Rendering the Cyberfag: An Examination on the Spatial Sociology of Grindr

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Rendering the Cyberfag:  
An Examination on the Spatial Sociology of Grindr 

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of Bard College 

by 
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“the road is long, we carry on, try to have fun in the meantime”- LDR

For my fellow homosexuals, I hope this isn't forever
Queerness in itself, is a societally paradoxical existence. The inception of homosexuality as a noun, the identity attached to same-sex attraction, relating to sex and technology, a space of pure artifice. Aaron Betsky, “Queer space” (1997), pg 13

Grindr is a location based social media and online dating application for the gay, bisexual, and transgender community developed by Joel Simkhai in 2009, becoming the most popular dating app in the world. Grindr is an innovative tool to positively connect queer community on a global scale, a “safe-space”, “trailblazing” the queer community towards a true, foundational community. The evolution of queer spaces from the physical to the digital, from cruising to Grindr, seems to have ushered in true queer liberation. This essay begins to ask how a digital space such as Grindr reconstructions the architectural/urban context in which queer people exist/interact? What are the consequences of these shifting interactions? How has commodification, consumerism, and neoliberalism altered the reality of progress as well as the values of queer culture? How has the transition from a physical queer culture to a digital one created a new level of spacelessness? This essay argues that the functions of these spaces, the progression from the physical to the digital, has shifted queer culture towards a synthetic reality; the creation of Grindr, and the cultural focus towards the digital space is derived from trauma, attempts to “fill the void” of spacelessness, and actively facilitates the experiencing of trauma and current “disorientation” of gay people.

Developing a Lexicon for Investigation

“There is no heterosexual orientation, the term ‘orientation’ in itself has implications of the “orient”, the east, or the foreign, and “orient” as a state of being in a deviant direction, needing to be ‘oriented’” (Ahmed, 12). In this quote, Ahmed implies that through this inherent deviancy of the very term “orientation”, it invokes a need to be oriented through this societal “disorientation”. Having “orientation”, or being “oriented” relies on established, foundational societal and spatial relations/navigations. Heterosexuals are seldomly labeled as being of heterosexual orientation because they have foundational orientation. Their spatial existence and community is the entire world. Homosexuals must carve and fabricate their spaces and architecture in an attempt to gain “orientation”, but this is fruitless, as homosexuals can not be “oriented” within established heterosexual space. Although queer spaces are made, they are inherently ephemeral and societally unprotected. Thus a void based on the lack of foundational physical spaces of existence for gay people is created.

This void of spacelessness, spatial/societal “disorientation” and subsequent spatial fabrication creates a reaction within homosexuals attempting to find purpose. Gay people then attempt to redefine the need for established physical space and rather create space through sensation. Queer spaces are immaterial facilitators utilized to “fill the void” of physical and spatial existence for gay people.

“Looking back on it, this was a queer space. In this book, I will try to describe what I mean by the phrase. It is a kind of space that I find liberating, and that I think might help us avoid some of the imprisoning characteristics of the modern city. It is a sordid, amoral, sexual space that lives only to end for existence. It is a space of spectacle, consumption, dance, and obscenity. It is a misuse or deformation of a place, an appropriation of the buildings and codes of the city for perverse purposes. It is a space in between the body and technology, a space of pure artifice.” Aaron Betsky, “Queer Space” (1997), pg 15

Figure 1. author’s photo

“A WEB OF SPACES BUILT BY SPOKEN WORD, INNUENDO, AND HINTS; HOMOSEXUAL NAVIGATION THROUGH A HETEROSEXUAL REALITY, A BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF OBSCURITY. THIS EXISTENCE WITHIN OBSCURITY, SPLIT A QUEER EXISTENCE BETWEEN REAL LIFE AND HOMOSEXUAL ACTS, THAT CREATES A DESIRE TO REFRAME AND ORIENT HOMOSEXUALS WITHIN THE SEEN WORLD.”

6 Cultural deviancy, an incorrect existence
7 “The queerest space of all is the void”, the void in this context, further revealed by AIDS, is a chasm etched from societal neglect. Aaron Betsky, “Queer Space” (1997), pg 15
8 Today, Grindr proudly represents a modern LGBTIQ+ identity that’s expanding into new platforms. From social issues to original content, we’re continuing to blaze innovative paths with a meaningful impact for our community. At Grindr, we’ve created a safe space where you can discover, navigate, and get zero-foot away from the queer world around you.” About, Grindr.com, https://www.grindr.com/about/
“THERE IS NO HETEROSEXUAL ORIENTATION, THE TERM ‘ORIENTATION’ IN ITSELF HAS IMPLICATIONS OF THE “ORIENT”, THE EAST, OR THE FOREIGN, AND “ORIENT” AS A STATE OF BEING IN A DEVIANT DIRECTION, NEEDING TO BE ‘ORIENTED’” (AHMED)

“THIS VOID OF SPACELESSNESS, SPATIAL/SOCIETAL “DISORIENTATION” AND SUBSEQUENT SPATIAL FABRICATION CREATES A REACTION WITHIN HOMOSEXUALS ATTEMPTING TO FIND PURPOSE. QUEER PEOPLE THEN ATTEMPT TO SHED THE NEED FOR ESTABLISHED PHYSICAL SPACE AND RATHER CREATE SPACE THROUGH SENSATION. QUEER SPACES BECOMES IMMATERIAL FACILITATORS UTILIZED TO ‘FILL THE VOID’”
Crafting a Praxis of Current Tensions and Failures through a Mapping of Gay Chronology

Queer spaces of the recent past were remappings of the built architectural environment rooted in achieving orgasm. These spaces, mainly the men’s bathroom or locker room, centered in masculinity and voyeurism obviously would fascilitate gay experiences, and often are the birthplaces of homosexual fantasy. The very architecture of these spaces have non-heterosexual implications. The complete lack of privacy, culturally accepted same-sex nudity, the very color of tiles all emphasize the human form. The urinal, a nonchalant display of male genitalia, the stark nude against white tile begs for focus, same-sex focus. Although homosexuality is implied it still requires discreet, subversive homosexuals acts. The gay bar/club attempts to create concrete queer establishments, spaces for congregation, potential for orgasm, and “safety” in knowing everyone in this space is queer. These spaces are all very sexual in nature and either “queer” or “queered” is homosexuality confined to the actions within, it does not solve the problem that gay people do not have any societal foundation to exist within. Gay existence in established space was even further uprooted after the HIV/AIDS epidemic, gay clubs, bars, bath houses, and known cruising spots were shut down and deserted out of fear and government sanction. In Queer Space by Aaron Betsky, he explains how HIV/AIDS created a “chasm” or “void” within gay life, fracturing any semblance of community and space, leaving gay men without any space to exist.

The digital age brought in a new way of attempting to “orient” the self in the wake of HIV/AIDS wreckage of queer spaces. Beginning with the chat rooms of the late 90’s. AOL created an entirely new mode of connection specifically rooted in anonymity. Users were able to join and create chat rooms with users of similar interests, the chat room was an internet specific coded language for gay men to find each other. The discretion, and lack of ability to send or receive images provided these users looking for sexual exploration with a sense of inhabition, the “cyberfantasy” and obsession, mainly focused on a Portland based sex worker named Brad. The men would describe their supposed soliscitations and encounters with Brad. Unknown whether or not these encounters were real they all described Brad as naive, worthless and entirely complicit with anything done to him. Cooper based the novel on his ownresearch, searching through the extensive chat logs of gay men in this chat room devoted to a gay porn star by the name Peter Azur. According to Cooper, the chat room had an extensive collection of the often dark, obsessive, and violent fantasies of these men about this porn star. He described that their fantasies spiraled into cruelty. These chat rooms furthered a subconscious concept within gay men as their sexuality being a hiding place. Chat Rooms did not remedy the issues of gay clubs or bars, but merely mimicked the sensation of community with the added complexities of digital anonymity.

Responding to the popularity of gay chat rooms, and the decentralization of gay life post HIV/AIDS, Joel Simkhai founded Grindr in 2009. The app redeselines and centralizes queer reality, it allows users to exist within a digital grid of sexual tension at all times. The app is a 24/7 (when allowed by the user) geolocator, allowing other users to see, down to feet, other users locations at any time. This creates a pervasive, ever-present undercurrent of sexual tension. The app constantly focuses the user towards sexual encounters without it even being on the mind of the user. Thus, queering every space, the workplace, the school, apartment complex, etc... becoming a space of “pre-orgasm”. While redefining reality, Grindr also solidifies the same orientational function of past queer spaces, this foundational network is a tool for momentary pleasure and gaining purpose through sensation not only active sensation but the inactive sensation of sexual tension. If sexual tension, and the possibility for sex is present in the subconscious mind, technically that should dismantle the ephemeral nature of gaining “orientation” through momentary sensation. If the sensation (tension) is ever-present, subconscious, and “foundational” then queer existential “orientation” is accomplished? Unfortunately, this does not take into account the “voidal” nature of the digital, and ways that bonding was based on pleasure.11

Grindr quite literally is a digital way of orienting the physical body, but also (dis)orientations reality from the physical to the synthetic and digital, shifting queer culture towards the “void”: “The texture of a smartphone’s alkali-aluminosilicate glass screen is similar to smooth skin, so even as you rub your thumb down the display of Grindr users, it is like touching the young, hairless skin of a naked body” (Jacque pp.76). Jacque then goes on to explain how Grindr provides a “new mode of romantic experience” that does not require physical touch or pursuits of love, but rather a synthesis of non-physical sensation altering queer reality

“THE GAY CLUB, CRUISING GROUNDS, BATHROOMS, OR GLORY HOLES ARE NOT THE ARCHITECTURES THAT ARE SPATIALLY FOCUSING QUEER PEOPLE, BUT RATHER, THE HUMANS THEMSELVES; SECTIONING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT INTO A MAZE OF BODIES ACHING, YEARNING, BEGGING, FILLING THEIR VOIDS. THIS ‘ORIENTS’ GAY PEOPLE TOWARDS CONSTANT MOMENTARY PLEASURES THAT EPHEMERALLY FILLS THE VOID OF SPACELESSNESS.”
from sexual sensation to synthetic digital sensation; which ‘requires and triggers important architectural and urban transformations. Alkali-aluminosilicate is human skin, networked’ (Jacque pp. 77). Queerness is now truly shedding most aspects of physical, non-synthetic reality. When the main way for queer people to find community is based on sex, sensation, and pleasure, and now there is a digital foundation to further position homosexuals towards this pursuit one must question the possibilities for new and unprecedented vulnerabilities for the users.

Queer space before Grindr’s inception, naturally facilitated the experiencing of trauma. When most queer spaces were and still are focused on pleasure, hedonism and anonymity, trauma would closely follow as these experiences often involve immense amounts of vulnerability. There is vulnerability in discretion, sexual encounters, drug and alcohol usage as well as the often illegality of these spaces being used. The abandoned warehouse, public pier or park is not sanctioned sexual space. As stated previously, these spaces were still rooted in “orienting” the “disoriented” homosexual existence through acts of superficial, momentary pleasure. Which creates an architecture that is queered by these acts, rather than being foundational queer. The trauma experienced, usually sexual violence, was largely due to this sex focused spatial arrangement, but access to these built spaces were only available to those involved within adult queer communities, usually located in major cities. Grindr, as the new normal foundation for queer spatial orientation and navigation, brings unprecedented access to a global network of queer people eagerly seeking both physical and mental sexual sensation. This almost societal acceptance of the app, and its prolific global use is largely due to modern queer liberation, sex positivity, and politically liberal movements. Modern queer liberation is mainly focused on explicit displays of sexuality, heteronormative displays of homosexuality, or homonationalism. Thus, Claiming prolific queer sex and assimilation into heteronormativity is true queer liberation, so most displays of gay “pride” or “joy” involves displaying, advertising, and idolizing the consumable human form. Sensations of the body and assimilated homosexuals participating in heterosexual consumerist culture become epitomized within the canon of queer identity. These values of supposed progress is exactly what Grindr is, excess sexuality, and consumerism. The app has intertwined itself within every aspect of gayness. Displays of queerness, modern media, the event of “Pride”, and the very language of gay people has been shifted towards the use of the app.

Gayness and desire is being commodified by Grindr and modern liberals who push for this form of “acceptance” and the idea of “homonormativity”. As of November 18th, 2022 Grindr was introduced to the public stock market, their stock surging 450% since. Some may see this as further acceptance, or perhaps negative assimilation. Grindr is undeniably invading the heteronormative world, heterosexual perception of gayness in response to Grindr becoming some of the most profitable stock could further push homosexuals into this digital, sexual void. This commodified, capitalist and insanely profitable advertisement of Grindr pushes this damaging form of existential purpose onto at-risk individuals, largely minors. According to a study conducted at Northwestern University an estimated 50% of queer youths (ages 14-17) use or have used the app. As Grindr requires no age verification, and the users age can be altered at any time, the use of Grindr in gay minors is overt. Gay minors, especially those not located in liberal coastal regions are perhaps some of the most “spaceless” and desperate, the possibility of experiencing any semblance of what a heterosexual experiences romantically far outweighs the risks in the mind of a minor. In another study it was found that in 2015 alone there 25 documented and criminally charged cases of statutory rape, sexual assault and molestation. Which obviously does not account for undocumented cases, as well as possession of child pornography when nudes are solicited from a minor. Grindr user, Grindr is pushing queer youth towards a “voidal” reality. Love and achieving “homonormativity” is all rooted within an unregulated digital realm that puts desirability and orgasm at the top of the modern gay person’s hierarchy of needs. The commodification of queerness seems to be the antithesis of queer liberation movements of the past. Grindr seems to turn the values of the past on its head. When spatial foundation is finally created specifically for queer purposes, no matter the mode in which the foundation orients the inhabitant towards, human nature is to find comfort in a larger system that “supports” their identity. The modern queer person now exists locked within a digital grid of sensual, sexual sensation. The inherent need to love and be loved is clouded and conflated to needing to be an object of desire, a need to be able to be consumed constantly and simultaneously by many. To be consumed and wanted becomes a way of existence, there is comfort in these feelings, albeit damaging, but still ever-present. The cycle of consuming and being consumed lasts as long as the individual is alive, sexual desire is constant. This existence inherently facilitates trauma, being an object to be consumed and used, debases queer existence, creating a cycle of queer space being relegated to the “void”.

“THE ‘CYBERFANTASY’ A NOVEL CONCEPT THAT IS ATTRIBUTED TO THIS DIGITAL ANONYMITY WAS BORN. USERS NOT ONLY EXPLORED THE SURFACE OF THEIR SEXUALITY, BUT ALSO WERE ABLE TO PUSH THEIR LIMITS OF SEXUAL MORALITY AND FANTASY WITH VIRTUALLY NO CONSEQUENCES.”

12 “...what I term “homonationalism”—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. There is a commitment to the global dominant ascendance of whiteness that is implicated in the transformation of the United States as empire as well as the alliance between this propagation and this brand of homosexuality.” Puar, J., “Introduction,” Terrorist Propagation of the United States as Empire as well as the Alliance Between the United States and the United Kingdom, 2017.

13 “Normal” homosexual behavior and values determined by media/culture and reliant on heterosexual acceptance

14 Trauma in a spatial, societal and active context, both the trauma of one’s identity being relegated to a synthetic frame, the trauma of reducing a humans existence to reducing freedom and community in potential sexual acts, and physical sexual trauma.

Figure 5. Still from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s 1977 film The 120 Days of Sodom
“IF SEXUAL TENSION, AND THE POSSIBILITY FOR SEX IS EVER-PRESENT IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND, TECHNICALLY THAT SHOULD DISMANTLE THE EPHEMERALITY OF GAINING "ORIENTATION" THROUGH MOMENTARY SENSATION. IF THE SENSATION (TENSION) IS EVER-PRESENT, SUBCONSCIOUS, AND "FOUNDATIONAL" THEN IS QUEER EXISTENTIAL "ORIENTATION" ACCOMPLISHED?”

“A SYNTHESIS OF NON-PHYSICAL SENSATION, ALTERING QUEER REALITY FROM SEXUAL SENSATION TO SYNTHETIC DIGITAL SENSATION; WHICH "REQUIRES AND TRIGGERS IMPORTANT ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS. ALKALI-ALUMINOSILICATE IS HUMAN SKIN, NETWORKED" (JAQUE, PP.76).”
As the only way truly available to “heal” this voidal trauma is momentary pleasure.

Assimilation into the “seen” world has pushed queerness as a concept for capitalist consumption. Damning queer people to find their existential “orientation” within being consumed.

Design Path I: Examining Current Spatial Tensions

The spatial examinations presented above frames architecture as spatial navigation, architecture as a construct of societal use and value. Architecture as something not entirely rooted in the physical, but a metaphysical excavation of established space using the digital. Grindr unearths, or reveals what is already there in physical reality, but organizes it for the user to navigate through the digital. Grindr is carving digital pathways and reframing the architecture in physical reality through a queer, sexual digital lens. The modern “orientation” of gay people completely alters the pre-conceived realities of architectural and spatial function. Currently, the function of an architectural or urban setting, in a gay context, is ruled by a digital grid of desire, trauma, and consumption. Queer spaces of the past were the mens bathroom seen through a lens of voyeurism and anonymity. The abandoned building as a place for sex or congregation, “gayborhoods” in NYC and San Francisco, gay bars and clubs. Queerness hides in plain sight, an intersection between the public and private, a sense of domesticity within the urban grid. Although still in existence, and often rooted in desire and sex there was a sense of community due to the physicality of the repurposed architecture and urban spaces.

Grindr is actively dissolving these coopted environments, in exchange for a digital architectural foundation that is a layering of transparency, secrecy, and voyeurism. Some argue that the app has allowed for gay people to “ascend” into the seen world, escape the “victimhood” of living within the urban underbelly; the once gritty “gayborhoods” of the lower east side, Hell’s Kitchen, and Chelsea now filled with millionaire homosexuals in high-rise apartments. There is no longer a need for physical spaces of congregation for homosexuals as the foundation for gay congregation existed digitally. This confusingly both fractures and connects the gay community, physically displacing areas of homosexual congregation but connecting homosexuals digitally. The queer urban space is actively being transitioned to the artificial unseen. Grindr is marketed to be the crux of progress and facilitator of acceptance, but it is rather making queerness more palatable for heterosexuals in its physical invisibility. It is extremely apparent that both queer people and heterosexuals have brought queer people to this point of a debased existence. There is currently a paradox being formed within the very definition of being “queer”. Queer progress is somehow being conflated to assimilation, Grindr and modern culture is flaying queer existence, commodifying the body, isolating and reorienting queer peoples relationship to sex and desire, relegating it to the digital realm; all in the name of achieving normalcy.

Grindr is a city itself, networked. A city as an endless network of human existences arranged for navigation and consumption. When this digital networked “city” is virtually boundless, unfixed, and untraceable in physical reality can community even be formed? The gay urban sprawl of the past navigated through word and nuance based in reality is now replaced by a digital map and compass. If the “gay” city was navigated, erected, and fabricated through these architectural “queered” repurposements that facilitated the experiencing of pleasure to “orient” the self, then the app is the queer city digitized and streamlined with a foundation for queer existence. Each profile, essentially creates an ever-present space of possible sexual encounter. If architecture is a container for existence, then a Grindr profile could be thought of as individualized containers for existences. Grindr coined their app as a “Globally Distributed Mobile Cloud Architecture”, a built environment that provides space for existence, a “city”. A city is technically entirely determined by population density, as well as distinctions of culture and social hierarchies. Grindr, with approximately 11 million users qualifies as a digital city with similar functionality. The lived digital existence of Grindr contains social hierarchies based on class, race, religion, age, body type and a specific Grindr-based dialect. Grindr is a complete digital reflection of a city, there are places within the grid with users that share similarities either physically, politically, linguistically etc… When physically moving throughout physical reality, or changing your location on the app the user on the grid change to reflect the inhabitants of the area. The user can virtually navigate through digital neighborhoods to look for users with their preferred traits; mainly wealth, race, or social clout. Grindr can be seen as a digital filter or mirror of the physical world to be viewed through to see or move through physical reality. Physical reality becomes secondary to the user’s existence on Grindr.

“...DISPLAYING, ADVERTISING, AND IDOLIZING THE CONSUMABLE HUMAN FORM. SENSATIONS OF THE BODY AND ASSIMILATED HOMOSEXUALS PARTICIPATING IN HETEROSEXUAL CONSUMERIST CULTURE BECOME EPITOMIZED WITHIN THE CANON OF QUEER IDENTITY.”

15... “As a testament to this back-and-forth discussion of a contemporary app’s digital space alongside a novelised yensou physical space, the paper explores how Grindr reimagines and highlights long-standing problems such as machismo and invisibility within Puerto Rican queer culture, while acknowledging the politics of space at an urban level.” “Back and Forth: Between Krash Klub and Grindr” (2020). Regner Ramos. Ramos documents the closure of physical gay space in Puerto Rico in response to Grindr’s emergence in a digital/spatial theoretical context.

16...What I didn’t see was that alot of that dissolution would come about because of how pervasive technology would become. My sense is a lot of these other spaces, the spaces of otherness, the physical places where queer men and women had to go to define themselves aren’t necessary anymore” [Allie Kolb interviewing Aaron Betsky, “The End of Queer Spaces?”, Log 41 p 88 (2017).]
“THE MODERN QUEER PERSON NOW EXISTS LOCKED WITHIN A DIGITAL GRID OF SENSUAL, SEXUAL SENSATION.”

“THE INHERENT NEED TO LOVE AND BE LOVED IS CLOUDED AND CONFLATED TO NEEDING TO BE AN OBJECT OF DESIRE, A NEED TO BE ABLE TO BE CONSUMED CONSTANTLY AND SIMULTANEOUSLY BY MANY. TO BE CONSUMED AND WANTED BECOMES A WAY OF EXISTENCE.”
In this seemingly constant and desperate attempt for queer people to find direction through a foundationally heterosexual reality, Grindr creates this foundation for homosexuals. Instead of a physical foundational reality rooted in all aspects of human existence, the queer foundation for "existential orientation" is not within the physical realm but fundamentally skews the inhabitant towards gaining their existential "orientation" or purpose through sexual sensation. This derailing of queerness towards the digital is actively stripping "queerness" from physical reality. Homosexuality/desire is being conflated with queerness, queer existence is not sexual, queerness is opposition, a way of being, existing, and contemplating. A queer space can not exist in a positive, futurist manner in the current cultural definition it resides under. Queerness is novel futurism, and queer space is abstraction. In José Esteban Muñoz's book *Crusing Utopias* he claims "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain". In this claim, and the rest of the book, he argues that "queerness" in this ideological sense, is forever a conceptual enigma of possible future existences. Gay people must strip their identities that surround hedonism, consumerism and sexuality as all of these conceptions are often entirely heterosexual. Foundational physical reality may not be the answer for true queer liberation to occur, perhaps it is fantasy, or perhaps it requires radical erasure. All that is known is that the queer space, as it is known now is a voidal artifice. The digitization and commodification of gay sex is lacking of any queerness. In the wake of this now foundational voidal digital architecture in which queers now exist within, can queer people shift from an artificial, superficial, sexually centered existence? Is the debasing of queer existence an inevitable consequence of capitalist commodification? Is it even possible for queer people to exist beyond the "voidal" within a heterosexual physical reality?

Examsing "queer architecture" there seems to be attempts at architecturally attempting to create or repurpose spaces to craft a type of micro-utopia. Architecture designed for exclusive queer existence often focused on domesticity, luxury, voyeurism, and largely, exclusivity. *The Rudolph Apartment at 23 Beekman's Place* by Paul Rudolph (1997), the *Weston Havens House* by Harwell Hamilton Harris (1940), and the *BOOM Community* by Mayer H. E. Diller and Renfro (2011), all are supposed "queer" spaces, redesigning the domestic for queer use. Yet, all of these proposals are deeply flawed, and only provides relief for the privileged contained within the walls of the space. Muñoz claims that queerness is a future-oriented, utopian way of existing. He states that queer people must collectively dream for new worlds, new ways of navigation, and more fulfilling pleasures. He actively defies the nihilism of modern queer theory that states that queer people should abandon looking towards the future, revel in the sensations of the present. So how can one even begin to imagine a future queer space? Rendering such projections seems entirely futile given the state of queerness now, versus the true nature of queerness. It first requires true community and collectivity, unlearning decades of established value systems and behaviors, collective healing, the eradication of Grindr, and then removing the damaging realities of the past and present from the universal temporal consciousness. Perhaps then can "queerness" be idealized and pondered through a collective existential orientation towards futurity. Now, in this apparent fictitious nature of change, disruptions must be made, the present spatial and superficial nature of queerness must be dissected for any semblance of collectivity to occur. Sex is not queerness, it is biological. Space can not be based on biology, but rather on future possibilities.
“EACH PROFILE ESSENTIALLY CREATES AN EVER-PRESENT SPACE OF POSSIBLE
SEXUAL ENCOUNTER. IF ARCHITECTURE IS A CONTAINER FOR EXISTENCE,
THEN A GRINDR PROFILE COULD BE THOUGHT OF AS INDIVIDUALIZED
CONTAINERS FOR EXISTENCES.”

Design Path II: The Hotel as a Point of Reflection and
Emulation

To further attempt to comprehend this
chronology of gay spatial sociology, and my crafting
of a possible “disruption”; I began to search for
existing architectural disruptions/investigations that
similarly attempt to dissect this reflection of sex,
consumerism, capitalism, and modern urban sociology
with architecture/space. Thaddeus P. Juscyzk’s 2009
Massachusetts Institute of Technology M. Arch thesis
titled Hotel Archiphilia, weaves a both written and visual
narrative based on Jean-Francois de Bastide 1879 novel
The Little House: An Architectural Seduction. Which
describes a story where a man romantically pursues a
woman within an estate that actively shifts and distorts
to aid the man in his romantic pursuit. Juscyzk’s thesis
questions the applicability of such a narrative within a
modern context. He recontextualizes this tale within a
fictional Boston “love hotel”, marketed as an escape, a
total, encapsulating environment free from the plights
of modern urban life. Accompanied by collaged images
and renderings of this hotel, through fiction and visuals
he begins to analyze and render out how architectural
design, specifically, how the hotel, can act as an
active participant in the narrative of a story within the
framework of modern urban sociology. He describes
how the hotel, architecturally, is designed in such a way
that is both intensely separatist, but also voyeuristic.
Juscyzk explains “… the love hotel room capitalizes
on the alienation inherent in the space, and applies
it towards fantasy and sexual abandon. By further
focusing the attention to the interior through texture,
framing, imagery, and limited exterior openings, the
love hotel facilitates a removal of inhibition through
enclosure, and the submission to fantasy through its
isolation.”

With this reference that introduces the
concept of how architecture (the hotel) could
be charged through design and subsequently
disrupt spatial use, and sociological conception
I began to further contextualize these concepts
through a homosexual lens. In my research, I
found Gaedicker’s 1949 guide Sodom-on-Hudson,
the first published guide to gay life, which outlined
almost every known bar, club, cruising spot and
hotel that served as hubs for gay existence. One
of the only hotels at the time that tolerated gay
tenants was the Hotel St.George in Brooklyn, over
time it became a gay institution, housing Truman
Capote, Tennessee Williams, and Hart Crane.
In 1995 the majority of the hotel burnt down,
and then lost most of its popularity due to its
diminished size.

19 Thaddeus P. Juscyzk, “Hotel Archiphilia”, M.Arch, Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, 2009
"...THEN REMOVING THE DAMAGING REALITIES OF THE PAST AND PRESENT FROM THE UNIVERSAL TEMPORAL CONSCIOUSNESS. PERHAPS THEN CAN "QUEERNESS" BE IDEALIZED AND PONDERED THROUGH A COLLECTIVE EXISTENTIAL ORIENTATION TOWARDS FUTURITY. NOW, IN THIS APPARENT FICTITIOUS NATURE OF CHANGE, DISRUPTIONS MUST BE MADE, THE PRESENT SPATIAL AND SUPERFICIAL NATURE OF QUEERNESS MUST BE DISECTED FOR ANY SEMBLANCE OF COLLECTIVITY TO OCCUR."

"...A REMOVAL OF INHIBITION THROUGH ENCLOSURE, AND THE SUBMISSION TO FANTASY THROUGH ITS ISOLATION." (Jusczynski, pp.109)
"A CONGLOMERATION OF SIMULTANEOUS EXISTENCES, A PILING OF BODIES WITHIN A REALM OF SPECIFICITY. BOTH BEING CONTAINERS FOR AN ENTROPIC REALITY RUNNING PARALLEL TO ‘REAL’ LIFE."

Design Path III: Rendering the Digital-Socio-Spatial Critique, Digitally

I began creating this visual representation of said likeness by digitally rendering and extruding the plans of Hotel St. George, and then viewing these hotel rooms, bathrooms, and hallways as opportunities to emulate the deconstruction of both physical and metaphysical thresholds of sex, privacy, existence, and identity as a result of the proliferation of Grindr, and the relegation of gay people to the digital realm. I viewed the architecture of the hotel as active facilitators for both wanted and unwanted connection; playing with the materiality of the wall, the use of mirrors, light, reflection, and opacity, as layers of access. In articulating these alterations, I was able to render an environment that set a scene reflective of Grindr’s architecture. I placed figures, ambiguous of age or identity throughout the scene, each contained in their own rooms that provides or forces moments of exhibition, voyeurism, invitation, connection, denial, rejection, secrecy, vulnerability, and isolation. The rooms are seemingly endlessly monotonous, decorated and adorned with modernist furniture to combat conceptions of futurity, and fracture the viewers preconceived temporal perceptions of the fabricated environment. Using V-Ray\(^20\), charges the film within an architectural context; Often, the software is utilized within architectural marketing. Its ability to render realistic materials, lights, and objects allows the designer to provide their potential client with nearly tangible imagery. Within Rendering the Cyberflag, the architectural implications in using this software targets the rendering of spatial marketing as a practice. In the film’s disorienting qualities, it aims to challenge the consumability of the scene, and question the use of the software as a tool for streamlined architectural consumption. Within this thesis’s theoretical praxis, the weaponizing of V-Ray emulates the concepts and critiques of Grindr being a tool for the exploitation and objectification of its users, and being a central cause of the modern socio-spatial frictions present in gay culture. The space is subsequently captured in a purposefully antiquated and distorted way, the visual noise and suffering pixels aims to further illustrate the sentiment that we do not exist within any semblance of queer ideality. The conjection of these seemingly polar aesthetics and concepts aims to disorient the viewer, and further orient the setting of this fictional disruption within “the void”.

20 V-Ray, developed by Chaos in 1997, is a computer-generated rendering software, often used by architects to design, model and market architectural projects.

21 Relating to the sociological aspects of spaces

Conclusion

The digitization of our current reality and the following consequences is not something novel to the modern gay experience, but through this chronological mapping of gay experience, theory and failures, it is glaringly apparent that there are temporal continuities relating to the political, spatial, interpersonal, and self-induced adulteration of gayness that lead to the targeted subjection of gay existence into the digital realm. Grindr, created by gay people, allowed for the containment of homosexuality. The centralization of an identity in a fabricated-digital reality actively creates unprecedented socio-spatial tensions, while it does harbor “orienting” qualities to aid in the creation of a foundation for community, the exploitative qualities of the digital realm are emboldened within Grindr’s inherently sexual contexts. This emboldening of vulnerabilities and normalization of Grindr as the standard for gay interpersonal navigation has altered concepts of love, eroticism, tension, spatial occupation, sex, and connection within physical reality. Thus, arguably, cementing queerness and queer spaces as sensation-based ephemera.

This investigation is an active acknowledgment of the futility in the pursuit of such a dramatic cultural shift, as even the eradication of Grindr could not solve the issues presented in this thesis. This coffin has been carefully crafted over decades of shifting suppression, there are fingers to be pointed at in all directions, including the victims of this supression. The existence of this thesis and film stands as dissent against the synthetic hedonism of twenty-first century homosexuality, perhaps acting as some kind of foundational reference for internal frustration and dissent.

Rendering the Cyberflag in its praxis, references, and its visuals asks nothing of the consumer, but rather it provides a critical lexicon of theory and precedent of visualizations for the emergence of this synthetic and paradoxical gay existence.
"...FIGURES, AMBIGUOUS OF AGE OR IDENTITY THROUGHOUT THE SCENE, EACH CONTAINED IN THEIR OWN ROOMS THAT PROVIDES OR FORCES MOMENTS OF EXHIBITION, VOYEURISM, INVITATION, CONNECTION, DENIAL, REJECTION, SECRECY, VULNERABILITY, AND ISOLATION."

"THUS, ARGUABLY, CEMENTING QUEERNESS AND QUEER SPACES AS SENSATION-BASED EPHEMERA."
"The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away." (Foucault, pp.43)

"The cycle of consuming and being consumed lasts as long as the individual is alive, sexual desire is constant."
"...PENETRATING THE ENCLOSURE OF SPACE, LEAVING A MARK OF HIS OR HER PRESENCE IS THE INTUITIVE GOAL. EACH PENETRATION INTO A ROOM IS AN ACT OF LEAVING A TRACE, OF ENTERING A SPACE, AND THEREBY ALTERING IT. BY HIS OR HER PRESENCE, THE ARCHIPHILIAC FOREVER VIOLATES THE MEMORY OF THE SPACE." (JUSCYZK)

"THIS EXISTENCE WITHIN OBSCURITY, SPLITS A QUEER EXISTENCE BETWEEN REAL LIFE AND HOMOSEXUAL ACTS, THAT CREATES A DESIRE TO REFRAME AND ORIENT HOMOSEXUALS WITHIN THE SEEN WORLD."
"YOU WOULDN’T EVEN LOOK AT A CLOCK UNLESS HOURS WERE LINES OF COKE, DIALS LOOKED LIKE THE SIGNS OF GAY BARS, OR TIME ITSELF WAS A FAIR HUSTLER IN BLACK LEATHER." (My Own Private Idaho, 00:29:53)

"IN A FEW WEEKS, ALL THE PROSTITUTES I’VE HIRED WILL BE THE LAST BOYS ON EARTH WHOM ANYONE WOULD PAY. NOT LONG AFTER I’M DEAD, THEY’LL BE DEAD. SOME NIGHTS I FANTASIZE ABOUT TELLING THEM WHAT SAINTS THEY ARE, BUT I DON’T. STILL, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I ALMOST GET THE FEELING THEY KNOW." (Cooper)
"...ORIENT THE SELF THROUGH PHYSICAL, CARNAL DESIRE CREATING A MOMENTARY, REPLICABLE ARCHITECTURE."