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Queering digital media spatiality: a phenomenology of bodies being stopped

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ABSTRACT

How are we to understand the politics of location in our “hyper-space-biased” time of digital existence? This article revisits the debate on media and spatiality through the lens of critical phenomenology and argues for the need to recognize multiple forms of embodiment in mediaspace. With support from a case study on queer digital media use in Russia, it takes the socially circumscribed subject as its strategic starting point for understanding digital media space. By doing so, it argues that often referred to as tropes of a “seamless medialife” are not only simplifying things, but can easily become normative. In digital existence, some bodies and mobilities are quite literally stopped, and we cannot conflate how flesh travels and occupies space with how we might occupy and travel in code. In order to develop my argument, I will put media phenomenology in dialogue with queer phenomenology, but also hint at how we may take our cue from the field of existential media studies to further this debate on vulnerabilities and technology.

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Introduction

M: So, it was a couple of years or something that you were online before you moved to Saint Petersburg?

Dima: Yes, it was like two or three years.

M: Yeah, and during that time, were you making any other efforts to meet gay people? Were you visiting like clubs in other cities or-

Dima: No.

M:-or doing anything outside of the online sphere?

Dima: No, not at all.

Interview with Dima, Saint Petersburg, 2014

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In times of deep mediatization (Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp 2017), digital media have become fully interweaved with everyday living, and the constant connectivity of mobile devices complicates any clear distinctions between “online” and “offline” space. Thus, Mark Deuze 2012, speaks of a “medialife” where life has become ontologically inseparable from media and calls it simply naive to keep on insisting on a world outside the digital world. In a similar vein, Christine Hine 2015 emphasizes how Internet environments nowadays become *seamlessly* integrated with other embodied experiences, while Nancy Baym 2010, 153) contends that “[w]hat happens via new technology is completely interwoven with what happens face-to-face and via other media.” In “mediaspace” (Couldry and McCarthy Anna 2004), we may then infer, people dwell and move about in flow, democratically and effortlessly without ever being stopped? Or are the possibilities for moving, belonging and thriving in physical-digital mediaspaces ultimately dependent upon the specific bodies that inhabit those spaces? And in that case, what kind of bodies do we, as media theorists, take as our starting points? Drawing on queer digital media use in Russia, this article will provide a critical discussion of dominant tropes within current media studies paradigms, such as *the online/offline collapse*, *flow* and *the disappearance of media*. As I will argue throughout this article, furthering the ideas of media geography, what media studies of today need is not to flatten out all distinctions between experiential spheres in relation to media use, but to develop much more sophisticated understandings of how digital infrastructures and uses of media are lived as spatiality, characterizing the world we are thrown into, and co-shaping our most intimate orientations in life.

The issue of space in media and communication studies

Relationships between media, space and embodiment have long occupied scholars in our field from various perspectives. Much early work focusing on the mass rise of electronic media, for example, assumed a *weakening* of geography (Joshua Meyrowitz 1985; Edward Relph 1976). This was based on the postulation that mobility opposes attachment to geographical locations, why the increased fluidity of information, content and people would lead to a lost “sense of place.” Later perspectives did, however, suggest that rather than doing away with geography, modern media is constantly *multiplying* or *recombining* it (e.g., Stephen Graham 1998). The intense engagement of today with multiple mobile screens, social media platforms, geolocative technologies, etc., thus leads us to previously unseen spatial complexities. It shapes what we perceive of as near and far, what we regard to be within reach, and what we look upon as private and public spheres. Media geographers therefore point at the importance of looking into such transformations, and the “spatial ambiguities” arising as a result, within the regime of “hyper-space-biased communication” (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006). Borrowing from Harold Innis 1951 distinction between “time-biased” and “space-biased” forms of communication throughout history, where the former implies the heaviness and durability of, for example, stone inscriptions, the “hyper-space-biased” regime of the present implies the ability of communication to cross vast distances as well as a temporal speed-up. This increase in the instantaneousness of content and communication across space is further commonly captured in tropes like “the network of flow” (Manuel Castells 1996; Castells, et al. 2007).

In addition, the dawn of the Internet era spurred discussions on whether the digital should be seen as producing spaces in their own right. Internet studies during the nineties thus sometimes spoke of a “cyberspace”, largely disconnected from “real life” (e.g., Michael Batty 1993; Howard Rheingold 1993; Sherry Turkle 1995). However, as studies of everyday digital media use have evolved (e.g., Maria Bakardjieva 2005; Daniel Miller and Don Slater 2000; Jenny Sundén 2003) such perspectives were increasingly critiqued as people’s mundane Internet use appeared to be mainly integrated into their offline lives. Since then, the more grounded approaches of “media/communication geography” (Couldry et al. 2004; Falkheimer et al. 2006; Paul Adams, et al. 2017)—particularly prominent within Scandinavia and the UK—have aimed to move away from grand spatial narratives in order to “look closely at the complex microphysics of the ways in which media take place and claim space” (Orvar Lofgren 2006, 299). In stark contrast to ideas of “virtuality” and “disembodiment”, media geography as well as (and often interrelated with) media phenomenology have rather stressed the place of media *within* the materiality of everyday living, with close attention to the situatedness of media use from an experiential perspective (e.g., Stina Bengtsson 2006; 2007; David Morley, 2000, 2001; Shaun Moores 2004, 2012, 2017; Sarah Pink 2012; Pink and Kerstin Leder Mackley 2012, 2013, 2016).

Such understandings thus commonly zoom in on embodied perception rather than medium theory, and on the contextual rather than the general. Yet arguably such perspectives, in turn, have more rarely embraced critical discussions on space in light of diversity and the politics of location. Related examples though come from, not least, Adi Kuntsman (e.g., 2009, 2011; Athina Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012), in her explorations into atheness, queer belonging and the digital, largely drawing on work among Russian immigrants in Israel. Combining ethnographic work online with theories on affect and political existence, Kuntsman has put significant efforts into laying bare the intricate and often conflicting interconnections of territory and digital space. The same can be said about Jenny Sunden’s (2003, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018) vital work on queering digital embodiment. Of particular interest in the article at hand is her still highly relevant update of Adrienne Rich (1986) work, where she argues that a “politics of location” for our (post) digital times must be able to capture the location of *several* bodies “in flesh as well as in code” and their multiple points of reference Sundén (2006, 293). It is also towards this kind of in-depth exploration of bodies as existing and moving through variously connected spaces that I am after, in order to attend to the power relations overlooked in mainstream media phenomenology. First, the article will look deeper into ideas of the multiply situated media users and the habituation of mediaspace in everyday living, primarily drawing on the work of Shaun Moores (2004, 2012, 2017). Then, by turning to Sarah Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, I will argue for the need of a digital media phenomenology that accounts for the uneven access to space due to normative textures.

I will further align the discussion with the young field of existential media studies, which focalizes on vulnerabilities as key for understanding how people inhabit digital existence (Amanda Lagerkvist 2016; 2018, 2019; Lagerkvist and Yvonne Andersson 2017; Charles Ess 2019)—and suggest that focusing on queer diversity may enrich this approach with fresh pertinent examples.

The multiply situated media user and the orientation of space

Looking at the digital media user, simultaneously spread out across different sites and devices, how *are* we to conceive of her situatedness? Where *is* she, in fact, located? Drawing on ideas of embodied perception, Moores (2004, 2012 and 2017) argues that this can best be understood through the time–space relationships of the individual lifeworld. Turning to Paddy Scannell (1996, 2014) media phenomenology, he suggests that there is a spatiotemporal *doubleness* to media practices. This means that media “offers locations or spaces of sort to occupy” (e.g., radio channels, inboxes, Messenger threads, social media profiles etc.) while media users at the same time *also* occupy an inescapable material environment. Therefore, according to Moores, the media user is best conceived of as *occupying several spaces at once*, instead of assuming them to collapse into one or ascribing primacy to one or the other. A person scrolling through her social media feed on the metro is neither furthestmost in territorial space because that is where her mortal body is situated, nor furthestmost in the mediated space of her feed because that is where she is cognitively absorbed, but *co-present* in several sites, each intimately interconnected and experienced through the living body. Rather than a seamless weave of perceptions containing both digital and non-digital components, we are thus here presented with a “multiply” positioned media user. Such an understanding of mediaspace goes in line with human geographer Doreen Massey's 2005 conceptualization of space as always inherently multiple, but also acknowledges the potential specificities of different co-existing spheres.

Moores also follows a phenomenological quest beyond the mere occupation of spaces towards an interest in matters of *habitation*. He draws attention to the fact that embodied being-there in time and space is relative to senses of *orientation* and *familiarity*. Drawing on humanist geographers Yu-Fu Tuan, David Seamon and Tim Ingold, Moores means that media scholars should explore the role of media within the repetitive embodied practices which evoke affective attachments to spaces and make us feel comfortable in various environments. Because affective attachment to territorial settings commonly depends on the simultaneous occupation of, or reaches into, mediated spaces and the other way around. However, habituation in Moores' account is seen as a fairly frictionless process, primarily depending on savviness and access, and always connected with the sense of ease assumed to come with familiarity and habit. Falling back on the persistent trope of “flow”, Moores refers to Ingold's 2011 comparison between the habituated use of tools and the pedestrian scheme, “in which each ‘step’ follows another and anticipates the next in a continuous, flowing, ‘processional’ . . . order” (Moorse 2012, 202). However, such an understanding does not really take into account the actual *orientation of space itself* which presents body-subjects with unequal access. While Moores importantly notes that a media phenomenology tending towards embodied practices of media use could easily become essentialist if not paying thorough attention to social difference and power, he hence falls a bit short of his own ambition, perhaps due to the fact that he in the end engages very sparsely with the range of feminist studies focusing on body/object relations (e.g., Ahmed 2006; Rosi Braidotti 1991; Judith Butler 1990; 1993, 1997; Rosalyn Diprose 1994; Elisabeth Grosz 1995; Iris Marion Young 1980). It seems that not only Moores, but also many other media phenomenological enquiries, tend to overlook power relations due to regimes of, for example, gender and sexuality. This results,

among other things, in the uneasy division of the public and private spheres remaining largely unproblematized, as well as in a flattening out of social difference in order to arrive at a protagonist possible to name “the ordinary man.” But like David Morley (2000, 2001) I rather recognize the need for a media phenomenology taking its starting point in “geographies of exclusion” and what it means to live with and through new media technologies for those who might not feel at ease with their surroundings.

A phenomenology of being stopped

The understanding of habituated media use, as part of a precognitive flow through space draws on the ways in which humanist geographers have applied classical phenomenological thinking about embodiment. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ([1962] 1997) influential writing, he argues that a body that is oriented towards its world can never exist as an object in space because it is the origin of all space perceived. Therefore, the basic condition of the body-subject is that of an open transcendence—a continuous motility—towards her world, as she is *already with the world* through the acting body. But every once in a while, Merleau-Ponty suggests, that flow will be momentarily broken due to unfamiliar situations or changes in the environment. That is, those “queer moments” when the world no longer appears “the right way up” and perception becomes odd and twisted. The immense intensity and disorientation of such moments forces the subject to quickly re-orient herself in order to overcome the queer effect (in Ahmed 2006, 65–66). Also, Moores’ media phenomenology takes such moments into account, as he argues that orientation in space and time may be broken by e.g., the loss of wifi, which may rub a particular space of its usual multiplicity and throw the subject into a more conscious and less comfortable way of being-there.

Critical phenomenologists have, however, argued that an unbroken directedness towards the world is not to be taken for granted. Taking the example of what it means to “throw like a girl”, feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young (1980, 146–147) e.g., demonstrates that while Merleau-Ponty ([1962] 1997) assumes the oriented body to stretch out towards its world with an “I can”, female bodily intentionality is commonly overlaid with immanence, and an “I cannot” through the habituation of gendered difference. Many women, according to Young (1980, 148), throughout activities such as throwing or swinging, stay attentive towards their own bodies while in action, as if to make sure they are doing what they are supposed to do. She then “posits her motion as the motion that is looked at”. Due to the particularities of female bodily comportment and motility, Young argues, there are also particular modalities of feminine spatiality. The female existence—both spatially constituted as an object and at the same time a constituting spatial subject might hence be said to live space as enclosed or confining, as herself *positioned* in space (p. 149). Similar conclusions can be found in Frantz Fanon's (1986) important work on the psychoanalysis of blackness, where he states that the bodily schema of the black subject in a white supremacist world means a constant awareness of one's embodied otherness and internalizing that otherness in how you practice and claim space. It is in accordance with such ideas that Ahmed (2006) turns the table of what is usually taken for granted within phenomenology by calling attention to the orientation of space itself. A body-subject's ability to stand in an open transcendence towards her world, she suggests, is thus not only about familiarity and habit, but also about the body's ability to *extend with* the space it

inhabits, and this is relative due to issues of power, as space is always oriented through social and embodied inscription (2006, 14). Aiming to develop a phenomenology of queer perception in a straight world, Ahmed argues that heteronormativity texturizes (c.f. Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 1984)) in space as a “straight line” dominating the society. That is, heterosexual endings are what will “line up” straight ahead for anyone not actively deviates from the main sociospatial tracks. Through the alignment of the straight body, the line itself further disappears out of view as simply given, why she contends that normativity can be redescribed as “a body that appears ‘*in line*.’ (p.66 [emphasis added].)” Due to the same logic, bodies orientated towards “the wrong kind of others”—those that do not “line up” straight ahead—will experience disorientation due to their inability to extend with their environment. In order to achieve a queer orientation, the subject thus have to leave the straight line and go *off line*. So, rather than disorientation being about moments of exception, breaking with normativity means a more consistent state of navigation in order to avoid or deal with such. As Ahmed suggests about her work, this may call for a phenomenology of “being stopped” rather than transcending. She contends: “A phenomenology of ‘being stopped’ might take us in a different direction than one that begins with motility, with a body that ‘can do’ by flowing into space” (2006, 139).

As argued by anthropologist Ulf Hannerz 1997 we should always be suspicious towards the pervasive effect of “flow” as a metaphor, since it tends to make cultural processes seem too easy and smooth, when in fact, all kinds of flows, whether they involve humans, commodities or media, involve a range of “perceptual and communicative modalities [...] which probably differ importantly in the way they draw their boundaries, that is their discontinuous distributions over people and relationships”. Therefore, Hannerz argues that the analysis of new kinds of movements across time and space must be able to capture *shifts* and *boundaries*, which is echoed in Ahmed’s effort to shed light on, what she calls “moments of shifting”. Hannerz (1997, 12) maintains that if flow “suggests some sort of continuity and passage” seen from a macroperspective, *boundaries* have to do with small-scale “discontinuities” and “obstacles”. To Ahmed (2006, 158), moments of shifting are about glitches in perception as we move between spaces, because “one moment does not follow another, as a sequence of spatial givens that unfolds as moments of time”, but rather constitutes shifts, ruptures and disorientation and this is particularly true for marginalized individuals.

So if we are to re-visit Moores’ multiply situated media user through the phenomenology of being stopped—what would that tell us about digital media spatiality? What does it mean to “walk off line” *online* while being surrounded by hostile territory? What kind of conflicts, frictions and unevenness occurs due to the multiple positionality of media users spread out across mediated and non-mediated sites as they move about in code and flesh, respectively? And what does this tell us about, for example, perceptual distinctions between the online and the offline? By drawing on my own empirical work among sexual minorities in urban Russia, I will put forward their experiences in order to highlight the productive synthesis between Moores and Ahmed.

Queering digital media phenomenology

In the following, I will go through some central results from a larger study where I explored ways in which “queer digital media use” reorganized and co-produced senses of space, time, and queer being-there for same-sex desiring men in contemporary Russia

(Tudor 2018). Thus, “queer” or “queer disposition”—used throughout as an epithet for subjects and practices—is first defined in close alliance with queer phenomenology, as a spatiotemporal inclination to deviate from the straight line of heterosexual culture. Second, it is strategically used as an alternative to e.g., “gay” or “MSM”, since the experiences of sexual difference captured among the informants recruited through a call for “same-sex desiring men” seldom took the shape of stable sexual identities or practices. “Queer disposition” refers to the etymology of “prevailing tendency”, “mood”, “inclination”, or “temperament” (Merriam Webster, 2018), and it sheds light on what queerness is so to speak “doing” with the informants’ lifeworlds. Rather than treating queerness as a label, or as a prescription of certain ways of living one’s life, the “queer disposition” says something about how queerness might be felt and experienced from within the body—as strange and often (at least initially) frightening inclinations, as leanings towards the “wrong” objects of desire, and as a sense of being out of place in a straight world. Dispositions understood as “temperament” are in fact picked up from the astrological use of the term, implying the “position of a planet as a determining influence” (Merriam Webster, 2018). This serves as a convenient pairing with the work of Ahmed who mainly discusses queerness in terms of orientations in space leading towards objects of desire. If queerness is, as she suggests, best understood as the prevailing tendency of diverting from the straight line in order to reach our sexual object choice; then, “queer dispositions” seems a suitable extension of that terminology. However, it should be clear that various subject positions across the LGBTQI spectrum could serve as potential starting points for explorations aiming “to queer” media phenomenology. In accordance with the current delimitation though the term “queer digital media use” aims to capture the *use of ICT for queer endings* among these same-sex desiring men. It is not that all things same-sex desiring people do with digital media make it turn queer, but that certain digital media practices are part and parcel of a queer orientation towards the world. This includes using queer-catering software, but also other mainstream resources *appropriated* for queer endings. Such endings are here not limited to actions supporting same-sex dating and queer networking, for example, but also embrace ways of, e.g., concealing one’s queer disposition. The study thus covers the use of mainstream social networks, IRC channels, digital bulletin boards, dating sites, web-cam forums, and geolocate hookup applications. Empirically, examples used draw on in-depth interviews with 19 same-sex desiring male informants in Saint Petersburg, and fieldwork performed there during 2013–2015. Taking a distinct phenomenological perspective, the study asked how digital media affected queer perceptions of the here and now, the proximate and the distant and spaces of belonging. In what ways was it entwined with the larger geography of everyday living? And how did the different mobilities of flesh and code relate to one another?

The online/offline divide and mobility across sites

As previously discussed, the integration of digital media in everyday living is today commonly perceived of in terms of seamlessness. Part of this discourse is the widely accepted idea among media scholars that the spatial distinction between online and offline has completely lost its bearing in the post-digital age (as discussed by e.g., Baym 2010 or Elija Cassidy 2013). However, looking at the experiences of my Russian informants, they were often highly invested in a perceived online/offline divide.

In order to understand their digital media practices though it should first of all be acknowledged that queerness among the men I interviewed was seldom expressed or experienced as a unitary homosexual identity, and was commonly kept as a separate sphere in everyday life. Family and straight friends did not know about their queer dispositions and for many of them, this was experienced as a fundamental split, which was not, under any circumstances, supposed to be challenged. Due to the naturalized straight orientation of territory surrounding them in general, what they referred to as their “ordinary” or “normal” life was usually the contexts in which they passed as straight, while their queerness was lived as deviations constituted by specific designated sites and spatiotemporal practices. This is very much in line with what previous research on contemporary queer living in Russia has established, as many same-sex-desiring Russians struggle to preserve a separation between spheres where they are seen as queer and those where they may pass in accordance with mainstream expectations (Kondakov Alexander 2017; Soboleva V. Irina Bakhmetjev and A. Yaroslav 2015; Stella 2012, 2013, 2015). And as opposed to much queer politics in the global West “visibility and authenticity per se are seldom prized” as positive core values of Russian queer living (Stella 2012, 1837). Stella (2012), for example, notes in her work on queer communities in Moscow and Ulyanovsk in the early 2010s that forms of strategic invisibility were in fact a central factor for the *production of queer space* among her informants. In order to “carve out” a safe and comfortable environment for themselves to inhabit, the groups actively worked on sheltering queer space from public scrutiny rather than making it visibly queer (p. 1839) and without expressing any interest in an “openly” queer lifestyle.

Any study on queer spatiotemporality in Russia must thus recognize the importance of parallel publics for existence and expressivity, and it’s been suggested that digital media may serve to support these with a greater range of possible actions than within the offline world (Kondakov 2017). This is clearly supported within my results as many of the informants had the experience of treating queer online spheres (such as anonymous dating profiles) as strictly separate from their offline life over extensive periods of time. When they first started to explore their queer dispositions, it was sometimes a matter of years before networking or simply spending time on queer online forums led to bodies meeting in the flesh. When speaking about such experiences, the informants commonly described the dating forums, digital bulletin boards and social networks they used as spaces in their own right where they came to feel a certain degree of privacy and at-homeness. Further, even if not so solidly hidden, the informants’ present queer digital media habits were still to be kept separate from the identifiability and visibility of the flesh. But how do you do that within a digital media culture where different resources, spaces, and timelines are supposed to subsume into a unified flow of content, all connected through your Google account? An example could be found on the mainstream social network *Vkontakte*, where the informants used multiple profiles—one “normal” more official profile, and one secret “gay” profile—as the informant Sergei described it. There they selectively chose which side of themselves to present to what audience, but also whom they had contact with and allowed as friends. We may hence discuss this in terms of a *digital compartmentalization* of orientations that consciously oppose the pressures on continuity within the “culture of connectivity” (José van Dijk 2013). It is also a matter of media producing multiple positionalities which cannot be understood in terms of seamlessness but rather as divides, but which were still commonly described to constitute a whole.

Sasha: [W]e are satisfied with that. Even on *Vkontakte* I have two profiles. On one I am like gay, and in the other one, I am an ordinary person. On one profile I have gay friends, and on the other one I have my parents and the others who know me. So, in this sense, we have two faces. But it's for the others. But for us, we remain the same.

So by managing these multiplied positionalities, the informants were carefully navigating, taking turns and holding back. In order not for their social media profiles to connect to one another through algorithmic bleeding, some would, e.g., try using different browsers and/or different devices for their respective profiles. Rather than the often-assumed “flow” of sites visited – whether online, offline, imagined, or real—in a continuous unfolding of space and time, queer digital media use among the informants were thus instead constituted by these very “moments of shifting” (Ahmed 2006). This further has a clear resonance with studies into disconnective practices which have argued that shifts, boundaries, and breaks are fundamental for digital connectivity itself (Ben Light 2014; Tero Karppi 2014; Sundén 2018). As social media seems to propel an all-consuming connectivity by its users, Light (2014) for example, argues that disconnection efforts, by which users strive to take more selective control over their online selves, have become central aspects of digital culture. This includes practices such as “untagging”, editing, and selective sharing. Similarly, Karppi (2014) sees these forms of online navigation as acts of turning away from the principles of the regime of connectivity.

However, the informants’ repeated turnings towards online queer spaces also served to habituate a queer orientation and inclined informants to move further towards others who could return their desire. Completing such transcendences meant following those enchanting objects into a world of other uncertainties and risks. Thus, even when the informants were striving for online/offline transcendence with the contacts they did initiate through queer digital media use, there were still ways of consciously slowing down such movements. The most extreme example might have come from the informant Nicolai, who while living in his hometown in the far north, had online contact with a boy from the same region for 2 years before finally meeting and realizing they were in fact neighbours. Besides the risk of queer exposure towards important others, one of the fears slowing down online/offline transcendence was that of homophobes lurking behind the digital contacts they made. Going from having an erotic or romantic conversation in code with a presumed flirt online, into being instantly thrown into the harshness of offline physical violence, painfully illustrates the most violent clashes of online/offline transcendence for queers moving around mediaspace. Sergey, a young queer activist whom I interviewed, thus worked with advising same-sex desiring Russians on how to protect themselves online.

Sergey: Before making new “friends”, chat with the person for some weeks to understand who is talking with you. [...] they should talk with them before, using web-cams, and meet only in very public places, like central metro stations. It will be better if they take some friends to go with them to the meeting to support them if something goes wrong.

According to Sergey, then, there are quite a number of steps one should take, slowing down and smoothing out the movement from an online flirt to an offline encounter—to chat for weeks, to talk on the phone, and to see the person face-to-face over a web-cam. If we can talk about a “coming” and “going” (c.f. Moores 2012) constituting the spatiality of online queer resources, it might be noted that these movements are reminders of those

when entering the queer nightclubs were the informants took me during weekends, and where I was rigidly informed about the procedures of how to enter and leave. To never leave the club alone; to not take a cab straight outside; to arrive at times when there were not so many people in line for the surrounding entrances; to wait outside if there were. It would definitely be an exaggeration to say that the movements of online/offline transcendence are always made with the same degree of precaution as those of coming and leaving a club, but there are moments of switching, similar to the strategies recommended by Sergej that most informants had habituated.

This is telling of how many people—including, but not exclusive to, queer individuals—use new communication technology to go *off line*, to speak with Ahmed, i.e., to break with forceful spatial discourses and normative expectations. While a seamless medialife seems to imply a somewhat harmonious flow between different angles of a unified subject, queer digital media use is often lived in conflict with other notions of community and shared space. Therefore, the smoothness of e.g., online/offline transcendence should also be discussed in terms of *normativity*. Borrowing once again from the writing of Ahmed, it must be recognized also in relation to the multiply situated media user that:

[t]he politics of mobility, of *who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces*, can be re-described as the politics of who gets to be at home and who gets to extend their bodies into inhabitable spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable as they extend the surfaces of such bodies (2006, 142, emphasis added.)

With this in mind, totalizing conceptualizations of mediaspace makes little sense, and it should be noted that even if primarily aiming to capture macro-dimensions of media culture, tropes of a complete online/offline collapse can make us insensitive to the many ongoing negotiations and navigations across varying connected landscapes that are characteristic of social living in present times.

The disappearance of media?

So as we have now looked closer at the multiplicity of queer digital space and some of the shifts and boundaries experienced in relation to it, we shall return to the question of habituation within Moores' media phenomenology and how it relates to other ideas about media use in our post-digital times. As previously discussed, Moores' notions on the habituation of media use draws on humanist geography, and ultimately on Merleau-Ponty's writing in which the body-subject stands in an open transcendence towards her world through the intentionality of the acting body. In the same way as this has lead geographers to assume habituated space to be lived as a "place ballet" (Seamon 1979), where moving about is done in a "continuous, flowing, 'processional' ... order" (Ingold 2011 in Moores 2012) Moores wants to draw attention to ways in which place-constituting movements, including a range of mediated mobilities, turn into "body schemes" that are largely pre-conscious and habitual. Such conclusions go well in line with more established ideas within contemporary media studies paradigm about the "disappearance of media" as it simply becomes the water we swim in (Deuze 2012) or mundane pieces of infrastructure to be forgotten (Hine 2015). In the long run, Moores contend, as space becomes familiar, media use as well as the texture of the place itself become invisible and thus is hardly noticed until it is suddenly missed/changed, causing disorientation. There is

obviously a general applicability of such ideas in regard to many media habits within everyday living, such as having the TV set on in the background of one's morning routine, or scrolling social media in public transport. But what I would here like to emphasize is that we should be careful with assuming a straightforward relationship between habituation and the primacy of media practice (or any practice for that matter).

Returning to Ahmed, she reminds us that same-sex desiring individuals do not simply *transcend* the straight line by going off line and habituating a queer orientation (2006, 75), but rather remain highly dependent also on the ways in which their bodies travel the mainstream geography of their surroundings. The queer body-subject thus internalizes the surrounding time and space, turning into orientations and leanings, including the habitual incorporation of (im)possibilities and expectations, which are navigated and lived in part through digital media use. She discusses this as a kind of "queer failure" of things being habituated. For, as she contends, certain bodies will always have to carry the weight of "standing out." Ahmed writes about furniture to illustrate that which is merely taken for granted. As she says, it is perhaps even the very meaning of furniture to disappear from view and be noticed only in how it supports action. In that sense, she acknowledges, queer furniture might be that furniture that never becomes merely a background, but which simply stands out. This illuminates the privileges connected with being extended by the space surrounding you, and how this is in turn a prerequisite for the kind of pre-cognitive media use assumed by Moores. Using Ahmed's vocabulary, we could thus say that normativity in media use can be redescribed as a media practice that appears "in line" (c.f. 2006, 66) and thus disappears from view.

Looking at the queer digital media use among my informants, whether in the form of geolocative applications possible to carry along while on the move, or the secretive sneaking of queer resources on the home computer, they *do* stand out. Even if there might be an intricate layering of space when using a queer hook-up app while in the middle of *Nevsky Prospect*, it will still be a practice that breaks with normative space, and which therefore has to be done with care and discretion. This is, of course, also the reason why a service like the gay male app *Grindr* has introduced a "discrete app icon"-function, so that members can hide it away behind a neutral looking icon on their phones. *Grindr* may thus illustratively be said to be the very opposite of forgotten or invisible media. Seeing *Grindr* as that furniture that never becomes a mere background reminds us that queer embodiment in a straight world, for most of us, depends on calculated management of the situational geography of social life, including digital media. For a fair amount of us, such as the disabled, those with racialized bodies, genderqueers, etc., it might even be that such habituation, where one forgets where one's body ends, and the world begins, and one is merely flowing through the "primacy of practice," is a rare privilege. The open transcendence of a body-subject towards her world must thus be recognized as freedom that has everything to do with power.

Summary

Within this article, I have aimed to develop on the idea of a multiply situated media user by focusing on that which "stops bodies" in flesh and in code within digital media use. By combining the work of Moores (2004, 2012, 2017) and Ahmed (2006) the aim has been to develop a queer digital media phenomenology as a distinctively critical perspective on

the spatiotemporalities of digital media use. I find Moores' ideas to lend themselves very well to an analysis of queer living, with its often conflicting social and spatial investments. Digital media resources, through the multiplying of space, thus equip the informants with infrastructure for entertaining several orientations at once and resources for keeping those spheres of living separate. Having several profiles within the world of a social media forum might serve as a way of giving structure to and habituating a separated but complete whole also offline. However, as I have shown, acknowledging the multiplicity of mediaspace also calls for critical investigations into issues of mobility across sites, and the ability to capture shifts and boundaries as well as forms of transcendence.

As I have argued, to focus on that which stops bodies requires a critical suspicion towards the concept of flow, whether it is about a never-ending flow of content between multiple sites of a unified subject, or a seamless flow between the online and the offline. The media phenomenology of that which stops bodies is one aiming to capture experiences of media use within migration, marginalization, oppression, censorship and quarantine, but also the general disorientation, ruptures, and clashes that are central to most of our lived experiences. Thinking about the etymology of "queer" as a crooked, skewed, and wonky angle, it thus serves to bend and challenge ideas that are commonly taken for granted within the research field. Not only as a "corrective" of unacknowledged or disregarded groups of media users, but also as something that twists the basis of the discussion towards different terrains and perspectives.

In a final note, I would thus like to lead the discussion over to the field of existential media studies (Lagerkvist 2016, 2018, 2019; Lagerkvist et al. 2017; Charles. M. Ess 2019), highlighting the need for media research more generally to place the vulnerable human being at the centre of their ideas. Putting together Heidegger's Dasein with Sherry Turkle's (2011 in Lagerkvist 2016) notion that we are nowadays "wired into existence through technology", Lagerkvist argues that the digital human condition presents us with a particular kind of thrownness. The principal subject for media studies, and the inhabitant of the digital ecology is first, according to Lagerkvist (2016, 1), an "exister": "a stumbling, hurting, and relational human being, who navigates within limits and among interruptions through the torrents of our digital existence, in search for meaning and existential security." Providing an existential perspective on digital technologies thus means stressing the uncertainty and vulnerability of the digital human condition into which we are thrown, rather than savviness and skill. Lagerkvist particularly emphasizes the ways in which digital culture can be understood in light of our search for, achievement, and loss of existential security, thus challenging an often taken for granted secular frame of media culture. She also emphasizes that "voids, silences and breaks, limits and limitations as inescapable and perhaps, valuable aspects of human existence in the digital age" (Lagerkvist 2016, 8). Described in this way, the exister in search of existential security points in the same direction as the body-subject whose transcendent openness towards her world cannot be taken for granted, but is situational and relational, and can be had as well as lost. Thus, thinking about that which stops bodies in mediaspace, it must be acknowledged that we all have our crookedness – the objects and destinations we desire that are not placed along the straight lines, or the characteristics we hold that make our bodies and practices stand out in space. And no matter who we are, when taken out of context, we all get disoriented. Hence,

putting the light on shifts and boundaries in queer digital media spatiality may serve as a strategic point from which to shed light on important aspects of lived experience within digital existence more generally.

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