Dis/place/d Consumers: A Multi-Sited Ethnography of LGBT+ Groups in Manchester

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Abstract

This thesis proposes the dis/place/d consumer as an alternative way of understanding place consumers within ambivalent networks of humans and nonhumans. In the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) tradition of marketing and consumer research there is a vast body of literature on the topic of ‘space and place consumption’. The majority of this literature focuses on understanding and theorising places and has paid far less attention to critically interrogating and developing the notion of the ‘place consumer’. It is argued that place consumers are implicitly conceptualised as agentic subjects of consumption who freely interpret, make-decisions about, and act upon places as the objects of consumption. However, this understanding is asynchronous with contemporary material-semiotic developments in CCT where agency is understood in more complex ways and where the subject-object binary has been challenged. Drawing on material-semiotic ideas, this study proposes that the place consumer can be re-conceptualised through the notion of ambivalent actor-networks.

The ambivalent actor-network conceptualisation is combined with data generated through a multi-sited ethnography with three LGBT+ leisure groups in Manchester, a city in the northwest of England. The resulting analysis and interpretation identifies three different ways in which place consumers emerge through actor-networks: as displaced consumers, as placed consumers, and as agentic place consumers. These evolve through two different phases of ambivalence: conflicting and co-operative. These five concepts are integrated into the dis/place/d consumer framework, which highlights how these different consumers and ambivalences are not discrete but co-emergent and overlapping phenomena.

The dis/place/d consumer framework provides a more complex and dynamic way of understanding the actions and experiences of place consumers, as well as their relationships to other place consumers and to places of consumption. In doing so it brings together material-semiotic thinking with the study of place consumption.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Acknowledgements

Writing is an act of petrification, in both senses of the word. In the first sense writing is a process of ossification, the reformulation of nebulous thoughts into black and white symbols. Once printed or published ideas are lapidified and subject to scrutiny. The first sense of the word engenders the second; because the product of writing is so formal, final, and fixed it can be a frightening prospect to commit oneself to an argument, a structure, even a turn of phrase. To commit to something with an anticipation of a readership, however small in number and friendly in disposition that audience may be, is anxiety-inducing.

Of course, writing is also an exhilarating and stimulating process, and turning thoughts into words that might be read can be inspiring. But to experience these benefits I needed to struggle through the periods when writing was not so easy, and when my project seemed lost. There were many such times—perhaps I was doing it all wrong— but fortunately I did not struggle alone. I had the benefit of being surrounded by many great people, extra-ordinary each in their own inimitable way, to enthuse me, believe in me, and challenge me. A significant amount of credit is due to these people, whom I name below, and my sincerest gratitude goes out to them for all that they did for me, knowingly or otherwise.

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My Partner: Matt; for your dedication, patience, and support, and for reminding me to have fun along the way.
Chapter 1: Introduction

I am writing this introduction one week before my thesis is due to be bound and submitted, sitting at the breakfast bar that I have recently commandeered as a writing desk. It is almost 10pm and it is quiet; except for the sound of the occasional car gliding down on the wet road outside the house, the periodic roar of a jet engine coming in to land at Manchester airport, and the (barely) muffled sounds of the neighbours and their children through one row of bricks. It is in this relative peace that I am trying to think back to the time, over four years ago now, when I found myself applying for a doctoral programme in marketing and consumer research. I write of ‘time’ because there was not a specific day or event that set the process in motion, and I use the phrase ‘found myself applying’ because I wish to stress that I was not alone in the application process. There were many other people involved, not to mention a plethora of non-human influencers, that it is more honest to describe myself as a minor participant in a far broader network. This network reconstituted me as someone who had the desire, confidence, and (just enough) know-how to apply, and an even greater network made my application successful. From this point of view it is somewhat disingenuous to try and write an ‘origin story’ that explains why I was motivated to explore the topics that I did, at least not in the form of an intensive introspection. Rather, I need to trace outward to the networks of interactions and relationships from which this piece of research, and my subject position as a researcher, emerged.

In the acknowledgements section preceding this introduction I have already mentioned the various people that contributed to this text, so in this section I want to pay more attention to the non-humans who (as material-semioticians have argued repeatedly) are often overlooked in social research. Specifically I want to focus on places, given that they are a central theme in this project. In the literature review I will give a number of theoretical justifications for choosing Manchester as a research context, but in some sense Manchester chose itself as the locus of research. To put it more prosaically, it was because I was based in Manchester at the inception of, and
throughout, the research process that the project evolved as it did. If I had been based elsewhere I might not have been prompted to ask the questions that I asked, read the literature that I read, or devise the methodology that I devised. This is an obvious statement, of course, but one worth making because the symbiotic relationship between researchers and researched are often overlooked (or purposefully omitted) in the course of writing up a project. Researchers appear (and feel) far more authoritative if they chose the context, rather than if they admit that it was more of a partnership (see Haraway, 1997).

In Manchester it was the Gay Village that was of theoretical (and personal) interest. Here was a place that was demarcated for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and other non-heterosexual (LGBT+) people, but one that appeared to be on the decline. During my time as an undergraduate student in Manchester I had spent much of my leisure time in this part of the city, yet over these three short years I had perceived a shift in the constitution of this place. A number of venues had closed or changed, but there were also other changes - less visible, less easily described, but no less palpable - underway. Talking to my friends made it clear that I was not alone in my nascent assessment, as did a variety of opinion pieces (which I will discuss in section 2.5.3). There was something to investigate, and as the Gay Village was primarily a commercial district it might be something worth investigating from the point of view of marketing and consumer research. Yet despite how compelling I (may have) made this seem in retrospect, at the time I was not interested in the Gay Village as an object of research. This was but one set of interactions and relations that was taking place in my extended network, but one that had yet to become active in the research process.

Another non-human influence was the work of Steven Kates, which focused on the ‘gay male subcultures’ of North America and Australia around the turn of the millennium (1997-2004). I enjoyed reading this body of research because I was familiar with many of the cultural references that he was describing and using as the basis of his theoretical work. However, I also found this work frustrating because it presented gay men as a stigmatised and segregated group of people with their own distinctive style of dressing, talking, and behaving. This subculture, as Kates (2002)
described it, was rather alien to my own experiences in Manchester and my home city of London. His emphasis on style suggested to me that sexuality only mattered when it was made visible through consumption, and it was only made visible when it was either (a) hyper-sexualised, or (b) deviated from gender norms. Importantly, Kates was building on a rich tradition within sociology and cultural studies about what sexuality (and gender) was, and his work had exerted a strong influence on how marketing and consumer research conceptualised gay men. I hasten to add that other LGBT+ people were often understood through the same lens as gay men. This was a problem that I was not particularly aware of or sensitive to in the early stages of this project, but it will become relevant later.

I began my project seeking to find a way of rethinking the relationships between sexuality and consumption in a way that avoided focusing solely on visibility. I was effectively trying to explore, and theorise, how sexual identities could be constructed invisibly via consumption. I turned to Goffman’s (1967) work on homosexuals who ‘pass’ as heterosexual, but the problem with his perspective was that it focused on these men’s conscious efforts to hide their stigmatised desires and activities. I was interested in exploring the lives of less stigmatised gay men, and through informal conversations it became clear to me that any identity construction was probably non-conscious. This was because the people that I spoke to actively rejected the idea that there was anything to study in the first place. Sexuality does not matter anymore, they collectively told me, gay men are just normal like everybody else. At first this was disheartening; I began to become uncomfortable talking about my project because the reaction was generally dismissive, if not outright negative. But it also marked a turning point in my thinking. Star (2010, p.605) writes of “that funny feeling of finding an anomaly... little irritating feeling, kind of a pre-sneeze sensation—and it is also exciting.” Perhaps it was the notion of normalcy that I needed to investigate- what were gay men talking about when they described themselves (or others) as normal?
I turned to the rich tradition of practice theory because it emphasised how human action was often habitual, pre-conscious, and driven by the contingencies of the immediate context more than deliberate human reasoning and decision-making (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005, 2015). Perhaps sexuality could be thought of in such terms, as a practice rather than an identity, something that was done rather than constructed and expressed? It was around this time that I stumbled on the term ‘post-gay’, which describes gay men (and it is predominantly young, white, middle-class, technologically-savvy gay men; Nash, 2013) who downplay or even deny the relevance of their sexuality beyond sexual desires and activities. Post-gays eschew the notions of gay identity, community, culture, politics, pride events, and places (Burston, 1991; Collard, 1998; Augirre-Livingston, 2011). The avoidance of gay villages (or ‘gayborhoods’) in North America was particularly salient in the academic literature at the time (Ghaziani, 2014; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014), but at this stage I had yet to become fixated on the topic of place. It was the broader post-gay notion that piqued my interest because it gave me an empirical handle around which to wrap my theory. Post-gay men were very unlikely to use consumption in distinctive ways, but perhaps they used consumption inconspicuously to substantiate (or enact) their anti-identities?

Reformulating these ideas for the purposes of this introduction makes me think that I may have been onto something interesting. However, at some point during this time something ‘slipped’, to paraphrase Butler (1993). I cannot recall exactly why, but my inchoate ideas about the consumption practices of post-gay anti-identities began to become more problematic than productive. Perhaps it was the obvious methodological issue of studying something that was invisible (and actively denied) by the people involved. There was also a growing feeling of discontent with focusing solely on gay men at the expense of other LGBT+ people, as previous research had done. Related to this was a growing recognition that the ‘post-gay’ lifestyle was limited to a very small group of rather privileged people (Ghaziani, 2011; Ng, 2013; Nash, 2013), and that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia were still manifest in a variety of everyday events and ongoing legal battles (as documented in the news and social media). A study focusing on ‘post-gay consumption’ began to seem out-of-
touch, and perhaps even irresponsible in the sense that it redirected attention away from more pressing issues.

A third factor that influenced my shift in thinking was my partner at the time, who was an architectural student and was (unsurprisingly) very passionate about places. The theory of how places were designed and how they influenced human lives was a regular topic of ours discussions, and I began to become increasingly interested in the phenomena of space and place in relation to my own work. At some point there was a confluence between this newfound interest in space and place, my earlier feeling that Manchester’s Gay Village was changing, and the various mentions of post-gays avoiding gay villages in the academic literature (see section 2.5). I recalled that gay villages had featured prominently in the work of Steven Kates, where he had used the evocative term ‘ghetto’ to describe how these were places of segregation but also community. My own experiences of Manchester’s Gay Village were patently different from the ghetto-like existence that Kates detailed, and while researchers in sociology and geography were documenting how gay villages were changing (e.g. Ghaziani, 2014; Nash, 2013, Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014), they were only briefly or tangentially considering how such changes were related to consumption and markets.

My project was coming together but it remained ill-defined. Wolcott (2009, p.34) advises researchers to complete the sentence “the purpose of this study is...” in order to specify the topic and intention of their research from the outset. At this stage I found it difficult to complete this sentence, and almost impossible to commit to any formulation of purpose that I devised. At some point I stumbled across Actor-Network Theory (ANT), but did not truly appreciate the multitudinous ideas within this diverse tradition. The main lesson that I drew was that non-human stuff can act. A talk by Domen Bajde at the Canon of Classics doctoral seminar (in Odense, 2014) improved my understanding of ANT, but I still did not recognise the potential of this perspective. It was only many months later when I engaged with (or was engaged by?) the broader literature on material-semiotics that I recognised how this approach might help me resolve some of the conceptual challenges that I had made for myself.
Most importantly, I thought it could help me to formulate what I wanted my project to be about.

Material-semiotics allowed me to think in terms of hazy becomings rather than stable beings, and of co-constitutive relating rather than deterministic relationships. Material-semiotics provides a worldview where “everything is in process and at stake” (Bettany and Kerrane, 2011, p.1747), and thus pushes the burden of explanation onto empirical research (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2013). In other words, material-semioticians challenge and deconstruct neat and stable worldviews, but they must follow this up by describing and explaining the messy realities that they have redirected attention toward. While other intellectual traditions tell a researcher what to look out for and how to interpret what they observe (Warde, 2014), material-semiotics challenges pre-existing models (especially binary ones) and encourages researchers to develop their own tailor-made understandings that appreciate the messiness, co-emergence, and process of reality (Law, 1999, 2009; Latour, 2005). It was through material-semiotic questioning, particularly questions of subject-object and of agency, that I came to hone in on a research project.

The purpose of this introduction was to provide some background to the uncertain evolution of this project. Undoubtedly there is much that I have left out, either due to forgetfulness or not being attentive enough in the first instance to the human and non-humans that influenced me. Despite these inevitable omissions, I hope that this section is enough to contextualise the study that will commence earnestly in the next chapter. Many of the ideas and questions described above have inflected the discussions to come, but for the purposes of clarity I will need to concern myself only with the ideas and questions that I have set out to address. Put another way, while this introduction has outlined some of the projects that might have been, the following chapters attend only to the project that was undertaken.

The messy trajectories documented in this introduction would often be omitted during the writing up of research in order to establish the authority of the researcher (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009), in part by establishing the researcher as organised and conscientious decision-makers. I have presented myself as ambivalent
and swayed by various external influences, with my research project emerging through struggle rather than being neatly planned out in advance. This is not to suggest that I avoided planning and making decisions, but merely to recognise how my plans and decisions were emergent and entangled just like the phenomena that I hoped to study. In the methodology chapter I will explore these emergent and entangled plans/decisions in much more detail. Before then, the next chapter introduces the theoretical topic of this study by reviewing the existing academic literature.

At this point it is worth briefly stating that I will use the third person mode of address in the next chapter, before switching back to the first person in the methodology chapter. Chapters 4 (findings) and 5 (discussions and conclusion) will also be in the third person. The use of the third person is partly a compromise with the conventions of the conventional thesis format, and partly because I came to writing in the first person (and the confidence that it necessitates) relatively late in my project. Much had already been written in the third person, but I wished to use the first person to put more of myself as a researcher into the project and into the writing. This is not just for the sake of vanity, but rather for the various epistemological reasons that I will explain in chapter 3.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Outline of the Literature Review

2.1.1. Addressing the Agentic Place Consumer

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a thorough but purposive review of the literature. It is thorough because it aims to cover enough of the literature to differentiate between what is known (or assumed) and what is unknown (or overlooked). It is purposive because it does not aim to be an exhaustive or systematic review, but rather seeks to build an argument and thus makes judgements about which studies are more relevant and which are less so. This literature review could also be described as a ‘critical review’. “Differently from systematic reviews or meta-analyses that imply a comprehensive search,” Giovanardi & Lucarelli (2018, p.151) write, “critical reviews aim to synthesize materials from diverse sources and to facilitate the interpretative procedures inherent in conceptualization”. In other words, the purpose is not to provide a review that can confidently be described as exhaustive or complete, but rather to provide a review that guides towards a particular argument, albeit with enough critical discussion of the wider scholarly discourses and the debates to act as contextualization.¹

The spirit of this thorough but purposive literature review is encapsulated in the following quote from Law (2009, p.142), who wrote the following when introducing material-semiotics and Actor-Network Theory:

“They [texts] come from somewhere and tell particular stories about particular relations. This implies the need for a health warning. You should beware of this chapter. I hope that it works and is useful, but it comes from somewhere, rather than everywhere or nowhere. It treats the actor network approach and material semiotics in a particular way. It proposes and seeks to enact a particular version of

¹ As well as satisfying the expectations of an ‘authoritative’ review of the modernist thesis genre (Bettany, 2007a).
this animal. Beware, then, of this chapter, but beware even more of any text about actor network theory that pretends to the objectivity of an overall view.”

The ‘somewhere’ from which this literature review has come has already been outlined in the previous chapter, but it is worth stating here in advance the argument that this literature review seeks to build, or ‘where the literature review is going’.

The central argument is as follows. The existing academic literature on ‘place consumption’ has (quite rightly) focused primarily on critically developing the notion of place, moving toward an increasingly complex, dynamic, and multifaceted understanding. However, the notion of the ‘place consumer’ has not been subject to the same degree of critical interrogation. Place consumers are typically (although often implicitly) presented as agentic decision-makers who choose where to consume based on the match between their own objectives (utilitarian, social, identity-related, etc.) and the features of the place (utopian, homely, heterotopic, and so on). This taken-for-granted agency in the place consumer is asynchronous with recent developments elsewhere in marketing and consumer research, where the material-semiotic tradition has repeatedly challenged the notion of human agency and replaced it with a model of co-emergent or collaborative agency. While material-semiotics continues the theoretical development of the ‘places’ concept (by granting them more agency), the notion of the ‘place consumer’ has remained relatively untouched. It is proposed that using the material-semiotic tradition (and specifically ambivalent actor-networks) to re-conceptualise the place consumer as a subject of consumption has advantages over other approaches. The empirical context of LGBT+ consumers will later (in section 2.5) be proposed as a useful illustration of (and route to explore) this argument. Overall, this chapter hopes to suggest that challenging the agentic place consumer will have a far wider import, and impact, in the CCT discourse.

As noted above, an appreciation of the broader literature (and the contextualisation that this provides) is important. To this end, figure 2.1 below provides a conceptual map that visualises the areas of literature from which this project draws.
Figure 2.1. Conceptual map of the relevant literature.

Bold boxes and lines signify areas of literature directly relevant to the central argument. Dashed boxes and lines represent other theoretical perspectives and topics within a given area of research.
2.1.2. Disciplinary context

In the introduction chapter the terms ‘marketing and consumer research’ and ‘CCT’ were used with relatively little qualification to describe the scholarly (sub)discipline within which this study seeks to position itself and its contribution. Before continuing with the main body of the literature review it is worth defining these terms in more detail.

Marketing can be defined as the study of markets and market-promoting activities (Branchik, 2002; Venkatesh & Peñaloza, 2006), while consumer research can be defined as the study of consumers and their consumption activities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Goulding, 1999). While marketing and consumer research can be thought of as separate disciplines, they are closely entangled because markets and consumption are intimately entwined and cannot be adequately understood without recourse to one another.

Within the hybrid discipline of marketing and consumer research there are many different intellectual traditions or sub-disciplines. One is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), an “academic brand” proposed by Arnould and Thompson (2005, p.868) to describe, legitimise, and promote a heterogeneous group of researchers who had, up until that point, been described variously as “relativist, post-positivist, interpretivist, humanistic, naturalistic” and “postmodern”. For Arnould and Thompson (2005, p.868) these various labels obscured the similarities between these researchers, so the label of CCT was intended to bring together (and brand) these researchers who (Arnould and Thompson believed) shared an interest in “the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings.”

CCT was proposed to promote cultural research at a time when marketing and consumer research was dominated by the traditions of consumer psychology and consumer economics (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Goulding, 1999). Both treated consumers as rational decision-makers who maximised their utility without social or cultural influence, but CCT researchers sought to understand consumers as sometimes irrational humans who were driven by a plethora of different motivations and were always influenced by their interpersonal and cultural milieux (Arnould and
Despite being branded as a ‘theory’, “CCT is not a unified, grand theory, nor does it aspire to such nomothetic claims” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p.868), rather it is a diverse community of researchers (Moisander, Peñaloza, & Valtonen, 2008) producing a ‘heteroglossic’ body of research (Thompson, Arnould, & Giesler, 2013). CCT should be thought of more of a broad (and often contested) umbrella term for areas of research and groups of researchers who are loosely connected by the notion of “cultural consumer research”, which “aims to make sense of human social behaviour in terms of cultural patterning” (Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009, p. 330). While Arnould and Thompson (2007, 2015) have repeatedly defended the open-ended nature of the CCT brand, Elliot and Cova (2007, p.71) have argued that “the very diversity of this research tradition, which is a source of richness, cannot be reduced to a sole brand name”. For the remainder of this study the term CCT will be deployed as a useful and open-ended label. This act effectively produces a ‘black box’ (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 1999), silencing the debates in favour of one perspective. However, this black box is a necessary parsimony for the purposes of moving on with this project effectively.

While Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) original branding effort traced the roots of the tradition back to the 1980s, Tadajewski (2006) identified ideas and research interests akin to CCT in the form of motivational research, which emerged in the 1950s, and was itself rooted in the psychoanalytic work of the 1930s. Acknowledging this extended lineage, Bajde (2014, pp. 11-12) has subdivided the history of CCT into three periods: “proto-CCT work (1930s-1970s)”, “1980s renaissance CCT research”, and the “institutionalised CCT” that began with Arnould and Thompson’s (2005) publication. In the years following the ‘launch’ of CCT there have been many intellectual developments, one of which has been the emergence of an area of research labelled ‘consumption in and of space and place’ (Chatzidakis & McEachern, 2013; Chatzidakis, McEachern, & Warnaby, 2017). In their original article Arnould
and Thompson (2005) identified four streams or topics of CCT research - consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers interpretive strategies – and while Arnould and Thompson (2015, 2018) have yet to add ‘consumption in and of space and place’ to the official list of CCT topics, a number of recent reviews point to the substantial and ever-growing body of literature in this area (Castilhos, Dolbec, & Veresiu, 2016; Chatzidakis, McEachern, & Warnaby, 2014; Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018). It is this area of research that the next section addresses.
2.2. Place Consumption, Places, and Place Consumers

2.2.1. The ‘Spatial Turn’ in Marketing and Consumer Research

Space and place are everyday words with a wide variety of different uses. In terms of scholarship no discipline has considered the concepts of space and place as extensively as geography. The study of space and place is arguably geography’s raison d’être as a discipline (Cresswell, 2004), and over several decades the meanings of these two words (and the distinctions or relations between them) have been continually debated and redefined within a variety of geographical traditions (Agnew, 2005, 2011; Cresswell, 2013; Merriman et al. 2012).

In recent years a number of other social research disciplines have undergone a “spatial turn”, in which, “increasing emphasis is being put on the fact that all social processes take place somewhere, and that where this somewhere is makes a major difference.” (Hein, Evans, & Jones, 2008, p. 1268) Marketing and consumer research has also increasingly considered the question of ‘where’, although its spatial turn is not so recent and can be traced back to the 1960s (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018; Sherry, 2013). This turn to spatiality has prompted marketing and consumer researchers to consider “the centrality of spatial context for understanding any economic and sociocultural phenomena” (Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018, p.149), and has produced a body of literature that has been loosely dubbed “consumption in and of space and place” (Chatzidakis & McEachern, 2013; Chatzidakis et al., 2017). The term ‘space and place consumption’ is more parsimonious and will be used in the sections that follow. Recent reviews demonstrate that the literature on space and place consumption is vast (Chatzidakis et al. 2014; Castilhos et al. 2016; Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018), not to mention related areas of research like place marketing and place branding (Vuignier, 2016; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). Within this literature “place-oriented” and “space-oriented thinking” emerge as a key distinction (Gionvanardi and Lucarelli, 2018, p.155), and after exploring both this literature review hones in on the former and the (problematic) figure of the ‘place consumer’ within this mode of thinking.
2.2.2. Place in Marketing and Consumer Research

Early responses to the spatial turn were to produce a range of specialist marketing concepts like marketing geography (Applebaum, 1961), atmospherics (Kotler, 1973), and servicescape (Bitner, 1992). One reason for the development of specialist terminology may have been that marketing and consumer research was dominated by the positivist tradition for most of the twentieth century (Hudson and Ozzane, 1988; Goulding, 1999), and that the everyday terms of space and place may not have been deemed ‘scientific’ enough. It is unsurprising, then, that most of the research in these early years was inspired by environmental psychology and model of humans as stimuli-processing organisms (see Turley & Milliman, 2000).

The term ‘place’ entered the marketing lexicon in the form of the marketing mix, where it was one of the 4Ps of marketing, but here the meaning of the term place was delimited to discussions of distribution channels and the organisation of products on shelves (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018; Rosenbaum, Kelleher, Friman, Kristensson, & Scherer, 2017). What might be described as a ‘second turn’ of geographically-inspired research emerged with the onset of the interpretive tradition in marketing and consumer research, where scholars began to broaden their epistemological, methodological, and theoretical horizons beyond positivism, experimental designs, and conceptions of consumers as stimuli-processors (Cova & Elliott, 2008; Hudson & Ozzane, 1988; Sherry, 1991; Tadajewski, 2006), in what would later be branded Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Initially these researchers continued to develop marketing concepts like the servicescape from a more interpretive position (Kozinets et al. 2002; Sherry, 1998a), but the coalescence of this ‘interpretive turn’ (Sherry, 1991) with the spatial (re)turn also inspired an increased interest in the geographical notions of space and place (e.g. Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012; Maclaran & Brown, 2005; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, & Anderson, 2010).

It would be more accurate to say that this second turn inspired an increased interest in space or place, rather than space and place. As noted by Giovanardi and Lucarelli (2018), CCT researchers would primarily focus on one of these two concepts at the
expense of the other. As noted earlier, there are multiple definitions and understandings of space, place, and the relationships between them, but it can be argued that CCT has been most heavily influenced by what has been described as the humanist geographical tradition (Cresswell, 2013; Agnew, 2011).

Humanist geography emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. This new tradition was response to the (then widely-held) worldview of ‘spatial science’ that environments determined human action (Cresswell, 2013). This view is still dominant in environmental psychology (Lewicka, 2011), which has, in turn, influenced a vast body of literature on the influence of store environments on customer behaviours (see Turley and Milliman, 2000). In this view space is defined in relational terms (Harvey, 2004), its form and function defined by the dynamic relationships between material things (Law & Mol, 2001; Müller, 2015). Space is also understood as deterministic, whereby spatial arrangements determine human action “even when consumers are not consciously aware of it” (Turley and Milliman, 2000, p.195). Put another way, the spatial science and environmental psychology traditions produced accounts where space overdetermined human activities, with people being afforded very little decision-making capacity and without the ability to act differently (i.e. without agency). In these traditions ‘place’ is rarely used as a term or concept (Cresswell, 2013).

At a time when the geographical tradition was dominated by spatial science, researchers like Tuan (1974, 1977), Relph (1976, 1985), and Seamon (1980) emerged as unorthodox trailblazers for a new (humanist) tradition. Drawing on the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1962), who focused on human experiences and interpretations to explain human action, these geographers focused on understanding what places mean to people and the processes of meaning-making (Seamon, 2000). Humanist geographers inverted the logic of spatial science in several key ways. First, they moved away from thinking about space and towards the notion of ‘place’, which can be defined loosely as a “meaningful location” (Cresswell, 2004, p.11). Space was understood as absolute, “represented as pre-existing and immovable grid” (Harvey, 2004, p.2), as an empty three-dimensional container within which all objects (including places) can be
located using Cartesian coordinates. Space is inert or inactive in this view (Cresswell, 2013). Following phenomenological philosophy, humanist geographers understood places as human experiences of materiality in space (Agnew, 1987). As Seamon (2014, p.11) explains, “phenomenologically, place can be defined as any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially”. This is why the accounts of humanist geographers focus on the human interpretations, experiences, and appropriations that turn space into place (Relph, 1985; Seamon, 1980, 2000).

For humanist geographers it is humans that are deterministic (as the title of their tradition might suggest), with the meanings and materiality of place being largely shaped by the agency of human place-makers. If humanist geographers mention space in an account (note: they do not always do so) it is generally presented as non-agentic and thus determined by human action (Agnew, 2011). Humanist geographers also emphasise the importance of boundaries in defining place apart from space (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 1996; Seamon, 2014). Cresswell (2004, p.51) has argued that this understanding of place can be described as “ideographic”, which “most closely resembles the common-sense idea of the world being a set of places each of which can be studied as a unique and particular entity”. As Cresswell (2013, p.220) has more recently put it, “these conceptions of place have a sense of places being different from other ones around them”. In line with the emphasis on human agency, the boundaries of a place are not necessarily associated with any material demarcations, but rather refer to symbolic and cultural boundaries that are open to multiple (re)interpretations between groups and over time (Cresswell, 2004; Lewicka, 2011).

In this section the humanist tradition of geography has been given more attention than spatial science because it has been considerably more influential in CCT studies of space and place. Humanist geographers argued that people were “not rocks of atoms” like the spatial scientists suggested, so geography “needed desperately to put humans back in” to descriptions and explanations (Cresswell, 2013, p.104). This call for a shift towards humanist thinking was also found in early CCT research. The CCT tradition emerged as a response to the positivistic approaches that dominated
marketing and consumer research for most of the twentieth century (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Tradajewski, 2006), where the characteristics of consumption objects were thought to predetermine how consumers would use them (see Bettany, 2007b). Like humanist geographers, early CCT researchers drew heavily on the phenomenological tradition to argue consumers played an active role in interpreting consumption objects, and thus to suggest that human experience of consumption should be positioned at the heart of consumer research (Thompson et al. 1989). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that early studies of ‘space and place consumption’ in CCT honed in on the concept of place (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018), and sought to explore the meanings that places had in consumers’ lives.

CCT researchers have made a vast number of theoretical contributions to understanding consumers’ interpretations and appropriations of place. One area of research explored how spectacular flagship stores created extraordinary consumption experiences (Penaloza, 1998; Sherry, 1998b; Sherry et al. 2001). Another investigated how consumers appropriated stores like coffee shops, restaurants, or shopping centres to create homes-away-from-home (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Venkatraman & Nelson, 2008), and how people grew attached to these places (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014; Rosenbaum, 2006), or interpreted them as utopian escapes (Maclaran & Brown, 2005). A third body of literature looked at noncommercial places that were used by (anti-)consumers to resist the influence of marketers (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Kozinets, 2002; Visconti et al. 2010), or to challenge cultural expectations such as those surrounding gender (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015) and sexuality (Kates, 2002; Visconti, 2008).

The three areas of research mentioned in the previous paragraph are not an exhaustive list, and this diverse body of literature could also organised in a multitude of alternative ways, but are provided here as a list of illustrative examples. These examples are meant to illustrate how CCT researchers have drawn on the humanist geographical tradition to think about place in a far broader way than had been attempted by other areas of marketing and consumer research, which could be described as providing “an overtly managerialist- and possibly reductionist –
perspective” (Chatzidakis et al. 2017, p. 1). Despite the diversity of theoretical topics (and physical locations) covered in the studies above, a common understanding of place can be identified. Following their extensive review of the CCT literature on markets and places, Castilhos et al. (2016, p. 3) conclude that “place is a concrete and limited space that is acknowledged, understood, and invested with meanings and value”. The influence of humanist geography is plain in the emphasis on boundaries and meaning, and there is also an implicit human place-maker who ‘acknowledges’, ‘understands’, and ‘invests’. This human place-maker, or place consumer, will be considered in more detail in sub-section 2.2.4. Before then it is important to briefly consider how space has been conceptualised within marketing and consumer research.
2.2.3. Space in Marketing and Consumer Research

In the CCT discourse space is often overlooked, and occasionally used interchangeably with place, but where space is explicitly and deliberately addressed it is understood in absolutist terms- as an unbounded, meaningless amorphousness that is awaiting human intervention. For instance, Visconti et al. (2010, pp.512-3) write that “the notion of space traditionally refers to something anonymous, whereas place distinctively accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site: that is, it is “consumed space” (Sherry, 1998; Tuan, 1977)... inchoate space (such as “outer space”, “wilderness,” and “wasteland”) is rendered tractable by dwelling practices... that can convert it into place.” This creates a hierarchical dichotomy between place (meaningful, bounded, consequential in consumers’ lives) and space (meaningless, unbounded, and inert), albeit one that is often implicit. In recent years researchers have begun to question the assumptions around space and produce analyses that consider the interplay or entanglement of spaces and places. One example of this nascent countervailing discourse is the study of the anti-capitalist district of Exarcheia (Athens) by Chatzidakis et al. (2012). Like other humanist-inspired accounts, their analysis and interpretation focused on the meanings and material appropriations of human actors, including (anti-)consumers but also the (anti-)consumer researchers that study them:

“Graffiti-covered walls, bearing lurid anarchistic slogans, border restaurants and bars with names like ‘Molotof’, ‘Kalashnikov Garden’, and ‘Necropolis’, and the riot police that stand guard around the clock at main entrance points make Exarcheia a place that you cannot stray into accidentally. You are acutely aware that you have reached Exarcheia.”

(Chatzidakis et al., 2012, p.494)

At the same time, their account also considered how the spatial relationships of Exarcheia subtly shaped the practices of the local residents and the events that occurred within the district:
“physical and geometrical characteristics of the area, such as streets intersecting every 45 metres (as opposed to 220 metres in more affluent Athenian areas) can explain how the murder [of a 15-year old by an Athenian policeman] was instantly communicated and riots were spread so quickly (Makrygianni & Tsavdaroglou, 2011). Such geographical characteristics are silent facilitators of most social activity and communication in Exarcheia”.

(Chatzidakis et al. 2012, p.501)

To make sense of these ‘silent facilitators’ Chatzidakis et al. (2012) turned (briefly) to the work of Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1980), who understood spatial and social relations as interacting in a dialectical relationship. Both authors are associated primarily with the Marxist tradition of geography (see Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2013), which generally moves away from bounded, meaningful places to look at broader socio-spatial relationships and their relationship to capitalism (e.g. Harvey, 2010).

Other CCT researchers have also questioned the conventional distinctions between space and place, albeit indirectly. One is Allen (2002), who studied why consumers chose to go to particular universities, but drew on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to argue that their ‘decisions’ were not so much driven by conscious deliberations (as the theory at the time suggested), but rather by preferences internalised over a lifetime of (classed) social influence. As evidence for his alternative framework (which he dubbed FLAG: fits-like-a-glove), Allen (2002, p.522) repeatedly emphasizes the prospective students’ experiences of campus:

“They verbally summarized their FLAG choices using shorthand expressions such as, “I knew it was the place for me the moment I set foot on campus,” “I just knew it was right,” “I knew it was the one,” “I was sold immediately,” and “I felt at home there.” … their representations of their FLAG choices were laced with vivid details such as Elizabeth’s reference to free coffee and blueberry muffins or
While place was not the theoretical focus of his study, Allen (2002) went on to explain that interviewing participants about their FLAG choices in situ (that is, in the location that was being discussed) became an important methodological tool. However, while the data suggest that meanings and experiences were important, Allen’s (2002) Bourdieusian perspective focused more on the implicit, difficult-to-articulate, and often entirely unrecognised influences on consumption ‘choices’. The university campus was clearly an important influence, but not necessarily in the ‘bounded’ and ‘meaning-laden’ sense implied by the notion of place (c.f. Castilhos et al. 2016) - at least not entirely.

Skandalis, Banister, and Byrom (2016, 2017) have also used Bourdieusian thinking to understand how consumption tastes are shaped by places. In their example of music tastes, they focused on the way in which the physical and sociocultural environment of the Bridgewater Hall subtly shaped consumers tastes over time (Skandalis et al. 2016). They also explored how different places (i.e. classical music venues versus indie festivals) shaped tastes in different ways (Skandalis et al. 2017). These authors mixed the language of place with that of space, and (again) the Bourdieusian perspective pointed to a questioning of the traditional divisions between space and place. This is because spaces/places shaped people’s tastes as people were shaping their understandings of space and place. They also paid more attention to the effects of materiality and spatial relations in shaping sensory and affective experiences directly, such as the “aural architecture” of the Bridgewater Hall, also they also appreciated how these features could also be made meaningful by the management team, for instance through organizing guided tours of the building and its carefully designed soundscape (Skandalis et al. 2016, p. 937).

Another paper that has explicitly redirected focus away from a purely place-oriented focus is Lucarelli and Giovanardi’s (2016, p. 325) study of a multi-site festival called La Notte Rosa (“The Pink Night”), a weekend where the 110 kilometre coast of the Romagna Riviera in transformed by a constellation of events (“concerts, live
performances, fireworks, and other minor happenings”) and people with pink clothing, accessories, and other products. Lucarelli and Giovanardi (2016, p.327) used this festival to reconceptualise mobile consumption as “spacing consumption”, arguing that the consumption of La Notte Rosa is embodied and performed in space. However, La Notte Rosa was not described as a place because it was not bounded or fixed to any particular location. Lucarelli and Giovanardi (2016) move the CCT discourse away from focusing solely on consumption in a particular place—what Cresswell (2004, p.51) would describe as an “ideographic” understanding (see subsection 2.2.2)—to exploring the spatial aspects of consumption in more fluid ways. This is a point that these two authors would later pick up on conceptually by pointing out that space is often used to denote experiences and actions that move fluidly through three dimensions, rather than being associated with or delimited to a particular place (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018).

These studies have incrementally re-conceptualised the space-place distinction by demonstrating how space can play an active role in subtly shaping consumption without necessarily relying on shaping human meanings, as well as re-conceptualising space as something more fluid, between places. However, the authors of these studies rarely make explicit their contributions to the blurring of the space/place dichotomy in the CCT discourse, and it can be summarised that “place-oriented thinking” still dominates the sub-discipline (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018, p. 149). This conceptual dichotomy in the literature was raised here because it is something that will be addressed periodically in the sections and chapters to come. It is also important to help justify the importance of the discussions in the next subsection, which focuses on the imbalance of critical research between place consumers (as subjects of place consumption) and places (as objects of place consumption). Identifying and interrogating this imbalance is important because of the emphasis put on place in the literature, with only a relatively marginal and nascent counter-discourse to offset it at present (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018).
2.2.4. Place Consumers and Places of Consumption

As the previous two sub-sections have suggested, the CCT tradition has primarily focused on the notion of place rather than space, barring some exceptions. Within the literature on place consumption the two key concepts are (rather unsurprisingly) place consumers and places. Section 2.2.2 pointed out the notion of place has been explicitly defined in the CCT discourse by Castilhos et al. (2016), but this succinct definition has also been elaborated and expanded by other conceptual/review papers (Chatzidakis et al., 2017; Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018; Sherry, 2013). However, the concept of the place consumer has been left rather ill-defined (both in the sense of being vague, and in the sense of not having been defined specifically).

The term consumer is far broader than that of customer. While ‘custom’ refers primarily to economic exchanges, ‘consumption’ is used to refer to a wider range of market-mediated interactions between people and objects that result in literal or metaphorical absorption of some kind (Campbell & McHugh, 2015). Consumers absorb food, images, experiences, knowledge, and all sorts of other meanings and materialities through consumption activities, especially in societies where the market is the dominant institution (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2002). Place consumers can certainly be thought about in this broad sense—they absorb physical resources but also the benefits of social relationships, restorative experiences, and so on (Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). Indeed, the vast majority of the literature in CCT has focused on broadening the understanding of place consumption beyond the simple focus on in situ purchases found in conventional marketing textbooks (Chatzidakis et al. 2017). As noted by Debenedetti et al. (2014), in most areas of social research commercial places are typically understood as primarily utilitarian, and more like meaningless non-places (Augé, 1995). As part of the ‘broadening’ of understanding mentioned above (Chatzidakis et al. 2017), and in sub-section 2.2.2, CCT researchers have explored a number of ways in which commercial places can be more than utilitarian and thus considered places in the humanist geographical sense of the term. Examples include highlighting the social benefits or ‘linking value’ of commercial places (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Cova, 1997), the escapism offered by extraordinary environments.
Aside from the increasingly multifaceted understanding of the place consumer, relatively little has been written about them from a conceptual or theoretical perspective. This is partly because the methodological approach of CCT researchers in this area is place-centric. While the theory of place in CCT is underpinned by the human-centric logic of humanist geography (as discussed in section 2.2.2), the \textit{methodological practice} of most researchers in this area has been to visit on one particular place and to observe and talk to the consumers who arrive there. Again, this what Cresswell (2004, p.51) describes (and may be implicitly critiquing) as the “ideographical” approach, which organises the world into a set of discrete locations. Researchers seek out the \textit{genius loci} or ‘spirit’ of a place through their research (Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Sherry, 2013), which in practical terms means theorising the key characteristics of a place. Data is gathered by spending time \textit{in} the place, so the understanding of place consumers is largely limited to how they are manifest in that place. While this methodology is not problematic in itself (the researchers manage to answer their research questions and provide insightful contributions to knowledge), it does mean that knowledge about place consumers is relatively fragmented.

Two examples of this ideographic approach are provided below. Sherry et al. (2001) sought to describe and understand how \textit{spectacular} places are alluring (even addictive) for consumers, and how the overwhelming character of these environments makes place consumers more susceptible to managerial manipulation. While their study considered the ways in which consumers might resist such manipulation, Sherry et al. (2001) did not explore how these spectacular environs attracted consumers in the first instance. That is, how did spectacular places like the ESPN Zone fit within the context of consumers’ lives, and how did such a place \textit{not} fit with other consumers who did not visit? A second example is Chatzidakis et al. (2012, p.497), who explained how \textit{heterotopian} places “are collective or shared spaces of ‘otherness’ where alternative forms of social organisation take place”, and studied
how a heterotopian place like Exarcheia helps to facilitate and engender ethical lifestyles that are difficult, if not impossible, to sustain elsewhere. This study focused on Exarcheia and the practices taking place there. It thus overlooked those who moved between this heterotopian district and the rest of the city, and how such anti/consumers might have mutable and contradictory identities to resolve.

Both examples are introduced here not to criticise the studies, but to explain how an ideographic focus on the place has limited the development of knowledge about place consumers *per se*. The place (anti) consumer is always present, and insights into their motivations and actions can be gleaned through exploring their relationships to place. However, the problem with this indirect theory building of the place consumer is that it means that a number of implicit theoretical assumptions are not critically interrogated. One implicit assumption is that the place consumer is a self-contained subject who interacts with places (as objects of consumption), with the latter having more or less temporary and localised effects of the former. Another, and related to the first, is that place consumers are presented as agentic—relatively independent decision makers who can act on their decisions with relatively little limitations. While the first assumption pertains to the subject-object binary of Western social thought, the second points to the related issue of agency (or who/what is acting in the accounts). These two issues are especially problematic from the point of view of material-semiotic thinking that has become increasingly influential in CCT in recent years (Bettany, 2007b, 2015; Arnould and Thompson, 2015; Canniford and Bajde, 2015). While material-semiotic thinking is explored in the next section, it is worth noting briefly here that it is (amongst other things) an intellectual tradition that seeks to challenge binary thinking (Bettany and Kerrane, 2011; Law, 2009; Canniford and Shankar, 2015). Material-semiotic researchers try to provide accounts of phenomena that do not rely on such dichotomous thinking, whilst also seeking to explain when and how such binaries emerge.

The first binary is the subject-object distinction, which is common in CCT (Bettany 2007b) and many other areas of social research. As Bettany and Kerrane (2011, p. 1747) explain, in CCT the subject/object binary “essentializes the consumer as a choosing, experiencing agent and the consumption object as something which is
acted on, and a “thing-in-itself” around which consumers make meaning.” This definition certainly resonates with the humanist geographical understanding of places as the products and focus (i.e. objects) of human interpretation and action. Bettany (2007b) also identified that while conventional marketing and consumer research had produced accounts where objects determined consumption (with their essential features driving consumer choice), CCT risked going too far in their attempts to counterbalance this tendency with an emphasis on human subjects, and interpretation and experiences, as the driving force in consumption. In other words, the agency was shifted from objects (e.g. products) to subjects (consumers). In this regard the literature on place consumption was not as subject-oriented as the rest of CCT had been. While many accounts focus primarily on place consumers as subjects who interpret and appropriate, almost always the material features of the place are afforded some kind of agency as well (Visconti et al. 2010; Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Peñaloza, 1998; Sherry, 1998). For example, Sherry et al. (2004) explored how the types of food and seating could engender masculine performances of identity in a habitual or almost automatic way. As Sherry (2013) later reflected, his early work on place consumption and the work of many colleagues held nascent ideas about material or nonhuman agency that would later proliferate in CCT.

Giving places agency as objects helped to diminish the subject-object distinction somewhat, but again reflects a methodological and theoretical emphasis on places or the objects of place consumption. The place consumer remained conceptually vague and elusive. In particular, the agency of the place consumer is rarely called into question within CCT. Place consumers are understood as agents who are free to choose where they consume, when to stop consuming in a place, and how they wish to appropriate a place to their needs. For example, Venkatraman and Nelson (2008) explored how Chinese consumers used Starbucks and found that they appropriated them as homes away from home (places to meet friends and dates outside the family home) or as second offices (places to work). Their data did not suggest that the presence of other consumers, or the employees and managers of Starbucks, impinged on each consumer’s agency to appropriate Starbucks as they wished. The consumer (subject) was sovereign. Similar sovereignty or agency can be seen in
formulations such as ‘loyalty, voice, exit, or twist’ (Aubert-Gamet, 1997), which focuses on how consumers respond to service environments, or place attachment, which is understood as an expression of consumer’s “ultimate loyalty” (Rosenbaum, 2006, p.66). While the term place attachment in other disciplines (see Lewicka, 2011) carries an implication of lost or forsaken agency (the individual cannot resist feeling attached to a place), in marketing and consumer research the consumer freely chooses to maintain attachments through volunteering and other out-of-the-commercial-ordinary activities (Debenedetti et al. 2014).

While the subject is afforded agency in these accounts this agency is not explained or qualified but simply taken-for-granted. To return to the place attachment example, CCT researchers have focused primarily on which features or resources make places more likely to engender attachments than others (Rosenbaum, 2006; Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). Accompanying explorations of attached consumers- such as the features in place consumers’ lives that are more likely to engender attachments, or factors outside the place of attachment that may augment, transmute, or destroy a place attachment- are under-developed. Rosenbaum (2006) notes that older widows are more likely to become attached to places that can alleviate their loneliness. However, this trajectory of thinking is not developed further because Rosenbaum (2006) focuses on the features of the place instead.

There are three studies in CCT that do challenge the notion of place consumers’ agency. Maclaran and Brown (2005) explored how the managers of Powerscourt, a festival mall in Dublin that consumers considered to be utopian in its otherworldliness, decided to refurbish the building so it was more ‘commercial’ and alike to every other shopping centre in the city. This demonstrated consumers’ lack of agency in relation to the managers, and Maclaran and Brown (2005) explored the ensuing loss of utopia that consumers experienced. However, Maclaran and Brown (2005) were theoretically interested in exploring Powerscourt and the notion of utopian marketplaces, so they did not push their analysis further to consider the implications of their study for notions of place consumers as agentic subjects. Kozinets et al. (2004) studied how ESPN Zone was akin to a game being played
between the managers, employees, and the various consumers. As the consumers tried to break certain rules in the place, such as how they were allowed to engage with arcade games, the employees and managers would intervene to enforce the rules. Sometimes these differing parties would come to creative compromises to ‘bend’ the rules so that all parties could be satisfied. Kozinets et al. (2004) argued that the ESPN Zone was a ‘ludic’ (play-like) environment and proposed the notion of inter-agency to explore how each actor in the place shaped one another’s abilities to act. Kjeldgaard and Bode (2017) applied the notion of inter-agency to a branded festival and proposed the term ‘hetero-agency’ to describe the diversity and sheer number of inter-acting actors that shaped one another’s experiences. The notion of inter/hetero-agency begins to challenge the assumption of the agentic consumer by proposing a more ‘networked’ view, but both of these studies turned again to focus on the place as examples of ludic play (Kozinets et al. 2004; Kjeldgaard and Bode, 2017), rather than pursue the destabilisation of the agentic consumer subject that their insights suggested.

To summarise, the preceding paragraphs have outlined in broad terms the existing literature on space and place consumption in CCT. It has explored the space/place binary, and the dominance of place-focused research in this sub-discipline. Honing in on the notion of place consumption, it has then been argued that the majority of focus has been on the places of consumption, with the concept of the place consumer left implicit. Looking critically at the literature it has been suggested that the place consumer is understood through the subject – object binary, with their status as an agentic subject remaining assumed (and conceptually undeveloped) rather than critically considered. With this gap in the literature identified, or crafted (Figueiredo, Gopaldas, & Fischer, 2016), but also some final threads of insight that suggest the starting point for a possible alternative in the form of the network, the literature review now moves onto material-semiotics, the intellectual tradition that will help to work toward a non-binary alternative understanding.
2.3. Material-Semiotics

2.3.1. Introducing Material-Semiotics

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet”

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet” —William Shakespeare: Romeo & Juliet (Act II, Scene II)

Donna Haraway is a feminist material-semiotician for whom the above statement is patently false. “Always sensitive to the importance of metaphors”, as Hetherington and Law (2000, p.128) write, Haraway’s work has primarily been about “discerning the ideologies implicit in common sense” and “reappropriating the ideologies in revolutionary ways” (Bastian, 2006, p.1037) through the creative use of metaphors, or what she calls ‘figurations’ (Haraway, 2003). The “technique of figuration”, as Bastian (2006, p.1028) describes it, rests on the premise that metaphors shape the way that people think about, relate to, and enact phenomena. This means that metaphors are more than just rhetorical constructions, they are also ‘performative’ material realities (Butler, 1991, 1993). The term figuration moves away from the primarily linguistic connotations of the term metaphor; as Casteñada (2002, p.3) writes, “figuration entails simultaneously semiotic and material practices.” The notion of performativity (the generative relationships between words, thoughts, relationships, and actions) is widely acknowledged within material-semiotic research (Law, 2009; Bettany and Daly, 2008; Canniford and Bajde, 2016), but is often denied when it comes to research practice (Bettany, 2015). That is, researchers often point to the importance of how consumers, marketers, and other actors within a culture present and enact their realities, but simultaneously overlook the potency of their own choice of concepts. This section introduces the intellectual tradition of material-semiotics, paying particular attention to the importance of terminology and the kinds of thinking that these engender. After this section provides a general introduction to material-semiotics, the following section moving from the notion of the actor-
networks, through that of assemblages and figurations, and back to ambivalent actor-networks, arguing that each directs the thinking and action of researchers in different ways, and that the last is the preferred mode of thought for the purposes of re-conceptualising the place consumer.

Following Law (2004, 2009), material-semiotics can be described as a loosely connected nebula of ideas and approaches to research with multiple origins. Law (2009) uses the metaphor of a ‘diaspora’ to describe how material-semiotics now has adherents across a wide range of disciplines, rather than having a specific disciplinary ‘home’ like psychology or geography. One of the most popular and famous ‘brand names’ within material-semiotics is Actor-Network Theory (see Latour, 2005). Bajde (2013, p.227) argues that CCT and ANT are “two self-proclaimed theories claiming not to be theories”, which “share an aversion to nomothetic formalism and an appreciation of the complexity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of social life.” Put differently, ANT shares CCT’s struggles to balance the benefits and drawbacks of academic branding and institutionalisation, with advocates of ANT often having to begin their accounts by stressing that ANT is an approach to research and theory-building rather than a pre-existing theory that can be applied like a rulebook (see Latour, 2005). Like CCT, ANT might be redefined as Actor-Network Thinking rather than Actor-Network theory. For Law (2009, p.142), the term material-semiotics is preferable because it eschews the T altogether, and “better captures the openness, uncertainty, revisability, and diversity of the most interesting work.” Material-semiotics is also used by a number of other authors as a kind of umbrella term for the various different perspectives (including ANT but also assemblage theory, and so forth) that share many philosophical tenets in common (e.g. Haraway, 2003; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014). Material-semiotics is employed here in such a way because the section is structured to move through the various perspectives and attend to their differences. Positioning a study as ‘material-semiotic’ also connotes the more eclectic and ecumenical approach that will be adopted in the rest of this study, where the analysis and interpretation is open to drawing upon a range of ideas (material-semiotic or otherwise) rather than remaining wedded to one conceptual framework.
Law (2009, p.142) adds that material-semiotic “projects are located in many different case studies, practices, and locations done in many different ways, and draw on a range of theoretical resources. How much those studies relate to one another is chronically uncertain, but this is better read as a sign of the strength of material semiotic sensibilities that than as a weakness.” Embracing this uncertain, open-ended, and nebulous ‘diasporic’ view of material-semiotics means any introduction to the tradition will be partial, incomplete, and told from a particular perspective (Law, 2009)- as discussed in section 2.1.1. These characteristics can be treated as limitations that researchers can overcome or as to gain insight into how a particular researcher develops their work (e.g. Bettany, 2015). As discussed in section 3.2, this study has opted for the second perspective.

A material-semiotic approach has been adopted in this study for a number of reasons. First, material-semioticians are generally opposed to binary thinking in scholarship, seek to challenge cultural binaries pervasive in society, and aim to provide non-binary alternative explanations (Law, 1999; Bettany, 2015; Bettany and Daly, 2008; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011; Haraway, 1991, 2003; Canniford and Shankar, 2015). The chief scholarly binary that this study seeks to challenge is the subject-object distinction, and the attendant understandings of agency that accompany it. The second reason that material-semiotics has been adopted is that it provides an alternative account of agency or action that views these phenomena as network properties (Latour, 2005), with the ‘agency’ of any individual entity emerging from their temporary positions and arrangements within a network (Bettany, 2007; Bettany et al. 2014). More fundamentally, material-semiotic perspectives suggest that the characteristics, boundaries, and very existence of entities are an effect of networks (Law, 2009; Bajde, 2013), and subject to ongoing revision (Singleton and Michael, 1993; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011).
2.3.2. Actor-Networks

Latour (2005) argues that conventional social research understands ‘the social’ to mean human-to-human interactions and relationships. Humans are the main ‘actors’ in social phenomena, acting on (and through) the world of meanings and materialities. One of the key purposes of material-semiotics is the “ontological and epistemological ‘reform’ of social science” (Bajde, 2013, p.227) by re-conceptualising ‘the social’ to refer to any interaction or relationship and ‘social science’ or ‘social research’ to refer to the study of heterogeneous associations (Latour, 2005, pp.12-13). This follows Callon’s (1988) early work on scallops, fishermen, and scientists, which saw all three as key social actors in the struggle over meaning and material consequence. He argued that humans and nonhumans should be treated equally, or symmetrically, with the social researcher remaining agnostic about who or what counts as a social actor (Callon, 1988). The principles of symmetry and agnosticism are common in material-semiotic work (Law, 2009; Bajde, 2013), although not always consistently applied (Hetherington & Law, 2000; Star, 1991), following Latour’s (2005) definition of actors as anything that can act upon anything else within a network (hence his term actor-network). Material-semiotics is therefore a post-human approach to research, usually considering heterogeneous arrays of actors in vast networks and even vaster networks of networks of reality-making (Bajde, 2013), rather than remaining anthropocentric and focusing solely on human actors. Indeed, to move away from the human associations of the word ‘actor’ material-semioticians often use the word actant to describe the things that inter-act in networks (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2013; Law, 2009).

This does not mean that human actors should be excluded from accounts unnecessarily (Thrift, 2000), and the human-esque term ‘actor’ remains in common circulation because it is less esoteric and more accessible. Actor (and actor-network) will be used in the remainder of this study, but always with a post-human sensibility. Actors can include animals, plants, objects, places, organisations, images, and anything else that can interact. In other words, every-thing. Indeed, ‘thingness’ is understood in material-semiotics not as an enduring essence ‘within’ entities but rather an emergent effect of their interactions (Bettany, 2007). Put differently, a
thing is defined by its “manifestations” in various interactions and cannot be understood as separate from them (Bajde, 2013, p.229). For instance, to understand what an Afghan hound ‘is’ Bettany and Daly (2008) studied the various manifestations of Afghan hounds across multiple sites (competitions, websites, homes, etc.), constructing a more abstract understanding through an inductive analysis rather than starting with the assumption that Afghan Hounds are fixed, taken-for-granted entities that are essentially the same in every context but perhaps playing different roles. To labour the point, material-semioticians do not argue simply that actors respond differently to each situation, like Goffman’s (1958) argument that people ‘present’ different selves, but rather that entities are co-constituted at a fundamental level by their interactions with other entities (Bettany, 2007; Bettany et al. 2014). This notion is captured by the term performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993) or enactment (Law and Singleton, 2005). Every thing is plastic and pliable, or even fluid and hazy, with no quality or characteristic being immune to interactive change; Bettany and Kerrane (2011, p.1747) use the term “ontologically mutable”. This understanding can be described as an anti-essentialist position (against the idea of ‘essences’), and portrays actors as “events” (Bajde, 2013, p.229).

As a corollary of its anti-essentialist position, material-semioticians are interested in explaining how actors form rather than explaining with actors. To paraphrase Amit and Rapport (2002, p.14), manifestations of seemingly consistent or stable phenomena like ‘entities’ “require sceptical investigation, rather than providing a ready-made social unit upon which to hang analysis.” This sensibility is clearly useful to the present project, which seeks to critically consider the place consumer rather than take them for granted. Actor-Network Thinkers argued that all actors were also networks (another reason for the term actor-network) and were thus “a collective achievement of heterogeneous, sociomaterial actants.” (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2013, p.229)

Over time the term ‘assemblage’ has become increasingly popular as an alternative to actor-network (see Canniford and Bajde, 2016). The term derives from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) but the concept was then developed further by DeLanda (2006). The term assemblage refers to collections of actants, or
‘components’ in DeLanda’s (2006) terms, that work together to produce temporary alloys or ‘greater wholes’. These are termed ‘assemblages’. Assemblages vary in their stability and coherence from loose collections like crowds of people to tight assemblages that take on the illusion of being a single thing, like people being made up of organs and cells. The degree to which an assemblage is stabilised and organised is referred to as territorialisation (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987; Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2016).

For some the notion that every thing is an assemblage within assemblages suggests that reality is like a house of cards, with larger entities being comprised by networks of smaller entities like Matryoska dolls (DeLanda, 2006). However, many material-semioticians prefer a ‘flat’ worldview where everything is explained at the same ‘level’ (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2013). It is helpful here to turn to the distinction between complexity, which refers to interdependent relations, and complication, which refers to multiple ‘layers’ or ‘stages’. Conventional social theory provides a more complicated understanding of reality by arguing that ‘micro-level’ phenomena like individual identities interact with ‘meso-level’ phenomena like group norms or field practices, which are in turn interacting with ‘macro-level’ phenomena like class structures or ideologies. However, organising reality into complicated levels tends to explain away complexity. As Bajde (2013, p.237) argues, the “ex-ante setting of boundaries, scale and temporality narrows the analytic gaze and tends to force researchers to, at best, haphazardly jump from messy events to purified structures and back.” Instead, material-semioticians prefer to explain and theorise phenomena in detail, tracing their complexity by attending to their interactions and interdependencies without using the conceptual short-cuts like ‘levels’ or other abstractions. An excellent illustration of what this ‘flat’ approach might look like is provided by Latour (2005, pp.182-3):

“Trails could be followed and a map could be drawn of, for instance, the various contradictory social theories that travel through Paris. Even if they appear immaterial, they are physically transported over fieldwork, questionnaires, statistical bureaus, academic polemics, journal articles, bar conversations, and grant applications before
making their way back through editorials, textbooks, party officials, strike committees, and war rooms, where they are put to use by some participants”.

What this example demonstrates is another sensibility in material-semiotics, the analytic focus on the processes of net-working or assembling (Canniford and Bajde, 2016). Material-semioticians explore how reality is constantly being re-made through connections and disconnections, and how phenomena flow along these ever-changing webs. For instance, Kozinets et al. (2017) demonstrate how desire flows across networks of images, technology, videos, and other actors, rather than being found ‘within’ the individual person or the ‘object of desire’. Desire flows like electricity, being redirected by new connections and disconnections in the circuitry and ‘electrifying’ nodes like people as it passes through them. Thus to understand desire, or any other phenomena, material-semioticians argue that researchers should focus on the processes of net-working rather than over-emphasising networks and their actors. It should be recognised that it is difficult to talk intelligibly without using nouns (i.e. talking about ‘things’ as well as ‘doings’), and that most people do not think and talk about the world in a material-semiotic way, so that some degree of ‘strategic essentialisation’ or ‘black boxing’ can be permitted (Law, 2009), particularly when trying to explain the world as others see it (see Canniford and Bajde, 2016). However, material-semioticians should always remain cautious of over-emphasising a world of things and categories at the expense of processes and emergences (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2016).
2.3.3. Material-Semiotics in CCT

Having outlined material-semiotics through some of its key ideas, it is now time to briefly comment on its adoption into CCT. Bettany (2007) introduced material-semiotics to CCT at a very early stage to argue (amongst other things) that the objects of consumer culture should be considered alongside the subject (e.g. consumers) in an symmetrical way as part of a co-constitutive network of networks (a.k.a. ‘consumer cultures’). Since then a number of researchers have drawn on material-semiotic ideas, although some authors choose to describe their studies using specific terms like ‘ANT’ or ‘Assemblage Theory’. Bettany and Daly (2008) theorised Afghan hounds from this perspective using a multi-sited ethnography (discussed in section 3.3). Epp and Price (2010) explored how the dining room table shaped the network of an extended family. Giesler (2012) explored how the meanings of Botox evolved through continuous negotiations between contradictory understandings. Marketers worked hard to convince consumers that Botox was a legitimate consumer product and injection fillers were a socially acceptable consumption practice. With each resolution new problems emerged, creating a continuous chain of net-working where various actants had to be ‘translated’ to be compatible with the marketing managers’ profit-seeking goals. Similarly, Lucarelli and Hallin (2015) explored how the place brand of Stockholm emerged and evolved as a continuous chain of net-working translations.

Bettany and Kerrane (2011) studied how chicken coops were part of a network that continuously negotiated their identities between the meanings of natural and artificial, mass-produced and anti-capitalist, pro-environmental and plastic. Similar borderline negotiations were explored by Canniford and Shankar (2013), who argued that the nature/culture divide was somewhat of an illusion that emerged from (and could be undermined by) surfers interactions with various non-human actors. For instance, the plastic boards of some surfers were shown to leak toxic chemicals into the water, undermining surfers’ (and surfing brands’) claims of being at one with nature. These two last studies are particularly important for highlighting a relevant trend in material-semiotics, the challenging and explanation of binaries rather than the unreflexive use and reiteration of them (Butler, 1991, 1993; Haraway, 2003; Law,
1999), a sensibility that has transferred to CCT in a limited way (Bettany, 2015; Canniford & Shankar, 2015), but is especially important to the present project. As Bettany and Kerrane (2011, p.1747) explain, material-semiotic approaches eschew subject-object explanations in favour of understandings where:

“agency is attributed in terms of formations of meaning and materiality in which objects, bodies and other heterogeneous entities, are embedded. In this approach, what might have been called subject and object are flattened into complex analyses of meaning and materiality”.

Some CCT researchers have considered the complexities and difficulties of forming nets-that-work, or assemblages that remain assembled. One example of complex net-working was studied by Thomas, Price, and Schau (2013) who understood the heterogeneous long-distance running community as an assemblage that needed to be constantly re-aligned in order to prevent the different actors from coming into conflict. Parmentier and Fischer (2015) demonstrated what can happen when net-working efforts fail to hold an assemblage together, by documenting in detail how the America’s Next Top Model brand, and its once-loyal audience, ‘fell apart’ due to a number of disruptive events. The reverse was demonstrated by Martin and Schouten (2014), who explored how the mini-moto market came together from consumers innovations and the work of various nonhuman actants. This challenged the established view that market innovations are driven only by large-scale organisations, but also demonstrated how much work was required to innovate across decentralised consumer networks. An important implication of these three studies is that instability is assumed to be a negative or undesirable state of affairs, something to be avoided at all costs, and that stability is the implied goal of all assemblages. This will be partially questioned in the next section, but addressed more fully later on in the findings and discussion of this study.

As Canniford and Bajde (2016, p.1) point out, “it would be impossible to describe the range of applications and innovations generated so far”, so the lists above are just a small sample of the relevant material-semiotic insights. However, what is clear is that
material-semiotics has been applied in a variety of ways to a variety of different theoretical topics. Material-semiotics is now a well-established approach within CCT (Arnoould and Thompson, 2015, 2018; Canniford and Bajde, 2015). Even when authors do not adopt a material-semiotic perspective explicitly, they often treat the eponymous ‘culture’ at the heart of Consumer Culture Theory as a co-constitutive network of meanings but also materials. Bettany et al. (2014) describe this as a material-semiotic view of culture, but it has also been described as ‘distributed’ (Arnoould and Thompson, 2015).

As Canniford and Bajde (2016, p.13) argue, “any target of analysis can be investigated as distributed, changeable and always in process.” Interestingly, however, the topic of ‘place’ has not been given the material-semiotic treatment in CCT, despite ‘space and place’ being a well-established and ever-growing area of interest (Castilhos et al. 2016; Giovanardi and Lucarelli, 2018). Sherry (2013) has suggested that future studies of place should adopt a material-semiotic perspective. The study by Lucarelli and Hallin (2015) explored place brands but not places per se. More recently, Vicedan and Hong (2017) have drawn on actor-networks to develop Soja’s notions of the sociospatial dialectic, understanding how the nonhuman actors in an Ecovillage shape the practices of the human actors. This can be thought of a material-semiotic extension of the ideas that Chatzidakis et al. (2012) had begun to formulate (see 2.2.2). Studies such as these are welcome, but they still remain focused on places and their complex ontologies rather than focusing on place consumers.

A paper that explores material-semiotics in relation to space (rather than place) is Epp et al. (2014), who studied ‘The Role of Brands and Mediating Technologies in Assembling Long-Distance Family Practices’. Epp et al. (2014) argue that the value of the brands providing such solutions is enhanced by the human actors’ dependence on these technologies, and their dependence on the desire to ‘be close’ to those who live and work further away. Epp et al. (2014) draw on assemblage theory to demonstrate how non-human actors like technologies can act as ‘mediators’ in bringing people together across geographical space. This is because material-semiotic thinkers hold that inter-actions require physical copresence or proximity
(Latour, 1996; Law and Mol, 2001), or mediation to carry interactions across space (Latour, 1993; Müller, 2015), and cannot simply traverse this distance by magic (Latour, 2005; Bajde, 2013). Connecting back to marketing concerns, Epp et al. (2014) argue that the value of the brands providing such solutions is enhanced by the human actors’ dependence on these technologies, dependence on the desire to ‘be close’ to those who live and work further away. However, while *space* is clearly considered in active terms by considering how connections are made *despite* distance, Epp et al. (2014) are not necessarily considering the consumption of *place* (as a set of meanings and experiences), and certainly not place consumers. Thus while Epp et al. (2014) stress material-semiotics, they do not quite combine these with the concepts of place consumers or place consumption that would aid in the progression of the present study. Thus, the area of development identified in 2.2.4 remains ripe for development.
2.3.4. Toward ambivalent Actor-Networks

As Singleton and Michaels (1993, p.232) note, “the networks of Callon and Latour are clean and clear. What, at first seem, to be complexly constituted actors often emerge as a unitary entity (though this is always a provisional state)”. However, this limitation is not necessarily a failure of Callon or Latour; Hetherington and Law (2000, p.128) point out that “feminist scholars have raised questions about the network metaphor itself.” It has been argued that the term ‘network’ is not neutral but rather laden with a number of cultural connotations (Strathern, 1996). As Latour (1999, p.15) notes, “now that the World Wide Web exists, everyone believes they understand what a network is. While twenty years ago there was some freshness in the term as a critical tool against notions as diverse as institution, society, nation-state and, more generally, any flat surface, it has lost any cutting edge”. He adds that while the term originally invoked the idea of continuous transformation, it now suggests the transportation of information “without deformation… exactly the opposite of what we [Actor-Network Thinkers] meant.” (Latour, 1999, p.15) It can be added that in the era of social media the popular representation of the social network dominates the cultural imagination. In everyday use the term network conjures a mental image of discrete, self-contained nodes connected by bold lines of dyadic relationships.

This problem is compounded by “the job of the analyst: to detect patterns, narratives, order” (Singleton and Michaels, 1993, p.232). While some neatening of reality is an important (and perhaps unavoidable) part of research, Singleton and Michaels (1993, p.232) point out that it can become problematic when it “threatens to occlude the indeterminacy and the ambivalence of those entities and of the associations into which they are tied.” Of course, the neatening of networks is not intrinsic to the notion of actor-networks, and the metaphor of the network has since been defended by Latour (2005). Researchers may mitigate against neatening and ossifying understandings by writing explicitly about the ‘messiness’, ‘precariousness’, or ‘fluidity’ of actor-networks. However, an alternative strategy is to jettison the network metaphor altogether in favour of something that is widely associated with
messiness, precariousness, fluidity, and any other important connotations that the material-semiotician wishes to invoke. One contender is the notion of assemblages.

In material-semiotics the concepts of actor-network and assemblage loom large, each providing what Anderson and McFarlane (2011) describe as a ‘descriptor’ for reality. In the chaos of material-semiotic relationality, actor-networks and assemblages are two terms to describe “the provisional assembly of productive, heterogeneous, and (this is the crucial point) quite limited forms of ordering located in no larger overall order.” (Law, 2009, p.146) A potential limitation of both actor-networks and assemblages is that they can sometimes present such assemblies as relatively neat and easy to achieve. Several authors identify this problem in actor-networks and have proposed the notion of assemblage instead (Law, 2004, 2009; Canniford and Bajde, 2016), but it can also be argued that assemblages are more problematic because they suggest neat collections of elements that can be assembled like flat-pack furniture (Allen, 2011). Arnauld and Thompson (2015) have noted that many uses of assemblage thinking present assembly as a relatively unproblematic process, devoid of power imbalances and exclusions. These were the self-same critiques levied against actor-networks that caused researchers to seek alternatives (Hetherington and Law, 2000).

Although the actor-network metaphor has been criticized by some researchers, others have sought to point out its advantages. For one the notion of networks put relationships at the foreground, rather than assemblages which emphasise the parts or components (DeLanda, 2006). Second, actor-networks make the entwined or co-constitutive nature of agency more obvious (Latour, 2005), which is particularly important to this study. Finally, as the image of a network is made from gaps as well as lines (Latour, 2005), it also provides a useful metaphor to attend to exclusions and power imbalances- as long as the researcher attends to these in their analysis (Hetherington and Law, 2000). Star (1991) has argued that early ANT studies produced accounts of actor-networks from one perspective (usually the dominant perspective), and overlooked the experiences of others in the network who were excluded, marginalised, or exploited. Indeed, Actor-Network research has sometimes been
criticised for overlooking, and perhaps actively avoiding, questions of power and politics in their work (Bettany, 2015; Law and Singleton, 2005).

A more politicised alternative to actor-networks and assemblages is the notion of *figuration*. Canniford and Bajde (2016, p.1) argue that the notion of figuration shares much in common with assemblages and actor-networks, with all three being a ‘descriptor’ (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011) of local and temporary orderings of material-semiotic relationality. As Bettany and Daly (2008, p.410) define them, “figures do not merely represent consumer meanings or interpretive themes but are concentrated constructions of identities, bodies, practices, and objects that govern how a particular cultural actor...takes shape as a specific entity.” This interpretation certainly accords with the feminist material-semiotic emphasis of the link between semiotic relations and material relations (Casteñada, 2002), and how figurations are more-than-metaphor (Bastian, 2006). As Bettany and Daly (2008, p.410) go on to stipulate, “in the face of ambivalent cultures, figures do not break down like metaphors (Belk, 1996) but structure an analysis that can explore the processes through which they emerge, the complex cultural worlds built into them, and the effects stemming from their interstices”. Figuration certainly moves away from the ‘flat pack’ interpretations of assemblages (Allen, 2011), without slipping back into the neatening tendencies that actor-networks have been criticised for (Singleton and Michael, 1993; Hetherington and Law, 2000). However, it could be suggested that writing of ‘figures’ and ‘figuration’ could overemphasise stability, just like assemblage theory can (McFarlane and Anderson, 2011), and inadvertently redirect attention to the results of processes rather than the processes themselves, just as actor-network accounts have been criticised for doing (Singleton and Michael, 1993; Singleton, 1998).

A more certain problem with using figuration as an alternative to actor-network or assemblage is that it risks obscuring and even enervating the political intention of the figurative technique. The political purpose of figuration is exemplified in the work of Donna Haraway (see Law, 2009; Bastian, 2006). Of Haraway’s many figurations, the famous was that of the cyborg. Haraway (1989, 1991) used the trope of the cyborg to challenge the idea of binary identity categories (male/female, white/black,
human/nonhuman), which she argued were impeding feminist politics by creating unnecessary divisions (e.g. white women versus women of colour). The cyborg suggested a composite subjectivity because it proposed an understanding of people as put together from various parts, and thus transgressive of cultural categories. Haraway intended the figuration of the cyborg to be a challenge to binary thinking \textit{per se}, but it has been noted that this intention has since been lost thanks to the popular culture understanding of cyborgs as human/technology hybrids (Bettany and Daly, 2008; Macauley and Gordo-Lopez, 1995; Squires, 2000; Haraway, 2000; Bastian, 2006). More recently, Haraway (2003) has proposed the figuration of the ‘companion species’, which focuses on the symbiotic relationships of humans and dogs as a new exemplar of non-binary relational thinking (Schnieder, 2005; Bettany and Daly, 2008).

The key point is that for Haraway, and the feminist material-semioticians that follow her lead (Bettany and Daly, 2008; Casteñada, 2002; Braidotti, 1994), figurations are more than simply a ‘descriptor’. Figurations are more like what Anderson and McFarlane (2011, p.126) describe as “a certain ethos of engagement with the world, one that experiments with methodological and presentational practices in order to attend to a lively world of differences”. The purpose of figuration is to intervene in orthodox and stultifying ways of thinking (Haraway, 2003; Law, 2009), including those of earlier figurations (Bastian, 2006). As Bettany (2015, p.193) once wrote, “tropes and figurations are metaphorical beings that swerve thought and thus conceal important differences and constructions”. Haraway’s work is about drawing attention to and deconstructing (often this means critiquing) everyday tropes/figurations and replacing them with alternatives (Bastian, 2006; Bettany, 2015; Hetherington and Law, 2000), such as the cyborg (Haraway, 1991) or modest witness (Haraway, 1997). As Law (2009, p.155) put it, “deconstruction is not enough.” In other words, one must deconstruct the taken for granted tropes/figurations and reconstruct a more suitable alternative in their place. In the present study it is the place consumer that is the trope or figuration of interest, with sub-section 2.2.4 being devoted to its exposition and/or deconstruction. In section 4.3 alternative figurations (placed consumers, displaced consumers, and place
consumers) are proposed as reconstructions. Bettany and Daly (2008) were attentive to the distinctive ethos of figuration, but to regularly use figuration as a synonym of actor-networks and assemblages, as Canniford and Bajde (2016) suggest, risks creating a new orthodox understanding of what a figuration could or should be. Given this potential performative effect this study avoids using figuration as a conceptual alternative to actor-networks (although it will be used as a methodological tool; see section 3.3).

Having explored assemblages and figurations as alternatives to actor-networks, and highlighted some of the enduring benefits of thinking and writing of actor-networks, the next section focuses on the notion of ambivalence that has been employed to overcome some of the limitations of actor-networks and unlock more of its potential. Put differently, having acknowledged the importance of maintaining the potency of the term figuration, one returns to the problem of how to replace the descriptors of actor-networks and assemblages with something messier, more precarious, fluvial, and so forth. In their critique of earlier actor-network studies, Singleton and Michaels (1993) propose the notion of ambivalence as a way to attenuate the neatening, stabilising, all-or-nothing tendencies of ANT accounts. For Singleton and Michaels (1993, p.232), the term ambivalence describes reality as a state of “permanent reform”, of arrangements characterised by “inherent instability and incessant skirmishes”, and “the multiplicity of given actors… reflected in the shifts and changes in the associations amongst them; that is to say, they are endowed with an intrinsic uncertainty.” As Bettany et al. (2014, p.1546) later summarised, “the concept of ambivalence… is used to theorize a more or less permanent state of struggle… challenging the assumption of classic ANT that the network achieves stabilization of meaning only after the resolution of struggle within the social context.” Feminist material-semioticians do not assume that interpretive consensus is a prerequisite for practical cooperation. As Star (2010, p.604) explains:

“many models in the late 1980s and continuing today, of cooperation often began conceptually, with the idea that first consensus must be reached, and the [sic] cooperation could begin. From my own field work... it seemed to me that the consensus model...
was untrue. Consensus was rarely reached, and fragile when it was, but cooperation continued, often unproblematically.”

While early actor-network researchers focused on how networks stabilised in order to act together, the notion of ambivalence suggests that actors in networks can act collaboratively without needing to agree entirely on the purpose, form, or even existence of the network (Singleton and Michaels, 1993; Singleton, 1999; Law and Singleton, 2005).

Hetherington and Law (2000, p.128) noted that Singleton and Michael were “still working within the language of ANT”, insofar as they retained the notion of actor-networks as their guiding descriptor. Similarly Bettany et al. (2014) positioned their study as an extension of the actor-network discourse within CCT. In these instances ambivalence is used in conjunction with actor-networks and its associated concepts like translation and enrolment (Singleton and Michael, 1993; Bettany et al. 2014).

However, given the mounting questions over the actor-network metaphor, ambivalence can also be used as an ‘after ANT’ concept (Law and Singleton, 2005). Bettany and Daly (2008, p.410) investigated the “ambivalent cultures” within which Afghan Hounds, the Mars© Coat King, and other figurations began to emerge, and did so whilst avoiding the terminology of actors-networks entirely. Bettany and Kerrane (2011) made a passing reference to actor-network theory (specifically Latour, 1992), before theorising the Eglu chicken coop as an ambivalent object almost entirely in the vocabulary of material-semiotics. Yet while Bettany and Daly (2008) replaced actor-networks with figurations, Bettany and Kerrane (2011, p.1747) did not adopt an abstract descriptor at all, but simply wrote of entities that were ‘ambivalent’, or “ontologically mutable, active and embedded in relations of emergent and entangled meaning and materiality.” Describing objects, subjects, and other phenomena as ambivalent can therefore be thought of as an alternative descriptor that replaces actor-network terminology (rather than extending it). Yet, while replacing the term actor-network may have its benefits, ‘actor-network’ is also useful to retain because of its emphasis on relationships but also gaps, and the way that agency is conceptualised in the term actor-network. Thus it is proposed here that combining ambivalence with actor-network is a useful conceptual hybridisation.
Singleton and Michael (1993, p.232) posit “incessant skirmishes”, but it is perhaps more useful to differentiate between ‘conflict’ and ‘cooperation’ as different forms of struggle, as Bettany et al. (2014) do in their study of fathers’ ambivalent relationships to branded caring technology. Extending the language of ANT, Bettany et al. (2014) describe how fathers, mothers, babies, baby monitors, BabyJoggers™, Mumsnet forums, and other actors formed in an ambivalent network characterised by struggles over meanings and materiality. At times these struggles settled into states of “cooperative ambivalence”, a term that Bettany et al. (2014, p.1549) used to described instances when actors “satisfied a degree of struggle contingently.” While cooperative ambivalence mitigated conflicts and contradictions, “this situation did not result in stability of meaning” but rather, “uneasy statuses” for actors involved, and a “recognition that this situation was not ideal but was satisfactory.” (Bettany et al. 2014, p.1549) This meant that co-operation was fragile, and was always vulnerable to “network interference” (Bettany et al. 2014, 1550) from other actors and networks, which could instigate “conflicting ambivalence”, cause a cooperative compromise to fall apart, and result in the “intensification” of struggles within the network (Bettany et al. 2014, p.1549). Concomitant with the definition of ambivalence as “a more or less permanent state of struggle” (Bettany et al. 2014, p.1546), or “permanent reform” (Singleton and Michael, 1993, p.232), co-operative ambivalence was understood as mitigated struggles, while conflicting ambivalence was understood as more intense struggles.

As stated previously, the notions of actor-network and assemblage can be interpreted in a variety of ways, so the argument in this section is not that these concepts are inherently or always problematic. Rather, the proposal here is that assemblages do not necessarily foreground the material-semiotic sensibilities of contingency, relationality, and process (etc.) as much as actor-networks do. It has also been argued that figurations should only be used by researchers attentive to its political intention and effects (and able to deftly wield such performative effects), lest the concept become diluted and ineffective. However, this section has leaned on the performative and figurative arguments that language and conceptualisation can shape how reality is perceived and enacted (Butler, 1991, 1993; Haraway, 1991,
2003; Bastian, 2006; Law, 2009; Bettany, 2015), proposing that it is important to find a vocabulary that *engenders* material-semiotic sensibilities rather than simply facilitating them. Indeed, material-semioticians have devoted some time to discussing the importance of choosing the right terminology to communicate the ontologies they wish to create (Latour, 1999; Heterington and Law, 2000; Stathern, 1996; Latour, 2005; Law, 2009). It can be argued that the terminology of ambivalence, which foregrounds struggles of co-operative or conflicting varieties, is usefully combined with actor-networks, with their lines of connection but also their empty spaces of absence or potential exclusion (Law and Singleton, 2005; Latour, 2005) to engender material-semiotic thinking that is contingent, processual, unstable, and able to operate without consensus (Star, 2010; Singleton and Michael, 1993; Bettany and Daly, 2008; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014).
2.4. Research Questions

So far the literature review has argued that the notion of the ‘place consumer’ is ill-defined, both in the sense of being a hazy concept and in the sense that it has not been explicitly defined in the CCT discourse. It was noted there that the nebulousness of the place consumer as a concept in the CCT tradition is productive because it allows researchers to explore a wide variety of interrelated place-related phenomenon rather than being rigidly bound to a particular definition. However, the multivariate deployments of the ‘place consumer’ in CCT studies all share the leitmotif of humanistic agency- the idea of a self-aware, actively-interpreting, decision-making, and empowered consumer- which was derived from the humanistic-phenomenological tradition in geography (see Cresswell, 2004), and facilitated by the existential-phenomenological understandings of consumption at large within CCT until relatively recently (after Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

It was only in retail studies and services marketing, as delineated by Giovanardi and Lucarelli (2018), that a less agentic understanding of place consumers was developed. But as these studies, informed as they were by the ontologies and epistemologies of environmental psychology, conceptualised place consumers (or, more restrictively, place ‘customers’) as self-contained stimuli-processing organisms that responded to an environment in fixed and (in theory) predictable ways (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Therefore, swapping the agentic consumer of CCT with the non-agentic stimuli processor of environmental psychology does not resolve the inherent subject-object dualism.

While there have been nascent developments that challenge the subject-object (and space-place) binary with dialectical approaches (e.g Chatzidakis et al. 2012), these can be considered problematic because they oscillate from one side of the dialectic to the other, and thus merely overlook and reinforce rather than resolve the underlying binary (Latour, 2005). The research drawing on Bourdieu also provides a way to overcome the object-subject binary in relation to place consumption (Allen, 2002; Skandalis et al. 2016, 2017), and this is an approach that is being explored in sociology as well (Green, 2008, 2013; Simpson, 2012, 2013, 2014). However,
Bourdieuian thought does not necessarily challenge the subject-object binary but seeks to provide a third position (the habitus) in order to mediate between the two (Green, 2008). It is also a theory that focuses on stability and durability rather than instability and process. For these reasons the ambivalent actor-network approach is adopted in this study.

It is now time to distil the arguments, gaps in the literature, and nascent ideas of how to advance this project, into research questions. As Gopaldas (2016, p.117) advises, “to leave no room for doubt about the research focus, I recommend restating the theoretical problems as research questions.” The questions below help to focus the analysis and interpretation to come.

Research Question 1: How do place consumers emerge and evolve through ambivalent struggles over meaning and materiality within actor-networks?

Research Question 2: How might exclusionary effects co-emerge with these place consumers and actor-networks?

Research Question 3: How might the subjects and objects of place consumption be understood in more co-emergent and co-constitutive ways?

While these research questions are certainly more focused, they remain relatively abstract. To help answer these questions, and develop the nebulous ideas and areas of development that they attempt to encapsulate, this research now turns to an empirical context where issues of place consumer subjects, places as objects of consumption, and the agencies emergent from their relations, are salient and thus more amenable to observation, analysis, and interpretation. The context in question is the city of Manchester (in the Northwest of England) and its ambivalent LGBT+ consumer cultures.
2.5. Post/gay Place Consumers of Manchester

2.5.1. Gay, Post-Gay, and Other(ed) LGBT+ Consumers

The term LGBT+ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, and other non-heterosexual people as a group or collective. While the term ‘gay’ has often been used as a catch-all term for non-heterosexual people in everyday and academic discourses (e.g. Kates, 2002; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005), the term primarily refers to homosexual men and therefore its excessive use potentially renders lesbians and bisexuals less visible. It also overlooks trans* people, whose gender identity is different from the binary sex category (male or female) that they were designated at birth (Devor and Dominic, 2015). While biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality are separate phenomena, in Anglo-European cultures they are often understood as closely linked (Butler, 1993; Cardoso, 2009; Foucault, 1978). This means that while some contest the association of trans* people with lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, historically these different groups have been closely entangled (Fornby, 2017). ‘Queer’ people also challenge the binary way of thinking about sexuality and gender, advocating instead for a fluid understanding of these phenomena and the eschewal of discrete categories altogether (Kates, 1999). Thanks to this philosophy, ‘queer’ is sometimes used as an alternative to ‘gay’ as a parsimonious catch-all term for LGBT+ people (e.g. Visconti, 2008). However, Ng (2013) contests this usage because it may enervate the radical and political intention of queer theory and activism to undermine established ways of thinking about, relating to, and enacting sexuality and gender. It also risks overlooking those who do identify with the identity labels of L, G, B, or T.

2 Trans* is a term that has come to replace transvestite, transsexual, and transgender, each of which is laden with certain assumptions or connotations that are currently contested (Devor & Dominic, 2015). The * imitates Boolean searches and leaves the term open-ended.
This study uses the term LGBT+ as an alternative term. LGBT+ is a widely circulating acronym in contemporary cultures that acknowledges this range of (anti-)identity labels. The ‘+’ leaves the possibilities of sexuality and gender open-ended without needing to continually extend the acronym (Ghaziani, 2011). The open-ended sensibility behind the ‘+’ also points to broader questions about the contemporary status of LGBT+ people as a group. The ‘+’ is sometimes used to include those who are asexual, questioning, or even heterosexual ‘allies’. Whilst the inclusion of heterosexuals in LGBT+ student and political organisations is a sign of increasing acceptance of diversity and social integration (Ghaziani, 2011), it might be argued that the term LGBT+ encompasses everyone except those who are explicitly homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic. When these questions are coupled with the heterogeneity and increasing fragmentation of LGBT+ communities, cultures, and markets in contemporary societies (Bettany, 2016), the term LGBT+ and the singular or coherent group that it implies is questionable. Whilst acknowledging these criticisms and unresolved questions, the term LGBT+ is (cautiously) adopted here as a useful tool to refer to these dynamic commercial-cultural complexes in a way that is readily recognisable and does not detract attention away from the main points of this study with lengthy asides about ontological insecurity. In other words, the term LGBT+ is one of the many (over)simplifying terms that will be necessary to allow the discussion in this study to move forward.

This section of the review explores the literature on LGBT+ place consumers. More accurately, it constructs an understanding of LGBT+ place consumers from a variety of different sources that deal with relationships between sexuality/gender, place, and consumption. Before beginning this construction project it is worth briefly outlining the history of research in CCT focusing on LGBT+ consumers. In the 1980s and 1990s a number of marketing practitioners became interested in gay men and (to a far lesser extent) lesbians, taking them to be ‘dream market’ of consumers with greater disposable incomes and “a desire to purchase high quality products” and services (Peñaloza, 1998; Kates, 1999, p.25; Gudelunas, 2011). Despite this practitioner interest scholars within marketing and consumer research generally avoided the topic of homosexuality. Marketing and consumer research was also
asynchronous with other social research disciplines (like psychology, sociology, and geography) that had taken an interest in human sexuality for a number of decades (DeLamater & Plante, 2015)

Early exceptions to this trend (or lack thereof) within marketing and consumer research included Lisa Peñaloza (1998), Steven Kates (1998, 1999, 2000), and Craig Haslop and colleagues (1998), all of whom could be labelled as part of the CCT ‘renaissance’ (Bajde, 2014, p.11). Peñaloza (1998) argued that while gay men and lesbians had been conceptualised as a ‘market’, this understanding overemphasised their role as economic agents at the expense of their status as members of political and (sub)cultural groups. She concluded that future research should conceptualise lesbians and gay men as members of ‘subcultures’ rather than markets (Peñaloza, 1998). Kates (1999, p. 25) focused on the “stereotype” of gay men as “dream consumers” and wrote that “gay men living with AIDS, gay men of color, gay men with little formal education, gay men with serious handicaps, and lesbian women- all groups who experience significant stigma beyond homophobia- may be economically disadvantaged.” These studies both reflect a more critical streak of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant representations, a streak that was effectively absent in practitioner and practitioner-oriented work on homosexual consumers. A significant turning point in the literature was Kates’s (2002) study of gay men’s subcultures. While Kates did not explicitly mention Peñaloza’s earlier call for a subcultural perspective, this study explored the sociocultural and political aspects of gay men’s consumption as Peñaloza suggested. Importantly for the purposes of this study, Kates (2002, p.385) built his understanding by immersing himself in a “downtown gay ghetto”. Similarly, Haslop, Hill, and Schmidt (1998) explored the distinctive place consumption of gay men and lesbians, and focused on the case study of Manchester’s Gay Village as a service environment, or ‘servicescape’. The work of Haslop et al. (1998) and Kates (2002) has many overlapping interests with the present study, and will be considered in more detail in sub-sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3.

Kates’s (2002) study was published in the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR), one of the most prestigious journals in the field, and seemed to signal that the study of
sexuality was now a legitimate area of research within marketing and consumer research, or at least within the (then emergent) sub-discipline of CCT. Kates (2004) then published another study in JCR on the topic of gay men’s brand relationships, which could be interpreted as further evidence of this legitimisation. However, Kates’s (2002, 2004) work focused almost entirely on homosexuals, and homosexual men at that. While Kates (2002, 2004) did consider the intersection of sexuality and gender in manifestations of camp (see also Kates, 2001) and drag (see also Kates, 2003), lesbians were only fleetingly mentioned. This focus on gay men would not be problematic if there were other studies in marketing and consumer research that focused on lesbians instead—unfortunately the field was, and has remained, primarily interested in gay men (e.g. Rinallo, 2007; Visconti, 2008; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005; Hsieh and Wu, 2011). Bisexual men and women have remained invisible in the CCT literature until very recently (Rowe & Rowe, 2015) and asexuality has yet to be considered. Other intersections of sexuality and gender, most notably trans* consumers, are also almost entirely absent from the CCT discourse.

Another key development is the emergence of the ‘post-gay’ discourse. In 1991 the British journalist Paul Burston coined the term ‘post-gay’ to describe societies where sexuality and gender were no longer major points of difference. The term was later introduced to an American audience by Collard (1998). While the ‘out-and-proud’ political movement of the post-stonewall era emphasised developing positive identities, building communities, and claiming territories, the ‘post-gay’ movement advocates downplaying difference, building bridges, and deterritorialising (Ghaziani, 2015). This is because changes in legislation, attitudes, and technology mean that LGBT+ people no longer feel the need to socially and spatially concentrate in order to have safe and fulfilling lives (Nash, 2013; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014; Ghaziani, 2014). This has consequences for the relationships between LGBT+ people and place (Formby, 2017). In the context of marketing and consumer research the established view of LGBT+ people is that they form a diverse but coherent subculture (Peñaloza, 1998; Kates, 2002; Haslop et al. 1998; Schofield and Schmidt, 2005) or market (Peñaloza, 1998; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005; Gudelunas, 2011) that consume in specific places. The ‘post-gay era’ suggests that new understandings and
conceptualisations of LGBT+ consumer groups may be required (Bettany, 2016). This includes reconsidering their relationships to place, as Collard’s (1998, p.53) opinion piece suggests:

“For me, the post-gay sensibility began when I realized that I preferred the social variety of “mixed” clubs to the more homogeneous gay clubs. First for protection and later with understandable pride, gays have come to colonize whole neighborhoods, like West Hollywood in LA and Chelsea in New York City. It seems to me that the new Jerusalem gay people have been striving for all these years won’t be found in a gay-only ghetto, but in a world where we are free, equal, and safe to live our lives”.

The sweeping rhetorical gesture of describing a society as ‘post-gay’ overlooks many countervailing trends: some legal inequalities still exist and others are being reinstated as the political climate changes; smartphone applications like Grindr may make dating more virtual and less place dependent, but some people are seeking out places to engage in embodied sexual and romantic activities (Atkins, 2013; Simpson, 2014); and while homophobia may be on the decrease, similar declines in biphobia (Bettany and Rowe, 2015) and transphobia (Devor & Dominic, 2015) are not necessarily evidenced. Seidman’s (2002) term ‘beyond the closet era’ is perhaps less problematic. Although the closet metaphor can be criticised (Pantazopolous & Bettany, 2010), Seidman (2002) argues that the closet (and the in/out and in/visible binaries it implies) defined LGBT+ life until the late 1980s and 1990s when social attitudes began to liberalise. While ‘beyond the closet’ is arguably a less misleading term than post-gay, the term post-gay is useful precisely because its misleading connotations are what are being hotly contested. For this reason, the term post-gay is adopted for the remainder of this study as a productively contentious term.
2.5.2. Gay Villages: Objects of LGBT+ Consumption

*Gay village* is a non-academic term that people use to refer colloquially to spatial concentrations of LGBT+ people, businesses, and noncommercial organisations. Despite the rural connotations of the word village, gay villages are typically urban districts. Gay villages are primarily found in the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, and North-Western Europe. They emerged during the twentieth century from a complex convergence of factors that included rapid urbanisation, criminalisation and other legal restrictions, mass relocations caused by military conscription, widespread discrimination, and the emergence of identity politics based on the ethnic model of the civil rights movement (see Ghaziani, 2014, 2015). These factors were not present in the same configurations elsewhere in the world, explaining why gay villages are not as common in countries like in Italy (Visconti, 2008), Taiwan (Hsieh and Wu, 2011) and South Africa (Visser, 2014). Some of the most famous gay villages are The Castro in San Francisco, Soho in London, Greenwich Village in New York, Boystown in Chicago, Oxford Street in Sydney, Schöneberg in Berlin, and Manchester’s Gay Village (the empirical context of this study). While in Europe gay villages are primarily commercial districts (Skeggs, 1999; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Simpson, 2012, 2013, 2014; Haslop et al. 1998; Schofield and Schmidt, 2005), in North America gay villages are often referred to as ‘gayborhoods’ because they contain both commercial and residential properties (Brown, 2014; Ghaziani, 2014; 2015).

During most of the twentieth century gay villages were also referred to as ‘gay ghettos’. The LGBT+ activist Wittman (1970, pp.67-68) described the Castro as a “refugee camp for homosexuals... a ghetto, out of self-protection.” The term ghetto originally referred to a district in Venice where Jewish people were forced to live in the 1500s (Ghaziani, 2015, p.314). This Venetian Jewish ghetto was an industrial area of the city, so it is perhaps no coincidence that the Italian word *getto* means ‘foundry’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). The term ghetto has since been adapted by sociologists to refer to any urban concentration of minority groups (Ghaziani, 2015, p.314). In North America the term ghetto is usually applied to urban neighbourhoods populated primarily by racial minorities, particularly African-
Americans (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004), and the notion of gay villages as ‘ghettos’ emerged alongside a “post-war self-conception of gays as a quasi-ethnic minority” (Wright, 1999, p.173). While the term ethnic is often treated as synonymous with race, Rosenbaum (2005, p.259) points out that ethnicity derives from the Greek word ethnos, which “refers to a collection of people who lack political power in their residing locale and are distinguished from the polis, or the group of people who maintain political power.” He adds that “typical elements that distinguish the ethnos from the polis are race, religion and sexual orientation.” (Rosenbaum, 2005, p.259, emphasis added) This broader definition of ethnicity is apposite for most LGBT+ people in the twentieth century. Excluding certain exceptions like Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s (Beachy, 2014), LGBT+ people generally had to live in secret due to prevalent stigmatisation and the criminalisation of same-sex activity (Hammack and Cohler, 2011; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005).

Given these historical roots the notion of the gay ghetto is primarily negative, associated with segregation, stigmatisation, and subordination (Hubbard et al. 2015). As Levine (1979, p.1739) once wrote, a gay ghetto is reflective of “a conspicuous and locally dominant subculture that is socially isolated from the larger community”, or mainstream (heterosexual) society. While the eye may linger on the negative notion of social isolation in Levine’s quote, the term subculture indicates that gay ghettos also have more positive associations. Steven Kates (2002, p.385) spent over a year living in gay ghetto of a Canadian city gathering data on the local subcultures of gay men. Kates’s (2002, p.386) use of the term ‘ghetto’ was deliberate because he argued that “homosexuality was still somewhat stigmatized in the research city”, so it was only in the gay ghetto that gay men “felt safe and secure to walk, talk, behave, and consume in as open a way as they wished”. Gay ghettos could therefore be understood as ‘heterotopian’ places, namely “collective or shared spaces of ‘otherness’ where alternative forms of social organisation take place, forms that stand in stark contrast to their surrounding environment.” (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012, p. 497) In the case of gay ghettos, these heterotopic places contrast to the pervasive heteronormativity of the surrounding city. Heteronormativity refers to the twinned assumptions that (a) everyone is heterosexual unless demonstrably
otherwise, and (b) that heterosexuality is ‘normal’, ‘natural’, and preferable (Hubbard et al. 2015). The colloquialism ‘straight’ is often used to invoke this sense that heterosexuality is the desirable norm, from which less desirable people deviate. As Bell et al. (1995, p.32) once argued, “if space is not made gay or lesbian, then it must be straight”. LGBT+ identities can often be invisible because they are not associated with skin colour or other material signals (Ghaziani, 2015), so gay ghettos only became heterotopian because LGBT+ people chose to ‘set the tone’ (Ghaziani, 2014), through distinctive clothing, mannerisms, and practices such as drag (Kates, 2002). The material environment of gay ghettos also helped to sustain the heterotopian identity of these districts through hyper-sexualised imagery, specialist businesses like saunas, and symbols like rainbow flags (Kates, 2002, 2004; Simpson, 2012; Ghaziani, 2014; Hughes, 2003, 2006).

The ‘ghetto’ identity of gay villages implicitly relies on this contrast against the heteronormative surroundings of the city. Indeed, the positive associations of ghettos like community, safety, and a sense of freedom (see Kates, 2002) only make sense in relation to the exclusion, danger, and restriction of the world beyond its borders. Following the “dramatic sea change in social and cultural attitudes” (Brown, 2009, p.1497) that some refer to as the ‘post-gay era’ (Ghaziani, 2011; Ng, 2013) the assumptions of heteronormativity have begun to be undermined. A number of authors have critically addressed the claims of ‘post-gay’ advocates, especially their often sweeping claims that all LGBT+ people are now accepted and celebrated equally (see Ghaziani, 2011; Ng, 2013; Duggan, 2002; Brown, 2008, 2009; Nash, 2013). However, what is generally agreed is that the once stark contrast between gay villages and their surroundings have begun to diminish and thus the historical trope of the ‘gay ghetto’ is less appropriate (Ghaziani, 2015). For instance, when Haslop et al. (1998, p. 318) studied LGBT+ consumers in Manchester’s Gay Village the found that the participants in their study did not express feelings of ‘community’ or ‘safety’ when discussing this district. Their explanation for this was because Manchester was experienced as a city that welcomed and even celebrated diverse sexualities and gender, a finding echoed in other studies from around the same period (Skeggs, 1999; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004). This meant that LGBT+ consumers in Manchester
“did not feel compelled to visit a bar purely on its homosexual status” (Haslop et al., 1998, p. 322). This contrasts with the work of Kates (2002, 2004), who found that gay men were incredibly loyal to the businesses in the gay ghetto of the Canadian city that he studied. Haslop et al. (1998) argued that Manchester’s Gay Village should be understood more like a tourist destination than the home of a stigmatised subculture, given the rapidly increasing number of heterosexual visitors to the district each year (Skeggs, 1999; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Hughes, 2003, 2006).

While heterosexual tourism was a signal of changing social attitudes toward LGBT+ people, it was also a threat to the future of gay villages as distinctive cultural places. Skeggs (1999) found that some heterosexual women made lesbian women feel ‘out-of-place’ in bars and clubs within Manchester’s Gay Village, and Binnie and Skeggs (2004) documented how those places in the Gay Village that were frequented by heterosexual women in hen parties would often be avoided by LGBT+ people, creating a sense of displacement. Hughes (2003, 2006) also described how Manchester’s Gay Village was increasingly being ‘sanitised’ in the interests of re-positioning the district as ‘family-friendly’ and more attractive to heterosexual customers. Sanitisation meant removing or relocating the overt references to non-heteronormative sexuality and gender identities. Ghaziani (2014) later described this process as ‘de-gaying’, and provided the example of a bar in Chicago’s Boystown called ‘Manhole’ whose risqué name was changed to ‘H2O’. Once a shadowy environment that catered to gay men who enjoyed wearing leather, Manhole was refurbished into a cocktail bar that would appeal to a wider audience. In terms of relocation, Atkin’s (2011, 2013) found that illicit sexual practices like cruising and prostitution, which were once common in and around Manchester’s Gay Village, were moved to other parts of the city by more regular and visible police activity. Like Hughes (2003, 2006), Atkins (2013) also referred to this processes as ‘sanitisation’, as well as linking them to efforts by the Manchester City Council and local tourism agencies to promote the Gay Village as one of several cultural districts (on this last point, see Bennison et al. 2007).
This literature suggests that there has been little resistance from LGBT+ consumers and businesses to the sanitisation or de-gaying of gay villages. Part of the reason for this is that the shifting social attitudes of the post-gay era have enabled LGBT+ people to feel more comfortable living, working, and consuming outside their local gay village (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014, 2017; Ghaziani, 2014). This is vividly demonstrated in Nash’s (2013, p.243) study of the “online firestorm” following the publication of an opinion piece called “Dawn of a new gay: Why you won’t find the younger generation partying in the Village or plastering rainbow flags on their bumpers.” In this opinion piece a Canadian author called Aguirre-Livingston (2011, p.1) described that younger gay men like himself now had “the freedom to live exactly the way we want”, which Nash (2013, p.243) notes meant that they have “abandoned Toronto’s gay village, eschewed attendance at Gay Pride events and rejected sexual orientation as a defining aspect of identity”. While Aguirre-Livingston (2011, p.1) described this imagined person as the “post-modern homo- the “post-mo” if you will”, it sounds remarkably similar to the ‘post-gay’ coined by Burston (1991) two decades earlier. Yet Nash’s (2013) research found that while many people were able to “utilize new and alternative social landscapes” as Aguirre-Livingston suggested, many continued to patronise “more ‘traditional’ spaces such as the gay Village”. This ‘deterritorialisation’ of LGBT+ cultures beyond gay villages is also explored in the work of Ghaziani (2007, 2008), most explicitly in his book There Goes the Gayborhood? (Ghaziani, 2014). Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from cities across the United States, but focusing on the case study of Boystown in Chicago, Ghaziani (2014, p.74) found that LGBT+ people’s use of gay villages was declining because “residents now imagine the entire city as gay in some ways”.

Nash and Gorman-Murray (2014) have described these social and spatial changes as an increase in the ‘mobility’ of LGBT+ people, but it might be more accurate to say that it is LGBT+ cultures (e.g. identities, practices, symbols, etc.) that have become more mobile. Historical research shows that LGBT+ people have always been mobile (Keating and McGloughlin, 2005; Hammack and Cohler, 2011; Foucault, 1978) provided that they were willing to ‘pass’ as heteronormative (Goffman, 1962)- the key shift in recent times has been that LGBT+ people can now move in and through
multiple places without needing to manage what they say and do. This is not to suggest that LGBT+ people feel that they can live and socialise anywhere. Ghaziani’s (2014, p.74) notion of “the entire city as gay” is qualified with the addendum “in some ways”. Later on in his book Ghaziani (2014) argues that there are distinct patterns in LGBT+ people’s choices of where to live and socialise once they leave their local gay village, creating distinct ‘islands’ of LGBT+ culture around the city. Similarly Nash’s (2013) work in Toronto also suggests that the deterritorialisation of LGBT+ cultures from the gay village is matched by patterns of re-territorialisation elsewhere. Nash and Gorman-Murray (2017) have recently argued that researchers have little understanding of why these uneven spatial redistributions take the form that they do. In their conceptual article they propose that the notion of assemblage (see section 2.5.2) may be a useful way to explore how certain places become sites of ‘coalescence’ for LGBT+ people and cultural objects while others do not (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2017). However, as a conceptual piece this article stops short of addressing the question of why certain places outside gay villages are more likely to be used by LGBT+ people than others.

One empirical study that has addressed this is Brown’s (2006) study of ‘post-gay’ places in Spitalfields, East London, where “many people identify themselves as ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ [or otherwise], but the sites themselves do not demand the assertion of one identity or another. Most of the time places such as Spitalfields contain a majority of heterosexuals, less frequently gay people may be in the majority, but that is not necessarily important. In these sites there is an openness and acceptance of (sexual) difference”. This spatial diffusion of LGBT+ cultures has prompted authors to question the notion that heteronormativity is pervasive or monolithic, replacing a blanket-like understanding for a set of norms that are locally adapted and contested (G. Brown, 2008, 2009; Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009).
2.5.3. Manchester’s Gay Village

Having laid the definitional and conceptual groundwork necessary to define gay village in the abstract, this section now focuses on Manchester’s Gay Village in particular (note the use of capital letters to denote that Manchester’s Gay Village is a proper noun, rather than the common noun ‘gay villages’ of the literature). This sub-section has two objectives. The first is to describe Manchester’s Gay Village, to provide all readers with relevant background information that will prove useful in the subsequent chapters. The second is to demonstrate how this place can be understood as an acute example of a key popular and scholarly debate in the existing literature about LGBT+ people’s changing relationships with LGBT+ districts. This discussion has already been alluded to in the previous section, but it will be unpacked in detail here as it is this changing person-place relationship that is the central ‘intellectual puzzle’ animating the present piece of research (Mason, 2002). By the end of this thesis the reader should have a solid understanding of Manchester’s Gay Village and the intellectual puzzle that it helps to direct attention toward.

Manchester’s Gay Village is a square mile in the centre of the city that is bisected by the Rochdale Canal. While there are residential properties in the area, the Gay Village is a leisure district constituted primarily by bars, clubs, and other nightlife leisure venues. While there are plans to develop more residential properties in the area, at the time of writing Manchester’s Gay Village remains a commercially oriented area. Manchester City Council has done much to promote the Gay Village as a place of culture and commerce, as part of their strategy to re-brand Manchester as a progressive and cosmopolitan city (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Hughes, 2003, 2006). The Gay Village is presently defined as one of the key economic and cultural “zones” in the city centre by the local council and tourist agency (see Bennison et al. 2007, p.630). In this it differs from the more residential ‘gayborhoods’ common in North American cities (Brown, 2014; Ghaziani, 2014). While Manchester’s Gay Village is understood as the LGBT+ place in the city by many, it can be countered that it is just the “most visible and publicly accessible” part of a much wider network of LGBT+ places, events, organisations, and groups across the Greater Manchester area.
Simpson, 2013, p.284). Indeed, the entire city of Manchester has been described as a “regional magnet” for LGBT+ people, thanks to its “highly developed and differentiated facilities” (Simpson, 2012, p.1), which include but exceed those found in the Gay Village.

The area that would later become known as the ‘Gay Village’ had been known as a non-heterosexual meeting place for many years. As Britain de-industrialised the Rochdale Canal fell into disuse and the surrounding warehouses, streets, and underpasses became places for criminals, prostitutes, and men with same-sex desires to meet for illicit and illegal activities (Atkins, 2013). Local public houses like the New Union were regularly raided by police in the 1940s at a time when same-sex sexual activity was illegal in the United Kingdom; after homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967, the area began to develop more openly, and by the 1980s the area had “three traditional gay bars and two major cottages” (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004, p.48), the term cottage referring to public places where men would go to engage in sexual activities with one another (Brown, 2007). However, further development was constrained by enduring social stigma, police discrimination, and events such as Section 28 and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004). Two other venues, the Rembrandt hotel and Napoleon’s club, both had obscured street-level windows and dim interiors. Such hermetic or protective architectural styles were typical of LGBT+ venues up until the 1990s in the United Kingdom (Skeggs, 1993; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005) and United States (Branchik, 2002; Ghaziani, 2011).

Binnie and Skeggs (2004, p.48) argued that the challenges of the 1980s had encouraged tightly-knit LGBT+ communities to form in Manchester, and as social and legal conditions began to change this community provided the resources for a ‘Gay Village’ to emerge. At the very start of the 1990s a bar called Manto was opened, and for Skeggs (1999, p.218), “the architectural design represented a queer visual statement: ‘We’re here, we’re queer . . . so get used to it’. It was a brick, glass and mortar refusal to hide anymore, to remain underground and invisible.” Manto bar was not an instant commercial success, as it took time for non-heterosexual people got used to being visible to passersby, but within six months it was one of the busiest
venues in the area (Lofthouse, 2013). While this may look like an ordinary bar in a heterosexual context, for LGBT+ people this was a dramatic change from what had come before. As Skeggs (1999, p.218) points out, the “visual statement” of Manto bar “should not be underestimated after years of homophobic persecution.”

The area surrounding the Rochdale Canal had continued to be understood as a place of deviant people and stigmatised, illicit activities even during the 1980s. This area fitted the *gay ghetto* template (Kates, 2002; Ghaziani, 2015) discussed in section 2.5.2. However, it was rapidly re-interpreted during the 1990s to become more of a commercial district and tourist site (Skeggs, 1999; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004). During the 1990s the number of bars and other explicitly LGBT+ businesses in the area increased dramatically (Simpson, 2013, p.285), so that by the time Haslop et al. (1998) came to study the Gay Village the district had diversified significantly. Most of the new bars and venues adopted the architectural template set by Manto bar, and the area began to become “more obviously visibly gay” (Skeggs, 1999, p.219).

Haslop et al. (1998) found that LGBT+ people generally welcomed these changes, and the increased acceptance of sexual and gender minorities that it suggested. However, they did also point out that several of the participants were critical of certain venues in the Gay Village, describing them as “dirty, tacky, sleazy” (Haslop et al. 1998, p.322). Skeggs (1999) also found that LGBT+ people were also critical of the increased number of heterosexual people that had begun visiting Gay Village venues. This began to make participants feel unwelcome in what had once been *their* exclusive place. These findings contrast with most of the sociological and geographical literature on LGBT+ districts, which use the term ‘gay village’ in a generally positive light, with the term ‘gay ghetto’ being its more negative conceptual counterpart (Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, & Nash, 2015). Early marketing and consumer research on Manchester’s Gay Village suggests a more critical perspective might be necessary (Haslop et al. 1998). As noted in the previous section, Kates’s (2002) research suggests gay ghettos may also have positive associations alongside the negative. More importantly, geographers and sociologists generally provide what might be described as a ‘progressive’ chronological narrative, whereby stigmatisation diminishes, laws change, and gay ghettos transform into gay villages.
Yet the case of Manchester’s Gay Village challenges this chronological narrative by demonstrating that for some the changes of gay ghetto to gay village were perceived negatively as displacements (Skeggs, 1999), while for others these developments engendered a mix of feelings at best (Haslop et al. 1991). Around the turn of the millennium the Gay Village became nationally, if not internationally, famous thanks to a television show called *Queer as Folk* (Skeggs et al. 2004). The show was a fictional drama focusing on the lives of three gay men, with the Gay Village taking centre stage in many of the episodes. Airing in 1999 and 2000 on Channel 4, one of the main broadcasters in the UK, Queer as Folk presented Manchester’s Gay Village (and the LGBT+ communities and cultures found there) in generally positive, although sometimes shocking, ways. The show made a large audience of heterosexuals and LGBT+ people more aware of Manchester’s Gay Village, and presented it to them as an innocuous leisure destination rather than a sinister sexual space (Skeggs et al. 2004). Following the show there was an upsurge in heterosexual tourism, particularly from women on hen nights (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004), intensifying the problems already identified by Skeggs (1999). This was because, as Skeggs (1999, p.219) had once argued, “visibility offers incentives for others to enter unknown spaces”. While Skeggs (1999) was writing about the material visibility created by changing architectural styles (e.g. Manto bar) and a more visible LGBT+ population, Queer as Folk represented a series of cultural representations that contributed to this visibility (Skeggs et al. 2004), and took it to a far larger and geographically dispersed audience.

According to Hughes (2003, 2006), there was also a ‘sanitisation’ of the Gay Village as the local council saw an opportunity to develop the nascent district and LGBT+ businesses sought to attract a new heterosexual clientele. Some more recent research has explored the *displacing* effects of this sanitation. Simpson (2012, 2013) explored how older gay and bisexual men continued to frequent venues in the Gay Village, but were increasingly feeling displaced by the changing demographics in the Gay Village. These ‘middle aged and older gay and bisexual men’, as Simpson described them, began to seek out other places, including events and social groups, where they felt more welcomed and valued (see Simpson, 2014). Similarly, Aitken

(Ghaziani, 2015).
(2011, 2013a, 2013b) has documented how a number of men (some who do not identify as gay or bisexual) used to engage in sex work within the Gay Village, but have since been ‘pushed out’ as the council, local police, and various businesses have sought to establish a more ‘family friendly’ and ‘wholesome’ image for the Gay Village.

What this small but recent body of academic research suggests is that during the late 2000s and early 2010s the trends identified around the turn of the century (e.g. Skeggs, 1999; Haslop et al. 1998) continued to displace LGBT+ consumers. Put differently, while Manchester’s Gay Village was becoming increasingly popular with heterosexuals and certain LGBT+ consumers, others were feeling displaced. This nascent interpretation of mixed feelings and feeling detached from the Gay Village gleaned from the existing scholarly research can be supplemented by recent opinion pieces from non-academic writers.

Consider the following extended extract from an opinion piece written by Andrew Collier (2014, p.x), which was entitled Gay Village: What has happened to Canal Street?

“I don’t want to sound too dramatic and I am taking into account my age difference between wide-eyed teenager and cynical 30-something, but the village feels like an alien landscape these days. I know that bars need people in them in order to make money and in a recession that means loosening up door policies to get the head count up. Taxes and business rates are through the roof, people are staying in to drink instead of heading out. However, the knock-on effect has been detrimental beyond anyone’s predictions. Take two steps onto Canal Street on a Saturday night and you feel like you’re an extra in a Mad Max film. Policemen on horseback trot past causing neon hen parties to stumble into doorways, cackling loudly. Metal detectors corral revellers moving between bars, while sizzled groups of lads fight with security guards. It’s no wonder the Gay Village is now officially the least safe area of the city centre [...] the
Gay Village has the ignominious title of winner of the most reported thefts and assaults in the 67 divisions of North Manchester. A sobering thought to consider en route to your Saturday night out. “Got any drugs, mate?” a wide-eyed girl asks me as my friends and I negotiate the cobbles, now more of an assault course. “Why would you ask me that?” I enquire quizzically. “Because you’re gay, mate. You’ve all got drugs.” What a way to start an evening, and comparatively a drop in the ocean compared with the stories I’ve heard about rampant homophobia and transphobia. When the dust settles and the sun rises, how many more bodies are going to be found floating in the canal?”

This rather vivid account portrays the Gay Village as a kind of paradise lost, echoing the work of Binnie and Skeggs (2004), Skeggs (1999), and Hughes (2003, 2006) that cast a somewhat nostalgic glow on the 1980s and 1990s as a time before the ‘heterosexual invasion’ and crass commercialization of the district. Indeed, Collier (2014, p.x) concludes “if acceptance means dealing with the current state of the Gay Village, by all means take me back to a time before Will and Grace[^3] made their way down the cobbles.” However, another commentator was quick to question Collier’s idealised retrospective, suggesting instead that the Gay Village had always been a place of mixed feelings:

“I read an article not so long ago referencing Manchester’s Gay Village. The author, Andrew Collier, described a Village that had once been an almost idyllic setting of progression and safety; one which, through my own perception and tinted idealism, was inclusive and accepting; one where you’d expect to find an eclectic blend of subcultures unified, but not defined by, their sexuality. This is pretty much the image I had in mind when I excitedly planned to

[^3] *Will and Grace* was a popular US television comedy about a heterosexual woman and her gay male friend living in New York City.
move to Manchester 7 years ago to study at university […] However it became more and more apparent that what I was enjoying was actually an idea I’d created of the Gay Village – an illusion, or at least, an augmentation of what was actually there, and consequently I started to get bored as I began to realise it wasn’t quite the diverse, accepting haven I once thought. I hardly ever felt I could go there with my straight friends as they felt unwelcome and the music was not to their taste. I have been rejected from gay clubs with the old “members only” line, which essentially means “sorry you don’t conform to our idea of gay people” and I’ll tell you it hurts being rejected for not normalising by a community that prides itself on accepting the queer. I apologise if this all sounds a bit dramatic, but it really started to feel like there wasn’t anything unifying beyond the fact that there existed a more dense population of gay people.” (North, 2014, n.p.)

What is clear from the existing research is that the recent past and the present of the Gay Village reveal a set of contested meanings and feelings for LGBT+ people. At the same time, North (2014) notes several positive developments in recent years that allows him to envision a role for the Gay Village even in (ostensibly) post-stigma and post-discrimination cities like Manchester:

“Thankfully, there are venues in the village that offer something a little different. The Molly House is exactly the kind of venue that I feel there should be more of in the Village: great food and drinks, lovely staff and an eclectic playlist. It feels like a bar that happens to have gay people in it, not something marketed around some offensive, corporate stereotype. Then there’s Taurus, which not only offers top-notch food and drinks, but is also one of the leading venues for fringe performance and theatre in Manchester.”

Collier (2014) is more cautious, but certainly suggests that there is a possible role for Manchester’s Gay Village. He wrote that:
“There are always rays of hope. Richmond Street has become an alternative destination away from the carnage, replete with bars that have a mixed crowd but a safe environment. Other bars on Canal Street have kept their door policies and thus offer a place for vulnerable members of the LGBT community to be themselves without the fear of violence or intimidation. The economy is slowly mending, but does this mean the Gay Village will also emerge from its recession?” (Collier, 2014, p.x)

In the context of North America there is a body of research exploring the present state and possible future of LGBT+ districts, as discussed above but summarised here. First, Nash (2013) investigated the online responses to an opinion piece written by Aguirre-Livingston (2011) in a Torontonian magazine, where he suggested that ‘post-mo’ (post-modern post-homosexuals) were not interested in visiting LGBT+ districts or LGBT+ festivals like Pride. Instead, they wanted to assimilate into the heterosexual mainstream, socialise in mixed venues, and dissimulate any sense of social or cultural difference. Nash (2013, p.243) found that while younger, middle-class, ‘technologically-savvy’, and white people agreed with Augirre-Livingston’s (2011) post-mo thesis, many others did not, “generating an online firestorm” of discussion about Toronto’s LGBT+ district (which, just like Manchester’s, was known locally as the ‘Gay Village’). Ghaziani (2014) conducted a similar analysis in the United States, focusing on Boystown in Chicago but also considering a number of other cities and LGBT+ districts through survey data and newspaper reports. Much like Nash (2013), he started with arguments in popular and academic discourses that America was increasingly ‘post-gay’, and that many LGBT+ people were no longer visiting LGBT+ districts. His analysis demonstrated a far more nuanced or ambivalent picture where LGBT+ people no longer felt restricted (or ‘ghettoised’) to LGBT+ districts, but nor did they feel entirely apathetic toward them.

Both studies also questioned the post-gay idea, or ideal (Collard, 1998, see section 2.2.2), that the LGBT+ people who no longer lived, worked, or socialised in LGBT+ districts were assimilating into the mainstream. Both pointed to other LGBT+ places, events, and groups beyond the Gay Village that were often less visible and less well
known, but no less important to LGBT+ communities, cultures, or commercial enterprises. This resonates with the work of Aitken (2011, 2013a, 2013b) and Simpson (2014), who demonstrated the emergence of similar LGBT+ places beyond Manchester’s Gay Village. Brown’s (2009) work on post-gay places in Spitalfields, and Andersson’s (2011) work on the (re-)emergence of Vauxhall both demonstrate similar processes at work in London, where Soho has historically been the primary LGBT+ district. Nash (2013, p.250) concluded that these shifts in consumption patterns were “contributing to the transformative processes reordering Toronto’s downtown neighborhoods.” It can also be argued that these shifting consumption patterns are ‘transformative’ of LGBT+ markets. As demonstrated by the historical research of Branchik (2002) and Keating and McGlouglin (2005), LGBT+ places have predominantly been commercial ventures, with social attitudes, market opportunities, and the form of places often co-evolving with one another. One of the key insights to emerge from the work of Nash (2013) and Ghaziani (2014) is that the mixed feelings towards Gay Villages have called their commercial viability into question. However, this is not just an esoteric academic argument. Take the following extract from an article from a British newspaper called The Guardian:

“The past couple of years have been notably hard for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) venues in the UK. In the capital alone, more than a dozen spaces have closed, from Vauxhall superclub Area in south London, to local pubs north of the river Thames, to lesbian institution Candy Bar in Soho and Madame Jojo’s, home to many queer nights. The future of four or five more hangs in the balance, and outside London, cities such as Brighton and Manchester are also suffering... in Manchester, local institutions Taurus and Eden have recently closed their doors, perhaps forever, and a sense of vulnerability is in the air.” (Walters, 2015, n.p.)

As noted earlier in this section, in Manchester existing research has demonstrated mixed feelings toward the local Gay Village (Haslop et al. 1998; Skeggs, 1999). The commercial ramifications of this were alluded to by Haslop et al. (1998, p.322), who found that social acceptance had reached such a point in Manchester that “it seems
that respondents did not feel compelled to visit a bar purely on its homosexual [sic] status. Thus “gay” service environments only “win” by the logic of the market, by offering an experience superior to that available through traditional alternatives.” These findings contrasted sharply with the work of Kates (2002, 2004), who found that LGBT+ consumers were incredibly loyal to LGBT+ businesses because they saw them as part of their community, as ‘allies’ against heteronormativity and discrimination. This commitment to ‘community’ businesses was also found by Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) in the context of African-American ghettos, and this was described as an ‘ideological’ commitment. Haslop et al. (1998) suggest that LGBT+ consumers lacked such ideological commitments, and instead treated places in the Gay Village just like any other marketplace venue.

What these studies suggest is that Manchester’s Gay Village is an acute example of the shifting relationships between social attitudes, LGBT+ identities and culture, LGBT+ markets, and LGBT+ places. In a special session about the “radical market de-homogenization, fragmentation, dissolution, and resistant of non-heterosexual consumer cultures”, Bettany (2016, p.33) suggested that many contemporary societies were a “complex post-gay vista of possibilities (and problems) for consumer culture research”, necessitating new “ideas of how to market to, characterize and entertain cultural logics of connection within post-gay consumer cultures, in the face of the radical de-homogenization, fragmentation and dissolution of the gay market.” That is, while earlier studies have criticised the popular notion of ‘the gay (and lesbian) market’ (e.g. Peñaloza, 1998; Kates,1999; Keating and McGloughlin, 2005; Gudelunas, 2011), shifts and disruptions in society and (consumer) culture mean that the picture had become too mixed and fluxional to be described in such simplistic and simplifying terminology. Manchester’s Gay Village is an acute example because the academic and non-academic discourse suggests that the increased ambivalence and state of flux found there was also found in LGBT+ districts elsewhere across the UK and North America.
3. Methodology

3.1. Overview of the methodology chapter

In this chapter I detail how I answered my research questions by generating, analysing, and interpreting a body of data. I will use the first-person address throughout this chapter in order to acknowledge and adequately explore my role in the research process (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Haraway, 1991b, 1997). This chapter is organised into four sections. Section 3.2 explores the epistemological position that I have adopted in order to produce knowledge. If ontology refers to a set of philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality, then epistemology refers to the closely related philosophical beliefs about how knowledge about that reality can be produced (Cresswell, 2007). The ontological position that I have adopted in this study has already been outlined in section 2.3 where I wrote at length about material-semiotics and the (post-) networked understandings of reality (or realities) that this intellectual tradition is based upon. However, my epistemological position remained implicit and needs to be carefully unpacked in this chapter.

In section 3.3 I describe ‘multi-sited ethnography’ and explain why I adopted this as the methodological approach for my study. In sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 I then provide more specific details about what I actually did in order to generate, analyse, and interpret the data. I will explain the research design in detail (i.e. what I planned to do), but also the unexpected events that I had to engage with throughout the research process. I saw these events not so much in the dichotomous terms of ‘challenges’ and/or ‘opportunities’, but rather in terms of turning points (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). These were moments where my taken-for-granted trajectories were disrupted, forcing me to reconsider the objects of my research, my own status as research subject, and the research methods that created the connection but also distinction between (research) subjects and objects. At times I found this connection and distinction slipping and myself asking- where am I in the research process?
3.2. Philosophical Positions: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that asks, “what is?” Epistemology is a distinct but related brand of philosophy that asks, “how can we know?” At least, those are my understandings of the two terms. As Spiggle (1994) points out, the practical implications of epistemology is that it defines how someone believes knowledge can and should be produced. An epistemological position therefore provides a way of assessing the quality of knowledge claims (Spiggle, 1994), a reasoned approach by which to differentiate convincing arguments from less convincing ones. Like ontology, everyone has an implicit epistemological position whether or not they have taken the time to consider it. It is therefore important for me explain my epistemological understandings and assumptions to render them visible and open to critical assessment.

As Bajde (2013, p. 229) notes, “while epistemology of any kind is inescapably entangled in ontological concerns, in the case of ANT the connection is especially potent.” Bajde (2013, p. 229) then goes on to explain that “epistemologically speaking, ANT aims to avoid the danger of sliding down two slippery slopes: (1) the slope of radical realism, which leads toward a singular, independent, ‘out there’ reality, cut off from ‘in here’ scientific practice of reality making, or (2) the slope of (nothing but) social constructivism, which leads toward realities fully and independently constructed by humans”. The former is static and fixed, which conflicts with ANT’s view of reality as processual and enacted (Bettany, 2007b; Law & Singleton, 2005), while the latter is plainly anthropocentric, and thus incommensurate with ANT’s post-human understandings and explanations (Latour, 2005). In addition, the problem with both of these epistemological perspectives (from an ANT perspective at least) is that they propose that high-quality knowledge about the world is created by humans who manage to ‘transcend’ the messiness of everyday life to a position ‘outside’ of reality (Haraway, 1997; Harman, 2009). Radical realists attempt this via experimental controls that (ostensibly) ensure that the researcher and researched remain independent of one another’s influence (Goulding, 1999; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988); social constructivists try to combine
human perspectives to create an ‘overarching’ position ‘above’ their realities, or seek a ‘critical’ position whereby they can observe the influences ‘behind’ everyday perspectives of reality (Bettany, 2007a; Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009).

Actor-network Thinkers argue that “knowing is embodied, situated, and embedded in practices, and practices are always being done somewhere”, which means that “there’s no grand overview, no neutral place.” (Law & Singleton, 2013, p. 486) Knowledge is inherently spatial (Rose, 1997), so each knowledge claim “comes from somewhere, rather than everywhere or nowhere.” (Law, 2009, p. 142) Related to this is the assertion that all knowledge is partial, incomplete, and biased. This “suggests the need for methodological humility” (Law & Singleton, 2005, p. 350), but this is not to suggest that ANT epistemologies treat the embodied, situated, embedded researcher or their partial, incomplete, and biased understandings as limitations to be overcome. Rather, these are characteristics that can be worked with to produce better quality research. Inverting the transcendental aspirations of radical realism and social constructivism, ANT (and material-semiotics more broadly) advocate the role of the modest witness who gets involved in messy reality-making (Bastian, 2006; Haraway, 1997), producing a “view from a body, always complex, contradictory... versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.” (Haraway, 1991a, p. 195) Rather than aspiring to a position outside of reality from which to understand, ANT and material-semioticians seek to make sense of reality building from within (Law, 2004), learning how actors and networks make reality from ‘up close’ (Latour, 2005). As Haraway (1997, p. 36) puts it:

*The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean. Knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention.*

The quote from Haraway also points to the epistemological position - shared by a number of material-semioticians - that knowledge and reality are not separate
domains but co-emergent ephemera. Put differently, knowledge-making and reality-making are viewed as co-evolving and co-constitutive processes. Reality is defined as performative (Butler, 1990, 1993), or continually and multiply enacted (Mol, 2002), and research is a set of relational processes entangled into these enactments of reality (Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005). In other words, knowledge about the world emerges by participating in a very small part of it, understanding the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the net-workings taking place there, and then reassembling these understandings into a written text (Law, 2004), or some other form of (non)representation (Hill, Canniford, & Mol, 2014). Researchers cannot claim to be innocent, as their actions have consequences (Haraway, 1997), and they also cannot claim to be autonomous, as they need (and need to acknowledge) the actor-networks that constitute them as researchers (Bettany, 2015). Researchers are actor-networks, actors that are produced by and only productive through their networks (Latour, 2005), and they should therefore try to make the co-emergent and co-constitutive character of the research process more apparent in their writing (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). To erase such details is not to ‘purify’ knowledge and make it more objective; it simply silences, erases, or obscures the details of knowledge production (Star, 2010).

This performative actor-network interplay is important in all aspects of material-semiotic research, but it was especially relevant to my exploration of the subject-object binary of place consumption. As Law (1999, p. 7) argued, material-semioticians challenge “essential differences”, treating them as something to be explained rather than something to “explain phenomena (away)” with (Bajde, 2013, p. 231). In this study I wanted to understand how place consumers co-emerge as subjects of consumption alongside places as objects of consumption. As part of that I also needed to recognise and work with my own co-emergent status as a researcher-subject alongside various objects of research (e.g. places, participants, events, etc.). The ANT epistemology meant that ‘researcher’ was not simply a role that I could adopt when it suited me. I had to become a researcher through networks of nonhumans and humans working together to allow me to emerge as such. These networks could be thought of as ambivalent – that is, messy, intersecting,
countervailing – and thus my status as a researcher was always ontologically uncertain. If I endorsed the material-semiotic idea that everything is “a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (Law, 2009, p. 141), I needed to admit that this logic applied to me too. I was a collection of “ambivalent subject effects of the research process.” (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009, p. 673)

At this stage these ideas may read as overly abstract, esoteric, and philosophical. However, in the sections that follow I hope to reflect upon the ways in which this performative, co-emergent, uncertain, situated, embodied (etc.) epistemology was deployed in practice. As noted by Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton (2009) researchers are often encouraged to be ‘reflexive’ about their research processes, which means explaining how and why they made decisions and how these decisions may have influenced the knowledge that they produced. The point of reflexivity is to allow readers to assess the quality of these decisions and take the postulated influences into account (Haraway, 1997). Researcher reflexivity is usually achieved in one of three ways: (a) detailing (and justifying) the research design, (b) intensive introspection about one’s own biases and preconceptions, or (c) reflecting on the perspective of the researcher and comparing and contrasting these to other possible perspectives (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009, p. 667). However, all three perspectives are problematic from the epistemological perspective of ANT and material-semiotics, where “all actors involved in the research are viewed as multiple, fragile and processual effects of the research not essential human subjects reflecting on their authentic experiences.” (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009, p. 673) Law (2004) argues that social researchers who view reality as messy, multiple, and mutable need to develop methodological approaches that share these same characteristics (see also Law & Singleton, 2005).

In the subsequent sections I aim to explore the messiness, multiplicity, and mutability of my research process, the research objects, and the research subject (me). To aid in this I follow the advice of Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton (2009, p. 673) to think in terms of “turnings” or turning points where the research process became problematic and went in a different direction, re-constituting the research
subject, the objects of research, and the relationships between them. Reflexivity becomes a process of ‘working out’ what happened in an honest and transparent way, never quite “solving it” but instead “doing the best you can within a situation where finding the perfect solution [or explanation] is impossible.” (Bettany, 2007a, p. 79).
3.3. Multi-sited\textsuperscript{4} Ethnography

I wanted to understand how place consumers and places co-emerge as subjects and objects of consumption. While I had chosen to focus on the LGBT+ cultures of Manchester as an empirical context, the first question that I had to ask myself was where I was going to focus my research. What co-emergent places and place consumers would I spend time coming to understand? The Gay Village was an obvious choice, given the historical importance of this district to the LGBT+ people in the city and the researchers who had studied them (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Simpson, 2012, 2013, 2014; Skeggs, 1999; Skeggs, Moran, Tyer, & Binnie, 2004). However, at the same time I wanted to take into account the ‘post-gay’ discourse and the lifestyles beyond Gay Villages that it redirected attention to (Ghaziani, 2014; Nash, 2013; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). Through my reading I had begun to think of the relationships between LGBT+ cultures and place as more fluid and de-territorialised (see also Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017). I needed a peripatetic methodology that allowed me to follow these flows between places and identify the moments where subjects and objects emerged from place consumption. Then I discovered the term ‘multi-sited ethnography’ that had begun to emerge within CCT (Bettany & Daly, 2008; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Ekström, 2006; Minowa, Visconti, & Maclaran, 2012; Visconti et al. 2010).

Ethnography emerged in anthropology as a way to study human cultures by participating in them and observing the details of everyday interactions (Agar, 1986; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Fielding, 1993; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, 1995). One of the earliest examples of ethnography as it is known today is Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1922) \textit{Argonauts of the Western Pacific}. Malinowski had been living with the Trobriand people of the Kiriwana archipelago, near present-day New Guinea, when

\textsuperscript{4} While some researchers use the term multi-sited ethnography (e.g. Marcus, 1995; Visconti et al. 2010), others write of multi-site ethnography (e.g. Bettany & Daly, 2008; Hannerz, 2003). As far as I am aware this distinction is a matter of stylistic preference.
the outbreak of World War One forced him to extend his residency for several years (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003, p. 215). During this time Malinowski participated in the Trobriand culture and made extensive observations of what he learnt. Later ethnographies followed in this spirit and produced work that focused on how cultures were enacted in situ, rather than how they were described in interviews or quantified in surveys (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). In situ enactments of culture are usually recorded in the form of written notes that include details of observed activities, the ethnographer’s multisensory experiences, insights from informal conversations with participants, and descriptions of the environment (Agar, 1996; Deutscher, Pestello, & Pestello, 1992; Gummesson, 2007; Pink, 2009), but also through photography (Penaloza, 1998), video (Belk & Kozinets, 2005), and a host of other more-than-linguistic techniques (see Hill et al. 2014).

Ethnographic approaches spread beyond anthropology to a range of other disciplines during the twentieth century (Agar, 1986; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), but the methodology only began to be adopted in marketing and consumer research during the late 1980s and early 1990s following the ‘interpretive turn’ (Sherry, 1991). Most marketing and consumer researchers at the time wanted to emulate the natural sciences and adopted experimental approaches to identify the universal laws of markets and consumption (Goulding, 1999; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). In this context ethnography was not deemed ‘objective’ enough, and it was only with the broadening of philosophical perspectives during the interpretive turn, or “renaissance CCT” (Bajde, 2014, p. 11), that researchers began to use ethnographic approaches in order “to explicate patterns of actions that are cultural and/or social rather than cognitive” (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994, p. 485).

Early examples of ethnographic studies in CCT include the Consumer Behavior Odyssey, a literal and theoretical journey across the consumer cultures of the United States (see Belk, 1991), and the ethnographic studies of Midwestern flea markets (McGrath, Sherry, & Heisley, 1993; Sherry, 1990), Nike Town (Penaloza, 1998; Sherry, 1998b), the ESPN Zone (Kozinets et al. 2004; Sherry et al. 2004; Sherry et al. 2001), and studies of Gay Villages (Haslop et al. 1998; Kates, 2002). Some early ANT studies also adopted ethnographic-style approaches of observing and participating in the
everyday life of laboratories to understand how knowledge is made (e.g. Latour & Woolgar, 1979). A common theme in CCT ethnographic studies (and ethnographic studies in general) is that they conceptualise human cultures as territorialised, or delimited to particular places. The term ethnographic research is often used as a synonym for identifying a place where a particular culture can be found and then spending extended lengths of time in and around that place (Arnould, 1998; Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006). To take an example relevant to my study, Kates (2002, p. 385) explained that “for a year and a half I immersed myself full time within the downtown gay ghetto, at the intersection of Corner and Williams, of a large Canadian city with a thriving gay and lesbian population.”

This territorialised view of culture - as something delimited to particular places – and the static application of ethnography that follows from it have both become increasingly problematic (Falzon, 2009). Over the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first) cultures became increasingly fluid and peripatetic as people, objects, and information have become increasingly mobile and interconnected (Amit & Rapport, 2002; Appadurai, 1990; Bardhi, Eckhardt, & Arnould, 2012; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). In response to these changes, Marcus (1995, p. 108) proposed the notion of multi-sited ethnography, arguing that proposed that multi-sited ethnographers should adopt a “speculative, open-ended spirit of tracing things” across various sites of manifestation including physical places, websites, and less well-defined sites of culture like conversations or mass media representations. If ethnography was about ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1973), then multi-sited ethnography was about “being there... and there... and there!” (Hannerz, 2003, p. 201)

Multi-sited ethnography resonates with the growing consensus in CCT that culture is distributed or networked (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). It is especially apposite for researchers working at the confluence of ANT and CCT, where consumer cultures are conceptualised as phenomena that emerge and evolve locally but also travel and transmute trans-locally (Bettany, 2007b; Canniford & Bajde, 2015; Woermann, 2017). However, a surprisingly small number of CCT researchers have described their methodological approach as a multi-sited ethnography. These include Bettany and Daly (2008), who traced Afghan Hounds as they were co-constituted and re-
constituted in various different sites of pedigree dog show networks, and Bettany and Kerrane (2011), who investigated how chicken coops were entangled into dynamic webs of materiality and meaning that continually redefined the purpose and impact of these objects. Visconti et al. (2010, p. 515) also used a multi-sited ethnographic approach to study how graffiti art challenged people’s understandings of public place across a variety of different cities within Europe and the United States. Like Bettany and Daly (2008), Visconti et al. (2010) also expanded their remit to include virtual sites through online data collection. Finally, Skandalis et al. (2017) used a multi-sited ethnography to consider how consumers’ musical tastes are shaped by different places in differing ways. There have also been two conceptual articles exploring the notion of multi-sited ethnography and its possible applications to marketing and consumer research (Ekström, 2006; Minowa et al. 2012).

Notwithstanding these contributions multi-sited ethnography remains relatively marginal in the CCT discourse. As noted by Falzon (2009), many in anthropology regard the term ‘multi-sited ethnography’ to be a tautology. This is because most ethnographies involve visiting multiple physical and virtual places to collect data, but simply define these sites as part of the same ‘field’. Similarly, many studies in CCT may not be described as multi-sited ethnographies but involved collecting data from a variety of different places (e.g. Bardhi et al. 2012; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Martin & Schouten, 2014; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, multi-sited ethnography is not differentiated from other ethnographies solely by its “multiplication of the sites of investigation”, as Minowa et al. (2012, p. 485) put it, but by its commitment to an unbounded and peripatetic ontology of culture and cultural phenomenon (Marcus, 1995, 1998). In other words, multi-sited ethnography is more about making the fluid and de-territorialised aspects of phenomena explicit in theory, and then complementing this assertion with a conscientiously peripatetic approach. To move away from the emphasis on ‘sites’ Hannerz (2003) has suggesting thinking more in terms of ‘translocal’ cultural phenomena and ethnographic methods. However, this risks overlooking the fact that cultural phenomena interact locally in order to enact realities (Law & Singleton, 2005; Mol, 2002; Woermann, 2017; Woermann & Kirschner, 2015), so the focus on sites is also important. Marcus
(1998, p. 90) later clarified that his understanding of multi-sited ethnography was that researchers should explore “chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions” between sites, but retain “an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites.” This means that multi-sited ethnography is about highlighting differences between sites (unlike conventional ethnographies that conflate them into a single ‘research field’) but also attending to the flows (or lack thereof) that bring sites into relationships with one another.

Multi-sited ethnography adopts a “speculative, open-ended spirit of tracing things” (Marcus, 1995, p. 108), which accords with the ANT exhortations to ‘follow’ actors as they co-enact realities in different times and places (Latour, 2005). This suited my desire to understand the co-emergence of LGBT+ place consumers and places across a heterogeneous array of different locations in Manchester. However, for me this unbounded spirit immediately raised two methodological questions. First, where should I start? Put another way, where were the possible ‘entry points’ into the flows that I wanted to study? A departure point was necessary but also consequential. Reading the work of John Law (Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005), I came to believe that different entry points would produce different enactments of these fluvial realities. Second, where should I focus? In other words, how would I know which flows and connections to follow and which to ignore? As Hill et al. (2014, p. 385, original emphasis) explain and ask:

“One cannot escape the need for research boundaries in terms of sites and samples. Without these boundaries, we risk obliging ourselves to account for everything that goes on in daily life. [But] how can we legitimately set the boundaries of our research domains?”

Echoing Latour (2005), Minowa et al. (2012, p. 483) suggest that multi-sited CCT researchers should “follow people, goods, metaphors, stories, biographies, or conflicts” in order to better understand translocal consumer cultures. Following something provides an answer to the question of where to start and where to focus. Bettany and Daly (2008) offer similar advice, but argue instead that multi-sited
ethnography should be structured around the hybrid figurations (Haraway, 1991a, 2003) that manifest within and move between sites. These figurations are patterns of actors and relations that recur in similar formations across time and space, such as the ‘savages’, ‘hearthounds’, ‘artefacts’, and ‘cyborgs’ identified by Bettany and Daly (2008) in the ambivalent cultures of Afghan hound companionship. The advantage of following hazy figurations rather than (ostensibly) self-contained people, products, stories, and so forth is that it is easier to see how figurations interconnect with a variety of other phenomena in each site (Castañeda, 2002). Thus figurations provide “something to track through the multiple sites of engagement” (Bettany & Daly, 2008, p. 410), but also encourage a researcher to look (tentatively) beyond toward other actors and networks, rather than focus myopically on the figuration itself.

Viewing figurations as “a tracking strategy...into distributed cultures” (Bettany & Daly, 2008, p. 410) is just one of many understandings of figuration and how it can be used in research (see also Bastian, 2006; Bettany, 2015). However, for me the figuration-as-tracking-device gave me a way to begin to try and address my research questions empirically. I had begun to emerge more definitely as a researcher-subject as I began to track down a hazy figuration-object.
3.4. Identifying a Figuration

The first step in the research process was to identify a figuration that I could work with to produce data, a figuration that would provide me access to the ambivalent and de-territorialised LGBT+ cultures that I wanted to follow and come to understand on my way to producing knowledge about the co-emergence of place consumers and places as objects of consumption.

At the start of the doctoral programme I audited a sociology course about gender and sexuality in order to learn more about some of the key ideas relating to this topic from a non-marketing perspective. One of the course leaders was Paul Simpson, who had studied the experiences of older gay and bisexual men in Manchester as part of his doctoral project (Simpson, 2011), the findings of which were later published in a series of papers (Simpson, 2012, 2013, 2014). There were clearly some parallels with my own work, particularly how Simpson considered places within and beyond the Gay Village. The thesis (Simpson, 2011) and one of the subsequent articles (Simpson, 2014) also mentioned the OutNorthwest magazine and its directory of LGBT+ support groups and leisure groups in and around the Greater Manchester Area. This was a turning point in my research. If I could identify a group that met in multiple different places I would have a figuration to track across multiple sites. While the members at each meeting or event would undoubtedly change, the identity of the group provided “an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites” (Marcus, 1998, p. 90), as well as suitable boundaries for my research (Hill et al. 2014). A site could be part of my research whenever the members of the group gathered in a place as members of the group (i.e. ‘officially’), and I could exclude the various other sites that the members used in the rest of their lives. In the spirit of ANT I was not going to commit to these analytical boundaries a priori and would remain open to redrawing or dissolving them if the data suggested that I should (Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). However, choosing a leisure group to track did provide a mutable focus for my research project.

Prior to discovering this directory I had attended a number of different LGBT+ events, such as three networking meetings of LGBT+ business owners in the Gay
Village, a ’queer cabaret’ in the Northern Quarter district, a fundraiser for an LGBT+ group at one of the city’s universities, two LGBT+ festivals (Manchester Pride and Sparkle, the annual trans* festival), a workshop for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) LGBT+ people held at the LGBT Foundation, a social event for the LGBT+ professional group of a local corporation, a seminar held by the UK Intersex Association (UKIA), and two ‘taster sessions’ of LGBT+ sports groups during ‘Sports May’ (a month of events promoting LGBT+ people’s participation in sport).

I avoided note taking during this exploratory phase because the people involved in the events had not consented to participate in a research project where detailed notes would be recorded about their activities and conversations. However, this process made it clear to me that the LGBT+ leisure groups would be the most suitable figure to follow in order to answer the objectives of my study. Events like Pride had many interacting stakeholders spread across many different places, but they were also infrequent (usually once a year) and thus provided very limited opportunities to collect data. In contrast, a formalised leisure group that met frequently (e.g. weekly) would provide many more opportunities to explore the co-emergent process of place consumption. In addition, a formalised group with a name/logo and ‘branded’ events would provide a way to identify which sites were part of the group’s activities and which were not. Formal groups were also more likely to have a structure in place (such as a committee) who made decisions about where events would be located.

Based on my experiences in the events described above I decided to exclude certain groups from consideration for practical and ethical reasons. Vocational groups, such as ‘LGBT+ networking groups’ associated with companies or set up by local entrepreneurs, could pose significant access issues or professional conflicts due to the commercial or corporate interests involved. I assumed that support groups would be reluctant to participate in my research, but even if the members agreed to work with me I was uncertain whether I would be able to navigate a suitable path through the complex and dynamic ethical challenges and conflicts that self-identified support groups might pose. This is not to suggest that other kinds of groups would not pose ethical challenges, merely that I recognised my inexperience as a neophyte
researcher and decided to err on the side of caution. Another reason to avoid vocational and support groups is because the relevance of consumption in the activities of such groups was not certain, and my preliminary explorations suggested that these kinds of groups rarely changed locations. ‘Avocational’ groups (Bettany & Daly, 2008), or what might be called leisure groups, were not consumption-oriented groups in the same sense as brand communities (Muñiz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001), but rather centred around a practice such as sport or drama. However, I took the view that consumption is “a moment in almost every practice” (Warde, 2005, p. 137), and the insights of the tribalism literature that show how leisure groups often draw upon a constellation of consumption resources to achieve their utilitarian and social objectives (Canniford, 2011; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Goulding, Shankar, & Canniford, 2013).

Having excluded vocational and support groups, I began to work my way through the OutNorthwest directory by conducting research online about each group in turn. I excluded groups that were based outside the city of Manchester because I wanted to choose a group that had easy access to the Gay Village. This would mean that I would be able to explore their choices to use (or avoid) places in this historically significant district. To this end I also began to exclude groups that met regularly in the same place, whether that was in the Gay Village or beyond. I wanted to identify groups where the choice of place was a regular and salient consideration, rather than groups that were able to unproblematically and unreflexively meet in the same place for each meeting. From the shortened list that I had produced I began to contact a number of different groups via the official emails that were provided on the group’s website or social media pages. In some cases I spoke to people that I already knew who were members of the group, and they put me in touch with the relevant gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are people who hold positions of responsibility to safeguard society members and were the appropriate point of contact to initially discuss the research (Hek, Judd, & Moule, 1996). I sent emails to these gatekeepers with an overview of the project and information of what would be involved.

A number of the gatekeepers did not respond to this initial email. One gatekeeper replied but politely declined, explaining that the members of her group had already
participated in a number of research projects before and were not interested in doing so again. Another gatekeeper expressed an initial interest, but the group later decided not to participate. Four gatekeepers expressed an interest but requested that I provide more information for the committee or (in one case) the extended membership to consider. I was invited to the next meetings of these four groups to present the aims and intentions of my research. Throughout this time I was being continually reconstituted as an ambivalent research subject - rejections, expressions of interest, and the uncertainty of explaining my research to a curious audience – my status as a legitimate and credible researcher was being continually questioned and tested. At the same time, it was only really in these instances that I existed as a researcher, someone who had potential research participants alongside whom to produce data. I also sent information sheets and consent forms electronically for the committees to disseminate to their membership via email. In these emails I was introduced as a researcher - I was emerging within the networks of the group not just as a new member but as a researcher.

Following this consultation period the gatekeepers of four LGBT+ leisure groups explained to me that their membership were happy to participate in my study. While initially I had intended to work closely with a single group as the figuration process continued it was decided that there were benefits to working with more than one group. I say ‘it was decided’ because this decision emerged through a number of conversations with my supervisors. We agreed that it could be dangerous to rely solely on a single group to gather data. My supervisors suggested two groups might be the ideal balance of breadth, depth, and spread of risk. However, I was uncertain of which of the four groups to choose. The four LGBT+ leisure groups that had agreed to participate in my study were a rugby team, a running club, an amateur theatre company, and a choir. I decided to begin an initial period of participant observation with all four and select two after this initial period.
3.5. Participant Observation

I began participant observation with the rugby group first, closely followed by the theatre group. The committee of these groups had agreed to participate early on and had disseminated emails to their members. While none of the members had raised any objections it was still important for me to ensure that I had informed consent from the participants, and to continue to do so when I met members for the first time. It was relatively easy to raise the topic as members would often begin conversations with me by asking what I did for a living. This provided me with the opportunity to explain that I was a doctoral researcher and outline my involvement in the group in that capacity. I was continually performing myself as a researcher, which was somewhat uncomfortable at times because I felt that I was distancing myself from the role of being a member in the group. However, all the members that I spoke to seemed to be interested in the research and expressed little concern at my involvement. Later when I joined the running club and the choir I had become more comfortable with introducing myself as a researcher, but to my surprise I found that members would rarely introduce me as such to other members. I was always treated (or described, at least) as a regular member, forcing me to actively seek out a way to introduce my research into conversation. While the consultation period meant that most of the members had been given opportunities to learn about the research, raise concerns, and express objections, I also brought information sheets and consent forms to each event so that further conversations could be held throughout the data collection period and, wherever appropriate, written consent forms could be signed by participants.

As noted by Gold (1957) participant observation is a spectrum from detached observation (i.e. no involvement in activities) to full participation (i.e. little time to observe other’s activities). The (multi-sited) ethnographic approach sits in a middle ground between these two extremes, participating and observing where appropriate (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1994). Participating and observing in tandem builds a richer data set, allows researchers to ingratiate themselves into a group, build rapport and trust, and encourages participants to become more comfortable with
the idea of an ethnographic researcher in their midst (Hein, O'Donohoe, & Ryan, 2011). This may encourage participants to disclose more information to the researcher (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003), which may lead to more sophisticated and nuanced interpretations. It may also make participants confident enough to establish and enforce their own boundaries about what should and what should not be included in the research, helping to ensure that the research maintains its ethical integrity. For these reasons it was important to me to be able to participate fully in all four groups, but also find ways to disengage from activities or conversations in order to observe carefully.

I had assumed that getting access to the four leisure groups would be the major challenge, but once access was achieved I would be able to participate in all four groups with relatively few problems. All four groups were very friendly to me as a new member but also as a researcher, and despite some initial discomfort at having to continually introduce myself as a researcher (and thus constitute myself as a partial outsider) I felt welcome to participate fully in the groups almost immediately. Paradoxically, this welcoming attitude created a problem between myself and the rugby team. More specifically, the rugby team wanted me to participate fully by playing games and getting involved in training, but my body was not used to playing rugby. I lacked the knowledge but also the embodied skills and physique to play the game easily, and while the group continued to be very welcoming I continued to feel out-of-place. I may have emerged in the rugby team network as a researcher-subject, but I was finding it difficult to emerge as a rugby-playing-subject as well. I suggested to the members that I could help in an auxiliary role, helping distribute water and sports equipment, but the group continued to encourage me to participate as a player. I ultimately decided that I would not be willing to participate as a rugby player over the period of several months, but it was clear that my role as a researcher could not continue to exist without being coupled or hybridised to that of a rugby player. I thanked the committee for letting me participate in the team but explained that I would not be working them as part of my research any longer.

This left the running club, the choir, and the community theatre company. At first I continued to consider which two of the three remaining groups I would eventually
end up working with as my main figures. However, over the period of a few weeks it became clear that I could continue to work with all three leisure groups. This was because the timings of their events rarely clashed, allowing me to participate in all three groups on a weekly basis. When there were clashes I made an assessment about which event to choose based on two main criteria. First, I would always choose a rare or one-off event over a regularly occurring event, reasoning that this would allow me to study the co-emergence of place consumers and places of consumption in a novel site, and thus expand my data set. Second, if two events were similar in the first regard I would choose the group that I had collected less data with in order to try and rebalance the data set.

After this extended period of building rapport and establishing the suitability of the groups in this research project, I began to keep extensive written notes of my experiences, observations, and the informal conversations that I had with members (Ekström, 2006; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Goulding, 2005). While I say that I kept ‘written’ notes in practice most of my note-taking was conducted using the notes function of a mobile phone, and could more accurately be described as ‘typed’ notes. Like Hein et al. (2011) suggest, the mobile became an extension of my body and mind as a participant observer— I used it to keep notes but also take photographs, record video, find locations, record audio notes to myself when typing was impractical, and in many other ways.

The mobile phone was also useful to remain inconspicuous. In ethnographic research it is important to minimise disruption to participants’ activities and mitigate the possibility of making them feel self-conscious or uncomfortable (Agar, 1996; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Following Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 46), I wrote “skeletal” notes during group events and then expanded upon these as soon as possible afterward. Attempts were also made to tailor note-taking to ‘mirror’ participants’ activities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koening, 2002); notes were written on paper whenever participants were seen to take notes, such as committee meetings and other sit down events (see figure 3.1), but when participants used their smartphones during events I would mimic their behaviour when note-taking (Hein et al. 2011). Regardless of the method used to take skeletal notes, these data would
then be transferred to my computer to be expanded with more details and retrospective reflections.

Figure 3.1: An example of skeletal notes. Written on handouts provided by one of the groups during a meeting. Details that could be used to identify the group or its members have been redacted.

Ethnographers generally aim for “thick description” in their written notes (Geertz, 1973, p. 10), which in practice means writing notes that include as many details as possible. However, this is not to suggest that an ethnographer can notice or remember everything. It would also be misleading to assume that ‘thicker’ description equates to more objective or less biased data. Ethnographers inevitably direct their attention (consciously or unconsciously) towards interactions and events that are relevant to the study at hand (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003), and indeed this directed attention is advantageous to producing useful data to answer theoretical questions. What is important is that researchers reflect on their research practice
and consider how these inflected the resultant understandings and theorisations (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009). Some have suggested that researchers keep a ‘research diary’ to record introspective thoughts and feelings that may later be useful in identifying why key decisions were taken (e.g. Bettany & Daly, 2008; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). I began by creating a separate document on my computer as a diary of reflections, but I soon discovered that it was much more useful to include my reflective notes alongside the observations that inspired or incited them. Square parenthesis were included in the notes to demarcate between my reflections and my observations, although in many cases the distinction between the two proved to be relatively indistinct.

Photography was also used to capture detailed records of the places visited during the multi-sited ethnography (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Penaloza, 1998), as shown in figure 3.2. Photographs were taken on a mobile phone (Hein et al. 2011), and the camera was carefully angled to avoid photographing participants in ways that would compromise their anonymity. This was because participants sometimes expressed concerns about being photographed. Committee members also explained that the groups sometimes removed members from their images if these members were not comfortable about being publicly associated with an LGBT+ group. I was aware that using photography could compromise my status as a researcher and cross ethical lines by coming into conflict with participants. It is widely recognised that photography poses key problems regarding participant anonymity that are difficult, although not impossible, to overcome (Wiles, Coffey, Robinson, & Heath, 2011; Wiles, Coffey, Robinson, & Prosser, 2012). To respect the participants’ trust I decided that photographs would only be taken of places. I complemented photographs with written notes about my experiences of what it felt like to ‘be there’, which could not be captured in a photograph. Leaflets and other cultural materials were also collected as data (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Fuentes, 2014), and photography was used to capture images of posters and other materials that could not be taken away as data.
Figure 3.2: Example of a photograph taken during the multi-sited ethnography.
3.6. Interviews with members

After several months of participating and observing, I felt that I had built a sufficient foundation of understanding about the group, as well as trust between myself and members in the three LGBT+ leisure groups. I began to identify gaps in my understanding (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003, p. 217) and formulated these into interview themes (Hein et al. 2011; Hein & O’Donohoe, 2013), which I then began to use in one-on-one interviews. Interviews have been a staple of CCT research at least since Thompson et al. (1989) called for researchers to ‘put the consumer experience back in’ to analysis and interpretation. However, interviews have recently been critiqued from a variety of theoretical perspectives (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al. 2009). It has been argued, and demonstrated, that different kinds of interviews yield different kinds of responses (Bagnoli, 2004, 2009; Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Clark & Emmel, 2010; Einarsdottir & Heaphy, 2012; Martens, 2012), with the ‘same’ participant emerging as multiple different subjects though different interview techniques (Spowart & Nairn, 2014). As Woermann (2017, p. 157) put it, interviews “do not take situatedness seriously” and “first and foremost provides clues about... the practice of answering interviews”. It is for this reason that some ethnographers argue that interviews are not particularly useful in understanding cultural meanings, materialities, and actions because they take people out-of-context (see Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). The position that I adopted in this study echoed Martens (2012), in suggesting that this out-of-context limitation of interviews can also be a strength because it provides data from a participant reflecting on their everyday activities and involvements at a distance (see also Spowart & Nairn, 2014). The artificial situation helps to produces a unique co-constituted understanding- an inter-view (Kvale, 1996)- that can yield new insights.

I use the term interview here to refer only to organised, audio-recorded conversations that I had with participants outside the context of regular group activities. While I had a number of informal conversations with the participants these data were captured in the observational notes. A specialist audio-recording device was purchased for the purposes of the interview, although the audio-record function
on a mobile phone proved to be more convenient and just as high quality (Hein et al. 2011, p. 259). Audio-recording interviews provides the possibility of a verbatim transcript of what participants said, allowing a researcher to conduct a finer grain analysis. Sometimes participants chose precise words to articulate their understandings, such as when members of the running club described one of the places that they used as ‘neutral’ (the significance of which will be discussed in chapter 4).

Another benefit of interviews was that they provided more time for participants to explain their understandings in detail, and to develop a more nuanced perspective by reflecting on topics that they might usually take for granted. The interviews were typically between one and two hours long. After discussing the informed consent form with the participant in question, interviews began with broad questions to establish rapport but also allow latitude for unexpected responses from the participants (Kates, 2002; McCracken, 1988). These broad questions included asking about the participant’s life before joining their group, their motivations to join, and what they had done since joining. The interviews were semi-structured and more like a purposeful conversation; several broad topics were identified in advance of the interview, but most of the discussion was directed by what the participants said and the new insights that these produced. Example topics were the places that the groups used, and the participants’ feelings toward these, as well as specific incidents observed during the participant observation where the relationships between the group and a place changed significantly. To encourage this more equal co-constitution of understanding, the interviews were generally conducted in a coffee shop within the city centre of Manchester. This provided an informal setting and a place that was not associated with either party (in contrast to an interview room at the university or the participant’s office). This location was also more convenient for many of the participants who worked in the city centre of Manchester and could be interviewed on their lunch break or just after work.

To minimise the potential power imbalances between myself and the participants, I asked the participants to propose a location of their choosing. Here I was performing myself as the ethical and conscientious researcher. However, often the participants
were indifferent about where we would meet, pushing the responsibility back onto me (and raising the potential of a power imbalance once again). In these instances I would then offer a range of places. It was important to me that the participants had a degree of choice about where we would meet because I assumed that there would be power imbalances between myself and the participants. However, I found that many of the people who offered to be in my interviews were confident and wanted to take the opportunity to speak at length about their groups (although not always positively), so at times I was uncertain who was directing the conversation and whether or not the assumption of researcher empowerment was always applicable.

The majority of interviews were conducted between December 2015 and April 2016. Four interviews were conducted before this time because the members in question were leaving the groups but offered to be interviewed before they left. However, on the whole the focus of data collection only shifted from participant observation to interviews in December. This shift occurred because organising and conducting the interviews, as well as transcribing the recordings, took a great deal of time and it became difficult to participate in and observe all events. I also made the decision that a sufficient understanding of the three LGBT+ leisure groups had been formed.

Interviewees were recruited through an email sent to all members via the committee of each group, supplemented by informal discussions with individual members. Anyone who was or had been a member of the three LGBT+ leisure groups were considered for interview if they responded to the email request, but the informal approaches were more ‘purposive’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994), oriented toward the goal of gathering a heterogeneous range of views. For instance, when the early interviews were predominantly with gay men, I wanted to interview more lesbian women and trans* members. When a number of committee members had been interviewed, I approached a number of ‘lay’ members to diversify the data set. Details of the members who were interviewed are presented in table 3.1 below, where it might be noted that three of the members had been members of more than one of the groups, demonstrating the overlapping sociocultural networks between the three groups. To preserve anonymity the names of the members have been
replaced with pseudonyms, both in the table and throughout the remainder of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Committee Members</th>
<th>Lay Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polari: An LGBT+ Community Theatre Company</td>
<td>Graham, Max, Edward</td>
<td>Robin, John, François, Ester, Antonio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polari &amp; Avant Garde</td>
<td>No members</td>
<td>Noah, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avant Garde &amp; MQC</td>
<td>No members</td>
<td>Harry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Manchester Queer Choir (MQC): An LGBT+ Choir</td>
<td>Ian, Renarta</td>
<td>Charlotte, Agatha, William, Dominic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1: Groups, pseudonyms and membership positions of research participants**
3.7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

It was during the interview period that the time spent participating in events and writing observational notes decreased. By the end of April the final interview had been conducted and the participant observation had finished. I did this by gradually withdrawing from the groups, but this was important so that the emphasis of my time could shift from generating data to analysing it. Like most ethnographic research the data analysis began almost as soon as the participant observation had commenced (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Goulding, 2005). However, analysis is time-consuming and effortful work and can benefit from an extended period of exclusive attention and focus (Stewart, 1998). In order to focus exclusively on data analysis I stopped the process of gathering new data and created a degree of ‘distance’ from the three groups.

A key question was when it was appropriate to withdraw from data collection and focus on data analysis, and I found myself being constituted as a research subject once again. Had I gathered ‘enough’ data? How would I know, given that I had never conducted a piece of research such as this before? Ethnographers usually recommend that the data generation process ends once the researcher has reached theoretical saturation, where “no additional information” or unexpected insights are being produced (Goulding, 2005, p. 297). However, I could never be entirely sure that I have reached theoretical saturation, as the next event could always produce a dramatic new insight. To my mind the notion of theoretical saturation is particularly problematic in multi-sited ethnography, whose open-ended tracing of networks (Marcus, 1995, 1998) always leaves open the possibility of a new connection or trajectory. Rather than the metaphor of ‘theoretical saturation’, then, I found it more useful to think in terms of theoretical confidence. As Elliott and Jankel-Elliott (2003) note, data collection should cease when a researcher believes that their data is substantial enough in quantity and quality to help answer their research question(s). As there is never a clear answer to this problem, the decision to leave the field requires a degree of confidence on the part of the researcher (or researchers). In my case I felt confident that I had ‘enough’ data because I had
already spent several months reading through it and making some informal analytical categories. I was unsure quite when to end data collection, but I decided that April 2016 would be the best time to end data collection and start analysing data more formally for two main reasons. First, by December 2015 a large body of data had already been collected and informal analysis suggested that these data were providing data relevant to the research topic. Data collection continued until April 2016, providing more confidence that the quantity and quality of data would be enough to meet the objectives of this research. Second, finishing in April meant that the multi-sited ethnography had been taking place for just over a year. A year-long ethnography is short by the standards of conventional ethnography, but fits with contemporary ethnographic recommendations (Stewart, 1998) and the ethnographic precedent set by CCT researchers (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Kates, 2002).

Analysis, interpretation, and theory building are three interrelated processes whose distinctions are “somewhat arbitrary”, but as a rough guide, “if the term ‘analysis’ is used to refer to finding patterns in the data, then the phrase ‘interpretation and theory building’ can be used to refer to coming up with an account of what the patterns mean.” (Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2013, p. 139) Another fuzzy distinction is that analysis aims to be a more systematic process (demarcating, labeling, organising, etc.) while interpretation is more open-ended (Wolcott, 2009). To facilitate the analysis I used NVivo, a software programme designed for qualitative research, in which I stored data as it was accumulated. The NVivo software allowed me to organise and reorganise my data through various iterations of analysis, as described below.

Analysis began with me reading through the data several times, producing a familiarity with the entire data set so that later interpretations were considered within this broader context (Belk et al. 2013). In other words, I wanted to get a sense of the messiness of the data before I began seeking out (or co-creating) patterns (Law, 2004). After this initial read-through the process of coding began. Coding can be defined as organising “data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 148). These segments, or codes, must “retain meaning if lifted out of context” (Belk et al. 2013, p. 139). I identified codes of
varying sizes or lengths including words, sentence, and entire paragraphs (Belk et al. 2013, pp. 140-141). I coded photographs by writing notes about how I interpreted them. This demonstrates the haziness of the analysis/interpretation distinction (Wolcott, 2009) but also my ongoing reliance on language as the main form of sense-making (Hill et al. 2014). This stage of initial coding required several iterations, as identifying new codes often meant that I had to return to the data that I had already reviewed to see if that code has been overlooked in an earlier iteration (Belk et al. 2013).

Then analysis continued by grouping codes together, a process that Spiggle (1994) calls abstraction. This is because these groups are named or labeled to produce “higher order, more abstract codes” (Belk et al. 2013, p. 147). As someone who had positioned themselves as a material-semiotic researcher I was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of abstraction, as it felt that I was moving away from the ANT warning not to leap to abstract explanations that “explain phenomena (away)” (Bajde, 2013, p. 231). I wondered if I was failing as a material-semiotic researcher, and whether my ambivalent status as a researcher was being thrown into sharp relief by growing incongruences between my epistemological stance and my approach to analysis. However, I reasoned that I was certainly not explaining away anything by trying to find abstract structures ‘behind’ or ‘above’ realities as they were being enacted, but rather carefully building an explanation by cautiously identifying patterns and trying to assemble a more elaborate and interconnected description of these patterns that worked for me (Law, 2004). However, this was undoubtedly a difficult part of the process for me. While it was easy for me to label and group pieces of data I felt perennially uncertain - and anxious – about whether my analytical codes were ‘good’ enough. This anxiety only intensified as I tried to incorporate ideas from the literature.

Throughout the analysis, but particularly at the stage of abstraction, it is important to draw on ideas and insights from the existing literature to draw parallels but also identify differences between the emerging patterns and the existing literature. Through combining these two sources the researcher avoids “reinventing the wheel”, helping the researcher go beyond what has already been established and
challenge assumptions with original insights (Belk et al. 2013, p. 144). At least, that is how the textbooks explain it. For me (re)turning to the literature was to help me identify tools that I could use to help make sense of the mess that I was creating with my analysis (Wolcott, 2009). That is, generating codes and patterns only populated my understandings of reality with more entities and relationships that I had not noticed before, and thus only served to increase the complexity of my understanding. I found questions and possible interpretations were proliferating and I was struggling to parse these off and focus around a single interpretation. I looked for tools to help organise my data, but each time I tried to apply a framework I found it to be an ill-fit at best, restricting the more ambivalent, multiple, and messy realities that I had come to know intimately but struggled to articulate in the discourses available (Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005). Therefore I settled for a slightly alternative interpretive strategy (perhaps one that many other interpretive researchers would have thought to use instinctively) of assembling a looser interpretation using multiple theoretical ideas rather than trying to orchestrate one around a single ‘enabling theory’ (c.f. Figueiredo et al. 2016). The other reason to (re)turn to the literature, as alluded to above, was to ensure that I could recognise how my emergent understanding extended or challenged existing ideas. In other words, to begin to make connections to the existing discussions and debates. For me this process happened as I was searching for ideas to help build my analysis—where they fit I could see extensions, where they were difficult to connect I could see challenges or areas that I was developing.

After a period of coding, the analysis process shifts from “identifying patterns in the data to attempting to find meaning in the patterns.” (Belk et al. 2013, p. 147) If I found analysis difficult I found interpretation even harder. I organised my interpretations into two interrelated sections. I began with an ‘intra-textual’ interpretation, which in this case meant a group-by-group interpretation, seeking to construct a narrative for each of the three groups that could guide me (and the readers of this study) through the main issues that shaped the groups; I then worked towards ‘inter-textual’ interpretations by looking for patterns or ‘themes’ that could be discerned in all three groups (Cherrier & Murray, 2007, pp. 6-7). Evidently the two
interpretations needed to ‘work together’, so I was not necessarily trying to produce an interpretation that captured everything, nor a ‘holistic’ interpretation that brings most of the data together (c.f. Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). Concomitant with my epistemological stance that I was co-constituting a co-emergent understanding through the processes of research (Law, 2004), I was not aspiring to produce an ‘overarching’ interpretation that provided a ‘birds-eye’ or deific perspective. Rather my goals were more modest (Haraway, 1997), I simply wanted to work out a position that made sense of what I had observed and connected to the theoretical concerns that I had identified. This was an ambivalent position, caught between many competing aspirations, interests, pieces of conflicting data, and theoretical ideas, and I moved between a vast number of different interpretations and reformulations. Indeed, I found the notion of ‘themes’ to be more restrictive than helpful, but it was difficult to let go of this legitimised and widely-used qualitative research technique. I eventually settled on a sort of compromise (in my mind at least), of making sense of the data as a cycle, with each of the stages as a ‘theme’ that I could explore (see section 4.3.1).

It is worth saying here that the interpretation continued to evolve during the process of writing up, with new insights, issues, and ideas emerging and conflicting in the process of putting my initial ideas into the more detailed linear narrative that was the findings chapter. This was disconcerting because I had the impression that the writing up section would be simple, as my research had already been ‘resolved’. I found my status as a researcher remained troubled to the very end, as I was uncertain quite how (or whether) all the pieces that I had tried to assemble worked together. I found that I was no longer working towards a solution- a transcendental explanation that suddenly made sense of all the analytic and interpretive struggles that I had been through - but rather a compromise – an interpretation that “satisfied a degree of struggle contingently”, to quote Bettany, Kerrane, and Hogg (2014, p. 1549) somewhat out of context. Like Law and Singleton (2005) I could interpret this as a methodological failure (I was simply not ‘doing research’ well enough), and perhaps there is an element of truth in this understanding. However, I could also interpret the messiness, unresolved, and ambivalence of the interpretation provided
here as a reflection of the messy, unresolvedness, and ambivalent ontology of the phenomena that I was trying to make sense of (Law & Singleton, 2005). I may have failed to do ‘neat’ research well, but I felt that I had emerged somewhat successfully as an ambivalent research subject.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Outline of the Findings Chapter

This chapter presents the substantive empirical findings of this study. This chapter is structured into two sections. Section 4.2 focuses on each of the three groups in turn: sub-section 4.2.1 describes the Manchester Queer Choir (MQC); sub-section 4.2.2 details Avant Garde, the LGBT+ running club; sub-section 4.2.3 explores Polari, the LGBT+ community theatre company. Each adopts a ‘realist’ style of narration, where the researcher is written out of the account in a third-person, matter-of-fact style of writing (Van Maanen, 1988). While this style of writing would not conventionally be used alongside the material-semiotic epistemology adopted in this study (as detailed in section 3.2), it is employed here purposively in order to convey a clear impression of the three LGBT+ leisure groups (amongst other reasons, see chapter 1). It also focuses on describing the groups but also the places that they used, treating each as distinct entities and thus producing an “ideographic” analysis (Cresswell, 2004, p.51).

Section 4.3 then focuses on building and exploring the material-semiotic alternative interpretation that was pursued in this study, moving away from ideographic understandings of discrete objects (places) and subjects (place consumers), and toward a more co-emergent and co-constitutive understanding (of dis/place/d consumers). It begins with an overview of the framework to provide a roadmap or guide (in sub-section 4.3.1), before moving through the various positions of the framework in each of the subsequent themes. These sections will point to various theoretical implications but will focus primarily on building the account based on the empirical data. Theoretical implications will be clarified and explored in more detail within the next chapter.

A number of places will be described and discussed in the remainder of this chapter (as well as Chapter 5). To aid comprehension and understanding, particularly for those unfamiliar with the city of Manchester, three maps are provided below in figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. These maps focus of the places that were important to the three LGBT+ leisure groups.
Figure 4.1. Map of Manchester’s Gay Village with relevant places highlighted.

Figure 4.2. Map of Manchester city centre with relevant places highlighted.
Figure 4.3. Map of South Manchester and Manchester city centre with relevant places highlighted.
4.2. The Three LGBT+ Groups

4.2.1 The Manchester Queer Choir (MQC)

The Manchester Queer Choir (MQC) began in 2000 as a small group of LGBT+ friends who enjoyed singing together in a friendly and informal environment. Over the next year the number of singers grew and the group began to perform publicly at a range of events oriented towards LGBT+ audiences. As MQC’s membership and public image became more established it began to become more formally organised with an elected committee, a salaried musical director, a logo, a uniform, a website, and a social media page.

“When the choir first started off in 2000 it was only about 3 or 4 people, and now it’s over 100 members... different people from different backgrounds...”

(William, late 20s, lay member)

MQC was the most diverse of the three leisure groups studied as part of this project. The split of men and women was generally equal, and a number of members identified as trans*. The age range was broad, with the youngest member in their mid-20s and the oldest being in their mid-80s, with no age group being dominant. The membership was also diverse in terms of ethnicity and nationality. For many of the members, MQC’s diversity was a source of pride and was understood as an achievement, given that many other LGBT+ groups and organisations were understood to have trouble developing and maintaining a truly diverse membership.

“What I really like about it is that it isn’t a men’s choir, you know? It’s a very mixed choir, and mixed in lots of ways. And we manage conflicts and disagreements, which I’ve seen other lesbian and gay groups just fall apart... I know it’s not easy, but it seems to do that really well. I don’t know if that’s relevant, but I think that’s really important [...] depending on who you are you’d probably get on with somebody in the choir who share interests with you. You’d meet
somebody in maybe your age group, I mean, there is that diversity there isn't there? So if you moved to Manchester and you were 80 you'd find other people of your age group there... as you would if you moved to Manchester and you were 19...”

(Samuel, early 40s, lay member of MQC).

As Thomas et al. (2013) have shown, diversity in a groups can often be a source of tension and conflict. This is a particular issue in LGBT+ groups, where the open-ended title ‘LGBT+’ signals that inclusivity is a prominent concern (Ghaziani, 2011). Despite being described as “protean” or “kaleidoscopic” subculture by Kates (2002, p.383), evidence suggests that sexual and gender minorities tend to form separate sub-groups based on race (Green, 2008), class (Brewis & Jack, 2010), and age (Simpson, 2012, 2013, 2014). In contrast, the participants of MQC saw the choir as a truly LGBT+ group where diversity was not only welcomed but truly encouraged through various practices. One example of these practices was the 50-50 raffle; for each £1 ticket half (50 pence) went into a weekly prize fund and the remainder went into a central pot which was used to subsidise the costs for some lower income choir members’ travel to MQC performances across the country (and sometimes internationally). This meant that all members could participate in choir activities if they wanted to, regardless of their economic means.

The choir’s efforts towards inclusivity even stretched to singing ability. Some members were highly skilled musicians and choral singers, able to read and write sheet music with ease. Many of the songs in the choir’s diverse repertoire had been re-composed or re-written by members of the group. At the other end of the spectrum were singers with very little experience. These “ropey” singers, as one of the members put it, were welcome alongside everyone else, and often these signers would improve quickly or, alternatively “self-select” to leave the group. The only real stipulation of membership was that the members were ‘proud’ to sing as part of an LGBT+ choir. Ian was a committee member who explained that even heterosexual people were welcome to join MQC as long as they adhered to this hallowed rule:
“The choir will not turn around and say to a non-gay person that they can’t join... the choir has had some straight people singing... some people might think “ooo, how does that work?” Well, as far as I’m concerned, and as far as the committee and really everybody in the choir [is concerned], as long as they’re happy to sing with LGBT people and dress with their uniform, in other words be proud to advertise the Manchester Queer Choir... why can’t they sing with us like we could sing with a normal straight choir down the road?”

(Ian, mid-60s, committee member)

While the choir positioned itself as welcoming of anyone, regardless of sexuality or gender expression, in practice there had been very few heterosexual members in the choir. No-one identified themselves as heterosexual during the period of the multi-sited ethnography, and members did not identify anyone else within the group that was heterosexual. Furthermore, it did not appear that the choir have initiatives to actively encourage heterosexual people to join as members, although the choir did work with a range of non-LGBT+ organisations like the City Council and the organisers of the Manchester International Festival (MIF). The data suggested that while MQC was open to heterosexual members, its primary focus was to work with Manchester’s LGBT+ population.

In contrast to the other two leisure clubs, MQC’s uniform made the LGBT+ affiliation of the choir salient by incorporating rainbow colours, a widely-recognised symbol of non-heterosexual culture (see Kates, 2002). Indeed, having an obvious and proud association with LGBT+ people was the leitmotif of the choir. The majority of events that the choir participated in were LGBT+ related events. These included international LGBT+ choir festivals, Transgender Day of Remembrance, Manchester Pride, and LGBT History Month. The choir also frequently performed at local civil partnership or same-sex marriage ceremonies (including those of the members). As suggested in the quotes below, MQC understood an active involvement in Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures and communities as a core part of the choir’s identity.
“We are proud to... you know, be able to advertise ourselves as part of the LGBT community, and we would always want to try and do as many LGBT community events as we could... and whenever we get asked, they have to be our preference, because I think that, we think that is right.”

(Ian, mid 60s, committee member)

“The choir will go and perform at gay events like Pride or fundraisers for gay charities or whatever it happens to be. That is, for me, sort of an intrinsic part of what we do. We will go and perform as a gay choir, we will go and perform at things that are important to the gay community.”

(Dominic, early 30s, lay member)

For the participants of MQC being ‘actively involved’ in Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures and communities did not necessarily mean taking part in events within the Gay Village district. The Defying Phobia event is a case-in-point. It was in response to a homophobic incident on one of Manchester’s trams, where two young men were attacked for singing songs from the musical Wicked. Members of MQC organised a ‘flashmob’ style event (see Barnes, 2006) where the choir appeared to spontaneously gather to sing an ‘impromptu’ concert in one of Manchester’s busiest public squares. In reality the event had been the result of intense planning between MQC, the Manchester City Council, and the Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) authority. The performance did not take place within the Gay Village because the members of MQC wanted to make a political and cultural statement about LGBT+ people’s equal right to public transport and public spaces in Manchester, supporting the claim by Visconti et al. (2010) that public places are sites of continuous cultural negotiation (or, it might be suggested, struggle). The event could also be interpreted as an attempt to deconstruct social and symbolic boundaries between LGBT+ people and the heterosexual majority (Visconti, 2008), and challenge any lingering notion that LGBT+ people should remain in their ‘ghettos’
(c.f. Kates, 2002), given that the intended audience was the population of Manchester as a whole, rather than the LGBT+ population in particular.

[We] wanted to be able to do something to ensure everybody knew what happened. And how bad it was, particularly in Manchester that has a fairly high gay community... it's just not right that that can happen in 2014 and we just wanted to do something to identify it and say, “look! You cannot have this happening in this day and age.”

(Dominic, early 30s, lay member)

The Gay Village was also a site of cultural struggle, being a mixture of privately owned but publicly accessible venues within a network of publicly owned and accessible streets, parks, and other places. Its importance to MQC, and to the LGBT+ cultures and communities that the choir aspired to represent, was continually contested. This was most clearly demonstrated by how MQC’s rehearsal venue changed over time. When the choir began in 2000 it rehearsed in a small chaplaincy near one of Manchester’s universities. This choice of venue could be considered surprising for an LGBT+ choir, given the historical conflict between many organised religions and people with non-heteronormative lifestyles (Keating and McGloughlin, 2005), but none of the participants appeared to find this choice surprising or noteworthy.

Shortly thereafter MQC moved to Taurus, a bar at the northeasterly end of Canal Street in the Gay Village. The reasons for this move were difficult to ascertain, especially as many of the participants in this study had not been members of the choir at this time. Those who had did not mention the chaplaincy during informal conversations or interviews. The existence of this place was only discerned through later online research on the choir’s website. In contrast to the relative invisibility or silence of the chaplaincy within the MQC’s culture, members of the choir were very vocal about their memories and experiences of Taurus. When describing MQC’s relationship to Taurus many of the participants spoke about the bar in ways that
suggested that they were *attached* to this venue, in the sense defined by existing research (Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). In particular, they described how the choir and the managers of Taurus had entered into a kind of ‘gift exchanging’ system very similar to that described by Debenedetti et al. (2014). This exchange was initiated by the managers of Taurus, who offered MQC a private room beneath the bar free-of-charge, which the choir used for rehearsals and meetings.

“They used to let us have it free […] and we were very friendly with them, we were like their pet choir. And they used to ask us to sing for the punters, of whom there were very few on a Monday

*laughs* And then they gave us chips, and sandwiches, and things…”

*(Agatha, mid 60s, lay member)*

Agatha’s use of the term “pet choir” suggests that this non-financial exchange reconstituted MQC as something other than typical place consumers. In this case they were more like producer-consumers, or ‘prosumers’ (Cova and White, 2010), becoming more entangled into the activities and identity of Taurus than would be expected in typical commercial exchanges (Debenedetti et al. 2014). They could also be interpreted as part of a pseudo-family (Rosenbaum, 2006), especially given the pet connotation that Agatha invoked. A third interpretation would be to suggest that MQC and Taurus had formed the kind of co-evolving, co-constitutive relationships that Haraway (2003) writes about in her companion species manifesto. The actions of Taurus management allowed MQC to exist as a choir, and as an LGBT+ choir rehearsing in the Gay Village, the historical centre of Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures. At the same time, MQC’s performances helped to reconstitute Taurus as a bar that was somewhat out-of-the-ordinary, and as a supporter of LGBT+ groups. However, the observation that MQC were *asked* to sing for other customers suggests that the exchanges between the choir and the managers of Taurus bar were perhaps more commercially-oriented than the ‘gift exchanges’ documented by Debenedetti et al. (2014), where consumers *volunteered* their skills and effort to their beloved places. Then again, the connotations of the term pet could be suggestive of a sense of
cultural ownership and power imbalance between Taurus and MQC—rather unlike the equitable hu/dog relations of companion species (c.f. Haraway, 2003; Bettany and Daly, 2008).

As the membership of MQC grew Taurus’s downstairs room became too small for the choir. Therefore, despite the feelings of attachment and entanglements of identity described above the committee was forced to look elsewhere for a rehearsal venue. Interestingly (from the point of view of this study) they looked to other venues in the Gay Village. This suggested that at least part of MQC’s entanglement with Taurus had been motivated by the bar’s identity as an LGBT+ place located in the Gay Village. If Taurus was no longer a practical option then the choir would look for a new place with the same ‘logic of association or connection’, to borrow a phrase from Marcus (1998, p.410); in this case the logic of connection was the Gay Village. MQC moved first to The Rembrandt, a pub near the middle of Canal Street. This venue offered a large room upstairs free-of-charge, but the participants did not report offers of free food or requests for MQC to sing for other customers. The identities of the choir and The Rembrandt did not appear to become entangled in the same way that had occurred in relation to Taurus. The choir soon moved to another venue, The Thompson’s Arms, which offered an even larger upstairs room for the choir to use. The Thompson’s Arms was also an LGBT+ venue located in the Gay Village, suggesting that there was a lingering desire to remain within the Gay Village wherever possible. This latent desire turned out to be potent enough to keep MQC in this venue despite its undesirable qualities as a rehearsal venue. Ian, a committee member in his early 60s who was quoted earlier, described The Thompson’s Arms as “a bit of a, excuse my term, crappy venue.” In her interview, Agatha detailed some of what was so undesirable about The Thompson’s Arms as a rehearsal venue.

“A dive! What a crap place. And you go into the loos. The women’s, well obviously I haven’t been in the men’s, but the toilets were vile. I would imagine they were even worse, because that’s the general rule, isn’t it? We had upstairs, and they hardly ever remembered to put the heating on, so it was freezing, feet stuck to the floor, it was
just that horrible place, but we didn’t have to pay, I think… if we did it was incredibly cheap. Because, to begin with we used to meet downstairs in Taurus, but we got too big for Taurus…”

(Agatha, mid 60s, lay member)

Theories of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011; Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017) and place identity (Rosenbaum et al. 2007; Rosenbaum and Montoya, 2007; Warnaby and Medway, 2013) generally posit that attachments and identifications only form when places provide positive or beneficial physical, social, and symbolic environments (see also Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Manzo, 2005). Yet here MQC continued to use The Thompson’s Arms in the absence of positive or beneficial features. One possible reason for this could simply be practical— they were ‘place dependent’ (Stockhols and Schumaker, 1978) because no other place was suitably large and cheap/free enough to meet MQC’s needs. By the time the multisited ethnography had begun in 2015 the choir had relocated their rehearsals to a room in Manchester’s Town Hall, and used one of two religious buildings as ‘backup locations’ when this building was closed for political rallies, film shoots, and other events. The data suggested that MQC had few practical issues in relocating the choir to alternative venues.

An alternative explanation is that the members of MQC had a latent desire to locate their events in the Gay Village and entangle the choir’s identity into the identity of this place, even though some of these situated entanglements led to ambivalent struggles (Bettany et al. 2014) rather than easy, love-like attachments (c.f. Debenedetti et al. 2014). This was most clearly articulated when members imagined how the Gay Village might be improved. These ‘utopian imaginings’ (Maclaran and Brown, 2005) presented the commercial environment of the Gay Village as a hub for LGBT+ communities and cultural events, albeit not necessarily in ways that precluded or contradicted commercial gain. Ever since the choir had moved from Taurus bar they had continued to use this place as a venue for informal post-rehearsal drinks and socialising. Even though MQC had moved their rehearsals to other drinking establishments (e.g. The Rembrandt and then The Thompson’s Arms)
the members continued to walk back to socialise in Taurus bar. This continued when
the choir moved their rehearsal venue to the Manchester Town Hall, even though
the committee of the choir had identified The City Arms as a far more convenient
meeting place for post-rehearsal socialising.

“Basically what we say, and if you have a look at the welcome letter
or the letter I perhaps sent to you earlier, we say afterwards we go
for a drink, some in a pub in the Village, some in a local pub round
the corner. So that is really saying you don't have to go to the pub
around the corner, you don’t have to go to the Village [...] 60 people
in a pub is not easy anyway so it’s quite handy that you would split.”

(Ian, early 60s, committee member)

It appeared that the official line from MQC’s committee was laissez-faire about
where the choir members should go after rehearsals. Ian appeared to suggest that
the choir welcomed a split within the group for pragmatic reasons. While a number
of the members chose to go to The City Arms, others chose to go to Taurus, and a
sizeable number oscillated between (i.e. went to both). The primary reason for
socialising in The City Arms- convenience- appeared obvious to participants, even
those who did not choose to go there themselves. There were other benefits, such
as the price and the fact that The City Arms was generally quiet and almost empty on
a Monday so that all of the MQC members could sit together at one end of the
venue. Despite Taurus being less convenient in terms of its location, as well as pricier
and busier than The City Arms, there appeared to be an enduring desire or attraction
to socialise in Taurus bar.

Agatha: “We used to walk to Taurus from the town hall, which took
a while... And some of the choir started going to a nearer pub [The
City Arms]. So the people who went there liked it as being an
ordinary pub, where the prices were less than they were in the
Village... I mean there was a time when some people went to Taurus
and some people went to The City Arms, and there were various
attempts to make sure everybody stayed together, because it was more, uh, community-building, by doing it alternate weeks, but it didn't work 'cos people wanted to go where they wanted to go... it [The City Arms] is the nearest pub, it does have the merit of that...”

Interviewer: “So that makes sense, so it's quite a pragmatic reason. But why did people still go out to Canal Street if it was so far away?”

Agatha: “Because Taurus was like our home, I suppose... and people said well they've been very good to us, we should bring our business to them.”

Agatha’s quote suggested that a specific attachment (Rosenbaum, 2006; Debenedetti et al. 2014) and identification (Rosenbaum et al. 2007; Rosenbaum and Montoya, 2007) between MQC members and Taurus bar motivated many participants to choose this venue over The City Arms, which all of the members agreed was a convenient and pleasant place to be.

Then Taurus closed unexpectedly for a refurbishment, during which time many choir members began to go to another venue in the Gay Village called The Molly House, rather than return to The City Arms. Interestingly, even when Taurus bar reopened members continued to socialise in The Molly House instead. One interpretation of this shift is that MQC members wanted to consume and socialise in the Gay Village as a place, rather than specific venues as places within it. In other words, the sense of attachment was to the Gay Village rather than (or in addition to) the places within it. Taurus had been the habitual choice with which the members were most familiar, where they felt the most secure, and most at home (Debenedetti et al. 2014). However, when Taurus was no longer available as a consumption choice the latent desire to be in the Gay Village became more obvious. What is particularly interesting in the quote below from Ian (early 60s, committee member), is that despite places outside the Gay Village being ostensibly more suitable and desirable than places inside, some form of attraction remained toward this district.
“Well previous to the Town Hall, [we used] mainly rooms above pubs, or below pubs, which have been fine but there's a limit to the space. And of course the noise... but there's lots of things about it [the Town Hall] that you have to think about, because we have... the benefit of a store room, to store all our music and uh, uniform and everything, which we need. We've got equipment, we've got a keyboard and everything, and so that's an asset to have. We may not get that elsewhere [...] I mean one could say well why can't we find somewhere in the Gay Village? Because you'd think that if you were from the LGBT community you'd want to try and find somewhere that was, you know, geared towards the LGBT community. But there just isn't anywhere that's large enough, or available, or quiet enough, to accommodate us. Otherwise we would do. We started, as I say, in the Gay Village. And it would be nice I mean, it's just one of those things.”

(Ian, early 60s, committee member)

The data seemed to suggest that there were available places that were large and quiet enough to hold the choir, such as The Thompson’s Arms, but that these were not particularly desirable places to spend two to three hours rehearsing. Interestingly, Ian also claimed that the choir started in the Gay Village. As alluded to earlier in this section, while MQC’s website claimed the group first rehearsed in a chaplaincy (as discussed above), many of the participants traced back the history of the group to Taurus. The ‘origin story’ of MQC appeared to be entwined with the Gay Village. The reasons for this remained unclear because the data generation period had ended by the time the incongruent observations were brought into comparison. One possible interpretation is simply the change in membership and the collective amnesia that this can bring. Another is a more symbolic change in identity, as the choir was reconstituted as a (more legitimate?) LGBT+ group by being (re)located in the Gay Village. This part of the data analysis and interpretation remains unresolved.
Regardless of the reasons for the move, note that Ian did not specify Taurus in the quote above. Rather he suggested that there was a strong preference for MQC to gather in, and be associated with, the Gay Village, a suggestion that was made more explicit during the interview with a direct question.

Ian: “And it would be nice I mean, it’s just one of those things.”

Interviewer: “So the preference would be to be there, if possible?”

Ian: “If we had the, if there was...”

Interviewer: “…a huge hall built?”

Ian: “Yeah! If there was a huge, community hall for LGBT communities. Yes.”

The holistic ideographic interpretation to emerge from the data was that the Gay Village had an ambivalent role within the LGBT+ culture of MQC as an object of place consumption. The data suggested that there was a persistent attraction to remain in, to go back towards, the Gay Village. This attraction swayed the group’s place consumption despite the more practical benefits or desirable features of other venues, and even when a particular venue was especially undesirable. Put differently, despite particular venues being understood as undesirable or impractical they were still use due to some latent attraction between the choir and the Gay Village as a whole. In some instances the only factors apparently preventing participants from consuming in the Gay Village were practical restrictions. As suggested throughout this sub-section, existing place attachment and place identity theories are not sufficient to understand these patterns of place consumption.

It was also clear that MQC had chosen to relocate their rehearsal venue outside the Gay Village, even though for a significant period of time they had chosen to remain in the less-than-ideal venue that was The Thompson’s Arms. A number of the participants did also choose to go to The City Arms for group socialising rather than a venue in the Gay Village. This was not simply due to practical necessity. As suggested above, the data seemed to suggest that MQC could have continued to use The
Thompson’s Arms as a rehearsal venue, and all of the members could have used Taurus, The Molly House, or another venue in the Gay Village as a place to socialise if they so wished (although perhaps not all at the same time). The data thus suggested that there were some counteracting factors that encouraged certain members, and sometimes the entire group, to relocate their consumption away from the Gay Village. The ideographic analysis of MQC struggled to identify precisely what these factors were, but they began to emerge more clearly when MQC’s data was compared with the data from Avant Garde and Polari.
4.2.2. Avant Garde

Avant Garde was part of an international network of LGBT+ running clubs. The original Avant Garde was established in San Francisco during the 1970s, with their model and brand being adopted by LGBT runners elsewhere in the United States. These clubs founded *International Avant Garde* in the late 1990s to help spread the Avant Garde brand abroad. Since then over 80 clubs have been established in cities across North America, Australasia, and Europe, as well as some parts of Asia and Latin America. In the UK Avant Garde groups can be found in cities such as London, Glasgow, Leeds, Newcastle, and Manchester. 'Manchester Avant Garde' was established in 2005 by a small group of friends, but has since grown to a club with over 100 registered members. While the club's full name was Manchester Avant Garde most of the members simply referred to the group as 'Avant Garde' unless they were making comparisons to other clubs. As this study focuses primarily on Manchester Avant Garde, the shorthand 'Avant Garde' will be used hereafter.

Despite being part of an international network Avant Garde was largely “autonomous” as Ash, a committee member in his mid 20s, put it. This meant that they designed their own logo and running kit, as well as a full schedule of running and social events. The three most frequent events were the weekly ‘training sessions’ that the committee organised for the members. *Tuesday Track* focused on running technique and was based at a specialist track and field stadium outside the city centre. *The Thursday Run* was a ten-kilometre route through the city centre. It began and ended at a gymnasium called the Sugden Centre, which provided the necessary changing and storage facilities. *The Saturday Run* was a ten-kilometre race through a suburban park near to the neighbourhood of Chorlton.

After the Thursday and Saturday training sessions, and after most races, the Avant Garde committee organised a meal or similar social event. The Saturday brunch, as it was known, had been held at a venue known as *The Lead Station* in Chorlton. Some members suggested that the venue had been chosen because the original owners were a lesbian couple, and because of Chorlton's place identity as a 'lesbian neighbourhood' within LGBT+ cultures:
“Now The Lead Station, now that’s a proper lesbian venue isn’t it?
*Laughs* My, we had our wedding reception there.”

(Charlotte, late 30s, lay member of Avant Garde)

Others suggested that the choice of The Lead Station was more pragmatic; it was close enough to the Saturday morning route, it was large enough to hold a relatively large number of members comfortably, and the original members had enjoyed eating and drinking there in their spare time anyway (as did many of the contemporary members). The Avant Garde never changed this venue because it was generally reliable and a desirable place to be. Despite these practical justifications, many of the members also emphasized that Chorlton’s status as a neighbourhood that celebrated diversity in general contributed to the feeling of acceptance there.

Hannah: “If you go to Chorlton... you don’t need to go to anywhere gay in Chorlton, because it’s stuffed full of all sorts of people. And no-one gives a shit. So you can hold hands and no-one cares... and I’d rather be in that environment than in... um... some grotty gay bar just because it’s gay. I suppose it’s kind of about being places where there is tolerance for everyone whether people are trans* or gay or black or white or whatever, I’d rather go to places where, I, I personally think society uhm... has succeeded when you have those, those sorts of places. Rather than black people go into a bar over there, trans* people feeling they need to go over there, gay people. I think ghettoisation is...”

Interviewer: “…bad?”

Hannah: “Uhm... I ... don’t think it’s always very helpful. I think where you’d want to be is to have somewhere where everyone felt included.”

Hannah (a lay member in her early 40s) was not-so-subtly alluding to the Gay Village when contrasting Chorlton against “grotty gay bars” and “ghettoisation”. Within
Ava

At the Gay Village, many of the participants understood it to be an undesirable place, both physically and symbolically. The food, drink, prices, décor, and atmosphere of most of the venues left much to be desired. Symbolically, the Gay Village and many of the venues within it were associated with negative stereotypes of LGBT+ lifestyles. In particular, they were associated with the imagined figures of young, gay men who drank excessively, took drugs, and had promiscuous sexual relations.

“If I had the money I would go to that Village and I would bin the entire thing. I would replace it, demolish the lot... I’d replace it with a few bars, fine, and this that and the other. But it would have a florist, it would have a bakers, it would have a butchers. It would have a coffee shop. And it would be a happy place to be. With a happy, vibrant atmosphere about it. It wouldn’t be this, "let’s get smashed". That’s the sort of Village that, if uhm, if the BNP was in charge or UKIP and they were told you have to designate this area to gay people they’d go right we’ll give themselves somewhere where they can drug themselves, and give themselves a shit life, and an early death... legally.”

(Charles, early 40s, lay member)

Charles referenced the British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), alluding to their reputation amongst LGBT+ people as being homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, and generally discriminatory organisations. For Charles the Gay Village was a material symbol of the worst of LGBT+ culture, given that it was a predominantly nightlife district oriented around drinking and drugs. For Charles the ideal solution would be for the Gay Village to diversify in order to represent LGBT+ culture more broadly. For the participants Avant Garde was a group that represented or embodied a more diverse range of LGBT+ culture and communities. In the quote below Ash, a committee member in his mid 20s, describes how Avant Garde’s participation in the Manchester Pride parade gave him a new perspective on
the relationship between the running club and (stereotypical parts of) the Gay Village.

“This year was my first year walking in the Parade, it was a fantastic experience. But the parade itself annoys me a little bit because, the Manchester Pride parade is the biggest, most visible thing about the LGBT society in the year. That is when the rest of Manchester can see us at our best, or worst, as the case may be. And what really frustrates me about the parade is how many floats are sponsored by bars and clubs. Because that reinforces the stereotype that that’s all we do. Go drinking. Go clubbing. Do drugs. Have sex. Contract HIV. That kind of view is dissipating but I think it’s important that we have groups like the Spartans [gay rugby team] and Avant Garde [...] I think the parade should more be about... that LGBT people are, just people. We go running, we work for the NHS, we are students, we live completely normal lives, we just happen to be attracted to people of the same sex. Or we happen to be born in the wrong body. Or whatever. I think LGBT acceptance is now at a point where we need to be "we’re here, we’re queer, get over it", I think we need to be "we’re here, we’re queer, and we’re just the same as you". I think that’s like, the next important thing.”

As Ash’s quote above suggests, the Gay Village was understood as a place associated with the consumption of alcohol, illicit substances, and bodies; a place that perpetuated the worst cultural stereotypes of LGBT+ people. In contrast, Avant Garde could be an alternative representation of this minority group and thus a political statement. If ‘politics’ is taken to be the exercise of status quo power relations through formal channels like public office, ‘political’ can refer to the everyday interactions that transform how people think, feel, and act toward one another (Müller, 2015). One of Avant Garde’s unofficial goals as a group appeared to be to change how the heterosexual majority thought about LGBT+ people, and how LGBT+ people thought about sport and fitness. Part of this involved avoiding the Gay Village and the excessive drinking culture that it engendered, but (paradoxically)
another part involved consuming in the Gay Village in order to create opportunities for LGBT+ to think, and act, differently by joining the running club.

“Like I mentioned earlier that I do think the Village needs to change... to keep up with the times, but I think it’s important that groups such as Avant Garde, and the Spartans, and Northern Wave [the LGBT+ swimming club] and The Village Bakers utilise the space that’s available in the Village to keep it alive. Because I think that kind of space is important, and I think also us being around there gets the word out to other people as well. Like, they might see us because we’re wearing our club clothes they might think, “oh, a gay running club, I’ll look into that”. Because I think, the important thing about the group is that we provide an opportunity for LGBT people to interact with other LGBT people outside of the stereotypical club and drinking culture.”

(Ash, mid 20s, committee member)

Just like the Manchester Queer Choir (MQC), Avant Garde’s identity as an LGBT+ running club explicitly emphasised inclusivity. Also like MQC, the term inclusive meant actively encouraging a diverse membership. Throughout the multi-sited ethnography a keen concern amongst the membership, and especially the committee, was how to make the group more diverse in terms of gender. According to Avant Garde’s own membership survey only 27% of members identified as female in 2015. Female attendance at most events was even lower, as a number of women only attended the monthly Women’s Wednesday events. No-one explicitly identified as trans* during the period of the multi-sited ethnography, although verbal data suggested that there had been some trans* members in previous years. The group was also relatively homogeneous in terms of racial, educational background, and having primarily able-bodied members (although the groups had made special efforts to ensure those with vision impairments could still run with the group). Some participants downplayed this homogeneity as typical of the running community more generally, but within the context of an LGBT+ club there appeared to be an
added pressure for the group to be diverse. The quote below is illustrative of many members’ struggle between being proud of their club for its achievements in terms of promoting diversity, but also looking critically at ways this could be improved further.

“The club has an issue with that we don’t have many openly bisexual people, we haven’t really had very, many trans* members, we haven’t had many longstanding trans* members. The club is overwhelmingly gay male, and lesbian, gay male and lesbian. So as an LGBT club we’re really only LG. Very visibly. We don’t have many disabled runners. We’re not too bad with BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] but then running is... I mean a lot of the people that come have got university educations. So in terms of diversity we’re not... but then running isn’t hugely diverse. It tends to be white middle class.”

(Hannah, early 40s, committee member)

Whether the wider running community was heterogeneous or not was beyond the remit of this study (but see Thomas et al. 2013). What was clear was that Avant Garde were concerned about being seen to be diverse as this would be a signal of the club’s inclusivity. It was reasoned that if the club’s public image and local reputation was that of an ‘inclusive’ LGBT+ group then more female and trans* members would join. This would reify and reinforce the club’s reputation as an inclusive group, creating a virtuous cycle. During the multi-sited ethnography it was revealed that this reputation building exercise was actually one of reputation re-building. For a number of years Avant Garde had been known as a “gentleman’s drinking club” or a “lad’s drinking club”. While it could be suggested that there is a classed distinction between the two terms, the members seemed to use it interchangeably with no clear patterns emerging in terms of who used which term or when they were used. This was particularly relevant to the present study because this reputation had been created, in no small part, by Avant Garde’s consumption in the Gay Village.
This consumption began with the Thursday night social, which followed the Thursday evening ten kilometre training session. According to participants Thursday had long been Avant Garde’s ‘main’ training session, and runners were strongly encouraged to attend the post-training social. During the early stages of the participant observation the Thursday evening training session was the run that most new members tried first, and thus the Thursday night social was the event that most new members attended to try to get to know other members more. These events therefore had a disproportionate influence on the impression that prospective and new members had of Avant Garde, and thus the reputation of the group as a whole. The Thursday night social had been held in a venue called Kro2 for a number of years, because it was a convenient location near to the Sugden Centre gymnasium where the Thursday night run began and ended. The participants who had been members of Avant Garde at this time remembered Kro2 fondly. The atmosphere created by the environment and the friendliness of the staff both contributed to members’ feelings of affection, and even attachment, towards Kro2, and this venue became synonymous with the identity of the Thursday night social as an event. Unfortunately for Avant Garde, and particularly the two committee members charged with organising venues for events, one week Kro2 closed unceremoniously with very little warning.

"Kro2 went bust... it was only because we were friends with the waitress that she sent us a message to tell us. Privately, not as a waitress but just as a person. "By the way, we've shut down." So... we had to react quickly to that... I walked around all the back streets near the Sugden Centre that would tick our boxes... it was a nightmare and that's why we went to places like Sackville Lounge because it ticked most of the boxes but then food quality and the service deteriorated, so, terribly. We were getting two or three people coming to Thursday social which is unimaginable...”

(David, early 40s, committee member)
After Kro2 closed Avant Garde trialled a couple of nearby locations in order to minimise disruption. None of these ticked the 'boxes' that mattered to the committee, which included reasonable prices, good quality food, options for those with dietary requirements, and a host of other practical concerns. Then the committee settled on the Sackville Lounge, a bar-cum-restaurant in the Gay Village that was located at least a fifteen minutes walk away from the Sugden centre. As David suggests, this relocation was not particularly popular with the majority of members and attendance at the Thursday night social dropped dramatically. It is worth noting that before relocating the Thursday night social to the Sackville Lounge none of Avant Garde’s official events took place within the Gay Village. In contrast to the data collected from MQC (see section 4.2.1), it appeared that within Avant Garde there was a latent desire to avoid the Gay Village. The Sackville Lounge was allegedly chosen because it was the only suitable option near to the Sugden centre, despite actually being at least a ten minute walk away past several other bar-cum-restaurant venues. When the service “deteriorated” the group moved next door to TriBeCa, another bar in the Gay Village⁵ that served food. Felix, a committee member in his late 30s who worked with David at the time to select venues, explained the difficulties of finding venues in the following way:

“I’ve organised events throughout my career and you can’t go to a restaurant and go, “oh by the way can you give us an area every Thursday night? Can you put on enough staff to staff it, but I might bring 30 one night and I might bring 4 the next? I don’t want to pre-order and I don’t want to pay a deposit.” They’ll be like, “you’re having a laugh?” And TriBeCa were like, yeah, yeah it’s fine if you don’t mind we’ve only got one chef, a small kitchen, and we can only offer you burgers and pasta and stuff like that?” We were like, “oh that’s fine.””

Given the distance between the Sugden Centre and the Gay Village it was debatable whether the Sackville Lounge and TriBeCa were the only suitable options available.

⁵ TriBeCa’s status as being ‘within’ the Gay Village was contested in the data, showing the fluidity or ambivalence of this districts boundaries as a place-object.
Another reason why these venues that emerged from the analysis was that the relocation of the Thursday night social venue to the Gay Village reflected the preferences of a small group of members with influence on the committee. After the meal at Kro2 this group of members had walked over to the Gay Village to go drinking and clubbing until the early hours. Relocating the post-training meal in the Gay Village facilitated this process somewhat. The Gay Village offered consumption experiences for these members that were difficult to find elsewhere in the city. The members of this small group were primarily younger, single gay or bisexual men, and their drinking and clubbing could be associated with the negative cultural stereotype of LGBT+ people discussed above. While the move to TriBeCa was initially met by an increase in attendance (the food service was allegedly better than the Sackville Lounge), friction and conflict within the group began to emerge.

“So we went to TriBeCa for a while, it got really loud, it was far more of a bar than it was a restaurant, and for whatever reason it did seem that all the guys sat at one end and all the ladies sat at the other. Just didn’t work for us, at all.”

(George, early 40s, committee member)

Avant Garde had prided itself on creating an inclusive atmosphere where people (regardless of sexuality, gender, or other differences) could mix freely. The move to TriBeCa appeared to create divisions within the group, or make pre-existing divisions more evident. The data did not suggest an obvious reason why these divisions formed, but one possibility was that male members generally drank more alcohol in preparation for a long evening in the Gay Village, while female members preferred to eat, talk, and then go home at a reasonable time.

“I don't feel I've got the time in my evenings, although I love you guys and would like to spend time in the pub with you, my partner's at home... waiting for me to come home, my dinner's waiting on the side, the dog's whining because I'm not there [...] So most, some of the guys live in the city centre. They're single, it's not a big deal for
them... they don't have the same kind of set up to go home to. Whereas I think more of the women tend to live out of the city centre, in South Manchester or whatever. So it's already a bit of an inconvenience to come to a Thursday night, start your run at half past 7, you're getting home reasonably late. 9 o'clock. That's your whole evening gone. Alright, I might not be doing anything other that sitting in front of the telly knitting on the sofa with my wife and my dog. But that's important time, even though we're not really doing anything, that's your chit chat, “how was your day?””

(Charlotte, late 30s, lay member)

Aside from the possible divisions caused by lifestyle, and the resulting differences in alcohol consumption, there was little indication in the data as to why women and men stopped mixing in TriBeCa. Then female members stopped attending, as Hannah (a committee member in her early 40s) explained:

Hannah: “I think it was the beginning of the end of women coming on a Thursday because it [TriBeCa] was very gay male. It didn’t bother me particularly but it wasn’t very inclusive... why would I want to bother going into the Village which is the opposite way from home to a venue that’s very, you know, very gay male?”

Interviewer: “In what sense?”

Hannah: “It’s... just the way it’s decorated. It’s kind of aimed at a particular age group of gay men really. I’d say it’s kind of aimed at 25-30 year olds, it’s not aimed at the really young... it’s the kind of décor, the neon lights [...] the kind of music as well, kind of high energy dance music it just appeals to a demographic that’s much younger. And... and very gay male. And it’s just a lot of little things that make you think their demographic is gay men.”
It could be argued that TriBeCa was a “gendered and gendering” venue where masculinity was valued over femininity, in a similar way to the ESPN Zone (Sherry et al. 2004, p.152). The participants agreed that TriBeCa was a place where the female members felt somewhat ‘out-of-place’ (May, 2013). It could be speculated that this discomfort was a contributing factor that encouraged female members to group together separately from the male members, but it was more certainly a key reason why women stopped attending the Thursday night social event. Rather than “voicing” their discontent to the committee, or attempting to “twist” the opinions of the male Avant Garde members, the women simply “exited” by no longer coming to the Thursday night social (Aubert-Gamet, 1997). This was in stark contrast to MQC. There a sense of latent attraction or connection to the Gay Village kept members loyal to venues that were impractical or undesirable. In Avant Garde the women did not appear to harbour these latent feelings. Women’s non-attendance of the Thursday night social could have been an isolated incident, but once they left this event became dominated by the once small group of members who wanted to go out drinking and clubbing.

“I’ve rolled in at half past 3 on Friday morning a few times, after going out with them. Yeah. It doesn’t happen every week but...”

(Hank, late 30s, lay member)

“Avant Garde got to a critical point of kind of like 20 people coming every Thursday... every Thursday we’d go out and get obliterated, and have hangovers on Friday... ten of us in Cruz 101 until 3 in the morning.”

(Felix, late 30s, committee member)

When the Thursday night social had been held at Kro2 a number of members would walk over to the Gay Village afterwards, but the physical distance created symbolic boundaries between these nights of revelry and the 'official' Avant Garde social itself. Yet during the ‘Tribeca era’ the identity of the Thursday night social became increasingly associated with the stereotype of younger, single gay men with this
smaller group of Avant Garde members then frequenting numerous bars and clubs after their meal (including The Thompson’s Arms, which MQC members had described in rather negative terms in sub-section 4.2.1). Diversity and inclusivity appeared to be less of a concern within this sub-group, and TriBeCa remained as Avant Garde’s Thursday night social venue for some time despite the drop in female attendance. Over time Avant Garde began to develop its reputation as a “gentlemen’s” or “lads’ drinking club”, both of which captured the gendered perception of the running club’s reputation. This reputation began to encourage female members to exit the club altogether, and discourage prospective female members from joining in the first place. This only served to exacerbate Avant Garde’s male-dominated reputation.

Yet while “gentlemen’s” or “lad’s” drinking club was evidently a gendered reputation, the “drinking club with a running problem” slogan was not specifically gendered. During data generation and early analysis an alternative understanding emerged that the committee had, to some extent, enacted the gendered problem into being as part of the research process. This is explained below.

The committee at the time of data collection were focused on improving the gender balance or diversity within the club, first by focusing on (cis) female members and then (towards the end of the data collection period) encouraging trans* members to join the group. The majority of data was thus refracted through the lens of gender by the participants. However, the data also suggested that the move to the Gay Village, and TriBeCa in particular, had been problematic for male members in the group as well.

“I never went because I hate TriBeCa... I think the food they serve is vile and I’m not really 100% on the atmosphere, and the crowd it attracts... I know that sounds really snobby, but I don’t enjoy going in there. It was cheap. They do 2 meals for a tenner [£10] but it was not very nice food... Avant Garde went there for years until they were like “enough’s enough!” So it’s not just that we need somewhere gay, we need somewhere that’s LGBT...”
(Ash, mid 20s, committee member).

The descriptions of innuendo, and the use of the terms ‘snobby’, ‘cheap’, and ‘vile’, indicates that some male participants were expressing their superior taste relative to TriBeCa. This expression of taste suggested that TriBeCa was a ‘classed’ venue (Bourdieu, 1984), not just a gendered one. Similar expressions of taste were seen throughout the data of all three groups in relation to the Gay Village as a whole, and resonates with existing work on the Gay Village being a classed place (Skeggs, 1999; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004), and LGBT+ places being classed in general (Brewis and Jack, 2010).

What these quotes also attest is that the desire to move away from TriBeCa, and perhaps the Gay Village entirely, was not restricted to the female membership. The reputation of the club was (rightly or wrongly) closely entwined with the choice of place on a Thursday night, but it appeared that the effects of TriBeCa were affecting many different groups of people, not just women. The reputation of the "gentleman's drinking club" or "lads' drinking club" was therefore slightly misleading. The main issue at the heart of the move appeared to be a shift from Kro2, which had been a restaurant that served alcohol and other beverages, to the Sackville Lounge and then TriBeCa, two venues that were primarily bars that also served food. The fact that the Sackville Lounge and TriBeCa were also located in the Gay Village tapped into the historical associations between gay male cultures and alcohol consumption that the participants had expressed above, and which Kates (2002, 2003) notes in his studies of gay subcultures. Ash’s shift from “somewhere gay” to “somewhere LGBT” is an explicit expression that the these two concepts are not synonymous with one another, a notion that was becoming increasingly salient within the group.

For a time the Avant Garde committee did not appear to be perturbed by their reputation- they embraced the "drinking club with a running problem" slogan as a term of endearment. After all, many of the members were enjoying themselves, and runners were free to attend training sessions without coming along to the Thursday night social. There was also the Saturday morning brunch for those who wanted a
more relaxed affair. However, the participants were clear that those in charge of the Thursday night social had begun to influence the rest of the events. This included the club holiday, an annual event that usually involved a short break to a European city where a major race was being organised. Avant Garde members would participate in the race, but also have a number of days to enjoy the city and surrounding area. As George, a committee member in his early 40s, explained, one infamous club holiday became what he called a “tipping point” for Avant Garde:

George: “The membership of the club had grown quite well, and we had quite a lot of people come along, I think about 40. With that was quite a lot of the old school, "we go out drinking" lot. So during that holiday there were quite a number of guys who just went out and got so drunk constantly. They didn't take part in the race. They didn't even manage to get up for the race to support the rest of us. And that included three members of the committee... so that lead to quite a lot of people leaving the club, including quite a lot of female members.”

Interviewer: “Citing that?”

George: “Yeah, that holiday was kind of the breaking point for the club.”

Following the holiday a new committee was elected, with many of the previous members standing down. The new committee were the ones who emphasised the importance of inclusivity and diversity, not only in terms of gender and other demographic characteristics of the membership but also in terms of the variety of events that the running club organised. Events focused on drinking and clubbing were not banned, but they were ‘counterbalanced’ by an increased number of well-organised training sessions and social events that involved walking, bowling, and other non-alcoholic activities. There appeared to be a strong push away from the Gay Village, as an increased number of events took place outside this district.
“We do a club survey every year and feedback previously has been that we potentially spend too much time in the Village. So we took that to heart like a year or so ago and have really made an effort to go to like the Northern Quarter, Chorlton, Didsbury, places on the way back [from races]... Personally I don't think there's particularly a lot of food places in the Village, I hope that changes. I was really excited about MCR42 but then that closed due to bankruptcy, so... I prefer going to the Northern Quarter, there's a lot more interesting places to go and eat.”

(Ash, mid 20s, committee member).

The overall interpretation of Avant Garde contrasted with that of MQC. While the MQC data seemed to suggest a strong preference to be in the Gay Village amongst members of the group, in Avant Garde there appeared to be a stronger preference to avoid this location. Or, perhaps more critically, there was a louder preference expressed by those members who were more vocal, although often ‘voiced’ through non-human actors like the survey. A sub-group of the club had certainly preferred to socialise in the Gay Village, and for a time this sub-group had dominated Avant Garde and its identity as a running (or drinking) club. Perhaps because of this historical swing towards a more homogeneous membership and alcohol-centric reputation, the prevailing narrative appeared to be that Avant Garde wished to ‘officially’ distance the club from the Gay Village. However, in practice their consumption as a group was far more conflicted and contradictory, with some groups consuming in the Gay Village, others avoiding it, and many members mixing their consumption.

“What tends to happen when we've gone to a non-LGBT venue for food, there'll be a follow on to another venue which will typically be an LGBT bar, which you've seen. So that will tend to be a default to go there anyway... So we get some feedback for some not-LGBT areas. Ok, not a problem. So we organised a little walk in Hebden bridge thing. We do a Northern Quarter thing now and again for a
change. So we do that for a change and attendance at these things are mixed. It's very interesting the feedback we get. Ask for change, whatever it may be. We deliver a change based on the feedback, so we haven't come up with it ourselves. And sometimes attendance is good, and sometimes it's what we perceive as relatively poor. Well, should we spend time and effort on these things that get less attendance or stick with where everyone wants to be most of the time?"

*(George, early 40s, committee member)*

The mixed attendance appeared to be evidence for the ambivalent role that the Gay Village played within the place attachments, group/place identities, and consumption activities of Avant Garde members. This appeared to be exacerbated by the fact that the committee paid a disproportionate amount of attention to the small number of requests for change in the annual club survey, reading these as issues or problems. In reality most members were simply ambivalent about the status quo, rather than being unhappy.

“So in the survey people were like, "oh we want to do something a bit different, we don’t always want to go to the Village." So we’d organise bowling and hardly anybody would rock up, and soon as we'd finish we'd go to the Village... we do it at [my] work, you get your results for a survey and you go straight to the bad bits and go, "oh I need to fix that." Well actually, 95% of the running club were happy with the social. But a tiny portion said they wanted more stuff that wasn’t drinking, more stuff outside the village... and then you organise that, hardly anybody turns up, and then afterwards they want to go to the Village.”

*(Felix, late 30s, committee member)*
The quotes from George and Felix suggest that despite the apparent group consensus to move away from the Gay Village that emerged during the early data generation period – focused mainly around the club’s erstwhile “drinking club” reputation - the final interpretation needed to be far more ambivalent in order to appreciate the contradictions and changes within the group about where the members wanted the club to consume and who they wanted the club to represent. While MQC’s ambivalence appeared to emerge from negative or mixed feelings about specific venues countenanced by a positive connection to the Gay Village as a whole, Avant Garde’s ambivalence was rather the opposite. Members appeared to form attachments to specific places, and the identities of sub-groups became entangled with these venues and their place identities, but the group appeared to have an aversion to being overly associated with the Gay Village. Ambivalence emerged because the members of Avant Garde wanted to tolerate, if not celebrate, the diversity of activities that took place within the running club, but also wanted to create a ‘balanced’ identity for the group. This ambivalent struggle within the club’s identity and practices is captured in the final quote below.

“That kind of reputation sticks. We’ve been trying to shake it for a while, even though we’ve not been like that for quite a long time now, there’s still whispers of it... I think we are quite a respected group now, but it’s taken quite a lot of work to, banish those demons. I mean, there’s obviously no issue with being seen as a drinking club. But that’s not how we wanted to be seen because we do have quite a lot of dedicated runners... we are a serious group. But as serious as we are about running, we are also serious about just having a good time with one another. It’s annoying that just one element of our group has been thought about. So I think it’s important that we acknowledge that we are a very good running group, who is accepting to all, and we do have a good social scene. But predominantly we are a running club.”

(Ash, late 20s, committee member)
4.2.3 Polari

Polari was described as an LGBT+ “community theatre company”. The word *theatre* denoted the heterogeneous activities that group members could participate in. As Polari tended to produce its own original shows from scratch, members could be involved in writing, editing, acting, directing, lighting, sound, set design, or promotion. Although members often expressed a preferred activity by describing themselves as “actors” or “writers” (etc.), most members moved between all of these roles fluidly and developed new skills in the process. The word *theatre* also emphasised that the group *performed* the shows that the members produced to a paying audience. However, this had not always been the case.

“From ’96 to when Rebecca [one of the founders] stopped being involved in 2009... basically it was a drop-in group. It was advertised as a “drama drop in” every two weeks. So the key objective was not performance, we did do performance but the objective was to involve the people in a sort of, well we did improvisations, we did drama games... and from week to week from fortnight to fortnight you wouldn’t know who was going to be there. But that lost momentum, and some of us thought that we should be doing, making it more structured.”

*(Graham, early 60s, committee member)*

The word *community* denoted Polari’s emphasis on being a valuable part of Manchester’s LGBT+ population or ‘communities’. While all members agreed that ‘being a part of the community’ was important, the precise definition of this ambition was often ambivalent and ambiguous. For one, while many of the group’s performances addressed topics that would be primarily of interest to LGBT+ audiences, members also wanted to entertain and educate the heterosexual majority about these issues. Thus being part of the community involved developing the community ‘from within’ but also promoting the community to ‘external’
stakeholders. Importantly for the present study, this ambivalence was expressed primarily through place consumption within and beyond the Gay Village.

“I don’t think it’s preaching to the converted because often what we’re doing, in the shows that I did, is talking about a history [LGBT+] people didn’t know, and perspectives on the present that people hadn’t thought about, so this isn’t something that they already, have got in their head, this is something different... but then I do think there is, in a broader sense, a kind of well are you just ghetto theatre? Or do you want to get out of that space and be in other spaces, where other people might come? You might, you’re pushing at the envelope all the time of what’s acceptable and where it’s acceptable. So doing performances that aren’t in Canal Street is also important, I think. So, ideally both.”

(Edward, mid 30s, committee member).

In contrast to MQC and Avant Garde, many members in Polari had a more theoretical approach to the selection of place, based on their educational and professional backgrounds in amateur and/or professional theatre. In these fields dramaturgical theory saw place as one of the most important factors when producing a show.

“When doing some cultural theatre I think there’s various things you need to look at [...] venue, in terms of who are you reaching by your venue? So, really broad example, if you were doing a play at the royal opera house, that comes with a certain, audience. If you’re doing it at your village pub, that comes with a different audience. I think venue and audience are a very strongly tied together.”

(Noah, late 20s, lay member)

The second sense in which Polari was a community theatre group was because it primarily sought to work with and develop LGBT+ people’s abilities and self-esteem.
The members explained that the term “community theatre” often puts more emphasis on development and self-expression, rather than on competition and professional quality. There was a sense within the group that Polari was working with and for vulnerable and marginalised parts of the LGBT+ population. This identity was established throughout the 2000s in the “drop in” period that Graham described above, as Richard explained in the quote below:

“I thought Polari was going to be something different to what it was actually. So we’re going back a long, long time. 2001, 2002, something like that. And I thought Polari was going to be more… structured. And I use the word neutrally. I’m not saying it would be better or worse if it were structured I’m just saying. I had a really hard time when I first came to Manchester. I had a series of times where I had been beat up really badly and actually I was really in need of a friendly, cosy, community group. Polari really provided that for me... it wasn’t a professional... it was scrawly, self-exploratory, you know? Not really focused on creating quality art but definitely cathartic material.”

(Richard, early 30s, lay member)

For Richard Polari was a safe space, as it was for many others. The space of the group was mobile (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018; Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2016), and in theory could manifest wherever the members were gathered. However, just as place had been important when considering the kind of audience that the group wanted to reach, so too was it important for the group to consider how place could affect the members. As Richard went on to explain, some of the venues that Polari members had used in the past for rehearsals and performances had not created the kind of “safe space” for LGBT+ people to explore and express their experiences through performance.

“The Chorlton Library... which Polari have used... it’s poor because you can get people wandering in. People who are not part of the
show. “Ooo, what’s in this room?” Somebody doing a play about how they’ve been sexually abused, or beaten up, or something really, you know… that shouldn’t happen… Do you understand that this is our motivation to create a safe space for people to put on a community performance to talk about community stuff?”

(Richard, early 30s, lay member)

The Chorlton Library had been used by Polari for a number of years as a rehearsal and performance venue. For Richard it was an unsuitable location for a community theatre company because it did not create the ‘safe’ atmosphere that was required due to the regularity of interruptions. However, a number of other members described The Chorlton Library in far more positive terms. For these members the Chorlton Library had played a crucial role in Polari’s history because it had provided a reliable (almost always available) meeting and rehearsal place for the group, allowing them to focus on producing higher quality shows. It was also free-of-charge, which was essential for Polari given its relatively limited funds (as detailed below).

This contradiction in place identity thus revealed a contradiction at the heart of the group, which would become problematic in the later stages of the multi-sited ethnography (and will be described later on in this section). This contradiction was that some members did not understand Polari as a community theatre group for vulnerable or marginalised groups, but rather a semi-professional theatre company that organised ambitious projects in a variety of venues, rather than the “scrawly, self-exploratory” group that needed a “safe space” described above.

Polari’s self-description as an LGBT+ “community theatre company” was a useful way to make sense of Polari’s contradictory and sometimes conflicted identity. Polari’s choice of places was also closely entangled into this ontological or existential friction between the members. During the multi-sited ethnography the group was highly conflicted, and the group’s place consumption was nomadic and erratic. To make sense of this it is helpful to look at the history of the group, which can be structured into roughly three time periods: 1996-2008, 2009-2014, and 2015-2016.
In the first period the communitarians within Polari held sway, while in the second period the committee was led by a number of members from professional theatre backgrounds who collectively took Polari in a more organised and less communitarian direction. The third period, which coincided with the multi-sited ethnographic data collection, was a period where neither side was dominant. Unfortunately this heterogeneity was not carefully managed like the cultural actors studied by Thomas et al. (2013), causing tensions, conflicts, and ultimately the dissolution of Polari altogether.

As Graham pointed out, in 2009 one of the founders of Polari left the group. Before 2009, venues for drop-in sessions (and occasionally performances) often took place in the Gay Village, in upstairs or downstairs rooms within bars and clubs (much like MQC; section 4.2.1). Often these rooms were offered for free, although for performances sometimes a deposit or profit sharing scheme was suggested. As a couple of members joked, the managers were often disappointed when they found out that community theatre productions rarely drew in huge crowds. Often venues would not offer a free room more than once. This meant that increasingly drop-in sessions and performances had to be located outside the Gay Village. These were often in places owned and managed by non-profit, ‘community-centric’ organisations such as the Zion Centre or LGBT centre near the Manchester Metropolitan University. While these venues were often suitable the members of Polari wanted the community theatre group to be based within the Gay Village. A popular option was Taurus bar, the same place that MQC had developed such a strong attachment to (see section 4.2.1). For the members of Polari Taurus was a very ‘homely’ place, evoking the familiarity that Debenedetti et al. (2014) identify as central to place attachment.

“Taurus always felt quite cosy, didn't it? It was almost like a cosy bar... you know, armchairs, sofas, cubby holes... comfy seating, warm colours... it felt warm when you walked in there... it wasn't a brightly lit, it was partially lit, dimly lit, you know? You know what I'm saying? It is hard to articulate, something just had a sense of feeling that there's a warmth and a... a welcomeness to it...”
Taurus was also understood as a place that was somewhat outside of the market, and thus a distinct place that was unlike the typical commercial venues. This evokes the notion of security that Debenedetti et al. (2014) identify as another key characteristic of place attachment, specifically security from the vicissitudes of the market.

“They’re totally up for, well, because they let you use the downstairs space for free, which is amazing. It’s a city centre space, One Canal Street is the address, you couldn’t... can you imagine getting that in Soho? A bar in Soho giving you like a 40 seater space downstairs that you can have for free?”

(Edward, early 40s, committee member)

As a community-oriented theatre group Polari often worked with members who had little disposable income. The group did not charge a membership fee (although it had trialled this at certain points in its history with limited success), and rarely made a significant profit from its shows. This meant that the group had a limited income and was thus reliant on free venues. This is a stark contrast to MQC and Avant Garde who both generated income from events and membership fees, creating a pool of resources or a budget that they could draw upon. Because Taurus offered it space for free it was seen as offering a degree of security to Polari, somewhere where they did not have to struggle to find money each week in order to remain in the place. It was also read as a sign of ‘authenticity’ (Debenedetti et al. 2014), referring here to the cultural associations between Taurus and the LGBT+ communities of Manchester. Rather than an ‘inauthentic’ commercial place, which only wanted to exploit associations for profit, Taurus was seen as a true “brand ally” (Kates, 2004), whose identity was intimately entwined with that of LGBT+ people (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007).

“Well Taurus [...] was often seen as the centre of the Village, despite being stuck on the end. A lot of the gay sports groups went to
Taurus, that’s where they had their socials... Canal-street.co.uk is ran by [...] people who are, were, involved in Taurus... and, they, they seem to wield power within the community. So it seems to get the most out of, to get the maximum, which when you’re involved in theatre you’re always looking for anyway, you’ve got this piece of art but you know that you’re going to need help getting it out there to a wider market, so it kind of, it made sense.”

(John, late 20s, lay member)

As the quote above suggested, Taurus had both a cultural and strategic significance for Polari. It was a homely, familiar, secure, and authentic place (Debenedetti et al. 2014) to which members could feel attached, and it was also a place whose identity was entangled into Manchester’s LGBT+ communities and cultures. It was a social and cultural nexus. It was a place that could enable Polari members to meet one another (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999), but also a place that could build bridges to other LGBT+ groups (Ghaziani, 2011), and thus provided two forms of what Cova (1997) might describe as ‘linking value’. However, the notion of Taurus “wielding power” could be read as a sign of mixed feelings about the venue. It could be beneficial to Polari but only if they managed to get Taurus to work with them. Another contributor to mixed feelings was the assessment that Taurus was not quite the ideal place for Polari. First, the downstairs rooms were not large enough for ambitious performances. Although around 40 people could fit in the space this had to be split between cast and audience members, resulting in either a smaller production or a smaller crowd. This meant that Polari primarily used Taurus’s rooms as rehearsal spaces rather than performance venues. However, Taurus was designed to be a bar rather than as a theatre, and it suffered with inadequate soundproofing. For the members this was quite a disruptive experience:

“The managers of Taurus are lovely. Really nice people. But there’s often a difference of motivation between management of the venue, who have their agenda, and arts groups. A big problem is noise bleed. By which I mean the noise of one space spoiling what’s
going on in the other space... your space has to be appropriate. Because this is a big part of what you’re doing isn’t it? Space? So, I feel they’ve [Polari] poorly chosen their space [...] because if you’re doing a piece of art about, where you’re really vulnerable, to hear like disco music is just gonna [...] yeah. I think that the noise bleed thing is an example of not choosing spaces fantastically.”

(Richard, early 30s, lay member)

Another key issue that limited members’ dependency on Taurus was the fact that there was no wheelchair access to the downstairs room.

“There was also a concern I think rightly, because it's a downstairs space and there's no lift, so it's not fully accessible. And on principle you shouldn’t have a non accessible space, but I think, and very immediately we did have, uh, a wheelchair user in the group. So for all sorts of reasons that turned out not to be the right space. Although generally, and I’ve done things subsequently in Taurus, and, uhm, they’re great, they’re really up for all that community involvement stuff.”

(Edward, early 40s, committee member).

Before 2009 the community theatre group had been focused towards working with vulnerable LGBT+ people, but after 2009 a new committee decided to make the theatre company more structured and professional. Polari’s calendar was organised around two major performances each year, one for Manchester Pride in August and one for LGBT History Month in February. Each meeting worked towards these performances, rather than being a ‘drop-in’ session, and thus only those willing to commit reasonable amounts of time and effort would be included in the group. Scripts were worked on collaboratively to improve their quality, actors would be expected to rehearse and train, and the goal was to not only break even through ticket sales but perhaps even make a small profit to fund future projects. While the company in “community theatre company” is generally used as a synonym for
'group' in amateur dramatic circles, in Polari’s case the commercial and organisational connotations of ‘company’ appeared to become more salient within the group’s identity. Given the entwinement of place and group identity, the new committee also began to choose places differently.

After 2009 drop-in sessions became rehearsals, and rehearsal venues were chosen more carefully for practical reasons such as quietness, cost (preferably free), and reliability. However, the reasons behind these choices were not to create a ‘safe space’ for vulnerable LGBT+ people to ‘drop in’. Instead the intention was to create a reliable and professional environment where Polari members could work. This contrast with most research on place attachment (Lewicka, 2011; Rosenbaum et al. 2007; Debellotti et al. 2014), and place research in general (Bradford and Sherry, 2015; Rosenbaum, 2006; Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999). From the perspective of seeking somewhere to work the Chorlton Library (which Richard and others had disparaged for not being ‘safe’ enough) had achieved an almost mythic status within Polari for some members, as illustrated in the quote below from Max, a committee member in his late 20s:

Max: “I mean, Polari wouldn’t have existed if it wasn’t for The Chorlton Library.”

Researcher: “Why’s that?”

Max: “Because it was a free venue, they let us use it every Sunday afternoon as a rehearsal space. Without it we would have no rehearsal space. Rehearsal space in Manchester is gold dust, and free rehearsal space is even rarer.”

Researcher: “And did it matter that it wasn’t an LGBT space, that it wasn’t on Canal Street? You know, as an LGBT community theatre?”

Max: “The venues at the time I was there, the venues were all charging. So we had nothing free. So the only choice we had was The Chorlton Library.”
The fact that it was located outside the Gay Village no longer appeared to be a significant concern. Data from other participants in Polari at the time suggested that Taurus and some other venues in the Gay Village still offered rehearsal spaces free of charge, so Max’s practical justification alone was not necessarily enough to explain the shift away from the Gay Village. Furthermore, Polari’s modest membership meant that unlike MQC the theatre group had not outgrown the various venues in the Gay Village. It was decided that Polari should permanently relocate to the Chorlton Library. If nothing else, this would save the considerable amount of time that members had to spend identifying new venues on a regular basis. It was also quieter and more reliable than Taurus. Rather than cost, it appeared that it was this stability, as Max suggested above, that Polari members valued. It enabled them to focus on their next performance. Another possible explanation for this shift was that many of the members at the time lived in or around Chorlton in South Manchester. This would later create a key problem, as many of the participants realised that the group had become primarily populated by older, university educated, white gay men and lesbians (as discussed below).

Performance venues were chosen primarily based on the audience that the group intended to reach, which varied from performance to performance as described above. This variation was less welcome before 2009 during the “community theatre” phase, when performance venues were chosen because they were familiar, safe, and often closed to everyone except supportive friends and family.

“People go to community things because people are kind and people want to support people, but they go in that knowledge, they’re not going like, you know, most of the audience are friends. And friends are biased. And they might go, “oh my gosh that’s better than what you see on telly” but they’re saying that because they’ve got an invested interest, you know?”

(Richard, early 30s, lay member)
After 2009 the choice of performance venues sought to draw in larger crowds, including strangers. As noted at the start of this section, venues outside the Gay Village were chosen when the group wanted to reach a mixed audience (LGBT+ and heterosexual), while places inside the Gay Village were chosen when the group wanted to focus on LGBT+ people more. While performances took place within and beyond the Gay Village before and after 2009, the number of events outside the Gay Village appeared to increase in the 2009-2014 period. As the theatre company became more professional (and less community-oriented), it began to seek out dedicated arts or cultural centres where the work would be taken more seriously. This effectively precluded the Gay Village from consideration.

“There isn't enough creative stuff [in the Gay Village]! Uhm... ... yeah, not what I, not what you'd expect. There's not even a gay and lesbian gallery, for heaven's sake, down on Canal Street. It's all inundated with... bars, and clubs. And I understand it's a drinking culture but in Melbourne we did have a gallery that focused on, on exhibiting gay and lesbian works. I think that's just, sort of just... missing. And... I don't think there's a gay and lesbian artists’ collective either.”

(Ester, mid 30s, lay member).

Another reason for Polari’s performances outside the Gay Village was their participation in Pride and LGBT history month. During both of these festivals, events were organised within the Gay Village district, but the majority of these were commercial in nature. The cultural or community-oriented events were usually located elsewhere across the city. Example venues included the University of Manchester’s student theatre, the People’s History Museum, and the Manchester Library. While Pride and LGBT History Month were associated with LGBTQ people, they were not restricted to the Gay Village. It was almost as if anywhere in the city could become a site of LGBT+ culture during the length of these festivals. Kates (2003, p.9) described a very similar phenomenon in Sydney during its Pride festival, known locally as 'Mardi Gras', when he wrote that "It is important to emphasize the
breadth and scope of the Mardi Gras. For the period that it runs, it appears that Sydney becomes a gay city." Through these festivals, Polari could organise events in a wide range of different locations across the city- including bars, pubs, libraries, museums, and even commercial theatres- attracting LGBT+ audience members thanks to the promotional efforts of the Pride and LGBT History Month organisers. By performing in these temporary LGBT+ places outside the Gay Village, Polari were still able to connect to LGBT+ social and cultural networks. They were also able to perform to interested heterosexual audiences as well.

Between 2009 and 2014 the committee leading this quasi-professionalisation of Polari were re-elected again and again, with Polari productions becoming increasingly ambitious, critically acclaimed, and commercially successful (especially in relation to the expectations of a ‘community’ theatre group). However, in 2015 a number of the committee members decided not to stand for re-election because they wanted to move onto new projects. Many had decided to begin a professional writing, acting, or directing career. Before this committee left it was decided that Polari should relocate its rehearsal venue back to the Gay Village. As shown in the illustrative quotes below, the Polari committee members shared the belief that the Gay Village was the place that a LGBT+ community theatre company should be. However, this alone was not explanation enough, as the committee had not chosen to relocate Polari sooner. Another reason appeared to be the realisation amongst the committee that the group was actually fairly homogeneous, as alluded to earlier in this section. Despite the longstanding reliability and support that the Chorlton Library had offered Polari, its location 3.5 kilometres away from the city centre meant that it could be challenging (in terms of money and/or time) for people to get to.

“If you’re coming from anywhere other than South Manchester you’ve got one journey to get into the city centre then, having got into the city centre, you’ve then got to go find another bus, tram, or whatever it is... to get out again to South Manchester. And you’ve then got to do it all again at like 10 o’clock on a Sunday evening [to get home], which I don’t think is a very attractive prospect to
people. So it kind of meant that unless you had a car, or you lived in Chorlton or Didsbury, you probably weren’t going to access it [Polari]. So I was very keen on moving it into the city centre, and getting somewhere preferably on Canal Street, or not very far from. Because it’s the gay village, so where’d you’d expect a lesbian and gay community theatre to meet, but perhaps primarily because of the transport... so just meant it was much easier for people across greater Manchester to access it because they only had one journey in.”

(Edward, early 40s, committee member)

Like Edward above, Graham also stressed the notion that the Gay Village was a place where LGBT+ people expected to meet.

“It’s cultural accessibility as well. It’s a space, you know, in the heart of the village so, culturally people feel that’s a good thing. We had a meeting in Taurus rather than the Chorlton Library because we felt it was perhaps more accessible to LGBTQ people, and that’s paid off because I think we’ve had a lot of people who’ve come to the group because we are on Canal Street who wouldn’t have gone to Chorlton library.”

(Graham, early 50s, committee member)

For newer members unfamiliar with the history of the theatre group the relocation to the Gay Village may have been understood as the group moving, but for the longstanding members it may have been seen as more of a return, given the importance of Gay Village venues in Polari’s early years. The location that Polari moved to was Taurus, which would not have been a surprise to anyone that knew the group well. However, the participants did not mention this historical connection between Polari and Taurus when describing the reasons for this choice. Rather they emphasised the cultural reasons, as Graham did above. As Graham also suggested,
the move to the Gay Village proved to be successful in terms of diversifying the membership.

Noah, Quentin, and I were discussing Polari’s past, present, and future. Noah spoke about how he now saw Polari as a “diverse diverse group”. Most LGBT groups, he argued, were only nominally LGBT. In practice they usually focused on the "L" (Lesbian women) or the "G" (Gay men) in their membership. In previous years Noah had thought of Polari as a “group of white, middle-class gay men performing Oscar Wilde.” Quentin added (only half-jokingly) that Noah was “totally correct, except for the Oscar Wilde.” This was because for a long time there had been “no trans* and no people of colour”, Quentin explained.

(Written notes, 6th July 2015)

As suggested by the work of Thomas et al. (2013), this more heterogeneous membership could contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of Polari if it was properly managed, or if there were enough material and semiotic resources so that all members could achieve their goals without conflict. At first the signs looked promising. At the next Annual General Meeting (AGM) the entire committee was replaced by new members who were eager to take Polari forward in a new direction. Unfortunately, none of the participants appeared to agree on what that new direction should be. While there were many different ideas within Polari they could be loosely organised into those members who wanted the group to remain quasi-professional, those members who wanted to return to Polari’s pre-2009 communitarian roots, and those who believed a productive hybrid of these two types of theatre group was possible. During the time of the multi-sited ethnography Polari’s identity remained ambivalent and uncertain, with no clear direction emerging.

Interviewer: “Could we talk about what you think the future of Polari is going to be, in your opinion?”
Noah: “I think it’s in a precarious position at the moment. I think it needs a very strong focused leadership that is either going to say “we are about community development and support”, and create a strong programme with goals and objectives at the end. Say, “that members feel more confident”, “learn from each other”... that’s one direction it could take... or it could say “we’re going to focus on productions and performances”. In which case, not everyone will always be involved, a much more producing theatre company. I think both those options are valid [...] Like what direction is it taking?”

Interviewer: “Do you think this community and this production-focus... are they mutually exclusive?”

Noah: “No, I think they can work together. But I think it’s a lot of work. And that’s the other thing. Polari is completely voluntary...”

Polari’s problems intensified a few weeks after they had relocated from the Chorlton Library to Taurus. One rehearsal the members arrived to find Taurus unexpectedly closed.

“We arrived in January to have our meeting and Taurus had closed down! We were hovering outside Taurus with a closed sign on it.... so we said, “ok we’ll go to Via Fossa... but we saw View Bar was empty and we said “why don’t we go in there?” So we went in View Bar, and we took that corner, and nobody else was there on a Monday night so... from there we’ve made it our little space... No it was a community takeover. They have no other customers, so... Then they complained after that, after about five months that we weren’t buying enough drinks.”

(Graham, early 50s, committee member)
View was a large bar on Canal Street that was spread over two floors. The ground floor was very visible from the street as the exterior walls were lined with glass windows. Through these glass windows Polari members had seen that View bar was empty, which was all the more dramatic because of the size of the venue. For Polari this venue was perfect for rehearsals, and perhaps even performances, given its size and the fact that most of the furniture was also loose and easily manoeuvred. This meant that members could appropriate and re-appropriate the space as they saw fit. The large number of windows meant that venue also had the strategic benefit of being a form of free promotion.

“It's somewhere where you can be identified for what you want to do. When we were in View bar every week we got some new people, just because they pass front of View Bar and asked "what is this?" [...] because we've got that informal prospection, you know? Informal marketing, that is it, in View Bar.”

(François, late 30s, lay member, non-native English speaker)

As Graham’s earlier phrase 'community takeover' might suggest, Polari’s use of View Bar was not the result of a negotiation between the group and the management. Rather, the participants simply kept turning up each week to use one corner of the bar as a makeshift rehearsal venue. For the first few weeks Polari would meet in View with relatively little incident. However, the members bought very few drinks or snacks from the bar, preferring instead to bring their own. One reason for this was a cultural norm (from the theatre) to 'come prepared' in order to get on with the task at hand (writing or rehearsing) with as little delay as possible. Another reason was the fact that a number of Polari members had limited financial means, as discussed above, and did not want to spend their money unnecessarily - especially on expensive alcoholic beverages that would only make them forget their lines. If anything the pressure to spend money in this place conflicted with Polari's communitarian identity as a freely accessible group in which to make friends, develop skills, and build confidence. However, participants also appreciated that View bar was a commercial organisation and thus it was expected that some of the
members would have to buy drinks. To resolve these potential tensions the committee members regularly assured lay members that they had 'struck up a deal' with the managers of View Bar, and that buying drinks was not necessary. These assurances appeared to quell members’ concerns because they stopped asking whether or not they should be buying drinks. Instead, members would simply arrive at View Bar and simply head straight over the area where the group usually met. However, after several weeks of observation it appeared that this pattern was a kind of silent spatial expression of participants’ feelings of being out-of-place.

Moving around View felt odd because usually Polari meetings only took place in one corner of the venue - the one furthest from the bar where the staff would serve drinks. View bar was only staffed by one person at a time, presumably because it was usually empty, and it appeared that this employee was unable (or perhaps just disinclined) to walk out from behind the bar. None of the members had commented on the fact that Polari were huddled in the corner, but my drawings of seating layouts and rearrangements had led to this observation. I had wondered whether this had anything to do with the fact that Polari members were not buying drinks.

(Written notes, Polari meeting 27th of April 2015)

Another way of thinking about this huddling behaviour was that the material layout of View bar enabled Polari members to continue consuming in View bar. The participants appeared to be caught in a struggle between wanting to use View as a free-to-use community theatre venue, and the cultural-commercial pressure to purchase drinks and snacks from the bar. By huddling in the corner where the sole staff member did not bother them, Polari members were able to forget about these ambivalent feelings and focus on the task at hand. The term “co-operative ambivalence” from the work of Bettany et al. (2014, p.1549) is especially useful here. The material affordances of View bar, combined with Polari’s careful (if unspoken) configuration of the place, provided a similar kind of co-operative ambivalence.
where View bar could be both commercial and community-supporting and Polari could be both potential customers and community appropriators.

This co-operative ambivalence came to an abrupt end when Polari members decided to venture out from their small corner of the venue. The group had decided to film a series of short videos as promotional material for their social media page. Again, the material arrangements of View bar were ideal because they were so varied. Across the two different floors were a variety of arches, cubby holes, stairwells, and other features that could be used to simulate a variety of different environments in a single location. However, it transpired that no-one in the group had asked permission to film in View bar. Instead the members had simply moved about the place, presumably hoping that their use of a tablet as a recording device was inconspicuous enough. Unfortunately, Polari’s feelings of ‘co-operative’ ambivalence were brought to an abrupt end by the actions of the manager, as captured in the written notes below.

The first few videos were filmed in Polari’s usual area, but then we moved to the lower floor. Midway through filming the manager (the only staff member on duty today) interrupted by saying that this part of the bar was ‘closed’. I saw no sign or other indication that this might be the case. Quite the opposite, the whole lower floor was brightly illuminated in a welcoming way. Edward asked where we would be allowed to film, to which the manager responded by explaining that no filming was allowed as we hadn’t asked for permission. She then added, "it’s not even like you’re paying for drinks."

While she stopped short of telling us to leave, the members felt very uncomfortable when we returned to explain what had happened. Some people commented that the manger was "watching us", and I could see that she had moved to get a better view of us from the bar. The meeting finished early. Once outside a number of the members commented that we would need to find a new venue.
Some were incredulous - how could an LGBTQ bar be so unfriendly to an LGBTQ community theatre group? Others were more cynical - it was just a business at the end of the day.

(Written notes, Polari meeting 27th of April 2015)

The co-operative ambivalence had ended when the hybrid identity of View bar was abruptly disambiguated by the staff member, who used her authority to re-establish the commercial identity of the place. The participants’ shock reflected an assumed sense that LGBT+ groups would be welcomed in a bar in the Gay Village even if they were not playing the role of the ‘good customer’. There was almost a sense of cultural entitlement, that LGBT+ groups should be able to use places in the Gay Village even without buying drinks or asking for permission to film. Such an expectation was unlikely to be shared with most commercial places, and suggested that the participants had assumed the manager of View bar would share a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001) to Manchester’s LGBT+ communities. If so, then the staff member would surely support a community-oriented group like Polari. While the materiality of View bar had enabled co-operative ambivalence to persist for a number of weeks, Polari’s move into the rest of the bar and use of filming technology appeared to prompt the staff member on duty to exert her authority.

The commercially-oriented identity of View bar also conflicted with aspects of Polari’s identity as a “community theatre company”, creating further feelings of ambivalence. If the group continued to use View bar the members would be expected to purchase more drinks and snacks, which conflicted with the groups’ commitment to creating a safe accessible place for all. This ambivalence was exacerbated by Polari’s reliance on View bar as a rehearsal venue. While there was little evidence to suggest that strong place attachments had formed, what might be described as place dependency (Stokhols and Schumaker, 1987) was clearly evident. Place dependency refers to instrumental, functional, or practical relationships between people and places. Usually place dependency is understood as a positive characteristic, but in this case Polari could be described as over-dependent on View.
They had no alternative venue, so they were forced to continue using View bar for another couple of weeks. In contrast to the typical image of the agentic consumer (Bettany and Kerrane, 2011), place dependency suggests that some place consumption may occur less freely.

Fortunate alignments of materiality allowed co-operative ambivalence to re-emerge. View bar had an outdoor seating area, and as the weather improved over the summer months Polari could appropriate this outside space with less likelihood of being interrupted by the staff. This compromise was a form of co-operative ambivalence because the committee members could claim that they had ‘spoken to the manager’. It was never clear whether any talks with management had occurred. Although informal conversations with them afterward suggest that this may have been a fabrication, Polari’s use of the outside space was left uninterrupted by the staff and View bar was again constituted as an ambiguous place for Polari to consume. It was ambiguous in the sense that it afforded committee members a degree of interpretive flexibility, being able to convince lay members that the venue was suitable while they hastily sought out a new venue behind the scenes. Sitting outside View bar was a co-operatively ambivalent compromise in the sense that it “satisfied a degree of struggle contingently...this situation was not ideal but was satisfactory.” (Bettany et al. 2014, p. 1549)

This co-operative ambivalence required constant maintenance as new members would often ask why Polari did not meet inside, and sometimes the weather was cold and thus it was uncomfortable for members to sit outside. At other times meetings were interrupted by homeless passersby asking for change or beginning a conversation. Committee members encouraged members to remain outdoors by talking about the foul smell within View bar, and emphasising other undesirable features that had not been mentioned before. However, rehearsing outside remained very difficult. Participants often said their lines whilst seated on the metal outdoor chairs, reluctant to stand up and practice properly whilst on a public street. Sitting on Canal Street outside View bar was not ideal for Polari members, but it was
“satisfactory” for the time being (Bettany et al. 2014, p.1549). Behind the scenes the committee was fervently searching for a new venue. Unfortunately, there were very few options for the group.

Soon the Polari committee had to concede that finding a suitable location in the Gay Village was almost impossible, and began looking for locations outside this district. At this stage Polari became nomadic because it struggled to find an alternative venue in the Gay Village. They moved from place to place in the Gay Village, with each being framed as a 'temporary compromise' before a 'more permanent solution' was found. Unfortunately, the cost of space in the city centre was expensive and Polari had to make do with the backrooms of obscure pubs and bars, which were offered freely. Those members who emphasised the ‘community’ aspects of Polari’s identity felt uncomfortable or out-of-place in these temporary places that were unassociated with LGBT+ populations or communitarian projects. Those who wanted Polari to move in a more professional direction were frustrated by the fact that these venues were often loud, uncomfortable, frequently interrupted, or difficult to reach. Little progress was achieved at each meeting, and as the theatre company would change locations regularly members began to become confused and often get lost.

This nomadism disrupted the community activities significantly, and each week attendance would fall. A few short months after the AGM the following message appeared on Polari’s social media page:

Polari is taking a holiday. NEXT MEETING: To be arranged. Let’s plan our next project, for Manchester Pride 2016. There wasn’t enough support for GODLY CONVERSATIONS.6 (Winter has always been a quiet time for Polari.) So we will talk together and look at possibilities. Another sketch show? Go virtual for the coming

6 Godly Conversations is a pseudonym for Polari’s LGBT History Month project in 2016.
project? Or both - or more? Membership drive - and redo our online presence.

(Social media post on the 11th of January, 2016)

At the time of writing no further meeting had been organised. The holiday had become more of a retirement; Polari had quietly disbanded. Although a number of factors may have contributed to Polari’s decline and eventual dissolution, the participants believed that the role of place (or lack thereof) was significant. In particular, the participants traced the beginning of Polari’s decline not to the change in the committee or some other factor, but to the closure of Taurus. Although Taurus reopened again a few months later, Polari members had to re-establish relationships afresh with the new managers. These negotiations were unsuccessful, and when a wheelchair user joined Polari the downstairs room of Taurus was a serious limitation. For Polari members Taurus’s closure brought into sharp relief the non-communitarian (even ‘irresponsible’) character of venues in the Gay Village, which had been previously understood as an ambivalent hybrids of community-supporting businesses.

“Taurus had a reputation of being a very community-focused venue, that supported a lot of activities like Polari. However, it closed down for quite a long period. I’m not sure if it’s the same management, or new management... Polari definitely got a bit displaced then [...] it’s got a very diverse group of participants with various access requirements I think it did struggle to find a place... And I actually think... speaking just as myself and not as a Polari representative I do think that does actually raise wider questions about the Canal Street area... in terms of the commercial versus the community. So you’ve got a lot of bars that are very, obviously, very commercial, but not a great amount of community spaces which for... the Village which is meant to be Manchester's queer community area, it doesn't have a great amount of community space. It’s much wider, and not specifically just in Manchester, you’d
find the same thing in Soho [London], or Brighton... actually possibly not Brighton I think Brighton has a bit more of a balance.”

(Noah, late 20s, lay member)

Through Polari’s struggles to relocate, it became clear that places held considerable agency in consumer-place relationships of various kinds, and that the members’ roles as place consumers was perennially uncertain and always contingent on other actors. Unfortunately for Polari their ambivalent struggles ultimately ended with the dissolution of their group after many successful years of performances.
4.3. The Emergent Interpretation

4.3.1. Understanding Ambivalent Place Consumption

The narrative analyses explored in section 4.2 demonstrated that places were important to the activities and identities of the three LGBT+ leisure groups studied here. The question of “who we are” was almost always inseparable from “where we meet”. It transpired that clear answers to this hybrid who/where question were impossible to find. Instead, the groups and the places that they used were in a state of “permanent reform” (Singleton & Michael, 1993, p. 232), or *ambivalence*, in the sense defined by feminist material-semiotics (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014; Singleton, 1998; Singleton & Michael, 1993). Thinking of the groups’ place consumption as ambivalence was a useful interpretive narrative to make sense of common patterns shared across three LGBT+ leisure groups, describing “a more or less permanent state of struggle” (Bettany et al. 2014, p. 1546) occurring between, but also within, all of the actors involved.

The analysis suggested that the groups’ use of places was almost always characterised by *struggles* (Bettany et al. 2014) of various kinds—between members, with other place consumers, with the managers and staff of venues, and with nonhuman actors in the place. These dynamic and open-ended networks can be described as *ambivalent*, characterised by “inherent instability and incessant skirmishes” (Singleton & Michael, 1993, p. 232). Ambivalent networks meant that the actors emergent from them—such as the LGBT+ leisure groups and places in Manchester—were constituted as ambivalent as well (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1747). This meant that the groups were not discrete, decision-making place consumers, and that places were not stable and bounded sites of meaning and materiality to be consumed. Instead, both were hazy objects with “emergent ontologies in which everything is in process and at stake” (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1747).

Ambivalent place consumption was most salient when related to Manchester’s Gay Village. Given the historical significance of the Gay Village in Manchester’s LGBT+
cultures (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Haslop et al. 1998; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Skeggs, 1999; Skeggs et al. 2004), it is perhaps unsurprising that this district featured prominently in the data. Yet the ways in which the Gay Village featured in the data were contested, dynamic, and multiple. Multiple actors within and beyond the three LGBT+ leisure groups struggled continuously, so no consensus regarding what this district meant or how its material environment should be appropriated emerged. The ontological status of the Gay Village, the places ‘within’ and ‘beyond’ its borders, the borders themselves, and the status of actors consuming were all being continually renegotiated. In contrast to early ANT but in accord with feminist reformulations, this lack of consensus did not impede the group’s ability to act (Bettany et al. 2014; Singleton, 1998; Singleton & Michael, 1993). As Star (2010, p. 604) has found throughout her work on scientists and other interdisciplinary workers, “consensus was rarely reached, and fragile when it was, but cooperation continued”. In other words, the actors did not wait for these networks (or themselves as actors within said networks) to stabilise before ‘getting on’ with their interactional and relational activities. However, the data analysis did not to suggest that cooperation proceeds “unproblematically”, as Star (2010, p. 604) suggested. Instead ambivalent place consumption was a complex process of temporary compromises, outbreaks of conflicts, periods of placelessness, and then the emergence of temporary compromises.

Using ambivalence in this broad sense was a useful description for what was observed, but it did not help to explain how struggles emerged and how they evolved. It provided some insight into the research questions that had motivated this piece of research but not specific answers as such. Thinking and writing of the place consumption observed in section 4.2 as ambivalent was a useful conclusion, but it provided only the point of interpretive departure for the next stage. What the next stage of analysis and interpretation sought to do was to understand these ambivalent struggles by identifying patterns. In doing so, it was hoped that an understanding of different place consumer subjects could emerge. This analysis identified a series of different subject positions that emerged from the ambivalent struggles, as well as two shifts in intensity (from low to high and high to low). As
analysis and interpretation continued eventually a way of organising the relationships between these different positions and shifts began to emerge. The interpretation understood the struggles of ambivalent place consumption to be organised in a cycle, presented in figure 4.1 below.

### Otherness

**Figure 4.4: The Cycle of Dis/place/d Consumers**

This framework emerged from the analysis and interpretation, so chronologically speaking this framework should be positioned at the end of this section. However, by putting this integrative framework at the start of the thematic analysis and interpretation means that it can serve as a guide or roadmap for the exposition of data that follows. This reverse chronological structure has been adopted by other CCT researchers studying the role of space and place when discussing a complex of many interpretive themes (e.g. Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Epp et al. 2014; Visconti et al. 2010).

The framework shows how the three place consumer subject positions – placed consumers, displaced consumers, and place consumers – and the two different
forms of ambivalence – conflicting and co-operative – relate to one another in a cycle of more or less intensive struggle. The sub-sections that follow are organised around this framework. Starting at the bottom with placed consumers (sub-section 4.3.2) and then displaced consumers (sub-section 4.3.3), it moves clockwise around the diagram with conflicting ambivalence (sub-section 4.3.4), place consumers (sub-section 4.3.5), and then to conclude with co-operative ambivalence (sub-section 4.3.6).

Figure 4.4 also includes the term ‘Otherness’, which surrounds the figure and represents the people and other actors that are not participants within the framework because they are ‘Othered’. Otherness is not explored in this chapter because it is, by definition, what sits outside the scope of the analysis and interpretation that this study is based upon. The definition and implications of this absence will be discussed in section 5.2.
4.3.2. Placed Consumers

The term placed consumers refers not to a type of consumer but a position within actor-networks that the participants sometimes adopted as subjects of consumption. Placed consumers were subject positions where the experience of place faded into the background, understood as periphery or supplementary to the main consumption activity at hand. Similar to Allen’s (2002) participants, the participants simply felt a sense of ‘fit’, which participants did not regularly reflect upon or discuss. When prompted to do so participants often struggled to describe these places.

“As it is now I don’t really have a strong opinion on it [Delicatezze] as I’ve only been twice. I’m not bored of the menu, I’ve not got bored of the service or anything like that. I didn’t really take any of that in. I don’t really know what other people’s opinions are because I haven’t spoken to them about it, well as far as I am concerns I am not I don’t really have an opinion on it either way.”

(Alex, late 20s, lay member of Avant Garde)

Rather than being place consumers, who were interpreting and making decisions about places as agentic place-makers, these participants were described as placed consumers, implying a sense of emplacement (Sherry, 1998; Bradford and Sherry, 2017) or being ‘in-place’ and at one with the place. In material-semiotic terms there was a degree of hybridisation occurring (Haraway, 2003; Latour, 1993)- the lines between (place consumer) subject and (place as) object were demonstrably blurring (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011), although not necessarily in ways that placed consumers were aware of. For the placed consumers the place was not their object of consumption but simply a location where another form of consumption or non-consumption practice could take place. Placed consumers were conceptually juxtaposed to place consumers (see figure 4.4). While place consumers focused on a place as the object and focus of their consumption, placed consumers would only think about place if it somehow interrupted or disrupted their consumption, which
was redirected at something else. It was only when an outsider, such as a new member, entered the cultural milieu that they recognised the place as an object at all. These new entrants were not yet placed consumers, and so emerged as ambivalent subjects that had yet to be ‘placed’ within the cultural assumptions of the group. The quotes below from Dominic (a lay member of MQC in his early 30s) are particularly useful illustrations of his own entry into the choir’s actor-network and his negotiations with others to become a placed consumer within their networks of assumptions. While Dominic’s transition (or transmutation) into a placed consumer appeared to be relatively smooth, his interactions with other members demonstrated how the places being used (or not used) were somewhat invisible to the placed consumers in question.

Dominic: “I was quite surprised actually that everyone didn’t go to the Village. I was surprised that everyone just went to the pub [The City Arms] around the corner [...] I don’t know I just assumed what with it being a gay group that people would naturally gravitate there [to the Gay Village]. And I think it’s really interesting that isn’t necessarily the case and that some people don’t want anything to do with the Village, and would steer clear, and would much rather go to, you know, a general pub... but yeah... I’ve found that a bit of a surprise. Doesn’t particularly matter to me. I guess it [the City Arms] is just location and it’s usually quiet, so why not? [...] I think it’s interesting that there’s that kind of, non-village centricity about it... I was quite surprised by that.”

Interviewer: “Did you ever... raise that or talk about that to someone... “this is a bit odd?” Or...?”

Dominic: “uhm... yeah well I suppose I probably mentioned it. No-one seemed that... everyone seemed relaxed about it, which I thought was, was good and not necessarily how I’d expect it to be. Also particularly as the choir can sort of be tribal-y gay, sometimes in the sense of... feeling... ... you know sort of, I think people have
quite a lot of... uhm... feeling about the choir as being part of the LGBT community and want it to be an advocate for the community and for individuals within that community, so I was quite surprised that people didn’t automatically associate that with the Village and felt quite relaxed about going to sort of, you know, non-LGBT venues, like The City Arms. But yeah, I don’t think anyone ever particularly said that there seemed to be a huge movement for or against it just seemed to be kind of, the deal, and no-one seemed all that upset about it either way really.”

Through participating in the group’s extended actor-networks members became entangled into the place/group hybrids and were repositioned as placed consumer. The emplaced consumer can be thought of as “performative images that can be inhabited” (Haraway, 1997, p. 11), or positions within spatialised actor-networks that can be taken. Regardless of terminology, the key point to make is that ‘being’ an emplaced consumer was to have a precarious ontological status, as will be demonstrated in the following sub-sections. At the same time, the participants did not necessarily experience their placed consumption as such. As alluded to above, placed consumption was invisible to the consumers who undertook it. Much like the brands in cupboards and pantries that become invisible over time (Coupland, 2005), when places worked they simply faded into the background. In the following quote Gordon (a lay member of Avant Garde in his early 40s) was discussing the negative features of places in the Gay Village, but concluded that when he was with other members of the club the place did not matter.

“maybe it’s just because I am getting old, but there’s very few places that I’d want to go, that I’d want to venture into, but I think when you’re with a group of other people and you’re having a bit of a laugh it doesn’t really matter, you take it for what it is... “

Gordon’s claim that “you take it for what it is” echoes Dominic’s earlier statement that the City Arms is “just a location and it’s usually quiet, so why not?” In both cases the place itself did not appear to be particularly important. In turn, Gordon and
Dominic were not experiencing themselves as place consumers *per se*, but rather as consumers who happened to be using a place.

As this theme was emerging from the data the status of the research was also being thrown into question - perhaps places and place consumers were not important in this context at all? Further analysis suggested that the invisible place-objects and unreflexive consumer-subjects were only emerging as such because of a great deal of unspoken work elsewhere in the extended actor-networks. Law and Singleton (2005) argued that some objects in ambivalent actor-networks only take on a presence by making other objects and subjects absent. In other words, the emergence of objects in an actor-network is always partially reliant on what is actively or accidentally ‘Othered’ (see also Law, 2004). Drawing on the work of Star (1991) it became clear that the emergence of placed consumers as consumers who ‘fit in’ to a place so well that it became invisible to them was contingent on a number of other people being displaced. In some cases the placed consumers were implicitly aware (or became aware through processes like the research interviews) that their placed consumption only came to matter (Butler, 1993; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011) through contrasts and oppositions with others.

“You see the LGBT community in Manchester, probably about 80% of it is not known... You get some people who always want to be out... to be on the scene, they always want to go to a gay bar only. They wouldn’t even dream of going, like we go, to a non-gay pub... after our rehearsal, simply because it’s near to the Town Hall and the Village is a way away. That’s the only real reason for doing that. But we’re welcomed with open arms, they love us going there on a Monday, and we’re quite proud to go there. We’re quite proud for people to know who we are... uh... we’re not any different from anybody else, just because we’re lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or whatever... uh... we can still drink in a pub. We still drink beer. We don’t drink pink champagne or something *laughs*”

*(Ian, mid 60s, committee member of MQC)*
Ian’s Othering of people who consumed primarily in the Gay Village helped to constitute him and other members of MQC as ‘better’ placed consumers.\(^7\) Interestingly Ian’s narrative seemed to momentarily overlook the number of his fellow choir members who would use the Gay Village. As a committee member Ian was well aware of the members who socialised in the Gay Village, and spoke about them in his interview whilst also emphasising his own consumption in the city arms. It was only during the interview that Ian momentarily reflected on his placed consumption and enacted a subjectivity more like a typical place consumer—interpreting, making decisions, and acting upon them. During participant observation in the City Arms (and many other locations) there was little evidence that participants were actively reflecting on their group’s choice of place. Instead they were simply getting on with collaborative activities (Star, 2010).

The data also suggested those who were un/consciously ‘Othered’ would often disrupt or undermine the precarious position of the placed consumers by making themselves matter—meaningfully and/or materially (Butler, 1993; Bettany and Kerrane, 2011)—to their fellow members. In Polari one of the members (Margaret) was a wheelchair user and the committee would often ensure that all rehearsal and performance venues were wheelchair accessible (see sub-section 4.2.3). However, even this simple practical restriction proved problematic for a group that had a number of other considerations to contend with, not least of which was a lack of funds to rent a specialist venue combined with a commitment to remain in the city centre to attract a more diverse membership. During the participant observation it was sometimes noted that events would sometimes be organised in locations that were not wheelchair accessible, a fact that few of the participants remarked upon. In

\(^7\) Homonormativity is a useful way to make sense of this interpretation and many other patterns in the data. Lisa Duggan (2003, p.50) used the term homonormativity to describe LGBT+ politics that endorses heterosexual institutions like marriage, monogamy, and domesticity, often advocating for LGBT+ people to live more ‘normal’ (that is, more heterosexual or ‘straight-acting’) lifestyles. Those who describe their lives as ‘post-gay’ tend to be espousing homonormative politics (Ghaziani, 2011, 2014, 2015; Nash, 2013), and the concept of homonormativity is a useful lens through which to critically analyse contemporary LGBT+ representations (Ng, 2013; Nolke, 2017), places (Brown, 2006, 2008, 2009), and other phenomena.
this sense Polari members were ‘breaking’ their own rules (Kozinets et al. 2004) in order to be able to use certain places that they would otherwise be unable to. However, the use of these places was contingent on the absence of a wheelchair user. At one meeting a small group of members had met at the Castle before the main rehearsal to discuss upcoming events. As the downstairs (and accessible) rooms were busy, the members went upstairs to an empty room. At this point one of the members raised the issue of wheelchair accessibility, but it was decided that the group would use the upstairs room for the meeting, and perhaps the main rehearsal, depending on whether or not Margaret arrived to attend. In this case she did, and the group relocated downstairs again - with a degree of discontent from some of the members who felt that this upstairs room was ideal for the group. In short, the placed consumption of some members was always more or less explicitly reliant on the absence or Othering of other members. Non-members and non-humans were also excluded or ‘Othered’. Non-members such homeless people interrupting Polari meetings outside View bar, or non-humans like the absence of certain drinks (“pink champagne”) supporting participants assertions.

In general emplaced consumption was a phenomenon that was difficult to observe, discuss, and grasp, both for the participants and from the point of view of research. Emplaced consumption was invisible and silent when it was working smoothly, only emerging when there was a disjuncture in the flow of events such as the entry of a new member in MQC, the interruptions of homeless people in Polari rehearsals, or (perhaps most commonly) during a research interview where the participant was prompted to reflect on their consumption. In the quote below Lee (a lay member of Avant Garde in his late 20s) had just been discussing the Thursday night social which was, at the time, located in Delicatezze.

*Interviewer: “Do you think it needs to be on Canal Street? Is there an actual reason for it to be there as opposed to somewhere else?”*

*Lee: “I'm not quite sure. I suppose with it being an LGBT club we just think that, it makes sense to have it in a place where it’s definitely
going to be accepted and everybody, comfortable, in. But I don’t see why it needs to be there. It could be anywhere really.”

Lee’s response to the interviewer’s question suggests that the location was the Thursday night social was not something that he had considered before, at least not in detail. He was an emplaced consumer of Delicatezze, rather than a place consumer in the humanist, agentic decision-making sense. The data suggested that almost of the participants spent at least some of their time as placed consumers, but as this section has already suggested the position of the placed consumer was partial and precarious. Further analysis suggested that placed consumers were always accompanied by a ‘shadow’ in the form of the displaced consumer.
4.3.3. Displaced Consumers

Displaced consumers are the consuming-subjects who are constituted as ‘Other’ by the successful ‘placements’ of other consumers. While placed consumers feel a ‘fit’ (Allen, 2002) with a place, displaced consumes feel out-of-place (Cresswell, 1996). In some cases they were excluded in some way, literally displaced from the location and sometimes even the group as a consequence. For instance, The City Arms was viewed by most participants as ‘ordinary’, or “just a location” as Dominic put it in the last section. However, these were the perspectives of emplaced consumers, whose relatively unproblematic entanglement with the place meant that they did not always observe the exclusions taking place. While Ian was cognisant of the kinds of people that he was avoiding (and avoiding being associated with) by consuming in the City Arms, he and the other committee members did not appear to be aware that some MQC members were being excluded from participation. One example captured in the interview data was William, a lay member of MQC in his late 20s, who had to use two forms of public transport to get home after choir rehearsals. As he explained, even the modest costs of the City Arms were too much for him to justify:

“I do go to the pub sometimes, but... a lot of the time it’s about money, as well, it’s about how much... drinking’s quite expensive, do you know what I mean? It’s not that I don’t want to go to the pub, it’s having the money to go to the pub... it’s a lot of money, even for just one drink.”

The emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility shared across the three LGBT+ leisure groups meant that places were chosen carefully to enable people from a range of economic backgrounds to participate. However, it was rarely possible to find venues that were entirely free-of-charge, and thus a degree of cost (and possible exclusion) was almost always a side effect of emplaced consumption. These findings also reflect the growing precarity of access-based economies (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2016), although this literature has (to date) not considered places as a form of access-based consumption (e.g. Bardhi et al. 2012).
Displacement was not always the result of a lack of resources. Sometimes it was an agentic act of self-exclusion from a place, a participant’s decision to stop consuming in a place because of its incongruences with their own identities or lifestyles. Through this moment of agency the displaced consumer was momentarily constituted as an anti-place consumer. Rather than selecting a place in order to work toward or perform an identity project, these consumers were (de)constructing or performing (against) a negative self (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Hogg & Banister, 2001).

Take the example from Charles, a lay member of Avant Garde in his early 40s who had grown dissatisfied with the Thursday night social after it had moved to the Gay Village:

“I've been around the whole time [during the changes of venue], but I very rarely go out on the Thursday night. I'm not a big fan of the conversations on the Thursday night... it's just a bit... I just remember two occasions in particular. I can't remember the exact conversation exactly how it went but basically I was saying ‘love playing pool.’ And there was loads of jokes about cues, balls, and holes. And I just thought what is the point in sitting doing this when I could be doing anything else?”

As Charles’s quote suggests, displaced consumers associate the negative experiences with the place just as much as with the people and practices. This is unsurprising, given the entwinement of places and placed consumers it was often far easier for participants to exit (Aubert-Gamet, 1997) than it was to try and work the nets of other actors. Yet while the decision to leave was experienced as a moment of agency (a choice to leave that was enacted) the material-semiotic approach suggested to think of this agentic moment as a collaborative achievement between various actors that (a) made the place appear undesirable, and (b) provide participants with a ‘line of flight’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Lines of flights are pre-existing or easily achieved connections that provide a way to change network configurations or reassemble reality in new ways. In the present context a line of flight provided a way of connecting to another place that provides
similar benefits. Without a pre-existing line of flight it was difficult, if not impossible, to move on. The example of Polari’s rejection from View bar, but subsequent use of its outside seating area, provides a case-in-point. The majority of members had felt displaced by the actions of the duty manager and the group had decided (in a moment of collective agency) to relocate the theatre company’s rehearsals to a new venue. However, at the next meeting the group was meeting at View once again, albeit outside, and the committee were rapidly constructing a new narrative to legitimise this state of affairs as chosen and desirable. This was because Polari had not identified somewhere else where the group could suitably relocate- they had no lines of flight and therefore had limited agency about what they could do.

When Kro2 unexpectedly closed Avant Garde were forced to find a place to relocate their Thursday night social in a very short amount of time. After a series of regular relocations the group finally managed to settle in the Sackville Lounge – at least for a time. After this experience the committee members of Avant decided that they should always be prepared for unexpected closures or changes to the places that they used. The formal role of ‘social secretary’ had been tasked with identifying and negotiating with potential places for social events for a number of years, but after the closure of Kro2 it became a norm within Avant Garde for all committee members (and, to a lesser extent, the members at large) to provide suggestions about where the group might use next. Through this pre-emptive searching Avant Garde ensured that they always had back-up locations, or ‘lines of flight’, prepared at all times. Similarly the MQC committee ensured that they worked out alternative rehearsal venues as the Town Hall would often be rented out by political parties or film crews. In their study of long distance family practices Epp et al. (2014) identified imaginative templates that enabled family members to imagine connections that did not presently exist, thus allowing networks to be creatively reworked. In this case the negative experiences of displaced consumers prompted them to think ahead or imagine more frequently in order to protect their actor-networks. While emplaced consumers (such as Avant Garde before the closure of Kro2) had an illusion of security, displaced consumers saw places as a problematic object and something to be managed.
The analysis suggested that placed consumers and displaced consumers were co-constitutive and co-emergent. That is, the creation of a placed consumer almost always entailed the creation of a displaced consumer, and visa versa. As humanist geographers point out, places are formed by boundaries and thus by an inside and an outside (Cresswell, 2013). Most humanist geographers focus on the ‘insider’ experience (Seamon, 2014), as do many CCT researchers (e.g. Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Sherry et al. 2004), and overlook the experiences of those on the ‘outside’. Cresswell (1996) points to the politics of places and their inside/outside dichotomy, arguing that ‘outsiders’ may be physically precluded from the place or found within the place but somehow marginalised or removed from full participation. Displaced consumers could be understood from this framework. They varied from those who were displaced entirely (as discussed above) to those who still participated in events but within uneven power relations. The totally displaced were overlooked by those who were emplaced. Latour’s (2005, p.244) notion of plasma is helpful here, which refers to the gaps in-between relationships or the space beyond an actor-network:

“I call this background plasma, namely that which is not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialized, not yet engaged in metrological chains, and not yet covered, surveyed, mobilized, or subjectified.”

But it must be added from the feminist material-semiotic perspective, and from Star (1991) especially, that one actor’s plasma is another actor’s network. Actor-networks are not evenly interconnected, there are gaps and partial connections abound (Law, 2004). It could be argued that while the emplaced consumers operated in one actor-network, such as the MQC members who used The City Arms, other actors-and-networks may be excluded, such as William. Those constituted as placed consumer subjects are, by virtue of their unevenly connected constitutive network, largely oblivious to those who are totally displaced. The findings of this study accord with Latour’s (2005, p.242) proposal that, “if knowledge of the social is limited to the termite galleries in which we have been traveling, what do we know about what is outside? Not much.”
In contrast to the totally displaced, those who are displaced ‘within’ a place are often a source of tension and potential conflict within an emplaced consumers actor-network. As these displaced consumers are connected (partially or unevenly) to their emplaced counterparts they can converse (metaphorically and literally) with one another. This often raises consciousness in the latter of the issues of the former, and can problematise and render visible the once invisible place as an object of contestation. One example of this was the emergent gender split within Avant Garde when the running club relocated the Thursday night social to TriBeCa. As noted by George (in section 4.2.2) and other participants, the men and women began to sit at separate ends of the table before the number of women in attendance began to decline. While a number of the male participants were content with TriBeCa as a venue, the evident decline in female attendance was a key problem for the committee. TriBeCa emerged from this network as the problematic object of consumption that needed to be removed from the network, and the committee emerged as place consuming subjects (as discussed in 4.3.5). Another example of tensions was found in MQC whenever the choir gathered in one of the two religious houses that were used as backup locations. Many of the members appeared to be emplaced without much difficulty, as evidenced by their having very little to say about these places even when prompted. However, other members appeared to be somewhat out-of-place or displaced in these locations. The historical opposition between religion and LGBT+ lifestyles (Keating & McLoughlin, 2005) seemed to manifest subtly in some participant’s feelings of displacement. The two quotes below suggest consumers who sit ambiguously on the dividing line between emplaced and displaced. While the first quote, from Dominic, is more emplaced he also notes the factors that could cause that fine distinction to shift for him. In contrast Rachael appeared uncertain about how she felt about the place, equivocating between different subject positions.

“The fact that they’re just sort of public spaces that are available and cheap... I don’t particularly mind going to a religious venue but I wouldn’t like it if there was any... I mean, it’s just a room as far as I’m concerned. Some people might mind. But I wouldn’t like it if
there was any religious aspect that went beyond that, and a lot of other people would feel strongly about that.”

(Dominic, early 30s, lay member of MQC)

“I thought that it was a nice venue, the sound bounced around really nicely... I felt a bit less neutral, I was quite aware... even though of all the religions it's quite a neutral one, it didn't feel like quite a neutral space, in... concept, but actually going in it was... not that I felt uncomfortable, but that people who were using it for it's normal purpose might, potentially be uncomfortable with us using it...”

(Rachael, late 20s, lay member of MQC)

The tensions that are created by the emergence of displaced consumers could be subtle or obvious, focused within a place or resulting in (self-)exclusion from the place altogether. Displaced and placed consumers could also live in relative harmony with one another over a long period of time. For instance, the differences between Dominic and Rachael were subtle differences in feeling that did not create an oppositional relationship between them. In contrast, the divisions in Avant Garde over the choice of TriBeCa (which included gender issues but also a plethora of other concerns) began to split the group and force a decision to be made. However, in almost all cases the harmonious relationship between placed and displaced consumers had a limited lifespan. Eventually conflict would erupt in the form of conflicting ambivalence.

Before continuing it is worth noting one final form of displacement that emerged in the data, which might be described as cultural displacement. In several cases the groups would choose a location in the Gay Village with an assumption that these businesses would be more likely to work with or support an LGBT+ group. Rosenbaum and Walsh (2012) have described this as ‘service nepotism’, using the example of gay male employees giving other gay men preferential treatment due to tribal affiliations. However, it seemed that in many cases the businesses in the Gay
Village would not provide preferential treatment to the LGBT+ groups unless they could demonstrate a clear economic return. Avant Garde’s sizeable membership with relatively large disposable income was contrasted sharply versus Polari’s small number of members of whom most had limited economic means. Avant Garde members were culturally (but also commercially) emplaced in the Gay Village and benefited from a range of discounts. Indeed, many of the members had begun to take these for granted and grew more ambitious or expectant.

“The likes of Delicatezze could do a bit more in rolling out the red carpet for us. Oscar’s [bar] is very good at that, I think... it probably makes more of a difference when we all roll up en masse. We’re putting more money in their till. And I think they do acknowledge that. They’re always coming around with shots, and stuff, aren’t they? I think Delicatezze are more. I don’t know, always seem a bit cold. Yeah, I don’t think they’ve made much of an effort to build a rapport with us as a group. We’re seen as more of a business transaction for them. I don’t know whether that’s the way that they run their business, but I think they should go the extra mile.”

(Hank, late 30s, lay member of Avant Garde)

In contrast, Polari had been disrupted by their experience in View bar and sought out an alternative rehearsal venue in the Gay Village. They struggled to identify a commercial venue that would offer them space free-of-charge, so they looked to non-commercial organisations like the LGBT Foundation (LGBTF). This organisation was based in the Gay Village, renting a building with multiple floors and rooms of several different sizes. Being based at the LGBTF headquarters would be the practical solution for Polari, but would also be a good match for the group’s identity as an LGBT+ community theatre company. Polari members had expected the LGBTF to offer a room to the group free of charge given that the charity was explicitly oriented toward LGBT+ communities and stakeholders.
“The amazing thing is, and I don’t know whether this has changed, but when I approached the [LGBTF] before, which is the publicly bodied community organisation, they wanted to charge us! And I said, "we’re an unfunded community organisation!" No difference... I’m sure they do do good work in the community and I’m sure they help people. But my personal experience of trying to get access to the space for Polari was poor.”

(Edward, early 40s, committee member of Polari)

There was an anticipation (if not presumption) that because the LGBT Foundation and Polari were both affiliated to LGBT+ cultures that a relationship between the two would form almost automatically. After being asked to pay for a room, Polari members then agreed to volunteer their time to help the LGBTF, hoping that by helping the charity they might build a stronger attachment and be 'gifted' a room in the LGBTF’s building in reciprocation (Debenedetti et al. 2014).

“I was particularly disappointed by... they’d run a day for, they wanted some profile to say they were running some days for community organisations and they wanted everyone to come in and do the stalls, so we agreed, got some people together, staffed a stall for a day, chatted, all the people who came along to be part of their event... and even after that when we said, "well we’ve helped you out, we’ve given profile to this event that you wanted. Can we have a free space?" And they still said no!”

(Edward, early 40s, committee member)

Edward’s quote is illustrative of the cultural displacement that many of the members felt in response to the LGBTF and View bar. They had entered these places with the assumption that they would be welcome as LGBT+ groups. In the terminology developed here, they were placed consumers in View bar before becoming displaced, while they were not even afforded the chance to become emplaced consumers with the LGBTF. These experiences agglomerated to create a
cultural displacement – Polari did not return to the Gay Village as a group in the months that followed.
4.3.4. Conflicting Ambivalence

While the data demonstrated that the groups could continue using the same place for weeks, months, and (in some rare cases) even years, in most cases the groups would change the locations of their events on a regular basis. Each relocation was a complex of different influences and factors, of course, but almost all of the cases could be understood through the notion of conflicting ambivalence, which Bettany et al. (2014, p.1549) originally proposed to understand how the delicate balance of relationships between new fathers and caring technologies could be disrupted when other actors or networks ‘interfered’. Concordant with the ambivalent understanding of actor-networks (Singleton and Michael, 1993), Bettany et al. (2014, p.1549) argued that balanced relationships were not necessarily stable or resolved, but simply a less intense state of struggle that they referred to as co-operative ambivalence. Conflicting ambivalence is used here to refer to interference in a network that increases the intensity of struggles within a place, disrupting the delicate (im)balances between placed consumers, displaced consumers, and the places of consumption. Conflicting ambivalence forces actor-networks (such as the LGBT+ leisure groups and the networks that they are embedded into) to make a choice about where they are consuming. The analysis suggested that conflicts could erupt from multiple sources (and often many sources at once), but two recurring origins of conflict were the displaced/placed consumer relationship and the other actor-networks using the place in question.

First to unpack the displaced/placed consumer. The analysis and interpretation of displaced and placed consumers demonstrated that the emergence of both subjects was a delicate balance of various forces. Furthermore, these two emergent consumer subjects would interact in co-constitutive ways, so the relationships between these consumers also had to be balanced. Displaced consumers and placed consumers shaped one another’s experiences of place (or lack thereof, in the case of placed consumers), as well as one another’s agencies (abilities to act). The analysis and interpretation even appeared to tentatively suggest that displaced and placed consumers were co-emergent, which meant that one could not emerge without the other. It was worth thinking in terms of co-emergent hybrids - dis/placed consumers.
– with the placing of one consumer requiring the displacement or others, and visa versa. Yet while displaced and placed consumers were co-emergent and co-constitutive, this is not to suggest that their ontological relationships were harmonious. Rather the hybrid ontology of dis/placed consumers is also an ambivalent one, “where everything is in process and at stake” (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1747). The groups’ use of place, and the two consumer-subjects that emerged from them, were characterised by exclusions, power imbalances, frustrations, and so forth. These tense but subtle struggles produced friction in the actor-networks which meant they were never at rest.

Conflicts within dis/placed consumer hybrids often emerged from those in the displaced position of the network. Displaced consumers could voice their concerns (i.e. to the committee), or demonstrate their discontent with their spatial relationships to other members (e.g. the male/female split in TriBeCa, or the self-exclusion of some members from the place). Conflict erupted when placed consumers responded to these challenges, ‘troubling’ (Butler, 1993) their own ontological status as a placed consumer. Whereas before the place had been an invisible background to their consumption, acknowledging the discontent of displaced consumers forced the place to emerge as an object of consumption, and a problematic one at that. In the quote below George, a committee member of Avant Garde in his early 40s, explains how even after some of the members of the committee had recognised that TriBeCa was a problematic place for some members, it took time for the decision to be taken to actually move.

“It took us about a year to get to the point where we’d kind of turned around to people and said, “look, this has got to slow down!”
People are joining this club because they want to join a running club, and they want to join because it’s an LGBT running club. But they do want it because it’s a running club.”

As the quote above suggests, the process of conflicting ambivalence was not always a rapid process or single event. Instead conflicting ambivalence could emerge as a gradual intensification of struggle. In such slowly emergent conflicts the relocation of
the groups was often only enacted when a ‘line of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) was identified between the problematic place and a more suitable place elsewhere. As the quote below illustrates the new place was often framed as an improvement on the last:

“TriBeCa was a very kind of stereotypical Canal Street venue and I think for a lot of women it really wasn’t their cup of tea. Whereas Delicatezze has a reputation for being very trans* friendly, for being a bit more female friendly. TriBeCa I’d say had a more masculine association. Delicatezze is more positively identified by women […] The lighting’s different, it’s got sofas… it’s clearly aimed at that more talking crowd as opposed to ‘shouting-over-music’ crowd… sometimes you do want to go in and sit, and talk in lighting that you can see each other in. And music that’s not really high energy dance music.”

(Hannah, early 40s, committee member of Avant Garde)

The shift from one place to another was generally framed as a positive development, at least at first and by some actors within the groups. One way of interpreting this comparison between two places was as manifestations of ‘utopian’ trajectories. The participants often constructed a narrative where their groups chose places that were an improvement on the last, working toward an ‘ideal’ place. The definition of ideal varied from member to member and over time, but a common theme across all three groups was the notion of ‘inclusivity’. The groups aspired to identify places where everyone could feel equally welcome (regardless of gender, race, age, etc.) and that everyone could access easily (irrespective of economic background, physical disabilities, and so on). As suggested in the previous two subsections, this ideal was never achieved and was likely impossible, so can be described as ‘utopian’; searching for an idealised place (eu-topia meaning good place) that could never be found (ou-topia meaning no place), but finding various marketplace approximations along the way (Maclaran and Brown, 2005; Chatzidakis et al. 2012). Unlike previous formulations of utopia, which focus on a particular place
as utopian (e.g. Maclaran and Brown, 2005), the data here suggest that the utopian ideal was driven by the co-emergent frictions between placed consumers and displaced consumers. It was when one place was problematised by displaced consumers that a place was deemed unsatisfactory, and a conflict emerged that inspired the groups to move on.

Another (arguably more critical) way of thinking about the comparisons between two places that often emerged during conflicting ambivalence was that it was an attempt by displaced consumers to reposition themselves as placed, even at the expense of displacing others. Hannah’s inversion above presented Delicatezze as “very trans* friendly” and “more female friendly” in comparison to TriBeCa, which was overly masculine. Describing Delicatezze as more ‘friendly’ to women and trans* people did not preclude the possibility that it could also be friendly to gay and bisexual men as well. Indeed, many of the participants described Delicatezze as “neutral”, implying that it was welcoming to everyone and close to the ideal of inclusivity.

So the current venue [Delicatezze] that we’re going to is more neutral. It is more of a restaurant than it is a bar, and I think therefore that the ladies do feel more comfortable coming along to that particular venue, so again we’ve learnt that we’ve got to find a venue that’s more like that [...] We really did have to look quite carefully at why the ladies weren’t coming along. Making sure that it was a location where they felt it was as much for women as it was for gents. Delicatezze fits that bill really nicely. Because they are perceived as being quite neutral… quite calm, not too busy. We can all sit, we can all get a table together… ladies and gents always mix together really well, you don’t suddenly find all the ladies at one end and all the gents at the other.

(George, early 40s, committee member, committee member of Avant Garde)
Yet while many participants used the term ‘neutral’ to describe Delicatezze (and other venues like the Town Hall, the Manchester Library, and so on), the analysis suggested that while this new place allowed women to shift from being displaced to placed consumers it did so by displacing other participants. As argued above, dis/placed consumers are co-emergent and co-constitutive so changes in one (such as power relations within the group) meant changes in the other (and usually oppositional changes). Felix, a committee member of Avant Garde in his late 30s, explained that he no longer went to the Thursday night social primarily because of the location change from TriBeCa to Delicatezze.

Felix: “I was happy with TriBeCa. I don’t particularly like going to Delicatezze. I don’t really go anymore [to the Thursday social].”

Interviewer: “Oh, ok, could you explain that to me a little bit more?”

Felix: “It’s too, it’s too formal, for... so a Thursday, after running, for me personally I’m starving, so I want to get served quickly, so we sit down at Delicatezze you have to wait for everyone to sit down, everyone to decide, everyone to order at the same time, the food has to come out at the same time... so when there’s 30 of you that takes time. And then by the time you’ve eaten, then you all have to pay... it’s like, sometimes I need to go, I just want to rush in, grab a bite to eat, catch up with the guys, and go. D’you know what I mean?”

The move from TriBeCa to Delicatezze may have helped to transform some displaced consumers into place consumers, it did so at the expense of displacing Felix and others like him. Felix simply stopped attending the Thursday night social, rather than creating conflict by voicing his discontent. While his reasons for self-exclusion were primarily utilitarian, this does not make them any less significant than the female members’ socio-symbolic concerns (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). However, the spectre of the drinking club reputation seemed to act within this network, as the non-attendance of Felix and some of the other participants did not seem to be raised
to the attention of the group, nor did it spark that much obvious concern, unlike the
decline in female attendance had done in the past.

The first interpretation was the dominant narrative told by those displaced
consumers who had now been placed— they understood their group as moving
toward a better future in a better place (or places). The second interpretation takes
the opposite effect into account, those who became displaced by these changes but
did not necessarily make their concerns known to the group at large.

The analysis above suggests that conflict and place changes can be prompted by
internal friction between placed consumers and displaced consumers. However, it
could also be prompted by network interference from actors and relationships
‘external’ to the groups. While the distinction between internal and external should
be used cautiously and flexibly, it was certainly clear for the participants that some
of the conflicts in their choice of place were due to non-members. One memorable
example in the data was the manager of View bar whose intervention in filming
disrupted Polari members’ fragile sense of being ‘in-place’. It would be more
accurate to suggest that the manager’s actions intensified struggles that were
already existent within the groups. The committee members had spent weeks
allaying concerns about the members’ non-consumption in the venue, mitigating
struggles over the meaning and materiality of the place. The manager telling Polari
members that they should buy drinks brought these concerns and conflicts to the
foreground again. Yet while the participants focused on the manager as the
interfering actor, the analysis also suggested that the emergence of struggle also
involved the work of nonhuman actors and their spatial relationships as well. It was
only when Polari members moved from their usual position, mostly hidden from the
bar where the manager usually stood, that the conflict emerged.

In Taurus non-human and human actors worked together in ways that created or
diminished ‘noise bleed’. Richard, a lay member of Polari and Avant Garde in his
early 30s, identified noise bleed in his interview (which was quoted in section 4.2.3),
but he also went on to explain that:
“[the managers] they’re inconsistent. If it [the bar upstairs] gets busy they will just turn up the music upstairs. They’ll just be like oh wow. They don’t care that there’s a event on downstairs. You might be lucky in there...”

Ambivalence has also been described as ‘artful inconsistency’ (Law & Moser, 1999), but there appeared to be little artful management of inconsistencies in this case. The nonhuman actors of walls and ceilings worked to create a quiet space downstairs, but the speakers – when combined with an influx of consumers and a manager’s response to these – conflict with this careful work. As suggested in the example of noise bleed, the suitability of a place is contingent on a range of different actors working together, or against one another, in an ambivalent struggle over meaning and materiality.
4.3.5. Emergent Place Consumers

An important effect of conflicting ambivalence was that it momentarily displaced all of the participants by rendering the place in question problematic for everyone. As the struggles intensified within the actor-networks the participants increasingly found themselves in a position of choice. Members needed to decide which sides of the emergent arguments they agreed with, whether or not they would agree with a proposed alternative or not, and if they could (or wanted to) continue to consume in a place that the group had rejected but that they, and/or a smaller sub-groups around them, preferred. These are just some of the questions that participants faced as conflicts increased, but these questions ultimately revolved around the issue of where the group (and/or various splinter sub-groups) should relocate to. It was in this moment of choice that actors similar to the ones implicitly described in the place consumption literature began to emerge. In other words, the analysis and interpretation suggested that agentic place consumers as subjects of consumption could emerge in ambivalent cultures, and that they co-emerged alongside a range of places as objects of consumption, or ‘consumption choices’.

One example of this emergent place consumer was when MQC members began to ‘split’ in their choices of the post-rehearsal drinking venue. At first the committee tried to intervene in this struggle over where to consume because they believed that it would lead to rifts forming in the group.

“There was a time when some people went to bullring and some people went to the City Arms, and there were various attempts to make sure everybody stayed together, because it was more, uh, community-building, by doing it alternate weeks, but it didn’t work ‘cos people wanted to go where they wanted to go.”

(Agatha, late 60s, lay member).

In effect the MQC committee were positioning themselves as arbiters of the choir’s place consumption, seeking to create rules that members might bend from time to time but would not break (Kozinets et al. 2004). However, as Agatha’s quote above...
suggests, the committee eventually conceded that their agency or influence within the group was not sufficient to shape where members went after rehearsals. During the multi-sited ethnographic period the committee had adopted a much more laissez-faire attitude where they shifted the agency or sovereignty of decisions onto the individual members.

“If you have a look at the welcome letter, or the letter I perhaps sent to you earlier, we say afterwards we go for a drink. Some in a pub in the Village, some in a local pub ’round the corner. So that is really saying, you don’t have to go to the pub around the corner, you don’t have to go to the Village. But normally a group of us go, if the whole choir, say, want to go for a drink, 60 people in a pub is not easy anyway so it’s quite handy that you would split.”

(Ian, early 60s, committee member of MQC)

The conflict within MQC had resulted in a struggle between members over where the group would organise events, with committee members eventually rescinding on their claims of agency. Ian, the other committee members, and the non-human actor of the welcome letter all helped to performatively constitute the members as agentic place consumers by helping to configure the ambivalent network in such a way that such positions could emerge. Despite these attempts, the participant observation suggested that there was a far more complex web of agency than Ian or the welcome letter might suggest. Most new members were told by members that the choir went to The City Arms, and only a select few seemed to be invited to the Gay Village. Therefore the ability to choose where to go out of the two options was a contingent achievement of various actors. Whether, when, and how the ‘position’ of the agentic place consumer emerged depended on much, and even when it did emerge there was no certainty that a participant would occupy it. Many participants simply went where their friends went.

While placed consumers were hybridised with places to the extent that they did not necessarily reflect on them, place consumers (without the ‘d’) were subjects who
were thinking actively about where to consume next. This analysis suggested that consumers did not always play the role of the agentic consumer, but that this was a contingent “effect” (Law, 2009, p. 141) or “event” (Bajde, 2013, p. 229) that was facilitated by occupying a particular point in an actor-network. In other words, agency was constituted by a network of relations rather than being found inherently within the individual. In other complexes of relationships it was the placed consumer or the displaced consumer that emerged.

When the agentic place consumer emerged the participants would often be confronted with many competing options, made all the more complex when they considered the interests and preferences of other members as well as their own. Place consumers could thus be defined as ambivalent in the material-semiotic sense, at the nexus of various countervailing network influences, but they did not necessarily feel ambivalent, in the everyday or phenomenological sense of the word (Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum, 1997; Penz & Hogg, 2011; Szmigin & Canning, 2015). The first quote below demonstrates a place consumer subject who emerged from the Avant Garde network when conflicting ambivalence had raised the possibility of relocating the Thursday night social away from Delicatezze. As this quote makes clear, the participant in question had rather clear-cut feelings about the issue.

“I think the general consensus is on the committee that we think it should be on Canal Street, because... ... people feel safer because it's an LGBT group so we can meet on Canal Street and socialise there. Uhm... there has been people thinking, well, “why does it have to be there?” You know? [...] I don't think the committee have put it out to the runners really, is this an issue? Do you want to be on Canal Street? I think they probably thought it should be because it's an LGBT group... I'd love it even if we went to the Northern Quarter, because it's so much nicer over there, we should try somewhere over there. It's a little bit further away, but we're runners *Laughs*. Walking around the Northern Quarter the atmosphere is great, it's great. Canal Street, I mean, it's just full of hen parties and... uhm...
riff-raff. It's the people that can't get into the Northern Quarter that come to Canal Street.”

(Nelson, late 40s, committee member of Avant Garde)

In contrast George had mixed feelings about whether or not the Thursday night social should remain located in the Gay Village or not. This may have been because of his alternative position on the committee from Nelson, whereby George was expected to consider the preferences of the wider group in relation to events and locations. This quote is provided in full to demonstrate how George oscillates between different positions and arguments but attempts to provide a single coherent narrative.

“My own perception of the Village and Canal Street is that it needs to really, really move on. I think whereas most gay and lesbian people’s lives have moved on and we feel we’re really accepted in society and haven’t got anything to worry about anymore, it almost kind of sort of feels like the Village is stuck in a time warp. Uhm, and therefore it is struggling to attract anything other than hen dos and god knows whatever else. And I think most of us feel that we might as well go to the Northern Quarter or Spinningfields or what-have-you instead. But I find it really disappointing if actually those business that have been there for years and years supporting the LGBT community didn’t, survive. They have got to move on, they have got to adapt, but actually we’ve got a part to play in terms of making sure that we continue to support them, promote them, eat there, drink there, do whatever to make sure they can continue to flourish. For me I suppose it's still important, there are still plenty of people out there who... view that as their way of coming out, or their safe place to go when they want to come out, and dare I say it for the trans* community it's the only place they've still got, at the moment where they still feel comfortable going. So actually, it is still
really important to me that, that is there for as long as it’s still needed. And therefore why we go and support it.”

(George, early 40s, committee member)

While Nelson and George differed in terms of whether they felt ambivalently about the choice of place, both can be described as ambivalently constituted because they were positioned the intersection of multiple interests.

The role of the place consumer can be described as “emergent and entangled” (Bettany and Kerrane, 2011, p.1747), insofar as it emerges from a particular position in a network and participants only became a place consumer if they occupied and became entangled into that position. Participants moved in and out of the place consumer role, and in and out of ambivalent experiences of it. For instance, when Felix (of Avant Garde, late 30s) decided to step down from being a committee member he felt many of the ‘moral responsibilities’ to the group dissolve (Muñiz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001), and that he had more agency about which Avant Garde events that he would attend.

Felix: “I’m more in control, I don’t feel a need to have to go every Thursday, I felt I had to show my face as a committee member, but now I feel I can dip in and out when I want to?”

Interviewer: “Ok. And how often would you say you do go?”

Felix: “More recently I haven’t been, but up until recently I did go every Thursday...”

Felix’s shifting network position, combined with the relocation from TriBeCa to Delicatezze, helped to explain why he no longer attended the Thursday social. While he and other participants emerged at various moments as an agentic consumer subject, the analysis and interpretation suggested that being an agentic place consumer was a network achievement rather than something that one simply was or was not. As Latour (2000, p. 192) once put it, “purposeful action and intentionality may not be properties of objects, but they are also not properties of humans either.
They are properties of . . .collectives of human and non-humans”. The place consumer subject appeared to be enabled by conflicting ambivalence, which intensified struggles and thus opened up possibilities, and necessities, for decisions to be taken. However, this decision making position was always somewhat of an illusion- it required a person to remain in that position as the actors that made it shifted and changed. The position of agentic decision-maker was an ever shifting dune that participants struggled to keep atop of (although they did not always seek to do so).
4.3.6. Co-operative Ambivalence

The place consumer emerged from conflicting ambivalence as a subject who has some agency to choose where to consume alongside other actors within the group. Often when one place was problematised the members would pool their collective experience to produce a list of possible alternatives. In certain cases, such as when Polari were displaced from View bar, no list of alternatives had been prepared and the members struggled to identify any location that met their many competing criteria (including the necessity that it was free). In this case there was no line of flight and the group had to compromise by remaining just outside View bar for several weeks. Other relocations were often described as collective decisions taken by the committee or, in some cases, the group at large. However, the analysis suggested a more complex picture where various actors and actor-networks interfered with the agentic place consumer’s list of possible places until only a small number (and usually one) place remained to ‘choose’ from. For instance, the spectre of Avant Garde’s masculine ‘drinking club’ reputation coalesced ambivalently with the committee’s explicit objective to attract and retain female members, (some) members’ desire to socialise in the Gay Village, the group’s values of choosing places that everyone can afford, and the relatively few restaurants (or restaurant-style) venues in the Gay Village; with these numerous interacting factors Delicatezze emerged as the only viable option, excluding when Velvet offered a discount in January and until The Urban Cookhouse opened just outside the Gay Village.

Taurus was a partial exception to the trend in the data to interpret places as compromises (if and when conscious interpretation happened at all; 4.3.2). When Taurus emerged as a topic of conversations, the majority of participants described it as the ‘home’ of Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures, and explained that it had been place that their groups had sought to ‘give back to’ through volunteering their time and by promoting the venue through word-of-mouth. Debenedetti et al. (2014) identified expressions of homeliness and the practices of volunteering and ambassadorship as signs of place attachment. When Taurus was refurbished it provoked a similar sense of loss as Maclaran and Brown (2005) observed in Powerscourt. However, even in this ‘homely’ and ‘utopic’ place created displaced consumers and created conflicting
ambivalence, hence why Taurus was only a *partial* exception to the trend of compromises. Moreover, the status of Taurus as a rare and ultimately finite manifestation of attachment and utopia suggested that these phenomena were rare in Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures.

These interfering networks produce what could be described as a ‘funneling effect’, leading to a place that was a compromise rather than a choice amongst alternatives. Following Bettany et al. (2014, p.1549) the label of “co-operative ambivalence” was used to refer to these processes by which struggle de-intensified but (crucially) never came to a resolution. Co-operative ambivalence returned consumers back to a state of (im)balanced and subtle struggles, from which displaced and placed consumers co-emerge once more. Co-operative ambivalence was something that was documented regularly during participant observation but also emerged repeatedly during the interviews. It appeared that the participants interpreted most of the places that their groups used as a compromise, rather than an ideal or even desirable choice. Gordon (a committee member of Avant Garde in his early 40s) articulated this place-as-compromise sensibility in the following conversation. Note the increasingly long list of factors that shape the eventual decision, but also Gordon’s resistance to consider a location in the Gay Village as an important criterion.

*Gordon:* “I mean, now, what's available... is actually... ... few and far between. It is actually quite dire. I mean, I think we've got the best of what we can, given the situation... ... the Thursday social venue [Delicatezze] is not great, the food's not great...”

*Interviewer:* “So if [Delicatezze] is so... not great shall we say, why do Avant Garde use it? And not another venue?

*Gordon:* “well, it's not because... ... it’s probably the best of a bad, bad-ish situation. We've looked into all sorts of places and a lot of them want pre-orders, but it's difficult... it get's very complicated. And we've spent a lot of time as a committee looking at other
options, other places. It sounds quite easy, “oh, a place to go for a group of people”, but actually it’s not. Think about vegetarians, dietary requirements, somewhere that doesn’t require a deposit or pre-ordered food, and a location that can potentially house quite a number of people. Quite difficult actually. So it’s definitely, we’ve got the best of what we can.”

Interviewer: “and was it important to make sure you were near Canal street?”

Gordon: “uhm, kind of. Because obviously when we went to Kro2. That wasn’t [near Canal Street], but it was right next to the gym [where Avant Garde train], so it was very handy and they were able to accommodate us. And back then we had a lot more people going to the Thursday afterwards... we had about 20 and 30 most weeks. Most people used to... and that’s gone. And we’ve never been able to replicate it since...”

Interviewer: “so the nearest place was Canal Street?”

Gordon: “Yeah... so we’ve looked at other places but some of them again it’s down to cost, menu choice, pre-booking... all sorts of things. And space... they’re keen to fill a restaurant but they don’t want to reserve a table for 20 people and then only 5 turn up.... because you can’t guarantee the numbers...”

Interviewer: “So the LGBT+ aspect wasn’t particularly prominent, really?”

Gordon: “I mean... ... we might have to look at this again, around April, May time... it’s quite funny because Thursday was always the main running day and social day... [Gordon changes topic]”
The status of the Gay Village as a site of consumption was contested. In Gordon’s case it appeared to have remarkably little influence on his perception of Avant Garde’s decision making. Yet while Canal Street and the Gay Village are no more than a fifteen minute walk from the end of Avant Garde’s training route, there are a number other places in-between these two locations that could be considered. As demonstrated in the group-by-group analysis, the Gay Village’s status was contested with no clear identity or role emerging. What was clear, however, is that the groups often selected a place in the Gay Village wherever possible, even when a comparable option outside the Gay Village was more desirable (recall Nelson’s frustration in subsection 4.3.5 at the repeated choices of locations in the Gay Village). As Gordon’s quote above suggests, the Gay Village was a place with relatively limited options for LGBT+ groups with as multivariate needs as the ones studied here. Yet many of the participants shared a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001) toward the Gay Village and the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) that it represented, as well as some guilt (Gopaldas, 2014) whenever they chose to consume elsewhere. These feelings of responsibility and guilt clashed with the practical concerns that members had, often meaning that the funneling effect was quick and usually resulted in a single place emerging as a viable alternative.

This single viable alternative could be described as an ‘obligatory passage point’, after Callon (1986b). However, unlike Callon’s study of how scientists enrolled scallops, fishers, and other actors into their actor-network and the obligatory passage point that it provides, the interpretation here is more ambivalent. A place becomes obligatory when it is the only actor that connects a complex network of actors and relationships – i.e. when it is the only satisfactory solution to ongoing struggles (Bettany et al. 2014)- not because the place or a related actor (such as a place manager) seeks to enroll the groups into their networks (although in some cases this appeared to have also been operating). Because the obligatory point emerged from the increasingly complex network of actors within the groups, it stood to reason that sub-groups (with fewer actors and relationships) often had considerably more agency over where to consume. For instance, while MQC had to
choose places that would be suitable to their heterogeneous membership, smaller friendship groups within the choir were more flexible and fluid.

“Those more hard-core drinkers on a Monday night is that there is often a little contingent that sort of migrate back towards the Village after... actually there's a few people who tend to meet there before rehearsals as well now uhm, and then go to rehearsal, then to The City Arms, and then back to the Village afterwards. It all depends on how much you want to drink on a Monday night.”

(Dominic, early 30s, lay member)

At the same time, some of the participants recognised the ‘compromised’ nature of their group’s place consumption, and sought to mitigate any over-dependencies with places by building multiple relationships, or what might be described as a portfolio of place relationships. By expanding their network the groups were reducing the relative importance of each place, just as Singleton and Michael (1993) found that General Practitioners could do by diversifying their work and professional affiliations.

We want to support them [places in the Gay Village] as much as they want us going there. Uhm. But we can't be reliant on just a couple of places. We've had our fingers burnt by the fact that we've been going somewhere and then they've closed down. So we've got two or three places... and just recently, just outside the Village actually, we've, uh, place where we went to for our Christmas party, gave us great discount, continue to build that kind of relationship... uhm, and actually it tends to be those places where, we build it with them, they build it with us, come to... liking each other. And good prices. And that kind of just works for us... we do try to vary it though. So the social after Thursday runs are never venues then for our socials on any other events.

(George, early 40s, committee member of Avant Garde)
Thus increasing the size and complexity of the network could either make groups more reliant on individual places or less so, depending on how this was managed by the group. While an active portfolio of places inevitably took more time and effort to set up and maintain it did reduce the risks of conflicting ambivalence for both Avant Garde and MQC. Polari, which only used one place at a time, discovered to its cost how dangerous relying on places could be.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Outline of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the various implications of the analysis and interpretation discussed in the previous chapter, and thus how this study contributes to existing knowledge within CCT about place consumers, places of consumption, and place consumption as a phenomenon more widely.

The chapter begins with the primary theoretical contributions and implications in section 5.2, with the discussion being structured around the figure of the dis/place/d consumer that emerged from the previous chapter. However, the analysis and interpretation of the previous chapter was grounded in the empirical context of three LGBT+ leisure groups in Manchester, making only small speculative conjectures about how these three groups could provide insights into Manchester’s networks of LGBT+ material-semiotic cultures more widely. This section is more ambitious and more abstract, seeking to look beyond the empirical context to consider the wider transferability of the ideas developed in this study (Figueiredo et al. 2016). Therefore, section 5.2 can be thought of as one that “restates the research question and [the] study’s answer in theoretical language, with little or no reference to the empirical context.” (Gopaldas, 2016, p. 120)

Section 5.3 then considers how the insights of this study may also have additional implications to other areas of research. These additional implications can be thought of as “more speculative theoretical insights that are applicable to other related literature.” (Gopaldas, 2016, p. 120) The list of ‘related literature’ is potentially vast, especially if one is willing to make especially speculative leaps. Section 5.3 therefore focuses on the three topic areas that have fed into this study: Sexuality, gender, and Place in CCT (sub-section 5.3.1); Space and Place in CCT (sub-section 5.3.2); Material-Semiotics in CCT (sub-section 5.3.3). All three sections focus primarily (but not exclusively) on the tradition of CCT because this is the area of discourse that this study has sought to contribute most significantly to. Sub-section 5.3.4 is more
speculative, however, and explores the possible implications of the present study on
the emergent academic fields of place marketing and place branding.

Section 5.4 shifts to focus on managerial contributions- how managers can put some
of the ideas in this study into practice. Section 5.5 then considers the limitations of
this study and the opportunities for future research that these point to: sub-section
5.5.1 considers limitations and opportunities arising from methodology while sub-
section 5.5.2 explores limitations and opportunities arising from the interpretation.
5.2. Primary Theoretical Contributions and Implications

The findings chapter sought to provide an answer to three research questions. This section considers the theoretical consequences of these answers in more detail. To aid in this task it may be helpful, as Gopaldas (2016, p. 120) suggests, to restate the research questions in more abstract terms. This can be achieved relatively easily simply by removing terms that grounded the research questions to the specific cultural context of LGBT+ consumers, and the geographical boundaries of Manchester. This returns one to the research questions as formulated in section 2.4.

Research Question 1: How do place consumers emerge and evolve through ambivalent struggles over meaning and materiality within actor-networks?

Research Question 2: How might exclusionary effects that co-emerge with these place consumers and actor-networks?

Research Question 3: How might the subjects and objects of place consumption be understood in more co-emergent and co-constitutive ways?

Once abstracted it should be clearer that the insights of the findings chapter may be transferable beyond Manchester’s LGBT+ cultures (circa 2014 to 2016), and may also be able to contribute to scholarly discussions and debates in the CCT discourse. However, this is not to suggest that this knowledge should (or indeed, could) be abstracted entirely from the conditions of its gestation. Attempts to do so would simply obscure insightful information about how the theoretical ideas were formed, how they might have been formed differently, and how they might be formed differently in the future (Bettany, 2015; Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Haraway, 1997; Law & Singleton, 2013). With this in mind the abstract discussions in following sub-sections reference back to the empirical context where re-contextualisation may help to provide useful insights.

The main contribution of this study has been to challenge the agentic idea of place consumers and replace them with the post-human figure of dis/place/d consumers. Following a review of the literature it was argued that place consumers are conceptualised as agentic decision-makers who select and appropriate places for
their individual and collective identity projects. Places, in this view, are conceptualised as relatively stable and inert (that is, non-agentic) objects of consumption. The place consumer formulation is implicitly organised around the subject/object binary, (re)creating an imbalanced ontology that “essentializes the consumer as a choosing, experiencing agent and the consumption object as something which is acted on, and a “thing-in-itself” around which consumers make meaning.” (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1747) The cycle of dis/place/d consumption, assembled in the previous chapter, argues instead that consumers are continually reconstituted though ambivalent actor-networks, emerging variously as ‘place consumers’, ‘placed consumers’, and ‘displaced consumers’. To labour the point, these three configurations emerge from ambivalent actor-networks. The post-human explanation of how certain places come to be used instead of others does not begin or end with the consumer and their choices. Consumers are treated as one of many actors within ambivalent networks (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014; Singleton & Michael, 1993), from which place consumption ‘decisions’ emerge as an “effect” (Law, 2009, p. 141) or “event” (Bajde, 2013, p. 229) rather than as a conscious or collective decision.

The remainder of this sub-section clarifies and discusses the theoretical implications of the dis/place/d consumer. This discussion is structured to mimic the cycle of dis/place/d consumption as visualised in figure 5.1 below. The discussion starts from the centre with the notion of the dis/place/d consumer. This serves to preface the discussion to follow by emphasising the hybrid, emergent, and relational ontology adopted in this study, and thus caution against any over-emphasis of the later parts at the expense of the whole. The discussion then moves to the bottom of the figure and moves clockwise. In the spirit of ANT (Latour, 2005), this clockwise direction emulates the world-making trajectories that the various actors in this study found themselves making.
Rather than treat place, placed, and displaced consumers as three different ‘types’ or ‘roles’ that consumers play, the interpretation in this study has drawn on feminist material-semiotics to build an understanding around the hybrid and post-human figure of the dis/place/d consumer. This formulation undeniably takes inspiration from the existing figure of in/appropriate/d others, which describes people caught between a range of contradictory discourses, practices, and material conditions and who are - at once and in alternation - appropriate, appropriated, inappropriate, and inappropriated subjects (Bettany, 2015; Haraway, 1992; Minh-Ha, 1989; Rowe & Rowe, 2015). The dis/place/d consumer is proposed to describe someone who is in-place (placed), out-of-place (displaced), and in-charge-of-placing (place) at varying times and to varying degrees, and should therefore be considered as a hybrid of all three. The dis/place/d consumers are also hybrid because the eponymous ‘place’ is not treated separately as an object of consumption, as something separate from the consumer-subject that the latter consumes. Rather, places and consumers are
treated as co-emergent, co-constitutive, co-evolving actants (Bettany & Daly, 2008; Haraway, 2003)- as implied by the centrality of place in the term dis/place/d consumers.

For placed consumers the phenomenological experience of a place is subtle and peripheral. The features of the place recede into the background of thought and activity. This means that consumption is in-place but is not about the place. The status of the place as an object of consumption dissolves. It was proposed that this was because the consumer (as ‘subject’) and place (‘as object’) have hybridised, becoming a subject/object that act symbiotically. Placed consumers are therefore proposed hybrids of place and consumer- they emerge from entangled networks of people, places, and other nonhumans- and thus represent the blending of human and place, subject and object. The placed consumer could also be described as ‘emplaced’ (as suggested in sub-section 4.3.2), emulating Bradford and Sherry’s (2017) descriptions of ‘emplaced’ brand communities. However, emplacement can be defined as “a structure on which something is firmly placed” (OED, 2013, n.p.), which suggests more stability and fixity than is intended here. As demonstrated in the findings chapter, and discussed further below, consumers are ‘placed’ provisionally and precariously and rarely remain so unproblematically. Another reason to eschew emplaced consumers in favour of placed consumers is that dis/placed consumers reads much more fluidly than dis/emplaced consumers. This is more than a stylistic argument; the key lesson of figurative thought is that metaphors matter (Bastian, 2006; Hetherington & Law, 2000), in both senses of the word (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Butler, 1993), and that the more fluid dis/placed is evocative of, and thus more likely to engender, the hybrid both/and thinking that is intended here.

Displaced consumers are subjects who are constituted as ‘Other’ by the hybridisation of other consumers with a particular place. The phenomenological experience of displaced consumers is a feeling of being out-of-place, a ‘lack of fit’ (Allen, 2002) or a feeling of not belonging (May, 2013), which sometimes manifests in (self-)exclusion from the place altogether. Displaced consumers were often invisible- sometimes they participated alongside everyone else without complaint, at
other times they were simply absent from a place. It was only when displaced consumers voiced their concerns within the group that they were recognised as such. Sometimes displaced consumers ‘spoke’ with their actions, such as when male and female members of Avant Garde sat at different ends of a table in TriBeCa or when MQC members chose to walk to the Gay Village instead of using The City Arms.

Following Cresswell (1996), it has been argued that placed consumers always co-emerge with displaced consumers because a place is constituted by its boundaries, which produces an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’, and in turn constitutes actants as either ‘included’ or ‘excluded’. One of the reasons the term dis/place/d is used is to draw attention to this co-emergent and co-constitutive relationship between placed and displaced consumers. Another is that subjects could find themselves constituted as placed in one instance and displaced in another. When the groups chose to relocate (or re-place) their activities this would almost always result in changing distributions of dis/placed consumers. Given the ‘inclusive’ ethos of the three leisure groups, the intention was usually to find a place that would increase the number of placed consumers, which was defined previously as utopian (and will be discussed further below). However, the data suggested that in almost all cases any relocation would also result in some placed consumers becoming displaced as they did not hybridise as symbiotically with the new place as they did with the previous one.

The hybrid ontology of dis/placed consumers is thus an ambivalent one, “where everything is in process and at stake” (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1747). Dis/placed consumers are not described as ambivalent because they had mixed feelings about a place- that is, ambivalence is not used here in the phenomenological sense of the term (e.g. Otnes et al. 1997; Penz & Hogg, 2011; Szmigin & Canning, 2015). Although mixed feelings were occasionally manifest, in many cases participants were either primarily positive (placed) or negative (displaced) in their assessments of a place. Furthermore, the data analysis suggested that placed consumers rarely reflected on the places that they were using and rather experienced these seamlessly as the backgrounds to their activities. This invokes Star and Ruhleder’s (1996) metaphor of infrastructure as networks that are overlooked or ‘transparent’ when used- provided that they are working seamlessly. It was only when there were “breaches” (Hill et al.
in this seamless flow that participants were reconstituted as place consumers who ‘reflected’ on the places that they used and came to make assessments or decisions about them.

The variegated breaches observed in this study can be put into one of two analytical categories. The first refers to ‘methodological breaches’. During the interviews many of the participants spoke at length about the places that their respective groups had, did, could, or should use, as well as articulating the symbiotic relationships between places and the groups’ identities and activities. However, from a performative perspective (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Butler, 1997b) it is better to suggest that these ‘place consumers’ emerged in the interviews as reflexive and agentic decision-making consumers of place. However, from a performative perspective the interview technique constitutes the “re-enactment of subjectivity” rather than a conversation with a pre-existing, fully-formed subject (Spowart & Nairn, 2014, p. 329). In other words, the interview situation was an actor-network comprised of an interviewer, set of questions, an audio-recording device, and an environment unassociated with the LGBT+ leisure groups (usually a coffee shop; see section 3.6). Within this material-semiotic milieu each volunteer was reconstituted as a ‘research participant’, and the situation produced “the possibility of interruption” in taken-for-granted assumptions (Spowart & Nairn, 2014, p. 329). The place consumer was enacted within the time and place of the interview, an ephemeral subject position that was brought into being for less than a couple of hours but spoke with the authority and self-assurance of someone who had existed for years. A similar ‘effect’ was produced during informal conversations, but to a lesser and more ephemeral extent. This performative ontology of interviews also has methodological implications, which will be explored further in section 5.3.3.

Interviews were not the only breaches observed in the data. Dis/placed consumers could also be disrupted by conflicting ambivalence, which refers to the intensification of struggles over meaning and materialities within, and across, actor-networks. Bettany et al. (2014, p. 1549) developed the concept of conflicting ambivalence in the context of family networks with new babies, describing how the introduction of caring technologies could be disrupted by when “other networks
(Mumsnet) and technologies (the mobile phone) emerged to interfere.” In the present study a variety of actors and networks could interfere to disrupt the precarious hybridisation of placed consumers. Displaced consumers were a common source of ‘interference’, using their voices or bodies to signal their discontent and create fissures in the place-consumer hybrid of placed consumers. Other human and nonhuman actants within the place could also disrupt placed consumers taken-for-granted flow of experience. Both of these result in what Star and Ruhleder (1996, p. 113), following Bowker (1994), describe as an “infrastructural inversion”. Placed consumers experience “a powerful figure-ground gestalt shift” (Star & Ruhleder, 1996, p. 113) whereby the place is reconstituted from being the taken-for-granted background of activity to the foreground of consideration and concern.

Describing conflicting ambivalence as the intensification of struggles (Bettany et al. 2014) signals that conflict does not appear from nowhere but rather reflects the build-up, and eventual discharge, of various frictions, contradictions, silences, exclusions, and frustrations. Singleton and Michael (1993, p. 232) proposed the metaphor of ambivalence to describe actor-networks in a state of “permanent reform”, rather than actor-networks that cycle through neatly-demarcated periods of stability and translation. Dis/placed consumers, and their single or repeated use of a particular location, represent only a temporary period of relative calm where struggles over meaning and materiality are mitigated but never resolved (Bettany et al. 2014). In some cases placed consumers were aware (more or less obliquely) of the unresolved tensions created when their group used a place. Polari’s use of View bar was a case-in-point, where members of the committee continually assuaged new members concerns about using a commercial venue without buying drinks, and sought to delay managerial intervention by positioning the group out-of-sight from the bar. However, in many cases placed consumers were largely unaware of the tensions that they moved through, with only the marginalised subjectivity of displaced consumers providing early warnings of conflicts to come. Like Star (1991), the findings of this study attest to the unevenness of power, visibility, and participation in actor-networks, and the importance of listening those who are out-
of-place or misplaced; a sensibility that Bettany (2015) has recently called for in CCT applications of material-semiotics.

One important effect of conflicting ambivalence, and the intensification of struggles that it denotes, is the emergence of places as objects of consumption and place consumers as subjects of consumption. To reiterate, placed consumers are hybrids of places and consumers, such that analysing or writing about them separately is somewhat misrepresentative. Placed consumers do not think about the place or about themselves as consuming places. Their consumption is directed toward some other object, such as the activities of the group or the purchase of food and beverages. Their consumption is in place but not of place, to appropriate the distinction coined by Chatzidakis and McEachern (2013). However, during a moment or period of conflicting ambivalence the place is transformed from a taken-for-granted actor within a network to the object that actor-networks are struggling over. This is not simply a shift in consumers’ attention, as Star and Ruhleder’s (1996) gestalt metaphor may inadvertently suggest. Following Law and Singleton (2005, p. 334), it is important to say that this is not an epistemological change (of perspective) but an ontological one- places “are enacted into being” as objects within networks by the event of problematisation, or conflicting ambivalence. The place consumer is enacted in the same moment as its necessary counterpart. That is, a place figuring as an object of consumption within a network (or analysis) implies one or more subject-consumers. Without a place consumer a place may still exist as a geographical location, a physical environment, a historical site, and so on, but it does not exist as an object of consumption in an substantive way.

Conflicting ambivalence is therefore an inaugurating act that brings a place consumer into being as a subject who ‘does’ consumption. The findings chapter adopted a more specific definition of ‘place consumer’ than that found in the existing CCT literature. The multivariate deployments of the ‘place consumer’ in CCT studies all share the leitmotif of humanistic agency- the idea of a self-aware, actively-interpreting, decision-making, and empowered consumer- which was derived from the humanistic-phenomenological tradition in geography (see Cresswell, 2004), and facilitated by the existential-phenomenological understandings...
of consumption at large within CCT until relatively recently (after Thompson et al. 1989). The emergent figures of emplaced and displaced consumers demonstrated that the agentic role of the place consumer was delimited to specific moments within the data. While dis/placed consumers referred to consumers in-place or out-of-place who took a place to be an (un)problematic background to (consumption) activities, place consumers (minus the ‘d’) were consumers who took place to be the object of their consumption. Subsequently, this study adopted a more specific definition of ‘place consumers’ as people who are actively interpreting, assessing, and making decisions about places. Describing someone as a place consumer implies that a place is the central object of consumption. In accord with the recent ‘spatialisation’ of the CCT discourse (Castilhos et al. 2016; Chatzidakis & McEachern, 2013; Chatzidakis et al. 2014, 2017; Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018), it should be noted that the ‘where’ of consumption is almost always relevant (Gollnhofer, 2016). However, whether that ‘where’ takes the form of a consumption object is an contested (or ambivalent) process that is inexorably coupled with the formation of the consumption subject (Bettany, 2007b; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011).

The interpretation proposed here is that place consumers are not an entity within actor-networks but emerge as the “effect” (Law, 2009, p. 141) or “event” (Bajde, 2013, p. 229) of a person occupying a particular position within turbulent actor-networks. Conflicting ambivalence intensified struggles and makes actor-networks more turbulent but also more interconnected. Actors, relations, and networks that were previously absent, or ‘Othered’ (Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005), ‘interfere’ in the struggle. This produces a series of intersections between actor-networks, or ‘ambivalent’ positions that actors can occupy (Singleton & Michael, 1993). These positions are ambivalent because the subjects in them are presented with many competing and contradictory courses of action. They often had a variety of possible places to choose from and, as members of a group, had a variety of different considerations and stakeholders to take into account. To reiterate the point made earlier in this section, while mixed feelings could result from being a place consumer the data here suggested that most participants had clear preferences about where their group should consume next (which sometimes included returning to the place
that was just problematised). Ambivalence is used by material-semioticians in a post-humanist way to refer to the ‘mixed’ trajectories of the network, and it is suggested here that the figure of the ‘place consumer’ emerges from “nexus” of these countervailing movements within actor-networks (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011, p. 1754). Whilst contrasting with the conventional view of place consumers in the humanist CCT discourse, viewing place consumers as emergent from a network would not be radical in material-semiotics (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Butler, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 2010; Haraway, 2003; Law, 2009). As Latour (2005, p. 218) once put it, “subjectivity is not a property of human souls but of the gathering itself - provided it lasts of course.”

People who occupy these (conflicting) ambivalent positions can be thought of as ‘boundary subjects’, following the notion of a boundary object. A boundary object is something at the intersection of multiple networks that can facilitate cooperation between groups without the need for consensus (Star & Griesemer, 1989). In their article Star and Griesemer (1989) compare boundary objects to marginal people, those who operate in more than one cultural world and thus must learn to operate across or between the boundaries or margins that these worlds create. While Star and Griesemer (1989) give the example of mixed race people, there are clear parallels with gay men’s fluid negotiation of gay/straight boundaries (Kates, 2002, 2003; Rinallo, 2007; Visconti, 2008) and bisexuals’ negotiation of many more (Rowe & Rowe, 2015). Abstracting from the LGBT+ context of this study, it can also be proposed that there are parallels between marginal people and the ambivalent place consumers proposed here. When a consumer occupies the position they are caught between the material-semiotic milieux of multiple actor-networks, and are constituted as a consumer that must make a decision between the various places that each actor-network promotes or discourages. This is very similar to how Singleton and Michael (1993, p. 258) described General Practitioners (GPs) who participated in the UK Cervical Screening Programme (CSP):

“broadening our view of the network, we see that the GP has a range of connections far beyond the CSP. Moreover, these can be deployed to problematize the latter. Thus the GP situates itself at
The GP, like the place consumer studied here, is an ambivalent marginal or boundary subject emergent at a complex of networks, and it is from this complex position (or complex of positions) that place consumers must seek to act.

While place consumers can emerge as agentic figures— as a person who interprets, assesses, and decides where to consume based on a mixture of utilitarian, social, emotional, and cultural reasons (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999; Borghini et al. 2009; Debenedetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017; Sherry, 2013; Sherry et al. 2004; Skandalis et al. 2016)— their agency is somewhat of an illusion. Concomitant with material-semiotic understandings of agency (the ability to act) as distributed across a network (Bajde, 2013; Bettany, 2007b; Canniford & Bajde, 2015; Latour, 2005; Law, 2009), the interpretation developed in this study was that the processes of place consuming (i.e. interpreting, assessing, deciding, and then acting out those decisions) are always mediated achievements between multiple actors (Bajde, 2013; Latour, 1992, 1994, 2005), who inter-determine one another’s characteristics via said interactions (Bettany, 2007b; Haraway, 2003). The data seemed to suggest that from an initial (ostensible) range of possible places that the place consumers had to choose from, interactions from the actor-networks that surrounded them worked to delimit, discourage, and direct their agency over a period of time. This has been represented as a funnel in figure 5.1 (on page 212), representing how possibilities were eliminated until only one place remained viable for the place consumers in the group. As the findings have demonstrated, this funnelling is enacted by a variety of actors, relations, and networks. For instance, the spectre of Avant Garde’s masculine ‘drinking club’ reputation coalesced ambivalently with the committee’s explicit objective to attract and retain female members, (some) members’ desire to socialise in the Gay Village, the group’s values of choosing places that everyone can afford, and the relatively few restaurants (or restaurant-style) venues in the Gay Village; with these numerous interacting factors Delicatezze emerged as the only viable
option, excluding when Velvet offered a discount in January and until The Urban Cookhouse opened just outside the Gay Village.

These heterogeneous interactions can be described generally as “interfering networks” because the members of the three leisure clubs, like the new father’s studied by Bettany et al. (2014, p. 1549), often described these as constraints on their ideal choices. Across the three leisure groups a recurring ideal emerged centred around inclusivity. To recap in brief, inclusivity stipulated that the ideal place for the LGBT+ group was accessible to all (regardless of bodily ability or economic means) and neutral in terms of associations (not overly gendered, classed, racialised, etcetera). One recurring source of conflicting ambivalence was the fact that places were not inclusive enough and this caused some participants to feel displaced. However, even when conflicting ambivalence was precipitated by some other event, the emergent place consumers often took the relocation of their leisure group as an opportunity to find a better (i.e. more inclusive) place. These idealised goals could be described as utopian, with the term utopia referring to imagined and idealised places (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Hetherington, 1997; Maclaran & Brown, 2005). In their study of the utopian shopping centre of Powerscourt, Maclaran and Brown (2005, p. 313) noted that the centre’s refurbishment was a period when “utopian imaginations were aroused and activated.” In Maclaran and Brown’s (2005) study these utopian imaginings focused towards the past, to the ‘paradise lost’ of the old Powerscourt. In this study the utopian imaginations of place consumers were also stimulated by the loss of an existing place but their efforts were directed toward the future. While inclusivity was the most salient utopia in the data other utopian ideals were also sought (such as places that would draw larger audiences than the last, places that were more reliable than the last, and so on), suggesting that a utopian imagination may be a common feature of place consumption. Despite the pervasiveness of the utopian imagination in the data utopian places were never actually found. In part this was because participants never reached a consensus about what features a utopian place would have. As Maclaran and Brown (2005, p. 316) found, “one person’s utopia can be another’s dystopia.” Even when some common ground could be reached (such as inclusivity), the utopian goals were not the only funneling
influence in place consumers’ ambivalent actor networks. Utopian imaginaries co-evolved with other forms of network interference until co-operative ambivalence emerged.

Bettany et al. (2014, p. 1549) proposed the term “co-operative ambivalence” to refer to instances when relationships between new fathers, caring technologies, and the wider family network emerged in ways that helped to mitigate inconsistencies and conflicts, but where such co-operation “did not result in stability of meaning”. In this study the term co-operative ambivalence has been used in much the same way, to refer to the de-intensification of ambivalent struggles in actor-networks. Co-operative ambivalence “resulted in uneasy statuses” for actors, leading some “to the recognition that this situation was not ideal but was satisfactory.” (Bettany et al. 2014, p. 1549) In other words, struggles were diminished but not resolved. Similarly, the analysis and interpretation in the previous chapter suggested that placed consumers viewed their choice of place as a compromise, the ‘best of what we can find’, to paraphrase one of the participants from section 4.3. Such compromises were not the kinds of stabilisation, consensus, or resolution that was typical of early ANT (e.g. Callon, 1986b). However, co-operative ambivalence did produce placed consumers as hybrid actor-networks that can undertake “cooperative work in the absence of consensus” (Star, 2010, p. 604), which allows place (and the agentic role of place consumer) to fade into the background. When prompted during informal conversations or interviews the participants would often explain that the places that their groups used were far from ideal. However, the observational data suggest that in practice most of the participants were content with such satisfactory solution because they enabled the groups to undertake activities, socialize, and work toward the projects that mattered to them.

As noted earlier, placed consumers are always accompanied by their ‘Othered’ counterpart (Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005), namely displaced consumers. It must therefore be noted that co-operative ambivalence involves processes that produce exclusion and power imbalances, an important theme in feminist material-semiotic research and theorisation (Bastian, 2006; Haraway, 1991a; Law & Singleton, 2013; Lee & Brown, 1994; Star, 1991). This ‘dark side’ of co-operative ambivalence
was not salient in the work of Bettany et al. (2014), except insofar as certain caring technologies were sometimes excluded from the network. In the present study exclusions and power balances had more human consequences. Some participants feeling marginalised within places, activities, and, by way of association, in the groups as a whole. Others even took it upon themselves to stop participating in certain activities or to leave the leisure group entirely. The reasons why consumers exit groups remains an under-developed area of research in CCT (McAlexander & DuFault, 2015), but this study contributes by suggesting that the choice of place can be an important factor. The data demonstrated that no place was entirely inclusive, despite the group’s ambitions to find such a utopic place, with one or more people being displaced. The best that the groups could achieve was to find more inclusive places.

Another solution to the problem of displacement was to regularly change places by producing a more complex network of places, or what was tentatively dubbed a ‘place portfolio’. Each instance of conflicting ambivalence disrupted taken-for-granted consumption in-place and the exclusions or power imbalances entangled within. This generated the possibility of a new place being chosen that would replace displaced consumers, although often at the expense of displacing placed consumers. In some cases change was framed as undesirable by placed consumers, and it was only through the interference of displaced consumers or other actors that opportunity for change emerged. However, toward the end of the data collection period a sensibility within the group that regular changes could be beneficial began to emerge. In MQC the objective to find a place for everyone to socialise in was relaxed and a more laissez-faire approach was adopted. In Avant Garde the committee went a step further by making the regular relocation of some of training and social events an explicit objective. These data, and the interpretive insight that conflicting ambivalence opened up possibilities to dissolve dis/placed binaries, suggest that a certain degree of instability could be a beneficial, and even desirable, state of affairs for the three leisure groups. While the phenomenological approach often presents ambivalence as an emotional state that consumers wish to avoid and resolve (Otnes et al., 1997; Penz & Hogg, 2011; Szmigin & Canning, 2015), use of the
term ambivalence in material-semiotics is often more positive, with ambivalent networks being more inclusive of incongruences, contradictions, and non-binary lifestyles (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Singleton & Michael, 1993).

This study also challenges the implicit assumption in CCT that the stability of meanings and material formations is preferable to instability. This assumption is also made in a number of CCT studies adopting a material-semiotic perspective, as explored in the literature review (sub-section 2.3.3). Studies of how brand managers resolve contradictory meanings (Giesler, 2012), how communities manage their heterogeneity so as not to fall apart (Thomas et al. 2013), how brand audiences fail to manage their dynamism and fall apart (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015), and how family practices are reassembled (as similarly as possible) over long-distances (Epp et al. 2014); the contribution of all these studies (and many others) is to better understand how stability emerges and how it can be maintained. In recent years a small number of studies have begun to move toward a more nuanced perspective where stability and instability are viewed as having potentially positive and potentially negative effects (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014; Canniford & Shankar, 2015; Price & Epp, 2015). The present study has drawn on the thread of ambivalence (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Bettany et al. 2014) in this small area of discourse, and has explored the positive effects of instability. Specifically, instability allows unequal power relations and exclusions to be redrawn. While they are often replaced with new unequal power relations and exclusions, continual instability allows hierarchies and differences to remain fluid and thus more temporary.

Thus while Bettany et al. (2014, p. 1550) present co-operative ambivalence and conflicting ambivalence as two “types of ambivalence… with different outcomes for the participants”, in the present context it was more helpful to think of them as countervailing processes within a cycle. Co-operative ambivalence can be thought of as the reversal of conflicting ambivalence, and visa versa. It is for this reason that the term “interference” has been applied to both conflicting ambivalence and co-operative ambivalence. Bettany et al. (2014, p. 1550) presented “network interference” as generative of intensified ambivalent struggles and (in some cases) the collapse of an actor-network- both processes associated with conflicting
ambivalence. It has been argued in this section that interference from actor-networks can also help to mitigate ambivalent struggles (by ‘selecting’ a place for place consumers) and subsequently co-constitute dis/placed consumers.

Surrounding the dis/place/d consumer framework is ‘Otherness’, which describes the actors who are excluded from the framework. There can be many reasons for this, many factors that produce ‘Othered’ actors or networks. While displaced consumers can refer to people who are (self-)excluded, ‘Othered’ consumers are those who are not even considered or may not even consider themselves as potential consumers of the place because of the structure of the wider network-of-networks. For instance, empirical research suggests that people from religious communities tend to frequent less visible LGBT+ places. Concealed meeting places such as gay saunas or public toilets function as places where LGBT+ people (primarily but not exclusively gay and bisexual cisgender men) meet (Brown, 2006). These are places where they can act upon their desires without having to commit to a particular public sociocultural identity, unlike bars and clubs in Gay Villages (Brown, 2006, Atkins, 2013). People from backgrounds where LGBT+ lifestyles are stigmatised are embedded in networks (and wider networks-of-networks) where places in the Gay Village do not emerge as a possible choice.

People from backgrounds where LGBT+ lifestyles are stigmatised are also more likely to avoid LGBT+ groups like MQC, Avant Garde, or Polari. As such, the methodological approach of this study overlooked certain actors, it actively ‘Othered’ them. The framework that emerged from this methodology is partial and biased, like all products of research are, but it also helps to reproduce these limitations and emphases in the mind of the reader and must be critically considered (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Haraway, 1997; Law, 2004). While the dis/place/d consumer framework seeks to redirect attention toward people who are excluded, inevitably there are some excluded groups who have not been mentioned at all. It can be argued that no research (nor researcher) can consider every actor, and that inevitably some actors must have been overlooked. In fact, Law and Singleton (2005, pp.342-3, original emphasis) argue that the ‘Other’ represents
actors “that are necessarily absent, that cannot be brought into presence; that are othered.”

While no researcher or research team can consider every actor, there is still a responsibility on the researcher to acknowledge the ‘Others’ that their research focus may have created. Law (2004) suggests the tripartite distinction of presence/absence/Other. Here the tripartite distinction is placed/displaced/’Othered’, with ‘Othered’ consumers being those absent in the groups’ place consumption and/or overlooked in the analysis, and thus excluded from the theory-building work and the five categories that it created. The inclusion of ‘Otherness’ around the framework is intended to acknowledge and draw attention to these conceptual omissions. Another way of thinking about this is to suggest that ‘Otherness’ is a reminder that this framework is partial and incomplete, hopefully useful but also a source of inspiration for further research. As Bettany (2015, p.193) argues, ambivalent actor-network thinking means that “the multiplicity of never ending actor networks potentially never ends, and the analyst has... to pragmatically choose, as Marilyn Strathern says, where to cut the network (1996).” In this study the network was ‘cut’ in order to produce the dis/place/d framework presented above; but in doing so a lot of actors, networks, and action were ‘cut out’, and this should be borne in mind.
5.3. Other Theoretical Contributions and Implications

5.3.1. Sexuality, Gender, and Place in CCT

One key contribution of this study has been to expand the CCT discourse on sexuality and gender by empirically investigating LGBT+ groups rather than focusing on gay men as the majority of the previous literature has done (e.g. Kates, 2002; Visconti, 2008; Rinallo, 2007). Other recent studies have begun to redress the balance by focusing on, and distinctively theorising, one of the many other LGBT+ identities; such as lesbian and bisexual women’s heterotopic experiences of coming out (Pantazopolous & Bettany, 2010), or bisexuals as in/appropriate/d others (Rowe & Rowe, 2015). This study adopted a more agnostic methodological and theoretical approach, choosing three LGBT+ leisure groups and seeing which (anti-)identities emerged. One unique insight of looking at LGBT+ consumers collectively- rather than honing in on L, G, B, T, or other non-heterosexuals individually- is that it has highlighted how ‘LGBT+’ is a contested and ambivalent cultural category. The participants were very proud that their group was LGBT+ rather than primarily for gay men, lesbians, etc. LGBT+ was synonymic with inclusivity, diversity, and openness and opposed to outmoded stereotypes and insular subcultures. However, it should also be noted that these stereotypes and subcultures were also contested and ambivalent, with multiple and dynamic understandings and deployments emerging, evolving, and dissolving during the period of the research. This study has contributed in a small way to the emergent discourse on LGBT+ consumption that seeks to critically update the key ideas developed around the turn of the century (Kates, 2002).

Another key contribution, and related to the last point in the previous paragraph, is that this study has contributed to updating empirical and theoretical understandings of LGBT+ places in CCT. The existing literature is based primarily on the work of Steven Kates, which in turn focuses on gay villages or ghettos. In geography and sociology the contemporary status and future viability of gay villages are being called into question in light of the post-gay era (Ghaziani, 2014, 2015; Nash, 2013; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014). While the notions of ‘post-gay’ eras or societies have
now been introduced to CCT (Bettany, 2016) studies in this new research area are forthcoming, and the understandings of place in LGBT+ consumers’ lives remains primarily based around the turn-of-the-millennium literature (e.g. Kates, 2002; Haslop et al. 1998). While this study was focused on critically examining and re-conceptualising place consumers, this study does provide some insight into gay villages and other LGBT+ places. The main insight to emerge is that gay villages are certainly changing and contested, but that the present picture (in Manchester at least) appears hazy. While many of the participants in this study were pulling away or detaching from Manchester’s Gay Village, others were vehement in their desire to protect and promote this district. A number of them were caught or moved ambivalently between these two binary opposites. While this study did not specifically theorise these issues, it has pointed to them and toward a more complex, co-constitutive, and co-emergent understanding of gay villages and other LGBT+ places. As Nash and Gorman-Murray (2017) point out, material-semiotic approaches can help move the debate beyond the present binary of de/territorialisation.
5.3.2. Space and Place in CCT

In the literature review it was noted that while recent reviews mention both space and place as conceptual companions (Chatzidakis et al. 2017; Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018), the vast majority of conceptual and empirical work has focused on place rather than space. This study is complicit in this, having chosen to identify the space/place dichotomy but then leave it relatively unchallenged in order to focus on the more specific notion of the place consumer. However, this study did identify a small number of studies that have begun to blur the distinctions between space and place, using them in tandem rather than adopting one and dismissing the other. This study contributes to this nascent discourse. While this study has undoubtedly focused on places (as relatively bounded geographical entities) and place consumers, the analysis has also adopted post-human and materialist ideas which are more commonly associated with space (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018). That is, rather than radically reject place in favour of an alternative spatial theorisation, this study has sought to extend place beyond its humanist and semiotic focus toward the post-humanism and materiality typically associated with space. This accords with the relational tradition in geography, where the distinctions between space and place are often blurred to the point that the terms are interchangeably (Cresswell, 2013; Massey, 2005).
5.3.3. Material-Semiotics in CCT

In Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) the translation and application of material-semiotic ideas has largely drawn from the canon of Actor-Network Theory (e.g. Bajde, 2013; Giesler, 2012; Martin and Schouten, 2014) or assemblage theory (e.g. Thomas et al. 2013; Epp et al. 2014; Canniford and Bajde, 2016). Both of these approaches, which are complementary in many ways, have challenged CCT researchers and enabled them to think about consumer cultures in more post-human, relational, distributed, and contingent formulations (see Arnould and Thompson, 2015). However, the ideas of feminist material-semioticians have remained relatively marginal in the CCT discourse (Bettany, 2015). This study has made a small contribution to this imbalance by drawing on the notions of ambivalence and (to a far lesser extent) figurations whilst demonstrating their utility as productive ways to rethink place consumption. These notions move away from the metaphor of assemblages and helps to overcome some of the limitations of early actor-network formulations. As the oeuvre of Donna Haraway (1991, 1994, 1997, 2003) attests, the choice of metaphor is important because it engenders certain ways of thinking and obscures others (Bettany, 2015; Heterington and Law, 2000; Bastian, 2006). In this study it has been argued that actor-networks and assemblages both have their uses and their limitations, but that thinking in terms of ambivalent actor-networks provides a potent tool to critically interrogate and re-conceptualise place consumers (amongst many other things).

As Canniford and Bajde (2016, p.1) note, “what unites ideas of assemblages, actor-networks and figurations are conceptions of the world as constituted from more or less temporary amalgamations of heterogeneous material and semiotic elements, amongst which capacities and actions emerge not as properties of individual elements, but through the relationships established between them.” Yet as noted in the preceding paragraphs, these concepts should not be conceived of as synonymous or interchangeable because there are also differences between them. Discussing such differences (albeit briefly), this study has contributed a modest and inchoate counter-discourse against the possible homogenisation of this rich intellectual tradition.
While there are certainly many overlaps between the concepts of actor-networks, assemblages, and figurations (Canniford and Bajde, 2016) they are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. A broader contribution of this thesis is to draw attention to the differences between these concepts (even if this study has only addressed a couple of these in detail). Geographers adopting material-semiotic ideas are generally more attentive to the potential differences between the three concepts than CCT researchers have been, producing a rich debate over the utility and limitations of each. Murdoch (2006) opined that actor-network thinking provided a host of benefits, but that assemblage thinking was largely synonymous and added little additional value. Allen (2011) challenged Murdoch’s perspective by arguing that the notion of assemblages differed from the notion of actor-networks in several key ways. Later Müller (2015) proposed that while assemblage thinking and actor-network thinking shared many overlapping concerns, but that there were also a number of (productive) differences and, in contrast to Murdoch (2006) and Allen (2011), proposed the use of both as complementary but also contrasting perspectives. Greenhough (2011) advocated conceptual eclecticism as well, but added Haraway’s notion of figuration into the mix. For Greenhough (2011) assemblage thinking directed attention to the possibilities of (re)assembly, actor-network thinking focused on the conditions necessary for assembly to occur, while figuration emphasises how participants were affected by their involvement in an assembly.
5.3.4. Place Marketing

This study has primarily focused on place consumption, but the ideas developed herein could also be transferred to the sub-discipline of place marketing. Place marketing studies “ways of relating marketable products to real geographical points on the earth’s surface” (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 152), turning places into “place offers, which are commodified and marketed to target audiences.” (Warnaby and Medway, 2013, p.346) Place marketing can pertain to small locations like restaurants or bars, larger areas like cities or regions, and a plethora of neighbourhoods, districts, and streets in-between (e.g. Bennison et al. 2007). A key area of research within place marketing is place branding, which has the twinned objective “to form a “unique selling proposition” that will secure visibility to the outside and reinforce “local identity” to the inside” (Colomb and Kalandides, 2010, p.175).

Place brands raise awareness and interest about a place to external stakeholders like tourists and investors, whilst also making internal stakeholders like residents and business owners more emotionally attached, both of which produce “some form of place competitive advantage” (Warnaby and Medway, 2013, p.346). At the same time, branding a place can be problematic because branding processes attempt to produce a single, clear, and attractive identities for entities which are multiple, hazy, and characterised by positive and negative traits. As Short (1999, p.40) explains in the context of branding cities, “the city is presented in a flattering light to attract investors, promote “development”, and influence local politics. But every bright light casts a shadow. The second discourse involves the identification of the shadow, the dark side that has to be contained, controlled, or ignored.”

The notion of dis/place/d consumers provides a useful complement to this more critical understanding, and resonates with the ‘shadow’ metaphor. Placed consumers are those who experience the insider identity of being at one with a place, while displaced consumers refer to those who are to be “contained, controlled, or ignored” (Short, 1999, p.40). Place consumers can be thought of as the ‘external stakeholders’, those in a position (ostensibly at least) to choose where to
live, invest, or visit. By directing attention to the fluidity between these three subjects, this study would suggest that place marketing move away from viewing the shadow in a negative light and rather see these as resources to mobilise and re-(net)work. The findings in this study suggest that trying to suppress displaced consumers is impossible and is likely to increase tensions. However, it also highlights that placed consumers are co-constituted by their displaced other. Therefore this study suggests that place marketers should work toward a more collaborative (or co-operative) approach, and provides some nascent conceptual tools that may help to initiate this alternative research programme.

Place branding, which “is very much a practitioner-led field” (Therkelsen et al. 2010: 138), generally focuses on producing best-practice on the creation of bright lights and the management of shadowy activities. Gay villages are a useful example of this process. Many cities have sought to promote their gay villages in order to signal that they are progressive, ‘cosmopolitan’ cities (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004), and thus attract more diverse and forward-thinking workers, businesses, and residents (Florida, 2002). However, given that many LGBT+ people are increasingly living and socialising elsewhere (Nash, 2013; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014; Simpson, 2014), this means that (rather paradoxically) gay villages are increasingly ‘sanitised’ in promotional activities as part of efforts to promote them as places for heterosexual tourists to visit (Hughes, 2003, 2006). This semiotic sanitisation also has its material equivalents. Venues with risqué imagery are refurbished, or ‘de-gayed’, become more ‘mainstream’ (Ghaziani, 2014), or heteronormative. Fetish clubs, saunas, and other sexualised spaces are closed or relocated elsewhere so that gay villages can become more ‘family-friendly’ (Atkins, 2013; Simpson, 2014). In other words, “the dark side” of gay villages are “contained” or “controlled”, to use Short’s (1999, p.40) words. This study would advocate for a more open-minded perspective where these ‘shadowy’ aspects of consumption are worked with, rather than against. While conflicts may occur these can result in new choices, opportunities, and compromises.

The present study has highlighted that such branding activities have the effect of enervating the diversity of the Gay Village, and some of what made it attractive and
even necessary to LGBT+ people in the first place. This finding echoes Clegg and Kornburger (2010, p.8), for whom “place branding is inherently political because it always includes a struggle between a brand and its homogenous, silencing effects, and the overflowing, polyphonic reality of people’s interpretations of a place”. Clegg and Kornburger’s (2010) position clearly resonates with the findings of this study, as does Warnaby and Medways (2013, pp.347-8) critique of the “the top-down nature of much place branding activity...in highlighting the commodification of place elements as a conflictual process in which certain groups may be marginalised”. If ambivalent place consumption and dis/place/d consumers are to contribute to place marketing, it is likely to be to this more critical school.

More broadly, thinking of place consumption from an ambivalent perspective attends more to the “overflowing, polyphonic reality” (Clegg and Kornburger, 2010, p.8) of the Gay Village and other LGBT+ places, exploring the multiplicitous enactments that emerge from localised and intersecting actor-networks. According to Henshaw et al. (2016, p.162) there are “growing calls in the literature for bottom-up rather than top-down (and often homogenising) place marketing activities, involving place users (residents, tourists, etc.) rather than just place marketing professionals”. Rather than focusing solely on place branding, the literature on place marketing could develop the notion of place ambivalence instead. Place ambivalence would prompt place marketers to consider the idea that places are contingent compromises that emerge from the struggles between human and non-human participants. This would redirect attention to better understanding these struggles and co-operating with participants to produce compromises that benefited many parties simultaneously- although always being attendant to the displaced consumers and actors as well. This concern with struggles and marginalisation brings place marketing more in line with those geographers (Sibley, 1995; Cresswell, 1996; Valentine, 1993; Philo; 1995) and feminist material-semioticians (Lee and Brown, 1994; Bloomfeld and Vardubis, 1999; Law, 1991; Singleton and Law, 2013; Star, 1991) who are concerned with exclusions, absences, and imbalances in material-semiotic relations and figurations.
The notion of place ambivalence puts struggles, multiplicity, and figurations of human and nonhuman participants at the foreground of analysis. It can therefore provide an alternative to place branding’s emphasis on resolution, singularisation, and human meanings.

The post-humanism of place ambivalence might also be helpful in redressing the balance between meaning and materiality within place marketing. While a growing number of place marketing academics in this area of research recognise the role of materiality in shaping the experience and identity of places (Hanna and Rowley, 2010; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005; Warnaby and Davies, 1997; Warnaby and Medway, 2010; Jones, 2011; Henshaw et al. 2017), place branding practitioners usually focus on images, narratives, and other semiotic associations (Warnaby and Medway, 2013). Place ambivalence moves beyond this semiotic emphasis to consider the ever-shifting materiality of places as well.
5.4. Managerial Contributions

The previous section on place marketing and branding has considered some practitioner applications, with ‘practitioner’ in that context being the marketing managers of cities and regions. This section will focus on the managers of smaller places like venues or nonprofit organisations. While this study will hopefully be insightful in many ways, a key application is to encourage managers to think about place consumers not as discrete decision makers who choose a place based on its superior features (however defined), but rather as networked effects that ‘come to rest’ in certain places that help to resolve the most compromises in their actor-networks.

While managers should continue to design and manage their environments in order to make them more attractive, useful, sociable, and culturally resonant— as the previous CCT literature has suggested— they could also benefit from identifying the various networks that use their places and identify the key struggles within them. Although no place can resolve these struggles entirely, if managers work conscientiously they could identify ways to mitigate conflicts and produce co-operative compromises more readily. For instance, managers might work with other places so that consumers can build their place portfolios more easily and effectively. While this opens up each place to the risk of competition, it also means that a place is more likely to remain a part of an ambivalent network because it does not force actors to make dichotomous choices. Ambivalent actors and dis/place/d consumers thrive with a degree of flexibility and ambiguity. Then again, managers may also wish to identify ways to stimulate conflicting ambivalence in order to change the make-up of their clientele.

Managers could also investigate the placed consumers in their environment as a means to try to identify the displaced consumers who avoid consuming there. If developed further this could be a particularly useful managerial tool, because usually it is almost impossible for managers to identify who is not coming to (or even considering coming to) their places. Managers of nonprofits could benefit from this
technique as well, given that certain stakeholder groups may be difficult to reach and even problematic to identify in the first place.
5.5. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

5.5.1. Limitations and Opportunities Arising from the Methodology

One limitation of the methodology was that the data generation methods in this study were relatively conventional – participant observation with written notes, photography, audio-recorded interviews, and desk research. These methods certainly produced enough data to answer the research questions, but following Law’s (2004) argument that methods enact realities (rather than simply capture them), it could be suggested that these conventional approaches will produce relatively conventional understandings and theorisation. The emergence of Non-Representational Theory (NRT) in CCT (Hill et al. 2014) is a useful methodological approach to push material-semiotic ideas beyond the boundaries of language-based methods like interviews. NRT emerged from geography (Thrift, 2000), so this approach may provide a rich seam of innovations to develop more nuanced, sensory, affective, pre-cognitive, and non-linguistic understandings of space, place, and their interrelationships to one another and to consumption. At this stage NRT remains highly experimental and theoretical, so it is over the next few years that the most innovative work may be produced (before a degree of institutionalisation sets in).

By choosing to study LGBT+ groups this study hoped to expand CCT understandings beyond gay men to consider more of the spectrum of non-heterosexual lifestyles. This aim has been partially achieved – several of the participants in this study identified as lesbian or trans*, and one as asexual. However, it was recognised through the research process that bisexual consumers remained invisible. A couple of the participants also appeared to recognise the invisibility of bisexual people within their groups. This study did not suitably adapt to help encourage bisexual people come forward to participate. It began with an open-ended sensibility of choosing three LGBT+ groups and allowing the diversity of the sample to be relatively emergent. Future research may seek to devise ways to be more selective in order to generate data from less visible groups. The asexual participant only emerged in the data process because she chose to make herself visible. While serendipity is part of all research it is also important to try and find more systematic
ways to draw out more diverse experiences. At the same time, it may be pointed out that more open ended approaches to research may be necessary in order to capture those who do not (want to) fit into existing identity labels and methods of categorisation.

On the note of diverse experiences and open ended approaches; this study chose to use LGBT+ groups as figures to help structure the data generation and analysis. While this enabled the research to progress and produced a rich data set, this methodology did restrict the data to the official events of the group. Further research could seek to build on the ideas in this study but engage more openly in network-tracing, going to whatever groups, events, persons, objects, and other phenomena that this might suggest. While using groups and other semi-coherent figures a priori to organise research is helpful, future research on LGBT+ cultures may seek to identify emergent figures as Bettany and Daly (2008) did. Bettany’s (2016) call to (re)theorise LGBT+ cultures and markets in the post-gay era raises many questions about the key concepts that CCT researchers have used in this context. LGBT+ communities, politics, and places are all undergoing a state of flux and new theoretical understandings are needed in order to grasp (however partially) at their complexity. These theoretical understandings will also necessitate more open-ended research methods. Multi-sited and multi-group ethnographies are a promising start, but perhaps something even hazier will be required. The ANT sensibility of following actors and exploring how they construct their own realities (Latour, 1999, 2005) may be a particularly useful route for CCT researchers interested in this area to take.
5.5.2. Limitations and Opportunities Arising from the Interpretation

The dis/place/d consumer model is limited by its cyclical structure. The cycle is beneficial because it points to the ways that consumers shift between different formations of the consumer subject in a reiterative or performative process (Butler, 1993; Bettany and Daly, 2008). However, this cyclical approach also risks closing off other possibilities. It is likely that there are a number of different ways that place consumers can emerge as subjects, and if future research identifies these they may problematise the cyclical structure. The cyclical structure is also suggestive that the same places are used time and again, which is not the intention. There may be a better way to visually present the same theoretical relationships in more open-ended and uncertain ways.

A key aim of this thesis was to redirect attention away from places as the objects of consumption and toward place consumers as subjects. This over-emphasis on the subject was important to provide the room to consider this concept at length and in detail. However, doing so also risks recreating the very subject-object binary that this study has sought to challenge. Future research must engage with the co-emergent and co-constitutive relationships of place consumers and places of consumption. This study did pay some attention to places as objects of consumption, but the objectives of this research meant that these theoretical threads were left undeveloped and ripe for future theorisation. To move beyond the binary entirely future research might consider focusing on place consumption as a process. Recently Kozinets et al. (2017) adopted a Deleuzian post-human understanding of desire as a force that flows through networks. A similar understanding of place consumption might be useful to sidestep the place/consumer binary altogether (although still explaining when and if these subjects and objects emerge). Thinking of place consumption in this way may also open up fruitful dialogues with the literature on space which has increasingly been understood through fluvial metaphors (Giovanardi & Lucarelli, 2018).

A key limitation of the interpretation offered here is that it did not engage with the notion of space, and it did not challenge the space/place binary in CCT research.
While the critical literature review explored the notion of space in some detail, it was ultimately put aside so that the study could focus on the place literature and the figure of the place consumer within it. This framing was important but does constitute a limitation. Future research may wish to apply ambivalence to the more fluid, material, and pre-cognitive notion of space (Merriman et al. 2012), and consider how the dis/place/d framework could relate to this (if at all). The existing literature has defined place as “consumed space” (Visconti et al. 2010, p.512; Sherry, 1998; Castilhos et al. 2016), which implies that space consumers do not exist. The work of Lucarelli and Giovanardi (2016) has challenged this perspective somewhat, but more research that explores the space-place distinction (and works beyond it) would greatly enrich the CCT discourse. Furthermore, research that focused specifically on the multivariate theorisations of space (e.g. Harvey, 2004; Merriman et al. 2012; Cresswell, 2013) and the possible applications to CCT would also be a useful counterbalance to the existing emphasis on place and humanistic geographical thought. For instance, space could be used to explore how spatial relationships shape consumption and markets in less visible, less conscious, and less static ways. Chatzidakis et al. (2017) have recently defined this area of research as ‘consumption in and of space and place’, research that considers space and place (as well as the in/of distinction) is an important area of development.

Throughout this study alcohol and gender have been recurring motifs. The data analysis and interpretation showed that both were important factors in the place consumption of the participants and the leisure groups that they were members of. The findings chapter described and addressed these factors as and when appropriate, but did not discuss or explicate the theoretical implications of these in any detail. This was because the focus of this study was to critically address the figure of the place consumer and to provide a material-semiotic alternative. However, future research could build on the findings of this study by exploring the role of alcohol in place consumption. To what extent is alcohol an obligatory passage point (Callon, 1986b) during place consumption within certain consumer cultures? Manchester’s Gay Village, a district dominated by drinking establishments, was an actor-network that made alcohol consumption almost obligatory, much to the
frustration of some participants. How does this obligatory status emerge and evolve within actor-networks, and when/where do consumers have agency to resist?

In terms of gender, future research could explore the enduring emphasis on gay men within Gay Villages and how this positions women (lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, or asexual) within networks of consumption. Beyond the LGBT+ context future research may wish to consider how gender affects the processes of dis/placement. For instance, why do trans* or cis women feel out-of-place in certain locations, and how can such displacements be challenged? Yet while gender is undoubtedly important in the present case (and more generally in consumer cultures), it did not feature as the specific focus on analysis because disability, race, and particularly class emerged as important as well. Future research may wish to take the dis/place/d consumer framework into other contexts to help make the experiences of displaced consumers more symmetrical with placed ones.

Finally, in this thesis it was also argued that places have exclusionary and political effects, creating inside/outside distinctions and subsequently insiders and outsiders (Cresswell, 1996). While the inside/outside binary is nearly sacrosanct in phenomenological geography it has been challenged and done away with in relational geography (Massey, 2005). As noted by Cresswell (2013, p.222, emphasis added), the relational ontology suggests that “all places are made in horizontal space by their connections, their role in networks that spread across the globe”, such that “the inside and outside are no longer easy to identify.” This study found that while inside and outside were not easy to identify (such boundaries were mutable and emergent), they had important consequences nonetheless. The findings of this research suggest that all forms of place consumption produce exclusions and imbalances, but future research may wish to challenge this by identifying ways in which places can be constructed in truly inclusive ways. The LGBT+ groups that participated in this study might benefit from such theoretical developments.
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