Brett A. Bumgarner

Mobilizing the Gay Bar: Grindr and the Layering of Spatial Context

Abstract:
The longevity of the gay bar has been a popular subject of media speculation recently, with many predicting their demise due to the proliferation of Grindr and other so-termed GPS-enabled “digital cruising” mobile applications. By rendering legible the homoerotic possibilities of heteronormative spaces, many fear Grindr will simultaneously render the gay bar obsolete. Drawing upon ten months of participant observation conducted within the city of Philadelphia, the notion that these applications threaten to disintermediate the gay bar is problematized through an exploration of the ways that these applications are used in conjunction with or as a means of augmenting the experience of the gay bar. Rather, these applications allow for the layering of both digital and physical social contexts in ways that give rise to new affordances made available only through their symbiotic interaction with the space of the gay bar.