

Remaking queer public space in The Castro

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Synopsis

In this discussion of urban design options for the public and primarily outdoor spaces of The Castro district of San Francisco, I begin by outlining with some of the key reasons for why it is necessary, at this point in location history, to focus on remaking the queerness and publicness of the area. I delve into the still relatively simplistic archetypes of queer "territorialization" from ghettos to walled-cities to the pre-industrial European spaces of "Sodom" and the more expansive North American homosexual enclaves. I then explore why public space is so important and strategic for sexual minorities while the functions of particular locations shift over the decades. I outline some of the various scales of queer placemaking, some forces that queered and continue to queer The Castro, and the queer & not-so-queer stakeholders of The Castro. At the core of better environmental planning and design for The Castro are new ways to assert, listen to, and acknowledge divergent experience of public space. Different social groups often have divergent perceptual and historical maps along with fantasies, dreams, and visions. I then outline different ways to take stock of queer public space and to recognize the importance of certain sites, routes, and constellations of locations for particular individuals and groups. After exploring the divergence of needs for experience of public space, by different sexual minorities, alliances, business and political entities, I explore ways to begin to practice as sort of queer environmental planning or "queerscape architecture" as an ongoing dialogue around public sites and neighbourhood quality. I then explore ways to link maps to dreams through environmental planning & design that more fully recognize eroticism, marginalized sexualities, and particular

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networks of sexual minorities along with their experiences of public space. I conclude with an exploration of new possibilities for blending queer and neighbourhood activism with a widening range of environmental design professions. I playfully call this the emergence of a critical culture of civic and environmental activist, "queer (public) space cadettes" for the imagining queerer, more equitable, & better neighbourhood space.

Introduction:

Why bother thinking of remaking queer public space?

It is a great pleasure to come back and talk about a neighbourhood in which I have lived on and off for twenty years. While I, like many people here, have a love-hate relationship with the Castro, I have yet to find such a remarkable refuge as a gay man. I am here to make what may be fairly controversial assertions about the recent history of The Castro and the prospects for more purposeful planning and design of public space -- everything outside of the interior of building. In my professional and scholarly work over the years, I have been focused on networks of parks and open space -- a world view which is only partially applicable to such a dense urban environment as The Castro. But I do think that The Castro can be both greener and "queerer" if you will allow me to explore the neighbourhood with you this evening. I am not here to speak for and certainly not to assess the achievements of Castro Planning + Action. I attended one early meeting and have been in only modest contact over the last two years. But towards the end of this discussion, I will be arguing that the emergence of queer planning and design groups in many of the gay and lesbian enclaves in the world, over the last few years, represents a very important development both for the urban environment and for queer theory and activism. I will be talking about why getting involved in groups like CAPA are important and of why we need more of such organizations asserting various experiences, imagining new possibilities, and proposing new designs. Though I have not been privy to CAPA's important work, I will be speaking as someone who has an ongoing presence in The Castro, as my favourite regional queer centre, but who has been based in another queer "mecca," Vancouver -- one that has burgeoned more rapidly in the last decade than did The Castro.

As someone who has not been involved, directly, in many of the current discussions on the neighbourhood, I argue that much of the recent conceptualizations of The Castro have been locked into a sort of mirroring and mimicking of a romanticized vision of itself mixed with a bit too much West Coast boosterism thrown in as well. Over the last two decades, The Castro has become synonymous with tolerant public space for sexual minorities, particularly for white, middle-class gay men, but if everybody is trying to imitate The Castro should The Castro be trying to imitate what it once was in some kind of idealized time? Hardly.

If The Castro is to fulfil any promise of being a truly humanistic and democratic neighbourhood for sexual minorities, it will need, as the vernacular goes, "to get a life" -- a new neighbourhood life that will cram far less into such a small area and which will expand the queerness of its public space in corridors and nodes across the Bay Area. Central to my idea of a modest central Castro and an expanded Castro across San Francisco are five central arguments around why and how we can begin to more carefully remake the queer public space in the

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Castro.

1. Why queerscape architecture? The need for interdisciplinary movements of planning, design, and (public) art.

I have been arguing for quite a few years now that it is time to more consciously plan and design queer public places and neighbourhoods. Queer public space is always changing thus providing varying levels of refuge to particular networks and groups of sexual minorities. If we don't consciously remake that queer public space, other social and political economic forces will remake it anyway -- in ways where many of us, particularly the less privileged, will lose out.

2. The Castro can never be made into an artifact of itself -- it continues change (and hopefully evolve).

The Castro can never be artifact of itself. Since the mid-nineteen seventies, the public spaces of The Castro have been described and to some extent marketed to the rest of the world as the apogee of openness, tolerance, and social equality for sexual minorities when the area, as most of us here know, has had serious limits in terms of the openness, tolerance, and social equality that it provided to all people living here. There a kind of neighbourhood that we can call the "ghetto" as in the four Italian Jewish ghettos with Venice's being the first in 1485 -- that forced people inside the walls after dark. There are various kinds of medieval walled cities which kept out certain groups of people. And while both of these urban experiences have relevance to experience of sexual minorities, The Castro is different than both of them and very much signals a new kind of urban space that was soon replicated in other parts of North America and the world. The problem is that if everybody else is trying to imitate The Castro, what models of urban space can The Castro follow? The Castro is stuck and planning around The Castro is stuck and whatever emerges in the actual, as opposed to the mythic, Castro is the coming years will be as different to the nineteen seventies Castro as this early gay neighbourhood was from the various kinds of ghettos and walled-cities.

3. Planning that recognizes marginalized sexualities and identities must be based on the assertion and acknowledgement of a wide range of experiences of the same places.

The core of any planning process which wants to acknowledge sexual minorities and foster safe, accessible, diverse, and democratic queer space is developing of ongoing processes of sharing experiences and perspectives of a wide group of residents and stakeholders. This politic of "sharing" of "cognitive maps," and relating them to decision-making, began to emerge, in the nineteen seventies, in The Castro but in recent years has been stymied by crowding, gentrification, displacement, and mild social amnesia.

4. Contests over public space are part of redefining and enhancing democracy.

The publicness and "democratic-ness" of public space, in deed queer public space, is always contentious, is never complete, and always involves some inequality -- that must constantly be addressed. Ongoing conflicts around public space are central to our erotic, civic, and economic identifications and as Frederic Douglas said over a century ago, "Where there is no struggle, there is no progress." For sexual minorities, for people who are marginalized

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because of our sexual and related social identities, public space is in large part constructed and remade around ongoing efforts to either correct or maintain particular inequities around gender, race, language, culture, class, aesthetics, and desire. Public space, neighbourhood space, regional service and commercial space as The Castro has also become the prime arenas for a lot of "issues" that will take a long time, if ever, to fully resolve. Expect contests over queer public space, involving both policy and deadlines, to become increasingly rancorous.

5. Probably more than anywhere else on earth, The Castro has the talent and resources to develop new ways to plan and design neighbourhoods to fully recognize and celebrate erotic desire and the needs of particular sexual minorities and other resident groups.

Today, no one has a good handle on how to plan and design in ways that acknowledge and nurture the eroticization of public space. But of all of the gay, lesbian, and queer enclaves in the world today, The Castro is in one of the strongest positions to begin to more consciously remake itself on an ongoing basis: to protect particularly strategic queer sites, to improve equity between different groups of sexual minorities as related to gender, class, age, ethnicity, culture, language, physical mobility -- to name but a few categories of social difference. This is because The Castro is increasingly diverse, can draw on a number of democratic traditions around neighbourhood activism in San Francisco, and because while the disparities between different groups in The Castro are "fierce" they are not as great nor paralyzing, politically, than in many other queer enclaves today.

So what's a member of a sexual minority to do when they have concerns about their neighbourhood environments, their most important "hangouts" and other public spaces at this turn of the century? A lot of things. And there are more opportunities and imperatives to act every day -- in many different ways. In the following sections, I outline an activist mode of community mapping of strategic queer public space; of ways to better identify the full sets of experience, needs, hazards, inequities, and pressures for sexual minorities and heterosexuals as well. I then want to explore with you ways that we might act together in neighbourhoods like the Castro in the coming years.

I first re-examine notions of the walled city, the "ghetto," Sodom, and the early twentieth century homosexual enclave. All these spaces prefigure and inform The Castro. I then look at the scales of queer placemaking in San Francisco as a basis to better inventory the public places that are more important to our lives than most of us realize. I then look at the very complicated list of stakeholders for The Castro. I then move on to ways to recognize and map those divergent experiences of public and related commercial and residential space. I then explore ways to better "share" and assert those maps as part of more realistic alliances, dialogues, struggles, and compromises. This is the core of environmental planning and I outline a set of approaches to better recognizing erotic networks with their needs and agendas for public spaces that I call "queerscape architecture." In closing I want to reflect on the emergence of queer environmental planning groups like CAPA all around the world and the new opportunities that are emerging for imagining for better places to live, work, and play.

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**The enigmas of queer neighbourhood space:
Ghetto versus walled-city versus visible "community"**

"San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there...we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs..."

Carl Wittman
from "A Gay Liberation Manifesto" 1972ⁱ

Sexual minorities have been "making" social spaces in the city for almost as long as there has been urbanism. But in each era, we have been marginalized in different ways in relationship to political economy and culture. Nearly always, this marginality has been severely compounded by our status as demographic minorities -- except in the rare locations where, often for only short periods, sexual minorities as a group or specific networks are the majority. Sexual minorities have often been involved in the construction of public space -- the core of the urban project. But our spacemaking and territorialization has taken very different forms in different social, biophysical, and political economic contexts. The notion of the "gay ghetto" or even the "enclave" embodies a lot of complex social relationships and urbanization processes that need to be explored more carefully. In looking more closely at "The Ghetto" and "The Castro," I want to pause to examine a few of the archetypes of homoeroticization of urban space that many of us have absorbed over the years but which we have blurred and used in confusing ways.

The walled city

There have been a lot of walled cities in human development including Sodom by the Dead Sea that so pissed off the tribal people whom it didn't always allow in. Many walled cities nurtured communal spaces for sexual minorities. The queerest sort of walled city in the last century was probably imperial Beijing. A city of only a million, before the nationalist period, only people, many of who were males, who could provide certain specialized services associated with the imperial courts were allowed live nearby and move relatively freely. The walled city as a kind of elite space, that often profited from the outlying suburbs, was frowned on in North America but was reworked as the stockade and today's walled community. The problem with such elite urban spaces for sexual minorities is that it's great when we are needed, such as in periods of repression when we often provide services at effectively lower costs, but we too can be pushed out and expelled -- especially when there are too many of us or we contest the *status quo*.

The Jewish ghetto

The first of the four, historic Italian Jewish ghettos was in Venice in 1496. Jews were forced to live inside the walls of the ghetto after dark in exceptionally crowded conditions and with little public space. For example, Venice's original ghetto, before it was expanded, had one piazza where everything from public meetings to the sale of produce to children playing and

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sports took place. While the walled city kept other groups out, the ghetto kept minorities in -- and constrained public discourse through limiting physical space.

Sodom as queer urban Europe

Paul Hallan's *The Book of Sodom* begins to document the formation of homosexual inn and entertainment blocks and streets in urbanizing London going back to the eighteenth century. The same kind of homosexual male urbanization had emerged in northern Italian city states two hundred years before. It was in these often squalid city blocks, that associations between drinking, increased travel, temporary housing, and homosexuality emerged and where the associations with the biblical Sodom were constructed. But these new Sodoms were little more than Skid Roads where homoeroticism was associated with ruination.

The early twentieth century homosexual enclave

While it was in the western European "Sodoms" that a spatial economy of alcohol consumption, emerged, it was in the twentieth century port cities of North America, where more diverse interior and exterior networks of spaces, what Christine Boyer might call *topoi*, began to emerge. These port areas involved a far more diverse sets of entertainments and spaces that were both commercial and that, such as parks for cruising and sex, involved few direct costs to entry. In North America, these new enclaves took up space more aggressively than what was seen in Europe -- and that space spread out into the streets creating a new publicness that was to lay the basis for the "democraticness" of the post-Stonewall gay ghettos. But these were largely criminalized neighbourhoods where the making of even temporary homosexual space often required bribes to the police and an indirect sort of taxation systems through organized crime.

The post-Stonewall gay male ghetto

The gay male ghettos and enclaves that coalesced in the nineteen sixties, in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City -- to name the largest, were still dominated by homosexuality being criminalized. One of the most important functions of these neighbourhoods was in providing the political base for agitating for decriminalization, anti-entrapment, and full civil rights. It was in these neighbourhoods, especially in The Castro, that the notion of "The Gay Community" was constructed and implemented. Since there was considerable homophobia outside of these areas, hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded in. A neighbourhood and then a more scattered political economy, based around a relatively cheap and plentiful pool of labour available for "gay-friendly" work environments emerged by the late nineteen seventies.

The lesbian or queer neighbourhood

In San Francisco and elsewhere, the nineteen seventies gay neighbourhoods were dominated by white, middle-class gay men with other sexual minorities in a distinct "minority" status. Other sexual minorities, such as lesbians, began to bust out of the ghetto, where they had only ever felt partially welcome, to create different kinds of homoeroticized spaces such as in north Oakland and along Valencia Street near The Castro. The (male) gendering and the (white) racializing of the ghetto was addressed by the kind of "rainbow politics," and alliances, that were

- pioneered in The Castro in the nineteen seventies and eighties. But it was the demographic changes in North America in the nineteen eighties, the alliances around fighting AIDS, and the economic gains of women and people of colour, which would transform the gay male ghetto into a more diverse and inclusive "queer nationalist" space.

These are just some of the kinds of homoerotic placemaking that we have seen in recent centuries and there are many more subtle relationships associated with each type. What I want to emphasize is that every neighbourhood embodies a specific set of opportunities for queer place-making and many potential enclaves, for many different reasons, never happened and have been obliterated. In San Francisco, we have only to look at Polk Street and South of Market -- losses that people living in and having to rely on the services of The Castro increasingly pay for.

Scales of queer placemaking

"As digital modes of communication expand, the need for physical proximity appears to increase as well."

Queer space is particularly important for a host of needs for sexual minorities, from communality to entertainment to delivery of services. when you are a largely invisible minority, visibility in public space becomes particularly important and those sites take on a social and political economic "strategicness." But queer space also important to society at large -- for enhancing the diversity of, the security in, and the freedom expression in the public realm. So queer space is never really discrete or separate but rather part of larger systems of public discourse. Queer spaces are often some of the few public sites in the city where there is any space for "spontaneous interaction"ⁱⁱⁱⁱ and which "foster the accidental and spontaneous encounters so central to urban life"^{iv}.

There is a dichotomy between ephemeral versus concretized queer space. There are poles, however, with ephemeral space, such as political action sites, cruising areas, bars, etc. or places on the edge of (or over) mainstream culture and urban space and more permanent and dedication spaces such as Halsted Street in Chicago. In Chicago, the city is proposing to undertake a street improvement that includes 25 foot high gateways pylons and street lights with rainbow freedom rings in neon. The specific intent of the design is to acknowledge and celebrate the gay presence on Halsted Street. But before we start dividing the world of public space into temporary and permanent, or even dedicated and multi-use, let's take a step back and consider some of the specific functions of queer public space, at least as they have emerged in The Castro, how these functions were necessary to cope with certain conditions and to respond to specific desires, and how these functions will be replaced by others, with new kinds of spaces, as the world changes.

1. encoding

These are signs and symbols that suggest that a sexual minority is welcome: rainbow flags,

- symbols of certain kinds erotic networks like leather. Twenty years ago, the lineup at the Hibernia Bank at 18th and Castro, "Hibernia Beach," saw a plethora of handkerchiefs indicating kinds of availability that seem almost quaint today.

2. seeing

Seeing other gay people and lesbians, people of the same age, and to be seen has been a major function of queer public space -- such as walking along the streets, at demonstrations or outside at Cafe Flore.

3. learning

The Castro has been a major location for distribution of information on a range of issues related to homosexuality from that lifestyle options to legal and political issues to health care and the prevention of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

4. protection

While we know that The Castro has attracted a lot of bashers, and there has been a phenomenon over the last twenty years of bashers attracted to gay ghettos, the area has been perceived as being safer than most for "out" gay men and lesbians. Certainly the commercial spaces have been perceived as being safe.

5. territorialization

Sometimes it is nice to have a neighbourhood or two to identify with, to even live in. The Castro became real and mythic territory for people who had often felt pretty "lost in space."

6. claiming

The struggles for visibility, gay rights, political representation, and the struggle of people with AIDS has marked The Castro as a place where sexual minorities have a place that is as important, or even more important, than other groups or business interests -- though in reality this is done little, so far, to slow the ravages of the increasing penetration of global capital.

Some specific forces that queer(ed) The Castro

The emergence of The Castro as a "gay mecca" occurred in stages -- with a fair bit of boosterism and subtle rewrites of history along the way. By the nineteen seventies, The Castro was being honed and then marketed as a gay mecca -- the reality being more complex and sometimes contradictory.

From the 1930's to the early 1970's, a quiet working class neighbourhood but with a relatively high degree of tolerance and ethnic diversity.

The American Left and the trade unions were particularly strong in working-class districts of San Francisco such as The Castro -- introducing aggressively democratic notions of access to

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resources and public space.

The aftermaths of World War II and the Korean conflict saw many single men and women socialized homoerotically during those conflicts moving into cities such as San Francisco, though originally not into The Castro.

The upper Castro was a frontier between older pedestrian-oriented urban culture and suburban, automobile-oriented living in upper Market and to the west. One of the first openly gay businesses in The Castro, going back to the mid-nineteen sixties, was a now long-gone gas station near 18th and Douglas.

In terms of gay and lesbian organizing, Los Angeles saw homophile organizations before San Francisco with organized confrontations with police in Griffith Park, very much around public space and strategic sites in the year lead up to the New York Stonewall Riots. In San Francisco, the newsletter of the Society of Individual Rights (S.I.R.) indicated gay enclaves along Polk Street with some sites in the Haight, South of Market, and The Castro.

The hippie and anti-war gays were attracted to the Castro district, near Haight Ashbury - houses suitable for communal living, parks, easy access to city, like a small town Main Street. Intensified urbanization with BART and the MUNI underground - the impacts of non-gay gentrification and its relationship to the "globalization" of downtown San Francisco starting in the late nineteen seventies

The post Stonewall gay culture allowed a number of strata of gay men and some women to live their lives relatively openly. There were some key groups and some omissions as well.

By the mid-nineteen seventies, gay men were creating an entertainment and commercial district along with a heightened sense of and commitment to community. It was in The Castro that a person or group could be "out" in public. The Castro became a laboratory for coding, constructing gay **visibility**, and claiming both space that was not homophobic and which actually began to celebrate gayness.

Men moved to the Castro "to be gay" -- for the communality, for the sex, for the personal transformations that emerged with less constrained access to both.

There emerged a sort of political economy of disco that nurtured a critical mass of gay businesses while coexisting with some space for non-consumptive services. But bars and other consumer items are not cheap and people effectively paid higher prices for indoor gay communal space and for "a place" in outdoor areas. In this political economy, communal space was effectively bought through consumption, via gay businesses, while non-proprietary public space was abdicated to generalized cruising and political organizing and demonstrations.

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By the late nineteen seventies, the visibility and concentration of gay people in The Castro was greater than in any neighbourhood on earth. The new gayness led to the election of Harvey Milk, political power and activism and the openness attract other gay people. Businesses began catering to the needs and desires of the gay population. Community institutions and service agencies were formed or revamped to serve the new, large gay male, community.

vulnerable bodies:

With AIDS and the aging of the baby boom health crises had tremendous impacts on both the "ghetto" and a pedestrian-based village -- and the transformation of an entertainment-oriented public space to a service-delivery and housing-oriented neighbourhood. For many people - both gay and straight, The Castro became associated with disease, death, and shattered dreams.

race and rainbows:

Many people of colour have experienced gayness of The Castro as being primarily white and by the mid-nineteen eighties a wide range of groups were deepening and making more visible a much wider range of networks -- that have increasingly contested and transformed public space.

Starting in the late nineteen eighties, the renewed activism of groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation created a climate for beginning to transform boystown to a sort of queer global village -- with limited success.

the high cost of being queer:

Castro neighbourhood is not alone in facing challenges, especially growing social and class disparities including:

- i. homelessness and the influx of particularly impoverished people;
- ii. stratification, inflation from the relative affluence (and poverty) of some gay men and lesbians; and
- iii. the shift from housing-based neighbourhood to regional commercial centre bringing additional automobile congestion.

landscapes of homelessness:

Just the same as many gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people were effectively evicted in the nineteen sixties and seventies and pushed into The Castro, homeless people have often perceived of The Castro as something of a refuge.

a destination for whom?

As the Castro becomes more of a regional and international destination, for both sexual minorities and others, questions emerge about who are stakeholders? The local residents and merchants? What about the entire city? What indirect international subsidies and consumers? How is globalization affecting the nature of decision-making over the neighbourhood and physical and financial aspects of the local environment?

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Where is the space for the Agora?

The automobile-dominated street? Harvey Milk Plaza? The Castro Theatre? That's is not much...

- i. The Agora: Occupation of urban space overlapping w/ engagement in the life of the community.
- ii. The planner, urban designer, and landscape architect become mediators around the extent and nature of and contests over public space

avoiding Meccas...

The real Mecca in Saudi Arabia gets terribly crowded every year. It is expensive to go on the *haj* and people often die in overcrowded conditions. To want to create an erotic Mecca in a small neighbourhood and a relatively small and concentrated city such as San Francisco, may lead to the loss of some of the public space amenities that attracted people to the city in the first place.

The queer & not-so-queer stakeholders of The Castro

"Within a network of electronic culture, where will the place for creative, face-to-face collaboration be?"

The Castro has a very large and complex set of groups that have interests in the neighbourhood -- perhaps too many for such a small and already congested area. Before we can look at protecting and remaking some of the public space, it is important to appreciate the wide range of groups who need and interests who have designs on sites that may be strategic for a number of groups

neighbourhood residents

renters:

small apartments,
shared apartments,
shared houses

owners:

entire houses with rental units,
TICs,
condos,
coops (?)

businesses:

live next to or in part of their offices / shops
(probably not many - but there area a growing number of people who work out of their homes)
local or unique businesses - catering to particular clientele such as gay men, lesbians, "queer

Gordon Brent Ingram, Remaking Queer Public Space in The Castro
Presentation to Castro Area Planning + Action, San Francisco, California, December 5, 1997

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people"
chain stores: regional / national / international

backgrounds:
gender & extent of distinctiveness / ambiguity of gender
sexual identity: gay / lesbian / bisexual / "queer identified" straight queer-friendly / straight
queer-indifferent / straight-or-closeted homophobic / straight-or-closeted basher
age group: child, youth, twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, elderly etc.
particular ethnic, language, and cultural group
level of interest in sexual contact
level of health, mobility and practical access to various parts of The Castro
class background especially in terms of access to housing, health care, and entertainment
domestic unit: single, couple, inter-generational family, family with children, lesbian or gay
family with children,

dependence on services:
communal-related (need for spaces to be with friends and to make friends, "to see and be seen")
culture:
San Francisco multicultural
gay male culture
lesbian culture
queer culture
particular kinds of gay, youth, queer culture for which The Castro is often "a Mecca"
immigrant
entertainment-related (particular kinds of interests, networks of people, fondness for food and
substances etc.)
health care delivery: HIV, AIDS, elderly, women's, children, immigrant / poverty-related

Groups not residing in The Castro

1. Upper Market / Haight / Mission residents
2. residents of other parts of San Francisco who are closely or partially linked into a sort of Greater Castro
3. other parts of the Bay Area serviced by BART that are also linked into or dependent on a kind of Greater Castro
4. residents of other automobile suburbs of the Bay Area: Silicon Valley, Marin etc. who drive in regularly or semi-regularly and who reside in places with very little gay, lesbian, queer communality and spaces -- in part because they have enough access to The Castro
5. residents of other parts of California who visit semi-regularly and who may only have access to a limited amount of local queer space
6. residents of other parts of United States who visit semi-regularly and who live in either other gay / lesbian / queer enclaves
OR who lead fairly isolated and invisible lives as sexual minorities

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AND who come from very different backgrounds to The Castro
OR who are part of a specific ethnic, language, erotic, political network
7. other parts of North America - roughly the same outline as for residents of other parts of the USA. However, NAFTA with all of its warts has increased the Mexican and Canadian links to The Castro and, to some extent, both the enrichment and the pressures on The Castro
8. other parts of the world - similar to the groups involved from other parts of the USA but a more diverse group

So what do these diverse, and sometimes conflicting, interests mean for The Castro?

1. Not every stakeholder group is going to have its needs satisfied in The Castro -- especially over the long-term. In fact, for some of these groups, The Castro may actually decline, quite substantially, in the provision of key public spaces and services over the next two decades. To me, this is the heart, of why we need to be looking at the publicness of public space in The Castro in this period.

2. The Castro as a gay / queer Mecca is increasingly interesting to new niche marketing strategies which could overwhelm, could swamp, its public (and private) commercial spaces.

3. The Castro as a gay / queer Mecca is increasingly important to cultural industries through gay-identified spaces such as SF Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, A Different Light book store and to broader culture in general. The Castro has become a destination for corporate and state cultural industries -- particularly for countries with human rights protections around sexual orientations. The Castro has become of the "location" of where gayness and "queerness" has been normalized even when many people don't want to be seen as being particularly "normal."

4. All this suggests to me that contemporary "globalization" could erode much of the local neighbourhood character of The Castro. An intensification of free market, "supply and demand," could turn The Castro into a landscape more oriented to the marketing of queer-related consumer items, images, ideas, and other culture at the expense of local residents -- some of whom very much need to be living here. Local residents will directly and indirectly pay for this globalization through having to deal with increased noise and congestion and for having to go further a field for shops and services. The poorest and most vulnerable people, such as those with AIDS, could tend to be indirectly pushed out by groups with more economic or even demographic clout. And these intensifying conflicts will increasingly involve designs over public spaces: streets, sidewalks, parks, facades, commercial and cultural establishments.

(Cognitive) maps & dreams

The core of any planning process which wants to acknowledge sexual minorities and foster safe, accessible, diverse, and democratic queer space is developing of ongoing processes of sharing experiences and perspectives of a wide group of residents and stakeholders. This

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politic of "sharing" of mental or "cognitive maps" of users and uses of public space and relating this diversity to decision-making, began to emerge, in the nineteen seventies. But while there has been a lot of talk about "diversity" and "community involvement" in neighbourhoods such as The Castro little has been done to successfully address increased traffic, crowding, gentrification, and displacement. In fact, there has been an almost mild social amnesia and the length of time that people have been talking about these issues.

By sharing more of each other's maps, be they street diagrams scrawled on pieces of paper or verbal descriptions expressed in meetings, we can begin to quantify queer space and to identify the most vulnerable locations and groups of people. By sharing maps we can begin to compile larger inventories of key public spaces for particular gay, lesbian, and other queer groups and explore where to find them in the Castro, what is missing in the Castro, where it is found elsewhere in the Bay Area and clues to how we might protect existing spaces and nurtures ones for other activities and groups.

Taking stock:

Inventorying key aspects of queer public space

What makes The Castro unique? What makes it similar to many other neighbourhoods around the world -- many of which show no signs of becoming queer enclaves? CAPA has noted some basic qualities that make the public spaces and neighbourhood character of The Castro so important.

"0. Political economic balance and detente around housing and public space

1. Traditional neighbourhood design.
 - a. Densely populated residential
 - b. Active commercial district that offers a broad range of shops and services.
 - c. Large parks as well as quiet tree lined streets.
 - d. Car traffic is secondary to pedestrian, several transit lines
2. Home town community that straight people often took for granted, also a liberated zone.
 3. Location and topography.
 - a. A valley on the edge of the older parts of the city,
 - b. Community that had always been outside the mainstream would settle on the edge..
 - c. The hills protect it from fog,
 - d. Physically separate the neighbourhood from other parts of the city.
 - e. Away from heterosexual scrutiny, new found autonomy of gay community
4. That autonomy allowed for idea of the gay enclave where a life is integrated with places.
 5. The Mecca's urban elements.
 - a. Occupying public spaces creates a culture of "being out"
 - b. "Gay dollar" becomes foothold for gay community in free market culture.
 - c. Flexible, non-hierarchical plan of Victorians allow for variety of households
 - d. Public space becomes rallying point for political movement
 - e. Physical and institutional connections to other neighbourhoods create coalitions"

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In beginning to build on the crucial inventories of groups such as CAPA, I want to focus on specifically public and semi-public space, not residential, to highlight how little of this space actually exists for such a residential and visitor population base. I want from you in the audience and to indicate on these overhead maps the most strategic and vulnerable sites of queer public space. I am calling on your "cognitive maps" of the neighbourhood to begin what could be a communal queer map as a basis for subtle redesigns in the coming years.

Types of queer public sites / space in The Castro

streets

sidewalks

parks

semi-public institutions and agencies

purely commercial spaces

Types of uses of public space in The Castro

services

shopping

cruising

culture

entertainment

vulnerability

1. which ones of the above-indicated sites / spaces and activities are on the decline and why?

2. which sites for vulnerable groups are particularly important and how might these places might also be vulnerable in the coming years?

The rest of this talk on how we can begin to develop strategies involving unorthodox sets of planning methods and activist tactics to protect and expand these particularly important and vulnerable fragments of the queer landscape that is The Castro.

Queerscape architecture as dialogue around public & neighbourhood space

Joe Curtin of CAPA shared with me a recent cartoon in a collection called "Gay Comix" called "Castro Street 2000 AD (After Disco)" by a comic strip artist named Vaughn. It was published a few years ago. The protagonist travels into the various futures of Castro Street. In 2000, it's a kind of tacky sex playground - Cala supermarket is turned into a sex toy supermarket and the Castro Theater is all porn. In 2025, the Castro lies in ruins - "even the Tenderloin crowd won't touch it". In 2050 it's been bought by the Disney Corporation, like what has happened with Manhattan's Times Square and restored to its full former glory circa 1980, with dioramas depicting bars and sex in the parks, and motorcycle tours given by a real leatherman. While none

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of us have crystal balls and all of our best reasoned projections will probably be quite off, what we imagine in groups will have a tremendous impact on what actually emerges, and the queerness, equity, and democraticness of that public space in the coming decades. It starts with groups like CAPA and discussions like this.

There is also an allied but almost separate political and environmental project going on today of "deghettoizing" queer space -- of forcing it outward from the older enclaves and self-described ghettos in order to "queer" [as a verb] entire cities. In this vision, The Castro becomes the centre of a "greater Castro" that becomes a social hub of much of the eastern side of the City of San Francisco. But deghettoization poses some extreme risks especially in a period of globalization of real estate, business, and even service delivery. Deghettoization should not allow for the more established, resident stakeholders of The Castro to lose influence and power, not that the residents really ever had any -- it was mainly with the gay businesses. Yet any notion of a political "majority" of gay men is long gone with the demographics of the late nineteen nineties. But diversity can also lead to being divided and conquered by outside forces, such as chain stores, especially if nagging inequities between different groups of sexual minorities, around effective access to public space, is not fully addressed.

For me -- as a white gay man, the hard part is still listening to a full range of other groups, be they sexual minorities or straight, and to compile maps, queer inventories, about what is there. The following guidelines for asserting and "sharing" a range of queer cognitive maps are derived from my work as an environmental planner and from working in a group called "queers in space vancouver" that met, talked, and began to redesign for a few years.

1. The content of all cognitive maps involve contests around sexual and related social expression and often some recognition of and responses to certain outlawed sexualities and groups.

Some principles for linking queer cognitive maps with activist environmental design in The Castro

2. The content of all cognitive maps, authored by "queers" or otherwise, also reflect a range of "difference" factors and related inequities in access to and enjoyment of public space, related gender, race, culture, language, and physical ability -- all cumulatively contributing to experiences of class.

3. All cognitive maps reflect some kind of historical experience even if that "reality" largely reflects attempted erasure of collective memory of certain sequences of events.

4. The production and use of cognitive maps always involve anticipated interests and audiences that in turn influences the content of the disclosures.

3. All cognitive maps are fragmentary, incomplete, and represent past experiences as soon as they are produced. But cognitive maps can be added to and expanded producing ongoing

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narratives of place.

4. Cognitive maps can be produced in clinical contexts, through the production of culture, and as part of input into planning and design.
5. All cognitive maps embody some kind of tension between the producer and the professional user of the disclosed information even when the anticipated audience is unclear to the producer.
6. Production of cognitive maps involves some divergence and disparities in the motives and rewards between producers of the maps and subsequent users of the information.
7. The production of all cognitive maps involve gaps, censorship, and erasure -- with some contexts involving more in disclosure information than others.
8. The transmission, compilation, and analysis of cognitive maps is invariably influenced by the politicized and opportunistic agendas around the use of such information.
9. Media "stories" increasingly embody conflicts, even "wars," over the cognitive maps of "the public."
10. Virtually any cognitive map can be used to substantiate supposedly democratic and "grassroots" interests, around public space, even if the opposite is more the case.
11. All cognitive maps indicate some divergence of social experiences and associated contests over space, with direct implications for the design and management of public space, even when the context of map production discourages the transmission of information alluding to such contentiousness. In other words, the conflict that is not mentioned in a cognitive map and how it is ignored is as important as what is described.
12. All environmental planning, including urban design and architecture, involves the use of cognitive maps filtered through various professional procedures that often function to enhance the objectivity, the *pouvoir*, of some interpretations of that diverse information.
13. Throughout urban planning and design processes, there are reinterpretations of cognitive maps, and contests over those interpretations, particularly in the negotiating around programming, design strategies and responses, plan detail, and construction. Typically, the more democratic inputs, and strategies for countering marginalization, that go into such an urban design process are neutralized and often removed from such processes.
14. Urban planning and design always uses cognitive maps and involves conflicts over

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cognitive maps with divergent interpretations typically favouring hegemonic versus oppositional projects around public space.

15. All aesthetic movements and systems embodied in particular designs of public space, including architecture that interacts with exterior environments, has relationships to historical experiences -- including legacies of past political economies and their relationships to the social and sexual expression that were / are marginalized at various points.

16. All planning and design around public space involve issues of sexual expression and those of equity in terms of erotic desires, identities, and acts along with contests around gender, race, class, culture, language, and disability.

17. Conflicts around freedom of sexual and other forms of consensual social expression in public space, and respective designs, can never be isolated -- are never "pure." In other words, along with contests around sex, there are also the ongoing social struggles around gender, race, culture, language, class, and disability.

18. It is never going to be viable, nor ethical in terms of issues of equity, to "privilege" freedom of sexual expression in designs of public space over other design-related issues involving gender, race, culture, language, class, and disability. Sex, in the final analysis, no matter how marginalized and indicative of broader systems of inequities, is always deeply embedded in the total discourse around specific public spaces.

Cognitive maps do not make a plan but sometimes plans are far less important than making the space to imagine. Plans, with all of their technical requirements, are still the easy part. It is building up the social infrastructure to put out what we do, where we depend, and what we worry about -- and then to be able to listen to each other for extended periods that is the difficult part.

Linking maps to dreams through environmental planning & design

So what challenges does the Castro face? As well as the vulnerability to the loss of queerness and publicness of public space in San Francisco, and The Castro in particular, there are some more fundamental obstacles that require new ways to organize, plan, and design. CAPA was noted that the following.

"People in the Castro are increasingly convinced that urban problems are intractable

1. People tend to blame them.
2. Urban design and planning not public priorities - left to a deregulated marketplace.
 - a. The City of San Francisco's General Plan does not deal with neighbourhoods as units.
 - b. Very little city planning actually takes place in the City Planning Department.
 - c. Existing neighbourhood and merchants groups have not taken on planning roles."

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the emergence of groups like CAPA

Castro Area Planning and Action is one of about a handful of loosely organized civic groups concerned with sexual minorities and physical space. CAPA has described some of the factors that have inspired its members to work together.

"A. Changes in the Castro District - for many gay and lesbian people, a kind of home town.

1. Media attention on openly gay and lesbian people had increased.
2. People with AIDS and HIV experiencing better health and hope for longevity
3. Recovery from the recession of the early 1990s, while the crisis of homelessness continued.
4. San Francisco became popular destinations for and chain stores expanded

B. Residents, merchants form Castro Area Planning and Action (CAPA) in 1995 - issues identified.

1. Tourist destination, or residential neighbourhood with neighbourhood business?
2. Retain its unique character, or indistinguishable from other neighbourhoods?
3. Could the Castro become model of neighbourhood response to problems?

C. In this environment of disengagement from the planning process that CAPA was formed in 1995.

1. Early meetings of angry residents and merchants
2. Group emerged, including architects and planners who saw need for a long-range plan
3. CAPA remained outside immediate (and somewhat reactionary) concerns of the neighbourhood"

"The participants in the subsequent planning workshops organized by CAPA came to an early agreement about many of the weaknesses and gaps in the Castro's urban form..." These meetings concluded that,

- "1. Market Street is underdeveloped does not support pedestrian activity for many blocks.
2. Appropriate civic space does not exist.
3. No place for community institutions especially gay or lesbian groups in which to locate.
4. Local business on Castro Street are struggling to compete with national chains.
5. Automobile congestion reduce pedestrian use of the streets as a place for social interaction."

These "deficiencies" were considered opportunities to resolve many of the conflicts that have stymied community and communal space in the neighbourhood. There was a particular interest in:

- "1. Concentrating new mixed use development on Market Street
 - a. Developing commercial/residential mixed use buildings,
 - b. Make Market Street more of a destination for visitors that Castro is now.
 - c. Accommodated Gay-lesbian community organizations in office space
 - d. Create pedestrian traffic needed to keep the street active, safe, and economically viable.
2. Anchor developments at points along Market will facilitate this expansion.
 - a. Redesigned Harvey Milk Plaza
 - b. Cultural center (for arts and theater)

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- c. Gateway, or entrance, to the newly-defined area.
3. Community development corporation to provide low-cost housing and commercial enterprises.
4. Pedestrian friendly environment in the neighbourhood especially on Castro Street

The plan which is emerging recognizes the importance of urban space in the life of a community, and has led to a recognition within the community of the need for a public city planning process."

As someone who has been tracking urban design and public space issues involving sexual minorities for many years, I can assure you that as a community-based organization, the achievements of CAPA are awesome. Having said this, I would expect years of ongoing organizing, activism, restructuring, expanded inclusion, plan revision, and the fragmentation of a comprehensive vision into more implementable, but incomplete, improvements in policy, site designs, and guidelines. In this environment, it will be easy to have a kind of "divide and conquer situation" where sexual minorities are gradually phased out as residents and The Castro turned into a showcase and shop window.

I see few comprehensive plans around sexual minorities and public space ever becoming implemented -- even though the visions and the group imaginings are crucial. Instead, we will probably see ongoing battles, a lot of piecemeal and "incrementalist" planning and design, that will be quite frustrating to have to counter. And it is through the kind of community-based social networks, that were originally generation around groups of primarily white middle-class gay men, but which can be made far more inclusive in the coming years through sister organizations or internal working groups, that continuity and vigilance can be maintained.

Conclusions ■ (Public) space cadettes:

Imagining queerer, more equitable & better neighbourhood space

I use terms like "queerscape architecture" and the envisioning of a cadre of "queer (public) space cadettes" with a great deal of humour. I confess that in my own life as a professional and an activist that I have had to sacrifice a lot of play time for the dry technical details often necessary to get a plan or design completed, to get paid, to receive professional recognition. We need a lot more people engaged in these issues and many of them are not going to have the time or resources to pursue advanced degrees. At the same time, this is a good time to inspire a new generation of environmental designers. In 1982 while beginning my doctoral studies at UC Berkeley I was privileged to be a founding member of Gays and Lesbians of Wurster Hall (the building that houses the College of Environmental Design). While many of these comrades are not with us today, many more became almost too successful and have not found the time to imagine new ways to plan and design -- and new ways to engage in making public space truly public, equitable, and democratic.

Urban activists in The Castro are in the enviable position of being able to influence gay culture and politics on a national and international scale. Likewise, the Castro is often expected to live up to a certain standard by gay people in other parts of the city, country, and world -- especially in terms of tolerance and equity.

1. Conflict is inevitable so you might as well have a good time anyway.
When we are dealing with a range of sexual minorities and related environments trying to assert themselves, things invariably get tense. Organizations have to constantly re-evaluate how they can be better inclusive while listening to frustrations only some of which are the able to respond to at any given time.
2. Humour and panache is key to organization survival.
Expect that it will take five times longer to actually implement a relatively straight forward policy or design improvement than what you expect. In the meantime, keep a sense of humour and use every bit of your hard-fought queer irony and sarcasm to stay sane and to stave off burnout.
3. Diversify the means for communicating and communicating.
Different cultural groups have different kinds of currencies especially around communicating around contest spaces. "Sharing" maps on napkins will work for some groups. Various kinds of visual and verbal exchanges will work between other groups. Find ways for your groups to communicate through various media and channels and to confront hierarchies where writing is valued more than talking or drawing.
4. Make lots of space to imagine and to day dream.
Today's clever plans are just the beginning. The key is to make the social and culture space to play, dream, and re-envision space on an ongoing basis.
5. When in doubt, be critical, irreverent but respectful.
However democratic and community-based is your group, you are vulnerable to be used by so-called "community leaders." Expected that you will be treated by some opportunist groups and figures as "tools" and have some fun with it -- without surrendering your loyalties, common sense, or autonomy.

It is in developing these qualities in planning, design, and activist projects in the coming years, that The Castro may become the first queer neighbourhood to protect and reinvent itself in a world that typically will be using rather than respecting the needs of sexual minorities to live together and to celebrate ourselves.

acknowledgements:

Thanks to Joe Curtin for information and advice. All opinions expressed represent the opinions of the author and are not intended to reflect positions of any organization.

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Gordon Brent Ingram, Remaking Queer Public Space in The Castro
Presentation to Castro Area Planning + Action, San Francisco, California, December 5, 1997

- use of parks and the anti-entrapment movement with a 1980 study of Buena Vista Park. His doctorate in environmental planning is from the Department of Landscape Architecture of the University of California, Berkeley and his dissertation explored the generating of alternative scenarios for planning networks of open space. This work is scheduled to go to press with Springer-Verlag as a text book in 1999. He was an editor of the 1997 Bay Press anthology, *Queers in Space: Communities | Public Spaces | Sites of Resistance*.

notes

- i. Carl Wittman. 1972. A Gay Manifesto, reprinted In *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*. K. Jay and A. Young (editors). (New York, Douglas Book / World Publishing / Times Mirror, 1972) pp. 330 to 345. See p. 330.
- ii. Moshe Safdie with Wendy Kohn. 1997. *The City After the Automobile: An Architect's Vision*. Toronto: Stoddart. p. 30.
- iii. *ibid.* p. 39.
- iv. *ibid.* p. 154.
- v. *ibid.* p. 29.