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LOCKDOWN – A DISORIENTING FORCE

A queer perspective on lockdown and isolation in
London during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a scientific interest in how certain measures of disease control, such as lockdowns, affects different individuals and different communities. Through a queer-phenomenological approach, the purpose of the study is to offer queer insights of lockdown as a measure of disease control by exploring how queer people in London orientate and experience the everyday spaces they have been confined to under those premises. By analysing written accounts sent in by queer people that has experienced lockdown in London, the result of the study shows that lockdown has had a palpable effect on the access and proximity to queer spaces. Lockdown organizes the everyday life under new premises and creates difficulties in facing a direction where one comes into contact with other queer people and allies. This might run the risk off putting disadvantaged queer people in an even more precarious position. The participants in the study tell off stories where one is limited to digital spaces and media. However, the time of lockdown has also been a time of liberation where participants speak of moments of revelation coming to terms with their sexuality and gender identity through times of isolation.

Keywords: queer, phenomenology, lockdown, isolation, covid-19

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I sit with some strange ambivalence, finishing the largest piece of work in my time at the university during the strangest and most difficult of times. A part of me wants to be over and done with it, but another part of me is afraid to let go. The part of me that is too afraid of letting go surely is very aware that this is my final piece of work at the Gender Studies Department at Lund University. And there is some melancholy in that. Since 2015, The Gender Studies Department has been home. My sincerest gratitude goes out to all the students and teachers I have crossed paths with and that has challenged and nurtured my way of thinking.

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1. Introduction

In 2020, I found myself spending many months inside an apartment in the central of London with my partner who recently had moved there. It was my first time visiting the grand capital, and what a strange time it was. My first impressions were of empty streets, closed shops, and masked faces. Those impressions were in effect the ones that led me here. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a scientific interest in how the crisis, as an overarching and inescapable force of nature, has affected people locally when life suddenly gets flipped upside down and has to be organized under different premises. Restrictions, such as lockdowns, has limited the possibilities for gathering in the public sphere which ultimately raises questions regarding how these isolative measures affect people in different communities and in different contexts. To a further extent, we have been confined to our homes where what lies beyond our front door every day becomes more of a mystery. Recent previous studies have already explored problematic and worrisome effects of isolation and lockdown measures in different contexts such as the increase of gender-based violence (Lorente Acosta 2020; Fawole, Okedare & Reed 2020) or the negative impact isolative measures has for people's mental health (Fiorenzato et al. 2021; Krüger-Malpartida et al. 2020). At the same time, lockdown has also entailed access to a life that previously was unthinkable. Frances Ryan writes in The Guardian that when society welcomes a more virtual way of living, people with disabilities have been able to participate in work and engage with culture to a further extent (Ryan, 2020).

How has queer people and the queer community faced the restrictions under lockdown? In 2020, Kneale and Bécares initiated a cross-sectional, web-based survey that they dubbed *the 'queerantime' study*. The purpose of the study was to assess the mental health and prevalence of discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in the United Kingdom during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. They motivated the study by speaking of how the crisis has both exposed and exacerbated already present health inequalities and how it could be assumed that LGBTQ+ people would suffer greater social and economic consequences because of the pandemic. Their result showed that indicators of depression and stress were very high, particularly with those who were younger and those who were transgender (Kneale & Bécares, 2021). Worth bearing in mind is that this study is of quantitative nature and cannot grant us in-depth knowledge of the experiences of what they call the queerantime. I found the conceptualization of "the queerantime" to be an alluring and enticing portmanteau and it is a term I would like to build

upon. What would a conceptualization of the queerantime look like and how could we explore lockdown as a measure for disease control from a queer point of view?

I think about how philosopher and scholar Sara Ahmed speak of the contributions of phenomenology where she writes about space as the extension of the body and how the direction of the body is dependent on the space it inhabits (Ahmed, 2006a:12). Direction is not accidental, she argues, but rather structurally constituted (Ahmed, 2006a:15). By highlighting the concept of orientation in phenomenology, she argues that how we orientate ourselves in space becomes a process of ‘finding our way’ and ‘feeling at home’ (Ahmed, 2006a:7). If we think about orientation in this way; as a way of turning in certain directions to ground ourselves and ‘find home’ and as something that is governed through structural norms, one cannot help then but wonder what happens when the possibilities for where and when we can turn are limited. In times of lockdown and isolation it is safe to say that to where we can turn and to what spaces we can orientate ourselves towards becomes restricted. If we previously have faced a certain direction that makes us arrive and feel at home what happens when it is no longer possible to turn the face that way? Where do we turn instead and what are the implications of that reorientation?

The locus of this thesis are the spatial reconfigurations that lockdown gives birth to and how those reconfigurations are experienced by queer people. I would argue that lockdown and isolation actualize the notion of space and the structural power relations that constitute our understanding and experiences of space. Space has become a keyword in this crisis that we are in, especially in contexts of lockdown and isolation. Restrictions are put in place that decide to what spaces we are confined to and what spaces we lose access to. As the previous research cited above tell of, this time has become a moment to critique structural implications of isolative measures, as well as exploring emancipatory potentials in the reconfiguration of space that the crisis creates. In this thesis, the gendered and sexualized dimension of space becomes essential. Like many feminist and queer geographers have emphasized, gender and sexuality cannot be disentangled from the notion of time and space. They are mutually constitutive in the way that gender and sexuality makes space and space makes gender and sexuality (Browne et al. 2008; Johnston, 2015; McDowell, 1999). This time could then be of great momentum. Not only to build upon research of experiences of lockdown measures through another point of view, but also for further exploration of the role space plays in the construction of gender and sexuality.

2. Purpose and Aim

Through an understanding of the importance of space in relation to gender and sexuality this thesis will explore how queer people in London have orientated in and experienced the everyday spaces under lockdown. By adopting an explorative, queer-phenomenological approach, I will analyse written texts by queer people in London about their experiences of everyday spaces under lockdown; the spaces they have been confined to, the spaces they have turned to, and the spaces that have been missed. By seizing this previously mentioned momentum, the purpose of the study is to investigate how lockdown has affected the way queer people orientate in everyday spaces under the new premises of lockdown, offering queer insights to lockdown as a measure for disease control as well as further exploring queerness and its relation to everyday spaces. An inevitable secondary outcome of this study will further be to explore how lockdown measures and isolation has affected queer people more generally. Such findings could then be of value for evaluation of how lockdown and isolation affect different communities. When I approach the material, I ask the following research questions:

1.1 Research Questions

- How has the participants orientated in everyday spaces under the premises of lockdown?
- How has the participants experienced everyday spaces under the premises of lockdown?
- How can we understand the everyday spaces under lockdown from a queer point of view?

3. Background

To set the study in its context, I aim to give a brief summary of how lockdown in London has transpired, before jumping into the giving an overview of previous research. London, and the entirety of the United Kingdom, has faced strict lockdown measures under the COVID-19 pandemic where many restrictions has been put on one's access to the public sphere. From the beginning of the pandemic up until now, the United Kingdom has had a number of national and local lockdowns as well as periods with fewer restrictions. During lockdown, the consensus has been to isolate with your household or the people you have formed a support bubble with. You

should only meet people in your nearest vicinity, you should only leave the home when necessary and work from home to the extent that you can. Public places and venues where people gather have either been heavily restricted or shut down completely.

The chronological order of restrictions and lockdowns that the United Kingdom has implemented has changed throughout the pandemic and it is most likely the case that it will continue to change even after the examination of this thesis. On the 24th of March 2020, the United Kingdom initiated their first nationwide lockdown. Many businesses were temporarily closed, and large gatherings of people were prohibited. On the 1st of May a policy of social distancing was introduced, which required people to stay at home and avoid any contact with people that were outside of one's household (Jaspal, Lopes & Lopes, 2020). In June of 2020, the restrictions began to ease where some businesses could open again and social contact with people outside of your household was permitted in limited circumstances (Meijer & Webster, 2020). After the summer when the second peak of infection made its presence known, a four levelled tier system, where restrictions varied, was introduced due to local outbreaks of the virus. Parts of the United Kingdom were either categorized as *medium*, *high*, *very high alert* or *stay at home*.

On the 4th of January 2021, a third national lockdown was announced. Citizens were required to stay at home and could only leave the home when it was permitted by law. A permitted reason to leave the home could be to carry out work that could not be done from home, attending to essential activities such as going to the store or the pharmacy, volunteering, or to provide emergency assistance. You were allowed to exercise outside of your home whilst being reminded that time spent away from your home should be limited to the furthest extent. The national lockdown meant further restrictions on international traveling where citizens were obligated to fill out a form to state on what legal grounds one was permitted to leave the country. Businesses and venues that were not essential were forced to close in order to reduce social contact. If any of these lockdown restrictions were broken, you would be fined. The fines ranged from 200 to 10,000£ depending on what restriction had been breached and how many times it had been breached (Walker & Belham, 2021).

On the 22nd of February 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a roadmap where the restrictions that lockdown brought with it would be eased step by step. The roadmap consisted of four steps, starting on the 8th of March with step one where schools and colleges were reopened. On the 29th of March, the rule of six, or the meeting of two households, came into effect regarding outdoor activities. On the 12th of April, step two was initiated where nonessential retail and outdoor venues could reopen. Leisure facilities indoors reopened, and venues would be able to stay open for outdoors service. On the 17th of May, they could move

on to the third step in the roadmap where six people, or two households, again were allowed to meet indoors. Overnight stays would again be permitted, and international travel would be able to resume without having a legally permitted reason to travel overseas. The roadmap was said to conclude no sooner than the 21st of June with the fourth step where there would be no restrictions on social distancing any longer and where larger events and nightclubs would be able to reopen. The fourth step was inevitably postponed by a month because of the rise of the delta variant. But on the 19th of July, citizens of the United Kingdom got to see what they called 'freedom day' with zero restrictions despite the rise of cases soaring through the country (Elgot & Sample, 2021).

4. Previous Research

At the heart of this study lies space. I turn to Gorman-Murray, McKinnon and Dominey-Howes that speak of how natural disasters have the prospects of causing displacement and unmaking space in the midst of crisis (Gorman-Murray, McKinnon & Dominey-Howes, 2014). This is the way I approach lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic; treating it as a natural disaster that creates spatial reconfigurations through measures of disease control such as lockdowns. Previous research has also drawn parallels between the COVID-19 pandemic and the HIV and AIDS crisis (Bassett, 2020; Dawa & Narain, 2021). Following will be an outline of which discussions the thesis will place itself in. The fields of research which I aim to write myself into and engage in a dialogue with is on one hand, research that has been conducted in the field of feminist, queer geography and geographies of sexuality and, on the other hand, studies and dissertations that adopts a phenomenological perspective in its analysis of space. The previous research thus establishes a framework for the spatial arenas that the material for my study touches upon. The home, the environment of digital media and the city landscape.

The contributions of feminist geography have been to explore and render visible the relationship between gender and space with an emphasis of the category's mutual construction (McDowell, 2004:12). In a similar manner, the field of geographies of sexuality explores the relationship of sexuality and space (Brown, Browne & Lim, 2007:2). Johnston also points to the prevalence of queer geographies and geographies of sexuality spun up as a reaction to the heterosexist canon of feminist geography (Johnston, 2015:809). Geographies of sexuality and queer geography do overlap. But as Gorman-Murray and McKinnon emphasize, they are not synonymous. Queer geographies specifically take use of queer theory in its analysis of space, and queer geographers have critiqued the field of geographies of sexuality in the way the field has been overly

concerned with strict binaries, where queer theory refuses any meaning of the fixed character (Gorman-Murray & McKinnon, 2015:759). In a similar manner, there also exist a critique in how race and intersectionality largely has been vacant in research of geography (Haritaworn et al. 2018:18) Geography of this kind thus seek to explore how structural norms are constituted and articulated through space, time, and spatial dimensions.

Given the context of lockdown and the ways the measure confides us to our homes, I find it productive to present previous research that has been done in connection to the home. This to provide a background for the importance of studying lockdown from a queer perspective and the locus of the everyday. There are a plethora of studies depicting how we might understand home from a queer perspective and in a queer way. A study by Gorman-Murray (2007a) about gay men and lesbian women living in the urban Australia challenges a theorized normative idea of home, namely that there is a dominant discourse within western society that a home is that of the nuclear heterosexual family. The word home and family become stuck together in this imaginary. Gorman-Murray furthermore clarifies that this does not mean all housing in the western world are designed for heterosexual family, but rather that there is a dominant discourse that a house becomes a home when it is the ground for the nuclear family (Gorman-Murray, 2007a:231). Embarking from this understanding and making these connotations is not unproblematic because it renders gay men and lesbian women as being incompatible with this imaginary of what a home is (Gorman-Murray, 2007a; Bell, 1991). However, it would be a great misconception to think of it as a clear demarcation between queer ways of living and more normative ways of living. These are not stable categories and to think of them as such would be for the analysis to render the complexity to its antonym (Gorman-Murray & Cook, 2007:1).

Vallerland notes how theories surrounding queer spaces is a way of demonstrating how queer people's occupation of space might help us rethink the very concept of home; how it is used and how it could be analysed (Vallerland, 2013:66). Gorman-Murray and Cook (2018) understand the interior of our homes as a fundamental site for understanding queer lives. They make this argument based on that for starters, it is the place where we spend most of our time and secondly, that the public life only can be understood by looking at it from the inside and out (Gorman-Murray & Cook, 2018:3). Home might also be understood as an arena in which identity is produced, constructed, and performed. Home is undoubtedly a place that involves powerful affections; the place where family and community orientated values take shape and transforms (Duncan & Lambert 2004:387).

If home is understood through strong connotations of that of the heterosexual nuclear family, the idea of home might elicit strong adverse emotions to the ones not adhering to that norm (Valentine, 1993). Choi (2013) for example explore the domestic home as an arena of conflict

for transgender people. That home, on one hand, plays a central role in policing gender and reinforcing the gendered binary system and is a site where trans people have to endure physical and domestic abuse at the hands of family members or partners. On the other hand, home might also be understood as the arena where trans people are able to challenge gendered binary norms in a way that is not possible in public spaces (Choi, 2013:137-138).

The idea of home has been problematized as being a safe haven where one is cut out from the dark outside world. It is possible for someone to inhabit a home without ever necessarily feeling at home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006:10). Home can also mean the processes in which a safe space and a shelter is produced which in a way diffuses or perhaps queers the clear demarcation of where and what home is. A home can, from that understanding, very well be a public place (Bryant, 2015:262). Vallerland (2013) also echoes what previously has been stated; how the division of the public and the private in the queer practices of homemaking does not suffice. Gorman-Murray and Cook furthermore notes how the construction of the home is a process created through human and other-than-human agents (Gorman-Murray & Cook, 2018:3). This could entail the neighbourhood the home is situated in and the neighbours one is surrounded by (Casey, 2013). But it could also entail digital media. Previous research written in the field of queer phenomenology and digital media studies have emphasized how digital media plays an integral part of the everyday life and cannot be understood as separate from the physical (Tudor, 2012; Moores, 2012). Digital spaces have likewise become a field of interest for queer geography (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019; Hanckel, 2019).

The spaces actualised in a study about lockdown are not limited to the private sphere of the home. In the material to come in the analysis, the city landscape and the spaces provided by digital technology become paramount for understanding. The city landscape and urban areas has been an area of interest in the way it actualizes gendered and sexualized norms from a queer-phenomenological perspective. Michelle Göransson (2012) have written about how the city landscape are structured through gendered and heteronormative norms and what implications that have for which bodies are embraced and rejected in the spaces that the city encompasses. Other previous research with connection to the city have explored how public spaces are experienced by queer people and structured through heteronormative, cisgendered norms as well as whiteness (Doan, 2010; Bremer, 2021). Another topic in the material of this study that relates to the space of city is the extensive policing of public spaces under lockdown. This actualises studies about how LGBTQIA+ people experience policing and law enforcement in The United Kingdom where studies point towards a prevalence of discrimination and distrust with police and law enforcement (Dwyer, Ball & Barker, 2004; Williams & Robinson, 2004).

5. Theoretical Framework

Moving on to the theoretical framework that lays the ground for the analysis is a brew containing several different ingredients. In the centre of the frame, the largest bubble of the mind map, lies queer phenomenology. Phenomenology is what determines and captures the subjective experience of space which not only bear the fruits for the understanding of space, but also what sows the seed for the methodology of the study. When moving beyond the lived experience of space, the theoretical framework is complimented by theories and disciplines that furthermore explores how space is understood throughout this thesis. By bringing the theory of queer temporality into the light, and how we can understand space, the foundation for the theoretical framework is established.

5.1 Queer Phenomenology

On one hand, philosopher and scholar Sara Ahmed offers a certain critique to phenomenology by suggesting ways of queering its framework. On the other hand, she also uses the phenomenological tradition and vocabulary to theorize a poststructural analysis of bodies orientations and inhabitation of space. In her book *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, objects, others* (2006a) she speaks in dialogue with phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and immerses the reader by exploring phenomenological assumptions that could be understood as being taken for granted. Furthermore, she takes use of Franz Fanon and Judith Butler to explore the racialized and sexualized dimension of being oriented in space.

The starting point is phenomenology, motivated through the way phenomenology places the concept of orientation in the centre of the argument of how our consciousness is always directed towards something (Ahmed, 2006b:544). Ahmed argues that phenomenology can offer further insight for the field of queer studies in the way that the philosophical tradition emphasizes how lived experience, and our orientation in space, is vital to the understanding of perception and consciousness. In doing so, Ahmed introduces a handful of concepts that become productive in our ways of thinking about consciousness and perception. If we understand consciousness as always being directed somewhere, how is it that we end up in the place where we are able to perceive things in the first place? How is it that we are directed in certain ways more than others? A queer phenomenology, she notes, could offer a framework for sexual orientation by reconceptualizing how direction towards certain objects shape bodies and space (Ahmed, 2006a:68).

A question Ahmed is asking is what it means for sexuality to be lived as an orientation (Ahmed, 2006b: 546). A key argument that Ahmed is making is that our nearness to certain objects and our ability to be in the place where we are able to perceive them is anything but accidental. Perceiving things requires a turning. The making of this turn, Ahmed explains through the concept of orientation. Orientation, she describes as the starting point of 'here' which, in turn, conditions how what is 'there' can be perceived. By orientating ourselves, we align our bodies with the space. In order to know when and where we can turn, we first must realize which way we are facing (Ahmed, 2006:7-8). Orientations are the starting point. It is the point from where we embark and further will proceed (Ahmed, 2006b:545). Orientation then becomes dependent on the way the body resides and extends itself in space and how bodies inhabit that space. Depending on where one turns their body, certain things come into view and others disappear (Ahmed, 2006a:6). Ahmed understands space as the body's second skin. Space becomes an elongation of the body and not something that can be understood as separate or exterior from ourselves. Our bodies are shaped by the spaces they inhabit, and they take shape through the process of orientation (Ahmed, 2006a:9).

But a question that this discussion leaves room for thought is why we are directed and facing certain ways by default. Why do we turn in the first place? By engaging in dialogue with Heidegger, Ahmed notes that orientation becomes a question of increasing our belonging to the world around us. From Heidegger's point of view orientation had less to do about orientation for the sake of differentiating the left side of the body from the right, and more about the necessity to turn towards objects that evoke a sense of familiarity. Ahmed comments on this and writes "The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to feel at home" (Ahmed, 2006a:7).

An argument Ahmed makes is that our direction and the way we are facing is not accidental. She asks the question what possibilities for the analysis arise when we think of direction as something organized rather than coincidental (Ahmed, 2006a:15). In order to explain the starting point of the body she invites the reader to think about lines that direct us. The lines in which our bodies align itself with can force us to be directed in a certain way. Such a direction is produced over time and requires the performative action of following certain norms and conventions that reproduce the line (Ahmed, 2006a:16). We can then speak of the structural organization of the ways bodies orientate in space by considering heterosexuality as a structural compulsory orientation that forces bodies to follow certain lines and face a certain way be default (Ahmed, 2006a: 84) or how one is racialized affects what is in reach (Ahmed, 2006a:112).

5.2 Queer Temporality

Halberstam claims that queerness has to depend upon both space and time in order to develop, in contrast to heterosexuality that reproduces itself through the process of reproduction. (Halberstam, 2005:1). Halberstam takes use of the notions of time and space as a framework for understanding and recognizing life, its locality and transformation. He traces and exemplifies different kinds of temporalities through different kinds of expressions in art and film to theorize how queer subcultures create temporalities that make futures imaginable through what lies beyond the markers that centres around reproduction, capitalism and longevity (Halberstam 2005:1-3) Halberstam furthermore describes a tension in the discussion of feminist geography where it has been increasingly difficult to speak about sexuality in relation to space in a conversation that has centred itself around globalization and capitalism (Halberstam, 2005:5)

Time not only uses reproduction as a framework for understanding it, but is also understood through the logic of capitalist accumulation. For those that cannot escape the process of accumulation under capitalism, this core becomes inevitable. Normativity is something that since long has been unquestioned in the debates of time and geography, Halberstam argues (Halberstam, 2005:6). Halberstam thus understands the unquestioned normativity of our understanding of time management and life as a huge oversight that bears significant consequences for sexuality and genderqueerness to be discussed in relation to time and space. The time that centres around reproductivity and family, Halberstam understands as such a (hetero)normative understanding. Halberstam claims that to incorporate queerness in the ways we think about time and space gives the discussion a different slant and can help us to broaden or rethink space as a concept. By adding this perspective to the discussion, Halberstam speaks specifically about ‘queer time’ and ‘queer space’. The word ‘queer’ refers to ‘nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity in space and time’ and queer time refers to temporal models beyond reproduction that become actualized once postmodernism enters the frame. Queer space refers to the practices of place-making that queer people engage in and create (Halberstam, 2005:6). What queer temporality offers to the theoretical framework of the analysis is to think about time and space beyond normative understandings that puts capitalism and reproductivity at its core. If the analysis would not be able to think beyond these structures, the risk for the analysis would be that many of the narrative accounts possibly would get lost where the potential for understanding diminishes all together.

José Esteban Muñoz likewise deploys temporality in his way of thinking of queerness. Muñoz views queerness as an ideality, a horizon that we cannot yet glimpse. But it likewise becomes a potentiality. It is utopian. Queerness, in his account, becomes characterized through a desire for futurity. Queerness becomes a mode which rejects what is here and now and looks beyond the dreaded present in an urge for other possible futures (Muñoz: 2009:1, 21). If queerness is said to have any sort of value, Muñoz argues that it must reject the politics of the present and what he deems to be the pragmatism of today's queer politics and instead look towards the future. From his point of view, queerness is utopian in the way that it is a call and a performative action towards a better future. Straight time, from his side of the shore, becomes a default kind of temporality that makes it clear that there is no future beyond the here and now. It is characterized through a 'presentness'. The only promise of future that straight time assures is that of reproductive heterosexuality and other self-naturalized modes of the world such as capitalism and the rigid nation state (Muñoz, 2009:22). "The present is not enough", he says (Muñoz, 2009:27). The present is depicted as a toxic environment for queer people and anyone that does not feel a majoritarian belonging. The time that is queer then, becomes defined through the stepping out of the linear straight time and the rejection of the self-naturalizing forces of the present (Muñoz, 2009:25). And that is the reason why the insistence of a queer futurity that is not here yet becomes crucial for queer theory. Because the present is too destructive and insufficient for a life that is queer (Muñoz, 2009:30).

5.3 The Meaning of Queer

Presented here have been a number of researchers and scholars that deploy the usage of the term queer. But there are differences in their deployment of the concept. Ahmed uses the concept of queer to describe those who practices 'non-normative sexualities' as well as characterizing queer as something that is 'oblique' or 'off-line' (Ahmed, 2006:161). But the queerness in queer phenomenology is, to a large extent, understood as sexuality. Whereas Halberstam characterizes the concept of queer as "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity in space and time" (Halberstam, 2005:6). Halberstam for example writes a lot about transgender people in films as threat to disclose the temporal logics of the past, present and future as it causes the perceiver to reorient the past in order to make sense of the future once they realize someone is transgender (Halberstam, 2002:42). Muñoz, however, argues that there is a theoretical benefit to viewing queerness as something that does not yet exist. It is a trajectory that is utopian and idealistic. He calls for a deployment of the concept

that is ‘epistemologically humble’ in the way that it does not claim an absolute conviction of the word. Queerness can then not be something that we already know (Munoz, 2009:28).

I am very drawn towards Munoz argument that there is some theoretical leverage in not setting a rigid standard for what queer is as it runs the risk of exclusion to deem what is queer and who is queer enough to be called queer. This would become an extensive problem since many of the participants in this study identify with the term queer and writes of themselves as queer. Although, I do realize that there are practical difficulties in studying something we do not know off yet. My usage of the word queer would be most in line with the definition provided by Halberstam as I find it the most inclusive. My deployment of the word will be to understand queerness as non-normative sexuality, gender identity and expression. I do think there is something inherently inclusive with Ahmed’s definition of queerness as something that is ‘oblique’ or off the line. Even though queer phenomenology largely is focused on sexuality when she speaks of the origin of the word as something that is ‘twisted’ and how making things queer means a disturb in order (Ahmed, 2009:161) I understand it as becoming something that could encompass gender identity as well. Previous research has for example deployed Ahmed’s queer phenomenology in analysing the transition of transgender people (Bremer, 2017; Lau, 2018).

5.4 The Meaning of Space

Throughout the section of previous research and the theoretical framework I have used the word space and here I would like to clarify and specify what the exact understanding of space is in this thesis. Doreen Massey (2005) enters this discussion of space by stipulating a few propositions about space and spatiality. She argues that space must be understood as a product of a complex network of relations, where the very actions of these relations constitute the space. These relations in the equation always bring with them practises that are embedded in the space. Not only does these relations constitute space, but the space where the practises are performed likewise constructs and transforms the relations. Space must also be understood as an arena of possibilities where it becomes a sphere of a ‘multiplicity of contemporaneous plurality’ (Massey, 2005:9-10). Space is therefore always under constant construction, something that is constantly being made over and over again whilst never reaching the process of becoming finished. Massey captures this beautifully where she states that a space is a place of ‘loose ends and missing links’ that never come close to tying a knot (Massey, 2005:12). Massey likewise writes about temporality. If space is understood as an ongoing production with loose ends that

recognizes a multiplicity of trajectories and possibilities, it would seem impossible to balance the equation without acknowledging temporality and the passing of time. In her account, neither time nor space can be reduced to the other. She thus critiques the idea that space is a mobile, closed-off entity (Massey, 2005:54). This is how I view space. I view it as a complex network of interrelations where the space is equally as constitutive of the relations in that space as the relations are of constituting that space. I view this in conjunction with the contributions of feminist, queer geographies and geographies of sexuality that an important foundation of the relations that govern space are gendered, sexualized and racialized (McDowell, 1999; Brown, Browne & Lim, 2007; Haritaworn et al. 2018).

6. Methods

The method of data collection deployed in this study has been solicited written accounts from queer people that has faced lockdown in London. The data is analysed through a qualitative categorical narrative analysis. The aim of the study is not to make sweeping generalizations of what lockdown means or to summarize a uniform queer experience of lockdown. I adhere to what Haraway writes as a fundamental basis for feminist research and feminist objectivity. Namely, situated knowledge; admitting to the limited location of the participants that take part in the study and the lens that I as a researcher am positioned in and analyse the material through (Haraway, 1988:583). What I wish to contribute with this study is to present and explore a different way of understanding what space under lockdown and isolation means, from the experiences of queer people. The analysis thus becomes a queer lens on how one could understand lockdown through a queer perspective. It is *a* queer perspective, but not *the* queer perspective.

Plummer notes how there is a misconception in that research of life story or human documents should produce facts where he argues that they rather seek to establish understanding, insight and appreciation for the contextual experience (Plummer, 2001:153). The problem of representation becomes a different one other than the statistical term where Plummer invites one to ask oneself ‘‘what does the story actually represent?’’ (Plummer, 2001:154). Because a difficulty in striving for a uniform summary is that who the participants are vary; from age, to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. It can then very well be assumed that the material will tell of contradictions and different experiences of the same phenomena. The material would then represent different queer perspectives on lockdown.

6.2 Methods of Empirical Collection

The empirical material that will be used for analysis are solicited written accounts from queer people in London. In essence, the method of collection is a form of narrative or life-story research. A total of eight participants took part in the study. The participants, found through the social media Instagram, were sent a writing guide containing a range of different themes and open questions to spark their imagination whilst at the same time setting a framework for the study. The participants were asked to think about how they had experienced lockdown in general, as well as how they had experienced lockdown through a number of different subjects related to space. For example, to think about the spaces they had been confined to, the spaces that had been missed, how they had experienced relationships and intimacy during lockdown. The writing guide also ended with an open question whether or not there was anything that the participant wanted to add or write about that the writing guide did not cover. The quantity of the material received from the participants vary from a minimum of half a page to a maximum of four pages of text.

The choice of the method for data collection is motivated through the phenomenological approach that lies at the core, as well as the themes the thesis will be dealing with. Written accounts might first lead the mind to imagine the material as being some form of diary or, at the very least, carry some form of quality which might correlate to a diary. Since phenomenologists seeks to explore how individuals understand the world through lived experience, diary methods could be a fruitful ground for exploration (Hyers, 2018:42). Hyers speak of it beautifully where she notes that “a diary written during a particular socio-political crisis is like a time capsule, revealing the lived experience of an historical epoch. ” (Hyers, 2018). Other scholars have described the material that derives from diaries as inviting the researcher into places they otherwise might not have direct access to such as the home or to glimpse into the mind of the participant (Sheble & Wildemuth, 2009).

Now, the material that I am working with could not be adequately understood as diaries. First and foremost, they are solicited – meaning that the participants would not have documented or written anything down if they had not participated in the study. Even though there is some room in the process, with the writing guide as a background, to go off course and write about questions that the guide did not specifically cover, without the participation in the study we cannot assume that the thoughts and feelings on these topics would have been documented by the participants. Second of all, the material is not in the form of a typical diary where the title of the page has the date of today underscored. The material is written in a sort of messy flow, carrying with it

memories of the past, coloured with the feeling of now in an act that brought with it the gift of reflection.

Plummer (2001) notes how narrative methods go by various names. Some call them personal documents, the documentary tradition or oral history. In sociology the term for the material has grown to be known as human documents meaning “accounts of an individual experience which reveal individual’s actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life” (Plummer, 2001:3). Because I find this description ever so fitting for how the material functions in this thesis, I will concur with this title. Studying human documents thus becomes an attempt to take part of the participants subjective world and experiences (Plummer, 2001:18). Furthermore, Plummer offers a critique towards different strands of social science in the way that the human subject more often than not is erased and sacrificed for tropes of generality and social structures over human agency. Plummer does not, however, argue for a science in which the subject is understood as transcending above its social, collective, and structural context. What he argues for is that there must be some tribute payed to the subject as an agent in research, challenging the abstract modern thought of grand narratives (Plummer, 2001:7). Embarking from a material such as this, could then be a way of overcoming that.

Plummer describes the narrative turn within research as being a late modern one. It is a turn in science which faces away from grand narratives and making too broad of a generality. Instead, the making of this turn regulates the view of the world towards the local and acknowledging a ‘multiplicity of stories’ (Plummer, 2001:12). Plummer calls this approach a critical humanism which deal with human experiences and emotions. It is an approach that focuses on subjects social and economic organization where the research is in pursuit of creating a world with less injustice and more creativity, diversity and equality (Plummer, 2001:14). The choice of this method then is very well aligned with the previously presented theoretical framework of space. In order to understand space as an arena for multiple trajectories, one could argue that we need a method that acknowledges a multiplicity of stories.

Embarking from this point, I would like to underscore the keywords reflection and subjective experience to argue for my choice of method for data collection. The participants in this study got to take part of a writing guide that had been constructed in line with the purpose in the study. In the writing guide were a number of questions and statements meant to spark the imagination whilst at the same time framing the study. In the writing guide the participant was informed that they could structure the text exactly how they wanted to. They also did not have to write about all the questions and were also free to write about other subjects that the questions and themes in the writing guide did not touch upon. As an overarching aspiration of the writing guide, the participants were asked to focus on how things had felt as well as giving as many examples as

possible. The material is produced is collected with a specific purpose in mind. Plummer notes how the researcher play a central role in the collection of solicited human documents claiming that, without the researcher, there would not be a life story to begin with (Plummer, 2001:28).

I would however argue that this understanding echo way too severe and absolute. There can be problematic notions in assuming that one's experiences do not become a valid narrative account until the moment where someone is given the space and opportunity to tell it. Understanding it as such, feels like a slippery slope to adopting some kind of 'saviour complex'. Because as Plummer also notes: 'life stories are everywhere' (Plummer, 2001:78). This goes in line with what Haraway writes about situated knowledges and how the 'object of knowledge' must be viewed as an agent and not simply a resource for knowledge (Haraway, 1988:592). I do agree however that I as a researcher play a central role in what material is being produced. I am the one that constructed the writing guide, and I am the one that will analyse the material. Such a process does require a great dose of 'strong reflexivity' (Harding, 2004) Namely, that I as a researcher need to be cognizant of how my positionality both can be a resource in the research process whilst being an obstacle to the same extent. I have some connection to London and living and identifying as a queer man I do carry with me some experiences in line with the study. But there are experiences told in the material in which I do not have any first-hand experiences of.

Furthermore, Plummer describes a serious pitfall to consider when it comes to viewing human documents as a resource for research. If one understands the documents as a series of stories, events and discourses, aimed to capture the subjective experience of the participant – how does one go about to analyse such a material without alienating the material from the subject? Such an attempt, to connect disparate accounts with others or to have it make sense with a theoretical framework runs the risk of producing research that is too abstract or, in a worst-case scenario, for the researcher to overinterpret the words of the participant (Plummer, 2001:37). Research that focuses on meaning and subjectivity, Plummer describes as a way human documents could be used as a resource. The analytical perspective should be one of understanding the subjective experience and offer an interpretation regarding how the narrative could be understood (Plummer, 2001:40).

Plummer furthermore argues that life stories and human documents are the most helpful in research when the researcher wants to understand the direct subjective understanding of inhabiting the social world. By engaging with this material, it enables the reader to see the world from the subject's point of view. Studying human documents also become a way of turning abstract theory into something more real (Plummer, 2001:131). Additionally, the method invites the researcher to better understand a problem (Plummer, 2001:130-131). This study does not go

above and beyond to establish that there is a problem to begin with, specifically. But the background for the research question does ascertain that lockdown and isolation does construct a new normal in which problems could arise.

Clarifying that the material is solicited and structured through a series of questions and themes might make some questions arise. If the writing guide is constructed through a structured writing guide, then why not do an interview? Here, I would like to argue that the medium of writing is in line with the phenomenological perspective where I would like to emphasize the keyword of consciousness. Ong (2002:77) speak of how the human consciousness has been altered through the medium of writing. Ong differentiates writing from speech in the sense that he understands writing as a conscious process. The rules of grammar that governs speech inhabit our unconscious to the point where we, for example, know of the comparative form of a certain adjective, but not why the comparative form is the way it is (Ong 2002:81). Writing, on the other hand, enhances consciousness. Writing advances speech and moves it to a world where it can be seen in a way that transforms both speech and thought. In writing, the writer is allowed to play with words; erase the ones that do not feel right and exchange them with other words that bear more of a precise meaning. Spoken words do not play by these rules. No word can be unspoken. Writing also bestows the writer the gift of distance by viewing their accounts on what previously was a blank sheet of paper. And distance is something Ong argues for is crucial to be able to fully understand life (Ong, 2002:81).

The underlying reason then for choosing to focus on the narrative would be that the data could be understood as becoming richer because the method itself entails for the participant to reflect and structure the text themselves. Having to write, the participant has to firstly orientate themselves in the writing guide. They read the plethora of questions and decide which ones to focus on and which ones they do not feel comfortable touching. Then the participant has to structure their text with some underlying motive, more or less present, of making it comprehensible and understandable. And in that process of remembering and tuning in to how things have felt, the participant is indirectly reflecting on those experiences. In an interview I could possibly interrupt and destroy that momentum all together. Surely, I could ask all the questions in the writing guide in an interview. I could ask follow-up questions to the parts I want the participant to dwell further into. But this choice of method runs the risk of losing that moment of reflection, because the participant has to, on the spot, make themselves understandable in the limited time of an interview. Nevertheless, the participants that voiced an interest in the study were informed that if they did not feel comfortable about writing about their experiences, they could opt in for an interview instead.

6.1 Ethical Considerations

This thesis has been conducted by the ethical considerations that the Swedish Research Council summarizes in 'Good Research Practise' (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017:8). As well as the writing guide, the participants in this study were sent a document containing general information as well as ethical considerations. There they could read that their written text would be anonymised to the furthest extent. They would be named under a pseudonym in the analysis and any detail that could be traced back to them would be erased. Anonymity entails a certain struggle within this field of research, Plummer notes (2001:137), in the sense that a rich narrative can produce such intimate details that make it easier for the reader to trace it back to the subject. This was something that I had to be incredibly mindful of in the process of analysis because the accounts tell so much of specific places and settings. And although the strive for anonymity is the virtue there are difficulties in making anything entirely anonymous.

Establishing a good relationship between the researcher and the participant can be understood as key for the process (Plummer, 2001:135). Being allowed to take part of the personal written accounts of their experiences is something I took with great responsibility on my part. Equally as important is the underlying motivation of why this research is being produced (Plummer, 2001:136). To bridge this gap between myself and the participant I found it necessary to tell them a little about myself. Who am I? Where am I from? What is my relationship with the city of London? I explained in a document of general information why this research was important. I wrote that I found it critical to tell our stories in this crisis to try and emphasise some sort of communal goal and purpose. Introducing my thesis with anecdotes of what led me where, was also a way of doing this. Doing so, is not without plight. It shows how the relation with the research process very easily can become personal and embodied work (Plummer, 2001:213).

I informed the participants how the material would be stored and processed. The day after their text was emailed to me the text would be printed, kept in safe storage and the email would be deleted. I stressed how it was very important that they sent in their material as a pdf. file to have them ensured that I would not be able to edit their text. I addressed the deadline for turning in their material and the deadline for refraining from the study if they already had sent in material. Lastly, I had to address some words of caution. Namely, that the process of writing and reliving a difficult time could be too much. I informed them that there never was any shame in opting out if they felt like it was too difficult.

Because I would like to further note two possible ethical concerns, besides the possible obstruction of reflection, with choosing the method of an interview in this case. Firstly, the themes that this study touches upon can be ones that are not easy to talk about. For many of us,

this pandemic has not been easy. This was a word of caution I had to address in the general document; that the process of writing and reliving could give birth to adverse emotions, where there would be no shame in opting out if it felt too difficult. In an interview, I could run the risk of robbing the participant of that intimate moment of realizing that it is too much having to relive it all. Secondly, the writing also allowed the participant to write about the things that they felt comfortable with and consciously dwell further into the deep where they found it reasonable to do so. If they have someone in front of them, indirectly forcing them to expand on what I deem empirically fruitful, there can be difficulties for the participant to know where to draw the line.

6.3 Method of Analysis

The method of analysis deployed is a narrative analysis organised through a categorical content perspective where the analysis is structured from different themes derived from the material (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Ziber, 1998:112). Since the study touches upon such ranging themes; about home and the public, digital media, about relationships and intimacy connecting to space, I would argue that the categorical content analysis is deemed the most appropriate. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Ziber provide a series of steps in the categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Ziber, 1998: 112-113) that I have followed in the process of the analysis. Firstly, the material was organized through a selective process of different kinds of subtext. Secondly, the categories were defined and as a third step in the process the outtakes of subtext were placed under each category defined category. Reaching the fourth step of results, they will be presented in a closing discussion to answer my research questions.

7. Analysis

The analysis has been reached and will be presented through three different themes. The themes symbolize three different spatial loci of exploration that cuts across the material in relation to the spaces that are spoken off. The first theme *Spatial Absences and Longings* primarily deals with the spaces that have been missed during lockdown and why these spaces are longed for. Given the premises of lockdown most of these spaces are spaces in the public sphere of the city landscape. The second theme *Facing towards Digital Spaces* are instances in the material which tells of an alternative way of turning, namely the spaces that digital media provide. *Lockdown – Altering the Imaginaries of the Everyday* is a broader theme where the focus is on the spatial reconfigurations in living situation that arises from lockdown and the pandemic, but also what those spatial reconfigurations mean for the participants. The analysis will be structured through outtakes from the participants writing where I play the role of engaging in dialogue with theory and previous research to offer an understanding of how the narrative could be understood. There are some instances where there are some similarities between the different participants stories and some instances where the writing is more specific. Nevertheless, all of the participants have a unique experience of lockdown and although similarities can be deciphered, they are all situated in different contexts and different bodies. The outtakes from the material has been chosen to capture the complexities in this question.

7.1 Spatial Absences and Longings

In the material, there are many mentions of places that have been missed. The material tells of spaces that lockdown has made them lose proximity to and focusing on the places that has been missed could serve to paint a picture of how space under lockdown has been experienced. The longing ranges from spaces that are understood as crucial for making sense of oneself to places that evoked a sense of comfort. A frequent concern that is mentioned several times in the material is how the economic consequences of lockdown will affect queer spaces where there is a fear that the future beyond the horizon is a bleak one. Lockdown seems to create a spatial reconfiguration for the participants in the ways the measure creates a new everyday where access to certain spaces is prohibited. But the concern lies not only in how the access to the spaces in question are lost in the present moment. The concerns are also about how lockdown

would mean a permanent closure of the space because of the economic consequences that lockdown would entail for certain venues. Following I will present a couple of outtakes that speak of these concerns:

“Well, they’re [queer spaces] a safe haven, aren’t they? Where we make our own rules. And I’m really worried that many aren’t going to survive the pandemic. That is the most unsettling thing. As a queer person, sometimes you feel like a guest in the straight world.

Queer spaces are the places where we’re the “hosts.” - Kim

“I am concerned for small LGBT+ run businesses, particularly the bar scene, as these are under pressure to remain viable (declining since 2008), and it would be a shame to lose more of these safe spaces due to Covid. They are becoming a less important as society evolves, especially in London, where there are a lot of specifically mixed spaces and events. For some though, where their ‘home’ isn’t a safe space, the need for a public safe space may feel greater.” - Squall

“Queer people have often been ostracised early on in their life. Thus, historically, we tend to build lives that revolve around communities (often in large cities). Theatres, bars, drag shows, cute coffee shops. What they all have in common is people. Even sex culture for many. And these will not feel really safe any time soon” - Lee

Kim, Squall and Lee paint a picture of what lockdown means for the future of queer spaces, but also what queer spaces mean for them. Lee notes that the importance of these public spaces that lockdown removes from reach and that the pandemic might force to be terminated has an importance for queer people specifically. As he understands it, the ostracizing queer people has experienced makes them face community centred public spaces where the commonality lies in meeting people for socialising or intimacy. The previous feelings of being ostracised becomes the explaining factor as to why turning to public spaces such as theatres or bars or drag shows becomes vital. How could be understand the making of this turn or the importance of orientating towards spaces such as this? By engaging in dialogue with Heidegger, Ahmed notes that orientation becomes a question of increasing our belonging to the world around us. From Heidegger’s point of view orientation had less to do about orientation for the sake of differentiating the left side of the body from the right, and more about the necessity to turn towards objects that evoke a sense of familiarity. Ahmed comments on this and writes ‘‘The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we ‘‘find our way’’ but how we come to feel at home’’ (Ahmed, 2006:7). And these spaces could be understood as an example of where queer people turn to find their way and feel at home. Squall writes of a different space with affect during the summer when the restrictions were fewer.

“Where we [LGBT+ people] have been able to socialise, for example, a Pride event which unofficially took place in July, when lockdown first eased in the summer, demonstrated that Gay Men were keen to return to normal levels of socialising. I attended the event, which was on The Common and banned from going ahead by the police, as I was keen for a sense of normality to return and wanted to see people outside of my small circle – and it was fantastic.” – Squall

Queer spaces, places where LGBT+ people gather and meet are, in these accounts, representative of something. But what does the losing of that space actually mean? More often than not in the material, these spaces are connoted and understood through concepts of safety where you meet people outside of your small circle. Losing a business such as a bar on the queer map of the city, means not only being robbed of a drink – it becomes a loss of a ‘safe haven’ as Kim chooses to phrase it. But according to Kim, what characterizes such a space is not only to what extent that place is safe, but also to how they explain that the space possesses the transformative power of shifting the positions that they feel are indicative of the world we live in. Kim explains that as a queer person, you feel like a guest in a straight world and how queer spaces are the one place where they are not the recipient, but rather the subsidizer of hospitality in the social interaction. I find the usage of the words guest and host to be especially captivating, given the context of the paragraph. Because these two actors could very well make sense in the context of the home, just as well as the context of a bar or a restaurant. The host is the agent that sets the rules and the agenda. The host is one that knows which couch is the most comfortable. The host is the one that is able to turn people away at the door. A guest can always choose to leave, but the content of these outtakes tells of a world where the possibilities for escaping the role of a guest are scarce. Jarred gives us a further glimpse as to why losing queer spaces would be a significant loss:

“I’m lucky enough to work in an industry filled with amazing queer people and so I never find myself yearning for some time at a gay bar to let me hair down, but I recognise that not all LGBTQ+ people are this lucky, so I can understand the importance of having these spaces readily available. This doesn’t necessarily apply to London specifically, but there must be a huge population of queer people who became trapped in a more linear, heteronormative lifestyle during lockdown, if queer spaces were forced to shut and restrictions were in place preventing any face-to-face social interaction with allies and other members of the community. This could very well still be happening even having just surpassed the first quarter of 2021, which is why notable queer London spaces being at risk for permanent closure is so awful, as many of these places won’t be around for these trapped individuals once restrictions are lifted in the Summer.” - Jarred

Jarred finds that the necessity for queer spaces in his case are lessened by the fact that he works in a field of work where he receives exactly what he assumes the purpose of queer spaces symbolize for others. Queer spaces become a place where one interacts with people of their communities and allies. And without such a space, Jarred fears that queer people would become trapped in a 'linear and heteronormative lifestyle'. Another word that is frequently used across the material from several of the participants is the word 'trapped'. And queer spaces seem to act like the buttered knife that squeezes one out of entrapment of a time and place that is heteronormative and linear. The space then, becomes a longed one in the way that it possesses the power to act as a rope ladder out of the moon crater that is heteronormativity. And public places such as bars, clubs or drag shows are not the only ones that are mentioned in the material as being missed. Seymour goes on to speak about his feelings for the city and the urban landscape with great affection.

"Though many speak of their desire for green spaces and the moving out of London to lush or cheaper suburbs, for me I have continued to enjoy the city's centre, though utilising it differently. The river is my favourite place to run. The estate is my favourite place to rest. The churchyard is my favourite place to eat outside. There is an abundance of interest and intrigue to the city for me, despite having lived here now for six years, and without public transport to rely on for much of the year, being a walking distance from the spaces in the city that fill me with the most joy has been invaluable and something I would not wish to relinquish for suburbia. London, the anonymity of the city, the noise replaced now by the quiet, still this is home for me." - Seymour

Furthermore, Seymour speaks about the orientation towards public places for interesting reasons. The places he speaks of as having been a loss under lockdown are places that involve quite a lot of people. Crowded galleries, theatres, public venues and even the tube are not understood as places that evoke a sense of discomfort however, rather they are treasured for their anonymity.

"A large, open, and generally indiscriminate public space such as a gallery has historically provided more benefit than a more intimate public setting such as a pub or restaurant, where your presence as an individual is more discernible. I believe that some of this has to do with minimising my presence as a gay man in order to reduce the level of threat posed by others. [...] The gay tube nerd must be quite a niche selection of people. Anyhow, for me this was a place that provided physical security in its anonymity, no one appears overly concerned in you or your activities, most are preoccupied with the discomfort of

being underground or focussed upon their final destination. I felt like I could be unnoticed in the best possible way when travelling underground.” - Seymour

Seymour’s account tells of the sexualized characteristics of everyday public spaces and public transport. He explains it as riding the tube evokes the same sensation as falling into a bed in the way that it provides security. The physical security that he describes that these places invoke are understood as providing just that because they cannot be separated from anonymity. This outtake presents a differing queer perspective from previous research that has written about public places as a site of discomfort from a queer perspective.

How can we understand this? Firstly, This outtake of Seymour’s could serve to answer Sara Ahmed’s presumption that sexuality becomes fundamental to bodily orientation. That orientation is not only a matter of being oriented towards certain object, but also how the body extends itself into the world. Intertwined in this understanding also lies how we relate to the world and how this is dependent on how one is faced, directed and inhabit space (Ahmed, 2006:67-68). Because inseparable from Seymour’s reflection on the places that has been missed, lies sexuality. The longing for the space and the reflection of why that space feels like a comfortable bed, becomes understood through the lens of sexuality. And even though sexuality could be understood as fundamental to the lens through how he understands that space, at the same time, it is not. Because the longing for the space and the inhabitation of it becomes treasured in the way that sexuality becomes diminished. Seymour states that these places are ones where no one is overly concerned about you. It is a space in which you can melt into the background. He understands the tube as a place where people only are concerned about their final destination, as if the space is a flux of different faces facing different directions beyond the transient underground space.

Michell Göransson uses the concept of materialisation to explain how spaces are constructed by us and, in the same breath, constructs us. She embarks from an understanding where the movement pattern of others and their perception of space cannot be separated from who you are and that this is central in the construction of how a certain space is perceived (Göransson, 2012:27). From her point of view, bodies are extended into space. But the material world and space also impose on the body in a complex co-creative web of interaction (Göransson, 2012:31). The account of Seymour and the spaces he speaks of could also be understood as a kind of materialized fear. In Michell Göransson’s dissertation, she writes about how the participants in her study speak of their approach to public spaces as calculated geography of risk. Entering a certain space is negotiated through the likeliness of experiencing violence or homophobia (Göransson, 2012:59). Seymour makes this deliberation in his account as well.

And his conclusion is that the larger and the more indiscriminate a place is, the more security it provides. And this is something that lockdown has stripped from him.

What can be distinguished in the writing is that going by unnoticed seems to be key. These places provide physical security because of anonymity. In Ahmed's writing, there are passages where familiarity becomes connected to the notion of going by unnoticed (Ahmed, 2006a:37). In Phenomenology, what lies beyond and around the object of perception is usually deemed as the background. The background is that which must construct the basis for the arrival of the object of perception to appear. But Ahmed also does add that the things we face might also be a part of the background (Ahmed, 2006a:37-38). In Seymour's written account, the key aspect that shifts him from being at the foreground of perception, is the intimacy of the setting, the activities that are taken place and the number of people present. The physical comfort then becomes dependant on both spatiality and temporality. Ahmed furthermore notes that when things are oriented, it allows for the body to be extended and certain actions are only possible insofar as the bodies and the object or spaces fit. Because not all bodies fit all spaces, or not all spaces allow for everyone's body to extend (Ahmed, 2006a:51).

And in this instances, Seymour's body fit into the space and is allowed to go by unnoticed, insofar as the space is an open landscape in a large setting filled with people. And this passing, the ability being able to go by unnoticed, privileges him in a way and could be understood as key as to why these public places in other studies are a site of discomfort. Doan for example write about how trans people experience tyranny in public spaces when they do not display the hegemonic expectations of gendered behaviour (Doan, 2016:635). Furthermore, Bremer argues, that the unspoken rule of not minding anyone in public transit is broken when someone is not perceived or coded as white or cisgendered (Bremer, 2021:256). The ability of going by unnoticed is thus very much contextually and structurally dependent on the ability to pass certain norms.

Seymour further goes on to add that in times of lockdown, when social contact is restricted, there are not many places left to 'dwell' without the looming fear of policing or enforcement present. In this account, public space under lockdown becomes intertwined with notions of policing and enforcement. There are studies illuminating how LGBTQIA+ people have negative experiences of policing and law enforcement, where it is not uncommon to have a distrust against enforcement or having experienced discrimination or harassment from police enforcement in the United Kingdom (Dwyer, Ball & Barker, 2004; Williams & Robinson, 2004). If we assume that queer people have a great distrust with policing and enforcement and some even carrying the baggage of having negative experiences with law enforcement, public spaces under lockdown could serve to exacerbate this discomfort. Because under lockdown

where there are restrictions put in place confining us to some spaces and prohibiting us from others, we are monitored and policed to a further extent. Furthermore, the feeling of constantly being watched in public places, the feeling of being policed in the public, disrupts this notion of going about unseen.

7.2 Facing Towards Digital Spaces

Orientating in the everyday of lockdown, a turn towards digital spaces become an alternative way of turning. In some readings it may seem that this turning is of a forced nature. It is not necessarily a place where one wants to face, but a direction in which one has to face in a time where the options are limited. There are instances where the turning towards digital spaces in the orientation of the everyday of lockdown is welcomed and there are some instances in some accounts where that turn open up new possibilities. But there are also wordings that convey much ambivalence in the making of this turn. Seymour discloses how he turns to Grindr, an online dating app for men who look for other men. The making of this turn is explained through the lack of intimacy from friends and people around him. He writes:

“I have maintained a consistent presence on ‘Grindr’ throughout the pandemic, something I resent myself for, though I have only begun to utilise it in earnest to meet up with people since 2021 began and I have been living alone. It is definitely the single most self-destructive habit I still maintain, yet without the busyness offered by ‘regular’ life, and the physicality of regular friendships, there are few other opportunities for ‘intimacy top-ups’ in lockdown. One additional aspect that I wanted to briefly touch upon, is the increasing prejudice against East Asians in the wake of the ‘Chinese-Virus’. As an East Asian predominantly raised in the UK, the #noasians, or worse #whitesonly, seen on Grindr profiles is not overly surprising having been present since I began using the app in my teens. It is also not unexpected for the first message received to be ‘Where are you from?’ having seen a profile entry of ‘Mixed’ under ethnicity, and a subsequent block when you disclose the details of your heritage.” - Seymour

Seymour describes the landscape of Grindr to be an encounter with a destructive habit. It is a place where he is faced with crude prejudices and discrimination for being racialized as Asian and how feels as if this permeates the space and has become exacerbated since the pandemic. His experiences of the digital space of Grindr under lockdown has been affected by the increased racism he experiences as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This also speaks to the intersectional dimension of space and how Seymour is racialized in that space to the same

extent that he is sexualized. His encounter with this digital space in question becomes not only an orientation that is governed by lines of sexuality and gender, but also about lines of race and whiteness.

He explains the upsurge of his usage as a consequence of lockdown. In a time where he is left without the intimacy of his friends, the dating app is one of the few places he can turn for any form of intimacy, and that turn is an ambivalent one. The life many of us face today with a screen always being in close proximity to us, Nash and Gorman-Murray argues that our online engagement cannot be understood as separate from whatever life offline that we would call 'real'. The overlapping layer of on and offline social interactions creates new spatial practices (Nash & Gorman-Murray 2019:1). Coming to a recognition as to how some spaces are already considered or constituted as safe spaces for queer people can only be understood by recognizing that meanings and normative practices are preceding the social interactions that form that place. That is, the places or subjects in question do not enter the equation as blank slates, as Nash and Gorman-Murray puts it. Meaning that the embodied gendered, sexualized and racialized lives we live affects the way we engage with media and how that space is utilized to remake both the subject and the space (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019:34-35). Seymour does not enter the online landscape as a blank slate, and nor is he treated like one.

Moore's likewise argues that the usage of media and its place-making properties occur simultaneously and alongside the physical everyday life. He sees them as overlapping environments and less as a dichotomy (Moore's, 2016:67). Moore's invites us to think about the embodied character of media usage. And in this invitation, phenomenology is used as a tool to emphasize the way that it is fingers that stroke the keyboard or swipe left and right on the screen. By taking usage of phenomenology, Moore's points towards how the on and offline are interconnected and how media studies need to take the concept of orientation and the embodiment of social media usage more seriously (Moore's, 2016:3). Because inasmuch as online spaces offer some degree of anonymity, Nash and Gorman-Murray stresses how we need to understand how the engagement with online spaces reshape the material and social everyday practices of the everyday (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019:3). That being said, how offline and how anonymous we may seem, and to some extent feel, when we are on the screen, we are still experiencing and engaging with the field situated in a body. The interactions that Seymour have online thus does not become less real because they are online. On the contrary, it could be and argued that in times of lockdown, the online interactions become the most real thing there is. In a similar way, Kim speaks of the way's media acts as a substitute to the physical face-to-face interaction with other queer people.

“Then, you have the media. We’re already deprived of interacting with other queer people, so we’re in an exclusive relationship with Netflix, which has limited representation.” - Kim

Depending on where we turn, different worlds open up for us (Ahmed, 2006a:11). As an alternative way of turning, Kim describes how one way to face in order to come into proximity of queer people, is through media. They describe the time of lockdown as a time where one is stripped of the possibility, or at the very least limited, to fully interact with other queer people. When the making of that turn is restricted, Kim has to resort to the mediums that are in proximity to them. They turn to Netflix. However, a problem that Kim derives from this notion is that the representation is that of a limited account. In times where one cannot choose to create their own space, or gravitate to places where one feels seen, an alternative option is to engage with media that provides a space constructed on forehand. Such a space invites the viewer to a queer world. But from Kim’s point of view, this opening is not exactly ideal. But the function it has could still relieve some of what is missing. But there are voices where the encounter with digital media and the place it has in the everyday of lockdown entails something else. Rem writes:

“I miss the queer community even though I haven’t been active in it recently. I want to reconnect, go to Gay’s the Word bookshop, go to trans pride. I’ve been following The Outside Project and Books Beyond Bars online, feeling admiration for their work and wanting to help my community more. I’ve been painfully aware of the growth of the antitrans movement in online spaces and in mainstream media, and I want to resist it and protect our young people from queerphobes who want to bring back new versions of anti lgbt+ legislation that we fought so hard to get rid of.” – Rem

On one hand, online spaces become a way of reconnecting with the community. What Rem cannot attend, they can follow on social media. On the other hand, the online landscape of social media is portrayed here as being filled with certain hurdles. As Rem describes and is painfully aware of, the time of lockdown has also been a time of an intense growth of the anti-trans movement. Engaging with social media and online spaces can therefore be a painful reminder where you have to bear witness to worrisome and violent developments. If we assume that online spaces and social media are one of the few spaces left to turn to in the time of lockdown, to what extent the online space can be seen as a refuge would largely be dependent on who you are. But Rem likewise writes about the emancipatory potentials of online spaces as well. They speak of how lockdown has entailed time to further reflect on their identity, from being a nonbinary person with they/them pronouns to wanting to partially seek out medical transition. And Rem attributes this shift in being able to take part of people’s stories online.

“Another shift that happened over lockdown, the most personal one maybe, is that I went from being a non-binary person happy just to use neutral pronouns & a neutral name, to wanting partial medical transition. I think having so much time to think and consider other people’s stories online gave me space to address what I really want. I’ve only just started to mention it to people and I’m not sure if it feels possible to do anything about it, since trans healthcare is so neglected and non-binary people aren’t really recognised legally or medically. Thinking about how difficult it might be is distressing, but it’s honest, and maybe I couldn’t have faced up to it without time alone and apart from other people’s perceptions of me.” – Rem

Nash and Gorman-Murray argues that the new technologies that have become a scope for human, feminist and queer geographies are reshaping more than one thing. This ‘new’ spatial arena is said to be the grounds of a ‘sexual revolution’ that reconfigures how we understand ourselves, our bodies and our sexuality through the very interaction with the medium (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019:2). It has been theorized how the online landscape has the power to reconfigure our understanding of intimacy, no longer bound to the premise of physical proximity to others. Subjects can now situate themselves in a world where they are able to establish genuine connections with others they have not met in person (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019:2).

In line with this argument, Matilda Tudor uses Ahmed’s term of queer tables in explaining the way digital technology connect queer people online. Ahmed writes how queer tables or queer objects are that which supports proximity and enables contact (Ahmed, 2006a:247). Proximity, Tudor argues, is enabled through digital media where physical distance does not have to mean that certain things do not come within reach. Digital media connects people through queer online landscapes and make up a space for points to meet where they otherwise would not have (Tudor, 2018:247). Hanckel likewise writes about how digital technologies can be an extremely important resource for queer people. In times of coming to terms with their sexuality and gender identity, online spaces can open up a door to a world where connections with others in a similar situation can be made. In the landscape of social media, there lies a great potential for queer people to create spaces where their stories and their understanding of gender and sexuality can be shared for others to take part of (Hanckel, 2019:204).

Hanckel deploys Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in explaining how the production of video content by people who share their stories of gender and sexuality online becomes a way of shifting the habitus of the viewer when a space is created that moves beyond a world where heteronormativity is privileged (Hanckel, 2019:207). He moves on to cite Sara Ahmed where

she writes that the unfolding of the queer occurs from specific points. Those points are the world of those who are not inhabiting the centre or the margins of heterosexual space. Online content such as videos or posts from queer people then presents a unique opportunity for the further unfolding of the queer to take place (Ahmed, 2006:172). The engagement in online spaces could thus prove to be another point on the map where queerness can unfold and have emancipatory potentials, particularly maybe so, in times of lockdown and isolation.

Moving towards a theoretical understanding of my own, I want to explore the concept of straight time and whether or not it is possible to understand the ways online spaces operate in Rem's account as a way of stepping out of it. Because what Rem speaks of, the way the stories they have read online presents an opportunity for revelation and re-evaluation of themselves likewise becomes a way of out of the dreaded presentness of now and to imagine a future where desire is at the centre. I wonder whether or not the revelation Rem speaks of is the 'affective result of stepping out of straight time' that Munoz writes about (Munoz, 2009:25). If straight time tells us that there is no future beyond the present, what Rem's account could be understood as a rejection of the present by glimpsing the future and the utopian in the quotidian (Munoz, 2009:22). In the same way Halberstam writes that queer subcultures can provide glimpses into a queer kind of temporality (Halberstam, 2005:89), the stories Rem take part of online can serve to provide this glimpse as well. Digital media under lockdown not only could be understood as a point for the queer to unfold. The part this social media engagement plays in the grand scheme of the presentness of lockdown could also be a tool that enables one to glimpse the future.

What these accounts tell us is how the landscape of the home and the private life is not limited to the material world under the roof and inside the walls. The narratives tell of instances where social media become an everyday encounter in their lives. As Casey (2013) emphasizes, the notion of the home is an illusive concept and one that is easily disrupted. Even if the home feels like safe haven and is constructed as such, there were accounts in Casey's study where the participants felt as if the outside impressed and made its way into the home. It could, for example, mean having windows uncovered or outsiders overhearing conversations in the garden (Casey, 2013:148). In material of this study the participants also seem to be concerned with outside making its way in. And the screens could be theorized as another window that they sometimes feel forced to engage with and other times cannot properly shield themselves from. Because inasmuch as digital media offer opportunities for glimpsing the future in the everyday, it is also described as a place where Rem is faced with transphobia and Seymour experiences racism. Through an intersectional perspective it then becomes crucial to speak of the participants possibilities for the digital space to provide the safe space needed in times of lockdown.

As Doreen Massey puts it, to analyse space is to recognize multiple trajectories, and these trajectories meet and they coexist (Massey, 2005:9). The ways digital media intertwines with the everyday living situation of the participants could be an example of two trajectories coexisting. This is something that Moores picks up on and uses to further emphasize how digital media and the everyday life take place simultaneously (Moores, 2005:3). Gorman-Murray likewise describes how the construction of the home is a production between human and other-than-human agents (Gorman-Murray, 2018:17). Other-than-human agents could be an abstract concept to imagine, but the accounts of both Rem, Kim and Seymour could allow us to understand what that means. It could be possible to understand the media, its representation, and the friction one might be exposed to there, as an other-than-human agent, active in the process of constructing the home and the everyday life. In the same way neighbours could glance through the window and in the same way you could look out, one might conceptualize that digital media could account for the same type of disruption and liberation. And in times where it is one of the few ways left to turn, this agent might even be more palpable.

7.3 Lockdown – Altering The Imaginaries Of The Everyday

Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, the material tells stories of lockdown that has altered the way homelife and relationships are structured. Gorman-Murray, McKinnon and Dominey-Howes (2014) have explored how LGBT people experience displacement in times of natural disasters where homes become ‘undone’ and ‘unmade’ in the face of such a crisis. They conclude that such natural disasters destroy LGBT homes and residences where recovery strategies first and foremost assist heterosexual nuclear families and where concern for LGBT people are not properly understood (Gorman-Murray, McKinnon & Dominey-Howes, 2014). Now, lockdown or the COVID-19 pandemic is not a natural disaster per say, but there is something to be said about how lockdown alters what home can be imagined to be. There is a common theme of displacement across the material when talking about how lockdown has turned some’s living situation upside down; sometimes it being a blessing, and sometimes it being a curse.

“Undoubtedly, lockdown has been a time of social isolation. Particularly in 2021, as I lived by myself and found that none of my immediate friends had returned to London, all had stayed with their parents or in their home countries.” - Seymour

“Entering 2021, my flatmate became trapped at their parent’s home as the UK entered it’s third formal lockdown.” - Austin

“Now that I’ve lived alone for a couple of years, I have experience with entertaining myself for long periods of time without requiring heaps of social interaction. Having said that, I had invited a close friend of mine (also gay, male) to endure the isolation with me. His flatmate was stuck in Australia, and truthfully, I worried for his well-being, knowing that living alone (and away from home for the first time) would have been tough on him.” –

Jarred

There are many instances in the material where lockdown has conditioned the way the participants, and the people around them has had to organise their lives. Some have had to move apartments, some have had to move back with their families, some have had roommates and people they live with disappear elsewhere. It thus becomes very apparent that lockdown has affected and shaped the everyday lives of the participants. Jarred writes how he had a friend move in with him as an act of solidarity where he feared for his mental wellbeing during lockdown. In some cases, this shaping then becomes one that raises serious concerns and has led some participants to being forced to relocate to places where they feel displaced whilst mentioning how lockdown has ‘trapped’ them. In other instances, being confined to certain places, like one’s home, and being cut-out from other influences also seems to have emancipatory potentials and this is something I will get back to. There are outtakes from the material that point towards that how lockdown has shaped the everyday has been dependant on heteronormative assumptions. Rem, for example, writes:

“I feel like the rules were very much geared towards traditional family units, with little to no attention paid to those of us outside them, which means LGBTQIA+ people especially.”

- Rem

Rem claims that the rules and regulations about lockdown has been heavily focused on the traditional family, where they feel like the government have not payed much attention to other living arrangements. There are several passages in the writing where the participants reflect on how lockdown has affected them in particular ways, specifically because they are queer, and how this can put them in precarious positions.

“I do not feel that all measures have been reasonable, and that there are many long-term health concerns (physical and mental) which will now present themselves in huge swathes within the UK – particularly in the young - due to the measures put in place to halt the spread of Covid-19. I wonder if it’s worth talking about drug and alcohol use in the LGBT+ community (already deemed way above average compared to straight folk), and how this has likely been exacerbated in lockdown? In the first lockdown, my drug / alcohol use increased, but normalised towards the end / present time. For many

members of the LGBT+ population, sex and drugs (together and separate) are a coping mechanism, and the pandemic has prompted many to turn to their tried and tested coping mechanisms – so I can't say I'm surprised" – Squall

"I do not feel enough consideration has been given to the inevitable mental health crisis that will arise as a result of isolation and confinement experienced by many. Perhaps I am projecting my own experience too broadly, but there may be something to be said for the LGBTQIA+ community being subject to greater challenges regarding mental wellbeing as a result of historic systemic discrimination and ongoing issues of acceptance" - Seymour

There is an awareness of how the crisis will hit the ones already struggling a lot harder. Here they speak of alcohol and substance addiction that Squall reflect on could become a prevalent coping mechanism when people become confined to the space of their home and possibly stripped from the emotional support of their surroundings. Kim shares a similar standpoint to that of Rem when it comes to the government response of the pandemic.

"As a queer person, it's frustrating and disheartening watching many of the politicians who handled the AIDS crisis by not getting involved because the demographic in danger wasn't exactly top priority, shut down the entire world to protect their own demographic in a way. As a human, of course I'll do my best to protect the vulnerable. But I can't help but think that I'm supposed to show grace and sacrifice so much for people who would never do the same for us. [...] Do we really think if there was something AIDS adjacent again, we would stop the world? Even if something new comes up that attacks mostly young people, I can just imagine them justifying not shutting down because to protect the economy." - Kim

In conjunction with this, Kim also further reflects on how they feel that there has not been enough support for young people in the crisis; how young people are asked to remain patient and how the older generation will be vaccinated before the summer and will be able to go on holidays. There is a palpable frustration that can be read in this outtake and Kim relates back to the AIDS crisis and feels that if something similar would come along again, it would not have played out in the same way. And there could definitely be something to be said about this. Because even in this crisis, the consequences that marginalized communities have suffered have been trivialized. There are indeed scholars that have drawn or attempted to summarize similarities between the AIDS crisis and the COVID-19 crisis (Bassett, 2020; Dawa & Narain, 2021).

Bassett argues that COVID-19 reminded us of what AIDS showed us back then. Namely, that those that suffer the most severe consequences are those that are marginalized. Similar to the response of the past and the response of now, Bassett argues that it was the affected people were deemed the issue. In the case of the HIV and AIDS crisis, it was men who had sex with men's behaviour that was deemed the problem and many of them were ostracized where homophobia had the public response and science lagging behind. In the same way Bassett illuminates how the Black, Latino, and Indigenous population of the United States were severely overrepresented in both cases and deaths of COVID-19. And the response from the government was that there was not much that could be done about the excess death. Bassett concludes this line of thought by arguing that when there is denominator that signifies difference such as sexual orientation, race or national origin, the unequal outcome of infection and death can go by unchallenged (Bassett, 2021:230). With that being said, the frustration Kim feels and the supposed outcome of a situation where shoes were on other feet can be understood as a valid and reasonable concern by looking at both the past and the present. Halberstam writes about queer time in relation to the AIDS epidemic as that the crisis diminished the possibilities for a future in the horizon (Halberstam, 2002:3). The COVID-19 pandemic could in that light become a question of who is promised futurity. Who is promised a future, who is worth sacrificing and what is it worth sacrificing it for?

Kim furthermore tells of a situation they were placed in during lockdown where they were forced to endure the first lockdown with their family. The story tells of a situation where the altering of their everyday living situation put them in a precarious position and how this was connected to the space they were confined to during lockdown.

"During the first lockdown, I stayed with my family, and it was rough. I started feeling like a teenager and hiding myself again. It goes without saying that without queer venues or the opportunity to be surrounded by queer people it becomes hard. First of all, being stuck with your family is already very stressful because you have to code-switch. Even if they're "ok" with your identity/sexuality, you kind of feel you don't wanna push it. I stopped painting my nails. I even threw out some thongs. It sounds silly, but as the underwear rotation went around some times the only ones left were thongs, but washing them and having them dry in the house with my family it made me feel like the first time we saw a gay person on TV together, and I pretended like I wasn't looking" - Kim

The outtake from Kim's text tell us a couple of things. First and foremost, lockdown becomes a force which might 'traps' Kim and confines them to a space which might not feel that safe and involve a great deal of discomfort. Kim writes it as being 'stuck', a word that leads your mind to the body being unable to move. It is not the only written account that uses words such

as ‘trap’ or ‘stuck’ when referring to having to endure lockdown. This goes in line with the critique of problematizing the notion of home as a safe haven or a sanctuary (Barrett, 2015). In this place, and in this time, turning to queer people and being surrounded with queer people becomes a turn that is difficult to make.

When Kim spends their first lockdown with their family, they mention a certain set of practices that they have to desert which they call ‘code-switching’. These practices are understood as not being allowed in the space of the family home. And that is understood as bringing with it an amount of stress. Kim stopped painting their nails and threw out thongs. This outtake not only speak of norms regarding sexuality, but also about norms encompassing expected gendered behaviour. Gendered expectations are always shaped and influenced by place and location. The notion about femininity and masculinity are dependent on the spatial and the spatial affects the gendered expectations we have (McDowell, 2004:7) Furthermore, Doan (2010) speak of how binary norms of gender is dependent on space and how these norms imposes a form of tyranny in people’s lives. This tyranny is enabled when people challenge the gendered expectations of that society or of that space, where the consequences are that of pain and discomfort. She writes that although gender is important in the discussion of how certain spaces regulate and police certain norms, how one performs their gender is equally as important.

The practices in Kim’s account regarding the turning away from nail polish and thongs could be understood as such a gender performance that is not perceived as appropriate gendered behaviour in that space. Another interesting aspect of the citation that at first glance slipped my mind is how it encompasses the notion of time. Kim initially mentions how spending the first lockdown with the family makes them feel like a teenager again and how they hid themselves away. The concept of time actualizes itself when they write about referring back to a time where they were younger and where a sense of hiding was present to a further extent. What lockdown means for Kim then is a turning back of time where they are situated in a rough place and being placed in a precarious situation of displacement. In other cases, spending more time with your family in the family home does not have to be a case of feeling out of place. Austin speaks of how he is traveling back to visit his family. Although being against lockdown rules, he understands is a vital part for his wellbeing to feel that type of belonging.

“I have also been traveling back ‘home’ to my parent’s house by the seaside to spend time with mum following her diagnosis. This has been against the lockdown rules, but the sense of feeling ‘home’ in the family unit, has been hugely important to me” – Austin

Because the actualized notion of home under lockdown needed not only be understood as a place of alienation and oppression. There are a few outtakes from the material which speak of

the importance of home and how lockdown has had nurturing and emancipatory effect in the lives of the participants. Being in farther proximity to the outside thus might become a way of realizing and coming to terms with possible futures. Following I will present a couple of outtakes from different participants that tell of different stories. There are however some similarities in the way they speak about their experiences of space under lockdown.

“In lockdown, I felt slightly untethered. I had a role in society. I had a role in the workplace. I had a role in my friendship group. Even if these roles are false, they were a guide rope. In lockdown, I lost this. I think for the first time in my life, I was not surrounded by people and their opinions and their expectations. It was just me, alone in my person. Alone in my queerness. I was still a few feet away from something, but I no longer knew what that thing was. I was tired, I was emotional, and I didn’t quite know where I fit any more”. – Lee

“Another shift that happened over lockdown, the most personal one maybe, is that I went from being a non-binary person happy just to use neutral pronouns & a neutral name, to wanting partial medical transition. I think having so much time to think and consider other people’s stories online gave me space to address what I really want. I’ve only just started to mention it to people and I’m not sure if it feels possible to do anything about it, since trans healthcare is so neglected and non-binary people aren’t really recognised legally or medically. Thinking about how difficult it might be is distressing, but it’s honest, and maybe I couldn’t have faced up to it without time alone and apart from other people’s perceptions of me.” – Rem

“As a gay person everything goes slow. You don’t come out and then you don’t have the experience of being gay from a very young age – so you’re always playing catch up. Am I missing out? What would it have been like if... but I feel like I got to evaluate and have a look without feeling pressure to conform. Sometimes all you need is time and a shared experience to appreciate who you’ve got. A lot of my friends found new partners in lockdown. The gays seem to be flourishing. Whilst a lot of them were made to feel even more isolated, if they were not out yet.” – Aleksandra

“Not only has time in isolation given me a space to figure out more about myself, it’s also given me some breathing room away from both friends and men on apps that frequently (and rightfully unapologetically) meet for sex because they require it at a carnal level. Although I don’t connect with my peers on this level, I’m still hopeful that I will find myself in a situation with another man who understands my sexual circumstance and is accepting of it. This has, however, proven quite challenging, and lockdown hasn’t necessarily supported my efforts” - Jarred

All of these narratives touch upon the notion of time and space. Perhaps time and space become the most fundamental part that ties all of the threads together. Rem for example speak of how the time in lockdown has attributed to having them consider medical transition. And even though it is a disheartening reflection to read about the difficulties to carry through such a transition, Rem explains this shift in the ways time alone in lockdown has, in a way, shielded them from the perception of others. Aleksandra reflects on the time and space under lockdown in a similar way. The time has ignited a newfound appreciation for her partner whilst also making her feel comfortable in herself without the pressure to conform. The pressure could be understood as very similar to the ‘perception of others’ that Rem speak of. Jarred mentions that his time in isolation has given him time to figure out more about himself and what he is looking for in a partner, even though lockdown creates difficulties in following through with it. Lee feels as if time in lockdown has made him lose those connections and affirmations from the roles he is performing and in the context he is performing them. He, then again, in a similar manner of that of Rem, Aleksandra and Jarred, notes how he has not been surrounded by other’s perception and expectations of him. He has been, as he puts it, alone in his queerness.

How could we understand these outtakes that actualize time and space? How can we understand the effects of being alone, the perception of others and how those key aspects play an influential role in their understanding of themselves? I wonder what phenomenology can contribute to understand these narratives. Ahmed claims that phenomenology is a reminder that the spaces in which bodies inhabit cannot be understand as exterior from them, but rather that space is the bodies second skin. The body is not an instrument that merely dwells in space, but the body unfolds and is shaped in the practise of dwelling in space (Ahmed, 2006a:9). This is something that become apparent in the material. It is their inhabitation in space that reveal moments of epiphanies about themselves; that Lee does not fit in; that Aleksandra got to have a further look at herself; that Rem is considering partial medical transition and that Jarred now knows what he is looking for in a partner. These realizations do not come out of nowhere, and neither of the participants seem bewildered as to why this time has become a time of realization. The causality is explained through being alone, through having time, through being less influenced by the perception of others.

It could here become fruitful to think about the concept of lines and the notion of direction that Ahmed theorizes. In the equation of orientating oneself, we are dependent on direction, influenced by certain lines. The world unfolds and opens itself up in different ways, depending on the way we have turned. A line is something we follow, and by following a line we acquire a certain direction. The direction is what makes us arrive somewhere when we have followed that line (Ahmed, 2006a:15-16). But a crucial argument that Ahmed is making is that direction

is not an accidental force. The default lines we are asked to follow complicate the practise of turning. Ahmed emphasizes how we need to understand the external pressure of following certain lines (Ahmed, 2006a:17). The perception of others could thus be theorised as symbolizing certain lines. Now, none of the accounts above mention lines specifically, except for in one instance. In a passage by Lee, he is recalling a dinner with his boyfriend's family, where he experiences some uncomfortable questions. He writes about like this:

"It has taken me a few months to re-find that space just outside of society that allows people to stop asking these questions. However, now it is a more conscious space. I can see the line and I can choose to walk away from it. It is very comfortable here, but I don't know whether I will stay. I have spent all my life looking towards society, making sure I don't stray too far. I now feel ready to turn a little and see what's in the other directions."

- Lee

These uncomfortable questions represent a line for Lee. It is a line in which he now recognizes and can make an active decision to turn away from. We might be able to use the concept of lines to understand what being on your own, cloistered from the perception others, mean. We might understand the perception of others as a line that acts as the instruction of a certain direction. In a time where that line is gone, or at the very least in farther proximity to the participants, they get directed in other ways and find themselves in a situation where they can explore and come to terms with possible futures without the external pressure to conform or follow a certain line. Furthermore, Ahmed emphasizes how losing our sense of direction, in fact might be a way of acquiring it (Ahmed, 2006a:19). We could understand the time of lockdown as a time where lines become blurred and directions are momentarily lost, but then again re-found.

This is not to say that losing direction is all that promising. As Lee puts it, when losing that guiding rope, he finds himself in a place where he feels tired and emotional because he does not know where he fits in anymore. What Lee experiences could be understood as a moment of disorientation. It is an unsettling feeling, and the wording he uses to describe the roles that has been put on him as a guiding rope, is quite a telling metaphor. As he puts it, when the guiding rope is gone, it leaves him feeling emotional and distressed as he does not know where he fits in anymore. Ahmed writes that when the body reaches out for something that is no longer there, when the body loses that support, it can leave us in a position of feeling lost. But these moments of disorientation Ahmed likewise understands as fundamental and even crucial (Ahmed 2006a:157). When he is alone with himself, alone in his queerness, what he used to grab onto is no longer there to offer the stability to life that it once did.

Munoz understands queerness as an ideality, a horizon that is not yet here and a horizon that we are always looking towards. Queerness is understood as utopian in the way that is directed

towards a future, beyond the here and now that is organized through straight time (Munoz, 2009; 1, 25). Furthermore, he describes how the queerness of time means to step out of the ‘‘presentness’’ of straight time. As a comment on James Schuyler’s poem ‘‘A photograph’’ Munoz reflects on how queerness is a way is glimpsing a future of possibilities in the everyday life, beyond the present that is characterized by adverse emotions. And the affective emotions of imagining a future beyond that now is, in his view, what it means to be out of straight time (Munoz, 2009:25). He captures it strikingly when he writes: ‘‘Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise’’ (Munoz, 2009:26). This is something that works well in dialogue with phenomenology. Namely, that our consciousness is always directed somewhere.

I previously offered an understanding to how Rem’s engagement on social media and the stories they took part of there presented an opportunity for them to step outside of straight time. But in Rem’s account, it is not only the access to online spaces and the stories shared by others that is used to explain the way lockdown has been a momentum for revelation. Rem also explains how it is the time alone that has contributed to the changes they want to see in the future. And Rem is not the only one that reflect on the notion of what being alone means. Lee and Jarred likewise contributes their epiphanies to being alone and in isolation. It seems then that this time spent in isolation under lockdown works in a way to enact a vision of the future that is less stumbled by the present. Lockdown would not only then affect what objects and spaces are in reach, but also what future that the hand can touch upon.

For Rem, Aleksandra, Jarred and Lee, lockdown is a time of revelation. The time alone has made Rem imagine a possible future. It has med Aleksandra find a newfound appreciation for her partner and it has made Jarred realize what he wants out of a partner and out of a relationship. And although they may not describe these revelations in terms of ecstasy, not at least from what I can decipher in written text, what I can read out are feelings of desire and longing. Whether it be for a potential or already existing partner. Whether it be for emotional fulfilment or self-realization – lockdown or the exceptional circumstance of finding yourself secluded in your own abode actualizes memories of the past and directs these narratives beyond the here and now towards a future of possibilities. Now, the purpose of this argument is not to praise lockdown and put it on a pedestal as a necessary mean for stepping out of straight time and imagining a different future. There would be severe difficulties in making such a case when taking into account all the other stories that tell of lockdown entailing something much different for the majority of the participants. But some emancipatory potentials can be deciphered in the material.

I wonder then if not all of these stories become instances of disorientation. Even if they may vary in degree of intensity, what comes across in the material written by the participants are instances where the lines being followed are blurred or even disrupted. And maybe it would seem as a given to expect some degree of disruption in a global pandemic where the way life organizes itself, in and around the participants, gets turned on its head by the introduction of measures of disease control such as lockdown. Sara Ahmed concludes in *Queer Phenomenology, Orientation, Objects, Others*, about coming to terms with the notion of disorientation and asking ourselves the questions regarding what momentum and intel we can gather from, yet again, finding ourselves in the dark (Ahmed, 2006a:158). In this time and in this context, the world queer people orientate themselves in, the lines they follow, the places they ones called home, the people that were once family, and the ways they understand themselves, are altered.

Lockdown ultimately changes many things and runs the risk of putting those in disadvantage in an even more precarious situation. But it must be acknowledged that in some instances the spaces some of the participants are confided to seem to place them in a world where there are moments of revelation that enacts a desire for a queer future. The new lines that are being followed, the orientation in the digital landscape of social media and the possibilities to step out of straight time could be the intel derived from what we gathered this time in the dark. They say that you direct quotations should be sparsely used, but this one I would not be able to reiterate with the same precision. Closing off this section, captured by Sara Ahmed, she writes:

“The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do) but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how things are directed and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of a new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope”

(Ahmed, 2006a:69).

8. Conclusion

What is the material pointing towards and what conclusion can be drawn from the analysis? Lockdown has undoubtedly altered the participants orientation in the everyday life, and the material tell of a life where turning towards physical spaces that are understood as queer, queer-friendly or safe for queer people has become limited. Orientation proves to be a valuable concept to understand how the participants are experiencing spaces under lockdown. Lockdown can be understood as a force that leaves the participants in a state of disorientation. Lockdown turns off the lights and unties the strings. The directions where the participants once turned become blurred and undone. The participants then find themselves in a dark room where they have to fumble to find a new direction. And some find a new direction and new spaces that provide relief in the crisis and in their life, but some also find themselves in a situation that is worse. The ways the participant orientate in the everyday of lockdown is one of finding relief and safe spaces where possible.

The material tells a story of space under lockdown from a queer perspective where participants lose proximity to what pre-lockdown was in reach. Given the context and the reason why the loss of public queer places is spoken of as having a significant impact in the lives of the participants, is explained through the ways those spaces function as an escape from heteronormativity. The material additionally tells of accounts where these public spaces may become of greater importance to the ones that do not experience the place where they spend their daily rest as a safe one. But queer spaces have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic where voices speak of the increased racism towards people racialized as Asian in these spaces. Lockdown seems to have had a profound change in the participants daily life and has affected their living arrangements. The strain of lockdown cause roommates to relocate or move away; people move in together as an act of solidarity to make life under lockdown more bearable; some are forced to move back to their family home.

The location and the ways queer spaces function under lockdown cannot be properly understood without taking into account the ways media and digital spaces make up a part of the participants daily activity. It makes up a part of how the participants orientate in the everyday of lockdown. In the stories told in the material, it seems to be impossible to understand the spatial reconfigurations of lockdown without taken into account the ways digital spaces play an integral part of the everyday. In a time where interaction with other queer people and allies are limited and where many physical queer spaces become lost, an alternative way of turning to gain closer

proximity to such safe spaces is to turn to the screens and online spaces. Given then the premise of lockdown, it seems to be of great importance to understand how online engagements and the interaction with media affect queer people. Sometimes it being a blessing in the everyday life, and sometimes it being a curse.

But lockdown also seems to carry with it some emancipatory moments. The material also tells of feelings of revelation in regard to the participants sexuality and gender identity. Time alone likewise seems to have some degree of effect when it comes to escaping heteronormativity and escaping straight time. And this might be less of a surprise, given the understanding that all spaces are governed by and regulate norms of gender and sexuality. Being in further proximity to certain spaces that regulate certain norms might then explain why an everyday life on your own might have a liberating effect.

8.1 Limitations and Future Research

This study has been of an explorative character to offer queer insights of lockdown as a measure of disease control by investigating how queer people orientate and experience everyday spaces under lockdown. A limitation to conducting a study like this, in this context and at this point in time, is that the field of research is constantly growing because we are in the moment. Although this study has been conducted through an explorative approach where the purpose has not been to summarize a uniform queer experience, but rather a queer perspective, there are limitations to such an approach. The shortcomings of being a study of an explorative nature could be that it lacks in being able to answer to a certain degree of specificity regarding the spaces that have been the scope of research, the themes that arise in the material and all the different experiences that fall under the queer umbrella. The study does however offer conclusions that further research could build upon and focus on specifically when studying lockdown and isolation from a queer perspective. For example, how the proximity to queer spaces has been altered by lockdown, how living arrangements and queer ways of living has been stifled by lockdown or the role digital media plays in the lives of queer people during isolation. Future research might also take an interest in qualitatively investigating the decline in mental health that queer people has experienced under lockdown and what coping mechanisms have been prevalent in this time of crisis. The insights offered in the material of this study could then be used as a background in a study that takes on such endeavours.

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Appendix A – the Writing Guide

Dear writer,

In this document, you will find some themes and questions to help you with the writing. The questions are meant to act as a framework for the study, but you shouldn't feel stifled by them. The questions **can** be answered one by one in a structured format, but if you feel that it gives the narrative a deeper meaning to simply write free, with some questions in the back of your mind, this works just as well.

Focus on the questions that you are drawn towards and feel comfortable writing about. You don't have to write about or cover everything. The text can be as short or as long as you want it to be. You can send it in all at once or bit by bit. The deadline however, for when I can't receive any more material, will be after the 12th of April.

As mentioned in the introductory information slip, the writing will be completely anonymized. The following day that the written account has been sent it, the document will be printed and kept in safe storage and the email will be deleted. If you feel like you no longer want to be a part of the study, after having sent in material, your account will be written out of the thesis and the document will be disposed of. This request has to be emailed to me before the 20th of May.

If you have any questions or need further help with the writing, you are welcome to email me at any time. And if you feel that the writing is difficult and want to switch to doing it orally, in the form of an interview, this works just as well.

Thank you and good luck!

Think about lockdown and the restrictive measures as a whole.

If you could summarize your experience of lockdown in three words, what would those words be?

What has been the most difficult part about lockdown?

Think about, whether or not, your wellbeing has changed since the start of the pandemic. If it has, what has been the biggest factors for that change?

What have you felt when you have read the various restrictive measures throughout the year? Think about whether or not you have felt that they have been reasonable. Think about whether or not you have felt included or left out.

Think about your living situation and where you have been during lockdown.

What does the word 'home' mean for you?

Where have you been? Think about whether or not your living situation has changed at all under lockdown.

Have you lived alone, or in the company of others? Think about whether or not this has affected your experiences under lockdown.

Think about, whether or not, lockdown has changed the way you think about home or your living situation.

Think about your relationships with others under lockdown

Are there any people that you have missed? In what setting would you otherwise have met those people? Think about whether or not this has affected your wellbeing and experiences under lockdown.

Think about, whether or not, the way you think about your relationships with others have changed during lockdown.

Have you developed or taken part in any alternative strategies to maintaining relationships with others that hasn't required close social contact?

Think about intimacy under lockdown

How has lockdown affected the way you have been able to be intimate with others?

Think about, whether or not, lockdown affected the way you think about intimacy.

Have you developed or taken part in any alternative strategies to maintaining intimacy with others that hasn't required close social contact?

Think about the places you haven't been able to visit.

What places would you normally have visited that you now can't?

Are there any particular public spaces or places that you have missed? What has it meant for you to not be able to visit those places?

Are there any particular events that you have missed? What has it meant for you to not be able to attend those events?

Have you developed or taken part in any alternative strategies to be able to attend certain places or events that hasn't required close social contact?

Think about, whether or not, lockdown has affected the way you think about particular public places and/or public events.

Is there anything else, that these questions do not cover, that you would like to reflect on when it comes to your experiences under lockdown?