

in a queer country

GAY & LESBIAN STUDIES

IN THE CANADIAN

CONTEXT

Edited by

TERRY GOLDIE

in a queer country

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IN A QUEER COUNTRY

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**redesigning wreck:
beach meets forest as location of
male homoerotic culture &
placemaking in pacific canada**

Gordon Brent Ingram

I think a lot about the qualities and designs of the public spaces that I visit regularly. I want to believe that this sensitivity to my environment, verging on an obsession, is rooted in some deep well of creativity. But my narratives of design and redesign are also part of a twentieth-century Canadian fag thing. I note escape routes from possible violence. I seek out screens for privacy and to avoid more obvious forms of hostility. I covet sites in which to have fun with my friends (new and old), natural stages on which to see and be seen. I am especially interested in the places where I find new forms of communality, which often is obscured by archaic notions of community. I take great pleasure in complex places that I can explore and in which I can



This is the more heavily visited portion of the southern end of Wreck Beach. This area is frequented by most of the gay and bisexual men who visit Wreck. Above the beach is the sprawling campus of the University of British Columbia with its Botanical Gardens, landscape architecture teaching studios, experimental fields, and dormitories. All the aerial simages in this essay are from the mid-1990s.

get lost. And I am not the only one. This preoccupation with homoerotic—often specifically homosexual—contact in public landscapes has a long history in Canadian gay male culture. Of such landscapes in the pantheon of Canadian male homosexual cultures, the West Coast's Wreck Beach, on the

edges of the University of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver, is particularly symbolic and strategic.

Wreck comprises the southwestern shore of the peninsula west of central Vancouver. Here, nudists, including male homosexuals, are crammed into some of the last remaining habitat, in the centre of the metropolitan region, for bald eagles and great blue herons. On the cliffs are some of the few remaining ancient Douglas fir and Red Cedar trees in the area. On warm and sunny days, Wreck embodies the most expansive constellation of queer outdoor space that Vancouver has ever seen. Space, as in territory, becomes a kind of fetish in itself. In the summer, the southern portion of Wreck provides more area of homoerotic social space than the rest of such spaces in western Canada combined. Wreck is a mythic configuration of sites, a distinct location, of significance as well for neighbouring parts of Northwestern United States, and something of a lightning rod for the contradictions in contemporary West Coast homoerotic culture, aesthetics, social relations, and sexual expression.

In terms of space and daily visitors, Wreck is one of the largest, gay male nude beaches in the world. There are only a few other beaches in British Columbia, clothed or clothing optional, with extensive summering populations of sexual minorities. At Wreck, a diverse and idealistic erotic culture has taken root that at times reinforces consumerist body culture and at other times contests it. At this margin, many of the unresolved issues around gender, race, class, and physical ability are reiterated as Vancouver transforms itself in its second century. Perhaps Wreck can show us some new possibilities. The south end of Wreck is, in part, a clothing-optional queer theme park (with its share of married men) that warrants a closer examination. For those of us who find Vancouver society short of spaces for male nudity, this zone provides a much-loved refuge and space to re-create and think again about making a better (and more homoerotic) world. Nevertheless, Wreck is still a particularly conflicted Canadian landscape, a racialized arena where European corporeality is normalized and Asian, African, and Latin bodies remain exoticized and marginalized (Ingram 2000, "On the Beach," 217–238).

In revisiting Wreck, I want to explore some links between desire, communality, and conscious alteration of environments—what I argue is "design." But design, as conscious, collective, and co-ordinated, is relative. Places are only in part the result of conscious designs. Such designs are rarely sexual in overt terms and more often result from natural change or political or economic conflict. These tensions between identification with supposedly "wild" landscapes or with urban spaces and between found space and made place have been central elements in Canadian planning for over a century (Honorat and Collins 1999, 19). Within these dialectics, the roles of strategic sites for homoerotic social exchange and cultural expression have been poorly

explored (Ingram 1997, 95–125). Even less understood has been the link between spaces of contact, cultural expression, and placemaking as forms of cultural production. In this essay, I examine the southern half of “Wreck,” an area that on sunny days is inhabited almost totally by men comfortable with, and often engaged in, homosexuality.

On this “walk” of Wreck Beach, I pose four questions. How does a gay male social scene on a nude beach create the basis for a kind of rudimentary queer scape architecture? (Ingram 2000 “On the Beach,” 108–123) How do the homoerotic bodies of naked men transform space? Besides these two questions, I also want to begin to unravel a disturbing paradox. Why are architecture and public art increasingly considered central in contemporary culture while queer desires in and designs for outdoor space, celebrating homoeroticism and disrupting notions of sexuality and gender, are still largely taboo in both academia and in planning decisions made about queer sites? Given that Wreck is a cultural landscape, still claimed by First Nations, can this space be used to “naturalize,” or at least normalize, consensual homosexuality between adults? But before the theory, let’s imagine a walk on a warm, sunny spring or summer day.

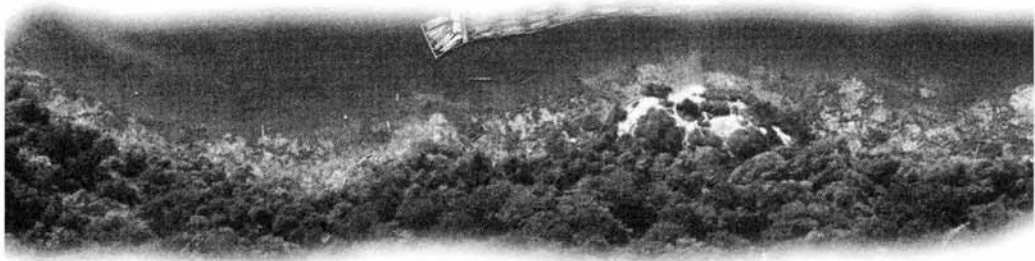
WALKING WRECK BEACH: FROM THAH’THUTLUM TO STSULAWH

In this shore route, walk southwest, then south, and then southeast in an arc that stretches around Point Grey. This landscape appears deceptively natural. Much of this walk is “clothing optional,” and you may feel conspicuous, from April to October, if you choose to overdress. Various technologies and fetishes, however, complicate exposure of corporeal surfaces. From backpacks and boots to tattoos and piercing, even nakedness at Wreck is relative.

Begin above Spanish Banks, at the cliffs that look across to the North Shore, English Bay, and downtown Vancouver. These cliffs make up the area just east of the former village site of *Thah’tlutlum* (shivering woman rock). This area was also an important site in the emergence of the West Coast counterculture in the dying embers of the Beats.

Moving southwest and along the bluffs, come to one of the most successful buildings designed by Arthur Erickson: the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. Of concrete and glass, it houses an exceptional collection of historic Northwest coast artifacts, including ones from the Musqueam villages of the area.

Walking behind the museum, locate the steep stairs beyond the facsimile Haida long houses. Go down the cliffs near *Ka’wum* (howling dog rock), and walk south along the narrow beach.



Above: The Outer Limits, with older men, is on the left. The Oasis, with several hundred younger men at a time on sunny weekend days, is in the centre-right. The Flats, the major gay area from the 1970s, is on the right.



With a view of Vancouver Island, pass the western tip of Point Grey, *Ulksun*, and the former seasonal camp of *Thutsuleek* (always rough). This was the part of Wreck favoured by many lesbians for two decades.

Moving south along the beach, come to the site of the former seasonal camp, *Keekullukhum* (little stockade), on the site of today's main Wreck Beach.

Search through the thousands of naked people to find a little enclave where people of the same sex are lying down a little more closely together. This is the little queer pocket surrounded by the heterosexual and bisexual masses.

Stroll to the beginning of the swampy trail south of the bottom of the main trail. This was the centre of the pre-nude gay male cruising areas from the 1940s until the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, this muddy route signalled the shift from the (hetero)sexual revolution to still highly taboo public (homo)sex. Muddy feet on males on the main part of Wreck suggested at least bicuriosity.

Continuing on through the salt marsh and mud, come to The Flats, the former site of a stockade and camp, *Kullukhun*, where waterfowl, octopus, and shellfish were harvested offshore. This was the major gay male social space at Wreck in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The forest behind The Flats was an important area of public sex for two decades. Today, the well-worn trails are somewhat exhausted; the sites of homoeroticism have become diffused and diversified in the dense forests along the beach to the south.

Moving along muddy trails through the forest, come to what today is often referred to as The Oasis, a former Salish campsite called *Humlusum* (bending

down to drink). The spring is still there but it has been polluted from the university campus on the cliffs above.

Out of the forest and on to the sandy beach below, search for a place to lie down. In the early 1990s, this tongue of sand was formed from a series of landslides. Alternatively called Glamour Beach and Attitude Point, on a sunny day, the beach sees hundreds of naked men, sleeping, chatting, and frolicking. Sometimes on particularly hot days, there is group sex just before sunset.

Going inland through a series of heavily eroticized side-trails and then south from the crowded beach area, find a series of quiet spots in the forest. This muddy shore supports only small groups of people in rich *topoi* of solitude, cruising, conversation, and sometimes a bit of sex.

Back on the main trail going south, come to a side trail up the slope and find a magnificent Douglas fir tree that is well over a hundred years old. At the base of the trunk is a slightly worn area sometimes littered with used condoms.

Further south, along the main trail, pass many naked men and occasionally a woman and come to several large boulders sacred to the Musqueam.

Continuing along the shore, as it shifts to the Southeast, come to the mouth of the stream, *Skeymukwalhtsa* (or devilfish [octopus] spring), at the bottom of Trail 7.

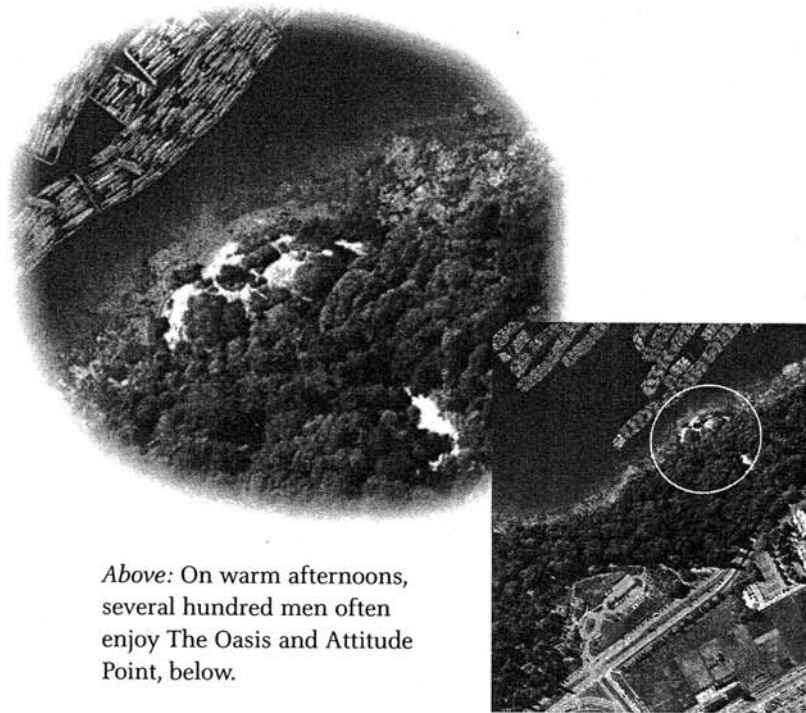
Struggle up the steep trail below the University's Botanical Gardens and go north on the side road to an area below Marine Drive with drive-by sex frequented by older males.

Down the trail again, meander south for another three kilometres along trails to find small clearings supporting intimate gay male scenes, often with more overt fetishists and older men. Moving southeast as the sea meets the great river, the Fraser, the Stalo, come to the still under-used area sometimes called The Outer Limits. After another hour of walking, come to the outskirts of what is left of two Musqueam villages, a cultural centre in the region for hundreds if not thousands of years.

WRECK AS THE TERMINAL CITY'S ALMOST-UTOPIAN QUEERSCAPE¹

In the artificially uncivilised areas of the cities, surveillance and detention threaten; in the externally uncivilised areas, nature threatens and—worse still—boredom. (Henning Bech 1997, 150)

Over the last century, beaches have been prime arenas for the homosexual outlaw and, more recently, for the gay consumer.² The emergence of nude beaches on public lands in twentieth-century North America has largely paralleled the emergence of the consciously homoerotic male. Nude beaches have



Above: On warm afternoons, several hundred men often enjoy The Oasis and Attitude Point, below.

often seen an effective tolerance of homoeroticism when homosexuality has been strictly forbidden. In the period since World War II, these nude beaches grew to tolerate some overt forms of queer, particularly male, communality and an innovative social order predicated on some co-operative and alternative relationships. But on Wreck, the social opportunities of nude beaches reached a more advanced phase. This large territory is seasonally queered with sites established by a range of relatively open networks, defined by social links and erotic desires.

In relatively new port cities such as Vancouver, beaches have become surrogates for purposefully designed forms of public space and the kinds of social discourses, from cruising to political demonstrations, that take place in such spaces (Berelowitz 1994, 32–37). Beaches with adjacent natural areas, and the regular warm-weather presence of networks of sexual minorities, can be particularly strategic sites. Such homoerotic beach spaces become institutions, or at least pre-institutions, though they remain vulnerable to homophobic planning decisions and outright attacks. Typically, such interzones support contradictory behaviour, from the communitarian to the atomized consumer, the hyper-commodified masculinity (Escoffier 1998, 66; Kinsman 1996, 304). Some behaviour at Wreck implies erotic alienation as “natural.” Also, while the stereotypical gay consumer is present, the shaping of homoerotic pleasure by market forces is largely absent.

Like contemporary Vancouver, Wreck supports a blend of utopian and cynical views of the body, Eros, love, and community. Wreck, as a relatively wild area, an open space on the suburban edges of Vancouver, produces simmering conflicts between eroticized recreation and habitat protection (Rust 1995, 5–6). In these conflicts, the discussions of public sex, primarily between men, constitute a case in point. Public sex is a small part of a broad body of homoerotic practices, some of which are learned, and improved upon, in places such as Wreck. Even the term becomes questionable. The acts that comprise public sex are highly variable and diverge between groups, between networks and locales, and between decades. The lines between public and private sex, even between homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual identities, are supple and beyond definition by the state, the market, and other ideologies. At Wreck, different homoerotic behaviours tend to overlap more than elsewhere in the city. Across such relatively large landscapes, the context of sex acts, their meanings and perhaps functions, can vary from site to site. All generalizations are problematic. At Wreck, as in this description of a case study from Montreal, “sexual relations in public, while they were supposed to be anonymous, silent, and quick, could sometimes be quite otherwise” (Higgins 1999, 194).

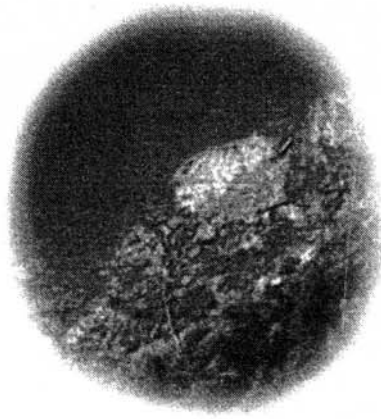
While the zone most frequented by gay males stretches for several kilometres along the south end of Wreck, lesbian sites, if they can even be called such, are small, scattered, and lie north of the main beach. There has been some discussion about the de facto segregation and domination of space by gay men at the south end of Wreck. Gay men have few public spaces in a region where they are close to being in a demographic majority but the south end of Wreck Beach is definitely one. Except for a few symbolic forays by young Amazons, this area has the “feel” of an all-male club on any sunny afternoon.³ But the reality is that most of this framing of queer male space has been homophobic, defined by those who do not want to be in a homosexual space. Also, most other groups have little use for the area. Such thick forests and dark trails would be seen as dangerous by most women unless they were in groups. Heterosexual females and males have their scene at the main Wreck Beach area. In the cooler months, a few walkers and bird watchers enjoy the entire area. Yet, perhaps in a reaction to the homophobia from without, these social spaces have often been indifferent or vaguely hostile to women. At the same time, this vacuum and relative disorder are consistent with the arguments of Elizabeth Wilson on spaces where women have been able to find relative freedom in the city (Wilson 1991). For some older gay men, however, typically socialized by a patriarchal and repressive culture, women, by their presence, can still disrupt some experiences of freedom.

**QUEER(ED) BY NATURE: SOME SHIFTING
AESTHETICS OF BODIES & LANDSCAPE**

To view body as land or land as body has no essential meaning, yet neither can it ever be innocent. Its politics are always contextual; there are different kinds of looking. (Catherine Nash 1996, 167)

So far in this discussion, I have been attempting to appropriate an often deceptively apolitical discourse on the use of "wildland," and considered it in terms of a particular user group (homoerotic males). In this case, the "wilds" are relatively urban and the recreation is overtly erotic, whether people want to admit it or not. Whoever is at the south end of Wreck is affected by homoeroticism, whether or not they choose to participate. Social conflicts become evident in tensions within and between bodies and the physical landscape. Aesthetics mark broader cultural and political economic relationships. Aesthetics become an important factor in understanding social interactions. Aesthetics become the matrix for desire, motivation, and even constraints on behaviour. It might be possible to reflect on the broader implications of political economy on erotic desire and the tensions that emerge between divergent "user groups" and "stakeholders."

Naked corporeality-in-the-landscape, particularly in sites of marginalized sexualities, generates new individual and collective experiences with inevitable, often localized, cultural, political, and environmental impacts. These local cultures, in turn, engender new opportunities for individuals. For some, experiences at Wreck confirm that they and what they do are "natural," or at least are normalized. For others, they are queered through their new actions and communalities. This is not a subtle difference. But the recent dialectic, between essentialist ("nature") and constructionist ("nurture," through culture) notions of homoeroticism, emerges once more around bodies and landscapes. Wreck has become a large zone, a strip, of multiple overlaps of (queer) ambiguity, between sexual acts and identities that are both erotic and contaminated by political conflict. The milieu of Wreck does not constitute community, in any territorialized sense, but rather a shifting conclave of desire, aesthetics, and ecological sensibilities set on a beautiful but vulnerable cultural landscape. Wreck embodies the conflicting and co-operative (and self-disciplined) relationships of communities. Homoerotic sites at Wreck embody a range of relationships between desire and identity, from self-identified, unconscious, and often essentialized centres to queerer margins. The more marginalized the group, the more queer the site and the more it is relegated to the distant landscape. The most queer thus becomes part of the hinterland, the stereotype of the quintessentially Canadian.



Above: South of The Flats.



POSTCOLONIAL BODIES IN RACIALIZED LANDSCAPES; RACIALIZED BODIES IN POSTCOLONIAL LANDSCAPES

One of the locations where essential notions of race are both enforced and contested is on nude beaches. Wreck is one of the few locales in the region that offer an appearance of emphatic multiculturalism through the mingling of racial bodies and sexual identities. At Wreck, it is inevitable to be near and in visual contact with men with very different kinds of bodies. The playing field of the homoerotic gaze at Wreck has not been levelled but public sex and humour have disrupted hierarchies.⁴ The forests behind the beach are used to stage fantasies that sometimes key on race, such as the jungle, and thus reinforce—and sometimes subvert—shifting castes of sex, social recognition, and consumerism.

Today, racialized body and landscape aesthetics are problematic, especially when they are defined by white perceptions of Asian, South Asian, and African groups in North America. On Wreck, three fetishized racial disparities tend to persist in public sex: the social invisibility of the Asian male and the exoticization of the dark, supposedly studly, male, primarily of African but at times South Asian heritage (Fung 1991; Mercer 1991 1994). The “black” presence sometimes disrupts the neo-colonial narrative of British Columbia being primarily white. In British Columbia, those of African heritage have often been mistakenly viewed as recent arrivals (Kanneh 1991; Ingram, “Mapping,” 2000). The resulting exoticization of black male bodies functions to make them “out of place,” fetish items rather than whole persons. Alternatively, the body of the Asian, in particular the south coast Chinese male, is too

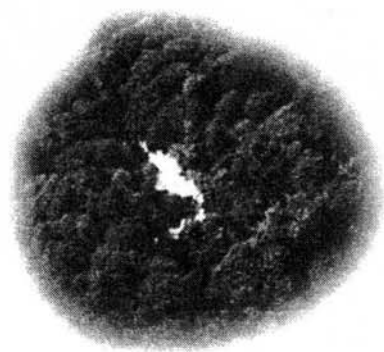
often ignored and treated as invisible in highly charged zones of male homoerotic contact (Wong 1991, 13). This is ironic given that men from the same regions have been so central to the construction of modern "British" Columbia. Most problematic, the Aboriginal body is largely absent. All of the exotic bodies are assumed to be recent transplants, new and thus in need of naturalization to a white and Eurocentric Canada. Like the playful, buff iconography in Bruce Weber's *Bear Pond*, attitudes too often support the myth that the northern landscape is primarily white territory.

The most valuable aspects of these sites of public sex, in terms of formation of new (Canadian) culture, are that at least men of a wide range of backgrounds and forms of racialization are attempting to take homoerotic space on their own constrained terms. The intimacy in the spaces in the forest behind Wreck operates through the tensions between a more race-blind body aesthetic and public sex that sometimes is intensely racialized. Racial fetishes at Wreck constitute a kind a map of the postcolonial world as played out in Pacific Canada, one more guide to more subtle inequities. The site, only selectively public with no direct cultural coding, is viewed as "natural habitat" (*Bear Pond* 1990, 171). But the queer naturalist aesthetic, and its associated fetishes, can obscure the reality that the opposite is closer to the truth. This "nature" consists of highly coded fragments inflected by both the adjacent campus and by heavy recreational use. But the indications of ecological degradation at Wreck are often detected less than the supposed "nature" of unabashed public homosexuality. This natural/unnatural dichotomy has emerged from centuries of obsessive attacks on homosexuality as a threat to the "natural" order of things. The obfuscation of the cultural landscape, created by the Musqueam, and the interracial encounter that came later, have yet to be considered fully "natural" in the cultures of the Canadian landscape.

DICKS IN PUBLIC SPACE

Lesbian sex is not typically associated with public accessibility or lewdness. The mechanics of such exchanges usually required more room than any toilet stall, nature trail or BMW can furnish. . . . (Alison Dowsett 1998, 30)

At places such as in the wilds of the southern end of Wreck, the male member, both as a means to pleasure and a cultural icon, is effectively reinvented every three to five years. The phallus, the dick in space, is constructed out of more raw forms of desire (and place). The south end of Wreck is one of the least overtly commercial areas of queer, public Vancouver. In this public territory, the fully exposed gay and bisexual male body becomes part of a



Above: One of the more celebrated public sex areas—looking over The Oasis.



spectacle, an icon, competing with “consumer space” very near (Willis 1993, 263–264). But a homoerotic space outside of the more typical commercial and institutional constraints that limit eroticized contact remains vulnerable. Going into the third decade of the AIDS pandemic, Michael Brown states that “The viral focus [still often] reduces the already marginalized gay body to a mere vector for illness” (Brown 1995, 161). In this sense, exposed phalluses (and buttocks) at the south end of Wreck, showing signs of on-site contact, can still be sucked into both the medicalization of homosexuality and the homophobic project of refusing—or denaturalizing—the healthy gay body. For too many, the south end of Wreck remains more as a space where HIV is spread than for a wide range of relatively safe, social contact. The tensions in these views, between relative health and high risk of disease, sometimes determine the use of the physical environment and the identifications with and interactions in particular sites. Thus, the public sex zone behind The Oasis and those in The Outer Limits are perceived by individuals who like standing erotic contact as places for exploration and practice and for others as high anxiety locales of risk.

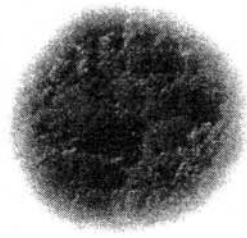
Through the exposure of male members within a still patriarchal apportionment of public space, Wreck was gendered before it was queered. Male nudity on the beach long preceded overt homosexuality. This old, neo-colonial dichotomy is slow to break down. The homoerotization of these areas, particularly along the southern trails, has been largely the result of an intensified masculinization rather than challenges to phobias around sex, homosexuality, group contact, and acts out of doors. If the body is the primary site for the construction of sexuality, an intersection of physicality, culture, and spirit,

then this Canadian queerscape constitutes the location, the context, the environment, and the means of support for the supposedly "normative performance" of gender, race, and the social structures that they represent (Brod 1995, 15–19). The queerscape supports both sites of production of body-sex relations and arenas for contests over modes of both social intercourse and its selective restriction and repression.

Locations that support social space of the marginalized, and different constellations of public and private, have divergent functions in the reproduction of broader social relations. Parks and respective designs have relationships to this reproduction of political economic relationships through culture (Berrizbeita 1999, 196). On nude beaches throughout the twentieth century, gay men, as only partially willing defectors from heteronormative life, have frequently taken on the armour of hyper-masculinity. Fortunately, there has often been a high degree of parody and camp. On nude beaches, such as the southern half of Wreck, there is space for a body culture and aesthetic that can be playfully over-determined by primary and secondary sexual features. In this sense, the homoerotic sites of Wreck still function more as zones of heightened but temporary privileging of some male bodies. But that use of the male body, in the consumer market, has been going on anyway. If anything, serious "objectification" in places like Wreck is on the decline as it increases for heterosexual males in broader society. As society's preoccupation with the male body is on the rise, Wreck provides another key function: for s/m (standing and modelling)—for spaces of irony in which to play.

"NATURAL" QUEER SPACE AS CONTESTED SITES

Gay beaches in North America have repeatedly been the sites of conflict around sexual propriety, played out through explicit design or indirect controls on access and behaviour. In the late 1970s, in roughly the same period as visits from the homophobic Anita Bryant crusades, a would-be Vancouver TV evangelist led her flock along Wreck Beach to protest its nudity, drug use, godlessness, and perversity. The idea was to confront sinners and to shame them. This conscious attempt at destroying queer space constantly invoked "Sodom," that code word for anxieties over queer spatial appropriation and territorialization. However, on the day of the protest, there was a downpour and the nudists present taunted the group. The event was ridiculed in the local media, and the campaign was a failure. Since then, there have been continued, but less overt, efforts to control behaviour at Wreck. After two futile decades of harassment, the police agreed to allow the beach to become clothing optional in the late 1980s. By 1990, in the summer of the second Gay Games, there were dusk orgies on some of the more remote beaches. Over the



Above: Ancient Douglas fir tree, the base of which is frequented for stand-up sex.



last decade, the homoeroticism and summer presence of queer enclaves has been only a mild concern for police and the park managers of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), who now have jurisdiction over management.⁵ As late as 1999, however, males engaging in public sex were given warnings for being “blatant and in complete disregard for other beach-goers and so-called “public standards” (Yeung 1999,12). Yet there has been little exhibitionism in the southern parts of Wreck because most present have been involved in the sexual activity themselves.

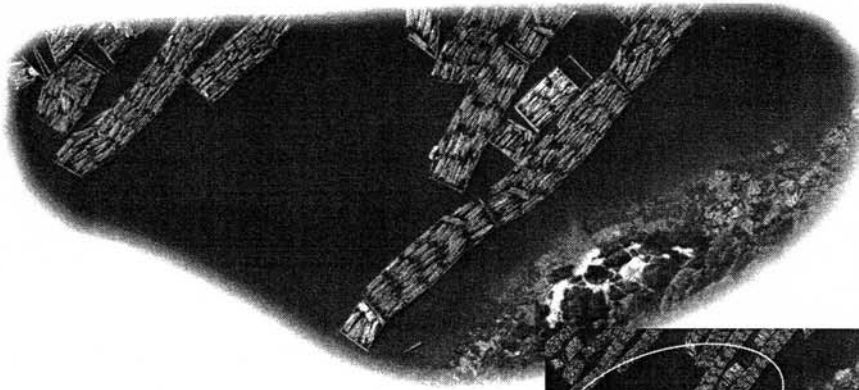
In recent years, police sometimes appear suddenly to arrest beer sellers and drug dealers. In turn, targeted individuals usually disappear into the forest. Police entrapment for public sex has never been effective in the area. There have been court challenges arguing that consensual sex in a remote natural place, even on public lands, is essentially private and therefore legal. The quasi-privatizing functions of driftwood structures have also involved a complex legal discussion. Fortunately, cruising, on almost any warm day, allows for a sort of community surveillance of any policing.

The Wreck Beach Preservation Society formed two decades ago to protect the right to nudity and the natural landscapes of the area. Unfortunately, the organization has had only limited feminist and queer involvement and has tended to focus on the problems of the main beach. Every few years, there have been pressures and proposals that would effectively drive socially active gay men (and public sex) out of the area. An example of the unsuccessful attempts at homophobia by design occurred soon after the GVRD took over management of the area from the university over a decade ago. Wealthy residents complained that they could not enjoy their beach because it was overrun with perverts. A service road was proposed for the base of the cliffs. The result would not only have destroyed more natural habitat but would have

further destabilised the cliffs and campus. In this case, the GVRD refused public funds for such closeted homophobia. But over the years, there have been more subtle efforts to block access to and to constrain the growth of the queer nodes.

CONCLUSIONS: CONFLICTING DESIGNS AS CANADIAN CULTURE

In returning to the four questions with which we embarked on in our walk along Wreck, some answers begin to emerge from this not-so-natural forest. For the sunny days of half the year, the gay male social scene on this nude beach generates a unique (Canadian) culture. There are virtually no other locations in the western half of the country in which to socialize in the same way. This culture is regional, national, and even international, by virtue of the citizenship and residence of the participants. These densities of homoerotic males, and their dense sets of homoerotic desires, transform the spaces in temporary and more indelible ways. Secondly, the freedom of this space is shaped by the expansive Canadian landscapes around it and the relatively tolerant society just beyond it. This freedom unleashes considerable energy that leads to both conscious designs, as in where people congregate, and effects. It remains difficult to have erotic desires without designs and without transforming locations: various tentative forms of queerscape architecture are shaped by culture. Thirdly, such "spontaneous" landscapes are ignored as culture (and any form of architecture) precisely because they challenge compartmentalized notions of culture, architecture, nature, sexuality, body, and landscape. Wreck is an exceptional and exoticized Canadian landscape and its culture remains marginalized even when homosexuality is no longer so marginal. Perhaps the least resolved question is whether this place, or any relatively wild Canadian landscape for that matter, can function to naturalize homosexuality and be "natural." There is the residue of over a century of Canadian cultural preoccupation with the natural landscape that often effectively celebrated the removal and marginalization of Aboriginals. With virtually all naked bodies still marked by discredited notions of race, desires, and relatively undisturbed habitat, no matter how marginal(ized), landscapes can never be transformed back to pristine states—conditions that may well have never existed anyway. To invoke other metaphors from adjacent parts of this landscape, Wreck is as much an arterial and expressway for a range of male homoerotic groups and an experimental station, with its share of toxic residues, as it is a rich and intact forest and shore ecosystem. As for the log booms, the mystique of the Canadian resource frontier and the fetish of export of "wood" from a hyper-masculine landscape have been all but exhausted.



Above: The log booms are part of the operations of a multinational corporation. The timber is exported to Japan and the United States.



The future for Wreck, as a homoerotic space, is unclear. Wreck, as a queer space, could evaporate tomorrow. Another set of groups could come to dominate the south end rather quickly. Claiming of this public space by homoerotic males remains a contentious notion for heterosexual men, women of all orientations, and many gay men ourselves. New ways to assess and monitor sexual minorities and sexuality in public space are necessary. For example, the police use geographic information systems to track many crimes but more proactive tracking of vulnerability to homophobia and violence has yet to be envisioned. Out of more extensive forms of queer inventorying and surveillance, sex-positive forms of landscape design could produce new site plans and broader landscape architectures. But minority sexualities in general will probably continue to remain the poor (horny) cousins in the stakeholders of landscapes. Today, queer-positive landscape designs of public spaces in Canada will typically be met by covert hostility from both homophobes and liberals. The resistance by landscape design and management practitioners to acknowledge the entitlements of individuals engaged in public sex, socializing, and even romance will continue to constrain the recognition of the diversity of "recreational" needs and identification of conciliatory options. Without queer-friendly landscape architecture, it will be virtually impossible for the various groups, homosexual and heterosexual, women and men, Musqueam and newcomers, to enjoy these precious places together.

Without recognition of the homosexuality in this landscape, as long as authorities deny this meaning of this social and cultural "place," natural conditions will continue to be degraded. This situation is not a uniquely West Coast or Canadian condition but affects many such urban "wildlands" here and elsewhere in the world. Still, Wreck is our place, our opportunity to envision very different relationships between "man" (and woman) and "nature." In the Terminal City, queer "programming" of public landscapes will remain problematic and largely utopian, relegated to fantasy and culture rather than policy, for some time. Multiple pressures for more use compound the obstacles to queerscape architecture as a social project. Both "nature" and "natural homosexuality" are harmed by continued ecological degradation. In these arenas of cultural skirmishes around gender and sexual expression, the struggle for equal access and comparable comfort levels for women and ethnic minorities, with—rather than against—groups of particularly hardy and adventurous gay men, will remain difficult. In initiatives to better protect habitat, there is liable to be increased competition between low impact recreation activities, including sunbathing and sex, and the conservation of biological diversity. In this faux symmetry, assertion of Musqueam options for management and utilization of traditional resources remains enigmatic, "the wild card." Regardless of these current and potential conflicts, it will be increasingly difficult to ignore networks of sexual minorities as visitors engaged in valid recreational activities.

Is there a queer utopia emerging at Wreck? No, but Wreck comprises a set of locations that engender those impulses. There are intriguing opportunities for new ways to interact, to express ourselves, and to share. The open space, the forested cliffs, the big and ancient trees, and the beautiful bodies offer respite from a chaotic world and the global market place. But while on sunny days Wreck is a remarkable place of peace and tolerance, it has not escaped persistent pressures from only partially resolved colonialism, male domination, commodification of both nature and the body, and environmental degradation. I have posited some unresolved contradictions around the homoerotic body, desire, and landscape. I argue that some aspects of these tensions are particularly queer and Canadian. But other contradictions are more derived from the history of British Columbia and still others from the shifts towards globalization of political economies and (homo)erotic cultures.

Contradictions, by themselves, do not make culture or transform spaces as culture. But some such contradictions have prevented sexual minorities from intervening collectively to control their strategic landscapes, beyond the rather arbitrary influence of their spontaneous activities. Queer cultures remain half-formed even in this time of globalization. Experience of and interest in relatively natural landscapes may be one of the more common and

stable elements of such cultures. A second element may be a conflicted attempt to remake sites formed by inequities around race, gender, and sexuality. In this Canadian context, notions of "naturalness," rather than indicating vital and diverse ecosystems, obfuscate social conflict. The feel of open space, of fewer social constraints, that is invoked by places such as Wreck is largely illusionary. It is open only in relation to the nagging claustrophobia of the growing state and urbanization.

At Wreck, different worlds strangely co-exist side by side and through bodies. Design proposals must recognize these tensions but refuse, which at least partially explains the lack of design, the illusion of nature conservation, in this Canadian landscape iconography. In ignoring conflict, even between eroticized male bodies, a false sense of freedom joins with new forms of cultural reproduction of social inequities. But Wreck remains one of my favourite places. For me, Wreck is a home in a larger culture that still often feels hostile to many homoerotic men and women. Even with all of the nagging tensions, the pleasure on a warm day of being with old and new friends naked on a beach or in a forest is indisputable.



Wreck transect: corporate log boom

(homo)sex beach and forest strand

cliff forest

drive-by public sex site

expressway

parking lot

experimental plot



NOTES

1. The label of "The Terminal City" for Vancouver goes back to the city's incorporation with a poem mentioned from 1887, in Roy, 1976.
2. Gay, nude, and semi-nude beaches have been strategic sites for gay and peace activism going back decades, as far back as, for example, the 1950s. See Hay, 1985/1996.
3. A trail and beach census by this author, on Sunday, August 12, 2001, between 3 and 5 p.m., yielded the following statistics: 6 women (all clothed and of European heritage) and 350 men. Of the men, most were completely naked with only 16 fully clothed and 57 nearly naked. Of the males, 313 appeared to have been primarily of European heritage, 26 of East Asian, 3 of South Asian, 2 of African, and 5 of Aboriginal. In that brief period, 34 of the men used public sex areas, and 14 were observed in sex or in states of sexual excitement.
4. The statements in this section about bodies are based on conversations on various parts of Wreck Beach, with men of a range of heritages, going back to the late 1970s.
5. In a mid-1998 statement, the police in charge of Wreck Beach indicated that they were not interested in enforcing laws against public sex as long as it was consensual and relatively discreet. See Zillich, 1998.

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