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Still getting it on online: Thirty years of queer male spaces brokered through digital technologies

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Abstract

Research across the social sciences testifies to an ongoing relationship between queerness and digital technology. This article tracks how different online spaces for queer men[1] have changed as the internet has developed over the past 30 years. It argues that queer spaces have become increasingly dominated by, and predicated on, internet technology. I review early interpretations of cyberspace as a liberatory space freed from heteronormativity and later more critical assessments of its potential, positioning arguments for and against the internet's status as a protective space. I then evaluate the huge popularity of mobile phone-based dating and hook-up apps such as Grindr and Tinder. These platforms have developed from static desktop offerings including Gaydar and PlanetRomeo, but emphasise a distinctly hybridised socio-technical experience in partner seeking. Finally, I consider the impact of locative media on more traditional queer concepts of cruising and community, concluding that contemporary apps refigure both structures in distinctive ways reflecting larger changes in sexuality and space studies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article argues that in the 30 years since the World Wide Web was developed, internet technology has influenced and shaped queer spaces more than any other single factor. Gay and bisexual men in particular have historically been early adopters of internet technology (Grov, Breslow, Newcomb, Rosenberger, & Bauermeister, 2013; McGlotten,

2013; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2016; Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binne, 2004). Riffing on the title of John Edward Campbell's influential 2004 study *Getting It On Online: Cyberspace, Gay Male Sexuality, and Embodied Identity*, this article tracks the history of queer male online spaces over the past 30 years through their relationships with different digital technologies. From the birth of the World Wide Web to contemporary mobile phone-enabled dating apps, I review a sometimes united, sometimes disparate queer male culture deeply influenced by its changing enrolment in a range of different socio-technical assemblages. These assemblages impact distinctively on how different physical environments have in turn proliferated or declined as queer male spaces. I contend that digital technologies have not only shaped queer male spaces over the past three decades, but increasingly constitute what these spaces are, how they are performed, and who is able to access them. The contribution of this article lies not just in tracking the evolution of sexualities via digital technologies but in demonstrating how locative media specifically, as the latest iteration of popular digital technology, hybridise queer offline and online intimacies. In this hybrid scenario, historical queer spaces are refigured for the contemporary app user with an emphasis on convenience and immediacy. However, older traditional practices of male cruising and traditional notions of (subjectively defined) queer "community" are themselves being reappraised by digital technology users.

One article cannot hope to cover every form of online queer space, but this paper moves chronologically through themes of early internet usage, desktop programmes, and mobile and locative media to track the increasing sophistication of the digital technology now used to facilitate queer intimacies. The roles of both cruising and community in online locative media contexts are particularly important because both practices are deeply impacted by these platforms. By first presenting the utopias envisioned by early cyberspace debates, and then later MSM desktop platforms such as Gaydar and PlanetRomeo, I will show how the introduction of domestic internet reframed historically analogue cruising practices. Over the past decade, these platforms have themselves given way to more embodied, hybridised digital-physical scenarios enabled by GPS-enabled smartphones. Here, I focus on locative media apps including Grindr, Tinder, and Hornet, outlining the key features of these dating apps, their role, and their use. I call on contemporary scholarship to demonstrate how these platforms offer a way into answering larger cultural questions about cruising, queer social life, and space. I conclude that these locative digital media occupy a distinctive position in the history of queer technologies and signal a shift in how gay male online spaces are both conceptualised and experienced. Beyond an examination of the changing landscape of queer male spaces, this article provides food a way into thinking about larger geographies grappling with the social implications of ubiquitous technology.

2 | QUEER SPACE: THE DIGITAL TAKEOVER

Sexuality has long been intertwined with space, with queerness historically occupying liminal physical spaces within societies (see, for example, Brown, 2001; Castells, 1983; Halberstam, 2005). Early interventions into sexualities and space research mapped the much-debated "gay village," as well as more dynamic queer migration patterns (Knopp, 1997; Lauria & Knopp, 1985; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). Throughout this history, urban space in particular has been recognised as an environment that offers the potential for sexual dissidence and queerness, but the city can also represent a difficult space to reconfigure away from heteronormativity (Golding, 1993) and, in more subtle ways, homonormativity (Brown, 2008). One way in which this reconfiguration from normativity has been exercised and subverted is via cruising, a centuries-old queer practice that comprises anything from the *flâneur* (Benjamin 1940, ed. 1999) walking through the city, to shared glances between men, to sex in public. Cruising cohered as an urban practice in the late-19th century, although the city has long provided a backdrop for men who have sex with men.[2] Imbued with a complex and unique personal geography, cruising has been mythologised as an almost celebratory practice that subverts the assimilationist expectations of the regulatory heteronormative culture.

Today, more assimilative forces shape queer male intimacies, and they are increasingly mediated through digital mobile technologies. Nevertheless, it is not hard to see why the "virtual" worlds made possible for the first time by the popularisation of the internet in the early 1990s were celebrated for their potential to host new and diverse

queer spaces of their own (Turkle, 1995; Wakeford, 1998). The development of the World Wide Web accelerated an already significant queer involvement with older technologies, as evidenced by early "lonely hearts" advertisements for men seeking men in printed newspapers from the first half of the 20th century (Cocks, 2002), and queer telephone helplines (as well as commercial chatlines) from the 1970s (Healey, 2000). The internet was able to act as host to online spaces of fluidity and alterity, and the potential that this unlocked for users in terms of sex and sexuality helped to kick-start liberatory techno-queer explorations. These flourished on the idea of cyberspace and cyberculture as disembodied entities, freed from the confines of geographical parameters and temporal fixity. Spatial concepts were represented by metaphors such as "chat rooms" (Mills, 1998), and embodiment by human-computer hybrid "cyborgs," which blurred boundaries between humans and machines (Haraway, 1985), and later, "avatars" or online characters (Anders, 1998). Seemingly freed from real-life hegemonic structures, digital technology advocates hoped to progress more democratic and power-equal structures, in the process opening up conceptual space for gender and sexual experimentation. Sherry Turkle (1995, p. 15) argued that online connection could, for the first time, play a part in these sexualities because "the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections." Thus the internet could provide not only a space but also a figurative "home" for sexual minorities.

As a result, the internet has often been interpreted as a protective environment for queer subjects. In an online setting, "personality becomes fluid, ephemeral and empowering because people can choose how they are represented" (Kitchin & Dodge, 2001, p. 24; see also Kitchin & Dodge 2011). It also offers an online space for sexual minorities to find each other, whether for information sharing, friendship opportunities, or sexual encounters (Gross, 2007, p. ix; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2016). For example, now-defunct Yahoo email list servers were hugely popular in the 1990s for queer individuals to communicate online with similarly identified users (Turner, 2003). Many of these users were isolated from analogue, i.e., in-person, LGBTQ support networks, and found themselves part of an online "community" (notwithstanding the subjectivities tied up in this conceptualisation) for the first time in their lives. Indeed, the potential for digital technology to disrupt the privileging of heterosexuality in "real" life and make room for non-normative lives has been broadly supported by the idea of the internet as a site, or sites, for resistance against dominant heteronormative cultural codes (Ashford, 2009; O'Riordan & Phillips, 2007). As Alexander and Losh (2010, p. 24) point out, for queer subjects, the internet "has been an important, even vital venue for connecting with others and establishing a sense of identity and community." Combining the historical queer male affinity for technology with a (relatively) democratic space for virtual identity expression helped situate the internet as a key queer resource by the late 1990s.

However, the queer claim that online space is by its very structure less hierarchical and more egalitarian than physical space deserves scrutiny. Particularly in its early days, but even in its contemporary iterations, access to the internet remains limited by socio-demographic factors including income and education (see, for example, Friemel, 2014). Online spaces are also still structured through heteronormativity, with the significant majority of online advertising, online media outlets, and pornography heterosexually coded. This problematises the argument made by Mark Turner (2003) and others that in online space, there is no normative "centre" and therefore no periphery, supposedly resulting a liberatory levelling effect. When it comes to sociality, Vikki Fraser (2009) points out that same-sex dating and hook-up websites like Gaydar (re)produce prejudicial discourses present in offline queer spaces, and Olu Jenzen (2017) problematises the assumption of online "safe" spaces as automatically providing refuge for trans youth. Cautioning against uncritical narratives of the relationship between queerness and technology, Jacob Gaboury (2013, n. pag) suggests that the role of the computer in the articulation of modern queer identity may have less to do with something inherently queer about computing, and more to do with the "broad indifference of these technologies toward such distinctions and the ease with which they facilitate contact and produce community." The idea that the internet provides an unproblematic environment for queer individuals is qualified somewhat by the replication of punitive offline social structures in online spaces. In early virtual realities, as now, online space is unfortunately shaped as much by its physical antecedents as it is by its ideological alterity.

What remains is an online space often lacking the purported potential with which it was imbued in the infancy of the World Wide Web. Pioneering cyberspace theorist Nina Wakeford asked back in 1997 what might happen when

"cyber" meets "queer," anticipating any number of fruitful new intersections. The novel construction of cyberculture, along with its democratic potential and the malleability of cyberspace, should logically have constituted an inviting platform for queer contributions. But for Wakeford (2002), reflecting on the intervening 5 years, the lived outcomes failed to match the ambitions of early predictions. This was due in part to an overemphasis on critical debates focusing on users' self-presentation online rather than issues of queer identity, as well an under-exploration of the relationship between online activity and everyday life. Evaluating cyberqueer discourses of the 1990s, Shaka McGlotten (2013, p. 2) similarly contends that "cyberspace promised infinite pleasures and freedoms, especially freedoms from the constraints of gender and sex," whereas its optimism is in hindsight viewed with "both distain and nostalgia." The trajectory of this queer virtual domain mirrors the unfulfilled potential of wider cyberspace read against early enthusiasm for what these worlds could offer (Fernback & Thompson, 1995; McClellan, 1994).

What is not disputed is the idea that online space presents a generative platform for queer networking, community building, and sexual encounter. However, the burgeoning popularity of location-based online networking within the last decade suggests that a significant degree of physicality is beneficial to effectively perform these functions. Recognising the limitations of a virtual world predicated on a conceptual remove, scholarship has developed the idea of a *hybridised* digital space that, as technology has developed, interacts more productively with physical embodiment (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017; Farman, 2012; Miles, 2017). New developments in technology have made hybridity a key feature of contemporary culture, with particular relevance for how identities and behaviour are produced online, offline, and in combination. This echoes the larger movement of queer male space; whereas the "gay world" was once something that could be metaphorically entered into (Chauncey, 1994), queerness is now more entangled with quotidian life. This entanglement suggests different routes to queer expression and spatial affinities. Central to the growth of digital-physical hybridisation is the use of mobile phones, which are now close to (and in many environments already) the dominant platform for online connectivity.

3 | QUEER LOCATIVE MEDIA

Since the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991, the internet has been able to somewhat overcome the obstacle of physical distance through virtual connection. Given that gay and bisexual men have adopted online dating and chat communities in "disproportionate numbers compared to other social groups" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 3), *non*-locative male–male dating has attracted valuable scholarship (see, for example, Ashford, 2009; Fraser, 2009; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012).[3] But locative media platforms offer a particularly interesting device for discussion because the mobile phones that host them are not tethered to domestic internet connection of older desktop platforms, instead using 3G, 4G, and public Wi-Fi networks to enable free movement for the user across all but the most remote physical environments. Triangulating spatial coordinates, mobile signal, and satellite position through GPS allows a mobile device to connect the user amongst a matrix of others similarly 'plugged in' to specific online networks, including same-sex encounter. In contrast to the previous crop of static dating portals such as Match.com (1995), Gaydar (1999), and PlanetRomeo (2002), locative dating apps on mobile devices make a virtue of their portability and immediacy. In a contemporary moment in which an estimated 27% of new relationships in the United Kingdom now begin online (Mintel, 2015; see also Hogan, Dutton, & Li, 2011), a locative function is the next logical step for bridging formerly placeless virtual space into a conceivable and local realm for users. Non-locative desktop dating websites have been the focus of at least some critical interest, but the relative youth of locative technology means critical approaches are currently less established. Nevertheless, the new configurations presented by these technological assemblages provide generative avenues for research. The impact of locative media on queer *behaviours* such as cruising, and queer *ideologies* such as community, can be extrapolated to wider debates about the impact of mobile technologies on a wide range of social behaviours.

Taking my lead from Collins and Drinkwater (2016, p. 8), my own survey of the Apple App Store evidences the popularity of queer dating apps today, with 209 same-same searching products available to download. Popular

locative apps include Grindr (founded in 2009), Scruff (2010), and Hornet (2013) for men seeking men, as well as Tinder (2012), conceived as a heterosexual app with a growing user base employing same-sex search functions. Grindr alone now counts over 10 million users across 196 countries worldwide, with two million users checking into Grindr daily (Parks-Ramage, 2016). By some measures, 71% or more of MSM meet sexual partners via locative apps (Chow et al., 2016), a striking proportion given a global context in which same-sex relationships remain criminal offences in 74 countries. The assumption that these platforms are not queer in the theoretical sense (i.e., anti-heteronormative and radical) because of their neoliberal economic context is complicated by their subversive potential as devices to assist male–male intimacies in socially illiberal contexts. Meanwhile, in the global north, these platforms are shifting in public consciousness from niche interests, little talked about with friends or colleagues, to the mainstream, even if, in the case of Grindr in particular, popular opinion remains rather mixed (Beusman & Sunderland, 2015; Greenberg, 2016; Trebay, 2014). What is clear is that their growth continues apace, with critical exploration of how they influence queer social and sexual behaviours yet to catch up.

Locative partner-seeking apps use GPS as a tool for highly proximate encounters, most often with new contacts. By locating other men subscribed to the platform and currently online in the neighbourhood, Grindr aggregates a grid of results based on proximity (see Figure 1). Available matches increase not just based on proximity to queer neighbourhoods or commercial venues but also with urban density. Meanwhile, competitor Tinder boasts a "swipe" facility, allowing users to flick their thumb in a satisfyingly haptic gesture to accept or reject the fellow user as someone they would be willing to "match" with. Each clickable profile thumbnail profile reveals vital statistics, a short biography, and a photograph, as well as options to interact: chat, send pictures, share locations, or block the contact (see Figure 1). What these apps share is an invitation to the user to log partner preferences as if products—their height and weight, ethnicity, body type, HIV status, and their varying propensity for relationships, friendships, or sex. The

FIGURE 1 Tinder (2017) and Grindr (2017) homescreens (generic publicity material)

eligible profiles are re-ordered as the user journeys between the variable urban densities of, say, a shopping centre, office block, or riverside. What distinguishes these apps from their static desktop predecessors is that the provocative visuality of their presentation, far from providing satisfaction on its own terms, is tied up in a rhetoric of users on the move. Because the mobile phone is a communicative device, it already lends itself to the process of negotiating sexual desire amongst potential partners (Goluboff, 2015). Yet by being hosted on mobile devices, and with the procedure for meeting other users for dates or sexual encounters so simplified, the apps communicate a narrative of immediacy and efficiency dependent on locational proximity.

Contrary to earlier cyberqueer visions of the domain as something disembodied and free from the constraints of the human body, locative apps actively foreground embodiment and physical encounter. The intense sociality promulgated by these apps resonates with the argument that locative media represent a "multiplication and complication of intimate relations, the promiscuous mingling of self with other, self with self, user with interface" (Payne, 2014, p. 3). Payne does not ask how spatially rooted this multimodal "promiscuity" is, yet the striking popularity of queer locative apps suggests that locality has become a key concern in queer digital spaces, far removed from historically "othered" cyberspace. As Grindr's (2017) press statement declares: '"0 Feet Away" is not just a cute slogan we print on our T-shirts'. Braquet and Mehra (2007, p. 5) have argued that rather than conceptualising the internet as a space which satisfactorily contains friendships or relationships, users are increasingly viewing it as a "means to an end" to generate physical meetings. That motivation is writ large in the emphasis of these platforms on embodied, rather than only virtual, encounter. Indeed, the almost-immediate gratifications offered by these locative media represent one key way in which digitally mediated sex and sexualities comprise new "spaces of encounter" (Cockayne, Leszczynski, & Zook, 2017, p. 1128). Far from a wholesale move to online life as predicted in the early days of the internet, locative networks pivot *more*, rather than less, on physically brokered connection. In so doing, they also re-territorialise spaces normally coded as heterosexual, because using the app overlays queer space on ostensibly normative terrain.

4 | CRUISING MEETS LOCATIVE MEDIA

This article now considers how locative apps might impact on cruising. Research has considered the impact of digital technology on cruising in terms of static online fora (Dean, 2009; Mowlabocus, 2010; Turner, 2003), but theorisations regarding technology's "locative turn" are limited (*pace* Woo, 2013; Race, 2015). Kane Race (2015, p. 255) rightly argues that any account trying to understand the digitally mediated sexual culture currently developing via smartphones as merely the newest iteration of cruising "misses something important about the specificity of the sociotechnical arrangements that shape its contours and conventional forms." Clearly men are still "getting it on online" (Campbell, 2004), but the physical encounter itself is being re-prioritised as the meeting space, and this brings with it new conceptualisations of queer space, whether conceptualised online, offline, or in hybrid combinations.

Having been unequivocally embodied for so long, cruising is reinterpreted through technology that restructures the practice, but not unrecognisably so. A sense of anonymity is central to the thrill of cruising (Bersani, 2002; Delany, 1999), and so apps face a challenge in faithfully reprising cruising when their very architecture requires legitimate identity. Most platforms require email or social media verification, reducing (albeit not eliminating) the presence of fake profiles. Further, location is built into the very architecture of the app: When a user spontaneously logs into the app in an unfamiliar neighbourhood, the discovery of potential partners is mediated by their geographical proximity rather than an unplanned meeting in the street. Thus cruising in a digital age engineers out the exhilarating unpredictability of potential public encounters. This tendency towards categorisation echoes Sander de Ridder's (2013, p. 5) queer analysis of social networking services, which notes that despite queer theory's push for anti-normative and anti-identitarian projects, social networking sites constitute problematic "fixing tools *par excellence*" that tend to reinforce gender categorisation. It is important to recognise that digitally hybridised queer spaces increasingly constitute predetermined, rather than serendipitous, encounters.

Locative media are by no means the first digital interventions in analogue cruising practices. Consider, for example, late 20th-century accounts of internet-relay chat (IRC) as an apparatus that offered a new "virtual gay bar" (Shaw, 1997), or the Gaydar and PlanetRomeo platforms already outlined. Locative media do however replace the fixity of desktop apparatus with extensive mobility, and physical cruising with digital scoping. But cruising requires a geographical specificity, if only to have something to transgress, and in comparison to earlier static online social networks, locative apps do more closely echo the spatial considerations of real-life cruising practices in the Lefebvrian sense of the urban terrain as site of encounter (Lefebvre, 1991). This novel hybridity of locative media is exemplified by time–space compression across distant territories. For example, someone waking up in New York can exchange photos with another app user in a nightclub in Tel Aviv in real-time. Thus, these apps allow users to make use *of the conceptual space created by their communication* as well as the space created by their embodied social or sexual encounters. Whilst locative technology cannot replicate the political dimensions of cruising as a disruptive force, insofar as cruising represents for many queer men a political action aimed at "taking back" public space (Brown, 2007), it can nevertheless potentialise queer disruption by allowing users to remediate space in the interests of challenging or disrupting heteronormative codes.

Finally, there is a need to consider the contemporary iteration of queer online space in how it maintains some of the hierarchies and inequalities that have permeated queer spaces historically. Despite the valorisation of cruising in queer scholarship (Dean, 2009; Delany, 1999; Muñoz, 2009; Turner, 2003), the simple fact of spaces being public does not make them egalitarian or inclusive, and this uneven access transfers to digitally mediated spaces too. Campbell (2004), Tudor (2012), Woo (2013), Roth (2015), Bonner-Thompson (2017), and Gieseking (2017) all testify to looks-based hierarchies that structure MSM dating apps. These are hierarchies that regulate not just physical appearance but age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Claims by Grindr creator Joel Simkhai regarding the liberatory potential of these GPS-enabled dating platforms may therefore be tempered by speaking in depth with some of its real-life users, and recent empirical results suggest that user experiences are often marked by ambiguity or fatigue (Brubaker, 2014; Corriero & Tong, 2016; Miles, 2017). Lived experiences of these digital queer spaces therefore suggests a less seamlessly integrated experience than that promulgated by the locative technology itself.

5 | LOCATIVE MEDIA AS QUEER COMMUNITY

The final section of this exploration of online queer male space analyses the idea of community in an effort to understand the extent to which online platforms can cohere queer community, long conceptualised via physical queer spaces (Escoffier, 1998; Delany, 1999; Turner, 2003). Situating community in relation to queer space is important because it allows us to evaluate the role, whether real or imagined, of community in different forms of queer life. In social conditions where community is more often figured in the service of hegemonic values than for queer bodies and their potential belonging, consideration of what queer community looks like in physical and digital terms is crucial.

Community is a complex set of relations. Whilst Frost and Meyer (2012) argue that a sense of queer community improves health and well-being for sexual minorities, other queer critics problematise notions of community based on its inevitable shortcomings as a cultural unit (Lewis et al., 2015; Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu, & Vilain, 2009). Sharif Mowlabocus (2010) qualifies assumptions that queer internet users can be interpreted as a coherent community, arguing that many LGBTQ individuals experience a sense of non-belonging rather than community, because community has historically been predicated on heterosexual kinship. Queer people are therefore more often seen as existing "outside" of definitions of community rather than "in here" (see, for example, Campbell, 2004; Hillis, 2009). Outside of queer contexts, Miranda Joseph (2002) has convincingly argued that notions of community are valorised unquestioningly. Certainly, looking beyond the positive familial aura of "community" and scrutinising its normative iteration shows us that it can be interpreted as a surprisingly inflexible site of traditional relations and thus a structure that generates significant exclusions.

Community has historically been identified by its spatial presence because traditional cartographies classified community via queer enclaves (Lauria & Knopp, 1985). However, over time scholarship shifted to focus on practices

rather than static mapping (Bell & Valentine, 1995), which has in turn evolved to theorisation in terms of spatial networks or processes (Castells, 2012). Whereas in previous years, spatial concentration represented the best way for queer individuals to develop a shared identity or solidarity, now social connectedness in more flexible terms informs integration (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). As a result, traditional cartographies and the communities they map can be more subjectively reimagined. This is exemplified, for example, by Gavin Brown's (2001) exercise in queer cognitive mapping in which gay and bisexual men sketched maps of London's East End based on their experiences of pleasure and danger. The growth of digital technologies diversifies this networked potential yet further. Rather than communities of the past that were based on shared physical space, the internet now allows for individual bonds via shared interests, which can include (but are not limited to) sexual interest. Communities can also operate at a geographical remove, which is significant given the ability of the internet to bisect distance. In fact, years before the advent of locative media, Zygmunt Bauman (1991) put his finger on the unusual modern condition of community:

> The "dense sociability" of the past strikes us, in retrospect, as distinct from our own condition not because it contained more friendship than we tend to experience in our own world, but because its world was tightly and almost completely filled with friends and enemies—and friends and enemies only. Little room, and if any then a marginal room only, was left in the life-world for the poorly defined strangers (151).

Locative media introduces a rather more subjective range of "poorly defined strangers" who might be said to constitute a community within the terms of online platforms. The potential for these strangers to become social or sexual partners, and in turn more significantly representative of community, however subjectively imagined, remains under-theorised. Given that community is such a complicated construct, comprising as it does both a sense of unity but also the negotiation of fissures within that unity, the chance to unpick locative app users' conceptualisations of community via its interpretation within locative platforms is pertinent to larger debates surrounding sexuality and space.

Bauman's later claim (2003) that with the advent of ubiquitous technology, online "connections" have come to replace relationships is equally relevant for consideration of the notion of community in the context of queer locative media. Theoretically, online communities are beneficial spaces that foster social networks, or "webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 2000, p. 5) that can grow based on like-minded identities rather than location (see also Boyd, 2010). Yet Berry, Martin, and Yue (2003, p. 9) argue that new technologies are dichotomous in their humanistic impact: "the new connectivity enabled by these technologies feeds hopes for global human community at the same time as it feeds fears about damage to face-to-face local community." Locative apps slot into this narrative of dichotomy. One way in which online communities have been defined is as a group of people who "come together for a particular purpose, and who are guided by policies (including norms and rules) and supported by software" (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, n.pag); gathering for a particular purpose is indisputably the primary diver to locative apps, even if that gathering is more often sexual than social. Apps can conversely be seen as the latest iteration of the internet as a social "venue" for queer individuals (Ashford, 2009; Campbell, 2004; van Doorn, 2011), but Brian King (2017) interrogates this conceptualisation of the platform as a venue by performing a linguistic analysis of online erotic conversation as a micro-level analysis *of that space* as well as the larger spatialities brought into play by those involved. Across these scenarios, locative platforms bring location back into consideration by re-establishing physical co-presence as specifically brokered by digital technology.

Either way, male–male locative media can strengthen and extend social-sexual networks, facilitating meetings with like-minded men across a borough, district, or city. This is especially true amongst the users for whom a queer community is out of reach because of their isolation, whether familial, social, or geographical. Of course, the proximity brokered by locative apps is not an automatic predicate for community, but it might at least invite forms of sociality that are mutually advantageous. Given that community is such a contested concept, it may prove more useful to focus more specifically on sociality, rather than community, as a structure that more broadly incorporates some of the fleeting intimacies that are part of locative media's social-sexual structure.

Today, debates continue regarding whether queer communities, structured online or offline, are concrete, fragmented, imagined, or even "post-gay" (coined by Paul Burston in 1994 but developed in spatial terms by Seidman, 2002; Collins, 2004; Ruting, 2008). This is further complicated by the fact that individuals have other "identities" to which they also align themselves, including cultural, familial, or ethnic, and these identities invariably interact with different spaces. Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 554) argue that community is "imagined as whole-person, face-to-face relations—local, experiential, proximate and saturating" but that non-heterosexuals rarely manifest themselves (or are able to manifest themselves) in such forms. The logical solution would therefore be a space to project alternative worlds, echoing the virtual queer utopias discussed at the outset of this article. However, Larry Gross (2007, p. x) encapsulates the perspective of many critics in noting that "virtual communities can be gated and restricted as well as open and playful, a sentiment often reflected in user experiences (Miles 2017)". As such, whatever their form, online queer spaces are never far removed from the social and cultural relations and restrictions that underpin physical domains, no matter how extensive their hybridisation.

6 | CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how the distinctive symbiosis between sexuality and space has progressed from physical to virtual spaces, whether via cruising, commercial venues and chatlines, or the queer utopias envisioned by cyberspace, desktop matchmaking, and the contemporary mobile phone-assisted encounter. Whilst a potted history of sociotechnical relations with queer male spaces cannot hope to cover every scenario—not least the intriguing impact of locative media on the deconcentration of commercial queer venues (see, for example, Collins & Drinkwater, 2016; Campkin & Marshall, 2017; Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017), I have explored the ways in which men have used technology to meet other men as a route into thinking about the larger impact of technology beyond the realms of geographies of sexualities. This exploration has comprised an assessment of how "getting it on online" has been differently interpreted over time via technologies used to broker new forms of queer male space. These space-making processes are particularly valuable for thinking about how digital hybridisation will impact on social and sexual practices in both the near and distant future. The broader implications for social and cultural geographies that explore digital technologies cannot be understated. There is an urgent need for scholarship that analyses the social impact of digital technology, even as it is being constantly refigured, in order to better understand what is at stake in these new hybrid networks.

This article has also suggested that the extent to which men seeking other men online can truly constitute community remains contested despite a fast-maturing technological queer landscape. However, the growing commitment in geographical research to non-normative cultures indicates openness within the discipline to new queer intersections that may well see such a group corralled under the banner of "community" or a more flexibly imagined sociality, even if the grouping departs from *historical* understandings of the concept. Nevertheless, the formation of this app-brokered sociality does not protect users against the same issues and divisions that often undergird their equivalent queer communities and spaces (or lack thereof). Today's online queer spaces perform highly effectively as introduction tools for non-heterosexual minorities, but their communitarian credentials are less guaranteed.

Looking more widely, it is clear that queer locative media emphasise an approach to the digital that maintains a focus on material spaces of the body and physical encounter, even if this is a reconfigured embodiment. This article has demonstrated that *hybridised* experiences of sex and sexuality should be central to theorising digital futures. As Gillian Rose (2017) has pointed out, the human element of hybrid assemblages is key to understanding digitally mediated spaces, even if posthumanist thinking tends to deprioritise human agency. For example, the spatial context of sex work, physically located in urban red-light districts, has been challenged by, and forced to negotiate with, increasingly sophisticated online spaces in which individuals and companies can sell sex (Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, & Collins, 2016; Sanders, 2015). Similarly, the overlap between pornography and home videos is progressively blurring as societies increasingly crowdsource online content. Both of these scenarios offer new directions for valuable future research that can further develop scholarly interrogation of the lack of critical approaches to locative media. Beyond

dating and hook-up apps, this review of the intersection between queer male spaces and technology demonstrates that sociotechnical apparatus will increasingly inform how online space impacts in important ways on the lived practice of a diverse range of technology users.

ENDNOTES

[1] Including men who seek sex with men (MSM) but who may not self-define as gay or bisexual.

[2] But less so women, with more limited historical research (Turner, 2003). The flâneuse, however, is productively explored by Wilson (1992); Munt (1998), and Elkin (2016).

[3] Although, as Grov et al. (2013) and Mowlabocus (2010) amongst others have argued, the majority of research in this area has been oriented to clinical or public health rather than social or cultural study.

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