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Sexuality, Governance and Urban Space: the sexual restructuring of Sydney

Dr Jason Hugh Prior

Research Fellow, Centre of Social Theory and Design, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this brief paper is to develop an awareness of the role that sexuality plays in spatial development of our cities as contested terrains, through an investigation of the emerging dynamic relations between homosexual, gay and queer culture, and urban space within Sydney in the 20th and early 21st century, which has seen these evolving cultures move from the peripheries of Sydney's urban space – beyond the pale of acceptability – to playing a key role within the formation of particular environs of the city and its international identity. This investigation is carried out through an analysis of the way in which ideas, beliefs, images, and anxieties about these sexual cultures have been conscripted into processes of governance that shape the urban environment. The paper will be of interest to queer studies, architecture, urban studies, sociology, geography and planning.

INTRODUCTION

Urban environments provide frequent opportunities for spatial contests because of their differentiated social entities which compete for control over material and symbolic resources, encoding these resources with intentions, aspirations, uses and meanings. In this brief paper I explore the role and significance of sexuality, in particular homosexual, gay and queer culture, in the formation of the urban environment within Sydney in the second half of the 20th century and early 21st Century. In carrying out this exploration the paper contributes to a growing awareness of how the sexualisation of urban spaces can be understood as a social product formed out of power relations that exist between people, movements, agencies, institutions and their changing understanding and awareness of sexuality and the role it plays within society. An awareness that first emerged in the 1960s, and more fully since the later 1970s within the work of historians such as Michel Foucault¹. Specifically in relation to Sydney, my work within this paper builds on the insights provided by historians such as Garry Wotherspoon and geographers such as Lawrence Knopp.²

Building on Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' this study proposes a more diffuse and historical understanding of the operation of power relations within society through the diverse structures and processes of state apparatuses such as bureaucracy and the influence of public discourse on authority and control of society.³ In the second half of the 20th century within Sydney the formal governance of urban form was a joint concern of local councils – City of Sydney amongst others – and the State Government through the development application process, which granted or denied consent for "the use of land or any building on that

land for specific habitual purposes"⁴. Their ability to control urban space depended on the gamut of laws surrounding what were perceived to be acceptable sexual conduct, behaviour and practice to inhabit land and buildings, and what was considered disorderly, scandalous, unnatural, unhealthy, and criminal. Laws that were enforced through policing and the judiciary. Laws that were constantly being amended in line with society's changing perceptions and values about sexuality. Within this context the urban environment of Sydney can be understood as a product of the power relations of a dynamic process of discourse, a dynamic balance within a permanently evolving society in which conflicts about sexuality are conceived, escalate and are extinguished; and new sexual truths and norms gain and lose their foothold.

URBAN DECAY AND THE HOMOSEXUAL OTHER⁵

In the post World War II years, Sydney was a city in reconstruction. This reconstruction was guided by the first major attempts at metropolitan planning within the city. When those in authority, and the people they represented, returned their focus to the city following World War II, they saw a neglected city, a city infected, with waning moral values that needed to be controlled. This view reflected an emerging social discourse in which "moralists and newspaper columnists condemned the 'new immorality' [that accompanied the war], implying that social collapse was imminent because of this"⁶. A consequence of these concerns was a call for a return to what were perceived as previous morals, standards and norms. The early metropolitan plan was one tool in an arsenal of land based planning mechanisms that were used by authorities during the post war period to regain

control of a city.⁷ A representation⁸ accompanying the Cumberland plan depicted the vision of reconstruction. It presented a bleak picture of the existing city—overcrowded, polluted and unhealthy inner-city suburbs where factories existed alongside terrace houses, against new orderly planned suburbs unrolling over it. In the vision, a Planner overlooks the unravelling of these new suburbs, behind him stand the occupants for whom this reconstruction is being designed: the white nuclear family and male wage earner that marked the post war 'Holdernist' suburban housing boom.

These post war attempts to protect the city and its population from immorality and decline, were no more evident than in the campaigns aimed at eliminating "the haunts of homosexuals"⁹ Slowly at first then escalating through the 1950s, homosexuality within the public discourse was increasingly seen as a threat – 'cancer'—to the cities stability, and newspapers provided detailed coverage of the proactive vice squad's campaigns to locate and eradicate these homosexual haunts.

The purpose of these campaigns was the dismantling of the growing and organised networks of homosexuals, by destroying the network of places they habitually used, particularly 'hotel bars', 'cafes', 'public lavatories', and 'private residential and flats' in such notoriously perverted areas of the inner city such as Kings Cross. These campaigns provided a sense of hope to a city that many believed was being inundated by "a plague of crime and vice", that was causing families and "suave continentals" within older inner urban areas such as Kings Cross to "retreat [to suburbs further out from the city such as] Double Bay, where they are not yet pestered by deviants and drug addicts".¹⁰ The consequence of these campaigns against spaces that allowed homosexuals to socialise amongst themselves meant that the spaces did not stop functioning, they were forced, instead, to operate clandestinely within the city.

These campaigns against homosexuals in the post-war years were formalised through the introduction for the first time of the term 'homosexuality' – in place of sodomy – into criminal legislation¹¹, and the amendment of the *Disorderly Houses Act 1943*¹² which provided police with new powers to eradicate homosexual establishments. The shift from sodomy to homosexuality within the coding of law represented a symbolic shift in the way in which society was coming to understand homosexuality not just as a practise, but as a personage with its own lifestyle, a lifestyle that was framed within the city's popular discourse as depraved, dangerous and unnatural.

The link between urban decay and homosexuality during this period was founded in part upon a popular belief that spaces in which we live – such as the home – are social structures that result primarily from, and satisfy, normal innate biological sexual drives, impulses and instincts which in their normal state are guided along a path towards the

opposite sex. Their displacement, or the deviation of their flow, lead to a variety of temporary or permanent inversions, aberrations or anomalies. Homosexuality being "the most clearly defined of all sexual deviations"¹³. Whilst temporary sexual inversion from being deprived of the presence of individuals of the opposite sex within such places as the army, boarding school, and prison¹⁴ were of concern, the greatest anxieties surrounding the contribution of homosexuality to urban decay stemmed from a perceived increase within urban contexts of places/institutions that supported the substitution of secondary – homosexual, prostitution etc – far primary contacts –traditional heterosexual family relations. The replacement of heterosexual with homosexual contact, was:

Intimately believed to be weakening ... bonds of kinship, and causing the declining social significance of the family, and making the city non conducive to the traditional type of family, including the rearing of children and the maintenance of the home as the locus of a whole round of vital activities.¹⁵

This led to a belief in the early and mid 20th century that the urban context caused the decay of normal social structure, resulting in the growth of homosexuality.¹⁶

GAYAFICATION OF URBAN SPACE AND POROUS BOUNDARIES¹⁷

From the 1960s the city began to witness a period of considerable change in the expression of sexual diversity within its urban form through the combined forces of multiculturalism, liberalisation, globalisation, and from the 1980s as a response to HIV. During this period homosexual identity became the subject of a series of recurrent battles amongst institutions such as the church, media, the human sciences and government authorities, as well as those whose experiences it sought to control, label, explain, identify and brand. Public support for homosexuality emerged with the formation of a homophile movement similar to those in Europe and North America, and other liberal minded groups within society, which argued for its decriminalisation and depathologisation. In Sydney these movements would be supplanted in the late 1960s by the more forceful gay liberation movements, which called for the legalisation of homosexuality, and sought to construct a holistic homosexual life-style.

The lifestyle of the emerging gay culture provided new opportunities and places that were aimed at allowing an alternative cultivation of the self. One of the first gay institutions that emerged and developed in the late 1960s, and which has played a significant, but generally less visible role, is the gay bathhouse, which was accompanied through the later 1970s by a variety of other establishments such as the backroom. These semi-public domains unlike most of the clandestine spaces that emerged since the 1950 were not just a temporary appropriation of built form, but were specifically

built and designed domains. They offered a fostering environment in which these twentieth century sexual heretics could practice their sexual rites and rituals in a context that was insulated as much as possible from the outside world. To maintain the anonymity of the baths, proprietors left exterior façades unchanged. Beyond these anonymous façades interior domains were cocooned by the blacking out of windows, boarding up of openings, solid walls and bolted doors. What is interesting within these semi-public domains, although the subject of another paper, is the way in which their interior walls, lighting, textures, sounds were designed to create stages which enabled men to desubjectify themselves from the normative sexual subject within the city outside, and engage in self transformative experiences. The presence of these domains within a city that was 'hostile' to them, was enabled through the use of built protective threshold mechanisms, and their visibility to authorities masked by the use of pseudonymous development applications.

These laboratories of sexual experimentation were gradually accompanied in the 1970s by places and events that emerged more fully within the city, such as the transient carnivalesque environment of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and the visibly gay commercial and residential district in and about Oxford Street Darlinghurst. In the late 1980s, the journalist Phillip McCarthy referred to the development of visible gay space within the city as "gayafication"¹⁸. Important to their initial emergence were the confrontations over the policing of homosexual expression at the Gay Mardi Gras in 1978 and a series of police raids on a gay male sex club called Club 80 in the early 1980s. It was in the wake of these public confrontations, and the broader multicultural and liberal agenda, that laws supporting police campaigns to close the city's gay spaces were dismantled, firstly by the positive affirmation of homosexuality through anti-discrimination legislation, and secondly through its decriminalisation¹⁹. A consequence of this change in legal recognition was the transfer of responsibility for the control of homosexual domains from the police as a criminal matter, to local councils as a planning regulatory control function. This transfer of responsibility paved the way in the mid 1980s to the first formal recognition of a development application for an openly gay venue that supported and fostered homo-social relations, and a decade later for the first formal recognition of a development application for a gay sex premises called Bodyline Spa and Sauna. Neither of these formal recognitions were won without some degree of contestation. For example the recognition of Bodyline Spa and Sauna was granted in 1992 through judicial process in the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales following South Sydney City Council's initial denial of consent.²⁰

The rapid emergence and formal recognition of these highly sexualised domains in the late 1980s and early 1990s reflected both the city's growing tolerance to sexual diversity/expression and more

importantly a joint decision by a range of organisations, including government in the wake of HIV, that these domains could provide important sites for the teaching and learning of safe sex practices. This decision depended upon an emerging understanding that sexual conduct and practice did not exceed the social; that sexuality was not something estranged from everyday life, but constructed within society, and that the built environment of sex on premise venues could be crafted and designed to create positive environments for experiential learning processes²¹ that facilitated and enhanced encounters between people, and could shape sexuality. Whilst the importance of sex premises was now being recognised within the city, it is important to note that recognition through the development application process was geographically specific. For example, Bodyline Spa and Sauna's development consent recognised the important role it played in promoting safe and healthy sexuality between men. The decision, however, only recognized its significance to the gay public within the visible gay environ of Darlinghurst.

A consequence of this growing acceptance and recognition of gay culture within the city has been the demise of built and protective thresholds surrounding a broad range of gay and lesbian domains used to insulate them from the city outside, creating more porous boundaries between these domains and the broader spaces of the city. This has been most evident in gay social spaces such as bars opening to the public street front, with security doors and blackened windows discarded. Whilst this paper focuses here on the demise of spatial thresholds within the city, it is important to note that this intermingling is not limited to urban spaces but extended to other aspects of cultural representation. Whilst formerly secluded gay social spaces have opened up, other more highly sexualised domains such as the gay bathhouse have remained more resilient to integration; isolated from the city outside. While the protective thresholds in such establishments as gay bathhouses are no longer required to protect them from detection by the authorities, the thresholds are still used by proprietors to act as a point at which 'undesirables' could be filtered out, so the domain can continue to be an exclusive public domain for the social and sexual explorations of "adult homosexual or bisexual men"²².

As these thresholds dissolved in the 1990s safety and assimilationist fears arose within many of the establishments giving rise to proactive campaigns by venue proprietors and event organisers to exclude non-gay identifying people from clubs and events. For example the all night gay and lesbian Mardi Gras party, which follows the annual parade, became so popular in the mid 1990s that organisers began to restrict access to members who were required to identify as gay or lesbian, and transgender. Whilst previously these spaces had operated clandestinely outside the law, their new location within the bounds of the law now made

them targets for legal challenges which questioned their right to exclude and select patrons. For example a 1997 Equal Opportunity Tribunal ruling declared that the proprietors of a lesbian night club, were required to give a formal apology to a man on the basis of sex discrimination because they had refused him access to the club²³. In the light of these challenges proprietors like Craig Weedon of Bodyline Spa and Sauna applied for exemption from the Anti-discrimination Act that would allow gay sex on premises venues to "refuse entry to women and heterosexual men" based upon the argument that it was important to have places "where homosexual men felt safe, given the level of violence against males in the community"²⁴.

THE GAY/QUEER METROPOLIS AND THE DEGAYING OF DARLINGHURST

The recognition of the benefits and importance of the gay urban infrastructure – of clubs, sex premise, etc – that had emerged within the environs of Darlinghurst by the 1990s had reached far beyond the formal governance processes within the city, into the growing world of cosmopolitan gay tourism where Sydney, and more specifically its gay epicentres of Darlinghurst and increasingly Newtown were being recognised as "most important gay metropolis outside of north America and Europe"²⁵. This process that was being helped in part by a growing entrepreneurialism towards gay culture within Sydney, from both private business and government saw benefit in providing promotional and financial support for annual festivals such as The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras as a means to visibly distinguish Sydney as a unique, culturally rich and tolerant tourism and lifestyle destination²⁶. By the last decade of the 20th century, and in line with the city's growing entrepreneurial spirit the festival was not only being supported for its cultural and political significance, but was as a key source of the city's tourism income; as an important factor to be taken into consideration in the city's strategic agenda to become a place of global significance and choice – an agenda that would be formalised within the city's 2005 metropolitan planning strategy²⁷.

At the same time that Sydney was developing global recognition as a gay metropolis, a broader understanding began to emerge within the city about what constituted the city's gay community, and its geographical domain within the city. In the 1990s articles began to appear in the gay press (and academic writings) calling for the acknowledgment of other gay publics beyond the highly visible one within the environs of Darlinghurst.²⁸ As one writer on the subject proposed:

There are a variety of 'gay communities' and Oxford Street [Darlinghurst], whilst the most public (and publicised) ... is not the only one to promote a strong sense of identity²⁹.

The growing awareness of these broader communities were reflected in ongoing debates within

such organisations as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Community Centre about whom it sought to represent; one nomenclature which was adopted during this time to identify these communities within Sydney was the term 'Queer'³⁰. Throughout the later 20th and early 21st century the vision of a queer Sydney that stretched from its core to its fringe became a key ordering principle within the relocation and placement of once Darlinghurst centric gay and lesbian institutions to Newtown/Erskineville which were seen to be more central to this broader queer metropolis (e.g. Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Community Centre, Mardi Gras, Lesbian space project, Gay and Lesbian Counselling Project etc.). This attempt to acknowledge and cater for a broader series of communities within greater metropolitan Sydney became the central political message of the Mardi Gras in 2001. The Mardi Gras poster for that year showed a panorama of Sydney from its centre moving out over the Cumberland plain draped in the colours of the Rainbow Flag – a symbol of the gay community – emblazoned with the slogan, "2001: Sydney Gay + Lesbian Mardi Gras: Out There: Everywhere"³¹. This growing understanding of the diversity of queer culture operating across Sydney, has also been seized upon by entrepreneurs who have sought to openly develop gay infrastructure – gay sex on premises venues, nightclubs and so on – which exist within Darlinghurst, in other locations across the city. These attempts have been met with both confrontation and success within various local council planning processes³².

A key consequence of this shifting focus of gay organisations/institutions from Darlinghurst to Newtown/Erskineville has led to a growing identification of the environs of Newtown/Erskineville as the new heart of Sydney's queer culture. As one recent article from Sydney's *Star Observer* argued "Newtown's King Street is set to overtake Darlinghurst's Oxford Street as the epicentre of gay Sydney"³³. Running parallel with this elevation of Newtown as the potentially new 'Darlinghurst' has been a growing fear of the 'degaying' of Oxford St, Darlinghurst, which was accentuated in the early 21st century by a spate of venue closures along the strip³⁴. As a consequence of these degaying concerns a series of formal government actions and community campaigns have emerged which have called for measures to preserve Oxford Street as a gay and lesbian precinct. Recently in a resolution on the redevelopment of the City of Sydney's Oxford Street properties the Council resolved to:

In conjunction with other levels of government, local residents and businesses and the gay and lesbian community, ... investigate additional strategies to retain and enhance: (1) existing long established Oxford Street retail businesses [many of which cater to the gay and lesbian community], and (2) the Oxford Street area as a significant gay and lesbian precinct.³⁵

CONCLUSION

Through this brief exploration of the emergence and development of homosexual, gay and more recently queer domains within Sydney in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century this study provides insight into some of the real forces at play within urban society: the complex interactions of power, domination and resistance that allow us to understand and make sense of the role that sexuality as an evolving and developing set of truths, beliefs, and cultures plays in the constitution of urban space. In concluding there are several aspects of this investigation that are worth noting.

First it is important to note how diverse are the range of social forces that have played a part in the transformation of Sydney's sexual landscapes since the post World War II period. At a city level these include the way in which: understandings and perceptions of sexual identities have been conscripted into formal processes of urban spatial governance – urban planning and policing – that are aimed at sustaining perceived ways of life; sexual subcultures, individuals and proprietors have managed to construct clandestine urban thresholds that protect domains from the dominant sexual encoding of space and allow the emergence of spaces that are encoded with their own sexual aspirations, intentions, means and uses; the open contestation over sexual visibility within urban space through festivals and demonstrations such as those surrounding Mardi Gras and the club 80 raids were used to express social and political positions. More generally the paper identifies how

these forces in conjunction with broader social forces such as the emergence of gay cosmopolitan tourism, HIV, globalisation and entrepreneurial governance and multiculturalism have over the last six decades contributed to the rapidly changing sexual landscape within Sydney.

In exploring the impact of these various forces the paper identified three key shifts in the way in which sexuality has been expressed within Sydney's urban space which I will briefly identify. The first emerged in the decades following World War II. During this period, in the interests of dominant social power, all spaces within the city became sexually encoded, with non-heterosexual spaces and experiences encoded as sexually depraved, dangerous and uncontrollable, and a catalyst for urban decay. Secondly in the 1970s-1980s there was a shift from a largely hidden, deviant homosexual coterie – made up of myriad clandestine spaces – to a more distinctly visible gay community with its own territories, institutions and events within specific parts of the inner city, in particular Oxford St, Darlinghurst. Thirdly a shift which has seen Oxford St, the epicentre of gay culture in the 1980s enter into a process of degaying which has been coupled with the distribution and emergence of territories and institutions within other parts of the city, in particular Newtown, which are seen to service a broader queer community within greater metropolitan Sydney than that which has become identified with the gay environs of Darlinghurst.

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Contesting brutalism in Australia: Robin Boyd's high-rise commissions

Peter Raisbeck and Christine Phillips

Department of Architecture, University of Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Australian Brutalism is a contested terrain in historiographic terms. Brutalism in Australian architecture is largely associated with the work of 1970s architects such as Barland, Gunn, Andrews Taglietti, Madigan and Jackson. However the emergence of Brutalism occurred earlier and is also evident in the work of Robin Boyd, who, just prior to his death in 1971, described the fact that there was no real Brutalism in Australian architecture. In light of this paper will examine Boyd's high-rise tower projects, after the split with Grounds from 1962 onwards, in order to explore his relationship to the New Brutalist ethic. These tower projects are significant in Boyd's oeuvre because, as Hamman notes, Boyd saw this type as liberating him from domestic scale commissions. These tower projects include: Lend Lease Rocks Redevelopment scheme (1961), the Carnich Towers Project at 60 Clarendon Street East Melbourne (1969–1971), Office 340 Albert Street East Melbourne (1971), Melbourne 2000 development proposal, Menzies College first scheme (1965). Using these projects we examine the emergence, dissemination and reception of Brutalism in Boyd's work. Banham's polemical question and title of his book *"The New Brutalism: Ethic of Aesthetic"?* is used to gauge Boyd's own view of Brutalism as suggested in his book *the Puzzle of Architecture* (1965). Hence, the paper better position's Boyd in relation to the international discourse of his time, as well as seeking to clarify the sources and character of Australian Brutalist architecture.

Robin Boyd is best known for his architectural writings. His books *Victorian Modern* (1947), *Australia's Home* (1952) and *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) were instrumental in steering the way that we view Australia's past architectural development. "His categories of styles and periods have created the framework by which we recognise our past, while the vitality of his descriptions of old buildings alone singles him out as a unique commentator".¹ Yet little investigation has been given to Boyd's high-rise tower commissions, which offers a different picture of Boyd. Indeed, Boyd himself appears to have thought that his designs for towers would signal to the world his architectural credentials.

Moreover, this paper will examine a selection of these designs in order to explore their relationship to English New Brutalism, contesting the current historiographic terrain surrounding Boyd's later projects. The paper will specifically focus on the following works: Lend Lease Rocks Redevelopment scheme (1961), the Carnich Towers Project at 60 Clarendon Street East Melbourne (1969–1971), Office 340 Albert Street East Melbourne (1971), Melbourne 2000 development proposal and the first scheme for Menzies College (1965). Given Boyd's interest in the high rise tower type this paper is based our search for examples of this type amongst the drawings and documents of the Grounds Romberg and Boyd Archive at the State Library of Victoria.²

In Australia Brutalism is a history waiting to be written. Jennifer Taylor has provided an initial survey of possible Australian Brutalist works in *Australian Architecture Since 1960* (1986) and conference papers have begun to examine the topic in closer detail, such as Joseph Buch's 'Beyond Brutalism: Another imported style vs team ten theoretical ideas'.³ However there is still a cloudy haze over how Australian Brutalism might be defined. How did it relate or differ to English New Brutalism and where is Boyd's work positioned within this? As noted above, this paper seeks to begin to tackle this complex problem through specific analysis of Boyd's high-rise and tower proposals.

Recent Boyd scholarship, whilst touching on Boyd's relationship to Archigram and Metabolism has not tested his work or positioned it against New Brutalism. This is despite the fact that in the early to mid 1960s the post CIAM landscape appears to be characterised by an intense ferment. During this period stylistic genres of New Brutalism, Neo-Liberty, and Metabolism and the Neo Futurism of Archigram all seemed to circulate in the international architectural arena. For this reason the paper begins by elucidating a clearer understanding of the distinction between the terms 'Brutalism' and 'New Brutalism' in order to ascertain any possible link between the work of the English New Brutalists and Boyd's later works. It will also understand the term 'ethic' according to Oxford Dictionary definition where it is described as "a set of moral