

***gordon brent INGRAM*** Ph.D. **environmental planning**  
1230 Hamilton Street #204, Vancouver V6B 2S8 CANADA  
tel. (604)669-0422  
preferred email: gb\_ingram@bc.sympatico.ca

Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning  
202 Wurster Hall  
University of California Berkeley California 94720  
tel. (510)643-0618 / messages: 643-9335

Oakland, April 19, 1998

Presentation to the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of  
Gays and Lesbian in Planning (GALIP)

## **Queerscape Architectures: In search of the implications of queer theory for urban planning**

### **introduction**

1. I'm here to review some of the implications of queer theory for urban design and planning.
2. In this discussion, I outline a kind of integrative and activist form of social policy and environmental design that I playfully label (for now), "queerscape architecture."
3. After proposing queerscape architecture as a way to better recognize and respond to the needs of particular groups of sexual minorities, I list some of the planning projects that are emerging in urban regions such as the San Francisco Bay Area.

### **themes**

1. If we frame sexual minorities as relatively fixed identities as largely defined by white, middle-class gay men (at least for North America), the need for better research on the "spaces" of sexual minorities and respective planning does not seem very apparent. It is with other less privileged sexual minorities, which are fast becoming the large majorities in a metropolitan regions sexual minorities, that there is more of a basis for policy, planning and design initiatives.
2. While queer theory, as often dominated by the perspectives of English Departments, has provided some badly needed theoretical space, they are essentially colonizing planning and design theory. Such queer theory cannot really prepare young people for practical interventions in communities. The implications of queer theory for planning will need to come from experienced, but not totally entrenched or complacent, planners who can identify gaps in the research and planning programs in the communities in which they work.

**background:**

the (queer) space industry in the 1990s: confronting inequities in public (and private) space in the face of globalization and privatization

late 1960s and 1970s gay liberation and lesbian feminist activism and the initial confrontations around “strategic sites” from cruising areas to bars to women’s centers

the initial critiques of “the gay ghetto” and the often muddled associations with Jewish ghettos and African-(North)American

the implications of separatism and its underlying critique of the inequities in public space; land communes / utopianism

the little scholarly work on sexual minorities in urban studies, planning, and geography until the 1980s

the first wave of discussions of “gay” and lesbian space in the early 1980s and the loss of interest with the AIDS pandemic

ACT UP in 1987 and queer nationalism in 1990: the implications for public space filter out by 1993-94

gender and space is a major source of interest in architectural theory in the early 1990s

geography, ever needing a reason for existence, starts tolerating explorations of “sexuality and space” with a major network formed in the early 1990s

by the mid-1990s every major city in the Western world had at least one discussion / professional / activist group on some aspect of planning policy and / or environmental design

**some tenets of queer theory:**

identities and acts not fixed but social constructed

identities and acts partly constructed through social environments and political economies

“queer” as emphasizing various forms of marginalization rather than a stable set of sexualities with same-sex contact tending to be the most ongoing source of isolation and lack of acceptance

avoidance of any “totalizing narratives” (monolithic modernist) analyses of all sexual minorities (“The Gay Community”) and supposed commonalities - the provisionality of theory

making provisional alliances through a politics of comparing and contrasting “cognitive maps” of often divergent sexual minority “networks”

a shift from (static) identity politics to more experiential “affinity” politics

a skepticism for both confrontational politics and bureaucratic compromise as is often

involved with planning  
a broader critique of state-oriented forms of intervention with a bias towards more  
specific and provisional efforts  
willingness to critique older left analysis of social inequities while often ignoring the  
kind  
of class issues so central to “progressive” planning

### **some problems with (queer) theory**

1. often times the theory is based in a limited amount of research based on very different situations as faced by location professionals and activists
2. people not so oriented to (or who don't have the same amount of privilege to indulge in) theory often find it of limited use
3. more practical people are forced to transfer vague developments of intellectual culture into policies and strategies

### **some reasons why g, l, b +t planners might want to be interested in queer theory and issues of sexuality and public space**

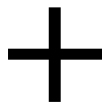
1. sometimes you as a member of a sexual minority might have a better knowledge of the situation than a straight colleague or politician
2. people are on the move and some of the communities in which you work will see a dramatic rise in “out” sexual minorities and an increase in demands for certain services, spaces, and related policies
3. less privileged groups of sexual minorities are becoming increasingly numerous and articulate -- defining new priorities that could translate into planning policy (whether you like it or no)
4. queerscape architecture sometimes can be less boring than some other fields in planning

### **some emerging queerscape architecture projects**

expanding visibility (that flag in the Castro for what it is worth)  
diversifying visibility (new symbols for different groups, cultures and politics)  
increasing safety (urban design interventions such as call boxes etc. etc.)  
providing services for particularly marginalized groups (like space for poor sexual  
minority groups with children -- especially women but some gay men)  
enhancing the publicness of public space (as with the discussions of Castro Area  
Planning  
+ Action)  
minimizing the problems of the ghetto as in congestion, noise, commercialization

**projects cont'd**

confronting homophobia by design in such settings as the design and redesign of queer nodes such as gay and lesbian nude beaches (including fighting obstructions to socializing as in the Russian River's Wohler Bridge beach)  
celebrating, excavating and preserving historical sites  
countering gentrification  
making regional centers like the Castro accessible to different groups (poorer people, youth, women, cultural groups)  
protecting and creating new sites for "public" sex and sexual education  
creating more effective sites for service delivery such as around health care and education  
linking up isolated enclaves into broader queerscapes  
locating and designing community  
redesign suburbs for queer families and other kinds of visibility  
housing projects, co-housing etc.



related stastical analysis, policy development,

alternative identification, charettes, design competition,  
critique of built spaces, calls for redesign, greater  
visibility in decision-making bodies especially in  
suburban areas...

obtaining

*Queers in Space: Communities / Public Places / Sites of Resistance*. 1997.

Seattle: Bay Press. G. B. Ingram, A. M. Bouthillette, Y. Retter (eds.)

review or examination copies:

BayPress@aol.com ATTN: Margaret Sullivan

retail: Modern Times Bookstore, A Different Light, amazon.com