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ISN'T IT QUEER:
EXPLORING SPACES, PEOPLE AND
AESTHETICS OF THE QUEER CULTURAL
MOVEMENT

GRANT HOLMES

**ISN'T IT QUEER:
EXPLORING SPACES, PEOPLE AND AESTHETICS OF THE
QUEER CULTURAL MOVEMENT**

GRANT STEVEN HOLMES

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

The University of Huddersfield

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Abstract

This study explores and argues the theory that the queer cultural movement in the UK is a splinter from the gay movement as a result of gay integration through assimilation into the heteronorm. It describes the three key areas of space, people and aesthetics employed in two major centres of queer culture in the UK, London and Manchester. This research has been motivated by a need to document this culture and explore the issues effecting its development. It has findings relating to a number of research areas, including human geography, sociology, design, marketing and queer theory.

The approach taken is based strongly in ethnographic research, with results and observations drawn directly from the field and the people taking part in this movement. In order to lend context, topics surrounding the primary research subject have been explored and integrated, such as the effects of gentrification, cosmopolitanism, gay spacial development and heteronormative forces in relation to queer identity.

This study has found a strong argument can be made to define queer culture as a separate movement when compared with the gay movement in 2016. In London, queer spaces are developing following a model of gentrification, whereas in Manchester, this development is somewhat stifled by the effects of mainstream gay cultures assimilation into the heteronorm and widespread cosmopolitanism, with queer culture existing in smaller queer 'bubbles' that may not develop to the extent of the capitals queer spaces.

The study concludes by discussing the need for queer space in a modern society, as a safe space for queer expression and exploration, and how the queer movement will take on the role of a progressive generations gender and sexual identity movement, in place of the gay movement of the 1970's.

Keywords: queer, gender, identity, sexuality, heteronorm, futurism, nihilism, assimilation, integration, gentrification, cosmopolitanism, space, human geography, aesthetics, ethnography, culture, movement, sociology, design, marketing

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1.0 Introduction

Gender identity and sexuality are two of the most fundamental components of what makes us human. For as long as there has been research into the male and female psyche, there has been research documenting and exploring gender and sexuality. The topic is broad and nuanced, in a continually evolving state that requires ongoing research to track its development and implications for the people it effects, and society as a whole. Queer theory, exploring queerness by examining social constructs, feminism and perceived normative 'straightness', has been integral to multiple disciplines since its rise to prominence in academic circles during the early 1990's. This study hopes to build on the portrait of queer cultural thinking by addressing the current state of what is a growing and increasingly prominent queer movement, splintered from the primary LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) movement.

This movement, whilst unified in its goals for integration through queer expression, is at different stages of development across the UK, with a particular concentration and growth happening in London. The movement, which is an amalgamation of different cultures, ethnicities, genders and sexualities is growing in prominence and fuelled by, at present, an increasingly tolerant society wherein the exploration of gender and sexuality is becoming more accepted and commonplace. However, it still faces a challenge in developing itself in a largely homophobic and heteronormative mainstream society, which places great importance on the application of gender norms and roles, as well as 'acceptable' sexuality.

This study introduces an argument in regards to the current state of queerness and its expression in the UK, discussing its relationship with LGBT culture, the role of geography and space in its development and existence, the people who are participating in this movement, and its aesthetic manifestations. This research has been undertaken with an aim to providing a new entry in the academic history of queerness and what this looks like in 2016, with focus on the UK's two most prominent centres for LGBT activity, London and Manchester. Whilst there are other major centres for LGBT and queer activity, such as Brighton, Edinburgh and Liverpool, London and Manchester have been selected for their strong historical links to these activities as well as their large populations and contrasting styles of development, which will be discussed later in this study.

This ethnographic study has been broken down into a series of sections that deal with different aspects of the topic at hand, and two case studies that have been undertaken in order to establish new thinking in the field of queer expression in the UK.

Section 1 deals with the rationale behind this study, its aims, and the way in which the study has been conducted. It also discusses the definitions used in the study.

Section 2 is the first case study looking at queerness in London, the role of gentrification, key spaces, people and aesthetic conventions, as well as the way in which queerness relates to the gay community in the capital.

Section 3 is the second case study, conducted after London, in order to establish commonalities and differences between the two, as well as the way in which queerness is expressed in the North and Manchester. It also looks at gay integration through cosmopolitanisation and the role this plays in shaping the direction of queerness outside London.

Section 4 looks at the necessity of queer space, its future and the possibilities and suggestions for research advancement.

1.1 Rationale

This study has been envisaged and designed to address 4 core aims:

- 1) To explore the queer movement in the UK in 2016, documenting this diverse and unpredictable splinter of gay culture, describing its core elements of space, people and aesthetics.
- 2) To produce a comprehensive overview of this queer movement to inform further research and understanding in the creative industries and beyond, with material for use in publishing, creative arts, performance, political thinking and geography.
- 3) Collect firsthand insight into queer expression in the north and south, constructing a portrait of queer culture and its nuances.
- 4) To establish, if any, codes and conventions in the expressions of queerness, including aesthetics and its relationship with gay culture and the heteronorm.

The first aim is in response to the growing popularity and exposure of the queer movement in the United Kingdom and its relationship with gay culture. It has been broken down into the 3 key areas of space, people and aesthetics in order to lend clarity and structure to the research. This also enables a greater understanding to be drawn from the study, as it considers more than one angle from which to approach this broad topic.

The second aim has been established in order to lend easier access to the concepts and topic at hand, allowing further research and utilisation in a range of industries. This aim seeks to clarify what the queer movement is in sectors that may need to draw upon this research for business or

research purposes. It is also aimed at providing context for academic purposes, primarily in the creative arts, but also fields to which the topic may be pertinent.

Thirdly, this research aims to document the queer movement for future research context. Whilst by its very nature the topic of queer expression may develop far beyond the scope of this research, it is important to document for posterity what was occurring in this time period in regards to queer expression, and the thoughts and feelings of those in the clubs experiencing this lifestyle.

The fourth aim has been established in order to present the relationship the queer movement has with current thinking surrounding gay culture and how this fits into 2016 heteronormative society and its gender and sexuality conventions. The focus on aesthetics serves to illustrate how the queer movement is manifesting and presenting itself in the north and south, highlighting the key differences between two centres of queer importance.

1.2 Methodology Overview

The methodical process applied in this research has been designed to offer an overview of a rich and varied movement of people. Due to the nature of the topic being discussed, it is difficult to offer empirical evidence as this cannot be drawn from purely observational viewpoints, nor can it be drawn from the testimony of the people participating. Views expressed may be opinion and therefore cannot be assumed to reflect the thinking of the entire community. However, where themes are shared, they can be used to build a picture of common thinking and therefore used to build theory.

The use of secondary research to establish key literature has informed the direction of the research and lent context and theory to the topics being discussed over the course of this study. This literature has been gathered from a range of academic and non-academic sources in order to gather the fullest picture of current queer thinking and topics linked to the discussions arising from the study.

The ethnographic approach taken by this study seeks to place focus on the topic as one that is human and, as a result, diverse and changeable. By drawing from firsthand experience and immersion into the spaces and communities covered, better understanding can be drawn from observation, allowing for unbiased observations that cannot be drawn from formal interviews. Rather, informal interviews in the form of discussion with many people surrounding topics relevant to the overarching theme provide the insight needed. These people came from a range of backgrounds, and were selected through social interaction and conversation, in the spaces being discussed as a means of identifying common thinking and themes amongst them. They were

identified for their participation in queer activity, be it dress, socialising, performance or observation, and covered a broad range of sexual orientations, genders, ages and ethnicities, providing a rich demographic sample from which to draw research.

The utilisation of social media has also been key to this observation, allowing for insights that may not otherwise be available from firsthand observation and interaction. The study looks at the performance and expression of queerness, which are edited and considered portrayals in the same way a social media post may be. As such, they allow for a pertinent and relevant insight in the same way as direct observation. Whilst superficial, this study does not seek to understand the psychology of queerness, but rather its expression and direction.

The study has been framed by two case studies, one focusing on London and the queer scene in the capital, and a second comparative case study discussing the queer movement in the north of the UK in Manchester. These two cities have been selected for not only their geographical positioning and importance, demonstrating the 'north-south' divide, but also their rich and historical links to gay culture, which as will be discussed is core in the case of the queer movement.

Each case study has taken a slightly different methodology, the details and process of which are explained in greater detail at the start of each.

1.2.1 Research Ethics

The research area is one that arises ethical issues due to its intensely personal and human involvement. These people come from a community and demographic which may be considered at risk due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. As such, those linked to the research may potentially face issues arising from their participation. There are cases in which photography has been used in order to document findings. Given the research's operation in perceived 'safe' queer space, this may present an ethical issue to those who may be identified as a result of being captured in photos. As a result of the firsthand research being conducted, there has been a question of morality in approach as some may not have been initially aware they were being interviewed and researched, however, this has been addressed with full disclosure of intent and explanation of the purpose of the conversation early on in interactions.

Participants in interviews and photography may be members of the queer community and scene, and by extension may also be part of the LGBT community, or may not be part of either of these communities. Whilst not all of the participants may be overtly vulnerable, in some cases participants may not be able to publicly demonstrate their queerness or sexuality and therefore could be deemed at risk in the research. All interviewees will be made aware of the public access and publication details of the research to ensure this is not a concern for them individually. In order

to protect identity, names have been omitted from this study as have descriptions that may identify anyone personally.

1.2.2 Use of Literature

An expansive review of literature has brought about a breath of different sources that are pertinent to the research area. It has introduced theory and content from not only academic papers, but from news media, television and social media among others. This is testament to the ever changing nature of a currently developing culture, resulting in some content being outdated despite its relatively contemporary publishing. However, there are some key sources that have been employed in the study to inform thinking and to support the arguments presented throughout.

Perhaps the most famous of these sources is the work of Judith Butler, whose paper “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” has achieved widespread discussion and recognition in its contributions to queer theory and gender thinking. Butler coins the term ‘gender performativity’, and discusses how gender is nothing more than a construct that arises from culture and society at large, with these constructed gender roles then performed to society (Butler, 1988). Butler’s thinking is furthered by the work of Jacob Mallinson Bird, who is featured for having given a talk at a TEDx event in which he discusses Butler’s work and how the act of queer dressing (Mallinson Bird is himself a drag performer) allows for the transgression of gender roles.

Given Butler’s assertion that gender is not fixed but merely a performance, Mallinson Bird then discusses the way in which queer culture is all-encompassing, with a spectrum of genders and sexualities all able to take part without repercussions for their identified gender or mainstream identity. He goes on to discuss the use of heteronormative spaces as harbours of homophobia and bigotry, indicating that this is transgressed by queer space, and exploring the role of traditionally ‘straight’ venues as queer spaces in London.

Interestingly, Mallinson Bird points towards two avenues of queer thinking, one of a nihilistic lifestyle, and the other of what he describes as queer futurism, which seeks to use the queer lifestyle as a tool for integration through acceptance, not a reactionary affront to the heteronorm in the way a queer nihilist lifestyle may be (TEDx Talks, 2015). However, it must be noted that the two may exist together side by side, and in queer space often do.

Contrasting with the queer development model set out by Mallinson Bird is the gay assimilation theory discussed by Natalie Oswin in her paper ‘Critical Geographies and the Uses of Sexuality: Deconstructing Queer Space’, in which she points to a two tier gay society in which there are

mainstreamed gay people who are assimilated into the wider heteronorm through heteronormative behaviour, implying an opposite component who do not wish to assimilate in this way. She uses the term “homomascularity” to describe this phenomenon. However she also suggests in the paper that queer space, distinct from LGBT space, transgresses heteronormative culture and transcends gender (Oswin, 2008), in keeping with the argument presented by Butler and Mallinson Bird.

Furthering the emerging argument that a secondary gay culture and movement may have formed is the work of Fiona Buckland, whose work ‘Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making’ points to an alternative gay movement, and goes on to discuss how the club scene of New York was a place of expression and imagination, free from the gender and sexual constraints of the heteronorm. She proposes that the aesthetic and social conventions of the queer movement are a result of its need to be visible in order to achieve integration and visibility as a minority. She muses on the use of club space as a venue for story telling and gender exploration, as a canvas on which queer people can express various performances of gender and sexuality in a safe space (Buckland, 2002).

Central to the arguments made in this research are the collective works of Jon Binnie, Beverley Skeggs, Leslie Moran, Paul Tyrer, David Bell and Karen Corteen, who have in a range of papers worked together exploring issues relating to queer space, cosmopolitanism and urban studies. These papers have a focus on Manchester, yet their content is applicable to queer communities at large. Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer and Corteen discuss the need for queer space in their paper ‘The Formation of Fear in Gay Space: The ‘Straights’ Story’. The paper discusses the necessity of gay space for safe sexual expression, whilst also referencing the process by which gentrification has led to straight people using the space, distilling its gayness. The paper highlights the importance of geography in queer culture and space, and demonstrates the way in which heteronormative mainstreaming can have a negative effect on the queer movement as a result of gay assimilation (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003).

However, in another paper entitled ‘Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance’ Bell and Binnie point out that some queer spaces can be said to have been ‘homonormified’, exploited by their respective cities as tools for tourism and promotion of an urban ideal. However they also acknowledge that this process may drive queer non-assimilated people underground and further from visibility in the heteronorm, such is their perception as being opposed to the acceptable face of gay culture. The pair make the argument that gay communities, and by extension queer communities, lead gentrification and have been responsible for redevelopment in many major cities with gay spaces, as a result of the perceived sophistication

and cosmopolitan vibe that they in turn generate, which leads to increased desirability in those areas (Bell & Binnie, 2004).

Furthering the discussion on the role of gentrification and cosmopolitanisation in queer space, Binnie teams up with Skeggs in their paper 'Cosmopolitan Knowledge and the Production and Consumption of Sexualised Space: Manchester's Gay Village'. They explore The Village as a destination for straight women, and how cosmopolitanism is a currency for The Village to maintain its existence in a heteronormative mainstream. This is a balancing act, with The Village relying on the economy of mainstreaming to attract a straight audience, but having to maintain enough authentic gayness to create its cosmopolitan vibrancy. In this way, gayness is a commodity, in a bizarre reversal of the heteronormative expectations of gay space as sexualised and taboo areas (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004).

In another collaborative paper, Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer and Binnie demonstrate the perceptions of gay space in the mainstream by contextually framing the gay village of Manchester through its appearance on the hit channel 4 show 'Queer As Folk' (T Davies, Harding, Huda, & McDougall, 1999). They use this reference to point out the similarities between The Village's portrayal on the show and in real life (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004).

Together these papers establish the perceptions of queer space in the mainstream, as well as the gay community. They collaboratively explore the role of gentrification and the effect this has had on Manchester specifically, resulting in a two tier gay scene as theorised by Natalie Oswin.

It is important to note that whilst these key academic references are instrumental to the research and arguments made in this paper, they only form a fraction of the total literature used over the course of the thesis.

This paper draws on these other references and texts throughout, in an extended literature review woven through the thesis and its key points and arguments.

1.3 Defining Queer And The Queer Cultural Movement

Before exploring the queer movement itself, it is first important to understand what is meant by the term 'queer' and who this is referring to. There has in recent times been a rise in the number of instances within the media and the wider population of references to LGBT people as queer, which is an accurate and acceptable description given its use as an umbrella term for all sexualities and genders beyond heterosexual (attracted to the opposite gender) and cisgendered (gender corresponds to their assigned sex at birth). It is important to clarify that in the context of the queer movement and this study, that gay culture and the queer movement are two separate concepts, sharing many of the same participant principles. However the term queer, for the sake of this study and clarity, is referred to as meaning the movement and people associated with it.

The overlapping tropes of queer culture and the movement discussed in this study arise from its roots in gay culture. As such, much of what is present in gay culture can also be seen in queer cultural spaces, with the distinctions being drawn upon further in this study. This study argues the case that until a point, gay culture and queer culture were one of the same, but having now reached a split, a distinction can be drawn between the two as the queer movement takes its own direction separate from the perceived direction of gay culture, itself continually developing and causing a need for a separate movement to form in order to cater to the needs and desires of a portion of its participants, the likes of which will be explored in the course of the two case studies in London and Manchester.

The use of the term queer itself is a statement about the type of people and culture it is being used to define, given the word 'queer' is a somewhat reclaimed word in the vein of 'faggot', used by some in gay community in reference to themselves and others. Frequently used as a derogatory term, the word queer has now been reclaimed and disarmed of its offensive mechanism to be utilised in the community itself.

Queer

1. Strange; odd

2. Informal, often offensive (Of a person) homosexual.

2.1 Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms:

'queer geek culture has featured gay themes since the 1980s'

'nightclubs have traditionally been a space where queer people, trans women in particular, can explore gender with relative safety' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016)

The definition and etymology of queer as a term demonstrates in itself the split that is now taking place, with the Oxford Dictionary now acknowledging that queer, as opposed to simply a term for gay people, is now a term to refer to culture which does not comply with “established ideas of sexuality and gender” as they are defined by the mainstream heteronormative society in which we live.

Herein lies the key distinction and cause for the movement away from the direction of gay culture, which is likened increasingly to heterosexual culture and can be described as assimilationist to the heteronorm rather integrationist, due to the ever more tolerant society in which gay people can now participate in to a greater extent than ever before. The queer movement has been sparked by those who do not desire to be assimilated into the heteronorm, but rather express and celebrate their sexual and gender identity differences. As such, the use of queer in the heteronorm is in fact an accurate description of these people in the mainstream context, and therefore it has been embraced and adopted as the term of choice to describe this movement of people and their culture.

Confusion can arise because of the multiple uses of queer by people who from a heteronormative viewpoint may appear to be the same. For example, the use of queer as a term to refer to other homosexual men in the gay community, could lead to confusion about which group they are referring to, although both are accurate uses of a reclaimed word. Therefore the term queer is context dependent and in the case of this study it is used to refer to the movement and people who align away from the direction of gay culture.

Queer can also be described as a placeholder term. Not all who were involved in this research use queer to define the group being discussed, although in the majority of cases this was the term used. This demonstrates that 'queer' is subjective and the term used to describe the group may change over time as this movement develops. In the case of this study, for clarity of discussion, where others may have elected to use another term, the word queer has been used to

demonstrate that it is in reference to the same people. Where the term gay is used, it is used to refer to gay culture and people specifically who may not align with queer culture, although as previously stated, the two do often overlap.

Secondly, the use of the term movement must be explored and justified in relation to queerness and gay culture. This study goes on to discuss and explore queerness and how it is most frequently performed and expressed in club, music and nightlife settings. Throughout history, previous movements have been referred to as such for their similar links, with examples including the punk movement and the new romantic movement. Given this way of defining these cultures, the term movement can realistically and justifiably be applied to queerness as a splinter from gay culture, with clubbing and nightlife acting as the windows through which expression is observed. The links to clubbing and nightlife are corresponding with the values expressed within the queer movement itself, with these activities exemplifying modern debauchery, but expressed and performed in a way which has a total disregard for the heteronormative perception of what a club should be.

To surmise for clarity in the context of this study:

The queer movement is a splinter movement away from the perceived assimilation of gay culture. It seeks to allow expression of gender and sexual identity through performance, socialisation and expression most commonly in a club and nightlife setting. The queer movement is welcoming and open to people of all genders and sexualities, including straight and cisgendered, but still heavily aligns with LGBT people and the associations of gay culture and aesthetics in the heteronorm. It places great prominence in celebration of differences in gender and sexuality and promotes self acceptance in order to achieve integration of queer people in modern society.

There will no doubt be people who do not agree fully with this definition, which by its very nature seems at odds with a group that seeks not to be definable, but ever changing and exploring. It is not intended to ring fence this group or shut down discussion of what it may mean and develop into, but rather to act as a contextual tool for the discussions in this study.

The terms 'heteronorm', 'heteronormative' and 'straight culture' are used throughout this study with the intention of identifying the world in general, wherein straight, cisgendered individuals make up the vast majority of the society we live in and as a result have had the power to forge conventions and societal rules. It is this which queer culture presents a challenge to.



Figure 1 - Image: Own Work

2.0 Queer London

2.1 Introduction And Background To the London Case Study

In order to establish the current portrait of queer culture across the United Kingdom in 2016, two comparative case studies have been undertaken. The first of these focuses on London, and examines queer spaces across the capital, such as bars, clubs and geographical zones, as well as the key aspects of people and aesthetics. London has been identified as a key city for study due to its size, historic multiculturalism and economic centrality in the UK.

In its capacity as the capital city of the United Kingdom, London maintains a thriving and expansive queer community. Contradicting the paradigm of other countries and their multiple core cities, London acts as the singular core UK city for culture, population and economic contribution, accounting for £564 billion (17%) of the UK's total gross domestic product (UNCSBRP, 2015). Due to its swollen population, the number of queer individuals living inside the capital exceeds the other major cities in the union, with Chalabi musing that "The percentage of Britons saying they're gay, lesbian or bisexual is far higher in London than anywhere else in the UK - 2.5% compared to just 1.1% in Northern Ireland and 1% in the East of England" (Chalabi, 2016). However, it must be considered that these percentages only account for those willing to submit their orientation to the research, and therefore it is reasonable to assume there is a greater percentage than presented in these statistics.

Whilst Soho is widely accepted as being the central 'gay village' of the capital, it has only existed openly as such for the last few decades, with the surrounding West End of London having historical gay spaces reaching back some 300 years, a result of its popular Turkish baths and 'Molly houses' (QX Magazine, 2006).

London serves as the most prominent example in the UK of queer spaces not only due to its size, but also for its multiculturalism and role as arguably the world's most varied cultural melting pot (Porter, 1994). As a result of this, different subcultures and minorities are more pronounced and freely accepted in the capital, with a core theme of interview responses to this case study indicating a more tolerant environment within the capital for expression. This case study will examine this in more detail, drawing on firsthand experience to establish a clearer understanding of the current queer scene in London.

2.2 London Case Study Methodology

Through the utilisation of ethnographic research techniques, coupled with responses from queer individuals, a substantial firsthand contribution can be made to identifying key spaces, roles and aesthetic conventions within the queer world. As a result of this, the study will frame current queer life in the capital, exploring its common themes and aesthetics, the types of personality that may be expressed and where these queer expressions are portrayed.

As part of the research effort in London, two weeks were spent in the capital over December 2015. This fortnight included informal interviews, firsthand experience of queer spaces and partaking in the cultural conventions associated with it. The interviews conducted were informally structured with a free flowing discourse to allow for thoughts and ideas to be expressed freely. This informed the research areas for this study, and provided a clearer map of the key areas and spaces to be further investigated. Cross referenced with existing literature surrounding the current state of the topic and its history, this case study has led to findings that are pertinent to a range of subjects and inform the current state of this culture in 2016.

This individual case study will contribute to the wider field of study by lending context to the other case study conducted, informing the focus and allowing for a more structured investigation in order to cross reference the topics and findings from each. This proto-research method is necessary when investigating a shifting and to a great extent visible culture, with very little literature relating to its modern form, which differs somewhat from the investigations found in literature published thus far.

The case study has been broken down into three key areas as a result of the findings and for their historical ties to each other, in order to lend clarity and structure to the topic and its at times complex relationships and nuances. These findings are discussed in depth in each section, with reference to other practitioner's findings and to the methods of research undertaken to establish the key points.

In order to establish the space of London's queer scene it is first required to establish its historical origins and provide a context for the current spaces and their roles in the timeline of queer culture in the capital. From this, the case study looks at the spaces, people and aesthetics of the culture.

2.3 Historical Origins: Space, New Romanticism and The Club Kids

The origins of modern queer culture in the capital can be traced to fashion movements occurring in the 70's and 80's, at a time when the gay community was still relatively underground, and outwardly transgressing fashion norms was rare and frowned upon by society at large. In his club fashion report 'New Club Kids', Oggy Yordanov utilises his firsthand experience of the London club scene to map club space for dressing up in London during the 'noughties', but also offers insight into the origins of these spaces by discussing the roots of club kid style and behaviour from the 80's onward. Yordanov points to 'Bowie Night', a "small gathering at Billy's in Soho" (Yordanov, 2011) as one of the originators of the the New Romantics and their style. New Romanticism hinged on the idea of shock and transgression of Punk aesthetics, with which its party-goers had become bored. At Blitz Club in Covent Garden, a spiritual successor to 'Bowie Night' at Billy's started by Steve Strange of Visage, "Outrage secured entry" (Johnson, 2015). Yordanov explains how the patrons of these club nights "drew inspiration from the unlikeliest of places and would go to extraordinary lengths to look different, anything to stay ahead of the pack" (Yordanov, 2011) demonstrating the aesthetic 'all or nothing' nature shared by modern day queer performers and personalities in London.

Taboo, the club opened by prominent and enduring influencer Leigh Bowery in 1985, again served to promote and provide a space for gender and creative expression, regardless of assigned gender, sexuality or social standing. Taboo, and the club kid movement which was by now becoming more and more prominent in the press and fashion, was a spacial incarnation of Bowery himself, to this day arguably one of the most important figures in queer history, his aesthetic and lifestyle "radically challenging the boundaries between figure, gender, fashion, beauty and art" (Yordanov, 2011), the very essence of queer culture and aesthetics in 2016.

These clubs and club nights endured into the 90's, with Soho still the focal point of London's queer scene. By 2003, spaces such as Kashpoint and Nag Nag Nag were becoming the new haunts of the bohemian image makers. Yordanov also points out that at the same time in the early 'noughties', a club called Act Art opened up "focussing on live performances merging art, fashion, pop and club culture" (Yordanov, 2011). Act Art persists in 2016, a space in which anyone is encouraged to "show experimental, underground, radical pieces and work that we think has something to say, be it political, confrontational, beautiful, ugly or simply a spectacle." (Act Art, 2016), exemplifying the ethos of queer culture and space, something which Yordanov identifies by stating it was a space which can "challenge creativity and make people feel like they belonged" (Yordanov, 2011).

By the mid and late 'noughties' the shift away from Soho, due to the effects of gentrification in the area, had shifted clubs to various locations across the capital. Boombox, held on Sundays at Hoxton Bar and Kitchen in the East End, gained notoriety as a favourite of fashion designers who were yet to make their mark, and of the fashion elite (Porter, 2007). This kickstarted a shift in fashionable club spaces in the East End, at a time when Shoreditch was pre-gentrified, eventually spilling into the neighbouring areas of Haggerston, Dalston and Bethnal Green, current centres for queer club nights and expression outside of Soho.

The history and roots of queer culture in London show a clear link between the people, spaces and styles which were used as vocabulary to project creative expression. What follows explores the current state of these elements across the capital in 2016.

2.4 Spaces

2.4.1 Queer Geography of London

The capital's queer geography has developed in a fractured way as a result of the gentrification and 'pricing out' of gay spaces in Soho, the historic gay centre of London. As such, areas of the city considered at one stage to be less desirable are home to some of the key spaces and residents. This process is an extension of the commonly recognised paradigm of bohemian cultures attaching to neighbourhoods that over time, and through their own gentrified processes, become desirable and as a result, 'price-out' the cultures that bring the desirability originally.

This cyclical process is ongoing, but in the time-frame of this study, the areas identified as being popular among queer subjects are a mix of both gentrified districts and districts currently experiencing this process. In his article for the Guardian from January 2016, O'Sullivan surmises this by stating "Their very presence in these areas, however, has allegedly transformed them, accelerating gentrification – and in turn pricing them out" in reference to LGBT people in gentrification 'hot spots' (O'Sullivan, 2016).

From the research, the fracturing of queer space across London can be seen as dividing into three areas; south of the river in Vauxhall, centrally in spaces scattered through Soho, and eastward, into the neighbouring boroughs such as Dalston, Haggerston and Bethnal Green. Camden represents a previously popular borough for queer expression, although through the closure of the historic and popular venue The Black Cap in a controversial move in April 2015, it has seen a decline in prominence as a queer space, although remains popular with the gay community at large. This is a case not uncommon in London, with an estimation from China Daily in September 2015 stating that one quarter of the capital's gay bars have now closed as a result of the property market boom and the price hike in London real estate (Abbas, 2015).

These identified areas are generally located beside previously accessible areas which in recent times have seen an exponential rise in property value, such as Vauxhall and its relatively central location near Soho, and in Dalston, Haggerston and Bethnal Green neighbouring Shoreditch. This is further example of how the gentrification process contributes to defining the capital's queer spaces, as a result of economic factors beyond the control of the people (see 2.5) creating the queer world.

In conversation with patrons of queer venues in the capital, the issue of multiculturalism in London arose as one of the key factors in defining queer space. This multicultural funnelling effect arises as a result of respect and concern for personal safety within the confines of minority space. One of

the interviewees, who was partying with friends at The Glory, proposed that as a minority itself, he felt it was disrespectful for queer identity to affront other minority areas, whether they be religious or ethnic. He offered up the example of Brick Lane in the East End as a space he would feel uncomfortable portraying an overtly queer identity in, out of respect for the minority groups, but also for his own personal safety, such as his worry of backlash if his queerness was seen as an affront. This results in a multicultural geographic 'turf war', whereby spaces are not only defined by economic factors, but social and cultural boundaries.

2.4.2 Heteronormative Transgression

Research revealed that a unifying feature of key queer spaces was their tendency to be staged in pubs and similar venues, spaces that would most likely be considered heteronormative in the wider context of social spaces in the UK. In his 2015 TEDxCourtauldInstitute discussion, Jacob Mallinson Bird suggests that one of the key drivers behind this phenomenon is part of the queer world's continuing transgression of the heteronormative, with pubs being held up in mainstream culture as footholds of heteronormativity and therefore harbours of homophobia, either consciously or through unconscious projection. As a result, queering these spaces creates an affront to the paradigms of mainstream heteronormative spaces. Examples of this queering can be found within the key queer areas of the city. The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, numerous Soho venues, Bethnal Green Working Men's Club and The Glory, all the most commonly identified in research as "queer venues", are examples of queered spaces that have transgressed the heteronormative pub trope.

One notable exception to this comes in the form of Dalston Superstore, along Great Cambridge Road A10. The venue is notable for being in situ at a former 'greasy spoon' cafe, from which the interior design is also derived alongside the queered space. Similarly so to pubs, it is arguable that this is representative of the same heteronormative queering, resulting in a blended space that is reminiscent of the other spaces discussed in this research.

2.4.3 The Role Of Gentrification In London

As of 2016, the issue of widespread gentrification in London has become and continues to be one of the capital's key issues of concern. The pricing out of 'ordinary Londoners' in order to make way for redevelopment of areas that were once considered undesirable has gained momentum after briefly stalling during the The Great Recession. As a result, minority spaces such as gay bars, and by extension, queer spaces, have been priced out of their formative locations in the capital, the most notable example of which is Soho, which has seen property prices increase by as much as +522% from 1995 - 2015 (home.co.uk, 2016).

The particular effect of gentrification on Soho and its nightlife, which is often cited as instrumental to the queer movement and cultural movements at large, was recently discussed in *The Guardian*, using the case of *The Wag* nightclub as an example of homogenisation distilling the expressions of queerness in Soho. Sullivan writes “As the march of gentrification and greed transforms London – as well as many of the UK’s other inner cities – one great British institution that has fallen foul has been the nightlife business. In London, the area that has suffered the most is Soho. Once a naughty, massively inspiring little Petri dish from which the likes of David Bowie, the Sex Pistols, Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud emerged, it is being rapidly reshaped into something resembling a homogenised shopping mall” and goes on to state that “Today, not only would I not be able to run a West End club, I wouldn’t even be able to hang out in Soho, because landlords and developers have priced the young and not-so-well-off out of inner London” (Sullivan, 2016) demonstrating the difficult circumstances in which spaces for expression must now fight to exist within.

The gentrification of areas is a response to the growing demand for luxury accommodation in the capital, with areas of decline harbouring what is perceived as desirable space. An exemplary case of this process in action can be seen in the form of *The Yard Bar*, situated on Rupert Street in Soho. The venue has been fighting continued attempts from its landlord to gain planning permission for redevelopment above the site, eradicating the eponymous “Yard”, in order to create a number of luxury flats (Duffy, 2015). Whilst not a specifically identified queer space, *The Yard* demonstrates a similar battle which has in recent times faced many of the venues both queer and mainstream across the capital, particularly in areas that were once seen as undesirable or ‘bohemian’. In a 2015 *Independent* article, which muses on the connection between the gay culture and the roots of bohemian fringe living, Foufas quotes openly gay artist David Hockney lamenting the loss of this bohemian lifestyle as a symptom of both gentrification and as a result of wider acceptance of gay people in mainstream society, alleviating a need for gay space. His comments also point to the researches’ identified ‘priced out’ areas, with Foufas musing that “in London the gentrification of areas like Soho, Brixton and Shoreditch is pricing out creative individuals and businesses” (Foufas, 2015). As a result, alongside other creative individuals and businesses that maintain the increasingly redundant bohemian lifestyle, queer spaces and creators have taken to the currently less desirable, yet still central, areas of the capital.

However it is of note that queer space has to an extent benefitted from the process of gentrification, driving the very basis of the reflection and transgression of mainstream culture upon which many of its tropes and ethos is built. In discussion of London’s drag scene, Al-Kadhi writes in *i-D* magazine that “London drag is inherently about performance” and that it harbours “the sense of an alternative cultural model to Capitalist success” (Al-Kadhi, 2016), indicative of the widespread

gentrification and capitalisation of London's minority and queer spaces, as well as pertaining to the function of these spaces in a modern city.

Queer performers have also taken gentrification into account in their performances, with one notable example that of Jonny Woo in April 2016 at his 'East London Lecture', in which he bid "farewell to the city he loved with this performance piece about the gentrification of the East End" (TimeOut London, 2016)

It was also reflected in research responses that if queer identity is introduced into a non-queer space, the space is then not said to have become queer, with a general view that the space is being queered, as opposed to intrinsically queer as a result of presence there. It is therefore important to note that whilst there are commonly identified spaces for queer expression in the capital, the list is not exhaustive and consists also of spaces in which queer presence is said to be queering the heteronorm.

This amplifies the argument being made that queerness is a movement separate from mainstream gay culture, and is following a pattern of disruption to the mainstream that has been a feature of cultural movements previously, with gentrification among its driving factors.

2.4.4 Spacial Uses

Establishing the uses of queer space is integral to understanding the enduring popularity and continued development of new queer venues in the capital and beyond. Commonly, the primarily identified queer spaces across London are venues in which to dance, drink and socialise, no different to heteronormative club space. However, queer spaces are also utilised by the queer community as a space for expression in ways that cannot commonly be performed in heteronormative space, for reasons of safety, respect and lack of queer companionship.

A uniting feature of queer space in London is the use of the cabaret bar format. Al-Kadhi makes the case that London's queer scene is geared toward performance space, using drag as a trope of queer space to exemplify that "London drag is about performance". The focus on the importance of performance space is underlined with the presence of stage areas in these venues, whether this be professional staging or the use of unconventional platforms, such as the bar itself in the case of Dalston Superstore. Again referring to the drag element of queer space, Al-Kadhi makes the point that, in London, "our most prized drag establishments are not nightclubs, but venues with stages" (Al-Kadhi, 2016). This performing is also evidenced in the way in which mainstream media describes the scenesters of queer space, such as London Live's 'Drag Queens of London' referring to them as "*performers* from London's drag scene" (Farber, 2014).

Queer space is essential to queer expression, in that it provides an outlet for creativity and social interaction with other queer entities. This was reflected in the answers of interviewees, who stated that their expression was not limited to queer space, but that those spaces did provide a safer environment in which to produce performances of gender and sexuality in a creative way, which may otherwise be viewed as an affront in heteronormative space. This expression with a 'safety-net' is exemplified by Buckland, who used the experiences of a gay man named Stephen to state that "fabulousness was a process of storytelling - a fabrication, a place where many different stories were performed through self-fashioning and celebrated for the richness of their diversity and the power of their commonalities." (Buckland, 2002)

These spaces are essential to the fabric of the queer world in London and beyond. They exist as bastions of queer culture, providing an answer to the question of queer's place in modern heteronormative society. Queer spaces provide a safe and open platform for queer expression, whereby the heteronorm is rejected and transgressed in order to establish a new homonormative state in which queer personalities and performances can fully inhabit and explore without inhibition of mainstream convention. Therefore, the very queer culture which inhabits and creates these spaces could not extend and thrive as it has without the queer venue.

As the heteronormative man is able to express his identity on the stage of his everyday life, because it is the accepted mainstream form of expression, the queer individual must fight for and seek out space in which to forge a queer expression, which could otherwise be an affront to the mainstream space in which he lives day to day.

2.4.5 Gay Space Vs. Queer Space

Central to the definition of queer space is the ongoing argument about what it is and what constitutes it as queer as opposed to gay or otherwise. The research carried out in London has identified that this is largely down to opinion and perception of the patrons of those spaces. In the slightly more formal setting of a coffee shop in Shoreditch, one young queer man who had agreed to a more lengthy discussion after an initial meeting the day before testified that he believed gay spaces are distinct and often lie in geographically gentrified areas, such as Soho and Vauxhall, with occasional cross over as this process continues. When probed as to what he felt was the key difference between the two spaces, he identified that "In Soho it's a lot more bar-y a lot more commercial. A lot more "RuPaul" dare I say. It's more "white-cis-het" (white-cisgendered-heteronormative), demonstrating the commercialisation and mainstreamed direction of the gay community, something which Panti Bliss, the Irish drag queen, eludes to in her biography 'A Woman In The Making' stating "(The 'New Gay') rejected it (queerness and gay expression) as an

identity because assimilation, not revolution, was the New Gay's dreary goal" (O'Neill, 2014). This identifies the difference between not only queer and gay spaces, but between gay and queer communities as a whole, having their ultimate goals for acceptance in heteronormative society achieved in two different ways, with gay culture assimilating and mainstreaming to achieve blending, and queer culture seeking to extend the definition of what is accepted through visibility and expression of gender and sexuality.

The continuing trend of gay culture toward a 'straighter-mainstream' identity is discussed in the November 2015 issue of Attitude magazine by columnist Joe Stone, who comments on the way in which gayness is now seemingly more accepted and prevalent in mainstream society, stating that "Increasingly, it seems that gay and straight cultures are merging. For proof, look no further than your Aunty Joy, who can't get enough of Drag Race (every other word is 'gurl'), or the fact that so many queer-ish club nights are attracting a mixed crowd" (Stone, 2015). This observation is widely acknowledged as generally positive to the gay cause, yet does not account for the minority within a minority that wish to express their gender and sexuality in a different way to that of the mainstream. From this, the queer movement takes root.

2.5 People

Over the course of the research into London's queer spaces, the great variety and number of queer people and their interactions with queer spaces became apparent. Because of this great variety and eternally evolving interaction, it is extremely difficult to categorise the queer culture into subcultures. However, this research does suggest definitions for the types of role these people commonly play, whilst interacting with queer space and other queer entities.

2.5.1 London Scenesters

The study in London identified three widely identifiable subcultures within the queer social sphere. Of the three, often the most visible and lauded were the queer scenesters. A scenester is a person often associated with a fashionable scene and is often entirely immersed and integrated into it. In queer space, this is taken one step further, with the use of scenester personalities used to promote and glue together the fabric of queer events and spaces across London. The scenester is also often used as reference material for the wider queer community, and many of these personalities have transitioned into gay and even mainstream recognition. One patron identified this use of reference when they stated that "(In queer space) It is accepted and encouraged if you want to do that (look unpolished), but it's also accepted if you want to look like you sniff glue, or you wanna look like Cheddar Gorgeous" framing his observations of the "glue sniffing" aesthetic with reference to Cheddar Gorgeous, a drag personality recognised for their high theatre acid-aesthetic drag, whose base is predominantly centred around Manchester, but whose utilisation of social media and recognition in the queer community has led to a nationwide and even international following. Further evidence of queer scenester transition into heteronormative space can be seen in the case of Chrissy Darling, a scenester whose association with queer and club culture led to his appearance as part of the Club Town Freaks on mainstream entertainment variety show 'Britain's Got Talent' in 2013 (Britain's Got Talent, 2013).

Scenesters in queer space are particularly notable for their great variety of aesthetics, ranging from polished 'fem-real' drag queens, such as DJ and drag hostess Jodie Harsh, to the theatre performance double act Bourgeois & Maurice. Whilst there is a majority of male queer scenesters in London, there is a reasonably sized portion of female performers, as a result of queer social acceptance afforded to all genders and sexualities. A performer's biological birth gender is largely negligible when looking to these subcultures, as a result of the queer convention of gender expression and self-determination in identity.

Summarily, it can be said that scenesters are micro-celebrities within the queer scene, often amassing followers across social media, utilising their influence to promote and propel the queer

scene forward, whilst simultaneously using it to express and perform their own gender and sexuality.

2.5.2 London Patrons

As a result of queer space as a place for expression, those comfortable with queer performance seeking an outlet for their gender and sexuality may be defined under the patrons subgroup. Whilst not achieving the exposure of the micro-celebrity scenester, patrons broadly follow the same conventions, frequenting club nights and queer spaces without garnering the ‘fame’ scenesters attract. However, it is of note that the scenester was at some point in their queer performance lifecycle a patron, without which they would not have gained exposure and notability.

The degree to which patrons perform and express their queerness varies greatly, with some over the course of the research being observed in regular everyday dress with subverted accents (such as a male wearing heels with otherwise typical heteronormative dress style). In this way it may be viewed as a transitional stage where experimentation with dress and performance allows for expression of ideas and arrival at an aesthetic the individual is comfortable to portray.

Recalling the gay man mentioned previously who was interviewed at greater length in a coffee shop. He is identifiable as a patron from his frequenting of queer spaces and events, but also from his continued experimentation with dress and performance. As a result of this, patrons also highlight the importance of socialising in the queer sphere in order to build smaller groups of patrons who will interact with the scene together as a unit, with one young gay man who was in drag dress at Dalston Superstore with friends referencing his “group” when discussing his aesthetic, and how their individual styles vary greatly from his own use of drag, something which Buckland recalls stating “In many cases I have experienced, people gathered at one persons home and preparation became an integral part of the whole social event” (Buckland, 2002).

Patrons may be considered more visible and recognisable from a casual observer.

2.5.3 London Observers

Observers constitute the remainder of the crowd who may be in a queer environment. As such they may not be identifiable visually as queer entities and may not identify themselves as such. Research in London demonstrated that some of the people among the crowd were simply “checking out the scene” and weren’t actively engaged with it. This demonstrates how while some of the observers in the crowd may be exploring queer space and introducing themselves to it, some may not yet be comfortable engaging with queer aesthetics or feel able to express their gender and sexuality. Conversely, some of the crowd may not wish to do this at all, instead simply

dropping into a queer setting for enjoyment, potentially fuelled by the ever increasing prominence of queer culture in the media and in the mainstreams consciousness. (AlKadhi, 2016) (Britain's Got Talent, 2013).

This portion of observers fuel the process by which queer space and culture is garnering acceptance in the mainstream, by welcoming and not disavowing heteronormative individuals to encounter and interact with queer space without militancy. The attraction to those outside of the queer scene can be seen in the testimony of one of Buckland's respondents, Stephen, who states that "It's a different gay movement" and Buckland furthering this by musing that "In these spaces, participants felt encouraged to fashion themselves and to realise their imaginative possibilities through dress, bearing, social interactions, and dance" (Buckland, 2002). This encouragement is the freedom queer space offers to scenesters, whom express their queerness openly and broadly to the wider world, and to patrons, whom express their queerness openly but in a more localised way, and also to the observer, who may be wishing to experience queerness or expose themselves to queer space in order to gain confidence in their own queer lifestyle.

2.5.4 Subgroups and Queer Context

Scenesters, patrons and observers do not represent a distillation of each other and cannot be considered any more or less visible in queer space, with the exception of the scenester who may be more visible through interaction and on social media, as opposed to the style of dress and recognisably queer aesthetics. For example, an observer seeking to experience queer space may dress in drag, a flamboyant overt style, but may still be considered an observer up until the point at which they interact with the space. As a result of this, these subgroups are contextually dependent, which can be evidenced in the way scenesters, who whilst in queer space may enjoy a heightened level of notability and micro-fame, may be entirely without that same fame when they leave queer space and re-enter heteronormative space. Mallinson Bird exemplifies this with his discussion of two scenesters in his TEDx Talk, in which he discusses queer personalities Robyn and Fanny at Sink The Pink, "We even have a glorious pole dancing drag queen called Robyn. And what's amazing about Robyn is that his most ardent fan is fellow performer and wife Fanny! And what's interesting about these two is that in many ways they uphold the heteronormative archetype. They have lovely day jobs, they're married, they look like perfectly normal heteronormative people, and yet they so deny the heteronormative dictum that say there's a singularity between sex, gender and sexuality" (TEDx Talks, 2015). This exemplifies the way in which Robyn and Fanny, whilst not actively seeking to garner fame, have attracted notability in the queer confines of Sink The Pink, which is only 'real' within the queer community and space.

2.5.6 The Heteronorm as Queer Inspiration

Heteronormative culture plays an integral role in queer space and personality. Whilst queer can be viewed as an answer to the question of assimilation into heteronormativity, it relies on heteronormative tropes and archetypes to shape many of its aesthetics and interactions. This is most prevalent in the use of drag in queer culture, which parodies and subverts the feminine archetype of the heteronormative woman, something which mainstream drag queen RuPaul identified in an interview with *The Guardian*, stating “First of all, drag is dangerous. We are making fun of everything” (Nicholson, 2015) in reference to the heteronorm. This also identifies a paradox in the way in which queer may become more tolerated and integrated within heteronormative society, as often queer is seen as an affront to heteronormative space and therefore inadmissible, something Mallinson Bird touches on whilst discussing his own experiences subverting the heteronorm at Cambridge university “It’s a place where the past 800 years great male minds have sat and broken bread, a place where we sing latin graces before we eat, where your gown says how high up in the school you are, where we pay silence to a gong, and in that space, my queer presence was an affront, it through the balance all off.” (TEDx Talks, 2015).

2.5.7 Language

Integral to the discussion of queer people is the way in which queer people interact. This is most obvious in the use of language in the queer community, and how it is used to afford assurance and knowledge that two or more participants are of similar queer understanding, therefore confirming the presence in queer space. This research has identified that among the most prevalent codes of language in queer space is the notable use of drag lexicon in everyday use, employed beyond the scope of drag queens or commentary on drag only. It is used in standard speech. Popularly used terms such as ‘sick’ning’, ‘shade’ and ‘living’ or ‘gagging’ are terms whose roots lay in drag, and at one point may have been considered purely drag lexicon. However, as a result of the endurance of drag into queer culture, these terms have expanded and are now in everyday queer dialect, with some of these terms integrating into the heteronorm. For example, the use of the fashion terms ‘fierce’ and ‘slay’ have recently begun to surface in legitimate mainstream fashion commentary, such as in E Entertainment’s coverage of the 2016 Grammy Award gowns: “Giuliana Rancic Slays in a Fierce Grommet-Studded Gown at the 2016 Grammys” (Finn, 2016). When asked about their thoughts on the use of drag lexicon, patrons at *The Glory* offered insight that “it (drag language) stems from the gay movement. Drag queens started it all really so I’m not surprised the language has endured. They’ve endured” and “I can’t say why we talk like that. It’s a shared understanding of something I suppose. If they know what you’re talking about then you’re on the same page. Plus it’s just funny”.

2.5.8 Partial Glossary of Common Drag Terms

The following is a partial glossary defining the meaning behind some of the most commonly used terms which have roots in drag culture and have crossed into queer lexicon as a result. This is not an exhaustive list but does highlight the most commonly used terms identified in the field during the research on London's queer scene.

- Beat/To Beat:

The application of makeup to the face i.e. "she beat her face gorgeous"

- Bitch/Bitches:

A person who is a friend, or a group of people who are friends i.e "she's my bitch/ where are my bitches?"

- Butch Queen:

A drag personality who is not very feminine in appearance, either by choice or by unpolished aesthetic i.e. "she's a butch queen". Derives from Paris Is Burning (Livingston, 1991)

- Drag:

Defined by RuPaul's Drag Race Dictionary as "a drag queen. A man who dresses as or impersonates a woman for entertainment and show purposes. D.R.A.G: An acronym for "Dressed Resembling A Girl", from which the term "Drag" is said to ostensibly originate. The term is said to date back to Shakespearean times when male theatrical actors would play female roles." (Wikia, 2016)

- Fierce:

Adjective used to describe appearance that is particularly good or strong in aesthetic. A particularly fashionable or comical look i.e. "her dress tonight is fierce"

- Lip-Sync:

The act of moving ones lips in time to match that of a pre-recorded vocal audio track for the purpose of performance, often used in a comedic way i.e. "she lip-synced to Madonna"

- Living:

Verb used to describe enjoyment of something, such as a song or someone's appearance i.e "I was living for the drama"

- Polished:

An adjective used to describe a highly produced and 'out-together' aesthetic, most commonly relating to drag queens i.e "her look was very polished"

- Read:

The act of calling someone out on their flaws, often with extreme wit. Derived from the saying "read them like a book". Often non-malicious and jocular i.e. "She read her"

- Serve/Serving:
Verb pertaining to the production of an aesthetic and it's general themes and inspirations i.e. "she was serving working-class-mum in the club"
- Shade:
A form of insult, associated with reading i.e. "she threw some shade with that read"
- Sick'ning:
Adjective describing something that is absolutely brilliant or amazing. The highest form of something i.e. "her makeup is sick'ning"
- Tea/Tee/T:
The truth. The facts about a particular topic. Gossip i.e. "I have some tea to spill to you"

2.6 Aesthetics

Time spent among queer personalities and in queer spaces across the capital revealed a broad range of aesthetics and interpretations of dress for the sake of performance and expression. It is contrary to the apparent point of queer dress, to subvert and transgress, to define styles and set aesthetic 'rules' by which the community in London and beyond express their queer identity. However, the way in which aesthetics are dreamt up and defined do have overarching commonalities, and in some cases, the criteria of a trend.

Queer aesthetics in London can be viewed entirely subjectively, separate from queer lifestyles and cultural behaviours. However, it is clear that the styles of dress in queer space are a direct outward expression of the internal thought processes and underlying nature of the queer movement, with dress acting as a visual expression of the political, social and societal subversion by queer entities.

2.6.1 Femininity In Queer Aesthetics

This subversion of the heteronorm can arguably be seen most overtly in the use of drag and other feminising dress codes used by cisgendered men in the queer space. The transgression of the male dominated patriarchy heteronorm receives this play with gender and dress as an affront to the 'straight' perception of what is feminine and what are typically viewed as feminine traits. This aesthetic is not always aligned with what may be considered 'real' (the art of embodying very closely the person you are replicating (Livingston, 1991)) in the heteronorm, although in some cases, and particularly surrounding Soho, this is often the case. A male drag queen who was interviewed at Dalston Superstore commented on this, pointing to the concept of Soho as an area that is less accepting of unusual drag aesthetics compared with the East End. He discusses how because of this "Soho it's a lot more bar-y a lot more commercial. A lot more "RuPaul" dare I say. It's more "white-cis-het" whereas in the East End, it's rougher round the edges and it is a lot less exclusive, which for me is what queer culture should be about". Judith Butler's discussions on gender as performance indicate that gender is nothing more than a subjective image which we project onto our outward appearance, drawing a distinction between gender and sexuality (Butler, 1988), allowing the use of feminine dress to be worn by straight men and gay men alike without it having consequences for their birth gender. This legitimises the use of feminine dress in queer culture, where it is as a result used as a tool to project a character or idea, in keeping with the queer paradigm of expression through dress.

2.6.2 Heteronormative Gendered Colour Concepts In Queer Expression

Further expressing rejection of mainstream heteronormative concepts is evidenced in the use of colour in dressing. If the traditional trope in 'straight' life dictates that blue is the colour of masculinity and pink that of femininity, queer nihilism (TEDx Talks, 2015) throws this dictum into

disregard and allows dressers to push back against this construct by wearing whatever colour they wish without the attachment of gender or sexuality. This use of gendered colours is a legitimate rejection of the heteronorm through subversion, pushing against integration through assimilation.

In this image of Ted Rogers (Joannou, 2016), a queer personality in London and performer at The Glory in Haggerston, is an example of the rejection of gendered colour concepts through the use of pink and blue in hair and clothing. The heteronormative construct of overt masculinity is performed by Rogers in his pronounced exposure of his body and hair, and subverted through his use of colour and fabric choices. He juxtaposes masculine and feminine through accessories, by posing with a handbag, a typically feminine piece of fashion iconography, and a machine gun, a typically aggressive piece of masculine imagery, subverting the expectations of the heteronorm, blending masculine and feminine in his performance of gender, further exaggerated by the use of colour. In an accompanying interview, Rogers describes his aesthetic as “cute” and “gang war” (Joannou, 2016) further exemplifying this commonly juxtaposed aesthetic in the queer community.

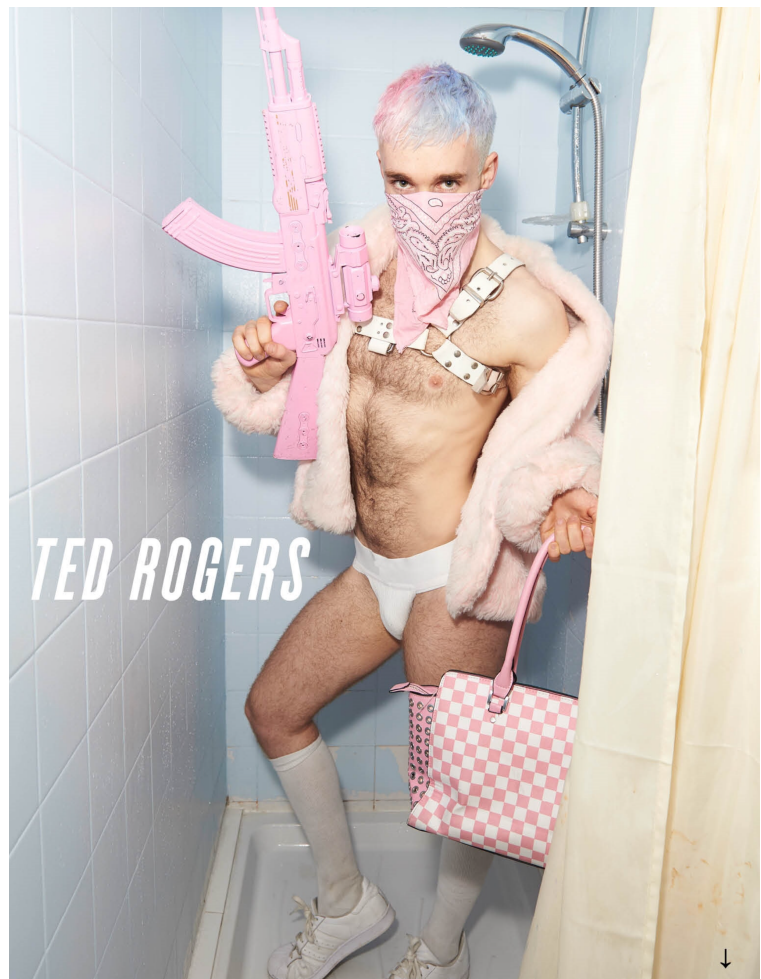


Figure 2 - Image: Attitude Magazine

2.6.3 Overt Sexuality As An Aesthetic Reaction

The use of overt sexuality is also employed in many cases of queer aesthetics as a tool for transgressing heteronormative cultural conventions. The use of sexuality can be seen as an affront to the homo-suppressive environment of the heteronorm, and as a reactionary tool to provoke a response from mainstream culture. Another patron of The Glory identified reaction against the heteronorm as something they held key to the definition of queerness in modern London, stating “It’s an umbrella term for sexuality other than heterosexuality, gender aside from cis-gender, and acting against the heteronorm”. Whilst not common across the queer scene in the capital, the use of sexuality, exposure and accentuation of the body was a recurring aesthetic in clubs across



Figure 3 - Image: Attitude Magazine

London. Items of dress such as harnesses, exposed underwear and other sexualised items of clothing were worn alongside typically fetishised garments and materials, such as leather and latex, however the connotation of sexual advancement as a result of this aesthetic was not the aim or a result. Scenesters such as 'Imma/Mess', seen here in a black latex catsuit at The Glory in London (Joannou, 2016), exemplify this sexualised-creative aesthetic, with the drama and image taking the place of sexual gratification and intent.

2.6.4 The Queer Trend

Whilst the concept of the traditional trend is difficult to observe in queer dress due to its ever shifting and

adapting nature, there are still aesthetic conventions that can be observed around particular styles, pieces and events. Queer aesthetics, whilst commonly taking from and parodying fashion, do not bow to the same fashion trends. Queer aesthetics are best discussed in terms of scenester and patron dress, with the dress choices of the observer more closely aligning with mainstream and heteronormative fashion as a result of their limited interaction with queer space and expression. In these subgroups, trends take on new meaning as common conventions that have occurred in multiple personalities outfit choices and in more than one space. For example, around Christmastime 2015 at The Glory in Haggerston, the Christmas tree in the bar area was decorated with neon and ultraviolet reactive colours and decorations, as well as severed doll heads. To take advantage of this, there were multiple cases of people dressing in attire that would provide the same effect in the UV light, as well as those who



Figure 4 - Image: Own Work

wore Christmas outfits mocking the heteronormative holiday archetype. Whilst there were multiple instances, this may not be considered a queer trend as it is socially context dependent, in this case around the tree at The Glory, with other spaces providing no context and therefore no need to wear such garments.

Trends in queer space can also be interpreted as a wider style or way of expressing queer identity. A group of club goers who were present after one of The Glory's now infamous drag cabaret shows, proposed that drag itself can be considered a trend within the queer community "People who want to start wearing girls clothes and going out as a drag queen and being provocative is a big trend". However, another made reference to one 'trend' in the form of the glitter beard, commenting on how perceived trends in queer culture are subject to the trickle up effect to the mainstream, as has been the case with queer social activities such as drag queen lip-syncing, translated into shows like The Tonight Show in America (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, 2015) and Lip Sync Battle (Channel 5, 2016). His observations on the trend for glittering beards were framed with references to Christmas 2015, where non-queer or gay media outlets demonstrated how to achieve the style.

2.6.5 Politics, Emotion and Concepts As Devices For Transgression And Subversion

At the core of queer dressing is an underlying desire to express ideas and present an image to the heteronorm of 'the true self'. This may be political, commenting on societal norms and concepts, emotional, presenting an aesthetic representative of the wearer and their desires in how they are perceived, and conceptual, presenting new ideas and approaches to what dress can be. The use of parody in drag, for example, can be seen as a politically motivated form of aesthetic expression. A look may be more than one of these alignments, as exemplified by a group of friends who were waiting to enter The Glory, who stated that their aesthetic was a result of wanting to "look as ugly and provocative as possible" and that they "wanted to go out and make people think "what the fuck"". This demonstrates a politically and emotionally motivated approach to aesthetic. Conceptual dressing may be considered more overt and visually striking, often drawing from fields and materials not commonly used in mainstream clothing, as was the case of Leigh Bowery in early club culture, and in today's dressers such as scenester Chrissy Darling.

These forms of dressing are used as devices by which dressers can express their ideas and form their queer identities when coupled with space and interaction with other queer entities. This results in transgression and subversion of the heteronorm, thereby disallowing the perceived oppression of the mainstream in queer space. Through this process, queer people are able to produce aesthetics which can be read by the wider community and even the heteronorm as acts of defiance and as markers of queer cultural dissent.

3.0 Queer Manchester

3.1 Introduction To The Manchester Case Study

This second case study focusses on the northern city of Manchester in Lancashire, England. Manchester has been selected as a key city in order to better establish the similarities and contrasts between large metropolitan areas in the UK, and to better establish the so called ‘north-south divide’ and its effects (if any) on queer cultural development. Manchester, with a population of 514,417, as of 2013 (UK Population 2016), is believed to have a queer LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) community of between 24,950 – 34,930 (The Lesbian And Gay Foundation, 2012).

Manchester has a well established and thriving gay village (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003), officially recognised by the local government since 1991, and has been described as “one of the most popular sexualised spaces in the UK” (Held, 2015). As such, its status as a popular queer space best frames the current state of queer expression in the northern UK, outside of the capital. Manchester’s increasing prominence in the UK and internationally demonstrates the goals of the ‘Northern Powerhouse’ plan of the UK government, which seeks to establish northern cities as a second cultural and economic centre outside of London, with a combined population in excess of 15 million as a result of improved transport and economic links (BBC News, 2015), attracting a wider queer population to geographically centralised Manchester, whose own population accounts for the largest segment (1 quarter) of the regions combined figure (Centre For Cities, 2015).

Whilst the population of queer people residing within Manchester or frequenting its gay village is smaller than the comparable group in London, Manchester offers “gay men in particular, high visibility and spacial concentration” (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003), allowing for greater social interaction and a denser concentration of queer spaces, creating an environment rich in opportunities for research.

Testament to this is the annual gay pride parade and weekend held in The Village, which engaged 43,000 for it’s 2015 event (Manchester Pride, 2016), held annually each summer since 1989 (Manchester Archives+, 2016).

The queer social-sphere of Canal Street (the primary street along which Manchester’s gay scene is based) is still one that is relatively young when compared with the queer history of London, resulting in a space which has formed alongside the rest of the city, establishing itself as one of the most cosmopolitan centres outside of London, with Manchester aiming to be “an age-friendly city and also aim to be the UK’s youth capital” where “Everyone will have the same opportunities and life chances no matter where they’re born or live.” (Manchester City Council, 2016).

Manchester has also been identified as a focus city for its strong ties to the media and entertainment industries, with a well documented history available for contributions and context within the research, with television shows such as Channel 4's 'Cucumber' (T Davies, 2015a), 'Banana' (T Davies, 2015b) and 'Queer as Folk' (T Davies, Harding, Huda, & McDougall, 1999) lending particular insight into The Village specifically, and its wider portrayals to a national and international audience of all genders and sexualities.

3.2 Manchester Case Study Methodology

The methodology developed for the Manchester case study has been adapted from the template laid down in the previous London research. The main source of primary research remains attainable through ethnographic research, with a particular focus being applied within the geographical boundaries of Manchester's gay village. This geographical 'cut off' zone for research to take place within was not possible in the previous research field of the capital, owing to its geographically diverse and distant locations. This echoes the approach taken by other notable practitioners such as Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs, who explored The Village as a contextual frame for cosmopolitan knowledge, and how the space was consumed in the mainstream (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004), as well as their essay looking at the representation of The Village as a result of the broadcast of 'Queer As Folk' (T Davies, Harding, Huda, & McDougall, 1999) and how this was aligned with the real experience of The Village to the people who used the space (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004).

Before beginning primary observations, secondary research was carried out to form the context of the queer scene in Manchester. This was a combination of sources including news articles, websites, research papers previously published pertaining to gay Manchester and its related topics, and analysis of gay media for information pertinent to the research aims and objectives in the case study.

In order to build a complete picture of northern queer expression, fields outside of gender and sexuality were explored in order to lend contextual reference to factors that may impact on these expressions. This involved exploration of topics pertaining to the economy of the north, and Manchester specifically, as well as social research papers and publications surrounding gentrification and regeneration, which have had marked effects on the development of the gay village and Manchester as whole since the early 90's (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004) (Hughes, 2003) (Bell & Binnie, 2004).

Interviews and overviews of social media used by queer people in Manchester were utilised to offer insight into the practise of queer life both inside and away from the queer space of The Village.

Exploration of mediums such as Instagram, which was also featured in the London case study, allow for access to the visual research that whilst presenting an edited version of queer aesthetics and personality, aligns with the real world processes by which queer people may dress and edit their appearance and personality, extending the theories presented by Judith Butler in relation to sexuality and gender and their performance in life (Butler, 1988). Kevin Almond also further discusses this use of dress in forging identity as a reaction to the mainstream, in his paper “Masquerade in Clubland: A safe space for glamour” in which he states the clubs of Leeds, another large northern city, run by Suzy Mason such as Speedqueen and Vague “very quickly captured the imagination of a clientele who hungered after the camp and glamour that Suzy promulgated as an antidote to a drab world”, answering the need for space in which people could create identities and explore their sexualities after she became “concerned that there were few places for cross dressers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to express themselves and feel safe” (Almond, 2012). As previously discussed, these are the very people who form the backbone of modern queer culture and drive its continued expansion of acceptance to all genders and sexualities.

This combination of research methods and sources, tweaked slightly from the previous template, allows better understanding of the current state of queer life in Manchester. Through the very process of adapting the research methodology, however slightly, conclusions can be drawn about the differences between the two cities resulting in the need for this change, particularly with regard to the geographical and official recognition of space.

3.3 History Of Manchester’s Gay Space

Manchester has been home to an officially recognised gay space since 1991 (Held, 2015), but its historical roots reach far back to a time when homosexuality was still illegal in the United Kingdom, and a time when Manchester was a world away from the cosmopolitan metropolis it has evolved into since the 80’s. Canal Street, which runs parallel to the Rochdale Canal in central Manchester, and its neighbouring streets are the geographic centre and historical home to the city’s large gay community, believed to be up to 35,000 people as of 2012 (The Lesbian And Gay Foundation, 2012).

The space first began to form into its modern iteration from the mid-80’s, prior to which “the district was full of cotton workers by day and prostitutes by night. Then the warehouses emptied and only the prostitutes were left” (Turner, 1996), demonstrating the roots of The Village as a sexualised space dating back to Manchester’s Victorian industrial heritage. This is a commonly recurring theme within gay spaces across the UK, as noted by Birmingham B5 Traders Association’s (a local trading association for the gay village on Birmingham’s Hurst Street) vice-chairman Andy King, who

explains “gay scenes, like the Soho area of London and the Canal Street area of Manchester, have always been in old industrial areas, which are out of the way with hardly anything going on” (Ind & Birmingham Post, 2013) indicative of the historical ties commonly shared by gay spaces.

Canal Street became a safe haven for those wishing to meet other gay people and to express themselves within the confines of the still underground village, formed from the likes of working mens bars hosting secretive gay gatherings, such as The Rembrandt and The New Union, geographically defining the edges of the emerging gay space. This underground community flourished despite political and legal pressures until as recently as the 1980’s, with Wolfe discussing the issue in an historical overview of The Village “The years before The village in the 1980’s were ones of repression, with relations with the local police at an all-time low” and pointing out the sharp contrasts to today’s modern village “These days, things have changed enormously, with a Police Liaison Officer for the gay community and the local police being cheered as they proudly march in the Pride parade through the city streets every year” (Wolfe, 2008)

The beginning of what would resemble today’s modern ‘cafe culture’ Canal Street began in the 1990’s, during the start of a period of mass redevelopment in the city centre, known as ‘The Manchester Model’, resulting in “the recent development of Manchester’s gay village” which “took place within the wider discourse of ‘the Manchester model’ of urban regeneration” (Bell & Binnie, 2004). This model was based on the councils “investment from the bottom up” (The Economist, 2013), something which the same article identifies as gentrification. Bell and Binnie argue that gentrification is often led by gay people, as has been the case on Canal Street and in Soho, as well as more recently in Birmingham and Leeds, in areas such as Hurst Street and Lower Briggate. They suggest that “Gays are often cast as model citizens of the urban renaissance, contributing towards the gentrification of commodifiable cosmopolitan residential and commercial areas” (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Skeggs also points out that “The streets behind Canal Street have also been gentrified as a result of the Commonwealth Games” (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004) demonstrating the contagion effect of gentrification on surrounding areas.

It is important to acknowledge that a large part of this regeneration effort and the resulting cosmopolitanisation and gentrification of not only Canal Street, but of the city as a whole, was in large part kick started and spurred into real action by the effects of the of 1996 IRA bombing of Corporation Street in central Manchester, which devastated a large and economically vital area of the city. Following the bombing, regeneration of the area was swift, with a newly rebuilt section of the now iconic Arndale shopping centre opening in 2003, growing the Manchester economy and leading to its solidification as an economic centre outside of London, with the Manchester Evening News commenting on the effects of the attack that Manchester had “rose from the ashes” and that

“Manchester has grown and has become truly cosmopolitan. It can rightly lay claim to being England’s second city” (Thompson, 2013).

At first, the process of gentrification and increasing cosmopolitanisation was of great benefit to Canal Street, providing the setting for the opening of one of the UK’s most iconic gay bars, Manto, to open its doors in 1990. Manto was historic for its design, which featured a glass front, allowing people to see into the bar and to the activity, and gay patrons, inside. Turner surmises the importance of Manto stating it was “the first of the capital-G Gay Village cafe bars, and the first gay venue in Manchester to come out of the closet with an open plate-glass front” (Turner, 1996). The language Turner uses is particularly representative of the wider movement toward openness and overt gayness that began following the opening of Manto, with many gay people, as well as the venues they visited, ‘coming out of the closet’ in this time, to such an extent that they were “putting themselves on show” (Hillmore, 1999).

As a result of the increased prominence of Canal Street as a confined gay village in Manchester, its increasing popularity began to attract those who did not identify as LGBT themselves. This effect was particularly exaggerated with the broadcast of ‘Queer As Folk’ (T Davies, Harding, Huda, & McDougall, 1999) and ‘Bob And Rose’ (Red Production Company, 2001) in the late 90’s and early 00’s. They marked a long and deeply connected relationship between Manchester’s gay village and the portrayal of gay culture on British Television, a relationship that was revisited in 2015 with the series ‘Cucumber’ (T Davies, 2015a) and ‘Banana’ (T Davies, 2015b) on Channel 4.

However this increased media prominence as a result of gentrification led to a somewhat runaway effect that is still being assessed in The Village today. The resulting attraction and promotion of Canal Street into a safe space for gay expression has led to a new found popularity among non-LGBT people, leading to a two-tier ‘homonormativity’ which “has driven the less-assimilated queers underground, back into the subterranean, back-street bars and cruising grounds” (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Bell and Binnie discuss how the use of media exposure has increased the homonormative profile of Canal Street, stating “television has brought with it tensions over ‘appropriate’ forms of sexual identity - another example of the casting-out of the ‘queer unwanted’, seen here as potentially damaging to the assimilationist agenda of respectability” (Bell & Binnie, 2004), supporting this study’s argument that gay culture seeks mainstream acceptance through assimilation. Bonnie further discusses the premise in his paper with Beverley Skeggs, summarising “that the branding of the space as part of a strategy to make the space less-threatening, hence a more appealing and desirable space of consumption for a wider, straight community” (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). Whilst this wider exposure has led to expansion and increased prominence in the

gay village, it has however led to “an obvious paradox” that “if too many straight people enter The Village its essential quality of authenticity, gayness, will be diluted” (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004).

3.4 Spaces

3.4.1 Queer Geography of Manchester

Manchester has a well developed and defined gay space (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003) running the length of Canal Street in the city centre, which lays parallel with the Rochdale Canal and is bordered by Richmond Street and Bloom Street, intersected by Chorlton Street and Sackville Street. The area is of such notable association to the gay community that it is officially recognised as such by the Manchester council (Held, 2015) and has even gained sufficient notability that it is included as a tagged geographic area within Google Maps overview of Manchester city centre (Google, n.d.).



Figure 5 - Image: Google Maps

The location of the city’s gay village is particularly well placed within the city centre and the wider region, given its extremely close proximity to one of the two main Manchester central train stations, Manchester Piccadilly, to its eastern end. Whilst this urban proximity cannot be held to have been a pre-planned effect on The Village’s formation, it can be seen as a contributing factor in The Village’s continued expansion since the 80’s, as well as its enduring reputation as a popular tourist destination within Manchester (Alan, 2007), and its central role as a northern “Gay Mecca” which “offers gay men in particular, high visibility and spacial concentration (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003).

The queer geography of Manchester is particularly interesting when compared and contrasted with that of London, which sees its queer spaces spread across a much wider area and with very little locality between them, particularly in the case of those spaces located outside of Soho, itself increasingly fractured, in the East End such as Shoreditch and Dalston. This has developed as a

result of the need for safe space, a historical driving factor in the development of Canal Street as a recognised gay cruising area and space for gay expression around other queer entities. Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen (2003) evidence this in their work surrounding the use of gay space by the straight community as a safe space, referring to the experience of one gay person who identified that "...the bus stop is a black spot" and that in straight areas surrounding The Village "you start feeling a bit more kind of self conscious basically as opposed to just letting your mind drift or be happy or whatever" (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003). This insight is indicative of the experience of many gay people even now within The Village, which has clearly defined boundaries to the extent that surrounding streets can be seen as gay and straight depending on personal location on that street. The testimony is telling of this, given the reference to the bus station, which lies on Bloom Street, bordering the gay village.

This queer geographic fencing is similar in practise to the case discussed in London, in which it was identified that certain areas were avoided for queer expression because of their cultural associations and practises out of respect and safety concerns. The same is true for Manchester, with the place of predominantly cultural based communities taken by that of the mainstream straight community.

However, a notable contrast to the paradigm of queer space in London lies in the effects of gentrification in Manchester, and how it has played a role in shaping and defining the gay village. As previously discussed, the process by which London's gay spaces are being gentrified, and as a result relocated in a continuing cycle, is lacking in the results of 'The Manchester Model' (Bell & Binnie, 2004), wherein gentrification has encouraged the development of The Village and ensured its geographic location within the city. Bell and Binnie discuss the effect of gentrification in The Village as a tool for promotion, by which outsiders may be brought into, exposing the space and fuelling its continued popularity, stating "the key to the 'success' of the gay village, however, has been the production of a desexualised consumption space where an asexual non-threatening (especially to women) gay identity can be enacted. Gayness is here used as a resource to attract women as consumers into the space" (Bell & Binnie, 2004). This has been achieved, and continues to be fuelled, by the labelling and straight identification of The Village as a cosmopolitan space in which they can enjoy the imagined benefits of gay culture in a heterosexual society, such as safety of person. This process was identified by one straight women interviewed in The Guardian in 2011, who mused in reference to herself and her female friends "Now we know we can come too, I think we make it more cosmopolitan, more stylish". (Aitkenhead, 2011).

The same article draws attention to the converse effect of gentrification, and the negative role it has had on The Village as a result of its increased prominence as a cosmopolitan area for straight

people to enjoy as well as gay. This is something which continues to concern the 'authentic' gay clientele, with "anxiety about customers "pretending to be gay" and about the "true village" being ruined by newcomers" (Turner, 1996). This gives rise to a paradox in the continuing development of The Village, both conceptually and geographically, where by the space needs enough prominence, brought by straight people as result of its cosmopolitan nature, to remain vibrant and economically viable, but excluding enough of them so as not to be overwhelmed and have its authenticity compromised, which is again demonstrated by Binnie and Skeggs in their work on the consumership of gay space by straight women "for if too many straight people enter The Village, its essential quality of authenticity, gayness, will be diluted" (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). This gayness is a perception of the cosmopolitan nature of The Village and has resulted in a space deeply entrenched within not only the local gay community, but within the national and international community, to which the Mail On Sunday begrudgingly conceding as early as 1999 that "Manchester's reputation as a 'gay capital' is too well established to be reversed" (Hillmore, 1999).

3.4.2 The Paradox Of Cosmopolitanism: Pedestrianised Canal Street

In order for Canal Street to continue development and growth as a gay space, it has had to embrace the positive aspects of gentrification and cosmopolitanism. The way in which this has manifested into The Village is both physical and conceptual. Whilst there is no specific formula as to how a place or person becomes cosmopolitan, Binnie and Skeggs argue that "cosmopolitanism is most commonly conveyed or represented as a particular attitude toward difference" and "to be cosmopolitan one has to have access to a particular form of knowledge" whilst simultaneously demonstrating that identifying oneself as cosmopolitan and sophisticated, equates to an immediate question over the legitimacy of those claims (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). In this case, the patrons of Canal Street, who have utilised the space for decades as a place for expression of their sexuality at first underground, and presently in open celebration, are the cast of characters who bring legitimate cosmopolitanism to The Village, drawing in a wider audience who wish to experience and participate in the perceived sophistication and modernity of a cosmopolitan space, namely, straight people of heteronormative cultural alignment. This perceived 'invasion' of gay space from the heteronorm has been of concern for Canal Street patrons since the 90's. However, Binnie and Bell's argument that the gayness of Canal Street is the primary source of cosmopolitan feeling acts as a safety net, by which the patrons of The Village have control over the space through their actions and presence. Paradoxically, if the gayness of The Village were to cease, and the patrons move on, the space would return to being primarily gay only, but for the lack of the very people who make it so.

The cosmopolitan element, however, cannot and should not be held entirely in contempt by the community of The Village, as it also acts as a key source of economic and social enrichment. Gay

people are also attracted to The Village through its promotion as a tourist attraction and its prominence in modern gay media, and to a lesser extent, exposure on straight mediums such as television in shows like 'Cucumber' from Channel 4 (T Davies, 2015). Tourism and cosmopolitan factors have left a key physical effect on Canal Street itself, in the form of the pedestrianisation of the street itself, which has since been expanded upon during prime social hours with extended pedestrianisation of Sackville Street (Canal St, 2013). Alan notes this in his work on the tourist appeal of the gay village, pointing out that "the 'outness' of gay life recognised by the pedestrianisation of The Village principle street to accommodate street socialisation and display" (Alan, 2007). He goes on to argue that as a result of this, The Village enjoys a "spacial coherence that is significantly absent in other urban areas" (Alan, 2007). This coherence is a result of the presence of venues in The Village, which are not only limited to nightclub hotspots, but also restaurants and saunas, catering for a gay clientele and "bookshop, solicitor, hair stylist and doctor" (Alan, 2007), further demonstrating the way in which the space has further pushed toward ghettoisation as a village, in a polarised model to those seen in other gay villages across the United Kingdom, with particular contrast to London's Soho.

3.4.3 A Truly Gay Village: Key Venues and Proximity

Whilst the variety of venues operating in the community on Canal Street is a key to its terming as a village, a primary factor comes in the simple proximity of the venues, which mainly occupy Canal Street itself but are still in reasonable numbers around the street. As discussed, there are a wide variety of businesses in The Village catering to gay clientele. However, it is notable that the vast majority of those businesses are bars and clubs, each with its own 'vibe' and relatively unique feature, headlined to attract the patrons of the street. However, observations show that it is uncommon for the people frequenting these venues to remain in only one on a typical evening out socialising and drinking. As a result of this, and as fuelled by the open pedestrianised nature of the street outside, people may flow from one venue to another, with the safety of gay space flowing with them into the street outside. This results in a large turnover rate of customers, as well as an erratic rhythm in terms of popularity and 'busyness'. For example, on one particular Thursday night in January, commonly reputed to be 'student night', the busiest venues were G-A-Y, hosting a karaoke party, and AXM, playing 90's house music. However, the contrast becomes apparent when the same venues were visited 2 weeks later, with G-A-Y standing noticeably quieter. The same was true for AXM. Key factors including the weather and term times of universities were the same in both cases, yet the shift to other venues had been stark, with spaces such as VIA and Barpop seemingly reaping the benefits. One patron when questioned about the flow of people in the street proposed "It's not, like, conscious I guess. We didn't come here tonight to make a point. We came in here cos' it was busy already. I guess it's go with the flow. We're not staying here all night." demonstrating the erratic nature of flow in The Village.

Parallels with the queer scene in London can be drawn in the form of more traditional 'pub' type gay bars being among the oldest and longest frequented venues on Canal Street, with The Rembrandt and New Union both being the most notable examples of this queer venue paradigm. Both are marketed as being traditional gay pubs, and their decor and clientele reflect this, with a wide range of clientele taking to them as places of socialisation. Owing to their long history in the context of Canal Street as a gay space, the two venues have contributed to the geographic defining of The Village and its borders, with one marking the entrance of Canal Street and the other now marking the central part of the strip.

However, in a departure from the apparent convention of gay pubs as queer spaces in the East End of London, the gay pubs of Canal Street remain a predominantly gay space that have yet to embrace the overt notion of queer expression, in a scenario which is indicative of Canal Street as a whole. In clear contrast to London, the use of gay space as a vessel for queer expression beyond simply gay socialisation is yet to be nurtured and developed as has been in the case in London.

The development of these venues on Canal Street would not be without precedent, as is evidenced by the case of Via Fossa, often simply referred to as Via. The style is that of a traditional pub-come-bar, and has been designed to reflect a gay sense of aesthetic. The pub is also notable for its continued marketing as a set location "as seen on Bob and Rose" (Stonegate Pub Company, 2015) indicating the venues knowledge of not only its local gay clientele, but the wider tourist element as a result of its appearance on 'Bob And Rose' (Red Production Company, 2001). Via is also notable as being one of the main venues on the strip which promotes its drag queen hostesses as one of its main nightly attractions, giving it a queer edge on its immediate neighbours. This is a practise used by some other pubs and bars, which have collectively come to be termed 'drag' or 'cabaret' venues.

One of the most prominent of these cabaret bars is New York, New York, which lays in The Village on Bloom Street, by the bus station, thereby acting as another marker of one of the boundaries of the gay space. New York, New York is a more pronounced gay and queer space than Via in its use of decor and styling to announce boldly that it is a gay venue, with the use of mirrors, glitter walls and disco lighting adding to its unique aesthetic within The Village. Its hosting and headlining of drag queens and performers of cabaret is indicative of the older style cabaret drag that is present in the previously mentioned gay pub-type venues. Drag, as seen in the case of London, is an integral aesthetic in the queer community and vital form of gender expression. As such, it can be argued that in this way, venues in Manchester are starting to adapt to queer culture with drag

leading at the forefront of this evolution, as has been the case in London also. However, a key difference developing in Manchester is the way in which larger gay nightclubs, and not pubs, are beginning to drive drag elements of queer expression forward, utilising its draw to attract gay and straight clientele alike.

AXM, on the corner of Bloom Street and Abingdon Street, plays host to a nationally and internationally acclaimed range of drag queens, predominantly those who have starred in 'RuPaul's Drag Race' (World Of Wonder Productions, 2009), a reality television show imported from America which has found cult following not only in gay society, but mainstream culture as well. The Club brands these guest performances as 'Holy Trannity' nights, and have been extremely popular since their launch. This has led to a renaissance in the way in which drag is sold and utilised in The Village, with other venues following the model set out by AXM, booking big name drag acts for nights at their clubs, the other most notable example being 'The Library', a name playing on drag terminology for those in the know on drag lexicon, taking place at Cruz 101 close to AXM.

The saturation of drag into The Village is made clear by the use of drag lexicon in the name of relatively young venue Kiki, further demonstrating the way in which drag is an acceptable form of queer expression that has become deeply integrated with Canal Street and its gay community as a whole, resulting in an inevitable influence on heterosexual and tourist cosmopolitans who visit Canal Street to experience its gayness, as previously discussed, demonstrating the way in which drag is increasingly seen as the acceptable face of the queer movement in heteronormative society.

A key draw to the wider gay community, not only in Manchester but across the United Kingdom, has been the development of the so called 'super-clubs' in The Village. These establishments have been integral to the enduring popularity of Canal Street as a destination for tourism and a younger gay generation who are increasingly accepted, and require a safe gay space in which to socialise in the more youth orientated context of a nightclub. One young club-goer was quick to point out that it was the arrival of these types of venue that had attracted his generation to Canal Street as a place for socialisation, stating "I think there's a club here for everyone. Like, outside of the generation thing, there's the type of gay you are. Basically I just wanna dance. We all mix but there's definitely types of place to go". In a paralleling of 'Queer As Folk', this statement, spoken in 2016, is an observation also shown by the writers of the show, reflected in the comments of the character Bernard, who, in a more aggressive and frustrated tone references the divisions between generations on the strip, and points out when asked which place is best to go "depends on what you're after. If you want bastards, you go in there. if you want wankers, go in there. And if you want selfish, little, mincing, piss-tight, dickheads, then pick a building." (T Davies, Harding, Huda, &

McDougall, 1999). This is a window into the world of late 90's Canal Street, which is noted as being accurate in Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie's observations over the course of their research that "All these different sources provide a contrasting range of research representations of the same space to that of Queer As Folk" and that "As the focus groups progressed, Queer As Folk was referred to by nearly all our participants, clouding the fine line between empirical research and televisual representation even further" (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004).

These 'younger' gay-focussed establishments, the super-clubs, occupy the large factory buildings of Canal Street and are often set across multiple floors with different rooms and multiple bars housed in the zoned areas. This allows for full operation on busy nights, and for only part of the venue to be accessible at quieter times of the week. Bars such as a Bar Pop and Cruz 101 exemplify this type of operation, as does the previously discussed AXM club. Both venues promote themselves as somewhat eclectic in music taste, with Cruz 101 describing their music policy as ranging "from disco to funky house, pop to trance, R'n'B to hard house....leaving no-one un-catered for." (Cruz 101 Manchester). The eclectic mix of music in these kinds of venues is again demonstrated in the description Bar Pop gives itself, as being one of "IndieDiscoElectroHomoMadHiphopBritPopFunkyKindaShagtagasticQueerThing" (Bar Pop - Official, n.d.) on their Facebook page, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the style and vibe of the club.

The stature of Canal Street as a perceived "Gay Mecca" (Moran, Skeggs, Tyrer, & Corteen, 2003) for the United Kingdom and increasingly the international gay community, has been solidified and demonstrated by the arrival of chains from other cities. The most notable of these, G-A-Y, expanded its offering to Manchester in 2011, opening a large venue close to the The Union and one of the main entrances to Canal Street, proudly displaying a large sign baring its name, a marker of not only the club, but of the street as whole and the culture to be found within. However it is interesting to note that as time has passed, and as Canal Street and the surrounding area has become more cosmopolitanised, the encroachment and acceptance of venues not specifically identifying as gay has increased. This can be seen best in the case of BaaBar, another large chain of bars operating across the UK which until August 2015 had two locations in Manchester. The Sackville Street venue, located within the confines of the geographic gay village, did not operate as a gay bar, yet the decor and typical crowd found within would imply otherwise. In a contrast to the paradigm of London, these venues are assimilated in the surrounding gay context, and do not dilute the gayness of the space itself.

Whilst the vast majority of these venues have now come to be viewed in heteronormative culture as a given feature of gay space, and enjoyed as such, the gay village also hosts venues which may not be seen as part of this acceptable face. The presence of a gay sauna, H2O, and of the

gay sex shop Clone Zone, represent the cultural ties of the gay community to sexuality and disregard for the heteronormative model of modesty surrounding it. This acceptability is further questioned by the use of dark rooms and sexualised spaces within the clubs themselves, such as The Eagle, in which gay men specifically can meet for sexual congress. These spaces form the backbone of the original intent of Canal Street as a meeting place for gay men (Turner, 1996). Whilst Alan argues that the gay space of Manchester “undeniably brings homosexuality into the public domain as an acceptable and unashamedly up-front way of life” (Alan, 2007), this does not translate as readily to the sexualised spaces of The Village. In fact the opposite may be true, in an antithesis to the process seen in London, by which queer space is growing and becoming more visible within both gay and mainstream culture. This is a concept also recognised in the work of Bell and Binnie, who propose that “The new publicity of more mainstream manifestations of gay consumer cultures -thoroughfares, street cafes, trendy bars, themed gay villages- has driven the less-assimilated queers underground, back into the subterranean, back-street bars and cruising grounds” (Bell & Binnie, 2004), raising an argument about the current development of queer space in the context of the gay space of The Village in Manchester, and its evolutionary trajectory.

3.4.4 Developmental Status Of Proto-Queer Culture

There is a marked difference in the way in which queer culture and wider gay culture have developed in London and Manchester, with contrasts in the formation of space, the way it is used and the way in which queer personalities interact with each other and the space itself. The current development of queer culture in Manchester, when compared with London, highlights a stark lack of overtly defined queer spaces for expression outside or interconnected with the wider gay space. That is to say that in London, a series of venues can be identified as more queer aligned than gay aligned, and the same is not replicated in Manchester, leading to the conclusion that whilst the culture is developing and shows signs of integration alongside the wider gay culture, it has yet to evolve to the same extent as London’s own scene.

There is also a contrast in the way in which queer culture parallels gay culture in Manchester, with the two currently operating side by side, compared with the case in London in which queer space has now evolved away from gay space, although remaining inextricably connected through a shared history and clientele.

As overt queerness continues to develop in the north, which at present is the logical trajectory for its evolution, the line between gay and queer may continue to blur, given the current way in which space is utilised by queer people. The physical geography of Manchester and its continued support and development of a specifically identified gay area, The Village, will also contribute to this effect. This is in contrast to the case seen in London, in which gay/queer venues and areas have been

gentrified in an predominantly negative way, leading to disintegration of any one gay area, such as Soho or Shoreditch. From the research gathered there is an inference that queer people, space and culture will continue to develop in a way that shares social and expressive parallels with London, but differs in how it is consumed and presented.

3.4.5 Micro-Queer Space Within Gay Venues

Queer space is currently at a premium for expression within the confines of The Village. Whilst queer entities do exist and utilise the area regardless of actively identified queer space, drag queens being the most prominent example, there is little in the way of spaces dedicated to this developing queer ethos. However, in a notable example of how this may develop within Manchester, pockets of micro-queer space do exist in certain venues on the strip. These micro-spaces, often taking the form of 'nights' once a week, allow for a greater degree of expression and socialisation within the wider context of a gay space. This is not to say that they are the only spaces in which queerness is expressed, as previously stated, as this is also evident in contained 'bubbles' of queerness across The Village, with every queer personality "queering the norm" (TEDx Talks, 2015) by inhabiting otherwise non defined gay space, a practise which is widely accepted and does not invoke the negative backlash that may arise in a heterosexual environment.

A typical example of this micro-queer space is seen on a quieter Wednesday night at G-A-Y, where drag queen Danny Beard, a glitter-bearded drag queen, acted as as host to a karaoke and lip-sync competition. The selection of a quieter evening by the club resulted in it being the busiest venue on Canal Street that evening, attracting a range of gay and queer people to watch and socialise in the space created by Danny. Whilst the formation of queer space for expression here is not at odds with what is seen in London, where this format is repeated by larger chains also, it is notable in the case of Manchester that it is the primary source of this space, whereas London enjoys a range of dedicated venues and events. The hosting of queer space by larger, and arguably more mainstream chains, lends credence to the theory that gay and queer culture do not exist at odds with each other, but rather in unison, with gay culture acting as the primary entry point to queer expression. However, this primary hosting of queer space in the context of Manchester, as opposed to queer spaces in their own right, points to the limits of queer development thus far in the north as a whole, where the spacial use of Canal Street is still dominated by gay and mainstreamed cosmopolitan spaces.

3.4.6 The Gay Ghetto

As mentioned previously, a key component in the success of Canal Street as a gay space able to support a diverse culture that includes and promotes queerness, is its geographically localised setting. However, this almost self contained space has split opinion both within and outside of the

gay community, as to whether the approach taken to Canal Street's development has been positive, or has left the space a closed off and managed "gay ghetto" (Hillmore, 1999). Whilst there is no evidence to support the argument that this has developed from a mainstream desire to limit gay space to one area, it can be argued that this is an unintentional result of heteronormative suppression and persecution of gay men for decades prior, resulting in a need for spaces to be close together and 'recognisably' gay. However, this argument must also be balanced with the social convention of venues that attract a particular clientele 'bunching' together in order to attract the business of the people most likely to attend such a venue, resulting in a mixed reasoning as to why spaces, including others outside of Canal Street, tend to gather together. On the one hand, mainstream suppression pushing such venues together. On the other, the convenience afforded to gay lifestyles by this bunching effect. Regardless, the similarities and use of the term "ghetto" is incredibly accurate as a description of this space, be it self imposed or attached by the heteronormative mainstream culture it is surrounded by.

Those on Canal Street are quick to explain the benefits of the space, with one group in G-A-Y stating "safety in numbers" as the most important reason the space was appealing, a theme that rang true in many other conversations on the street. This was however balanced by a recognition that the space was limiting in a way, with a lesbian woman, who was keen not to be identified, stating she felt that "It's still safer here than a straight bar. You still get looks, even if we can get married, you still get people looking. They look here too I guess. But here I don't care you're in my space". This demonstrated the overarching theme of ownership over the space being inhabited, and an acknowledgment of the constraints of a localised queer space. However, it also demonstrated a lack of concern at the arrangement, demonstrating that the ghetto effect has, regardless of true intention, been taken over the by the community it holds as their own.

The self imposition of the "gay ghetto" theory is evidenced in one particularly controversial way. The introduction of 'gay only' door policies has in recent times spread to many of the larger venues in The Village. The policy can be seen as early as the 90's, as The Village was entering popularity with cosmopolitan heterosexuals. Hillmore writes in an 1999 article for The Mail On Sunday that "I was told some bars employ bouncers who are instructed to turn away heterosexuals, a bizarre reversal of the sort of discrimination that gays had been campaigning against for years" (Hillmore, 1999) demonstrating the somewhat contradictory nature of the gay village. This continues in the present, a seemingly accepted discrimination against straight people. However it must be recognised that whilst this practise has become somewhat commonplace in gay spaces, the micro queer spaces that rely on gay space in Manchester inevitably suffer as a result, such is their basic principle of gender and sexual orientation disregard.

3.5 People

In comparing the presence and types of people in queer Manchester with those in London, focus is placed on the previously discussed notion of the continued development of Manchester in relation to its southern neighbour. This can most readily be seen in the presence of the same categories of scenesters, patrons and observers, but with a greater degree of blurring between the categories as a result of their still developing and defining nature. However, as a result of Manchester's currently closer alignment to gay culture, the role of scenesters is in some ways better defined than that of London, with a particular focus placed on these micro-celebrities in the the gay space of The Village. With queer specific space at a great premium in Manchester, the opportunities for identifying and researching these categories is reduced, and increasingly blurred with the larger gay population of the space, resulting in a more free flowing movement of people into spaces, and as a result, greater blurring of categories into one another, as well as the wider categories of gay people inhabiting the spaces. The following is a discussion of the most prominent examples of the individually identified categories that are present in both London and Manchester, with efforts made to define the categories in such a way as to discount the wider effects of the gay community on the queer persons in the categories. However, as noted, the blurred effect of close proximity and space means this is not entirely feasible, and is arguably integral to understanding the core difference between London and Manchester and its current queer development of people.

3.5.1 Mancunian Scenesters

Given the prominence of gay culture in The Village, it is no surprise to find that the most prominent of the local scenesters are drag queens, with some taking a more traditional approach to drag dress and others experimenting and pushing the medium in a queer direction that may more commonly be described as a London trait. The presence of drag as the main guise of scenesters on Canal Street can once again be compared with the case in London, in which drag seems to play a greater role in the world of queer dress and expression as a perceived 'acceptable face' of queer culture in both gay and the larger heteronormative space. Given Manchester's broadly varying demographic of not only queer, gay and heterosexual users, the presence of drag as the primary form of expression is not surprising.

In Manchester, the well established drag convention of houses and families, first brought to mainstream attention in the seminal documentary 'Paris Is Burning' (Livingston, 1991), has been used in order to brand and propel the prominence of the main group of scenesters on the street. While not an official drag house, the 'Manchester Queens' are a group of drag and cabaret performers who inhabit various venues around The Village and have even gone on to expand their reach to London and international gigs as a result of their utilisation of social media and brand marketing. Anna Phylactic and Cheddar Gorgeous represent two of the most recognised and well

established of this group of drag queens, with both exemplifying a less 'fem-real' aesthetic in favour of a more outlandish, queer and at times shocking style of drag. This is a style that has gone on to become more common in the way in which prominent drag queens dress in Manchester, with hosts such as Danny Beard also adopting a style that pushes the creative possibilities of makeup and costume beyond what might otherwise be perceived as simple and mundane 'real' drag.

However, the use of traditional drag styles is still very much present in Canal Street, with the roles of many hostesses, door girls and DJs fulfilled by Drag Queens of all shapes and sizes. This can be seen as a personification of the northern attitude to drag, with camp irreverence and humour becoming the primary goals of the performance and polished aesthetic taking a less prominent role.

In the case of Manchester, it is also interesting to note when looking at scenesters, that the presence of visiting performers not local to the scene, or the area geographically, plays an integral role in the identity of Manchester's gay space to the wider world and places greater exposure on not only the local queens, but the development of the space as a gay and queer area to the wider world. This can be exemplified in the continued presence of drag personalities made famous within gay culture and in some cases mainstream circles, most notably those featured on 'RuPaul's Drag Race' on American LGBT television network Logo (World Of Wonder Production, 2009).

Such is the draw of 'Holy Trannity', a club night held at megaclub AXM specifically to host 'Drag Race' stars, that it has now achieved national recognition as the primary venue in which to see these gay celebrities in the UK, beyond even the pull of performances at G-A-Y in London.

It could be argued that the role of the scenester in Manchester is one that is much more career and business related as opposed to the general freedom and creative expression enjoyed by London scenesters. Whilst Manchester scenesters are in no way lesser than their London counterparts, there is an argument to be made in the way in which they have presented themselves as a brand to the wider world and the scene itself, and in doing so, adding a corporate sensibility to their work and lifestyles, which whilst necessary for some, could be perceived as at odds with the queer ideal of expression and rejection of heteronormative paradigms, falling away from the queer nihilist outlook, as discussed by Mallinson Bird (TEDx Talks, 2015).

3.5.2 Mancunian Patrons

The role of the patron in Manchester is much less defined compared with London, and in many cases is formed from a pool of ranging demographics who utilise the space of Canal Street for a

multitude of difference reasons. This is a result of the spaces mixed use, as a social area, a safe space and as one in the central heart of Manchester providing ease of access and cosmopolitan enjoyment. Because of the mixing of queer space and gay space to such a great extent, a similar mix has been achieved in the patrons of the space, rather than just being formed from those people who may wish to exclusively seek out and partake in queer spaces, which is not always possible in Manchester given the previously discussed micro-queer spaces absorbed into often larger gay spaces. This is not a negative process, but has greatly influenced the makeup of the groups utilising the space of The Village when compared with London.

When looking at patrons in Manchester, one of the most interesting and unexpected demographics making up the group comes in the form of the heterosexual population of Manchester, predominantly women, who use The Village for its cosmopolitan urban setting close to work, in a convenient utilisation that also provides them with a perceived safer space than if they were to visit heteronormative spaces, resulting in a blurring of the role of Canal Street, something which has been an issue of tension and discussion in the gay community there for many years, given the rise of 'straight' influx since its regeneration and increased prominence.

These straight people are encompassed in the category of patron because whilst not being queer identified themselves, they are taking part in the space of Canal Street willingly and with awareness of what the space is in an effort to experience the scene. Many of these people can be found to head to Canal Street after work, in many cases for food and drink or for socialising in a progression of 'meeting down the local' after work, with Canal Street as a whole now taking on the role as the destination for metropolitan unwinding in the modern work place. Of course, this is not universally true, and the proportion of people who behave in this pattern are in the minority when considered in the larger context of Manchester and the region.

The second interesting demographic to look at is the presence of young people on the street, who in many cases are utilising the space as a safe space in which to explore and express their sexuality openly and with fear of repercussion. Whilst this is common in most gay areas of larger cities, Manchester has garnered a reputation of a premier destination for this kind of expression and has led to an almost pilgrimage like scenario for younger gay people making their first trip there to experience its gay scene. In asking people "when was the first time you came to Canal Street?" it is quickly revealed that in the majority of cases, people were not only quick to remember but also very specific, demonstrating the allure of the street in popular gay culture as a destination.

3.5.3 Mancunian Observers

The role of the observer on Canal Street is much reduced than that of the scenester or the patron, as a result of the ghettoisation of the space. Observers do still however follow the same basic principles as those in the London queer-sphere, being present at gatherings and spaces but not actively engaging in them. This may be in the form of the unwitting customer, the pedestrian walking along the street, or the mother who wanted to know what all the fuss was about, to name a few examples. Due to the nature of Canal Street and particularly the blurred roles of the other categories, the observer is much less visible and does not present such a compelling discussion of queerness when seen from the Manchester perspective. Instead, the influence of northern citizenship can be seen to have a greater influence.

3.5.4 The North Face: The Effect of Northernness in Gay Manchester

Key to exploring Canal Street as a queer space is its placement at the geographic heart of the queer north, as discussed previously in its positioning at the centre of the UK government's 'Northern Powerhouse' plan (BBC News, 2015). More difficult to determine, however, is the effect of this geographical placement on the formation of the space as a northern hub for queerness and gay culture.

This northern influence can most readily be identified in some of the very people who inhabit the space, commonly a melting pot of races, nationalities and sexualities/genders. However one overwhelmingly obvious trait is present in some of these people, particularly local residents and those from nearby cities, that being the overt 'northern' attitude that perpetuates throughout themselves and by extension The Village. Despite the cosmopolitanisation of Canal Street, its industrial heritage and placement within a typically proud northern city has influenced the formation of the space and permeated into the culture of the those who inhabit it, with a distinct presence of 'northern grit' attached to the street and its people, something not exclusive to the gay space of The Village, but rather the whole of the city and the north of the UK. This disposition has been widely acknowledged in a somewhat tongue in cheek way of describing the quality of being northern, with the Yorkshire Evening Post referring to it as a "Brazen" (Cross, 2007) quality.

This brazen northern pride and state of being is something that has been utilised in the gay village as a way of ensuring better integration and even acceptance among the typically perceived conservative north, with flamboyant demonstrations of queerness often accepted for their tongue in cheek references and lack of intrinsic grace and attempted superiority.

Acknowledgement of this northern quality is seen in examples of Canal Street throughout its media history, with 'Queer As Folk' portraying the characters as an array of backgrounds tied together

with a brash northern confidence exhibited in their everyday lives both on and off the street (T Davies, Harding, Huda, & McDougall, 1999). This can be taken to exemplify the attitude on the street, particularly in the late 90's and early 2000's, as discussed in the work of Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, who argue that 'Queer As Folk' mirrored extremely closely the reality of Canal Street at it's time of broadcast, stating that "Queer As Folk has an impact far beyond its representation particularly because it drew on the recognisable places and character" (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004). Hillmore also points to the intrinsic northernness of the street, observing that on Canal Street and in The Village "The bluff Northerner has been replaced by the gaudily dressed gay Northerner just a few hundred yards from the seedy, heterosexual red light district of Whitworth Street" (Hillmore, 1999).

The tongue in cheek attitude to sexuality and lifestyle can be seen in the characterisation of the street, with the overt use of rainbow flags, the traditional marker of gay space and gay friendly venues, and the "creative vandalism that continually erases the C and S from Canal Street" (Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004) in a self deprecating yet humorous marking of the space as predominantly gay. This irreverence towards sexuality and gender in day to day socialising manifests in the aesthetic conventions of Canal Street, exemplified, as previously mentioned, by the use of drag as a tool to reflect surroundings and culture in gay and queer space.



Figure 6 - Image: Queer As Folk, Channel 4

3.6 Aesthetics

Queer aesthetic considerations in the Manchester queer-sphere are predominantly represented in the way in which drag queens, particularly scenester personalities, tend to dress and portray a queer identity. Due to its mix of spaces and uses, Canal Street offers a practically limitless range of dress codes and conventions that mix and blend to create a rich and dynamic aesthetic that is incredibly difficult to describe through individual trends. In fact, the general 'look' of Canal Street is more varied and visually rich than those of queer spaces in London, which given their particular niche and established clientele have a more definable style and image within the confines of their respective spaces. However, this is not to say that there are no aesthetic considerations to mention in regard to Canal Street, but rather they are more concerned with space and a particular range of people as opposed to the general 'vibe' which can be seen in London.

3.6.1 Cosmopolitanism In The Design Of Canal Street

In the case of Canal Street, and its unique position in the UK as an almost fully self contained gay village, cosmopolitanism itself can be seen to play a key role in the design and aesthetic tone of the space. The length of Canal Street runs parallel to the Rochdale Canal, which has given rise to venues along the waterfront of the street, utilising their position in The Village to expand outward into the street, quite literally, with seating areas and umbrellas. This is a style often seen in cosmopolitanised spaces, replicating the European style of cafe culture as a relaxed and trendy space for professionals to enjoy within cities. In this way, the role of cosmopolitanism can be said to have a heteronormative effect on the street, providing in the daytime at least, a space which could be as at home on the continent as in a modern cosmopolitan UK city. This is evidenced by the influx of white shirted office workers who can often be seen to frequent Canal Street in after work hours to relax. This again reinforces the cosmopolitanised feel of the space, given its use as a space for relaxation for all genders and sexualities.

The effect of the cosmopolitan design paradigms should be taken into account when looking at the surrounding geographic context of Canal Street. At both ends and to the area behind the main strip, Manchester has seen a dramatic transformation as a result of its economic development and as an effect of regeneration following the IRA bombing of the Arndale centre in 1996 (Thompson, 2013) . The prominence of glass fronted skyscrapers and modern steel construction is now widely present across the city centre, which has had a profound and lasting effect on the cosmopolitanised ambience of Manchester beyond Canal Street, informing its own development along with the rest of the city, and demonstrating the way in which the 'Manchester Model' has ensured a cohesive approach to integrating The Village with the rest of the city centre, something which is not always appreciated, with The Economist also commenting that "Manchester's new

buildings do tend to feature a lot of the sheer glass and multi-coloured Juliet balconies that make modern architecture so unloved” (The Economist, 2013).

Whilst there is no definable mix of features that can be called cosmopolitan per se, there are certainly parallels to be drawn from other cosmopolitan spaces around the UK, often aligning with spaces that have seen gentrification and redevelopment over recent years. In the case of Canal Street, the modernisation of industrial buildings into stylish loft and club spaces is furthered by the addition of a sleek metal and glass railing that frames the canal along the length of the street, tying the space together not only for safety, but as a marker of the space and the way in which the use of the street itself has been considered and invested in. It is by this railing that venues set out their outdoor spaces during the day.

Binnie and Skeggs discuss the role of the community in creating this aesthetic alongside the physical characteristics of the street, stating that “In spring and summer when packed with promenading (or cruising) gay men, lesbians, tourists of all varieties and the smart and trendy clubbers it could at moments be a vision of a sophisticated space” (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). This statement hinges on the phrase ‘at moments’, demonstrating that whilst these people may alter the tone of the street, ultimately it retains a gayness that is considered unsophisticated, yet compliments the daytime cosmopolitanism with a nighttime alternative, providing a space that truly adapts with the people using it.

3.6.2 Capital G-A-Y: The Prominence Of Gayness In Manchester

Contrasting this daytime cosmopolitanism that is often utilised by the wider heteronormative community, is the after dark transformation of Canal Street into a thriving, camp, stylish, loud and proud gay centre for partying and socialisation. The gayness of the space spills quite literally out of the buildings and clubs and into the street, over taking the cafe culture set up by the canal and replacing it with smoking areas and a thoroughfare for bar hopping. This is not fully present everyday of the week, but to some degree on any given night, particularly in the summer months. The presence of gay ambience is unmistakable, given the countless rainbow flags, fairy lights, coloured lighting and even tiki torches that have been present on an evening since The Village’s makeover following its regeneration.

This overt gay aesthetic, which is as difficult to define as cosmopolitanism aesthetics, takes from queerness as part of its identity. Namely, the idea that the space is a safe place for experimentation and expression, with imaginative, and often loud interpretations. The drag queens who act as ‘door whores’ along the street mark the various venues and act as a human answer to



Figure 7 - Image: Queer As Folk, Channel 4 1999



Figure 8 - Image: Cucumber, Channel 4 2015

the railings opposite, marking the space and providing a clear visual demonstration of who the space is intended to be for, without intimidating or limiting the clientele.

Of particular importance, and now acting as an icon of sorts, is the sign for G-A-Y club at the end of the Canal Street, which serves not only to advertise, but to announce the space. Its bright bulbs make it distinctly more visible on an evening than during the daytime, something of a metaphor shared by much of the street in general, with lighting in many venues transforming the street on an evening into a colourful and welcoming space. As part of this overt gayness is the use of camp and playful 'tacky' aesthetics that have long accompanied gay spaces. This is particularly prominent around the time of pride, during which various decoration spectacles are used as a marker of The Village and queer visibility. As previously discussed, the drag personalities of the street act as tide

markers for The Village, often taking on their own more queer identity which marks the height of the overtness of the space year round.

3.6.3 Roughing It: Drag Aesthetics In The North

The role of drag in both gay and queer culture cannot be understated, as has been previously discussed, given its position as the acceptable face of a queer culture in the mainstream and an increasingly heteronormative gay space. In this way, it is understandable that drag as an artistic form of expression adapts and melds to the requirements and demands of a space and culture in order to be felt, appreciated and accepted. In this case, a northern cosmopolitan city with strong industrial ties, the drag element has taken on two distinct guises: one of a polished and extremely well performed and executed style, contrasting the second 'rough-around-the-edges' style that has proven popular through its parody of mainstream culture and even drag itself. This northern tolerance to unpolished looks relates back to the very types of people that are experiencing and taking part in the drag performances in Manchester, who view the performance as parody and escapism from the increasingly polished aesthetic of mainstream drag, but also for its humorous mockery of heteronormative lifestyle. This can perhaps also be traced to the developing nature of Canal Street as a queer space, in that no one aesthetic convention has yet been reached given the ever shifting space itself.

However there is common ground to be found between these two styles, particularly in the way in which they both utilise comedy and exaggeration as the primary basis for an aesthetic on any given night. Whilst those who portray a more polished and finely executed look may produce this through makeup talent or fantastical costume choices, the traditional drags may utilise exaggerated makeup or costume of a purposefully harsh quality to communicate comedy. However this does not present a barrier between the two interpretations, rather presenting a dialogue which is enjoyed by both sides, who can be found working together in the same venues with no animosity to the others style of drag, perhaps a key signifier of the way in which queerness is informing the interactions on Canal Street going forward.

This commonality can also be found in the reasoning for portraying a certain aesthetic in both camps, something which throughout the period of observation in The Village appeared to be the use of current affairs and translation of puns and metaphors into visual expressions. This was particularly clear in the wake of the Orlando nightclub attack, which saw a call to arms for gay communities across the world. The resulting costuming of the local drag community took the sombre tone of the attack into consideration, yet many were seen to portray a style that was overtly gay and proud, with particular focus on the LGBT rainbow flag as part of the general aesthetic in response to the notion that whilst many gathered to remember the victims in grief and unity, there

was also a need to assert the presence of gayness and the act of being gay to the wider world. Whilst this was not a particularly northern related trait within the queer drag community, it was notable in the confines of such a small area as Canal Street, as the clashing of different styles was particularly well illustrated as a result of the spaces limitations.

3.6.4 Canal Street The Time Capsule

Core to the aesthetic makeup of Canal Street is the way in which the venues contribute internally and externally to the wider space, creating a distinctive community vibe as varied as the people who visit those same venues. The mixture of venues that have long and short histories in The Village, ensures a wide variety of styles and destinations for clubgoers, as well as the opportunity for continual redevelopment of older venues ensuring a fresh mix on an ongoing basis. The older venues, such as Churchills, New Union and The Rembrandt, are marked by their pub roots, and as such this is present in their style and presence on the street. Inside, the traditional markings of a working man's pub are present, but mixed with newer, perhaps gayer, features such as disco lights and cabaret stages. This stands in stark contrast to the modern venues that have opened only recently in the context of Canal Street's history, with venues such as G-A-Y, Kiki and View basking in their club atmospheres and industrial setting, taking their design cues from brick, metal and glass.

To this extent, Canal Street can be described as a physical time capsule containing examples of venues past and present and combining them in one cohesive space that continues to change and develop. However, on the street itself there is a distinctive '90's' vibe that persists to this day as a result of the steadfast venues which have been instrumental in the regeneration and popularisation of the street in both Manchester itself, and the mainstream media and community. Venues such as Via, New York New York and View, featured at various points in different television shows, have instilled a particular look and expectation of Canal Street venues, which as long as the custom continues, are unlikely to change their aesthetic '90's' style for which they were recognised on television. This is part of their headline attraction. Canal Street has in this way contributed to the preservation and promotion of its own aesthetics and acts as space in which the history of the street itself can be clearly seen in the buildings and venues it hosts. This married with the industrial vibe of the street itself, and its proximity to the very tunnels that gay men would use for rendezvous as early as Victorian times, demonstrates the historical significance and preservation that Canal Street can boast as a unique feature both nationally and globally, contributing in part to its allure and success as a gay destination for tourists.

4.0 The Necessity Of Queer Space

As has been discussed in the contrast between London and Manchester, the current state of development in queer cultural movements in the north and the south varies greatly, with Manchester's queer community still existing as an addition to the gay space that is now entrenched in the fabric of Manchester's cosmopolitan culture. This is a development that London has surpassed, with queer spaces and personalities now inhabiting their own venues in their own right with parallels, but not reliance, to the gay scene in the capital.

What is made clear by these evolutionary differences is that queer cultures may develop differently and adapt to the conditions around them. In the case of Manchester, given its integrated gay 'ghetto', it is hard to imagine a need for queer space to break out in its own right, contrary to the case in London, in which the primary gay space has been eroded and mainstreamed as a result of runaway gentrification. However, if we are to take Butler's assertions that gender is simply a performance that we adorn ourselves with unrelated to the sex we are assigned (Butler, 1988) and there is an expressive way through clubbing and socialising to show "that there is this division between sex and gender" (TEDx Talks, 2015a) then the necessity of queer space in order to express and explore gender without the confines of an overwhelmingly heteronormative society cannot be understated, particularly given the rise in recent times of right-wing politics across Europe.

Matthew Todd, former editor of the UK's best selling gay magazine *Attitude*, makes perhaps the most poignant argument for the need, now more than ever, for queer space and expression of the true self in his book 'Straight Jacket: How To Be Gay And Happy', in which he discusses the link between increased prominence of depression, drug abuse, addiction and relationship issues in gay men and the experience of growing up gay, musing on the work of therapist Joe Kort and his book '10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do To Improve Their Lives' (Kort, 2003), stating that "It is the damage done to us by growing up strapped inside a cultural straitjacket, a tight fitting, one-size restraint imposed on us at birth that leaves no room to grow outside its narrow confines" (Todd, 2016) in reference to the heteronorm and the pressure LGBT people face to adhere to its societal standards of gender and sexuality.

The necessity of queer space for expression has once more been thrown into the global spotlight following the attacks at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, which left 50 people dead as a result. The incident, among one of the worst mass shootings in US history, cast light on the question "why do we need gay bars?". The international gay community united in displays of unity, with Shin Faye of British magazine *Dazed and Confused* seeking to address that question by stating that "To those

– straight or gay – who thought that queer liberation was already achieved this is a painful reminder it has not been” and that the media had underplayed the relevance of their queerness, a common feeling held in the LGBT community, adding “The 50 queers slaughtered were killed because they were queer and seeing mainstream news outlets, uncomfortable with this reality, try to deny or elide this reality makes me despair, then angry” (Faye, 2016).



Figure 9 - Image: Facebook

Queer expressions within the gay community have long existed and been demonstrated in cultural movements such as punk and new romanticism, yet it is only now, that given the progression of relative tolerance and LGBT rights in the west, that a queer lifestyle, be it in part of fully as an identity, is now becoming commonplace in the makeup of social spaces across the country.

In London, one club goer acknowledged the importance of queer space and its limited presence as a place for expression stating that “They have facilitated these queer people with this ability to express themselves and act in a way which societally would be unacceptable, not for moral reasons, but for heteronormative reasons” and that “across the country and across the world I can think of very few places where that can happen”. This demonstrates the acknowledgment within the queer community that there is a need and an appreciation of such spaces, which ought to be protected and encouraged as a space for continued development and expression of overt, proud queerness.

4.1 Closing Discussion And The Future Of The Queer Movement

Over the course of the two case studies, different concepts and theories have been discussed and brought forward for clarification. However, whilst the aim of this study was not to draw any direct conclusions about the future direction of this queer movement, there are scenarios which can be confidently put forward as likely possibilities for its continued development. Conclusions can also be draw about the way in which this movement is currently functioning and how this varies in different contexts.

This study has concluded that the queer movement which is currently taking place across the UK, is descended from, and is inextricably linked to, the gay/LGBT movement and its culture. The two exist together, often in the same spaces with many of the same participants, in an amicable relationship that has resulted in two schools of thinking for wider queer acceptance into mainstream society. This can be described in two methods.

The first, the reactionary method, is seen more prevalently in London, and is based in the use of queer expression as a way of visually reacting to the heteronorm and its imposed notions surrounding gender and sexuality. These reactions change as time progresses, fuelled in part by the ongoing process of gentrification in London, which has seen the continual relocation of centres of gay and queerness. In this way, the queer movement in London can be said to have more possibilities for advancement and visibility, as it continues to adapt, transgress and redefine. This reactionary integration method achieves its goal by becoming the norm through continual visual presence across the capital, integration through expression, which as discussed previously is at the core of the queer movement at large. This is seen to some extent in Manchester but is stifled by the second method, basic integration.

Basic integration, which is the most prevalent in Manchester when compared against London, is a result of the limited ways in which queerness has been able to express itself in the cosmopolitanised gay ghetto of Canal Street. The gay movement has had success at integration here by mainstreaming the space, although how this will effect the gayness of the street is debatable and remains to be seen in the coming years. However, as a result of having less stand-alone credibility in Manchester, the queer movement here is integrated along with the gay movement into the local mainstream, achieving a somewhat integrated acceptance whether they intend to or not.

What is also clear as a conclusion of this study is that whilst the queer movement and the gay 'scene' do not exist in animosity to each other, they have, as time has progressed, sought to distance themselves from each other in order to define themselves and their goals better, a process which is likely to continue, with gay culture continuing to adapt and mainstream to achieve integration through assimilation, and queerness taking a more defiant stance in the face of heteronormative suppression of gender and sexual deviations.

Perhaps most importantly, and on a human level, this study has shown that there are a great many people in the UK who feel the need and desire to express their gender and sexuality in a different way not available to them in the mainstream without having to face the repercussions of a non-heteronormative lifestyle. It has placed focus, in a small way, on the need for queer expression,

and the benefits this has for culture, and the healthy development of those who question their gender and sexuality. Given the current unpredictable political landscape and fragile perceived tolerance of LGBT people, it cannot be known at present if this will continue to grow, or if it will be repressed in a manner similar to the early gay movement, which is now being integrated as it mainstreams itself to societies standards.

However if this is not the case, and it is allowed to continue to develop and thrive, the queer movement will find new prominence in a new generation of people seeking an outlet for their gender and sexual expressions. Queerness may become as much a part of future generations demographic makeup as that of the gay movement also once did, moving from taboo to accepted and enjoyed trait.

4.2 Research Advancement

This study has sought to act as a starting point in the discussion of the queer movement in a variety of fields, and as such, the opportunities for further research into the field are many. The study sought to inform further research and understanding in the creative industries and beyond, with material for use in publishing, creative arts, performance, political thinking and geography.

The most pressing research topic to come from this research is that of further documentation as time progresses. By its very nature, the queer movement is likely to progress in ways which cannot be measured by observation alone and ought to be recorded for future study. This also leaves a question over the direction of this movement, study of which may inform further a variety of industries and their reflections of this culture, better catering solutions towards them.

Research could be directed towards integration and the placement of the queer movement in a cohesive society, without assimilation into the heteronorm, leading to a wider discussion around community cohesion and multiculturalism in a modern United Kingdom.

Particularly interesting may be the opportunities for further research into the codes and conventions of queer aesthetics for the visual arts, leading to a discussion around queer psychology and decision making. Of interest during the course of the study was the relationship between the development of gay men and people who pursue a queer expression. Research may benefit from an exploration of the links and commonalities between the two, and to what extent nature and nurture have in this difference of sexual and gender identity expression.

The question of sexuality and gender identity is one which requires further exploration on an ongoing basis, and this study aimed to provide a discussion point to that research, informing it of

the use of the term queer, but also of its portrayals of gender and sexuality as holding little meaning in a queer context.

The research may lend an informative viewpoint to those in the performance field, who require background to performances with queer themes and concepts, and how best to explore these either through people, space or aesthetics.

Political thinking may benefit from an informed view of the discussions had in this study around gentrification, cohesion and integration, and geographical division between the north and south and the role this plays. This has implications for not only local government, but for policy on a wider level in relation to gender and sexual identity in the United Kingdom. The opportunities for geography come from the discussions had around queer space and the ways in which these are utilised and formed. This is of particular importance in Manchester, which would benefit from further research to provide a clear picture of the gay and queer scene beyond the gay village, if it does indeed have a wider reach.

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive and it is hoped this research will fuel discussion around the queer movement in ways that cannot be foreseen, as well as those which would benefit the topic from further research and understanding.

5.0 Appendices

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