural artefact which is contingent on the objectives of the photographer (Clark, 2013). Despite this, the image is included as a starting point for this analysis; not to give credence to an ocularcentric means of understanding gaybourhood change, but rather to use the image as means to probe the silences and absences that are otherwise obscured by the limits of this representation (Crang, 2010). In turning to the embodied accounts of LGBTQ+ people who frequented such spaces, this image can be recast, nuancing our understanding of the gaybourhood within each geo-historical conjuncture.

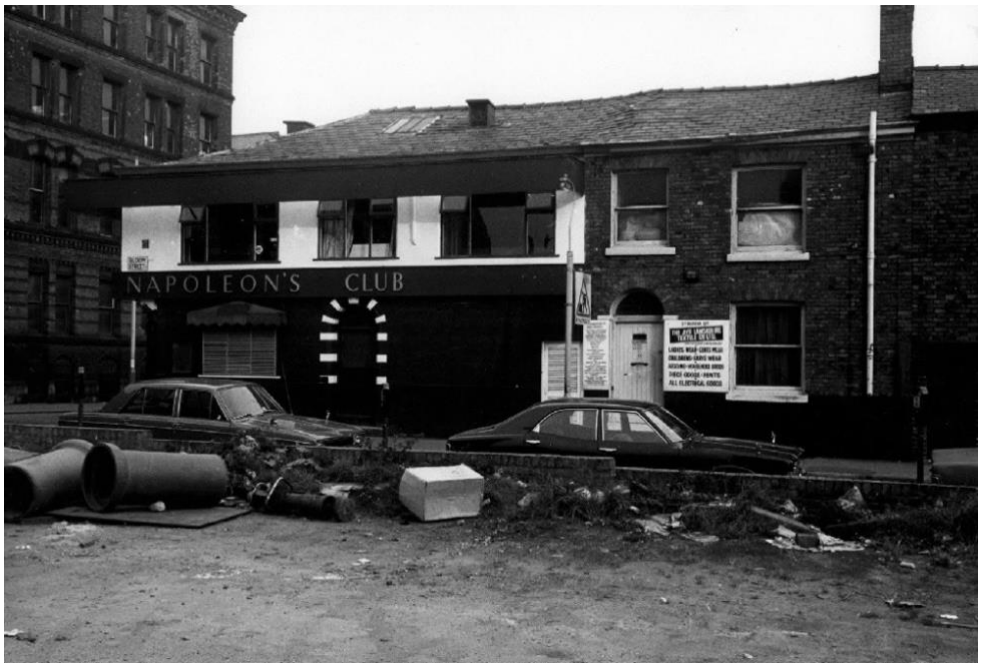

Figure 1: Napoleon’s Club, Bloom Street, South side to Sackville/Canal Street, 1973
Available at:https://manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2020/08/24/online-memory-box-pride-manchesters-lgbtq-history/
Date accessed: 13/11/23

Despite Baby Boomers coming of age during the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, participants spoke of the de facto homophobia which was rampant throughout their early life course. For instance corporeal homophobia in the form of ‘queer bashing’

and the infamous police raids, championed by Chief constable of Manchester Police, James Anderton (Figure 2). Homophobia, produced at a broader institutional scale, led to feelings of shame and precarity regarding disclosing one's sexual identity in spaces of work and the home: "I felt like a second-class citizen" (Dave, 64, Gay). Constituted thus was a collective worldview of discretion, with participants internalising this stigma and being consciously aware of the appropriate degree and location in which they expressed themselves (Bitterman & Hess, 2021).

SM cop should get the chop

THE mad man of Manchester and God's own policeman (self-appointed), Chief Constable James Anderton has called for the re-criminalising of homosexuality and has offered to flog people who break the law.

Despite half-baked attempts to silence his outrageous public statements, the man responsible for the policing of over six million men and women declares that: "Sodomy between males is an abhorrent offence condemned by the word of God."

This follows on from comments made earlier this year when he proclaimed that those most at risk from Aids were "swirling around in a cesspit of their own making."

Mr Anderton, who advocates the castration of rapists, is calling for the return of corporal punishment. "It should be administered so that they beg for mercy", said the barmy bobby in an interview published in Woman's Own magazine. "They should be punished until they repent of their sins. I'd thrash some criminals myself, most surely. I could punish people quite easily."

The SM cop has been described by one colleague as: "doing enough punishing every time he opens his mouth. He is becoming more of an embarrassment to his force every day and if as he claims he has a hotline to the Almighty, then why doesn't he stick on a frock and become a priest."

The Chief Constable discloses in the interview that he feels "very close to God in quiet moments of silent prayer. It was during such a moment that I felt compelled to talk about Aids. If I feel strongly about an issue I regard as reprehensible in society, I do it. It is instinctive."

If you feel instinctive or compelled to talk to the man with a 'hotline to God', he can be contacted on 061 872 5050. Alternatively, his boss on earth is Douglas Hurd and he is at the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1.

Figure 2: 'SM cop should get the chop'. Opinion Article
Source: *Pink Paper* (17/12/87: 6, p. 5), Manchester LGBT Archive

Projected onto the cityscape, this worldview delimited a series of spaces for queer congregation which were seamlessly integrated into the background of the urban landscape. All of these venues were described under a language of discretion, with phrases such as "rough and ready" and "secretive" used to describe the materiality and sociality of these pubs. For instance, the presence of 'back rooms' for cruising or the use of 'Polari' "our secrete gay language" (Dave). Thus, these venues sought to detract attention from the heteronormative gaze of the city, ensuring their queer visuality remained inward, as if to spill any queer presence outward would mark the pub 'out of place' (Creswell, 1996).

"You felt safe there because you knew that people couldn't be looking in and seeing you." (Steve, 68, Gay)

This discretion also manifests in the relatively sparse distribution of pubs. Forsyth (2001: 343) defines the topography of the queerscape during this era as "scattered gay places". Examining Figure 3, this fragmented spatiality is evident, however in and around Canal Street, we see a distinct cluster of gay pubs. Whilst not cohering in a formal gay district (Ghaziani, 2014), this cluster, as will be discussed later, certainly set the tone for what was to become known as 'The Gay Village'.

Although Baby Boomers noted the crude materiality of these pubs, these comments were greatly outweighed by the rich, potentially limitless potential such spaces offered for sexual expression (Binnie, 2001). Tracing how these worldviews were enacted, an inextricable link between the discretion a space afforded and its potential to be deemed safe for queer congregation emerges, indicative of why queer spatiality was located in the "bohemia parts of the city" (Ghaziani, 2014: 13).

Figure 3: Map showing the distribution of extant gay pubs in Manchester (1970-1989) (1: The Exit; 2: Heros; 3: Stuffed Olives; 4: Number One; 5: New Union; 6: High Society; 7: Rockie's; 8: Paddy's Goose; 9: New York New York; 10: Rembrandt; 11: Napoleon's; 12: The Thompsons Arms; 13: Nickelby's; 14: Dicken's)

As a result of their common oppression, Baby Boomers revelled in the discretion such semi-public spaces offered for self-expression, speaking of these pubs under a language of privacy and territoriality. For example, Steve claimed "This is *our* space, and this is *our* time. *We* can dance here." Similarly, Dave described the internal architecture of small, horseshoe booths in many pubs as fostering a "private and nice atmosphere" in which one

felt safe, excitingly describing the community they afforded as a “secret society”. Baby Boomers envisioned the gaybourhood as a collection of social spaces for safety and self-expression, as gay pubs allowed LGBTQ+ to be “ignored rather than tolerated” (Quilley, 1997: 277). This demarcation of discreet spaces *as* queer places can be seen as a “spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” (Lauria and & Knopp, 1985: 126), as LGBTQ+ individuals saw the transgressive potential of these ‘left-over’, dilapidated spaces to appropriate them to construct the lives they desired (Bell, 1997; Bitterman, 2020). As Dave recalled:

“When I first came out, I was quite terrified. I thought, because I didn't know anything about gay, I thought you'd walk through the door (of a gay pub), and you'd get raped straight away.” (Dave)

In entering the pub however, Dave’s pre-conceived worldview was shattered. Inside, he found “established gay people” and in turn felt “normal, comfortable and safe to be there.” Here, the subversion of heteronormative space is itself a political act, as these pubs on the margins are rendered a space of resistance- a space in which one can distinguish between difference imposed versus difference one chooses (hooks, 1990). The gay pub offered Dave an oppositional way of thinking (ibid.) about his own sexuality, one not accessible in the heteronormative ‘dictatorship’ of the city (Higgs, 1999). To this end, the space of the gaybourhood does not merely reflect generational world views (Brown, 2014), but, as the gaybourhood perturbs previously held, dominant worldviews, actively reproduces them.

This contradicts Castells & Murphy’s (1982) claim that early gaybourhoods were only rendered ‘political’ with the emergence of queer social movements. Claims such as: “[there was] no community, but networks. No territory but places” (253) reveals the problematic nature of generalising queer histories which marginalise the processes by which queer life worlds are produced. These pubs were the territorial basis of Manchester’s formative gaybourhood, facilitating a composition of queer subjectivities which emerged from the cracks of a heteronormative city (Binnie, 2001). Interestingly, participants of this cohort all considered Manchester to be a “gay city” during this era, exemplifying how such flickers of queerness offered infinite possibilities for sexual expression (ibid.), and thus an essential lifeline for LGBTQ+ during this “blood and dagger era” (Dave).

However, this spatial politics of subversion rendered LGBTQ+ vulnerable to further stigmatisation. Participants recalled Chief Constable of Manchester Police, James Anderton, and his infamous remark that gay people were “swirling in a cesspit of their own making” and how this reified the discourse of queer body as threat. This underscores the contradictory nature of the gaybourhood during this era as a simultaneously strategic and dangerous site (Ingram, 1997), exemplary of how queer spatial politics must be situated in its wider geo-historical setting to evaluate its emancipatory potential (Baiely, 2001).

4.2. ‘Bohemias’

When using generations in relation to sexual spatiality, it is important to remember the heterogeneity within cohorts (Nash, 2013). In situating generational worldviews, we see this in the polyvalent spatiality of Manchester’s early gaybourhood. As Ingram (1997) argues, the queerscape is comprised of ‘erotic-alien-nations’ which are a product of marginalisation based on more than just same sex desire. These spatial configurations can be located in the variety of gay pubs forming around pre-defined class, gendered, and cultural categories of difference (Oswin, 2008).

Figure 4: The Rembrandt Hotel, Sackville/Canal Street, 1973
Source:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/5335375268/in/album-72157662726491409/
Date accessed: 13/11/23

For Baby Boomers with sufficient economic, cultural or erotic capital (Bordieu,1983; Hakim, 2010), a discreet space was a pub such as The Rembrandt Hotel. In this relatively parochial space, comprised of a clientele of exclusively gay men, internally practised,

highly visible acts of queerness were enacted. These took the form of ‘nights’, e.g. a cruising themed night in which a floor was bathed in complete darkness, decorated with camouflage nets, and men engaged in sexual acts. Such events were common, with this venue serving as a key arena for the performance and development sub-cultural groups e.g. denim, leather, or suits (Davis & Kennedy, 1986). Interestingly, Harry, as he had grown up in a relatively supportive household, did not perceive such spaces as a “refuge”. Rather, they were spaces in which difference imposed upon him could be inverted for the affirmation of his gay identity:

“In those places you were an adjunct and there was a bit of a frisson about that you felt you were different, a bit special in a way.” (Harry, 64, Gay).

Conversely, Steve and Dave rarely frequented such spaces, referring to those that did as “piss elegant queens” or a “certain type of gay man”. Having a more working-class background, and both being stigmatised in the home, school, and workplace growing up, they envisioned more “open”, “democratic”, and “mixed” spaces as discreet. Here, they were simply normal, not different, as they could engage in the same sexual behaviours heterosexual people could in the spaces of the everyday (Binnie, 2001). These included pubs such as Napoleon’s or Paddy’s Goose…

“…where female prostitutes used to go… You’d get trans people (.) the kind of very outcast minorities.. they would stick together and be in the same place as the prostitutes and pretend to be straight there… [it was where] bisexual men could go pick up other men (.) or if they wasn’t quite out… but there were gay pubs as well.” (Dave)

In the cluster towards Piccadilly, participants noted the pub Dicken’s, describing it as “mental”, “random” and “rough”. Due to its location by the bus station, working class postal and railway workers would frequent such spaces in the evenings, reconstructing the spatio-temporal organisation of bodies, comprising a majority heterosexual clientele (Simonsen, 2017). Despite this, Dicken’s was the hub for lesbian women, “a different world” from Steve’s perspective, all of whom were regarded as interlopers in the male-dominated spaces of Canal Street. Participants of this cohort, all of whom are male, never frequented such a space, as this alternative urban imaginary (which I will return to in the next section) didn’t align with their perception of a discreet space.

Therefore, although queer visuality was located at the scale of body space (Grosz, 1992) across venues, this, in and of itself, was not sufficient to be demarcate a space as queer. Although all Baby Boomers relied on the gaybourhood due to its abundance of discreet spaces, there were degrees to which a gay venue could enable self-expression, as attributes of demography and the porosity of borders were all tied to the ontological security of queerness (Matesjskova, 2017).

This self-segregation of LGBTQ+ is indicative of how discretion manifests itself in manifold, geo-historically specific ways, and thus how generational worldviews shape a polyvalent gaybourhood. Against Bitterman & Hess' (2021: 327) claim that early generations of gay men "preferred to socialise in bars visited strictly by gay men", these embodied histories highlight its reductivity, as spatial preference is delimited by one's chosen mode of community engagement (Lewis, 2013). Just as how homosexuality is not monolithic, nor is heterosexuality, as sexual spaces delineate themselves through marking boundaries between 'moral and immoral heterosexual identities' (Hubbard, 2000: 211)- as exemplified through the partial demarcation of working class, mixed pubs as queer, safe spaces.

This attests to attuning to the minutiae of LGBTQ+ experience to understand how formative gaybourhoods, although stemming from a common desire for safe self-expression, were "produced through specifity and lived out in their singularity" (Probyn, 1996: 10). Failure to account for these myriad uses of sexuality (ibid.) renders the production of less overtly contiguous queer urban space invisible to the eyes of the researcher. In turn, the gaybourhood comes to be read as a singular, coherent urban form, solely defined in opposition to heterosexual space and constituted by a fixed gay identity, disregarding the fluid and contested transformation of queer urban sites (Nash, 2006; Oswin, 2008). By appreciation of how a collective, but inherently fluid worldview came to constitute Manchester's formative gaybourhood, analysis is re-opened into how the urban form can be reconfigured with the emergence of a more dominant one.

4.3: Chapter 2. Gaybourhood as oasis, queerness as culture ('coming out' era: late 1980s-late 2000s)

Transitioning into the late-1980s, Manchester's gaybourhood would begin to be frequented by a new generation: Generation X (Gen X). During this era, LGBTQ+ became more integrated and tolerated within mainstream culture and society (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). Ghaziani (2014) claims that with the nascent desire for visible queer assertion in public space which followed, many young LGBTQ+ people referred to gaybourhoods under a language of centrality, such as an 'oases' to which queer people fled. However, this attribute was not inherent of Gen X's worldview in Manchester.

Gen X spoke of a distinct temporal binary in which they went from perceiving the gaybourhood as a space of insignificance and fear to an integral part of their personal and political worldviews. For instance, Sam (56, Gay) explained how he never frequented Canal Street or any gay venues until after "Canal Street became much more open and less of a little ghetto", as for Sam these "old school gay bars" with their "old school drag queens" were "scary" and a "bit of an underworld". As Manheim (1927) notes, the 'problem of generations' rests not solely on their succession, but also their coexistence, or 'contemporaneity'. The space of Canal Street served as a focal point through which generational worldviews overlapped, or a "geographic centre of cross-generational movement" (Bitterman & Hess, 2021: 326). Gen X were confronted with a gaybourhood configured before them by the previous generation's needs. Coming of age at a time of the downfall of James Anderton and the emergence of Never Going Undergound (Northwest) (Figure 5), launched in response to the passing of Clause 28 in 1988, Gen X perceived this accumulated heritage of queer culture from a "changed relationship of distance" (Manheim, 1927: 293). In turn, the socio-political significance the gaybourhood held for the generation prior lacked salience for this nascent 'out generation'.

Although Gen X described the former gaybourhood under a similar language as Baby Boomers, this was not accompanied by their affordances for queer sociality. For instance one participant remarked:

"You would never say for one minute that Manchester was a 'gay city'. You'd say that it had like a bit of an underground scene, but it was really like a handful of shady pubs." (Susan, 53, Lesbian)

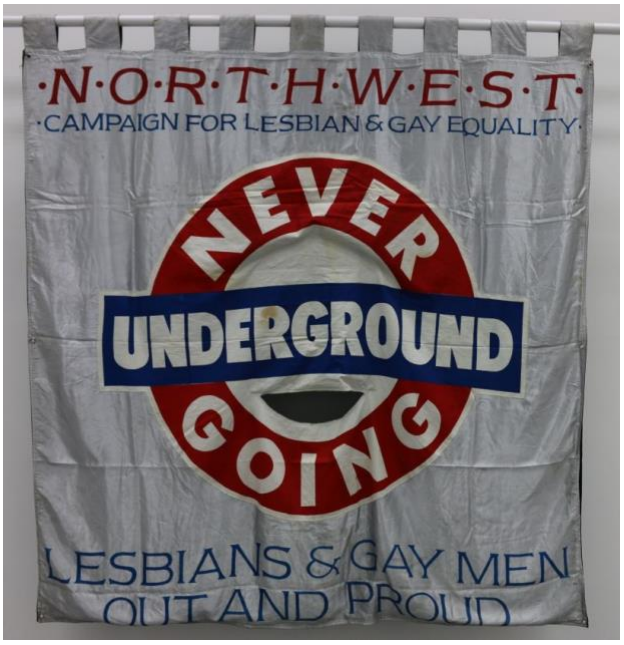

Figure 5: 'Never Going Underground' (North West) logo, 1988- 'Never Going Undergound' holds a literal meaning in this context as LGBTQ+ Gen X envisioned wider integration into the cityscape. Source: https://www.creativeboom.com/news/never-going-underground-peoples-history-museum-marks-50-years-since-the-partial-decriminalisation-of-homosexual-actsFigure 7:
Date accessed: 13/11/23

Similarly, Sam recalled his "introduction to the gay world", describing the people in gay pubs as "look[ing] like they [were] in the village people". Despite sharing a common identity with such individuals, Sam regarded himself an outsider in such spaces. To frequent 'shady' places or be associated with stereotypes (Hanardt, 2013) such as 'clones' or 'leather daddies' was disciplinary, not liberatory, for Sam and Susan (Oswin, 2008). Perceiving the gaybourhood as 'ghetto', or as "city centre shitholes" (Susan), its limitless potential was rendered monolithic. Queer social spaces confined to the private back rooms of Napoleon's were seen as artefacts of a far-gone era as they juxtaposed Gen X's desire for sexual integration, and their political aspirations based in visibility. Reflecting on Figure 6 and 7, these perspectives are indicative of the collective worldview amongst LGBTQ+ youth at the time which saw the 'ghetto' as synonymous with a 'close-minded' approach to queer politics and thus prevented assimilation into wider society.

PINK THINKS

The first resort

They had chalets not closets at Butlin's for *Camp Camp*, the first ever lesbian and gay weekender. There's never been such a "safe space" for us before and you could see the smiling relaxation on the faces of the one and a half thousand dancers, bingo-players and "water-babies".

The Rank-Butlin's management emphasised to us, in a press conference, that this was totally a commercial decision. That cuts down to size Skegness's mayor and the tabloids, who tried to rubbish us.

The pink pound has at last launched us out of ghetto bars and clubs, and we've bought over one of Britain's straightest institutions, the holiday suburb by the sea. It's thanks to enterprising Camp Pink Promotions.

For some, it was an unexpected return., because they'd been in Skegness as "straight" kids. We talk about breaking down the ghetto walls, about coming out and getting out. But we need our own "safe spaces" to be what we are, an extended family. *Camp Camp* is now a British institution and we beat them at their own game; we privatised our own holiday camp. Here's to next November - we're all going on a Skegness holiday!

Useful function?

Dear Editor

It is surely time to question the antics of the gay rights group OutRage! I believe they perform no useful function for homosexuals. Indeed, I would say that some of their activities do us all a great deal of harm.

To stage a mock crucifixion outside Westminster Cathedral may be attention-grabbing, but it's a cheap, tabloid shot and makes us all look cheap. We are a minority and must win people round to the justice of our cause, to an acceptance of our humanity and individuality.

Mocking people's beliefs in no way helps us. Rather it confirms the worst prejudices of the bigot. It is also easy and selective.

Many black churches in Britain are ferociously anti-gay. Does OutRage! target them? Or mosques in Bradford? Synagogues in Stamford Hill?

It is all very well for the metropolitan-based members of OutRage! to rampage through the easy streets of London and then melt back into the gay ghetto, but the majority of homosexuals must function under very different circumstances. We have to rub along with heterosexuals, to show them - if we're out - that we are people worthy of respect... As Good As You. OutRage! simply serves the dubious function of giving queer-bashers, both mental and physical, a justification of their attacks.

Silence is Death but let's speak out in a coherent and positive manner.

Yours faithfully
Michael Carson
Pouys

Figure 6: 'The First Resort', opinion article. The narrative of finding 'safe space' via being 'launched out of the ghetto' resonates with Sam's perspective of finding Canal Street scary and unsafe prior to its development.

Source: Pink Paper (16/3/1991: 166, p. 12), Manchester LGBT Archive

Figure 7: 'Useful function?', opinion article on the controversial queer social movement 'OutRage!'. Note the use of the term 'melts' which equates this group's 'antics' to the space of the ghetto, imbuing it with spatial stigma.

Source: Pink Paper (25/10/1992: 249, p. 11), Manchester LGBT Archive

This imagined geography of an integrated queer city was fundamentally at odds with the urban configuration enacted by the previous generation. Seeking to re-represent the city in "the image of their subjective imaginaries" (Soja, 1998: 79), Gen X shifted their urban imaginary onto aspects of urban life which exceeded the pre-existing socio-spatial categories of the queerscape (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017). All participants spoke of frequenting a straight bar on Whitworth Street, adjacent to Canal Street, called the Hacienda. This space became synonymous with the rave scene of the late 1980s and continued to be so into the early 1990s, reaching its peak with the advent of a weekly gay night called 'Flesh (at the Hacienda)'.

“It kind of attracted everybody and they welcomed everybody as well… it was one of the first places people could dress very outlandishly and it was encouraged.. yes it was a gay night, but it was for everybody.” (Kate, 53, Queer)

Figure 8: Advertisement promoting Flesh (at the Hacienda) Excerpt from the *Pink Paper* (21/12/1991: 12)

This event is ultimately indicative of how the perceived demise of a former gaybourhood can invoke ‘new’ queer urban spaces which nascent generational worldviews configure themselves around (Coffin, 2021; Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017). Participants recall being struck at first by how “risky”, “American”, and “edgy” this night was “because you were now having a gay night in a straight club” (Sam). The term ‘Gaychester’ was coined by the event’s managers, with this spatio-temporal blurring of queerness and heteronormativity, and its association with the cultural avant-garde, aptly moulding to Gen X’s worldview. For instance Kate spoke of a distinct temporal binary of ‘pre-rave’ in which straight and gay communities were segregated, with the gay pubs she frequented feeling like “cattle markets”. However ‘post-rave’, “barriers broke down” across sexual and gendered communities- indicative of how she valued the assimilatory affordances of mainstream culture.

As queerness was constitutive of its meaning but not limited to it, wider aspects of urban life were able to percolate (Bailey, 2001). Gen X participants were thus drawn to this novel space: “Now I’ve got somewhere that’s cool to go to, you know?” (Sam). This viscosity of

bodies was comprised of subjects not bound by pre-existing socio-spatial categories, but rather responding to the inter-corporeality of alike bodies and their spatial setting: a gay night, in a straight space, for everyone (Saldanha, 2006). Over time, through this collection of inter-corporeal affordances (ibid.), the Hacienda became the most popular gay and lesbian venue in the north of England (Figure 8).

This dramatic (re)configuration perturbed the conventional socio-spatial syntax of the queerscape (Tironi, 2012), inspiring a bar on Canal Street called Manto (Manchester Tomorrow) in 1990. Manto, with its 30-foot glass windows and glossy interior, was the first of its kind in Manchester and was "the place to be seen" (Kate). As the dominant configuration of the gaybourhood transitioned from segregated gay pubs to theatrical, open "gay-friendly" bars, such as Via Fossa and Velvet, queer latency shifted from implicit to explicit (Desért, 1997). As Canal Street (Figure 9) became the centre of this 'geography of cool' (Rushbrook, 2002), heterosexuals re-appropriated this space (Matejskova, 2017). This was openly accepted by Gen X, as many noted how they could take their straight friends to Canal Street "because it wasn't a spit and sawdust place anymore" (Michael, 50, Gay), or how it transformed Canal Street into a laboratory for gender queering- a place where anyone could be their most authentic selves.

"It felt like Amsterdam, quite European, quite exotic. It had, you know, something about it which was attractive to everybody, so I found it nice to go there." (Michael)

This specific 'gravitational effect' (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2021) lagged behind other Gay Village trajectories across the Global North. For instance Toronto's equivalent, Church and Wellesley Street, was formally recognised as a gay district by the late 1970s (ibid.). On the other hand, the demarcation of Manchester's Gay Village did not occur until the late 1990s, due to largely being inhibited by conservative policies which prevented local councils from promoting homosexuality (Quilley,1997). For Gen X, who came of age during the Village's rise in popularity, Manto and the nascent rebranding of Canal Street was "life-changing" as the materiality of Canal Street gave way to an urban imaginary (Soja, 1998) where the gaybourhood was of central importance to the young, queer city dweller:

“When Manto opened it was just amazing. We were just like, we are a new generation, we're cool, we're queer, we're here, everyone can see us, and we don't give a shit because we're not afraid or scared anymore… the confidence was palpable.” (Susan)

“Prior to that (Manto’s opening) I didn't go to Canal Street… It was *those* bars that I think opened the doors to much more acceptance. They made me feel safe, made me feel confident, made me feel proud.” (Sam)

Figure 9: Canal Street and Manto (left of image), 1995
Source: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gay-village-nightclubs-bars-1990s-27569033
Date accessed: 13/11/23

Critically, Gen X’s worldviews were not spatially determined by the gaybourhood, but they were nevertheless partially contingent upon its urban form for their spatial reification. Had Canal Street not undergone redevelopment, it is probable to assert that Gen X would have shaped an alternative gaybourhood detached from the spatial practice of their predecessors. However, as it acquired mainstream appeal, Gen X identified Canal Street as a site rife with political potential, and thus sought to transform this inherited gaybourhood by hijacking it as a key text for counter-hegemonic contestation (Soja, 1998).

This resonates with Nash's (2005: 115) account of Toronto's Gay Village, whereby queer social movements sought to deploy an "acceptable representation of homosexual identity to garner mainstream acceptance". In Manchester's case, this manifest in Gen X shifting perceptions of Canal Street as 'ghetto' for LGBTQ+ to a 'mecca' for anyone, by re-grounding their collective and individual worldviews within it (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2014). For instance, with the airing of the television series *Queer as Folk* (1999), Canal Street grew to international fame. Participants, such as Sam, applauded the show as "it encouraged lots of people to come to Canal Street", but were initially wary as to *which* side of gay culture was to be represented:

"I really thought that it was going to just be about those other bars that you talked about, like Napoleon's and New Union, New York… Oh no, you're going to make us look seedy, behind, not progressive…. No! Don't show *that* side of gay life because it isn't just that, but everybody has always thought for the last 50 years…" (Sam)

Through discourses of queer assimilation, Gen X juxtaposed the essentialist configuration enacted in response to a now lesser salient stigma (Bender, 2012). Thus established, was a politics of reciprocal spatial inclusion, shifting the spatial syntax of the queerscape from us *versus* them, to us *and* them (Ghaziani, 2014). Although Canal Street was rendered a safe space for Gen X to express themselves, this was not necessarily contingent on it being a social space of protection, but more so a symbolic space of representation (Soja, 1998)- a beacon of queer culture of which Gen X were proud. For matter of comparison, Baby Boomer participants deplored *Queer as Folk* for how it "put [them] on the map", with Harry (64) noting how queer spaces lost their "frisson" of distinctly being "our space". Similarly, Dave (64) recalled being confused and frustrated by this heterosexual influx: "oh no, this is our venue, haven't they got Deansgate or somewhere else to go?", indicative of how the contours of 'moral/immoral' heterosexual identities are as fluid as queer (Hubbard, 2000).

Therefore, gaybourhood change is not driven solely by the uprooting of wider social mores, but in relation to the queerscape of its past, demonstrating the pertinence of geo-historical context in gaybourhood analyses. This temporal relationship is not necessarily recognised as genealogical but can be contested and adapted to create spaces which facilitate the dominant generational worldview (Brown, 2017). This supplements Bitterman & Hess' (2021) claim that former respite queer spaces, pioneered by the previous

generation, offered fertile ground for the mobilisation of queer acceptance. Critically, however, such spaces were not necessarily built *upon* but rather *against*, as Gen X LGBTQ+ sought to displace these physical building blocks of the former gaybourhood in order to detach themselves from them, broadening the queer urban imaginary from the interior of gay pubs to the bar, such that they could colonise the street and beyond (Quilley, 1997).

4.4. The queer unwanted

Although this normative configuration of the gaybourhood was emancipatory for some, i.e. cis men and heterosexual women, it shifted to be a disciplinary space for others (Oswin, 2008). Gen X participants held a common worldview of queer assimilation, however female participants recalled feeling disempowered to reproduce this in the material and symbolic environment of Canal Street (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2021). Susan and Kate recalled how the origins of 'Gaychester' were tainted by the "pink pound of Canal Street", and with the rise of "body fascism" that followed, Canal Street only catered a specific subset of LGBTQ+. These participants expressed how within a year of Manto opening, Canal Street went from being their "mecca to go to" to a "monster".

This exclusion of 'non-normative' sexual identities is identified by Binnie & Skeggs (2004), who argue that this 'sanitisation of gay space', by means of excluding the 'queer unwanted' (Casey, 2017) to include and encourage more 'non-threatening gay identities', was part of a larger project to promote Manchester as a 'gay capital'. Manchester's Gay Village became configured around a 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2002) and queer subjects who found it difficult to adapt to these lifestyles, premised on a depoliticised queer culture anchored in consumption, were estranged from these sites.

Although such analyses acknowledge the polymorphic meanings of these demographic shifts (Ghaziani, 2014), as what is 'progressive' change for some is experienced as destructive for others, they fail to account for the plurality of queer geographies which can emerge from this exclusion. Taking an embodied, relational approach we are able to avoid reducing queer subjects to their marginality, noting how they are continually in the process of reproducing queer urban space (Nash, 2005).

This alternative queer geo-graphy manifested in the back rooms of Follies, a lesbian owned bar on Whitworth Street, where the first annual 'Homo Electric' was held in 1997.

This bar was intriguingly reminiscent of the mixed venues of the era prior, e.g. Dicken's, with phrases such as "back to the gutter" indicating how it sought to simulate the "old school gay culture" (Kate) which had been pushed to the margins by the expanse of The Gay Village.

Figure 10: Promotional material for the 2nd annual HomoElectric (2/4/1998)
Source: Manchester Digital Music Archive
Available at: https://www.mdmarchive.co.uk/artefact/5610/Kath-McDermott-Luke-Unabomber-Follies-Flyer-1998

"…it was so old school, it was rough as fuck and no, it wasn't a cool place to go, but we loved it." (Susan)

This night, defined in opposition to homonormative gaybourhood (Figure 10), demonstrates, once again, how a common worldview can enact vastly different spatial configurations. Unlike Flesh (at the Hacienda), HomoBloc (at Follies) appears to excavate the underground and unfiltered aesthetics associated with traditional gay pubs and re-situate them in a present context of increased tolerance towards LGBTQ+. Thus, whilst still underlined by a logic of 'us and them', the conduit to incite such reciprocal spatial inclusion was not via mainstream culture, but through a 'geography of uncool' which sought to filter the straight ally from the straight tourist, as well as the hedonistic queer from the radical. This narrative of the dominant/contiguous socio-physical unit of the gaybourhood failing to

express the desires of non-male identities is identified by Gieseking (2020), who notes how lesbians instead rely on ‘constellations’, an alternative urban imaginary contingent on temporary social networks, such as alternative nights, rather than fixed, commercial sites (Podmore, 2006; Valentine,1993).

Therefore, this multiplicity of competing and supplementary generational worldviews (re)configured Manchester’s gaybourhood in relation to its past. Given the non-linear, contested nature of gaybourhood change (Nash, 2006), affordances enacted through the emerging assimilationism of Gen X were not equitably experienced. Drawing on Coffin’s (2021) concept of ‘afterglows’, it appears lingering aspects of queer culture, e.g. associations with dirt and sexual depravity, can be displaced to mobilise a gaybourhood of mass appeal and/or excavated and harnessed politically to aid in the self-actualisation of those discontent with the constraining topologies of the dominant gaybourhood (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2021). To this end, through these inter/intra generational worldviews which leave their mark upon the queerscape, Manchester’s gaybourhood is rendered a site of ‘open-to-change becomings’, delimiting the trajectories of present and near-future generations who pass through it (Coffin, 2021).

4.5: Chapter 3. Gaybourhood as cityscape, queerness as passé? ('post-gay' era: late 2000s- present)

The socio-spatial dynamism of urban sexuality finds itself in a transitional stage towards a 'post-gay' era, with Generation Z coming of age at a time of "unprecedented social acceptance towards homosexuality" (Ghaziani, 2014: 6). In turn, young LGBTQ+ now have more open space to discuss their sexual and gender identity with friends and family, and with the rise of digital technologies, a broader means of expressing this (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). Scholars note that for LGBTQ+ members of this cohort, sexual identity is not as primary to one's identity as generations past, and thus they rely less on a coherent, territorial basis for self-expression (Nash, 2013).

Unlike previous generations who were more or less bound by common cultural and political values, e.g. the collective trauma of AIDS or Section 28, Gen Z are seeking sexually integrated lifestyles to align with their deeply personalised, internally divergent worldviews (Ghaziani, 2014). As Nash (2013) phrases it, young LGBTQ+ are not fighting for the 'right to be gay' but the 'right way to be gay'. Amidst this 'post-binary' era of sexuality (Hess, 2019), Gen Z appear to envision a queerscape in distinctly non-dichotomous terms. This is inflected in the similar way participants defined their sexual identity, e.g. as "unbounded", "unconventional", "something which rejects", or "an umbrella term". This translates to an imaginary of perceiving The Gay Village as one out of a host of options for sexual expression. For instance, participants expressed a lack of place-possession, as at no point was The Gay Village referred to as 'our' space or under any language of territoriality. Tom (19, Bisexual) noted the "importance of queer people having the option to express themselves differently" rather than being "enclosed in one space"- indicative of shift in the queer urban imaginary of 'us and them' to simply 'us'. Moreover, although The Gay Village was referred to as a 'safe space', participants explained that they could seek out alike people in other spaces they deemed queer e.g. online, university halls, alternative nights in straight bars, and, in turn expressed a lack of a *need* to belong in The Gay Village:

"Oh we're going to the Gay Village, that's gonna be fun, and there's the added factor that it's a safe space… it's not something I think proactively but it comes as part of it… they overlap (sexuality and enjoyment) so whilst there's kind of a sense of belonging, you can detach yourself from that belonging." (Ollie, Queer, 23)

“Now as a queer person, if you want to be yourself, you can arguably do it wherever.” (Tom)

“I don't think I want to offer it (The Gay Village) enough to feel a sense of belonging there.” (Liam, Gay, 20)

This lack of belonging does not indicate a ‘de-spatialised’ gaybourhood but rather an ‘ongoing re-spatialisation’ across the wider cityscape (Coffin, 2021; Bitterman, 2020). Ghaziani (2014) notes the importance of looking beyond the delimited boundaries of a gaybourhood to effectively trace changing LGBTQ+ topologies. The overall interpretation of LGBTQ+ urbanism for this cohort rested on an imaginary of Manchester as a “queer city”, with the Gay Village referred to as a “hub” from which this queerness spread. This imaginary, akin to the ‘mecca’ of the era prior but now able to “leak” into the surrounding peripheries, is indicative of how a queer politics based in visibility still lingers in the minds of young LGBTQ+ (Davis, 1995). Participants noted that despite The Gay Village being in the “background” of everyday life, and how they did not frequent it often, it was nevertheless important for establishing and emitting a “positive atmosphere” which allowed for one to “visibly see queerness in the [rest] of the city” (Lily, Bisexual, 19) (Figure 11). Chris referred to the Gay Village as a “stronghold of LGBT”, noting that whilst it has assimilated into the wider city, it has visually maintained its queer identity. He went on to explain how he valued this queer visuality present in Manchester as it inclined him to come out:

“Growing up in a city that has somewhere that is known as ‘The Gay Village’, having that sort of place in popular discourse and everyday language, I think produces a mindset of: yeah, that's fine, yeah, it's normal. It really helps sort of come to terms with it and accepting like naturalising difference in a way.” (Chris)

Although harassment towards LGBTQ+ has decreased, Gen Z are not immune from stigma. The history of the Gay Village thus affords a sense of psychic comfort for Gen Z, even in a world which is statistically safer (Bitterman, 2020). Participants referred to the gaybourhood’s “legendary queer scene”, “legacy”, and “rich history” of the gaybourhood, noting how its past granted them a sense of reassurance in daily life. This affordance of safety, therefore, is not necessarily contingent on Gen Z, as individuals, being seen, but more so the ‘appropriated memory’ (Manheim, 1927) of previous generations which is

witnessed in the everyday rhythms of urban life. One is represented in the city, and thus one feels seen by it:

"… obviously being queer here is great because we've got The Gay Village." (Alice (she/they), Bisexual, 23).

Figure 11: Indicators of the gaybourhood's semiotics within (left) as well as leaking beyond (right) the boundaries of Canal Street.
Source: Images taken by author (17/8/23)

Whilst true LGBTQ+ Gen Z have not undergone a shared form as struggle akin to their predecessors (Nash, 2013), there was a common thread throughout discussions that their right to the city was ever precarious. Participants referred to an underlying rise in the stigmatisation towards LGBTQ+ e.g. transphobia, attitudes towards drag queens, and the overall rise of right-wing ideologies. As such, many valued the gaybourhood for its potential to, as Ollie (23, Queer) put it, "garner togetherness almost when the community doesn't need to be together" due to its historical precedence of being the focus of queer politics.

To this end, Gen Z have (re)configured the gaybourhood such that it remains a social and symbolic space, but also now a psychological space in which queerness can endure

(Ghaziani, 2014). As a memorial to queer history, the production of this queer palimpsest is seen as complete, but its maintenance must be constant. For instance, participants emphasised the 'passive' occupation of queer bodies and how simply being one's authentic self within Canal Street was a form of protest or the need to contest commercialisation if it infringed upon the gaybourhood's visual regime. The former generations' worldviews, imbued within the urban memory of the gaybourhood (Coffin, 2021), thus serve as a basis around which the unprecedently divergent worldviews of Gen Z can converge, affording a quasi-collective worldview:

"It's a really important time in queer history and I think it's so important to reflect on now." (Ollie)

"We'll never understand the pain that (AIDS) had on the community… you know the recycling of homophobic views shows The Gay Village and other queer spaces are still so important." (Alice)

Bitterman & Hess (2021: 328) claim that younger generations of LGBTQ+, unaware of the challenges and struggles encountered by previous generations, may fail to grasp the importance of the gaybourhood for queer politics, sociality, and culture, and thus view it as a relic of the past. These findings trouble this notion, however, as the majority of Gen Z were aware of the history of The Gay Village, and in fact, this history was largely the reason they valued it as a queer space, perceiving it as a relic with a contemporary purpose:

"I think it's more like a celebratory space rather than an antagonistic space now. Like there is still consciousness that the space is grounded in antagonism, and we can very much rekindle that antagonism if necessary." (Chris)

This complements Coffin's (2021) research of Manchester's Gay Village which found that participants felt a desire to patronise this space but could not articulate why. Perhaps the past enactments of previous generations, which continue to produce intense affective qualities in the minds of young LGBTQ+, elicit a desire to keep lit the gaybourhood's afterimage for its political potential (ibid.).

4.6. Starting over?

This worldview is not solely configured around The Gay Village. Although all participants considered Canal Street a key queer space, many expressed ambivalences regarding whether it should be sustained as this hub of queerness or be superseded by emerging queer spaces elsewhere. A substantial sub-set of Gen Z participants expressed a contradictory twin impulse for integrated sexual lifestyles and more internally divergent sexual practices (Nash, 2013). Gen Z participants belonging to alternative and/or non-male identities, referred to the Northern Quarter, a "counter-cultural hub which is linked to queerness" (Poppy, 20, Bisexual) as a more "open" and "inclusive" queer space than that of The Gay Village. One participant emphasised the need to sustain these queer spaces beyond Canal Street, such as the café 'Feel Good Club':

"*Those* are the spaces that are so vitally important because they're gonna' attract allies of the queer community (1) it's a queer space that's been created by queer people, for queer people you know, that makes it more like authentic and more able to go to." (Alice)

This region is akin to 'Mile End' Podmore (2021) identifies as a 'cultural archipelago' (Ghaziani, 2019: 12) in Montreal. In Manchester, this region is contingent on nascent generational interpretations of LGBTQ+ urbanism: the rejection of communitarianism which has thus far configured the gaybourhood, but a continual desire for self-expression. Participants referred to this region as simultaneously 'alternative' and 'queer', noting how this co-constiution afforded a reliable safety not found in the homonormative Gay Village:

"There's places in the Northern Quarter that are specifically queer, you know, even though they're not, I don't know, it just, feels like a safer space because it's kind of more of an alternative space." (Poppy)

Participants appreciated the 'ambient community' (Brown-Saracino, 2011: 361) which formed here, noting how they could meet people across a range of genders and sexualities to form a sense of belonging and identity due to shared interest in alternative culture e.g. HomoBloc (a continuation of HomoElectric). The Northern Quarter appears to exist in productive tension (Podmore, 2021) with the Gay Village, as the queerness present here, whilst not as overtly dominant, was considered to be more attuned to the desires of LGBTQ+ than that of the "palatable" (Ollie) queerness found in Canal Street.

Unlike the previous era in which alternative queer spaces were contingent on the visible assertion of queerness, contemporary manifestations rely on a more ambiguous, blurred assertion of ‘hipster queerness’ (Podmore, 2021) in accordance with Gen Z’s post-binary worldview (Hess, 2019). Such spaces are thus rendered queer due to their affordance of both diverse and integratory sexual practices not granted by the dominant gaybourhood.

Therefore, although sexual identity is unprecedently unbounded for Gen Z, it is nevertheless configured in and through space (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017). Be this the more historically bound, visible Gay Village which provides the basis for Manchester to be felt as a queer city, or the more fluid, Northern Quarter and similar regions which are emerging. With the popularity of the Northern Quarter growing, and that of Canal Street’s dwindling (Coffin, 2021), such sites may foretell a spatial shift as to where the ‘hub’ of Manchester’s gaybourhood will soon (re)configure.

6. Conclusion

From fragmented sites of protection, to demarcated hubs of mobilisation, and atmospheres of comfort, Manchester's LGBTQ+ urbanism has (re)configured around a broad range of spatialities and imaginaries. This research has outlined the inherent instability of these reconfigurations, demonstrating the plural gaybourhood which emerges through the enactment of generational worldviews. This is indicative of how queerness is not an autonomous mode of experience, but constitutive of other axes of difference which are always more-than-sexual (Oswin, 2008). Due to this spatial heterogeneity, the gaybourhood is always open to the values, perceptions, and practices that new LGBTQ+ generations bring with them. A 'geography of looking back' is required to ascertain the antecedents of previous generations and how these delimit the inscription of nascent worldviews through their dissolution, replacement and/or maintenance.

These findings demonstrate how generational analysis is an illuminative method to understand how and why gaybourhoods change. However, I implore geographers to pay attention to how these generalised social subjectivities function in accordance with their geo-historical context (Soja, 1998). This grants an avenue to discern how the gaybourhood is an active recipient of generational change, as well as avoiding depictions of sexual urban subjectivities which are passive bearers of such urban variations. More situated studies of generational change could be cross compared with other cities, with their own geographies and histories, to analyse further this co-constitution of how worldviews shape and are shaped by the gaybourhood.

My methodological approach could be improved in two ways. Firstly, focus groups, conducted alongside interviews, would mean that individual discussions can be supplemented by competing viewpoints (Conradson, 2013). This enhances an understanding of the multivariate ways sexuality is used and thus deepens our conceptualisation of the inherent instability and perpetual motion of this urban form. Secondly, my research has made me aware of the importance of heterosexual space and identities in the constitution of LGBTQ+ lived experience. Therefore, the perspectives of heterosexual members of these cohorts would greatly support a more comprehensive understanding of gaybourhood change.

Finally, these findings have practical implications in the field of urban planning. As Ghaziani (2014: 32) asks: “Is it possible for new gayborhoods to emerge… will these look and feel different?” The answer to this appears to lie less so in broad demographic patterns and social trends, but in the embodied practices and attitudes of the next cohort of LGBTQ+, i.e. Generation Alpha, who will invariably shape future gaybourhoods’ form and function.

7:.Appendices

7.1: Appendix 1: List of anonymised participants by generational cohort

	'Name'	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation
Baby Boomer	Steve	68	he/him	Gay
	Dave	64	he/him	Gay
	Harry	64	he/him	Gay
Generation X	Kate	53	she/her	Lesbian
	Susan	53	she/her	Queer
	Michael	50	he/him	Gay
	Sam	56	he/him	Gay
Generation Z	Chris	21	he/him	Bisexual
	Alice	23	she/they	Bisexual
	Tom	19	he/him	Bisexual
	Morgan	20	he/him	Gay
	Lily	20	she/her	Bisexual
	Sarah	20	she/her	Lesbian
	Ollie	23	he/him	Queer

7.2: Appendix 2: Example of coded transcript

Harry: The gay scene itself has changed. Um, you felt, well, I felt in the early 80s, perhaps even when I first dipped my toe in the water.	
Yeah.	
Harry: **There was a frisson that, uh, you don't have now**. You felt that you were, um, **parallel to society**. You weren't really part of society.	Atmosphere Essentialist
In those places, you were, you were an adjunct (.) And there was a bit of a frisson about that **you felt you were different. A bit special in a way.**	Re-affirming difference
Yeah.	
Harry: Um, and when the odd straight person, uh, who walked into one of the gay pubs.	
Yeah.	
Harry: ***They* felt uncomfortable.** You could see that. And that made you feel different because it wasn't the other way around. You were going into a straight pub, feeling a bit. Like a fish out of water. **It was your pond**, so to speak.	Heterosexual/Gay
Yeah, I understand. Yeah.	Territoriality
Harry: So, yeah. And then it changed. In my view, **it changed for the worse.**	Shit in perception
Okay	
Harry: I'm speaking personally.	
Yeah, that's fine.	
Harry: Um, it changed when *Queer as Folk* was broadcast.	
Yeah, and that really **put the gay village on the map**. It had been put on the map because of the council adopting that strategy to develop it as a gay area. But it hadn't really worked in my opinion. And **it was *Queer as Folk* that put us on the map.**	Queer space representation
In a way which I didn't appreciate personally. Because you would go into a gay bar... You'd sit there with your partner, with your friends, and then a group of straight couples would walk in. They'd get their drink at the bar, go and sit down. And you'd look at them, and they were **sort of nudging each other with their elbows**, and said, have you seen that over there, look at that, and you felt they were **impinging on your space** and it became **less pleasant to be there** because you **were now a fish in a**	Heterosexual re-appropriation Discomfort

7.3: Appendix 3: Consent form for participants

Research project title: The gaybourhood never sleeps: Mapping the inter-generational (re)configurations of queer urban space (Manchester's Gay Village)

Research investigator [redacted] Researcher Institution: Durham University

Interview Consent Form

- Research Topic: Understanding how LGBTQ+ urban sexualities have changed over time by comparing the perspectives and lived experiences of Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generations Z LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Questions will regard participants' experience and perspective of Manchester's Gay Village. This will involve retracing key events in your life course as well as your own account of Manchester's queer landscape. The discussion will be predominantly focused on sexual identity, as well as other underlying identity axes e.g. age, ethnicity, class, gender. As such, triggering themes such as coming out, homophobia and physical/verbal assault are likely to be addressed in the interview. This interview will last around 1 hour.
- Participants have no obligation to answer all questions and can withdraw consent at any point in the research process. In this event, the interview, and accompanying data, will be terminated.
- All participants will be made anonymous at source and their data will be secured in a password-protected file on my computer that only I have access to. All data, both digital and any field notes, will be destroyed once the research process is complete. The interview will be recorded on the audio software on my mobile phone, this shall be transferred to a password protected file on my computer which is equipped with anti-virus mechanisms. This audio will be used to transcribe our conversation at a later point. This transcription will be secured in a password-protected file on my computer.
- The data will be used for my undergraduate dissertation research project, which is read by my dissertation advisor and further assessors at Durham University. All data used is anonymous, thus only I, the researcher, will have the knowledge as to which individual the data applies to, i.e. participant 1= their name, age and sexual orientation. Such data will be safely secured in a separate, password protected file. This research project may be published for wider audiences in the future.

Consent:

- I agree to participate in an interview carried out by [redacted] of the Durham University, to aid with the research of 'The gaybourhood never sleeps: Mapping the inter-generational (re)configurations of queer urban space (Manchester's Gay Village)'
- I have read the information sheet/summary related to the 'The gaybourhood never sleeps: Mapping the inter-generational (re)configurations of queer urban space (Manchester's Gay Village)',
- and understand the aims of the project.
- I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the interview.
- I am fully aware that my personal data will be kept confidential/ and that I have the right to leave the interview at any point.
- I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance GDPR and Durham University standards.
- I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question, but that I do so at my own free will.

Audio recording, Confidentiality & Anonymity

- I agree to have the interview recorded (audio), so it can be transcribed after the interview is held.
- I prefer to remain completely anonymous, and DO NOT consent to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: Participants name: Date:

If you have concerns about the research, or would like further information you can contact me at [redacted] or my academic advisor at: [redacted]

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