

THE GAY CITY IN HISTORY

David Higgs

Of course, there has never been a Gay City in history any more than there has been a City of God. Both have been longed for, intensely, by different kinds of people, or the same people at different times. They are ideals. However my title is an allusion to Lewis Mumford's famous 1961 book in which he described how urban spaces changed over time in different parts of the world as a result of evolving social forms.¹ He wrote about the earliest cities as sanctuary, village and stronghold, the ancient city with slaves, sewers and circuses, turning to the medieval European city dotted with nunneries and clustering around the cathedral and markets, the baroque city with its princely palaces, courts and vistas, and on to the industrial city which was being destroyed by the automobile and flight to suburbia.

I hasten to add that Lewis Mumford did not write a word in his book about homosexuals, let alone queer sites. No more did Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) in his *The Reasons for the Greatness and Splendour of Cities*. Nor did an erstwhile professor of geography at Leeds University in an interpretation of the city in Europe which was influential in the 1950s and 1960s.² Nothing too in a 1960 general discussion of the spatial arrangements of cities before modernisation.³ A more recent survey of cities from 1450 to 1750 mentioned that male prostitution was rare, citing a study of Seville, and spoke of the burning of two sodomites in 1750 in central Paris.⁴ A survey of urban Europe from 1500 to 1700 had no reference to homosexual users of city space.⁵ Residential patterns of religious minorities like Jews or Protestants or Catholics have been inscribed on some city maps. Urban geographies of ethnic districts of foreigners have occasionally been compiled, like the map of nineteenth-

¹Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1961), 657.

²Robert E Dickinson, *The West European City: A Geographical Interpretation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

³Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City, Past and Present* (Glencoe Il: Free Press, 1960).

⁴C R Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City 1450-1750* (London: Longman, 1995).

⁵A Cowan, *Urban Europe 1500-1700* (London: Arnold, 1998).

century Smyrna with its Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Moslem quarters.⁶

In many past works by urban geographers and historians there were no references to points or sites within the city where the opportunity for homosexual encounters existed. For instance, city parks are noted without mention of how they were traditional sites for gay cruising. Public baths existed in many places since antiquity but their utilisation by homosexuals was not discussed. In much normative writing by geographers and historians about past city forms homosexuals are simply non-existent, erased, and to that extent are victims of a *de facto* homophobia.⁷ Only relatively recently, in Canada since 1969, have visible districts emerged where there was a "turf mentality" among gay men reflecting patterns of residential clustering, or economic activity.

Since the 1980s significant progress was made in the historical geography of gay urban territories.⁸ Gay urban histories appeared dealing with Sydney, Rio de Janeiro, New York, and Philadelphia among other cities and more are in preparation. Modern gay experience has been mainly urban. It has been argued that age structured, gender stratified and egalitarian homosexual relationships have existed at all times and in all cultures in the past so that urbanisation, industrialisation and capitalism are not nearly as crucial to gay identity as sometimes claimed.⁹ Be that as it may, it is now timely to mesh together the two story lines about the gay city in the West: on the one hand that of urban histories and on the other the social identities that predated a politicized modern lesbian gay bisexual transgendered and queer movement.¹⁰

For reasons that I shall return to let me say at the outset that I refer primarily to gay men rather than lesbians as I talk of the "gay" city although of course sometimes the label gay has been used by modern lesbians. Wonderful studies of twentieth-century lesbian Buffalo and Toronto have shown us how lesbian urban history can be written.¹¹ They also made clear the specificity of the *genre* and its relations to the history of women. The

⁶Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, "Les Européens et leur implantation dans l'espace urbain de Smyrne (1750-1850)" in *Les étrangers dans la ville, minorités et espace urbain du bas Moyen Age a l'époque moderne*, ed J Bottin and D Calabi (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1998), 66.

⁷Daniel Borrillo, *L'Homophobie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).

⁸See for instance the maps in Richard Parker, *Beneath the Equator: Cultures of Desire, Male Homosexuality and Emerging Gay Communities in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁹S O Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁰B D Adam, *The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1995).

¹¹E L Kennedy and M D Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); B L Ross, *The House that Jill Built: a Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

major contribution of lesbians and other women to scholarship is apparent in recent work on the geography of sexuality.¹² Everybody knows, and especially gay men, that much change in attitudes towards patriarchal norms in the developed world since 1950 resulted from feminist and lesbian activism.

When I say for convenience the word gay I am aware that in earlier times men coming to orgasm with other males would not use such a label of sexual identity. Homosexual as a word was only coined in 1867, albeit before the word heterosexual. Older words, however, like *cinaedus* in Latin, *fanchonos* in Portuguese, mollies, fruits or pansies in English, *tante* in French, and so on can be discussed more fully in the contexts of their currency, as shown in a study of medieval Spanish and Portuguese.¹³ Language can construct identities as well as exclusions.¹⁴ Homosexuals have to be named before they can be mapped either in their encounters, residences or sites of sociability.

The definition of Gay Space in the writings of the Canadian environmental planner Gordon Brent Ingram is that it is terrain strategically crucial for the maintenance, cohesion and survival of urban homosexual communities.¹⁵ When such communities or subcultures existed as self-identified collectivities in the past they for centuries were considered by the authorities to be covens of sinners or criminals. The Enlightenment propagated ideas of egalitarian rights. In France from the nineteenth century on there was fitful, uneven toleration of adult sexual practices in private while policing as indecent any public affirmation of sexual dissidence. Finally legal rights came into existence to satisfy a collective pressure to be visible from lesbian and gay activists and their sympathisers.¹⁶ That struggle, starting with Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), had a particular urban focus as in Florence Tamagne's study of European homosexuality between the World Wars which contrasted three capitals: Berlin, London and Paris.¹⁷ Figuratively speaking for a long time one could explore the gay city in history only at night and as a network of places for furtive encounters, then in twilight during much of the twentieth century with a fitful toleration of some

¹²David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1995). See particularly the bibliography, 325-53.

¹³J Blackmore and G S Hutcheson, *Queer Iberia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹⁴S H Riggins, ed *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997).

¹⁵Gordon Brent Ingram, A M Bouthillette and Y Retter, eds *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997).

¹⁶David Rayside, *On the Fringe: Gays and Lesbians in Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁷Florence Tamagne, *Histoire de l'homosexualité en Europe: Berlin, Londres, Paris 1919-1939* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

institutions that served a public, and on to the "out" gay city since decriminalization of consenting adults in private who could parade at noon with rainbow flags in the Third Millennium.

When adults affirmed a shared sensibility, an "ethnogenesis" so to speak, and the desire to congregate together in some way, from a homosocial picnic to a sexual bath-house, the basis for an urban social history emerged. Gay historiography is a recent development since only in the last twenty years of the twentieth century was a sufficiently large corpus of historical production available to permit comparisons to be drawn of different modes of investigation or interpretations over time. It also involves some consideration of what proportion of the urban male population could be identified as "gay" and what proportion of lesbians among women. We can keep the hypothesis in mind that the conditions of modern urban life may cause more children to develop as lesbians and gays than was the case in the past, just as we can recall the argument that lesbians and gays existed in all societies and have, as children, similar traits of gender inappropriate behaviours.¹⁸

Let me say that I adhere to the modern "partner model" which takes co-resident egalitarian relationships on a long-term basis to be the notional building blocks of gay society, and hence the ability to imagine a gay city that is not evanescent. The partner model is moreover the closest in its dynamics to the modern heterosexual nuclear family where both husband and wife work, and is perhaps the most widely acceptable to the heterosexual majority. A US survey noting non-family households such as roommates and friends living together found they comprised only 1.7 per cent of all households in 1970, but it grew to 4.5 per cent in 1990 and to 5 per cent in 1995.¹⁹ Certainly not all such households were comprised of gays and lesbians, but their numbers among those totals were in all likelihood rising. Co-habiting gay couples in 2001 constitute probably no more than a third of all exclusively homosexual men in North America. This contrasts with the 64 per cent of all Canadian adults who reported in 2000 they are in a loving relationship.²⁰ The emergence of modern forms of long term male-male couples who live together and who share and control a domestic space, (and sometimes offspring) was often resisted in the prescriptive literature. Kinsey in his 1948 report flatly stated that "Long term relationships between two males are notably few".²¹

¹⁸F L Whitam and R M Mathy, *Male Homosexuality in Four Societies: Brazil, Guatemala, the Phillipines, and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 32-67.

¹⁹*Globe and Mail*, 1996, A17.

²⁰Murray Campbell, "100% Canadian" *Globe and Mail* (30 December 2000) A13.

²¹A C Kinsey, W B Pomeroy and E E Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Philadelphia:Saunders, 1948), 633.

The adoption of this "virtually normal"²² model has been questioned.²³ Many contemporary males seek same-sex pleasures but do not aspire to be in a co-resident couple or to identify themselves as gays. There were many more in the past before the political campaigns for gay rights during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Not only Nietzsche railed against "this wretched contentment in pair!... This one went out like a hero in quest of truths and eventually he conquered a little dressed-up lie. His marriage he calls it."²⁴ A common Canadian pattern in the twentieth century and before was for a man to marry a woman and have children while having covert sexual adventures with other men unknown to the wife or offspring, just as many lesbians married men. Some divorced individuals as well as some gay intellectuals praise the solitary freedoms and narcissism lauded by the late Quentin Crisp. Others extol as liberating communal promiscuous sexuality (bath houses, leather houses, leather cliques, rest rooms, parks and miscellaneous fetishists). They are dismissive of the domesticated partner model as restrictive and dull.

Historical sources rarely allow us to investigate the same question of partnerships in the past. Co-resident same-sex partners were probably much rarer, or perhaps existed in different forms, as between members of a religious order, or between live-in unmarried servants, or between co-workers who shared lodgings. What services lay behind the handsome legacy to his major-domo by a bachelor nobleman in Paris in a will made two years before his death in 1863? Most of his bequests were to relatives but he left a substantial sum of money to his most trusted employee together with all his own clothes and linens as well as his watches and all his personal jewellery. This might be a last gesture of appreciation for a trusted employee, or it could have been a farewell to a lower-class lover with whom he lived under the same roof for years.²⁵ Around 1930 when he was thirty two years old, Montague Glover met a good-looking Cockney boy aged about seventeen. For more than fifty years they lived together as professional gentleman (Glover was an architect) with his manservant/companion. The photographs of Ralph Hall, as well as of other working-class men, and a box of correspondence sold at auction after the death of the younger man enabled James Gardiner to illustrate in a

²²A Sullivan, *Virtually Normal. An Argument About Homosexuality* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

²³Micheal Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans Walter Kauffman (New York: Viking, 1966), 70.

²⁵David Higgs, *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France: the Practice of Inegalitarianism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987), 234-6.

remarkable way aspects of homosexual life in mid-twentieth-century Britain.²⁶

Gay urban histories make reference to the efforts of activists to establish institutions, the emergence of self-identifying populations, and the existence of co-resident gay couples, depending on the location of the city or town involved. This calls for a discussion of the residential patterns, cruising spaces, homosociability [i.e. non genital association of homosexuals] for both singles and couples. Those patterns could have class overtones. Mumford wrote of "the over-concentration of upper-class housing that so often leads to the toleration of urban disorder in the remoter districts of a town."²⁷ Until the quite recent past the "remoter districts" were once favoured for taverns with gay patrons and parks were for whores but also male hustlers as well as non-venal gay cruising. Conversely they could be in central but non-residential districts. The celebrated Letros gay bar in Toronto was located on Queen Street East because in the 1960s the Business District was deserted at night. Clients were not likely to be seen by heterosexuals who knew them as they slipped into the doorway and down the steps to the underground bar. In cities before 1900 the closest thing to an incipient gay district would be that where respectable denizens would not be encountered at night. In the United States it has been said that gay identity is skewed in terms of class, race and gender. "[I]t is easier, economically and otherwise, for middle-class white males to identify and live as openly gay people than it is for women, non-whites, and non-middle-class people."²⁸

The gay child only gradually comes to recognize that his sexual urges are different from those of other boys, and then comes to understand social realms either quicker or slower depending on how he is guided or discovers that information. There is a vast literature on the psychological costs of that development and the stresses generated by the repression of sexuality. The adolescent or young man may become sexually active and may then move into the core of homosociability—go and live and even work in the ghetto—or position himself in greater or lesser proximity to it.

The larger the modern city the greater the range of information dispersed particularly in the capitalist West. A Toronto gay teenager in 2001 who sees the flyer for the annual sale of gay pornographic videos distributed with the free newspaper *Xtra!* which can be picked up at distribution boxes throughout the city will understand the existence of a range of sexualities and behaviours not all of which he imagined before he started to read. If he searches the Internet for a suggestive item—say gay men or twink—he will find literally hundreds or thousands of gay pornographic sites, and strings

²⁶James Gardiner, *A Class Apart: the Private Pictures of Montague Glover* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992).

²⁷Mumford, *The City in History*, 322.

²⁸L Knopp, "Gentrification and gay neighbourhood formation in New Orleans: a case study," in A Gluckman and B Reed, eds (New York: Routledge, 1997), 46.

of identifiers that may suggest additional searches. And as he reads the articles and want ads in *Xtra!* he will be given information on locations and personalities which was not available to his forequeers in Toronto. Sex on a screen or a mobile telephone can be anywhere in the wired city; however the bar, park or ravine is a locality in urban geography.

As we re-read Mumford and other historians of city forms in the distant past together with works on gay history we can better understand the evolution of the city and the place of gay pleasures in it.²⁹

The prestige of classical learning meant that ancient evidence of homosexuality was part of the educated Christian world view. Many a young Latin scholar recognised in Virgil's pastoral—and hence not urban—poems his first encounter with a same sex love triangle, somewhat mangled in translation:

The shepherd Corydon had lost his heart to the beautiful Alexis.
But Alexis was his master's favourite: there was no hope for
Corydon.³⁰

Gide called his 1922 discussion of male homosexuality *Corydon*. Caravaggio's fifteenth-century models paid homage to enduring classical poses as much as California beef-cake physique photographs from the 1950s. The arcades of the Roman Coliseum in the heart of the Italian capital were a notorious cruising venue in the 1960s.

The prestige of historicity leading back into a pagan world could drape discussions and study of male homosexual acts between dominant males and adolescents. Had not the Emperor Hadrian been forty years older than his beloved Antinous? The statue of the drowned (130 CE) Bithnyian lover had been set up in many cities on the order of the grieving Emperor as a public imperial memorial. Since the nineteenth century much progress was made in expanding the archeological evidence available. This showed that one could be gay in the ancient city within unequal age and status combinations.³¹

Many historians of urban processes distinguished between preindustrial and industrial cities, and how the latter might transform into post-industrial forms when services displaced manufacturing in the local economy. Together with economic activities, the population size of cities affected the likelihood of opportunities for male homosexuality. About the closest concept of adult sexual identities current prior to 1800 was the idea that obviously "feminine" men or "mannish" women were somehow a kind of third sex. They were visible from their sex-inappropriate mannerisms.

²⁹See J R Ackerly, *My Father and Myself* (London: Bodley Head, 1968) and Micheal Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford, 1996).

³⁰Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim, /delicias domini, nec, quid speraret, habebat. Virgil, *The Pastoral Poems (the Eclogues)* The Latin Text with Translation by E V Rieu (London: Penguin, 1949), 30-7.

³¹Craig A Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

Adolescent boys before marriage were known sometimes to find genital satisfaction in experimentation with each other. If they were without the protection of older men, like fathers or brothers, they were desirable *faute de mieux* penetrable sexual objects for adult males under certain circumstances, as was commonplace in fifteenth-century Florence.³² There some passers-by recognized what a modern scholar revealed to us about the Ponte Vecchio: it "teemed with men and boys involved in sodomy" and at least fifty individuals who worked on the bridge were in trouble with the authorities between 1478 to 1502.³³

Larger cities offer an ever-widening range of possible encounters. Two major approaches to the study of urbanisation can be identified. One is the Central Place System as a concept to explain how cities provided more services than those available in adjacent towns or smaller urban clusters. This central space system is propitious to gay locales like parks, baths, or battlements for cruising. A second perspective is to look at Urban Network Systems, where cities grew because they are part of a human or economic chain: an example would be ports for shipping the products of a hinterland. The national capital or leading regional city may display concentrations of elite residents with servants and other dependent forms of employment. The network city may provide work for specialized categories of workers like sailors, drovers or porters, and could attract new residents who fixated on such partners.³⁴

Both sets of cities could support total institutions like prisons or galleys, or barracks, monasteries or schools which brought together large numbers of young males without women. A city garrison provided soldiers some of whom were ready for homosexual activities as well as the maintenance of absolutist or state authority. Gay clergy preferred central city locations with a fluctuating congregation and passers by who provided more opportunities for pick-ups than those available to the parish priest in a small place. Churches could serve in some locations for trysts. Hirschfeld noted a missionary in Berlin c 1894 who sexually touched boys behind the pulpit, the organ and also in the sacristy.³⁵

The number of large cities has grown throughout the world, and the number of megapolises is expected to accelerate in the Third Millennium. The smallest of the forty largest cities in Europe from East to West in 1750 began at a lower threshold of 50,000 inhabitants, while in 1850 it had doubled to 108,000. By 1950 the lower threshold for the top forty was more than half a million: 675,000. The smallest of the forty largest cities in 1950 had the same population as the biggest two centuries earlier. Two cities always remained at the head of the list over the centuries since 1750: London was the biggest European city and Paris second.

³²Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*.

³³Ibid, 186.

³⁴Steven Zeeland, *Military Trade* (New York: Harrington, 1999).

³⁵Magnus Hirschfeld, *Le Troisième sexe - Les homosexuels de Berlin*, deuxième édition corrigée (Lille: Cahiers Gay Kamp, 1993), 18-19.

Urban dwellers steadily increased as a proportion of the European, and indeed world, populations since 1600. This was not necessarily linked to innovative economic activity: both Madrid and Moscow grew mightily from 1600 to 1800. In the Americas once settlement started in earnest, the early towns grew into cities. Mortality rates among residents fell in the big European cities especially after 1870. In those towns the numbers of unmarried young men also expanded in the general population.

Economic factors affect the social history of men engaging in same-sex activities just as they do that of women. Conditions of employment, wealth, living quarters all greatly affect the possibility for expressing homosexuality. It can be said that: "... European cities had almost a dual structure; a permanent cadre of inhabitants and a substantial floating group of recent immigrants, temporary residents, and transients."³⁶

Males hoping for sexual encounters with other men are attentive to sites of sociability and fun, and the mood changes caused by alcohol. In eighteenth-century Paris there were notorious drinking places in the Porcherons (Trinity quarter) and in the faubourgs Saint-Martin or Saint-Antoine where the *double-entendres* and jokes might make a gay environment for the *chevaliers de la manchette*. Workmen found recreation in the growing alcoholisation of leisure in the nineteenth century. A tavern was open to clients with money in their purse but also to enemies and censors of those who sought same-sex encounters. During the twentieth century the numbers of bars increased in all the cities in this essay. In New York, Chicago and San Francisco there was a sharp rise in numbers of obviously gay bars in the 1960s. For heterosexuals the most fundamental unit in European social history was the family, and before 1900 most people before they married lived either with their parents and siblings, or their relatives. This was particularly true in southern Europe where adolescents were less likely to leave home to work before marriage than those in northern Europe. For some gay men fleeing family disapproval, however, there was a desire to live where they might find their like. They might dwell in a looser relationship with distant kin, or with employers or share a bed in a rooming house. The luxury of the "tiny urban households of the present" was simply unfordable.³⁷ Larger upper-class households had various male servants while lower-class houses had lodgers who were often not consanguine with the family. Modern standards of broadly based privacy for intimate behaviour were impossible in the European city before the explosion of housing in the nineteenth century. Moreover the lack of tapped water or individual toilets pushed people in tenements or shared housing to encounter neighbours in shared facilities. Children were often in the streets, the traditional arena of "urban folklore" with its festivals of local patron saints and other processional and carnivalesque occasions.

³⁶P M Hohenberg and L H Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1994* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 96.

³⁷Hodenberg and Lees, *Urban Europe*, 66.

The 1920s saw a growing list of descriptive discussions of same sex sexual encounters. "Willy", the exploitative French journalist who encouraged Colette to introduce a lesbian element into her *Claudine* stories, himself produced in 1927 a work called *The Third Sex*³⁸ which, under a protective cover of sarcasm and witticisms about "ephèbes" and "messieurs-dames," provided names and addresses for what he called a "tour des curieux" in male homosexual Paris.

Attempts to propose a tentative dating scheme for the open elaboration of a gay and lesbian urban "subculture" points to the "Roaring Twenties" for rapid progress then followed by a sharp political reaction (eg Berlin). In the 1960s there was a surge of agitation as a time of increasing legal decriminalization of consenting adults engaging in private same-sex acts. They were permitted in Sweden from 1944, and in Canada since Bill C-150 which received third and final reading in the Federal House of Commons on May 14th, 1969.

We need to look back into the social history of male homosexuality in its urban spatial contexts before and after the onset of this legal "visibility". A question to bear in mind is whether the gay circuits in new world cities were more changeable than those in the old. Urban history and social history in general records change to which the day to day actors are often oblivious. For instance, black-white gay couples were much rarer in San Francisco in 1940, when approximately one per cent of the population was Afro-American, than in 1990, when that percentage had risen to fifteen per cent. Each contrast and reference can be specific in a particular city as well as serving to elaborate gay urban history in general.

Indeed an "economic" understanding of gay sexual behaviour even outside of prostitution has been noted by various writers.

Of all the different types of masculine sexual behaviour, homosexuality is undoubtedly the one whose functioning is most strongly suggestive of a market, in which in the last analysis one orgasm is bartered for another. The key institutions of homosexual life are initially the 'pick-up' spots: bars, saunas, cinemas, specialized restaurants and public parks.³⁹

What has been called "community morphogenesis" can best be mapped in a city from the locations of such businesses as well as outdoor cruising areas which are often interspersed with unrelated ones. In 1989 central Prague Wenceslaus Square offered to the gay tourist and also the locals opportunities for encounters, either near the Café de l'Europe or at a more grubby snack bar, or even in the luxuriously snobby setting of the nearby

³⁸Willy [pseud], *Le Troisième sexe, introduction de Louis Esteve* (Paris: Paris Editions, 1927).

³⁹M Pollak, "Male Homosexuality—or happiness in the ghetto" in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, eds P Aries and A Bejin (New York: Oxford, 1985), 44.

Bar-T.⁴⁰ In the 1980s Palermo, capital of Sicily, still had nothing like a "gay" bar or a "gay" discothèque but for more than two thousand years youths could be met who thought themselves "doubly male" because they not only aspired to have sex with women but did so with men. So a guide could recommend strolling at the Villa Bonano in front of the Norman Palace and in the Favourite's park behind the Hippodrome, and so forth, but also stress the ambiguities of definitions and sex roles. Places at one moment might be "too full of families" but at others magical cruising sites in Sicilian nature.⁴¹ In Milan in the 1980s the park near the fortifications of the Venice Gate was a well-known area for gay men, transvestites, and foreign migrants to cruise looking for sexual release.⁴²

To the extent that these published accounts gave a sense of situations and locations for sexual activities, they defined a potential gay space in the city. Historians found that the tabloid press from the 1940s and 1950s and earlier is a rewarding source to identify shifting locations of lesbian and gay history.⁴³ Until recently publicizing reprovved activities was wrong in some eyes. In 1983 a 15,000 strong gay and lesbian Mardi Gras procession from the Sydney Town Hall, down George Street, up Liverpool Street to Oxford Street and on to a party at the Sydney Show Park was not reported as news by any mainstream newspaper or television channel in Australia.⁴⁴ (Not so ironically, once the commercial rewards of the parade to city businesses became apparent the annual event became a major international tourist attraction.) People who travel for pleasure are usually ready to pay for diversion, and the monies spent in same-sex activities broadly defined have grown into a major economic fact.⁴⁵

Another possible type of location for encounters had to do with transportation. In modern cities the subway and metro stations were equally arenas for pickups as were the terminals of long distance buses. George Orwell noted in October 1931: "*Homosexual vice in London*. It appears that

⁴⁰J Renar, "Zone dure: Prague avant l'orage" *Gai Pied Hebdo* (397:7 December 1989), 56-62.

⁴¹F Gnerre & A Pini, "Sicile" *Gai Pied Hebdo* (275:20-26 June 1987), 43-45. See on the sexualized response to Sicily by eighteenth-century travellers: Alessandra Ponte, "Architecture and Phallogentrism in Richard Payne Knight's Theory" in *Sexuality and the State* ed Beatriz Colomina (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 273-305.

⁴²Gianni Martino, "Milan: les p'tits anges de las fosse aux lions" *Gai Pied Hebdo* (255: 31 January 1987), 46-9.

⁴³George Chauncey, "Privacy could only be had in public: gay uses of the street" in *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* ed Joel Saunders (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 224-61.

⁴⁴Gary Wotherspoon, *The City of the Plain: History of Gay Sub-culture* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1991), 13-14.

⁴⁵Jon Binnie, "Trading Places: consumption, sexuality and the production of queer space" in *Mapping Desire*, eds. D Bell and G valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), 182-99.

one of the great rendezvous is Charing Cross underground station. It appeared to be taken for granted by the people on Trafalgar Square that youths could earn a bit this way, and several said to me, 'I need never sleep out if I choose to go down to Charing Cross.' They added that the usual fee is a shilling."⁴⁶

Public baths and swimming locations were implicitly homoerotic permitting the exchange of glances which might result in sexual activity. At the same time that gay men defined particular beaches for nudity or cruising, the local authorities or unsympathetic males might be vigilant in their disapproval. Accompanied by the daughter of the wardrobe mistress from his company, the famous Australian ballet dancer and exquisite Robert Helpmann walked onto Bondi Beach in the 1920s wearing Oxford bags, a pink shirt with red painted finger nails and plucked eyebrows. This costume screamed defiance in broad daylight at the butch ethos of the beach as Helpmann glided across the sand, followed by a silent crowd. Finally he was challenged and humiliated. Some brawny, bronzed lifeguards seized him and simply dumped him in the surf.⁴⁷

Homosexual individuals in a village or small town eventually learn that in a larger setting with many strangers there is much more psychic anonymity, freedom and choice. That is they locate in that gay city of those with shared tastes.⁴⁸

Hohenberg and Lees rightly stressed that late marrying or never married individuals were concentrated in towns, especially servants and clerics.⁴⁹ Sociologists in the 1970s like C S Fischer argued that the more urban and densely populated a place, and hence with a higher degree of anonymity even towards neighbours, the more intensely felt is membership of a subculture.⁵⁰ This affinity can be ethnic or sexual, or even sexually ethnic clusters. In modern ethnic districts there may be a "national" label to a district—the Greek area—but there are subcomponents under the larger label. Regional, sporting and clubs or shops are associated with particular Greek islands or regions. Since the 1980s lesbian and gay areas may in Europe and the Americas display the rainbow flag, but such areas also have

⁴⁶George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, vol One: An age like this 1920-1940* (London: Penguin, 1970), 96-7.

⁴⁷E Salter, *Helpmann: the Authorized Biography* (Brighton UK: Angus and Robertson, 1978), 40.

⁴⁸Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982) has argued that the town/country dichotomy has been overly stressed in social history. He thinks that in the early modern city in-migrants from the rural areas and the seasonal exodus of urban dwellers to work in the country meant there was a continuum of country-town attitudes. For a twentieth-century participant-observer approach to the urban-rural sexuality divide see Jerry Lee Kramer, "Bachelor Farmers and Spinsters: Gay and Lesbian identities and communities in rural North Dakota" in *Mapping Desires* eds Bell and Valentine, 200-21

⁴⁹Hohenberg and Lees, 86.

⁵⁰Hohenberg and Lees, 265.

institutions marked for sub identities: transgendered or gays or lesbians, s/m, clones, bears and so forth.

The book entitled *The Intersexes* published in Rome c. 1908 had no index but provided a few indications about locations where soldiers hustled in various central European cities.⁵¹ "Gay" guides like the famous *Spartacus* series edited by John D Stamford in Amsterdam which listed such information were a commercial product dating from the 1960s. Only in the last fifty years have extensive descriptions of cruising grounds in foreign cities been provided in commercial guides and magazine features, although some literary evocations were informative. Certainly the gay Canadian Catholic poet, the snowbird from Lindsay, Ontario: Edward A Lacey, (1937-1995) evoked the central cruising ground of Rio de Janeiro well and his engagement with it in erotic poems like his "King of the Night." He also made a nostalgic salute to the city on Guanabara Bay:

L'envoi. Pour Cavafy. By E A Lacey

Now you are leaving, but you will not leave, stranger.
 Goodbye, Godspeed, bon voyage, but you will not go.
 You will never depart from Rio de Janeiro.
 Whenever you travel you will take Rio with you;
 in a thousand distant places you will walk her dark streets,
 sit to rest for a moment in the shade of her almond trees,
 hear the wind along the avenue rustle her palms.
 Whenever you smell the sea-smell, you will remember Rio.
 Whenever you sit in a sidewalk café and watch people passing,
 you will be here.
 Whenever you kiss a boy, he will turn in your arms and will be
 Paulinho.
 You will not escape, traveller, though now you try to leave us;
 Now we are part of you.⁵²

Toronto's Gloucester Street was evoked by a journalist describing the heavy concentration of gay residents there. She pointed to evidence that showed it had been so in the 1930s.⁵³ The audiences for a play entitled *Molly Wood's Bush* about a homosexual scandal in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada learned that the man involved owned property which coincided with a street that carried his name in the contemporary Toronto gay district. The sense of the relationship of homosexual males to their imagined forequeers in cities they know, and hence to dead men who shared sites and districts as well as hopes and dreams, is rewarding to those who identify themselves as part of a lesbian and gay "community" as

⁵¹X Mayne [pseud], *The Intersexes: a History of Similosexualism as a Problem in Social Life* (1908?, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1975)

⁵²E A Lacey, *Later Poems 1973-1978* (Scarborough Ont: Catalyst Press, 1978), 68.

⁵³V Cusack, "Gloucester Then and Now," *Toronto Life* (March 2000), 72-8.

meant by Gordon Brent Ingram. In Berlin at least they can visit exhibitions at the Schwules Museum.⁵⁴ In Toronto they can consult the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

Over time the knowledge acquired from individual experiences and passed on by others formed an urban lore about cruising grounds, diversions, personalities and services. This lore was itself a social and a mental construct. It was of course long restricted to personal contacts and whispered confidences. Just before the advent of AIDS a Canadian sociologist envisaged the gay ecosystem of "Metropolis"—an abstraction meaning any large North American city but one which bore a close resemblance to Toronto where the author lived—as the different forms of enjoying promiscuity.⁵⁵ Whether garnered from chats with other homosexuals or read in books sold in specialized bookshops like *Glad Day* in Toronto, the historical evidence for these cognitive city maps is scattered and diffuse. It is part of the social history of homosexual men that to them and sympathisers merits recognition, and recording and illustration.⁵⁶

One friendly but exasperated reader of an earlier manuscript on gay urban history complained that it read "on and on and on and on" about urinals, baths and parks in cities. Instead he longed to read more about the arts, music and wit, the salons and courts and interesting lives where men involved in homosexuality made a mark on the city culture. His objection on aesthetic grounds was understandable but has not vanquished the need for social history. Ultimately public recognition of collective sexual identities in the public realm comes from acceptance of, or perhaps better indifference to, private behaviours which were long forbidden. Dan Healey faced a similar objection in Moscow when speaking to a lesbian and gay study group where an indignant auditor burst out that gay culture was not toilet culture. Indeed, it is not now, but gay cultural uses of urban space cannot be divorced from furtive ways of being that were forced upon queer men by persecution. By drawing attention to the history of lives in private and public spaces in cities and the intrusions into them of forbidden desires one points to paths that lead to future freedoms.

I shall omit further references to the extensive literature which we might describe as studies on cruising in parks, urinals, steam-baths, and so forth. The salient point is that this knowledge was shared within a sexual economy where for a long time "pansies" or homosexuals were pursuing "straight" men. Increasingly from the 1960s those involved mutually recognized each other as queers searching for others like themselves.

The postmodern geography of homosexuality is defined by desire and places where both partners identify as gay and frequent places where they may meet sexual partners. In the democratic West it is assumed that this

⁵⁴Goodbye (1997).

⁵⁵John Alan Lee, *Getting Sex: a New Approach: More Fun, Less Guilt* (Don Mills ON: Musson Book Company, 1978).

⁵⁶See the period photographs of New York City intended to illustrate Chauncey (1994) but in fact published elsewhere, Chauncey (1996).

will be consensual, and without requests for money. Prudish gay activists as well as those who cannot either afford or accept the fact they may be asked to buy genital pleasures disapprove of sex workers. However in the past a monetary, or at least a gift-giving, aspect of inter-class sexual encounter simply echoed the relationships of servant-employer which were commonplace in most of North America and Europe prior to 1900, and which continue in much of South America and Asia into the Third Millennium.

Historically minority space is of course limited by a set of sometimes invisible markers, or rather visible to those who have eyes to see, which may include hostile but attentive viewers, like the police or moral crusaders. Gay sites of encounter were often outdoors. The crucial element for the eventual commission of sexual acts between men was a modicum of indoor privacy. Access to a place to go and have sex—without being at risk and and is a concern of male homosexuals. Sometimes space could be rented for a time in inns or pensions. A remarkable evocation of such a hotel was made by the bi-sexual French anarchist Daniel Guérin when he described an establishment in the XVIIIth arrondissement of Paris which served as a venue for brief gay sexual encounters for almost half a century, from the 1930s to the 1970s, with seven rooms with double beds on the first floor, and two on the ground floor for heterosexual prostitution. The Madame was discreet and knowing. She could help a client arrange for an encounter or, in a nearby café, (*La Nuit*) clients could locate a partner on a free market. Guérin added that the going rate was "at least twice the very modest cost of a room." Madame Madeleine kept an air of respectability and control in her hotel, and made her profit from the relatively short occupancy of the rooms used solely for sexual purposes.⁵⁷ In Athens in the 1970s some complaisant hoteliers near the cruisy Omonia Square would rent bedrooms by the hour, while other establishments had a clear policy of refusing accommodation to a foreigner with a sailor seeking a bed.

A famous early example of the desire to establish a household and to live as a couple was the Englishman Edward Carpenter, (1844-1929).⁵⁸ Gradually and in increasing numbers homosexual men controlled a domestic space where they might live as they wished. A fondness for domestic embellishment has been advanced as a cross-cultural and quasi-inherent gay characteristic linked to the cross-gender play of small boys who as adults become gay.⁵⁹

However, for post 1969 consenting adults co-resident partners in house or apartment bourgeois and upper-class residential districts were sought out as being more respectful of privacy and property. In fact there is a literature showing how gay "gentrification" could push up real estate values in some districts and thus dissuade new in-migrants from settling there. Gay districts

⁵⁷D Guérin, "Memoire. Chez Mado" *Gai Pied Hebdo* 227, 5-11 July 1986, 39-40.

⁵⁸Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 20-2.

⁵⁹Whitam and Mathy, *Male Homosexuality in Four Societies*, 86.

in cities are increasingly being openly marked and decorated to celebrate gay pride. North Halsted Street in Chicago, Illinois, was renovated with a municipal grant of several million dollars despite the predictable opposition from some conservatives. (*The Economist*, August 23 1997, 20.) Legal and gay-identified businesses and dwelling places emerged in Canada after 1969. In the past gay men were most likely to find each other in known cruising sites catering to them: one Toronto academic met both of his long-term (by which I mean more than one year co-residency) partners in gay focussed establishments (a club and a bar) on the right side of Yonge Street between Bloor and College Streets, the first in 1967 and the second in 1971. Neither club nor bar still existed in 2000, but others had appeared in the same city zone. Jim Egan (1921 - 2000) met Jack Nisbett (1927-2000) at the Savarin Hotel beverage room on 336-44 Bay Street in Toronto in August 1948. The Savarin was known as one of the gay drinking places of the time.⁶⁰ Both men died in 2000 in BC having become the icon of a committed couple for the Canadian Igbtq movement, some months before a lesbian and a gay Toronto couple had their banns read in December at the Metropolitan church.⁶¹

To conclude one should stress how much the gay city contributes to improving the quality of life—services and entertainments, shops, dwellings, and the arts—for all residents. One professor of regional development at Carnegie Mellon University has argued a "gay index" is the leading predictor of a city's ability to attract and retain knowledge workers. Professor Florida claimed that:

"...[A] gay population is a dependable indicator of the environmental factors—tolerance, openness to diversity, and lots of urban-oriented amenities—that are critical for attracting world-class workers."⁶²

In some circles the idea of a gay identity, analogous to ethnicity, is derided as restricted identity politics on the American model.⁶³ Others see it as understandable that like should seek out like.⁶⁴ Ideally the state simply withdraws from telling consenting adults how to behave in private. Within the "Rights Revolution," as Michael Ignatieff puts it, gays can live openly and

⁶⁰Jim Egan, *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence: my Life as a Canadian Gay Activist*, comp Donald M McLeod (Toronto: Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, 1998) 33-8.

⁶¹E Kukla, "Love at first sight: Magic Moment fours [sic] years ago leads to marriage" *Xtra!* (December 28, 2000), 14.

⁶²Micheal Kesterton, "Social Studies" *Globe and Mail* (January 5, 2001) A16.

⁶³Joao Silverio Trevisan, *Devassos no paraíso: a homossexualidade no Brasil, da colônia a atualidade* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), *passim*.

⁶⁴Marie-Joelle Gros, "Consommer gayment" *Liberation* (June 22, 2000), 30. "On peut s'étonner de l'émergence d'un tel phénomène à l'adresse d'une communauté qui revendique un "droit à l'indifférence." Mais on peut aussi reconnaître le désir légitime de vivre dans une sorte d'entre soi. Après tout, ces portraits ne sont que le pendant électronique des quartiers "où l'on peut se balader la main dans la main sans essayer des insultes ou des coups" note le rédacteur en chef de fr.gays.com

legally anywhere in Canada.⁶⁵ In Canada and elsewhere autobiographies and interviews with openly queer people have been published which are revealing about big city life.⁶⁶

Urban gay space in the twenty-first century may develop new meanings in the exponential growth of the Internet and the possibilities of on-line Chat-Rooms, email and pornography. In the future it may be the well-turned phrase or an alluring photograph that will lead to encounters that profoundly affect gay existence. Cyber cruising can be planetary in scale when homophobia is a personal, not a public, stance. In the twenty-first century the stress on gay urban zones may diminish as a global gay virtual city emerges on screen with the Internet.

However, given the higher percentages of unattached gay men than Canadian males at large in the same age cohorts probably the social functions of the gay city will grow and diversify. There are found the community coffee shops, bars, bookstores, restaurants and meeting places for lgbtq people with special interests. Cities in the past played a unique and changing role in homosexual lives. The larger the city the greater the diversity of individual self realizations.

Lewis Mumford concluded his classic work *The City in History* by saying that the city's final mission was to further man's conscious participation in its historic processes leading to the "illumination of consciousness, the stamp of purpose, the colour of love".⁶⁷ At least some residents of Canadian cities forty years later, like those who attended the marriages of two couples, one lesbian and the other gay, on January 14, 2001 in Toronto, agree that changes for the better took place in the interval since Mumford wrote those words. (Valpy, (2001) A1,6.)

⁶⁵M Ignatieff, *The Rights of Revolution: the 2000 Massey Lectures* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2000).

⁶⁶Egan, *Challenging Conspiracy*; Sky Gilbert, *Ejaculation for the Charm Factory: a Memoir* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2000); T Castro d'Aire, *A homossexualidade masculina* G(Lisbon: Teras d'Actualidade, 1995); K Porter and J Weeks, *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁶⁷Mumford, *The City in History*, 576.