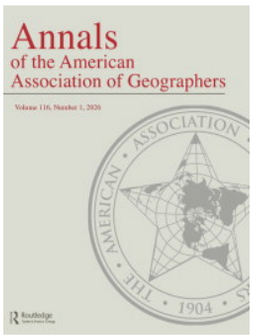

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Space for Alienation: Seriality (or Being Alone Together) in the Swimming Hall

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This article investigates the sociality of Scandinavian public swimming halls through Jean-Paul Sartre's reworking of Marxist alienation as seriality. Drawing on fifty-nine personal narratives, it explores how behaviors of mutual semi-unawareness in settings involving multiple activities and (partial) nudity among strangers intersect with fundamentally diverse and ambiguous experiences. Combining Iris Marion Young's feminist reading of "seriality" with Sartre's concept of "the look," the article conceptualizes three forms of seriality: serial behavior, serial space, and serial being. Against the understanding of spatial alienation as exclusively the property of socially marginalized consciousness, seriality offers a deeper understanding of alienation as a general yet historical-geographical social structure. Although seriality is traditionally conceived as something normatively negative, this study demonstrates how social alienation can also foster individual relief and senses of community. Furthermore, the theory of seriality is developed by asking what it feels like to partake in a sociospatial series from different perspectives, and it is argued that in these kind of series, the notion of the Other's look is unsurmountable. Contributing to critical phenomenology in geography, the article offers a spatially grounded account of diverse experiences within a single kind of public space, highlighting how serial spaces mediate difference, vulnerability, and coexistence. *Key Words: alienation, critical phenomenology in geography, public pools, seriality, the look.*

The discourse of "culture wars" gradually colonizes all social issues, including the ways certain places are understood in public debates. One notable case in the Nordic countries is the changing media discourse on public pools. Due to the climate, community swimming pools are more commonly indoor facilities—known as "swimming halls" (*simhallar* or *svømmehaller* in Swedish or Norwegian, respectively). Popularized after World War II, Nordic pool swimming has a more public character than it does, for example, in the United States (Wiltse 2007). Swimming is popular in the Nordic countries, and swimming ability is widespread. The swimming halls, however, are used for many different activities besides swimming: water aerobics, rehabilitation, recreation, and family socializing. Indeed, for many families, the swimming hall functions as a budget resort for weekends and holidays. These halls are, in other words, genuinely public places, as they are heavily publicly subsidized and used by people of practically all ages, body types, and social backgrounds. Although the Nordic countries are afflicted with residential, educational, and work-related racial segregation, swimming halls tend to be visited by both rich and poor, as well as white and nonwhite residents.

Meanwhile, over the last twenty years, the swimming hall has become a symbol of culture wars in the media (Hansson n.d.). Very often, they are depicted as places where one's own (potential) homeliness is, or might become, incompatible with the Others' homeliness. Whether the debate revolves around feminist activists demanding the right to be topless, nonbinary people desiring a third option for changing rooms, the right of Muslim women to wear burkinis or have access to women-only hours, refugee boys sexually harassing girls, juvenile violence, fear of pedophiles, or surveillance cameras, the fundamental problem is *the Others' ways*. With this narrative, the media consumer gets the impression of the Nordic swimming hall as a

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place of increasing estrangement and mutual alienation between different social groups—disrupting a presumed previous social harmony.

Critiquing this ideology of cultural irreconcilability, this article presents the results of a case study of fifty-nine individuals' memories and experiences of the social dimensions of Scandinavian swimming halls carried out between 2020 and 2022. This critique, however, proceeds from the acknowledgment that, in reality, the sociality of a public bathhouse indeed demands some degree of personal estrangement to be a practically public place. Indeed, this type of enclosed space, where people are remarkably undressed and yet strangers to each other, where someone's bodily motions easily affect other bodies, and where there are risks of drowning, appears to demand a certain kind of order of self-control (Scott 2009). There are many explicit and tacit rules that visitors are to follow and that seem to be broken all the time. A public pool is then a place of adaptation and frustration, but nonetheless also of conviviality and gratification. It is indeed a peculiar kind of relational place, with social and experiential dimensions that have only recently caught the attention of geographers (Adiv 2015; Ward 2017). Yet we still lack geographical studies that take into account different phenomenological positionalities within this spatiality (Kinkaid 2022) to understand the place's sociality as a unity of these differences.

Recent years have witnessed a renewed geographical interest in phenomenology. Against earlier humanistic geography and "classical" phenomenology's perceived neglect of differentiated (i.e., beyond male and/or white) embodied experiences, scholars seek to develop new theories that account for lived experiences of alterity and difference. Whereas postphenomenology seeks to transcend human subjectivity altogether (for critique, see Hepach 2021; Kinkaid 2022), critical phenomenology (Kinkaid 2020; Simonsen and Koefoed 2020; Hepach and Kinkaid 2024) seeks to recharge phenomenology into a spatial theory that is "sensitive to difference" and "involves a politics that emphasizes coexistence" (Simonsen and Koefoed 2020, 8). As critical phenomenology understands the human condition as inescapably social and diverse, it marries critical social theory with phenomenological spatial experience and differentiates this experience as always positional vis-à-vis other experiences. The critical dimension concerns the very unevenness of experiences—how power relations that (re)produce unequal life situations come to be translated into different sociospatial experiences of different bodies. Given this aim, "the first-person consciousness of minoritized or otherwise marginalized subjects" readily becomes "an epistemological vantage point to encounter and render visible the logics that shape those broader orders and one's place within them" (Hepach and Kinkaid 2024, 7). One way to study these logics is to study such positionalities' experience of alienation in space. Drawing on different critical and queer thinkers, Kinkaid (2020) argued that bodies marked by social difference entering spaces of dominant normativity experience alienation as embodied disorientation, as "the relations between the body and its milieu fail to cohere" (180). Meanwhile, I argue that we must be careful not to mistake such spatial alienation as exclusively the property of socially marginalized consciousness. Indeed, critical geographical phenomenology can benefit from a deeper understanding of alienation as a general yet historical-geographical social structure. One such underexplored theory of alienation was provided by Sartre ([1960] 2004) as seriality: "the practical existence of men [sic] among men" (258) under class society. Properly developed, this theory can account for the relation between gathered strangers' differing experiences and their spatial-behavioral unity.

This article aims to make a twofold theoretical contribution. First, the article brings Sartre's philosophy into dialogue with contemporary critical phenomenology in geography by spatializing seriality as a sociospatial bond of individuals (Boyle 2005), expressed as "a plurality of isolations" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 256). Second, this study aims to develop the theory of seriality itself in mainly three ways: first, by asking what it feels like to partake in series from different perspectives within the same sort of sociospatial setting; second, by not treating the phenomenon as something inherently normative. For both Sartre, who understood seriality as the antithesis of revolutionary spontaneity, and Young (1994), who appropriated the idea to explain gender as a sociomaterial collectivity, seriality designates mundane yet oppressive social structures. Not dismissing these dimensions (as will become clear), the accounts of the case study problematize this articulation of sociophenomenological alienation as always destructive. The third development of seriality is to bring it into

dialogue with Sartre's ([1943] 2009) earlier existential-phenomenological notion of *the look*. This concept inspired Lacan's gaze theory, which preceded Mulvey's (1975) "male gaze" and its sociocultural modifications. With the look, I aim to show how serial behavior and serial being, in the serial space of a Scandinavian swimming hall, are experienced through different ways of coping with being looked at by Others (cf. Davidson 2003).

In what follows, I first present Sartre's compatibility with critical phenomenology. Then, I present my reading of Sartre's concepts of the look and seriality. For analytical purposes, I suggest a triad of serial phenomena: serial behaviors, serial spaces, and serial beings. Finally, we turn to the case study's method and results.

Sartre's Existential Phenomenology and Social Alienation

Compared with de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, or Heidegger, Sartre's phenomenology appears strikingly disembodied, as he preoccupied himself with consciousness before embodiment—nevertheless, he took it as self-evident that consciousness appears through corporeal sensations. Meanwhile, against both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Sartre was unapologetically anthropocentric: Human consciousness is "absolute" because one cannot access anything of reality except through it (Catalano 2010, 38). Against postphenomenological misconceptions, however, this consciousness is anything but sovereign, rational, or coherent. Indeed, one often-ignored key factor in Sartre's thought is that consciousness is a negation of that which exists. In *Being and Nothingness* (BN) (Sartre [1943] 2009), consciousness is a response to the lack in being: There can never be a reconciliation between subject and object, and thus never a coherent essential identity of either the subject or the object. This negative conception of being-in-the-world should find resonance in critical phenomenologists' emphasis on experiences of estrangement. In BN, however, because he did "not see as his business as a phenomenologist to do" (Morris 2010, 16), Sartre generally refrained from exploring the experience of embodied social difference. This attitude, however, would change with Sartre's political radicalization.

If Sartre's philosophical mission was to reveal how we "constitute ourselves and our natures," his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre [1960] 2004) is "a progression in awareness of the social and historical realms of this constituting" (Catalano 2010, 37). The (unfinished) *Critique*'s purpose was to find the meaning of all of humanity's history, which, Sartre hypothesized, is ultimately Marx's class struggle. This meaning can only be grasped through lived experience, however. Here, Sartre maintained a methodological individualism; as in BN, consciousness is located in an individuated human body, which is why one consciousness is always organically isolated from another. There is, however, a crucial difference in Sartre's new understanding of consciousness's concrete relationship to Others. In BN, alienation is the logical effect of consciousness's coexistence with other Others' consciousnesses; alienation is found in the direct relation between subject and Other. In the *Critique*, however, alienation originates in the concrete relation between subject and object, when consciousness objectifies itself to process matter (whether physical or the matter of language and thoughts; Sartre [1960] 2004, 163). The result becomes alienating because there is something in the worked matter that is Other than both the original object and subject, and this Other will act on humans and their social relations. This means that in the *Critique*, interpersonal relations are not essentially plagued by alienation (bad faith) but become alienated by the influence of the results of previous human actions. Nonetheless, in both BN and the *Critique*, "our interpersonal relations and our social organization are not *by nature* positive" (Catalano 1986, 33, italics in original): Even in a hypothetical nonalienated social relation, people would still be able to hurt each other. In both works, consciousness is in an inescapable entanglement with the Other as both concrete and imagined; the Other could be a source of danger to oneself and one's relationship to the world. This primordial capacity is absorbed by alienation in complex ways. As the *Critique*'s business is to construct a model to interpret world history from a Marxist perspective, however, it only considers the threat of being-with-Others through the social situation of material scarcity. Thus, to take into account other sources of interpersonal threat, I suggest a return to BN and its notion of *the look*.

The Look

According to Morris (2010), with the "focus on the body's lived awareness of being under the Other's objectifying gaze," Sartre outdid Merleau-Ponty in providing a "theoretical basis for the embodiment of oppression" (4). Indeed, the theory of the look inspired both de Beauvoir's (1986) feminist and Fanon's (1967) antiracist phenomenology. For Sartre, however, the look did not concern experiences of oppression but constituted a dialectical-logical step in investigating how consciousness realizes its ultimate limit in the phenomenological world through the Other's existence. This realization is illustrated as the sensation of the Other's look on oneself—narrated as a horrible sensation. Not necessarily derived from someone's actual eyes, "the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches," or "a light movement of a curtain" (Sartre [1943] 2009, 281). What is horrible about being looked at is that one's person, body, and actions can become an *object of evaluation* over which one has no power. This recognition of others' subjectivity entails the permanent possibility of being looked at—including by oneself. Although the look itself is ultimately nonpositional, it positions consciousness in space: As one is seen somewhere, one's consciousness becomes delimited to this position (cf. Hepach 2021, 1289):

> What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that *there is someone there*; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense—in short, that I *am seen*. (Sartre [1943] 2009, 282, italics in original)

Without the capacity to be seen, consciousness would treat the world of objects as a phenomenal extension of itself. With being looked at, however, one realizes one's own potential objectification by the Other: to become an object oneself. Furthermore, this indicates the separation between consciousness and its perceived ego. Consciousness might think of itself as constituting a coherent subjectivity, but as one can look at "oneself" from the "outside," this ego is an object of evaluation both for consciousness itself and for consciousness's Other.

With the look, *shame* enters consciousness's world as the state of feeling reduced to an object evaluated by the Other. Consider Sartre's reflection on modesty:

> [T]he fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness [is] only a symbolic specification of original shame; the body symbolizes here our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be pure subject. (Sartre [1943] 2009, 312)

This quote implies several epistemological layers. For Sartre, consciousness cannot become a "pure subject" because its actual essence is a negativity of being; it is only through what we today call performativity that consciousness can believe itself to be a subject. To live authentically would indicate an impossible balancing act of neither treating oneself as an imaginary subject (which effectively would make the Other into an object) nor as an object for the Other. Allegorically, "to put on clothes" thus means to act in bad faith, because one perpetuates the illusion of being a pure subject and alienates oneself from the Other's look.

With this theory, we can discern a model for an existential-phenomenological social pragmatism: In the social world, one is always negotiating a tripartite of consciousness–body–look in a dialectical relationship to the Other. This Other is both other empirical persons and the Other within consciousness itself: consciousness looking at one's self or body as an Other. In other words, interpreting "nakedness" here figuratively, everyday sociality implies Goffmanian negotiations against the sufferings that the sensations of being looked at might cause—including shame, agoraphobia, and oppression (Davidson 2003). We could also interpret "nakedness" literally, however. In his anthropology of nudity and shame, Duerr ([1988] 1994) argued that there has never existed a culture with an "unforced relationship to the naked body" (105). Namely, what is culturally considered nudity does not come down to the degree of covering one's skin, but to what the norm considers too revealing to someone's gaze. Whether in nudist camps, Nordic saunas, or subequatorial Indigenous communities, shameful nudity still exists in spite of the lack of any clothing—one's nudity is revealed to oneself as the consequence of how one apprehends someone else's

looking at one's body. Thus, even when completely unclothed, people might want their "object-states" to remain concealed from the look.

Seriality

Introducing power and social difference to the look's dialectic actualizes notions of sexual (de Beauvoir 1986), racial (Fanon 1967), and other kinds of social objectification—that is, alienation. In the *Critique*, alienation equals the social structures of domination and exploitation that make people oppress each other through institutions, actions, and thoughts. As individuals are powerless to overcome alienation, the occasion for authenticity now becomes the rare moments throughout history when a sufficient number of strangers come together to change society as an active group: the group-in-fusion. In this group, everyone is personally invested in a jointly shared project and recognizes each other for the person they are. Sartre did not apply the look in the *Critique's* model, but if he did, we would say that in the group-in-fusion, everyone's simultaneous look at the Other breaks the double-bind of objectification, and everyone becomes a subject through joint action. Alas, this group can only last temporarily before it either becomes dissolved or institutionalized. The group-in-fusion is therefore a temporal break from the standard order of the social bond between strangers; seriality is the antithesis of the group-in-fusion, yet also its prerequisite.

Serial Behavior

Sartre introduced seriality by watching strangers across the street queuing at a bus stop. From his viewpoint, this gathering appears as a group, as these individuals share an interest (getting onto the bus) and are physically united in one place. More accurate, however, is to say that this gathering constitutes "a plurality of isolations" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 256). The individuals do not meet each other as persons. Instead, they treat each other, and themselves, as just another number in a series of interchangeable queuers.

> These people—who may differ greatly in age, sex, class, and social milieu—realize, within the ordinariness of everyday life, the relation of isolation, [which] is characteristic of, for example, the residents of a big city in so far as they are united though not integrated [as a group]. … [T]hese people do not care about or speak to each other and, in general, they do not look at one another; they exist side by side alongside the bus stop. (Sartre [1960] 2004, 256)

Although each individual has "real membership of other groups" (families, colleagues, friendships), their reciprocal "semi-unawareness" of each other nonetheless constitutes a social unity (Sartre [1960] 2004, 256–57). Not only do they share an interest; by ignoring each other they are actually interacting, and their isolated individual actions can be added together into a collective structure. This structure is a series of individuals doing something together yet alone. In contrast to consciousness's ontological isolation, here

> isolation is a project. [Nevertheless,] at the same time, the relation of reciprocity remains in the gathering itself. … [This] is, in fact, quite simply, the practical existence of men [*sic*] among men. Not only is there a lived reality—for everyone, even if he turns his back on the Others, and is unaware of their number and their appearance, knows that they exist as a finite and indeterminate plurality *of which he is a part*—[the] ensemble of *isolated* behavior [presupposes] a structure of reciprocity at every level. (Sartre [1960] 2004, 258, italics in original)

As this quote makes clear, seriality concerns much more of social life than occasions of physical proximity of strangers. Indeed, this isolation "does not remove one from the visual and practical field of the Other" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 258, italics in original), as this Other influences one's behaviors as serial even when one happens to be all alone. Ultimately seriality is a social bond of alterity, because everyone involved treats others and oneself as Other: "*a series is a mode of being for individuals both in relation to one another and in relation to their common being*" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 266, italics in original). Therefore, seriality is not bound by scale. Series can both be spatially demarcated and dispersed. Sartre exemplified this with the logic of media consumption: When distant individuals listen to the same radio program, they are part of a series of listeners. They constitute a relational unity and are aware of each other's existence—but not as persons (Sartre [1960] 2004, 270–76). Moreover, one can actively reflect on one's part-taking in the series, which is why serial behavior is not defined by members' self-consciousness. What matters is what individuals do before what they think.

As a theory of social action, the function of seriality is its alienating character. Through rituals of reciprocity, wherein everyone involved treats and behaves as an Other in relation to an Other, people also fend off possibilities for enmity in social life. Think of the situation when the queuers realize that "*there are not enough places for everyone*" on the bus (Sartre [1960] 2004, 260, italics in original). As a serial phenomenon, the queue itself neutralizes conflict because of the reciprocity of everyone's depersonalized interchangeability: Given our relation of alterity, "[here] constituted as a rule of succession" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 276), there was nothing personal about me not getting the last seat, as I was number six and there were only five seats left. This defense mechanism risks turning into the opposite, though, as this reasoning invites—as will be developed later—stereotyping.

Serial Space

Sartre kept faith with Marxism in the sense that thoughts and actions are responses to sociomaterial circumstances. While he considered the bus queue example, he reflected on how seriality produces and is produced by space, as everyone's isolation here becomes the "real, social product of cities" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 257). Indeed, seriality influences all spatial arrangements, as series are the result of what Sartre called the *practico-inert*: the historical-geographical material results of former human actions. By acting on matter, humans inscribe their intentions on it, which eventually influence Others' actions. Indeed, all built environment is a practico-inert reality, as its materiality is a product of human practice on matter that then influences human practice (Kobayashi 1989). Thus, space (re)produces seriality, which (re)produces space—hence the only social space that is not serial ought to be the temporal space intentionally produced by a group-in-fusion.

As series are not place-bound, their spaces are not necessarily territorial. In this article, however, I focus on seriality as lived in physical proximity with strangers within a type of building. Given the serial behaviors this building is dedicated to and shaped by—swimming in lanes, (un)dressing, and showering among Others—I argue that we might interpret the public indoor pool as a serial space. This does not, however, mean that the series taking place there are metaphysically trapped within the walls. Namely, the serial behaviors and spaces do refer to other serial behaviors and spaces elsewhere (cf. Massey 2005).

Serial Being

The look's qualities derive from its nonpositionality; what matters is not being looked at by someone, but the fact that one can be looked at. In the same way, the so-called glue that makes a series into a practical unity of Others "must always be elsewhere" than the individuals themselves (Sartre [1960] 2004, 267). A series is ontologically infinite to its members; in theory, the number of people waiting for the bus could be endless and could even encompass all bus commuters in the city, or indeed the whole world. Thus, a series always refers further to someone else somewhere else. As one never gets to the series' source, no one is responsible for or holds power over it.

This theory is indeed complex because seriality is found in both physical and immaterial social products. Namely, the series' nonpositional Other "elsewhere" is also the logical bind for racism, which is the material consequence of *serial thinking* (Sartre [1960] 2004, 303). "The Jew," for example, is neither an identity nor a concept but effectively a serial entity: "*the* Jew, far from being *the type* common to each separate instance, represents *on the contrary* the perpetual *being-outside-themselves-in-the-other* of the members of [this objectified] grouping" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 268, italics in original). One must here recall Sartre's ontological position that a social identity cannot exist as a personal essence but can only be lived as bad faith: the objectification of oneself by others, oneself, or both. There is no such thing as "a Jew," only a series of people objectified as Other-as-Jews by their surroundings and (eventually) by themselves. The only real "Jew" (or "Arab" or "Frenchman") is precisely this Other elsewhere—the logical, but empirically nonexisting, first number of the series to which all attributions of the identity ultimately refer back. Large collective belongings thus bear similarity to Anderson's (2006) theory of nations as "imagined communities" of strangers, who actually do not know each other yet identify themselves as belonging to a series of Others of the same nationality. Thus, for Sartre, the only identity that can exist is the identification with a series of

Others—a kind of social being. One of the *Critique*'s aims is to criticize Marxist dogmatism regarding the idea of the working class as a unitary collective identity throughout space and time. All laboring individuals have their own unique historical-geographical situation but are simultaneously entangled in series on different spatial-temporal scales—several beyond their comprehension. Whereas class exists, class consciousness does not. Instead, working-class individuals live their class as *class-being*. This "being" concerns the extent to which one's class, one's social position as actually lived—one's work life, income, residential situation, health, and so on—serializes (or structures) one's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings.

Granted, one individual's life is shaped by several serial "beings." One such being is gender-being, which Sartre himself did not care to explore. Instead, Young took seriality further by arguing that the metaphysics of gender is indeed that of seriality. Neither a biological essence nor a social construction, gender is lived as a social bond of alterity in series, historically produced by "enforced heterosexuality and a sexual division of labor" (Young 1994, 738). For example, when one refers to one's experience of being a woman, one refers to a series of Other women and Other experiences. Indeed, such series are coproduced with spaces; "spaces that materially inscribe the norms of gender. I may discover myself 'as a woman' by being on the 'wrong' dorm floor" (Young 1994, 730). Young argued that, just as the seriality of class-being can be transformed into a group-in-fusion of workers aiming at upheaving class-being, the serial collective of women forms the condition for *feminist* groups-in-fusion. When these do not materialize, one lives one's gender in society serially:

> "I am a woman" at this level is an anonymous fact that does not define me in my active individuality. It means that I check one box rather than another on my driver's license application … and sometimes find myself in situations in which I anticipate deprecation or humiliation from a man. … As I utter the phrase, I experience a serial interchangeability between myself and others. (Young 1994, 731)

So far, we can say that within serial spaces we find serial behaviors lived as serial beings, where "serial" refers to "practico-inert necessities that condition [our] lives and with which [we] must deal" (Young 1994, 732). Given the multiplicity of series that are present in every social circumstance, and are lived by every individual, however, different series are accentuated differently for different people in different spaces. In this case, for example, due to the serial exposure of people's body shapes and skin, the swimming hall space accentuates gender-being and race-being more readily than class-being (Wiltse 2007).

The Serialized Look in the Public Pool

Although the look is ontological, because it expresses an existential-phenomenological logic that is embedded in human consciousness regarding its factual coexistence with Others, the space in which it is experienced is always historical. Space is the practico-inert result of myriads of serial practices that have shaped both its physical form and the social forms of practice and interaction that take place there. In the community pool space, however, the fact of the possibility of being looked at is experientially accentuated. Consciousness' embodiment, its very object status, practically comes to the forefront through one's (un)dressing and exposure before strangers of one's body in a shared body of water. The experience of the emplaced look is always personal, but this personal experience is nonetheless influenced by the multiplicity of serial beings, behaviors, and thoughts. In practice, in different historical-geographical settings, different bodies are looked at differently, with different social implications. Furthermore, the concrete practices of looking and looking away in different ways are serial practices themselves. These practices come from and result in alienation, as one's experiences and actions are primarily guided by being Other to an Other.

It is in this concrete kind of social setting, however, that we can problematize the *Critique*'s normative denunciation of seriality. Depending on the sociospatial situation at hand for a differentiated social being (Kinkaid 2022), individual serial actions can both cause and counteract the look's objectification. Regarding gender-being, for example, the look is serialized into an indispensable factor in the reproduction of patriarchal relations; its objectifying qualities are everywhere present in society. The sensation of being looked at might become somewhat bearable, however, by adapting serial behaviors—such as a state of semiunawareness. Depending on one's history and situation, the reciprocal exposure of nudity in a public bathhouse can be experienced

as a weight because of a sensed evaluation (due to one's identity-being, for example), but it can also become a relief if one manages to identify oneself as an unaware Other.

Swimming Diaries and Pool Memories

The data for this article come from an exploratory project aimed at generating qualitative knowledge about experiences of and in Scandinavian (municipal) swimming halls. No attempt was made to achieve statistical significance or strong reliability regarding local, regional, or national populations. Nor was any delimitation made between gender, age, or other categorizations, as I aimed for as broad a selection as possible of experiences. The total population of participants in this study is fifty-nine individuals.[1]

The experiences were collected through two methods. The original method was named "swimming diaries," where the task was to write diary-like notes after every pool visit, focusing on one's experiences of the space's sociality. As a Swedish citizen (from Stockholm) who at the time held a research position in Norway (Trondheim), I had the opportunity to study two different yet similar national contexts in towns of two different sizes (Stockholm County has almost 1 million residents, Trondheim circa 212,000). I put up contact ads in public spaces and on information boards all over Trondheim and Stockholm, in both Scandinavian and English, encouraging people to contact me if they wanted to participate. Unfortunately, the ads were posted just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe and most swimming halls were closed. Nonetheless, from February to October 2020, ten people (including myself) wrote irregular diary notes: Seven were conducted in Stockholm, two in Trondheim, and my own took place in both towns. I do not have any information on these other participants except their gender (eight were women).

My subsequent method was a web-based qualitative survey designed with the digital survey tool SenseMaker. This survey ran from January to March 2022 (coinciding with the fourth wave of COVID-19). The data collection period could not exceed two months due to a time-limited license for the survey tool. Given this lack of time and resources, the survey was spread through a chain-referral sampling method. I made one Swedish and one Norwegian version of the survey, then shared these with friends, family, colleagues, and through social media channels, encouraging people not only to partake but also to forward the survey to others. Both national surveys had an English language option alongside the Scandinavian one (which only one respondent opted for) to facilitate participation across language barriers.[2] In all, forty-nine persons responded to the survey: thirty-nine in Sweden and ten in Norway. Gender-wise, there were thirty-four women (twenty-five in Sweden, nine in Norway), fourteen men (thirteen in Sweden, one in Norway), and one nonbinary (Sweden). In total, three people identified themselves as homosexual and six as nonbinary sexual. Twenty-five people were between twenty-six and thirty-five years old; three were younger and two were older than sixty-six years. This bias was probably due to my own age being between twenty-six and thirty-five at this time. Regarding race and ethnicity, only five persons reported being born outside their country of residence. People's parental origin was from outside of Western Europe in only four cases. Three persons identified themselves as having Asian origin. Regarding religion, there were three self-proclaimed Christians and one Muslim. Furthermore, the spatial distribution of regional residency was extremely unevenly concentrated in urban regions, as thirty-five individuals lived in cities (twenty-nine in the Stockholm region) and no one in the countryside.

SenseMaker is designed as an ethnographic survey tool, where the ethnographic element involves collecting micronarratives that are then further explored through follow-up questions. The opening question, which aimed to elicit the micronarrative, read:

> Have you ever experienced something that made you reflect on the swimming hall as a social place? What happened, and what did you start to reflect on? If you don't remember any specific memory, you can reflect on how you feel about being in a swimming hall more generally.

The choice to focus on memories was intended to invite personal reflections about previous experiences. By using memories, the study avoided the contingency of lockdowns and also opened up to participants who did not necessarily visit swimming halls regularly. For example, Person 40 stated, "I never go to the swimming pool unless I have to," such as "rare exceptions to make my children happy." Moreover, the very space of the Scandinavian swimming hall studied

became a relational place expanded in time and space (Massey 2005): It became a place of the past alongside the present, but also of various different contemporary places.

The micronarrative was followed by triangular grading questions (with three extremes) on different themes regarding the shared experience: if there was something risky (physical, others' behaviors, one's appearance), the morality of the situation (hygiene, rule-following, integrity), what part of one's identity mattered most (body, gender or sexuality, values), and reasons for one's visit (exercise, relaxation, fun). Other graded questions resembled unnumbered Likert scales and focused on whether one wants to be social or alone there; whether others' presence makes one uncomfortable or comfortable; whether the visits are calming or stressful; whether the spaces are clean or dirty; and whether one feels so similar to others that one feels "like a sheep" or so different that one feels "out of place." There were also two multiple-choice questions: one regarding in which space one tends to primarily notice others' behaviors (the pool area, the locker and shower rooms, the sauna), and another on choosing the feeling that best describes one's reaction to others' behavior (scared, irritated, uncomfortable, unaffected, interested, excited, other). Finally, respondents were offered the opportunity to write answers to questions concerning how it is to spend time in swimming halls with strangers, why one visits swimming halls, and what one thinks of their future and desired development.

Given the randomness of sampling, the different types of information generated from the two methods, and the lack of any distinctive patterns in the grading and choice questions, the analysis focused on written accounts. For all graded questions, however, respondents could voluntarily elaborate on their answers in a text field. Thus, the grading and choice questions had a function: They invited respondents to write down their reasoning on different matters that they might otherwise not have started reflecting on in connection to their micronarrative. The empirical material generated by SenseMaker that I eventually used for analysis was the written accounts. Hence, despite the two different methods, their generated data eventually took the same form: text.

The swimming diaries demanded quite a lot of the respondent; not only were they supposed to keep a diary, but they were expected to write with hardly any guidance on how or what to write. This method is fitting for participants who like to write, but I wanted to reach other temperaments as well. By comparison, the SenseMaker survey required a one-time engagement, with concrete questions and no demands regarding the length of written answers—indeed, one did not have to write anything except for a few words in the answer field for the micronarrative (one survey taker wrote down only three words). Thus, by combining these two methods and piling the survey answers and diary entries together, a rich and genuine multitude of voices was provided. The freedom of the diary form encouraged some participants to make associations between the particular visit and memories from other occasions, or to make reflections on cultural and social issues; the guidance provided by the survey form invited both straightforward answers and replies that problematized the questions themselves.

To analyze the collected data, I identified recurring themes while reading through it all (approximately 77,000 words)—if one sentence mentioned, for example, sensations of disgust, I grouped this quote with other similar quotes and created a subtheme under the overarching theme of feelings. Other themes included corporeality (with subthemes such as nudity and sexualization), sociality (rules, strangers, difference, looking, etc.), and spaces (sauna, changing room, etc.). In this way, gradually a totality emerged with some overarching recurrences, which I eventually made sense of through the discovery of Sartre's theory of seriality and the look. With these concepts in turn, I discerned two overarching themes: coexistence with strangers and identity issues. Within the former, there were two subthemes: experiences of sharing activity space (the pool areas) and the undressed space (of the shower, dressing, and sauna rooms). The theme of identity is subdivided into themes of race and racism and gender and sexuality. The choice of narratives and quotes to illustrate the empirical totality tries to accurately reflect the plurality of attitudes and voices.

Swimming Hall Serialities

Serial Spaces and Behaviors

A typical swimming hall has as its main attraction a twenty-five-meter swimming pool—sometimes it can be double that length. Usually, there is a smaller and shallower pool for small children and educational

purposes, and since the 1990s, it has been common to include a small whirlpool and water playground. Larger facilities have more pools but also usually a waterpark area aimed at children and families. As in other countries, Nordic municipal pools went through a paradigm shift between the 1980s and 2000s, from being conceived predominantly as places for exercise swimming to places for family experiences. The contemporary average Scandinavian swimming hall is no amusement park, however—even the large adventure-oriented complexes have large spaces for rectangular pools frequented by sports clubs, aquatic exercise and teaching classes, play hours, and, when no one has booked the pool, civilian swimming.

When I spectate the indoor scenes of the swimming halls I usually visit, I can observe several different series: the swimmers in the different lanes, the children playing, the relaxers in the whirlpool, the patient parents waiting while their children attend swimming school, the individuals washing themselves alongside each other in the shower room, the sauna bathers, the people getting dressed and undressed, and so on. All these temporal-spatial gatherings are, as long as not everyone in the gathering knows everyone else, different place-specific series. Of course, in the swimming lanes, individuals can swim in different ways, at different speeds, and for different purposes. Often, amateurs and professionals, fast and slow swimmers, social and nonsocial, share the same lanes. This practical-inert finitude of lanes is a source of much frustration, and one might register Others breaking the more-or-less tacit rules of behavior and interaction. Nonetheless, in this place, at this time, these different subjectivities form a series together through their overarching serial behavior: swimming back and forth in the same water. Depending on the level of abstraction and scale, I can indeed observe all visitors in the different rooms as part of a series of their own: Its members have entered the facility, passed through the dressing and shower rooms, and are (for different reasons) engaged in the activity of being swimming hall visitors. They are socially separated yet united by the building itself and its customs. Furthermore, the architecture of an average swimming hall is the historical-geographical result of series of decisions and actions of Others from elsewhere in time and space. These former actions, now objectified, then interact with the series of habitual behaviors and customs, themselves also resulting from an innumerable series of individual and collective "behaviors," "feelings," and "thoughts" (Sartre [1960] 2004, 266) from before and elsewhere.

I discovered Sartre's seriality when trying to articulate several respondents' experiences of the swimming hall as a place where people are "strangers together" (Person 33). When asked if they visited swimming halls to socialize or to be alone, Person 3 found the question unanswerable as they "would describe it more as being left alone with others." Person 14 also problematized the question: "I don't experience it as spending time with [others], but often see it as my own time. Like we don't move in the room together but in parallel lines." Furthermore, on the question of whether one feels similar or different to other visitors, Person 3 answered:

> Similarity is not the right concept. It is the activity, and not the similarity between us, that unites us. It is also precisely because we are socially different, that we come from different social groups and ages, that creates the feeling of a group/herd—a heterogeneous group, that is.

One of the diary writers reflected on her calm early-morning swims with strangers:

> We are all there with our own private agenda and at the same time we are doing something very intimate together. It's like going to church. Alone together. Everyone knows. No one disturbs. (Person 53)

Of course, there are many occasions when visitors get disturbed by one another, for a myriad of reasons: from Others getting in the way to Others' lack of hygiene. Furthermore, many people visit the swimming hall just to socialize, however predominantly with people they bring with them from the "outside," such as families and friends. Even here, though, people are "alone together" in the sense that these small groups are within the series of Other-visitors. Moreover, one athlete explained that the very sport of competitive swimming is itself "individual-oriented," but "despite this fact" you do this to "participate together with the club, which creates team spirit" (Person 45). Sartre ([1960] 2004, 266) clarified that in every nonserial activity we find a serial one and vice versa. A case in point is Person 1, who has, after twenty years of early-morning visits, built up a small "community" together with fellow daybreak swimmers. Although they hardly meet outside of these walls, and their interaction is

"superficial," they have some sort of personal bonds in here. Whether or not these social relationships can be classified as serial or not, the sociospatial conditions of this group are indeed serialized, both considering the behavior and the space: "After all, this superficial community is meaningful to me. It makes training fun and makes me feel at home in the swimming pool." Another example is a diary note on how a man found himself alone in the changing room with an elderly father and his son: The son helped his disabled father get dressed in a very caring way, and the writer, pretending not to notice them, nonetheless felt as if he briefly became himself part of this very personal bond:

> It was very … intimate, close, very personal in some way to take part in that little, short moment—the experience there together. … It was like I got to see a little, little fragment [within] someone's life there, accompany them for a little while. Right there our paths met and, well, maybe the paths will never meet again, but for that little moment indeed. (Person 55)

Nausea of Sharing Differently. In the swimming hall context, social activities can be classified into a binary between exercise and recreation, each of which in turn can be divided into social activity and passivity. The unique thing about swimming halls is precisely that their pools are supposed to account for all these different social activities and for all ages—often simultaneously. Yet, despite all these differences, at one level, every hall and every visit are the same for everyone: Every visitor encounters dressing rooms, showers, turquoise water, and a certain type of air.

> There is security there: life changes, but the swimming pool remains, with the smell of chlorine, turquoise water, the feeling of being in the water, the showers in a row, the sound volume, one's wrinkled fingers, the calm in the body afterward. I appreciate all that. (Person 15)

Nonetheless, one major finding is the sheer difference between experiences of swimming hall visits as overall stressing or relaxing, comfortable or uncomfortable, and so on. For example, Person 1 is "never disturbed by other visitors" because they are her "fellow swimmers. Sharing the place and the experience of it with others is only positive for me." Meanwhile, there are others who think that the staff are too "cautious to tell people [almost only guys] who are disturbing" (Person 12) in the lanes by swimming the wrong way. There are two serial collectives predominantly invoked as "disturbing": children and men—the former for their rowdiness, and the latter for their lack of respect. This disrespect concerns mostly the taking up of space or swimming "wrong," but it is also about men's objectifying looking (which is developed later).

Of course, the accounts do not refer to the same facility, nor to visits at the same time. There are reasons to suspect, however, that in the same facility and at the same time, someone's relaxing atmosphere might be someone else's stressful environment. Indeed, Person 40 recalled from her visits as a child that "fun play for some is not always fun play for others," and Person 55 was boiling with anger after getting his exercise ruined by rowdy kids whose noisiness was accentuated by the hall's acoustics. Another example of this difference within a serial gathering is found when compiling accounts from respondents who only visit swimming halls for the sake of their children—most often for the children's enjoyment, but also to help them establish water habits or learn to swim. Some of these parents do not enjoy being in the facility at all: One could not swim himself, another found the overall environment stressful, a third was reminded of her own childhood memories of visiting swimming halls with the school, which she "dreaded" (Person 7).

Maybe the greatest example of how the seriality of swimming halls contains different attitudes and feelings toward the series in question is the division regarding the smell of chlorine: Several respondents loved this smell, whereas others found it disgusting. Namely, some people find swimming halls overall to be nauseous spaces. Because of their moist indoor environment combined with the chemicals, washing rituals, and disrobed bodies, swimming halls do indeed contain many visual-tactile signs of abjection (cf. Sartre [1943] 2009, 625–32): Mold, hairs, fluff, saliva, snot, and so on, might be found everywhere here. Consider Person 4's reflection:

> In general, I am struck by a strong smell of old moisture and sweat in the dressing room, [as I] see disgusting tile joints with moisture damage. The pool itself can also have other disgusting smells that penetrate the smell of chlorine. When such smells appear, I start to think about what the drains look like, if the pool will collapse. [I'm] also thinking a lot about how people breathe when they swim, how they spit out water/saliva—it becomes like the water is a big pool of body fluids.

Perhaps these considerations were amplified by her recollection of when she saw

> a woman [shaving] her genitals in the public shower. It disgusted me to see something so private, and I have never before or since seen anyone do this. It felt unbelievably unrestrained.

She tried to make sense of this subversive behavior: Was the Other woman homeless and could therefore not tend to her hygiene anywhere else? But was it even acceptable then? Or was there something wrong with *her* in reacting so strongly? Maybe Others did not react, as they did not seem to care. Here, we see a glimpse of the phenomenological dialectic of the look: how one looking at an Other leads to looking at oneself as an Other.

The disgust with Others in the series does not have to come from the perception of Others' actions, but sometimes from their very corporeal alterity. Person 27's memory told of abjection of human bodies when he watched as the staff hoisted an arm- and legless man into a whirlpool, "whereupon the other bathers left the whirlpool. I was happy that the man was welcome and that they had the tools to make the place accessible to him and sad that the bathers were so weirded out by him." Sometimes it is not the look at, but the smelling of the Other that causes nausea. Person 20 did stop swimming as her form of exercise after having enough of the "smell of old men" in the swimming lane: "My experience became so strong that I would gag every time I swam past an elderly gentleman."

Being Undressed Together. In Nordic bathhouses, users are expected (since at least the late 1800s) to shower with no fabric whatsoever. The dressing and showering rooms also, as a rule, do not offer privacy booths; instead, the rooms are divided into male and female areas. It is also standard that the sauna (a must in at least Finnish and Swedish bathhouses) is gender segregated, with each area having its own. In the sauna, you must sit on a towel for hygienic reasons, and it is traditionally expected for users to be completely undressed there as well. These expectations of dishabille, however, are anything but strictly followed. It is common to see various signs instructing visitors about the same things: Shower completely naked before bathing, use soap, do not wear underwear, and sit on a towel in the sauna. One should keep in mind that not only do different cultural traditions prescribe different conceptions of nudity and modesty, but also different ideas of what is hygienic and what is not. Of course, such differences are also found among individuals of the same "cultures."

Otherwise, the sociality of the swimming hall's gender-segregated spaces was fittingly summarized by Person 13: "It's like public transport but naked." She explained that these are "one of the few intimate (naked) places with total strangers, often people who don't otherwise encounter each other in everyday life." This paradox of intimacy and alienation was also acknowledged by Person 3: In the women's changing room, "it's almost as if you know each other, that you are part of the same herd as human animals, sort of." Except for the qualitative difference in degree of nudity, the difference between these spaces and the pool space lies in the diminished range and kinetic intensity of activities: People are more naked and do more of the same thing. The accounts of these spaces also focus predominantly on the situational nudity: Some respondents found the serial atmosphere relaxing, whereas others seemed to put effort into behaving as if they were relaxed. Person 14, for example, did not "want people to find it uncomfortable that" she is "aware of their bodies. They're just there to do their thing. So I pay close attention to my own behavior." Disinterested reciprocity is an active undertaking, but the degree of exertion differs between individuals. Because of the omnipresence of nudity, in these undressed areas, the look appears as omnipresent in how people interact with each other. In a paradoxical way, people here engage in serial interaction where everyone treats each other as "objects" to counteract each and one own's "defenseless state as objects"; "the right of seeing without being seen" (Sartre [1943] 2009, 312) is guaranteed by acting as if oneself does not see.

These spaces' seriality is, however, experienced by many as fragile. Once, Person 8 encountered a colleague in the shower who also had her daughter with her, a former pupil of Person 8: "We had not arranged a meeting with each other where we agreed to be naked. We bumped into each other by accident and thus my nudity was somehow imposed on the other people." Such short-circuits of the alienation might be uncomfortable because of the look's impact on one's sense of nudity. In her middle school years, Person 39 "felt uncomfortable" with the sauna because "everyone seemed to have slightly different personal rules/boundaries around their nudity." Others find the situation space unpalatable

because of their encounter with their look on their own body by the sheer presence of disinterested Others. One person loved going to the swimming hall with his kids, but he feared the shower rooms: "I am self-conscious about my body and find it discomforting and vulnerable to be naked with others. I judge how self-confident and secure in their bodies other people seem to be." Of course, nudity is per se inseparable from notions of gender and sexuality (Wiltse 2007).

Serial Beings

The Nordic swimming hall's architecture indeed makes gender-being a "practico-inert reality": Gender division, and thus (non)belonging, is built into the physical spaces themselves. Add to this the state of undress and the patriarchal objectification of the female body, and we have an "overdetermined" gendered serial gathering in the swimming hall. Due to this exposure of skin, however, another set of serial categorizations is also latently ubiquitous: racialized series.

Race-Beings. Compared with other kinds of Scandinavian public spaces, the gathering of individuals in swimming halls, at least in densely populated regions, tends to be unusually multiracial:

> So many different languages and colors and shapes. I thought: what other places are there in our time and our city [Stockholm] where white and Black, Asian and Middle Eastern bodies meet in this way? Completely democratic. Without attributes. When am I found with my whiteness and all my privileges so close to bodies from, I don't know, Uzbekistan and China and Afghanistan and Somalia, on exactly the same terms, as here? Never, I think. It's stunning and beautiful. (Person 53)

Indeed, several respondents (all self-identifying as white, ethnic Swedish) pointed out this idiosyncrasy of the collective and spoke positively about it. Due to the lack of diverse representation, the textual material includes only two accounts of experiences of being racialized in these spaces. Person 49 said people tend to check her out "because I am Asian looking. But I usually ignore them," and Person 18, also Asian looking, once found himself in the sauna with a group of white retirees talking:

> It was obvious that they felt safe in this room and could talk about things that would not normally be brought up in public, such as "Thai whores," etcetera. They noticed my presence and somehow, I disturbed them. Not that they fell silent, on the contrary. I actually think they spoke louder and with more emphasis precisely because I was there, as if to mark territory. As if to mark for both me and themselves that they would certainly not be silenced by me. … I became very self-conscious. I wondered how my behavior affected them, and what would be a reasonable and effective counter-action.

Here, we see how the series of racial being plays out through the look and the serialization and objectification of Person 18 as racial Other. Because of the seniors' racist objectification of women-Others who supposedly are "elsewhere," Person 18 became registered as another Other within this series of "Asians." Furthermore, through their looking at him, Person 18 recognized his belonging to this series of Asian-being; that is, his being-outside-himself-in-the-other (Sartre [1960] 2004, 268) in reference to multiple Asian-being Others elsewhere. What, however, makes this situation place-specific is the provided intimacy of strangers by the spatial design. Here, "the Other sex" is excluded, and men are to sit down and relax undressed together, with no surveillance, both with friends and strangers—within the larger building's seriality, here is a potential "safe space" of group intimacy. Here, there is space to form a group, if only temporarily. Whereas other respondents talked of small moments of such groupings in the sauna (whether male or female) as something lovely, Person 18 revealed that surely there is nothing inherently positive about them.

Gender-Beings. There are several voices praising the swimming hall's social role in teaching girls—against destructive gender norms—about the multiplicity of female body shapes and types. Person 33 remembered:

> When I was a teenager, I—like most teenage girls—had body complexes of various kinds and therefore started working out and swimming at the local swimming pool a few times a week. I remember it was the first time I saw strange naked women in the dressing room, and it was almost frightening how incredibly varied their bodies were. However, after going there regularly for a few weeks, I noticed that my slightly horrified look at the other women in the dressing room had softened, and that in turn affected how I perceived my own body. It has been so valuable to me.

On the other hand, Person 44 remembered when, as a ten-year-old, she entered the women's changing room and was shocked by the carelessness of nudity: "It surprised me how 'free' the adult ladies were; they just strolled around and showered as if no one else was there." These are examples of how serial behavior affects serial being: The active mutual ignorance of each other here has a positive function for these girls' self-images—it becomes a collective shielding against the patriarchal look. Today, when Person 44 brings her three-year-old son to the women's wardrobe, she tries to behave in the same way for pedagogical reasons: "I feel I must be a good role model with a relaxed relationship with the body and nudity. When I'm alone [there], I don't manage this to the same extent." The last sentence indicates that this exhibited carelessness might not always be experienced as such. Whereas Person 19 loved these backstage spaces because "the tits get to flutter freely. It's wonderful!," other women found "the experience of nudity in the dressing room" difficult: "I am shy about nudity in front of others and have a hard time letting go of the thought of others watching me, both while undressing and in swimwear" (Person 9).

Moving to the gender-mixed activity spaces, this divergence in corporeal comfort is also discernible when it comes to notions of sexuality. Person 53 felt that "nothing is as unsexy as a bathhouse" because of its "complete renunciation of sexual energy." There are other experiences regarding the presence of sexual energy, however. Although Person 21 "really [wanted] to enjoy" herself at the swimming hall, she was caught by negative memories of being sexually assaulted (in the changing room). Many recalled their teenage years' "sexual energy" in this exciting space, where friends, acquaintances, and strangers of the same age were unusually undressed together. Nonetheless, teenage girls can also become involuntary targets of the Other's sexual energy. Person 6 recalled when, as an adolescent, she and her two girlfriends were told off by a (slightly) older male staff member for not having showered before entering the pool. During their subsequent bickering, she felt his gaze objectifying her: "I felt both humiliated and exposed to his gaze, while also finding it a little exciting. The emotional sensation was mainly a strong nervousness." Young (1994) stated that one recognizes one's "serialized existence" as a woman in situations in which one must "anticipate deprecation or humiliation from a man" (731). Given the increased exposure of one's body to the nonpositional and personal look, several women sensed this serialized existence constantly in the pool space: "Being more aware of yourself and your own body also makes you more attentive to others, also to scan the room for potential dangers as you, as a woman, can never escape the fact that you are exposed" (Person 20). Person 39 was almost explicit about how she tried to handle the look through serial behavior in the pool area: "I avoid eye contact and do not expose my naked body to the gaze of strangers for longer than necessary." One nonbinary person explained that "It feels more exposing" in the swimming hall than elsewhere because "the body, language, hair, skin color, how the body is designed/functions are the only things that mark or delimit one's belonging." They continued by invoking "the male gaze" (Mulvey 1975):

> In the swimming pool, there is like the "male gaze" (perhaps internalized) and a normative gaze, children staring or guys staring at you. At the same time, everyone is exposed to this, being physically exposed, and it creates a culture of "whatever," you may care in a way, but since it is normal to vary, it becomes less of a thing. (Person 3)

Once again, although it is through serial behavior that the sufferings of one's serial being become actualized, serial behavior also becomes a protection against this very suffering. This emotional dialectic of seriality is furthermore conditioned by the social and physical practico-inert reality of space itself. Although the series of the swimming hall all have origins "elsewhere," their geographical gathering in this particular composition nonetheless creates place-specific behaviors, feelings, and thoughts.

Conclusion

Hidden within a protracted footnote, Sartre ([1960] 2004, 307–08) acknowledged a "real [theoretical] problem—which we cannot go into here," namely: "Must the disappearance of capitalist forms of alienation mean the elimination of all forms of alienation?" Left unanswered by Sartre himself, this question might imply that just because the *Critique* searched for the seeds of liberation from class society does not have to mean that Sartre thought of all kinds of alienation in everyday life as necessarily

destructive (see also Catalano 1986, 147). For example, it is hard to imagine how a public pool could function without a dominant order of interpersonal alienation—without seriality as the prevailing social bond. Given the multiplicity of beings gathered, combined with the tension between demanded nudity on one hand and private intimacy and public shame on the other, there might not be any better way to organize the public pool space than as an everyday atomized public space. Indeed, as revealed in this study, serial behavior in the swimming hall is both the source of, and the remedy for, the frictions arising from exposure to strangers and their gazes. In this case study, mutual ignorance and semiunawareness often serve as the basis for individual senses of "community" feelings, even though people neither know nor actively interact with their fellow "community" members. In any case, without the serial mode of interaction and the shared interest among strangers in having a public pool, the public pool—with its corporeal, mental, and social pleasures—would not exist.

Although we here have appropriated seriality to describe individual experiences of a mundane sociality in a unique spatiality, this theory highlights that social life overall is challenging, regardless of the number of people involved or their (varied) degree of estrangement. As social structures are always-already inherited from previous actions from elsewhere in time and space, or, to use Massey's (2005) term, because of society's spatial throwntogetherness, the alienating character of seriality is found in every kind of social space. In practically every spatial gathering, a multitude of intersectional experiences of conviviality and distress coexist—in spite of, and thanks to, social alienation.

Thus, a lesson for critical geographical phenomenology is that there are several kinds of alienation, which need not be treated as inherently good or bad. Such moral judgments should be made depending on the particular situation at hand, in both its social (historical-geographical) and subjective (experiential) dimensions. Nevertheless, there certainly are inherent dangers with seriality, such as dehumanizing objectification made through the logic of identity-being. This is where we return to the original issue of the serial thinking of culture wars. Recall how media consumption is a serial activity closely aligned with the illusion of national community, and how racism and sexism get reproduced through serial thinking. Genuine concerns for other peoples' behavior affecting oneself (because we cannot ignore the existence of human aggression and fear) readily get manipulated into serialized thinking of Other persons as inherently Other beings, objectified to be the bearers of aggression and fear. In the Nordic context of today, social events and conflicts in swimming halls are used as proofs of fundamental societal antagonisms between cultural values and sexual and racial Others (Hansson n.d.). This study has attempted to show that public places, even those remarkably intimate, indeed contain personal and social tensions, but that this is precisely why they work as public places. Hell is other people, Sartre (2010) once wrote. In such a genuinely pluralist space as the Nordic swimming hall, certainly Other people make Other people's hell constantly. What Sartre showed us is that ultimately this is not the result of certain values, but of the condition of being human.

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Notes

1. The research project was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and received institutional permission to conduct human subjects research.
2. I also managed to get help translating it into Tigrinya (although no participant used this option) and had plans to have it translated into Arabic and Somali as well—but there was not enough time.

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