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## **Making 'The Ghetto' in The Terminal City: Some queer language of resistance & community formation in mid to late 20th Century Vancouver**

### **abstract**

The re-invention of the term 'ghetto' to refer to neighbourhoods with sexual minorities, most commonly used as 'the gay ghetto', roughly parallels in much of the Western World the last years of criminalization of homosexuality, struggles for decriminalization, gay and women's liberation, the formation of neighbourhoods marked as gay and lesbian and 'friendly', inner city gentrification, and gains in human rights protections increasingly extending to same-sex partnerships and marriage. Today, the term, 'gay ghetto', is an anachronism associated with the period from the nineteen-sixties through the eighties. This paper explores the multiple meanings and allusions imbedded in uses of 'the gay ghetto' in Vancouver, Canada which had two areas of neighbourhood formation in the 1970s and 1980s with one area, the West End identified with men, and the other, Commercial Drive, identified with women. The activism centred in those areas was highly influential in Canadian sexual politics contributing significantly to victories around human rights, domestic partners, public sex, censorship, and marriage. But neither of these locales ever has been particularly similar to historic or more recent ethnic ghettos – or well-defined gay ghettos in the large cities in the United States. So the uses of 'the ghetto' had some particular cultural and political utilities – for a time. This discussion focuses on the following question related to homophobia and language. How much was the use of the term part of aggressive strategies of political organizing, defence of social spaces, community-building, and the claiming of public space? And how much of use of 'the gay ghetto' was in response to levels of current (for those times) and recent homophobia so daunting as to make certain kinds of activism seem futile and accommodations in various 'private' sectors seem prudent? And how did the dimensions of culture and ethnicity play out in a city that had significant racial segregation until two decades before Gay Liberation. This work on language and culture is not

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centred in literature but rather in civic discourses related to neighbourhood planning and their interface with the popular and alternative journalism of the time. Notions of homophobia in this discussion are grounded in imperial and homophobic discourses in British Columbia. These neo-colonial narratives are grafted on to more North American vernaculars of resistance associated with labour activism, most notably from homosocial IWW culture in British Columbia, and Carl Wittman's 1969 essay on San Francisco as a 'ghetto', "A Gay Manifesto." And while this particular language of 'the ghetto' is now 'history', the ambiguous uses of these terms in Vancouver have left marks in the contemporary cultural environments of neighbourhoods and unfolding civic discourses and politics.

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**Introduction**

Words can have multiple uses and site-specific meanings. In vernaculars of resistance, ambiguities and stretched comparisons can have utility – at least for historical moments. Cultural experiences and theoretical tensions can be embedded in particular word choices. This discussion about homophobia and language emerges from contemporary investigations in urban and community planning for sexuality minorities – and around questions of how the older enclaves, sometimes referred to as 'ghettos', are being transformed as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people feel more comfortable and choose to live in a wider range of neighbourhoods. This investigation of homophobia and language, focuses on the late 1960s through the early 1990s when there was as much of a focus with sexual minorities on confronting 'internalized homophobia' as with confronting often daunting levels of hostility.

This discussion focuses on the loose, liberal and occasionally florid use of the term 'ghetto' in ways that today can appear vague, ambiguous and contradictory. The shifting usage of 'queer', from derision to resistance, comprises the most celebrated example of such a shifting frontier of meanings for sexual minorities in Twentieth Century North America. Similarly, the appropriation and later the disappearance of "The Ghetto" for neighbourhoods with sizable gay male (and sometimes lesbian) networks in second half of the Twentieth Century can tell us, in the early Twenty-First Century, much about how experiences of homophobic inequities, coupled with actual and threats of violence, were partially disentangled and sometimes linked to strategies of resistance, community formation and place-making. This discussion is about the use of the term 'ghetto' over a period of less than two decades for a neighbourhood, the West End of Vancouver, which has had few of the characteristics of the original Jewish ghettos and the Black ghettos of the Twentieth Century. Why then was the term 'The Ghetto' re-invoked, effectively re-invented, barely a quarter century after the near total destruction of the historic Jewish ghettos (even with the resistance of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising) and while historic African American (and Canadian) enclaves were often threatened?

In this paper, I explore both the poorness of fit between the formerly established notions of 'The Ghetto' and gay and lesbian enclaves and friendlier neighbourhoods in

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the second half of the Twentieth Century – and how the term mobilized notions of entitlement, rights and community. I query 'The Ghetto' in Vancouver's West End in order to examine how the use of a powerful though, for many, an often inappropriate word was part of a process of coping with and unbundling complex and overwhelming experiences of homophobia while serving as an emblem during community formation and constructing public interests for urban space. This sketch of the usage of 'The Ghetto' and 'The Gay Ghetto' Vancouver's West End functions to explore the following arguments.

1. While 'The Gay Ghetto' was often used as a moniker of pride and conscious engagement in community-building, the term often masked the extent of the wounds of homophobia that many men (and women) were experiencing. In other words, 'The Gay Ghetto' was a highly pressurized emotional and cultural 'place' that even with decriminalization in 1969 constituted a predicament from which many gay men, lesbians and bisexuals did not feel they could escape. In other words, the pain from homophobia was still so overwhelming for most people that there was little concern for clarity in use of such a loaded term.
2. The more the term, 'The Gay Ghetto' was used, throughout the 1970s, the larger the space became with more numerous the homoerotic sites (though not necessary because of cause-effect relationship). So 'The Ghetto' became a remarkably pleasant place to live and go and became associated with greater freedom (while for three decades and up to recent years attracting homophobic repression).
3. By the mid to late 1970s, the use of "The Gay Ghetto" in Vancouver had become self-fulfilling. But instead of a minority being forced into a ghetto, gay men (and not lesbians) were attracted to the West End. A demographic shift had been established with gay men becoming a significant population and voting block in central Vancouver – though never anywhere near a majority. This latter use of "The Gay Ghetto" was part of a process of empowerment under the rubric of identity politics – with the similarities to Jewish and Black ghettos increasingly unclear (and irrelevant).

In concluding this essay, I relate these arguments to a broader exploration of sexual minorities and urban land economics under intensified globalization. As in much of North America, the use of 'The Gay Ghetto' with all its allusions to repression and resistance was replaced, in the 1990s, by less loaded terms for the middle and upper class -- particularly as repression subsided and inclusion in local politics was consolidated. More significantly were processes of "deghettoization"<sup>1</sup> that are not covered in this discussion. Out of this deghettoization came the coining of terms such as "queer space" in the 1990s providing more nuanced frameworks for recognizing and mapping competing processes of homophobia, resistance and accommodation at particular sites, landscapes and neighbourhoods.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter. 1995. *Sex Wars: Sexual dissent and political culture*. p. 168.

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This discussions begins with a short examination of Carl Wittman's 1969 – 70 essay on San Francisco as a 'ghetto', entitled "A Gay Manifesto," because it was one of the few theoretical pieces from the period that clearly articulated a concept of gay ghettoization albeit only sketched. But what exactly were the social projects bundled into choosing the term 'ghetto' for neighbourhoods both in San Francisco and small, marginal cities such as Vancouver? I structure this examination through chronicles of a number of processes of resistance and community formation:

1. the neo-colonial repression and resistance, that was often racialized, in the formation of Vancouver, The Terminal City;
2. the 1960s strategies of so-called 'urban renewal' that saw the dispersal of sexual minorities;
3. the struggle for decriminalization of homosexuality;
4. the explosion of resistance after decriminalization and the Stonewall Riots both in 1969;
5. construction of visible gay and lesbian spaces, resistance to repression and the racializing and gendering of the West End as a space primarily for white males;
6. reconstructing public space as sites of homoerotic contact;
7. gay liberation a the construction of visibility;
8. gay rights struggles & the appropriation of space;
9. the coalescence of specific homoerotic networks;
10. the marketing of gay and lesbian commercial spaces;
11. the challenging of homophobic harassment and violence in public places; and
12. the contest between gay male bar and cruising space and heterosexual street prostitution.

The core of my argument in this essay is that the various articulations of 'The Gay Ghetto' of the West End reflected shifting cultural and political alliances that often conflated three distinct sets of neighbourhood projects:

1. confronting internalized homophobia;
2. confronting external homophobia, repression and a wider array of inequities; and

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3. building networks and respective institutions for expression of a widening array of homoerotic and respective homosocial expression.

I centre this examination of the semantics of 'The Gay Ghetto' on the key piece of ghetto theory from the gay liberation period, which was not written about Vancouver, and then examine some textual fragments from the period that give us clues to how language was reconstructed to both unbundled and recombine the three categories of neighbourhood projects outlined above.

**Querying the semantics of 'The Gay Ghetto' in the Twenty-First Century**

"We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it was so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled small towns where to be ourselves would be to endanger our jobs and any hope of decent life...And 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 "A Gay Manifesto" circa 1970<sup>2</sup>

Carl Wittman's essay on San Francisco became one of the most salient pieces of gay liberation theory and articulated a particularly cogent notion of "the Gay Ghetto." While Wittman's theorizing was specific to San Francisco, he recognized a form of ghetto and community formation (and obstacles to those processes) at various scales throughout North America.<sup>3</sup> At times, his position was even more oppositional, and almost separatist in its leaning, than other gay liberation theorists.<sup>4</sup>

In Wittman's new North American gay ghetto, so-called refugees were forced into relatively pleasant neighbourhoods.

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<sup>2</sup> The original form, title and sequence of reproductions of "A Gay Manifesto" is unclear to me though I do recall conversations with Carl Wittman in 1974, after he'd eschewed the urban ghettos for rural life, where he alluded to the essay's circulation in pamphlet form. The version quoted in my discussion, today, is published as, Wittman, Carl. 1972. A Gay Manifesto. in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*. Karla Jay and Allen Young (eds.). New York: A Douglas Book. pp. 330 – 342. This quotation above is on page 330 of this 1972 version of the essay.

<sup>3</sup> "San Francisco – Ghetto or Free Territory: Our ghetto certainly is more beautiful and larger and more diverse than most ghettos, and certainly freer than the rest of Amerika. That's why we're here. But it isn't ours." (Wittman, Carl. 1972. A Gay Manifesto. in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*. Karla Jay and Allen Young (eds.). New York: A Douglas Book. pp. 330 – 342. page 339.)

<sup>4</sup> Wittman's framing of San Francisco's gay ghetto is a departure from some of the early gay gentrification narratives of the period, notably the class-focused essay by the Chicago Liberation Front (n.d.) that stated, "Housing – the homosexual ghetto..." (Chicago Liberation Front. 1972. Working Paper for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention. in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*. Karla Jay and Allen Young (eds.). New York: A Douglas Book. pp. 346 – 352. page 349.)

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“We are refugees from Amerika. So we came to the ghetto – and as other ghettos it has negative and positive aspects. Refugee camps are better than what preceded them or people never would have come.”<sup>5</sup>

Wittman’s deeper critique centered on the impoverished levels of services and organizations provided by sexual minorities in gay ghettos.

“Ghettos breed exploitation...We crowd their bars not because of their merit but because of the absence of any other social institution.”<sup>6</sup>

While Wittman’s essay focused on San Francisco, his rhetoric became highly influential in communities of sexual minorities on the West Coast and with gay male activists, in particular, engaged in alternately confronting (and avoiding) the homophobic state. Thus, Wittman’s notions of “gay ghetto” provided a framework for a small group of Vancouver-based activists, many recent émigrés from the United States and less urban parts of Canada, to claim and defend neighbourhood space while, like most, avoiding careful examinations of the inter-relationships between homophobia, accommodation, and resistance.

**Homophobic repression & resistance in the construction of The Terminal City**

THE HISTORY OF THE place/

(like) a whip across the face

Stan Persky (written in and about Vancouver and published in 1977)<sup>7</sup>

Vancouver was incorporated in 1886—just a few months following the additional codification of the sodomy laws in Britain. ‘Vancouver’ was an after-thought with the label ‘The Terminal City’<sup>8</sup> almost becoming the (racist) name of the town. Soon after, several years of race riots established a line running north to south with north-western Europeans on the west side of Carroll and then what became Main Street. Soon after, the West End was constructed as a relatively multicultural enclave on the white peninsula.

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<sup>5</sup> Wittman, Carl. 1972. *A Gay Manifesto*. page 339.

<sup>6</sup> Wittman, Carl. 1972. *A Gay Manifesto*. page 339.

<sup>7</sup> Stan Persky. 1977. *Wrestling the Angel*. Vancouver: Talonbooks. p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> The label of "Terminal City" for Vancouver goes back to at the city's incorporation with a poem mentioned from 1887 in Patricia E. Roy. 1976. The preservation of peace in Vancouver: The aftermath of the anti-Chinese riots of 1887. *BC Studies* 31: 44 - 59. See p. 44.

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As control over western Canada was consolidated, the land subdued, and natural resources more systematically exploited, there came a growing public preoccupation with the control of women and sexuality. As legal historian Terry Chapman observes, “The definition of a sex crime in the late Victoria and Edwardian era in Canada knew no boundaries.”<sup>9</sup> It was during this period that the notion of a homosexual identity, either fixed and inborn as a sickness or consciously acquired as a perversion, was imported to Canada—not coincidentally, in response to news of the Oscar Wilde trials.<sup>10</sup> After Wilde's demise, there was a confluence of notions of homosexual acts with identities. However, homosexual orientation in British Columbia was largely a notion of and about the middle and upper classes well into the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> In the subsequent decade, “an Oscar Wilde-type” became the code word for the unrepentant homosexual, the one who resisted homophobia and who must be put back in his (and soon her) place. The chill around the regulation of sexuality was felt in the margins of the Empire, such as in the new “boom towns” of Vancouver with their rootless working class culture.<sup>12</sup>

The policing of consensual male homosexuality emerged at a time of anxiety about the long-term demographic trends that suggested that the nascent Anglo-Saxon power structure was not numerically secure. Another manifestation of this anxiety concerned inter-racial homosexuality with its suggestions of the sexual exploitation of white men emerged. Police entrapment in the City of Vancouver was instituted by 1909. With an extraordinary program of police interest that verged on sexual engagement, one group in particular was targeted: South Asian men, nearly all of the Sikh religion recently from the Punjab (that today is split between Pakistan and India). More than half of the records located of trials for consensual homosexuality before the end of World War I, more than half targeted Sikhs sometimes referred to in court documents as 'Hindoos'. Referred to as “oriental cases” by the courts, these new spectacles about homosexuality took place at a time when exceptional measures were taken to discourage Sikh immigration to British Columbia.<sup>13</sup> In 1909, the South Asian population in British Columbia only numbered in the thousands. Yet Sikh males were the targets of scores of trials and were the defendants in the British Columbia's

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<sup>9</sup>. Terry L. Chapman. 1986. Male homosexuality: Legal restraints and social attitudes in Western Canada, 1890-1920. *Law and Justice in a New Land: Essays in Western Canadian Legal History*. Louis Knafla (ed.). Toronto: Carswell. pp. 277-292. See p. 277.

<sup>10</sup>. Terry L. Chapman. 1983. See pp. 99 - 101; Michael S. Foldy. 1997. *The Trials of Oscar Wilde - Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

<sup>11</sup>. Thomas Waugh. 1996. *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall*. New York: Columbia University Press. See p. 290.

<sup>12</sup>. Robert A. J. McDonald. 1996. *Making Vancouver: Class, Status and Social Boundaries 1863-1913*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. p. 57.

<sup>13</sup>. letter to A. H. McNeill, Crown Prosecutor, Vancouver, from E. M. N. Woods, Barrister, May 6th to May 20th, 1915 included in the dossier with the Crown Brief. Rex vs. - - & - -. Offence: Attempt Buggery. 1915. on file, BCA, BC Attorney General documents GR 419, volume 197, file 31 (1915).

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first legal attacks on group and public homosexuality.<sup>14</sup> Most of the first cases against consensual male public sex involved couples and groups where at least one partner was a Punjabi<sup>15</sup>. This kind of racialized state homophobia extended into the 1940s and the 1947 – 9 years that saw the dismantling of race laws and institutionalized disenfranchisement. Less racialized homophobic repression (of white males) intensified in World War II.

The most repressive period in the history of the West End came in the decades after World War II; those years saw the most careful coordination of queer node suppression through harassment, entrapment, and arrests. Yet with many dislocations and migrations to the West Coast along with increased commerce and tourism, male homosexual cruising appears to have increased at the mid-century.<sup>16</sup> Parks remained peripheral to the design of the city and because of the low valuation of nature and 'publicness', such space could be appropriated, temporarily, for rebel sexualities.

Despite systematic oppression, homosexual culture persisted and evolved. Homosexual males in Vancouver developed a secretive culture in the years after 1945. In the emerging mid-century quasi-neighbourhoods of gay men and some lesbians in the West End, social life was necessarily discreet, coded and furtive.<sup>17</sup> The little public space centered around parks and beer parlours<sup>18</sup>. The numerous cruising areas included the theatres of Granville Street and the balcony of the Colonial Theatre. Only Stanley Park, the large park in the city and on the edge of the West End, provided a large and dependable communal space for mutual recognition and sex partners. The cruising area there formed the nucleus for gay male erotic communality, and was thought by Fairclough to have "had its origins in homosexual activity behind the Crystal Baths . . . demolished in the early 1970s."<sup>19</sup> These sites became surrogates for more purposeful forms of public space and fulcra for social discourse, from socializing to political demonstrations, that typically go on in the centres of urban fabrics. Discourse, however, was set in an ongoing context of anxiety: when a gay man reported that circa 1950, "The beaches at night were safe, and anywhere from Spanish Banks right around to Kitsilano to Sunset Beach right around to Stanley Park were good pickings in those days. Very cruisey,"<sup>20</sup> his "good pickings" are predicated foremost on safety. Even into the '50s,

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* volume 143, files 48 - 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ingram, G. B. 2003. Returning to the scene of the crime: Uses of trial narratives of consensual male homosexuality for urban research, with examples from Twentieth-Century British Columbia. *GLQ (Gay and Lesbian Quarterly)* 10(1): 77 - 110.

<sup>16</sup> One semi-autobiographical U.S. account of park cruising as a culture, that involved tactics for avoiding police harassment, is Reginald Harvey's 1959. *Park Beat* (New York, Castle Books).

<sup>17</sup> Terence John Fairclough. 1985. The gay community of Vancouver's West End: The geography of a modern urban phenomenon. M.A. thesis. Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. on file, UBC Special Collections Division LE3.B7 1985 A98 F348. See p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Myron Plett and Robert Rother. 2000. Life in the beer parlour. *Xtra West!* (169): 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.



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Vancouver was a city of remarkably unregulated and public outdoor space—so much that homosexual contact could occur there routinely.

As in much of Canada, Vancouver missed the full extent of the publicity of the blend of Cold War panic and homophobia that gripped the United States. Canadian authorities were less blatant even though they extended their operations for a much longer period. Whereas the homophobia consolidated under McCarthyism began to subside in the United States by the late 1950s, the Canadian government's security interests in homosexuality was not satiated for another decade – and actually became a concern that lead to decriminalization. In the 1961-1962 period the RCMP investigated 850 civil servants. These investigations extended to many positions, such as in the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, that were not remotely tied to national security. Another example of the escalation is the number of RCMP reports on homosexuals, which jumped from 1,000 in 1960-1961 to 9,000 in 1967-1968.<sup>21</sup> One's association with a space—a cruising area or a bar—was the most probable basis for the RCMP to open a file. More insidiously, in 1959 federal employment began to be subject to a process instituted to screen out prospective homosexuals; the screening effectively pushed males into poorly paying small business and related service sectors and lesbians into surplus-labour margins of the extractive industries and low-paying service sector jobs. In Victoria and Vancouver these actions may have been more severe than in purged American cities.<sup>22</sup> What is remarkable about the situation of Canada and Vancouver in the '60s, one that made a particularly Canadian-oriented movement for decriminalization such an imperative, was that the police apparatus in Pacific Canada ran so out of control. Even when there was pressure from the United States to relax this kind of investigation, the apparatus continued to grow<sup>23</sup> in cities like Vancouver. The seamlessness of the two gay movements in Vancouver—for decriminalization and for civil rights—came in large part because the trajectory of that runaway machine constructed as part of the Cold War effort.

**Locating the ghetto in neo-colonial Vancouver**

There was a painful irony in using 'The Ghetto' for Vancouver's West End in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While the usage of 'ghetto' accurately referred to the high levels of arrests and harassment of men who may have been engaged in homosexuality,

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<sup>20</sup> Gay territory ca 1950 - Tides of Men Project - <http://www.LesBiGay.com/tides/Chapter1/Ch1Pg1.html>. This was on the worldwide web in 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Kinsman. 'Fruit Machines' Towards an analysis if the anti-homosexual security campaigns in the Canadian Civil Service. *Labour/La Travail* 35 (spring 1995): 133-161, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> pp. 134 - 136.

<sup>23</sup> David Kimmel and Daniel Robinson. 1994. The queer career of homosexual security vetting in Cold-War Canada. *Canadian Historical Review* 75(3): 319-345. See p. 345.

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Vancouver did have some real ghettos. The city's Chinatown was particularly large and heavily segregated in the inter-war years – though it had previously been only half Chinese and also referred to as “Celestailand” for its night light, prostitution, opium dens, and homosexuality. And after World War II, an African Canadian enclave had formed, a far poorer community than previous middle-class black networks on Canada's West Coast called Hogan's Alley. The ten block neighbourhood soon shared some gritty port-side streets with the West Coast's first bars and hotels with visible butch-femme lesbian culture.

Hogan's Alley was a neighbourhood of over 800 people living in flimsy wooden frame shacks, barely large enough for extended families. Along the north side of the central rail yards, the neighbourhood was built on a former salt marsh just north of the garbage dump that included The Jungle and its hobo culture. As racialized geography, Hogan's Alley was crammed between the railway terminal, the port, and Chinatown<sup>24</sup>. Built at the head of False Creek as part of the city's first racial minorities<sup>25</sup> enclave and ghetto, the area's first wave of racially mixed residents moved to better housing to the east and left a space for incoming Canadian and United States citizens of African heritage<sup>26</sup>. Most of the males were soon unionized for the first time, in the Brotherhood of Railway Car Porters, while women, who were often caring for children, developed a parallel economy around "joints." Serving fried chicken, sometimes with jazz performances, these "chicken houses" were some of the most alternative cultural spaces in British Columbia from The Depression into the nineteen fifties.

Vancouver was by no means the only North American city that saw early though uneasy alliances between the often self-described "negro" or "black"<sup>27</sup> community and lesbians<sup>28</sup>. The extent to which a sexual permissiveness, that extended to sexuality between women, made its way to Hogan's Alley remains unclear. But an informal black-lesbian "alliance" in Vancouver, when it existed at all, was modest in comparison to cities such as New York or even Buffalo. In Vancouver's case, both communities were tiny, in

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<sup>24</sup>. Peter Hudson. 1996/97. Disappearing histories of the black Pacific: Contemporary black art of Vancouver. *MIX* 22(3): 48 - 56. See p. 49.

<sup>25</sup>. See "minorities" on Map 5, pp. 64 - 65 of Edward Mark Walter Gibson. 1971. The impact of social belief on landscape change: A Geographical study of Vancouver. University of British Columbia Department of Geography Ph.D. thesis, on file, Simon Fraser University HT 169 C26V.

<sup>26</sup>. Donna MacKinnon, (captions from photographs exhibited for Vancouver Black History Month exhibited by and on file at CVPA), pers. comm., 1997.

<sup>27</sup>. "[B]lack' is essentially a politically and cultural **constructed** category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories." Stuart Hall. 1988. New ethnicities. In *Black Film: British Cinema* Kobena Mercer (ed.). London: ICA Documents 7. p. 28.

<sup>28</sup>. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy & Madeline D.. Davis. 1993. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*. pp. 113 - 123.

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comparison to other minority groups, in the decades leading up to the nineteen sixties. Active members numbered not much more than a thousand each. And there remained considerable racism in the primarily lesbian spaces that remained white-oriented. The 1994 video *Hogan's Alley*<sup>29</sup> is based around the reminiscences of three women who grew up in the neighbourhood. A major part of the second half of this video centres on the contentious relationships one of the three, Leah Curtis, and the tensions of coming of age as a lesbian in the nineteen sixties within the black community. She acknowledged that her lesbian gave her an "out" from the considerable pressures to care for the children of Hogan's Alley's tightly entwined extended families. Early on, Leah Curtis also confronted racism in the Vancouver lesbian community. "So I used to go back and forth from the New Fountain to the Vanport<sup>30</sup> but I really didn't like the Vanport too much because it was mostly just white uppity people there. And I wasn't really accepted there because there was a lot of prejudiced women...Well I fixed that right quick...There was an older dyke there that was callin' me names. I said, well, 'You call me that name again and I'm going to fix you.'...And then it was just like a western bar scene where two people start fighting then the whole club starts fighting...the bartender threw me outside...They called me a 'nigger' and it only takes that one word." Even with the racism, Curtis chose to trade the traditional role of unmarried women as care-giver, for the surveillance of the "panoptic gaze of heterosexism,"<sup>31</sup> of her racially and ethnically defined community. In those interviews, Curtis, now a recovering addict, outlines the Faustian bargain she accepted where she gave up her ethnically based community, defined by far more than "colour," to be an only slightly multicultural lesbian network. "I wanted some freedom...So how they dealt with my lesbianism was they just totally disowned, ostracized me, which suited me fine because the black community, was really tight, then, and even people who weren't related to you, in a sense we were related were all one family, told you what to do...When they found out I was gay, the life I was leading, they would talk about it in their own houses but not with anybody else. I wasn't asked any questions at all but I knew that they knew. They made sure that I knew that they knew but it suited me fine and at least I was free to live my life, my own lifestyle...After when I decided that I was not going to go home again, ever, that was my home, the gay community, and at that time, it was The New Fountain..."

The homes and streets at the core of Hogan's Alley were destroyed by the City of Vancouver, with funds from the Government of Canada, for the Georgia Viaduct. The project was originally proposed for Chinatown to the north but was moved south with

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<sup>29</sup>. Andrea Fatona and Cornelia Wyngaarden, 1994, *Hogan's Alley*, colour, English language, 32:30 minutes, distributed by Video In, 1965 Main Street, Vancouver, Canada fax: 1(604)876-1185. Both Fatona and Wyngaarden provided additional information from their research on the project in conversations in 1994 and 1995.

<sup>30</sup>. The Vanport Hotel and Pub, at 645 Main Street, existed from the at least as early as the 1950s until 1976 (Donald W. McLeod. 1996. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, p. 278).

<sup>31</sup>. Larry Knopp. 1992. Sexuality and the spatial dynamics of capitalism. *Environment and Planning D* 10: 651 - 669. p. 665.

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activists in that community opposed the project. Not coincidentally, this loss of community in the name of supposed redevelopment was contemporary with other expressway construction that fragmented the fulcra of many other black neighbourhoods in smaller North American cities. The very tentative lesbian spaces were also destroyed. Between 1961 and 1967, the City of Vancouver expropriated 23 hectares of residential land and displaced literally thousands of people from the neighbourhood, nearly all of whom were of non-western European backgrounds<sup>32</sup>. So in some curious ways, the West End became the *faux* ghetto oriented to gay white male Canadian discourses about homophobia – in a community that came to flourish as others had been destroyed.

**The struggle for decriminalization**

"In this narrow, `private' sphere, homosexual acts were to be decriminalized. In the broader public realm, same-gender sex would continue to be prohibited, and the debates and the reform itself contained clear instructions to the legal system and the police for sanctions to be retained and extended." Gary Kinsman<sup>33</sup>

More than most other urban areas in Canada, central Vancouver had become a homoerotic landscape with local institutions increasingly invested in decriminalization. In Montréal and Toronto, the other major gay and lesbian enclaves, the police were more repressive. Hence, the gay spaces that were tolerated around Vancouver's port and other downtown areas, were a significant expansion over anything ever seen in the country. Vancouver was linked, increasingly, to Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, and Hong Kong. But Vancouver was no Lotus Land for gay men and lesbians. There was just a bit more physical space for avoiding detection by the state.

The first homophile organization in Canada, the Association for Social Knowledge, was formed in Vancouver in April 1964<sup>34</sup> after a year of continued police harassment in the city's gay bars. At the height of the Cold War and continuing homophobic repression, where some of the more liberal groups in churches and the legal professional began to talk about mistreatment of homosexuals and the need for greater respect towards them. In the summer of 1964, ASK sponsored parties, social spaces<sup>35</sup>, and public discussions on "homosexual marriages," "lesbians," "drag and transvestitism," and "sadism, masochism, and fetishism"<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Macdonald. 1992. *Vancouver: A Visual History*. Vancouver: Talonbooks. See p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Gary Kinsman. 1996. *The Regulation of Desire*. p. 273.

<sup>34</sup> Gary Kinsman provides the most complete description of the beginnings of ASK in his 1996. *The Regulation of Desire*. pp. 230 - 235.

<sup>35</sup> "ASK supported law reform and sponsored public lectures and discussion groups, coffee parties (Gab'N'Java), social events and outings, a lending library, and, eventually, a drop-in and community centre." (Donald W. McLeod. 1996. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A selected annotated chronology, 1964 - 1975*. pp. 7, 10). Also see Gary Kinsman. 1987. *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*. pp. 147 - 158.

<sup>36</sup> Announcement. *ASK Newsletter* (Vancouver) 1(August 1964): 8.

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By 1965, Vancouver became a major centre in the international movement to decriminalize homosexuality<sup>37</sup> and had strong ties to U.S.-based homophile organizations such as San Francisco's Society for Individual Rights. In 1965, ASK expanded its operations and held a meeting in Seattle and a year later was active in the United States-oriented National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations. ASK was instrumental in gay rights organizing in the United States Pacific Northwest in the late nineteen sixties. But none of ASK's offices were ever in or even close to the West End. ASK activism in the late 1960s shifted to the West End and gradually began to influence federal urban policies that lead up to the reforms under Trudeau. The year 1967 was the defining time for the emerging Canadian gay rights movement. Trudeau's federal Liberal Party announced its plans to decriminalize homosexuality (Bill C-150). In response, there was an unsuccessful and homophobic, smear effort against Liberal politicians. Sanders made one of the first submissions to a government Royal Commission on countering anti-gay discrimination<sup>38</sup>. By the mid-nineteen sixties, Vancouver courts, "generally treated the homosexual charges as a relatively trivial matter."<sup>39</sup> But there was considerable hostility towards any decriminalization of homosexuality -- from public institutions that had built and rationalized themselves in the post-war period, on homophobia. Bill C-150 was finally passed and came into effect in 1969. The **partial** decriminalization of homosexual acts in 1969 only limited day-to-day impacts on these networks and respective neighbourhoods, particularly since police harassment continued. If anything, arrests and pointed discrimination around homosexuality increased after 1969.

**Radical place-making:****'The Ghetto' as the location of resistance to homophobia**

"That is the ghetto trip. At one time there was no alternative, no way out. Now there is. It's called liberation to those who can dig it.

John Forbes on gay male life in Vancouver 1971<sup>40</sup>

The April 6, 1977 public meeting on "the problems of Davie Street"<sup>41</sup> was a queering event of singular importance for the West End. What was supposed to have been a quiet City Hall-initiated effort to begin to move homosexuals out of public space (and the neighbourhood) became a better-documented instance of resistance in the history of

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Gary Kinsman. 1987. *The Regulation of Desire*. p. 157.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>40</sup> The Body Politic. 1971. The Gay Ghetto [of Vancouver]. *The Body Politic* (Toronto) (November - December 1971): 17.

<sup>41</sup> Carol Volkart. 1977. Prostitutes, gays clash with residents: West End's many faces exposed. *Vancouver Sun* (April 7, 1977): 25.

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Vancouver. A supposedly small meeting organized by the police became a raucous confrontation with four hundred people. A reporter from the Vancouver Sun stated that, "Most visible -- and vocal -- were the homosexuals, who charged that police had called the meeting to manipulate public sentiment in support of an intensified campaign against gay people."<sup>42</sup> In the same meeting, was some of the first public resistance by prostitutes - especially directly to the police.

The nineteen seventies was the decade in Vancouver history with the most conscious reconstruction of homoerotic social space. Here the experience of the residents of the central neighbourhoods of The Terminal City began to diverge dramatically with those of other British Columbia. Vancouver was queered first and most profoundly. This was the root of Pacific Canadian experiences of the gay ghetto though the term has only limited relevance here. In the nineteen seventies, we saw a dramatic shift away, almost a discarding, from gay and lesbian networks as criminal underworlds towards visible communities and consumer blocks. In less than a decade, Vancouver's underworld was transformed into a self-defined gay ghetto. Until 1969, homosexuality alone could be grounds for what might effectively amount to life imprisonment as a "dangerous sexual offender." The confrontations leading up to the partial decriminalization in 1967-1969 had tremendous impacts on public spaces in Pacific Canada in the subsequent decade. But was soon as most consenting homosexuality between adults was removed as the basis for arrest, new barriers emerged around the eroticized lines between the public and the private.

In this period, sexual minorities came out publicly but continued to have limited options for intimacy in both private and public. In this vacuum, a limited detente emerged between the emerging gay male middle-class and apparatuses of the state -- especially social welfare funding agencies and the police. In turn, the state, in centres for provincial and federal offices such as Vancouver, re-emerged as a major employer and refuge of sexual minorities, especially professional gay men. As of 1969, only one kind of homosexuality was not illegal: two adults of the same sex in either of their bedrooms. All other homoerotic areas were still vulnerable to direct state control. Gary Kinsman reflected on what really changed and what did not in Canada: "Integral to this public / private distinction is the social organization of gender, patriarchal relations, and a number of sexist assumptions...this strategy focused on regulation in the socially defined 'public' realm and not on sexual violence and harassment in the 'private' realm."<sup>43</sup> The homophile, gay rights, gay liberation, and even lesbian feminism were partially about increased access to and opportunities for homoerotic expression in public space as those movements were concerned with civil rights. And coming out, as defined by gay liberation and lesbian feminism, soon became as much about the right to be visible and to transform communal space as the right to perform certain sexual acts in private without criminalization.

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<sup>42</sup> Carol Volkart. 1977. Prostitutes, gays clash with residents: West End's many faces exposed. *Vancouver Sun* (April 7, 1977): 25.

<sup>43</sup> Gary Kinsman. 1996. *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities*. Montréal: Black Rose Books. p. 219.

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In trying to fathom the rapid changes in the nineteen sixties and seventies, and the culture of resistance and sexual dissidence that emerged, we progress through the following topics. The coalescence of strategic outdoor and indoor sites, crossroads of different genders, races, and erotic and affinal networks, soon emerged as fulcra for resistance to the repression of the Cold War. Out of these topographies came particular notions of and constructed goals for gay rights rooted in a melange of local, national, Commonwealth as in formerly imperial or colonized, and United States political histories. Gay liberation and lesbian feminism were attempts, often only partially successful, to inject sexual politics into the broader body politic. We then examine the place-making and space taking aspects of gay liberation and lesbian feminism as these movements grew, flowered, diverged and disappeared. Gay liberation and lesbian feminism were labels for coalitions that extended to activism with communal goals far more extensive than for full decriminalization and human rights protections. And as soon as the vision of gay rights and a gay and a lesbian feminist community was articulated in Vancouver, a host of new networks and communalities emerged. Perhaps not paradoxically, the nineteen seventies in Vancouver saw for the first time the self-organization of practitioners of specific sexual acts and members of similar religious beliefs. In the second half of this chapter, we describe the divergence in organizations which emphasized service from those more concerned with anti-discrimination activism that extended to confronting the state. Through charting the growth in gay and lesbian organizations in the nineteen seventies, we describe the divergence of centrist versus left political activism. This was paralleled by divergent emphases on private and commercial and public space. Corresponding differences in tactics, of collaboration versus confrontation with the homophobic state, was a reiteration of small business versus labour politics, between the Liberal Party and the "socialists" that had been set in motion in British Columbia before the beginning of this century.

The nineteen seventies saw the beginnings of queer media with small newsletters and the *Gay Tide* monthly. The institutionalization of police harassment in parks, including entrapment in and around sites of public sex<sup>44</sup>, was remarkably successful in Vancouver in large part from the tenacity of the Gay Alliance Towards Equality. Thirdly, the roots of pressure for state protections against homophobic discrimination were sunk early in Vancouver in large part from a curious combination of closeted gay and bisexual men with links to the ruling, federal Liberal Party and to the local pedigree of particularly aggressive organizing approaches of West Coast social(ist) activists. It is perhaps the use of public space of West Coast activists that is the most relevant to our discussion of historical geography. There was a dearth of recorded information on homoerotic space in Pacific Canada before 1969. In contrast, the nineteen seventies saw the shift from a set of networks defined primarily by aural communication to a so-called "community" somewhat united by the printed word. By the end of the nineteen seventies, media was again to transform local

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<sup>44</sup> For one of the more candid discussions of entrapment in Canada in the 1960s, see Jack Batten. 1969. The homosexual life in Canada (Will Trudeau's change in the law make any difference? An answer from the gay world). *Saturday Night* (Toronto) 84(9): 28 - 32 especially page 32.

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notions of the commonalities between sexual minorities, and the functions of public space, as electronic media was increasingly utilized. In contrast to the muffled silence and the archaeology of homoerotic traces of the first half of the twentieth century, there is almost too much to say about the emergence of visible gay and lesbian space in the nineteen seventies.

**The emergence of the ghetto:****From furtive homosexual presence to visible gay space**

"Hell feels like being kept from moving freely...  
 hindering articulation...I go over  
 the terms of things. I despair of space."

George Stanley of Vancouver, "Hell" written in the decade before 1975<sup>45</sup>

The first murmurs of a gay ghetto in Pacific Canada came along Robson Street in the nineteen sixties. The downtown neighbourhood was less self-identified as a homoerotic than as cosmopolitan, liberal and tolerant. The social conditions that allowed the mild queering was more a product of indifference than of tolerance. And like the century of temporary and mobile settlements in British Columbia, this proto-ghetto was soon to move east and then south along Richards and Seymour Streets. The explosion of organizing in the early nineteen seventies was as much about fighting for space, and against evictions from public areas, as it was for the creation of visibility. For instance, the radical Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE), was refused a meeting room by the downtown YMCA<sup>46</sup>. "The Y" had provided a key institutional space that for decades had harboured considerable furtive homosexuality between patrons. GATE's gay liberation was considered a threat to that unorganized homosexual and pro-ghetto space.

In the nineteen seventies, the publicness of space was still defined, even more than today, in terms of a mélange of heteronormative and state and market-regulated indicators. It was to take the entire decade to begin to untie this knot, in cultural terms. For one example of how difficult it was to create visible, communal gay space, in contrast to the burgeoning illegal and commercial spaces of public sex and bars, we can track the public celebration around the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots. These observances of Stonewall, in Vancouver, were the sole public events in Pacific Canada for two decades. The Vancouver "Stonewall" and "Pride" events began in 1971 but remained relatively small, compared to those in similarly sized cities in North America, for much of the decade.

The notion of open outdoor space, particularly its preservation, has been one of the cornerstones of North American urban liberalism in this century. Paradoxically, the decade leading up to the explosion of gay liberation saw a highly contradictory articulation of liberal notions of publicness. But the contradiction was that the notion of 'open space' was

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<sup>45</sup> George Stanley. 1975. *You*. Vancouver: New Star Books. p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> GATE. 1973. Press Release, 5 March, 1973. on file, CVPA, Add. Mss. No. 720. V. no. 1, file no. 1.



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still largely oriented to middle-class males of European heritages. Most members of sexual minorities would not have had such easy access to public space even if there was much less homophobia. The North American open-space movement had a tremendous impact on Vancouver, particularly through the Parks Board. It gained momentum in the early nineteen sixties. The movement coincided with a new openness, which affected both rightist and leftist parties. Ironically, the new emphasis on political transparency contributed to less clarity about design programmes and management objectives; vagueness that allowed for decisions based on homophobia to remain undetected. Homophobia around public space began to go underground, through "design process." As Kevin Lynch, the major ideologue in the open space movement, argued, almost prophetically, "Freedom of action in public spaces is defined and redefined in each shift of power and custom."<sup>47</sup> Such shifts and vacillations characterized the management of public space for homoerotic women and men in Vancouver from the nineteen sixties into the nineteen eighties.

**Public space as sites of homoerotic contact**

"As weeks passed by, I returned to [Stanley] park again and again for a moment's relief from loneliness. It was almost like sitting in front of the general store in a small town, watching the familiar though nameless faces pass by.

It was the first comradeship I found with those of my kind. And I believe that something is to be said for the 'Gay Park'." anonymous 1973<sup>48</sup>

Decriminalization of homosexuality came to British Columbia in a wave from the late nineteen sixties into the early nineteen seventies. The liberalization of federal Canadian law was influenced, quite directly, by the same processes taking place in Britain after the Wolfenden report. That report was rooted in a new consensus in the establishment of London about the inevitability of social changes taking place in Britain. Sexual minorities had become visible. Spaces were being marked. And in my ways the liberalization was an attempt to cordon homoeroticized space through relatively recently articulated divisions of public and private. As Frank Mort noted, "The Wolfenden report itself confronted this changing moral landscape. Its philosophical boundaries between public morality and private tolerance were a sophisticated attempt to bridge an old and new sexual code. But subsequent events on the ground, especially in the metropolis [London], were to show just how difficult that line was to hold."<sup>49</sup> And in the social worlds of Vancouver, increasingly distant from the social and institutional forces shaping the former imperial capital, the spuriousness of the new line between public and private became a centre of conflict verging on rebellion.

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<sup>47</sup> Kevin Lynch. 1991. Open space: Freedom and control (1979). in: *City Sense and City Design: Writings and projects of Kevin Lynch*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. pp. 413 - 417. See p. 413.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous. 1973. The gay park. *Your Thing* 1(5): 3.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Mort. 1999. Mapping sexual London: The Wolfenden Committee on homosexual offences and prostitution 1954-57. *New Formations* 37: 92 - 113. See p. 113.

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By the time of decriminalization, many of the male outdoor cruising sites of Vancouver had been established, most notably, the "Fruit Loop" parking lot in the West End around 1490 Beach, the English Bay men's washroom, Lee's Trail in Stanley Park, and Wreck Beach<sup>50</sup>. Within Canada, Vancouver's city police have been more tolerant of homosexual expression in public and less effective in its control. Vancouver has had less of a history of violent and organized harassment by police compared to those of Toronto and Montréal. But, at times, there has been considerable surveillance of gathering places of "known homosexuals." This surveillance continued and sometimes intensified after the partial decriminalization<sup>51</sup>. In no way did the 1969 reforms did not extend to public space -- not even to tolerance of same-sex affection that was not overtly sexual. Instead, as a sign of continued institutional homophobia, police became more pre-occupied with control of same-sex affection in public.

After 1969, the emphasis on repression shifted from employment and social visibility in institutions to bars and clubs, so-called radical political organizing, public sex, and child pornography. But there was much confusion and resistance to decriminalization especially on the part of morality squads in the various police forces. In Vancouver, police entrapment and harassment around cruising and public sex, intensified in the nineteen seventies<sup>52</sup> as homophobic police apparatuses attempted to justify themselves into the nineteen eighties<sup>53</sup>. As late as 1977, openly gay men were being harassed by city police -- sometimes to the point of requiring hospitalization<sup>54</sup>. By that year, the anti-entrapment committee of SEARCH (Society for Education Action Research and Counselling on

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<sup>50</sup> Roedy Green. March 1971. "A Guide For The Naive Homosexual." Vancouver (self-published and distributed). on file, BCA NWp 301.415 G797g 1971. See p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> For an outline of why the 1969 decriminalization was only partial, especially for gay presence in public space, see Gary Kinsman. 1996. *The Regulation of Desire*. p. 224. Also see August 28th Gay Day Committee 1971. 1982. We demand. Reprinted in *Flaunting It: A decade of gay journalism from The Body Politic!* (Ed Jackson and Stan Persky (eds.) Vancouver: New Star Books. pp. 217 - 220.

<sup>52</sup> Doug Sanders stated, erroneously, in 1968 that, "There is no evidence of any police force in Canada using entrapment methods, where plain clothes officers pose as homosexuals and wait in appropriate places for advances to be made." (1968. The mysterious case of Everett Klippert. *Georgia Straight* September 27 - October 3, 1968: 10 - 11, 17, See p. 17) suggesting that this form of police harassment came to be employed after decriminalization.

<sup>53</sup> See the following articles from the *Gay Tide* the Vancouver paper that most carefully monitored police harassment of gays in the 1970s: Editorial. 1975. Police entrapment on upswing. 2(4) August: 1; Anonymous. 1976. Gay victim speaks out. 3(3) August: 9; David Rand and Robert Cook. 1977. Community unites to voice anger. 16: 1; *Gay Tide*. 1977. No liaison with police. 16: 2; Editorial. 1977. A breakthrough. 16: 3; Don Hann and Rob Royce. 1977. City police record: smash hit. 16: 4; *Gay Tide*. 1977. police harassment: three responses. 17: 4; *Gay Tide*. 1978. Stop police attacks. 18: 1. Even as late as the mid-1980s, there were warnings within the gay community of upcoming action by the "Morality Squad" (*Vancouver Gay Community Centre News* June 1981 p. 11) & Warning issued. James Trenhome, Coordinator, Police/Gay Liaison Committee (*Angles* May 1985: 7).

<sup>54</sup> Don Hann and Rob Royce. 1977. City police record: smash hit. *Gay Tide* 16: 4.

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Homosexuality) were appealing to gay men for caution in its newsletter. "Imagine the satisfaction of a young police officer in plain clothes LEANING INVITINGLY against a tree in English Bay at midnight. Waiting to lure the safe quarry, savouring the thrilling culmination of another arrest on this record and the moral satisfaction of catching a `pervert'."<sup>55</sup> Compounding this history of municipal repression, the RCMP were carefully inventorying, monitoring, and mapping sites of queer desire in public space into the late nineteen sixties. Some of this surveillance appears to have extended to Vancouver<sup>56</sup>. And until the nineteen sixties, these federal government officials could denounce people as homosexual and have them lose their jobs. In British Columbia, outside of central Vancouver, the progress in police tolerance was at least ten years behind. Thus the liberalizing of the nineteen seventies, as the federal level, was often countered by intensified repression against gay men and lesbians. And the new battleground was not the space of the bodies of adults engaged in consensual sex but rather the public sites of self-identified sexual minorities with a scattering of self-styled dissidents.

**Gay liberation & the construction of visibility**

The Stonewall Riots were the first televised reterritorialization, a sort of homoerotic recoding, of public space by sexual minorities. Canadian gay men and lesbians had just won respite from generations of the kind of repression that generated the resistance that summer in New York City. For Pacific Canada, the notion of Stonewall as a seminal event obscures the full extent of the activism of those times -- and the specific realities of Vancouver. Similar, though slightly less militant, confrontations with the police had been going on for several years in North American cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vancouver. In Vancouver, Gay Liberation groups, associated with younger people born after World War II, began to form in 1969<sup>57</sup>. In 1970, lesbians and gay men formed a short-lived Gay Action Committee<sup>58</sup>. In November 1970, over a year after the Stonewall riots in New York City, the Vancouver Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed around a drop-in centre shared with the Yippies (Youth International Party) in Gastown<sup>59</sup>. They operated a switchboard into 1971. The Vancouver GLF did not find a support base in the emerging gay male ghetto in the city's West End and was defunct a year later. It was soon succeeded by

<sup>55</sup> SEARCH. Police at English Bay. *SEARCH Newsletter* (Vancouver) (February 1977): 1

<sup>56</sup> RCMP surveillance of public washrooms and homosexuality extended well into the 1980s in the greater Vancouver area (Neil Whaley. 1985. Raids made. *Angles* (September 1985): 5 & Fred Gilbertson. 1985. Washroom watch. *Angles* (October 1985): 19).

<sup>57</sup> For a complete list of the gay and lesbian organizations in Vancouver in the 1964 to 1976 period, see Donald W. McLeod. 1996. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*. pp. 253- 254.

<sup>58</sup> Q.Q. aka Kevin McKeown. 1970. Page 69 column. *Georgia Straight* (19 - 26 August, 1970): 21.

<sup>59</sup> Georgia Straight. 1970. We are the people our parents warned us about. *Georgia Straight* 2 - 9 December 1970: 9.; Q.Q. Out of the closets and into the street. *Georgia Straight* 20 - 27 January, 1971: 18; and Y.I.P. & G.L.F. space-in. *Georgia Straight* March 3 - 10, 1971: 4).

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the more conservative, Canadian Gay Activist Alliance and the specifically socialist (and essentially Trotskyist) GATE.

The gay liberation era brought proliferating forms of visibility. With gay liberation came a kind of cultural revolution often associated with more aggressive forms of camp. For example, as early activist Roedy Green used a scoring system in "How to tell if a guy is gay" with such telling indicators as:

"He is effeminate (4)  
 He wears white shoes (5)  
 He wears tight pants (5)...  
 By slip of the tongue he calls a guy `she' or `bitch' (15)...  
 He uses the word `tacky'(15)  
 He stares at other boys as he walks down the street (17)"<sup>60</sup>

And just from these points, a lot of men in central Vancouver would have been scoring well above 30 by the early nineteen seventies.

**Gay rights struggles & the appropriation of space**

"The dichotomy and antagonism between various organizations in this city can only serve to reaffirm in us the stereotypes of gay people as bitter, bitchy queens and vindictive penis-envying dykes." anonymous, 1973 GATE meeting<sup>61</sup>

As in most cities where it exploded in 1969 and 1970, gay **liberation** in Vancouver was over in a few years. There was quickly a shift to gay **rights** as the euphoria of the partial decriminalization began to wear off. There was considerable social and cultural friction between groups formed in the criminalized period in contrast to those purportedly more radical that formed in 1970 and after. By 1973, there were at least four political and service organizations in Vancouver: Canadian Gay Activists Alliance - that soon became GATE, Gay People Together, Transsexual & Transvestite Info, and the Gay Alcoholics Group. Feuding between these often adversarial factions, between those people out and those more closeted and allied with gay business interests, was to dominate Vancouver gay male and lesbian politics until the onslaught of AIDS a decade and a half later. There were never the sorts of broader political allies tied to a political machine, which were seen in San Francisco. Instead, there were poles defined by left and right, differences in priorities around human rights protections on one hand, and direct collaboration with the state for badly needed social services on the other hand. But neither left nor right really questioned the central role of the Canadian state. The groups associated with leftist and centrist positions were both

<sup>60</sup> Roedy Green. 1971. A Guide for the Naive Homosexual. p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> GATE member. 1973. "for G.H.I.E. meeting March 4, 1973 and V. G. Caucus." in GATE Minutes 1973, on file, CVPA, Add. Mss. No. 720, V. 1, File 1.

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heavily connected to the government either through employment or government control of or subsidies to corporations.

The contradiction was that a huge portion of the out gay men and lesbians at the time were exceptionally marginalized in the work force -- often directly because of homophobia. Many, since the purges after World War II, were often forced to be the most marginal of entrepreneurs. Neither of the two political models for improvement of "the gay community" were compelling to people who were under-employed in the service sector, had businesses that were barely making money, or were even further afield in the economy. Perhaps even more curiously was how this gay city politic differed from that of neighbouring Seattle. In the Puget Sound region, it was the left that was originally more focused on providing a social safety net for gay people -- because the United States federal and Washington State governments would not. In Seattle it was often the centrists who were more preoccupied with broader human rights protections as framed in terms of the discrimination experienced by white, middle-class gay men. In contrast, Vancouver had a more effective safety net except that this slightly more extensive "welfare state" in the north was homophobic. In contrast, Vancouver's centrists developed a gay oriented set of services and vacillated from critiquing the welfare state, from the right, or hoping to augment and reinforce it in hopes of slowing its supposed drift to the left.

In trying to understand the emergence of gay politics in the nineteen seventies, it is necessary to discuss some personalities. Downtown Vancouver, including the West End, was represented in Canadian Parliament by a discreet, bisexual man, Ron Basford, who rose in the early Trudeau cabinets to be Minister of (the short-lived portfolio) Urban Affairs. He had a tremendous impact on the pattern of public spaces in the city, especially with the redevelopment of Granville Island. Basford later became Minister of Justice and developed and successfully enacted the Federal Government of Canada's first human rights laws. Paradoxically, Basford was often resistant to full decriminalization of homosexuality, at least in the nineteen seventies, and even with considerable pressure from activists would not enact sexual orientation protections in the human rights laws that he succeeded in passing<sup>62</sup>.

While Basford had the support of a large network of still closeted gay men, some of whom were relatively prosperous, groups of younger males formed new, self-avowedly radical social networks. Some of these groups, such as the Vancouver Gay Liberation Front, were overtly political. With the collapse of the GLF, the more avowedly revolutionary GATE soon rented an office on the edge of Yaletown south of the Robson Street pre-ghetto. Here, GATE was the first organization to consider tactics around demonstrations, publicity, and the appropriation of public space. In 1972, GATE began confronting the first social democratic provincial government about its homophobia and the lack of human rights protections for sexual minorities. But GATE remained a small group that did function curiously as the vanguard for gay male activism in subsequent years. GATE's first

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<sup>62</sup> Jamie Lamb. 1977. Basford denies rumour. *Sun* (April 30, 1977): 24 & Joey Thompson. 1977. Making the 'right' promises. *Province* (May 2, 1997): 22.

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demonstration in front of the British Columbia Legislature in Victoria was on November 9, 1973<sup>63</sup> to demand provincial human rights protections around sexual orientation. The group mustered ten people for the demonstration.

GATE sometimes tapped into the concerns of broader social networks such as those more public through their association with bars. In this nascent ghetto economy, GATE confronted local business interests, particularly gay hotel, pub, and club-owners, as well as the large body of lingering homophobic policy in the federal government such as related to immigration and social welfare policy. In contrast to GATE which was never distinctly anchored to any social network, except for the growing group of relatively educated and "out" gay men, the university campuses in the height of The Sexual Revolution provided excellent opportunities for organizing. The focus of much activism in those time -- "Gay people" first began organizing in 1971 at the University of British Columbia. The Gay People's Alliance began in 1971 and become Gay People of UBC a year later. These groups were the first in the region to discuss the need for a "gay studies" curriculum at The University of British Columbia. East of Vancouver, Gay People of Simon Fraser University formed in the autumn of 1974.

The establishment of GATE represented the genesis of local strategizing for public space especially for confronting institutional homophobia. The August 1971 national demonstrations in front of the Canadian Parliament, like a precursor of the United States marches on Washington, thrust gay and lesbian rights into the Canadian national consciousness. Social change was occurring at a dizzying pace. For example, to the chagrin of conservative politicians, a high school in New Westminster, on the edge of Greater Vancouver, saw gay youth organizing in 1972. The first local gay pride rally in commemoration of the Stonewall riots was organized by GATE in June of 1972 at Ceperly Park now part of Stanley Park. The second gay pride march in Vancouver was a year later. Instead of commemorating the American riot, Stonewall, this event was in August in observance of the first gay rights march in Ottawa. GATE attempted to work in broad coalitions of the left but was constantly having to deal with homophobia from members of communist and socialist factions.

In February 1971, The Canadian Gay Activist Alliance (CGAA) was formed. It was oriented to social services and also tended to represent the community's more reformist and centrist political tendencies. The CGAA was specifically oriented to the West End's burgeoning gay male population. The organization's office, at 1604 - 1320 Bute Street, later took on many institutional names and was the most stable and public, gay male service space in Vancouver for the next two decades. It was the work around this office that consolidated the position of the West End as the focal point for gay male activism. The CGAA was soon in feuds with and red-baiting more leftist gay liberationists. It was administering federal moneys a year later. Project Open Doors produced one of the first

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<sup>63</sup> Donald W. McLeod. 1996. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A selected annotated chronology, 1964 - 1975*. pp. 142 & Don Hann, pers. comm. 1999.

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manuals, anywhere, on confronting homophobia<sup>64</sup> and the use of federal funds was condemned by homophobes on the right and on the left.

The event that ignited a decade of antipathy between right-centrist organizations, concerned with accommodation and place-making, and leftist organizations willing to confront the state in public space, was the May 1972 GATE picket of the Castle Hotel pub. There was some solidarity from the non-gay left and there was considerable hostility to such confrontational activism from the nascent gay bureaucracies such as CGAA. The GATE picket was successful even though CGAA members made a point of publicly crossing it<sup>65</sup>. Later that year, both CGAA and GATE picketed Prime Minister Trudeau while he was campaigning for his successful re-election -- on the same day at separate sites. Just weeks later, GATE was demonstrating over the war in Indochina, arguing, not always coherently, that the common enemy of both the Vietnamese people and Canadian homosexuals was the government of the United States<sup>66</sup>.

As well as developing the *Gay Tide* newspaper, as the first public space to theorize on the emancipation of sexual minorities, GATE made many lasting contributions. The GATE campaign that had national significance was the case against the *Vancouver Sun* not printing an advertisement in 1973. This struggle, though unsuccessful in the short-term, was eventually taken to the Supreme Court of Canada<sup>67</sup> and influenced a decade of interpretations of the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms around sexual minorities. At a time when media was becoming almost a regulator of sexual politics in public space, GATE aimed high in attempting to confront homophobia. But most lesbians were more involved in internal feminist politics and most gay men were happy to accept the fragments of new social space yielded from decriminalization. Before the ravages of AIDS, the need for human rights protections for sexual minorities was perceived, by many, as too theoretical, unattainable, and a low priority in their lives. In 1980, GATE dissolved itself. The remaining members of GATE noted that, "The lesbian and gay movement in Vancouver has advanced to the point where there are numerous and diverse organizations."<sup>68</sup> The dissolution of GATE occurred two years before the first human rights protections for sexual orientation, which for nearly a decade were limited to the City of Vancouver, and three years before the

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<sup>64</sup> John Greenfield, Dick Rulens, and Dieter Grapp. 1972. "Open doors: A manual on the prejudice and discrimination against gay people." on file, BC Gay and Lesbian Archives. Also see \$9,329 to gay research. *Open Doors 2* (June 1972): 1, 5; *The Body Politic*. 1972. OFY Grant. *Body Politic 5*: 18; Q.Q. 1972. Page 69. *Georgia Straight* (15 - 22 June, 1972): 13.

<sup>65</sup> Donald W. McLeod. 1996. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*. pp. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Jay Melmer. 1972. GATE slams the war. *Georgia Straight* 23 - 30 November, 1972: 3.

<sup>67</sup> Miriam Smith. 1998. Social movements and equality seeking: The case of gay liberation in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science XXXI*(2): 285 - 309. See pp. 301 - 303.

<sup>68</sup> GATE. June 24, 1980. PRESS RELEASE: The dissolution of GATE Vancouver and Gay Tide. on file Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Toronto, (GATE 82-005/10 (Vancouver)). 2 pp.

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first organizing around AIDS. In 1982, the City of Vancouver COPE administration of Michael Harcourt, allied to the New Democrats, banned discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.

**Alternative subcultures:****The surfacing of specific homoerotic networks**

"Strung up, spread-eagled nude between two poles...  
 White-helmeted leather god seizes me in the grip of  
 His gauntlets and squeezes my balls until, screaming,  
 I come, and awake with my sperm puddling the sheet  
 And my wife bending over me, asking if anything  
 is wrong."

anonymous - a Vancouver resident, "Masochist," 1973<sup>69</sup>

For gay men, particularly ones who were white and English-speaking, access to the remnants of the underground pre-gay liberation salons and "courts" provided space for socializing and organizing for community charities. These organizations, notably the Dogwood Monarchist Society, emerged in the years just before and after decriminalization. These more conservative networks were less focused on ideology and, instead, organized key social functions until well into the nineteen eighties. The original "Court" had strong links to San Francisco through drag and early gay rights activist, José Sarria de Maldonado.<sup>70</sup> In Vancouver the nineteen seventies was the peak of The Court's considerable membership and influence -- that exceeded virtually all other homosexual organizations. The annual Coronation Ball, and parallel and less formal "empress brawl," were crucial social occasions for men seriously involved in drag.

In British Columbia, 'Dogwood', and its satellite network in Victoria, provided a less radical model for organizing around community needs and the need for social services through voluntarism. The work of Dogwood in the nineteen seventies broadened the models available for community service delivery and provided crucial preparation for dealing with the ravages of AIDS. Culturally, there was the embellishing of personal events and the height of camp. Here, North American and particularly West Coast mythologies were queered and reproduced. For example, there was the archetypic success story of the "girl" who worked hard and became an Empress. She then moved on to become active in the leather community, through which he was able to transform her former gender position to be crowned an Emperor.

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<sup>69</sup> anonymous. 1973. Masochist. *Your Thing* (June 25, 1973): 8.

<sup>70</sup> Les Wright. 1999. San Francisco. in *Queer Sites: Gay urban histories since 1600*. David Higgs (ed.). New York: Routledge. 167 - 189. See p. 175.



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Vancouver of the early nineteen seventies saw a brief explosion of genderfuck and other more radical drag associated with the Gay Liberation Front. Drag began to flow openly in Vancouver in the 1967 New Year's Eve benefit for ASK and was associated with a whole wave of new gay clubs that opened in Vancouver in the late nineteen sixties, including The August Club (that later became The Shaggy Horse), B.J.s, and Champagne Charlie's. The bar-financed Royal Dogwood Court operated the Dogwood Monarchist Society. In contrast to ASK's vanguard status in Pacific Northwest gay rights organizations, the inception of the Dogwood Court was rooted the Portland, Oregon Court. The Court provided a counterpoint to the too often only skin-deep radical ideologies that were swirling about on the university campuses and at the infrequent demonstrations in Vancouver's more symbolic and "spectacular" public spaces. As one Empress recalls, The Court's. "purpose was to generate gay community unity and to support charitable causes within the community through the staging of drag balls. The court was not without its detractors; some activists saw it as an anachronism that promoted sexism and discrimination."<sup>71</sup> The Court also organized a sector of formerly isolated gay men and introduced them to social and political events for the first time -- including the organization of benefits for scholarships and disaster relief. And in a few years, homoerotic males were to experience their own disaster, greater than any so far, in the history of The Terminal City. The political skills learned at `Court' were to prove crucial in provide relief to thousands.

As in most North American cities, the nineteen seventies saw the first articulation and constructed visibility of specific lesbian and gay networks. In Vancouver, the more overtly gay, West End Slo-Pitch Association (WESA) was first organized in 1978<sup>72</sup>. The first recorded public Jewish involvement in decriminalized gay Vancouver was around the High Holidays in 1973. In the subsequent years, gay networks related to Chinese, Italian, and Asian cultures emerged, though often stayed relatively private and outside of the more public sites of the gay West End. In the nineteen seventies, the leather and S / M scenes became visible and expanded rapidly. A prototype for partying-oriented organizations came with the formation of the gay motorcycle club, The Border Riders, in 1971 and with its May 1973 Mr. Cowboy contest. In January 1973, the Zodiac Motor Club was formed and was explicitly oriented to leather and SM. In the next decade, as we shall see in chapter eight, Vancouver became a thriving community of "leathersexuality" and S/M in Pacific Canada had strong social links to San Francisco's burgeoning South of Market Area (SOMA)<sup>73</sup>. In the geography of male leather culture, Vancouver came to be the rich, northern frontier for

<sup>71</sup> Empress interview (interviewing Ted North). *Open Doors* 1 (June 1971): 2, 4; Sugar Plum fairies. *Open Doors* (Vancouver) 2 (May 1972): 5; & Empress & gay clubs promote sexism and discrimination. *Open Doors* 2 (June 1972): 6.

<sup>72</sup> Blair Hirtle. 1998. 20 years throwing balls. *Xtra West* 129 (July 23, 1998): 15.

<sup>73</sup> One of the major figures in early leathersexuality, in general, was the late Geoff Mains who began his gay / leather activism in Vancouver and in the latter years of his life commuted between San Francisco and Vancouver. For years, his 1984, *Urban Aborigines: A celebration of leathersexuality* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press) was the manifesto of the leather community. Much of the perspectives developed in the book were from Mains' experiences in Vancouver.

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the hyper-masculine. But it was to be more than another decade before there was significant space for lesbian and female bisexual sadomasochists in Vancouver. And resistance to these sensibilities persisted in some sexual minority institutions well into the early nineteen nineties.

**Heightened marketing of gay & lesbian commercial spaces**

"iuv seen yr x lovrs stagging out  
 uv aftnoon moovees late nite bars"  
 "granville street vancouver" Bill Bissett 1983<sup>74</sup>

As homosexuality was legalized, bars and for men also baths, proliferated to service both people who came of age in the criminal period and the new wave of youth culture. Space of inebriation soon became the strategic sites of the gay ghetto in the 1970s. Many of these establishments catered to individuals whose consumption patterns, and indeed their desires, had been formed in the criminalization period. The early nineteen seventies, as a rapid period of liberalization, saw an explosion of gay and lesbian clubs that Vancouver had never seen nor would see again -- at least in the twentieth century. And the spaces of these new establishments became politicized though the extent of the legacies of the political actions around these bars remains a point for contentious discussion.<sup>75</sup> What is clear is that Vancouver City Hall, both politicians and bureaucrats, worked hard to obstruct the creation of gay and lesbian-oriented establishments, particularly bars. Except for a few periods of tolerance in the nineteen eighties and nineties, this pattern of institutional homophobia has continued. The nature of today's resistance to homoerotically oriented commercial established was set in place in the years directly after decriminalization.

For people who were still coming out and uncomfortable with their sexuality, alcohol tended to lubricate social contact. The gay (and sometimes mixed) commercial establishments that emerged after decriminalization can be divided into four groups. There were the pubs with liquor licenses that were typically granted decades before and that were gradually queered. Secondly, there were newer gay clubs without liquor licenses but where patrons brought in their own booze. Thirdly, there were clubs after 1972 that were established under the liberalization of liquor laws. Finally, there were other spaces that did not sell liquor, such as counterculture events, where the social currency did not require intoxication from alcohol. This fourth category of spaces became the prototype of what was referred to, in the nineteen nineties, as "the rave." How had this explosion of a male homosexual economy of pleasure come about? And why were women effectively more

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<sup>74</sup> Bill Bissett. 1983. *Seagull on Yonge Street*. Vancouver: Talonbooks. np.

<sup>75</sup> In recent years, individuals not present at the time have tried to romanticize the activism around bars, and to exaggerate the impacts on broader gay and lesbian organizing, such as in Tom Yeung's 1999 "It was our Stonewall: Gay rebelled against city hall in the 1970s over liquor laws" (*Xtra West* 161 (October 14, 1999): 11).

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marginalized in commercial entertainment space in the nineteen seventies than they had in the two decades that preceded decriminalization? First, there was a rapid increase in self-acknowledgement due more to greater mobility, urbanization and (male) consumer power. By the early nineteen seventies, gay business space was essentially formed, or rather more purposefully marked and defended, in terms of the new proprieties of **partial** decriminalization. Commercial spaces added fuller protection for gay men through being paying patrons.

In British Columbia, openly defined gay and lesbian clubs emerged in the aftermath of the June 30, 1973 police raids of the Hampton Court on Seymour Street. Discrimination in the licensing of gay clubs began to ease in the mid-nineteen seventies, though not without considerable militancy that, in effect, gave conservative bar owners the clout to force compromises from city officials. Paradoxically, the new gay proprietors went on to use their considerable profits, from subsequent years, to create more conservative political bases in "the gay [male] community". The bars that were transformed from furtive spots of homoerotic contact to homosexual bars to gays bars were the only continuous 'queer' social spaces in Pacific Canada aside from a few parks. Author David Watmough remembers the major bars spaces for gay men in the late nineteen sixties as The Castle, the basement of the Devonshire Hotel for the university crowd, and the basement of the Hotel Vancouver. But since homosexuality was partially decriminalized, these more conservative establishments chose to do away with most of their gay clientele altogether rather than risk the stigma of having a public association with 'gays'. In contrast, there was a group of older clubs, most notably The Castle, that "went gay" in the nineteen seventies and took on more strategic roles because they were large, well-known, and more diverse. Even as late as the nineteen sixties, the filthy Montreal Club, that was soon to stop being a queer space, was the only place where men could dance together.

The economics of these new gay spaces often were marginal. Owners tended to expect higher than average profits which were rarely put back into the spaces themselves. There may have been links to organized crime and to police pay-offs though these have yet to be documented. In order to maintain their liquor licences, bars with furtive male homosexual spaces in the nineteen fifties were effectively required to look good. While closeted gay spaces in the criminal period tended to be either 'prissy' or, as with those for women, squalid, many of the seventies clubs became, more uniformly sleazy. We could even un-coding sleaze as a nineteen seventies spatial transition from criminalization with violent social stigmatization to partially decriminalized and increasingly vulnerable to social hostility. Perhaps low levels of hygiene and safety<sup>76</sup> were a kind of defence mechanism if not an easy way to exploit a social minority. In the spaces without liquor licenses, patrons brought in their own booze. The emphasis was more on socializing, as in living out "the sexual revolution," and less on getting inebriated. For example, The Playpen South did not

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<sup>76</sup> For some indications of the economics of and safety problems in some of these bars in this period, see Report to Council (City of Vancouver), May 19, 1977 Study Committee of Council on Community Services, CVPA microfilm MCR-1, Vol. 126.

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have a liquor license for some years. Instead, the social club ambience was adapted and ratcheted with a hyper-masculinity that made this the most regularly used back room sex space in the history of the region.

By 1973, there were seven gay and / or lesbian clubs that served alcohol and five bathhouses. Curiously, this is a similar level of homoerotic alcohol and legal sex establishments to what we see in Vancouver today. At the height the articulation of 'The Gay Ghetto', drinking of alcohol, with pressure was excess, was almost the required price for men having sexual contact. And city tolerance was undependable. For example, some bars, such as the 616 Club near Robson and Granville, were repeatedly harassed about male prostitution and forced to "clean-up" and be less tolerant of homosexuality. Harassment was spear-headed by the city government's Community Services Committee chaired by the most outspoken leftist (and homophobe), Harry Rankin.

As significant as the politics of post-gay liberation was the coalescence of clone and vaguely allied same-sex domestic consumer culture. The rise of gay male culture and businesses in the nineteen seventies was entwined with the emergence of disco and the increased buying power of the baby boom. In post-criminalization Vancouver, there was an expansion of the total square footage of gay establishments and the creation of sites of [sexual] "disorientation" and reorientation. Sometimes these spaces were considered "bisexual" and other times for people "needing space to explore." For the first time, this creation of a safe zone of cultural and erotic exploration became integrated into the market economy. This was the frontier of the service economy, a sector that in Pacific Canada had been particularly weak because of boom and bust cycles. Because gay men and lesbians had been so ostracized in work places and pushed on to the often lower-paying entrepreneurial margins, the skills often were in place to contribute to economic survival. But in the nineteen seventies, probably no more than half of the establishments that catered to sexual minorities were owned by them. And the entrepreneurial skills of 'gay people' were worked more as paid managers than owners.

### **Challenging harassment & violence in public places**

"th wind thru th trees  
 hasnt given us  
 much  
 but dreems  
 we all die for."

Bertrand Lachance, "thinkin" 1973<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bertrand Lachance. 1973. *Cock Tales*. Vancouver: Talonbooks. n.p. Lachance, who went on to be a successful filmmaker in Quebec, was active in confronting police harassment of gays in the mid-1970s and has described some first-hand experiences.

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As long as the City of Vancouver has existed, parks have been a primary arena for conflicting sexualities and ethics. Since World War II, city park space, outdoor and in facilities, had been of growing interest for police surveillance. But it was only as interest in enforcement of laws against homosexuality in **private** declined that these conflicts intensified. As part of a highly organized programme of entrapment<sup>78</sup>, eight men were arrested for sex in a washroom in Stanley Park in June of 1963. Some of the subsequent defence arguments, focused on individual rights, were to ignite the public advocacy for decriminalization throughout the urban areas of Canada. These cases were used to highlight the irrationality of the state and provided the grist for Trudeau's successful 1967 advocacy for partial decriminalization. It is worth looking closely at some of the legal contradictions that emerged in Vancouver's parks, and few other public spaces in Canada, in the mid-nineteen sixties. The meanness of the state was exception and Doug Sanders noted "there were suicides as a result of this police surveillance"<sup>79</sup>. In one June 1963 arrest, men engaged in sex relatively simultaneous in the English Bay washrooms on the edge of the park were tried. Identified as Holte, Landry, LaChance, Bliss, Desjarlais, Ferguson, Herrmann, and Singer, the men eventually only received suspended sentences. Herrmann and Singer were originally sentenced to three months of incarceration. They were all forced to pay bonds of \$500 with the condition that they "stay away from all public parks"<sup>80</sup>. The six not originally sentenced to incarceration appealed for a lighter sentence and were forced to report to a psychiatrist as well as to probation officers.

Car (homo)sex, typically conducted in cruising areas, was another basis for prosecution. In West Vancouver in the spring and summer of 1996, Wemp and Pillard were charged with homosexual activity on different days and fined \$250 each<sup>81</sup>. In Vancouver in the spring of 1966, two men on different days were apprehended alone though they may have had multiple partners. "Marshall" was sentenced to one day and fined \$100 and Turpin was imprisoned for one month and forced to post a bond, for a year, of \$200<sup>82</sup>. Punishments for men having sex in female clothing were steeper. In a 1966 case, *Regina versus Del Vecchio*, police followed a pickup of a cross-dressing man by a sailor and subsequently burst into a room where they were naked and having sex. The sailor later claimed that originally he did not know that his partner was a man. The sailor was not charged but the crossdressing Del Vecchio was given a suspended sentence of eighteen months, was forced to post a bond and to submit to a psychiatric assessment and subsequent treatment<sup>83</sup>. In a

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<sup>78</sup> Doug Sanders. 1968. The mysterious case of Everett Klippert. *Georgia Straight* September 27 - October 3, 1968: 10 - 11, 17. See p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas E. Sanders. 1967. Sentencing of homosexual offenders. p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 27 - 28.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

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similar case in 1966, *Regina versus De Seve*, a crossdressing male prostitute was paid \$10 for giving oral sex and later was imprisoned for three months while the john was never charged<sup>84</sup>. But the logic of the hierarchy of gender-identification was beginning to break down. For example, in the high-profile 1967, *Regina versus Boisvert and Lupien* case, crossdressing Boisvert only received a fine of \$100 while the masculine Lupien, a senior civil servant, was fined \$750<sup>85</sup>.

In the nineteen seventies, there was an explosion in the formation of lesbian and gay movements and institutions that powered an increase in resistance to police entrapment and harassment and other particularly mean forms of discrimination. There was a wave of police harassment of the gay clubs in 1973, the same year that the first organized Gay Pride Week<sup>86</sup>, in late June. That repression brought out a demonstration of about one hundred people in a cruising area near Ceperly Park and the seawall. For well into the nineteen seventies, police harassment extended to same-sex couples kissing, holding hands, and furtive groping<sup>87</sup> in public spaces. In partial response to continued police harassment, the first Pride parade was organized in the West End in 1977. It was in the nineteen seventies that physical aspects of public outdoor space began to be considered relevant to sexual politics. But in the same period, a more subtle but intensive form of homophobia by design was embedded in the local cultural of landscape architecture, as it first emerged as a profession in the region, and in the management of use of public space. In one example, police on horseback harassed and attempted to scare away men they thought were gay and looking for sex along Lees Trail<sup>88</sup>. A 1977 police study described the cruising along English Bay, including parts of Stanley Park, as "a very serious situation that seems to be getting worse"<sup>89</sup>. The report functioned to justify the intensifying pattern of arrests. Over 100 gay men were charged for loitering and indecency at English Bay in the first quarter of 1977 alone, - some of the highest level arrests for homosexuality ever seen in Vancouver -- to this day. The promenade around English Bay became a site of resistance -- with standoffs

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> Melinda Marie Jette has argued that the first institutionalized Pride march was in 1977 ("Twenty Years of Pride in British Columbia: Reflections on the Practice of Public History in Queer Vancouver" presented at the Do Ask, Do Tell: Outing Pacific Northwest History Conference, Washington State History Museum, Tacoma, October 24, 1998). However earlier "marches" were also organized as Vancouver's equivalent and its solidarity with Pride events in other cities.

<sup>87</sup> The Body Politic. 1977. Van cops scour bay. *The Body Politic* March 1977: 8 - 9.

<sup>88</sup> In Stanley Park, police harassment on horseback of supposedly gay men seems to have continued into the late nineteen seventies (Don Hamm, 1998, pers. comm.).

<sup>89</sup> Sun. 1977. City police, gays cooperate. *Sun* (July 28, 1977): 24. The report mentioned does not appear to have been entered into the public record nor debated by the city council.

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between gay men, other residents, and police<sup>90</sup> -- most similar to those in Griffith Park in Los Angeles in the months before the 1969 Stonewall Riots. In the emerging SEARCH versus GATE split (what amounted to centrist Liberal Party-allied versus mildly leftist New Democratic Party-allied), GATE challenged police harassment and SEARCH focused on dialogue and self-restraint where "Representatives of homosexual groups, the police, Vancouver city council and the West End community resources advisory board have been involved in the meetings...Referring to the problem of homosexual gatherings, [Geoff] Mains said gay publications are urging their readers to confine activities to the privacy of their homes, while continuing to use the beach as a meeting place."<sup>91</sup>

Another (homophobia by design) response was to make lighting along English Bay "the solution," rather than embarrassing police repression that brought public resistance. During a June 21st, 1977 Vancouver City Council meeting, the Department of Public Works, citing city police information of a rising problem of public sex<sup>92</sup>, asked for \$250,000 for lighting to discourage "criminal activity." The main concern was gay male cruising and public sex. The request was deferred. Alderman Harry Rankin succeeded with a less expensive budget that still emphasized police harassment. This "compromise"<sup>93</sup> was approved unanimously by Council including by its left-of-centre members, Darlene Marzari and future premier, Michael Harcourt<sup>94</sup>.

As visibility increased in the nineteen seventies, so did anti-homosexual attacks. There was an increase with the Anita Bryant campaign of 1978, which saw scores of gay men and lesbians harassed and assaulted in the West End<sup>95</sup>. Gaybashing emerged as a major issue in the West End in 1979 when GATE organized a campaign after numerous violent incidents at the Sea Festival. It was the summer of 1979 that due to a series of meetings

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<sup>90</sup> Carol Volkart. 1977. Prostitutes, gays clash with residents: West End's many faces exposed. *Sun* (April 7, 1977): 25.

<sup>91</sup> Sun. 1977. City police, gays cooperate. *Sun* (July 28, 1977): 24.

<sup>92</sup> Manager's Report, June 17, 1977, Works & Utility Matters (A1-1) attached to Minutes of Regular City of Vancouver Council Meeting, June 21, 1977. (CVPA microfilm MCR-1, Vol. 126).

<sup>93</sup> In the June 21, 1977 meeting, Alderman Harry Rankin, with strong ties to factions of the declining Communist Party, voted against the appropriation and noted that "This deals with the simple matter of people who may be obnoxious, but not dangerous". Rankin suggested as an alternative, gates and additional police patrols while social democrat Darlene Marzari, who went to become a provincial minister under Michael Harcourt, abstained arguing, "'special lighting' would only have the effect of displacing gay around the city." (City Council EnLIGHTens Bathhouse. *Gay Tide* (September 1977): 4). Also see, *The Body Politic* (September 1977): 8.

<sup>94</sup> Minutes of Regular City of Vancouver Council Meeting, June 21, 1977 - p. 4. (CVPA microfilm MCR-1, Vol. 126).

<sup>95</sup> *Gay Tide*. 1978. Gang beats gays. *Gay Tide* (December 1978): 5.

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organized by GATE saw the first assessment of the extent of anti-gay and lesbian<sup>96</sup> violence, particularly in public places. In the subsequent weeks, there was a demonstration against anti-gay violence on the steps of the Provincial Courthouse on Robson Street. That wave of relatively organized and unpoliced anti-gay vigilantism continued into the early nineteen eighties notably in the areas of recently visible concentrations of sexual minorities such as on the streets of the West End<sup>97</sup> and in Stanley Park<sup>98</sup>.

**The Ghetto strikes back:****Gay bar & cruising versus heterosexual street prostitution**

"We all wanted lovers - we all ended up with tricks. We were sexist, totally."  
 John Forbes 1971<sup>99</sup>

By the nineteen seventies, Davie Street became the "high end" area for female street prostitution in Vancouver. A substantial part of the indoor prostitution was associated with two cabarets, and the sex trade was forced out-of-doors in the 1975-1978 period as part of a concerted media and political campaign. The spectre of aggressive street prostitution, as a political rallying point, was partially constructed<sup>100</sup> through the of increased evictions of sex work from lower-end indoor areas. In turn, many of the streetwalkers used Davie Street, from Nicola to Thurlow, as a stepping stone to more lucrative, off-street sex work<sup>101</sup>. At the same time, a network of one hundred to a hundred and fifty male hustlers<sup>102</sup>, mainly between the age of 14 and 25 and many francophone<sup>103</sup>,

<sup>96</sup> There was broad feminist support for the challenging of anti-gay violence as part of a broader analysis of violence against women. See Michelle Marko. 1979. Take an overview of violence against lesbians and gay men. *Kinesis* (November 1979): 17.

<sup>97</sup> Jim Hume. 1981. Vigilantes roam as 'fag-beaters'. *Times-Colonist* (Victoria): November 20, 1981: cf 1.

<sup>98</sup> Vancouver Gay Community Centre News. 1981. In the last little while. *Vancouver Gay Community Centre News* (November 1981): 30 - 31.

<sup>99</sup> The Body Politic. 1971. The Gay Ghetto.

<sup>100</sup> John Lowman. 1986. Prostitution in Vancouver: Some Notes on the Genesis of a Social Problem. *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 28(1): 1-16

<sup>101</sup> Monique Layton. 1975. Prostitution in Vancouver (1973 - 1975) - Official and unofficial reports. A report to the B.C. Police Commission. submitted in September 1975. on file, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of British Columbia. See p. 100.

<sup>102</sup> Corporal G. A. Forbes. 1977. Street prostitution in Vancouver's West End, prepared for Vancouver Police Board and Vancouver City Council. September 7, 1977. 25 pp. on file CVPA, Prostitution downtown file, location: 103-G-1, file 2.

<sup>103</sup> The francophone factor is intriguing here because it could be interpreted to be that these gay men had less options of employment in the West End's still aggressively anglophone service sector. Many of the



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became visible along Davie<sup>104</sup>. Into the early nineteen eighties, some of the same male prostitutes and others worked Granville Street between Georgia and Smythe Streets. There was another parallel culture of under-aged males engaged in prostitution in some of the area's bathhouses<sup>105</sup>. Many of the teenaged males who were thrown out of their parents' homes in the nineteen seventies when their parents became aware that they were gay. Without many youth-oriented services, these teenaged males had few places to go. Hustler street scenes were also the products of the need for gay youth housing and peer support. The rates of drug use were high. The scene that emerged on Davie Street, with or without sex for money, was about youth culture and homelessness. A relatively full-time transvestite and transsexual street culture had also emerged in the same area<sup>106</sup>.

The West End's gay male identity was formed in the late nineteen seventies from a social contest that came to pit gay bars against female street prostitution. In some curious acts of city planning and more spontaneous territorialization, where space and gay space, like tectonic plates, came to collide<sup>107</sup> along Davie Street. Ironically, it was the sexual freedom exuded by hookers, drag queens, the sexual ambiguities, that provided the key bridge to move the early nineteen seventies gay scene along Seymour and Richards, with its links to Gastown and Robson, into Davie Street. By the early nineteen eighties, the gay space along Davie expanded and moved west<sup>108</sup>, as Seymour Street, as an increasingly exhausted scene, moved south to intersect it. This intersection formed the city's core gay male *topoi* of the nineteen nineties. Even as late as 1982, gay male spaces in the core of the city were as much along Robson, Seymour, and Richards Streets as along Davie Street. In this shell-game, prostitution moved east to fill a low rent gap as gay male space shifted southwest.

In the early nineteen eighties, both the left and the right in the West End were allied in the fight against prostitution such as around the 1981-1982 construction of street

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francophone males appear to have been non-*Québécois*. Most likely, they had the least amount of options for "coming out" outside of the declining economy of young-male-as-"trade." See Monique Layton. 1975. Prostitution in Vancouver (1973 - 1975) - Official and unofficial reports. A report to the B.C. Police Commission. submitted in September 1975. on file, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of British Columbia. pp. 136 - 137.

<sup>104</sup> Monique Layton. 1975. Prostitution in Vancouver (1973 - 1975). p. 128.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> For a 1983 map illustrating how the Seymour and Richards Street "Theatre Row" gay area had separated from Gastown gay spaces, and had collided with the more recent Davie Street spaces, while Robson Street gay businesses were on the decline is in the December 1983 issue of *Angles* on p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> Listings. 1982. *NW Fountain* (Seattle) (March 1982): 20 - 21.

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dividers<sup>109</sup> to slow down the increasingly noisy automobile traffic associated with johns. The dividers made the streets far more pedestrian-friendly, for chatting and cruising for example, but not for servicing automobile-based customers of sex. In the early nineteen eighties, more centrist gay males, notably Gordon Price, formed an alliance with anti-street prostitution groups and involved such organizations as the 1984-85 Shame the Johns in the West End. But the shame was more directed at women and resulted in less comfortable access by all females to public space. Part of the gay and anti-prostitution alliance was that many of the heterosexual johns were homophobic and their pursuits were interfering with the subtle assertions of homoeroticism on the same streets.

Increased gay male visibility and creation of visible homoerotic space occurred at a dizzying pace in the West End throughout the nineteen seventies. By 1983 there was almost a sense of normalization. As described by one *Vancouver Sun* reporter: "At one time, gays were a novelty, a visible aberration. Now, it's a mature, stable community."<sup>110</sup> But that sense of singularity, with its emphasis on white, middle-class gay men, was soon shattered by the pressures for broader coalitions to educate against the spread of AIDS, to care for the sick, and confront the rightist agenda of the nineteen eighties. By the early nineteen eighties, the bar economy of Davie Street and Richards Street began to diversify, shifting from primarily alcohol and male sex to a range of services from food to medical to travel. The early establishment of restaurants such as Doll and Penny's and Hamburger Mary's were emblematic of this change in culture and political economy, as was western Canada's early gay and lesbian book store, Little Sisters. But little of this diversification of establishments provided much space for women, children in queer families, and groups of males other than the young and middle-aged with a substantial disposable income. In this context, if The Drive had not been invented by the recombined Left, the contradictions generated and the exclusions reproduced in the West End would have created it.

**Conclusions:****Ambiguous language for the transformation of social networks & neighbourhoods**

"The conspiracy to suppress homosexuality has held us submerged, dwelling in a huge Atlantis where contact is perilous, communication distorted and shadowy. Sounds are stifled and identities murky, in this watery underworld of the nonconformist...with the participation and enthusiasm of gay sisters and brothers determined never to go back into the closet. Gay liberation will chart a new course in

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<sup>109</sup> City Clerk. 1981. Extract from City Council Minutes, November 3, 1981, Social Service & Health Matters, "West End Prostitution / Nuisance Problem." on file in dossier 81-G-4, file 4.

<sup>110</sup> M. Andrews. 1983. Getting the lowdown on the gay community. *Sun* (November 19, 1983): D2.

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a new ship and on a new tide." Walter Blumenthal, 1971, a member of Gay Alliance Towards Equality, Vancouver<sup>111</sup>

What is the answer to the riddle of why the West End was labelled a 'ghetto' for more than three decades when it was like no other ghetto in the history of the use of the word? This question remains enigmatic especially since what residents fled from was far more repression than they typically saw in the West End. But the currents of repression from the Cold War arrests, the entrapments and the homophobic violence that has yet to disappear do link the West End of the 1960s through the 1990s to the Jewish and Black ghettos. But certainly 'ghetto' remains an ambiguous and queer label that was only partially useful in untangling contradictory impulses to both confront and dismantle homophobia, on one hand, and to create space for homoeroticism and social networks on the other.

At a time of demographic expansion of urban gay men, as a result of the post-war Baby Boom, a new kind of Canadian urban experience was coalescing. Coincidentally, this was during the country's shift from neo-colonialism to post-colonialism and the 1983 – 85 establishment of the Canadian Constitution that subsequently has been the basis for human rights gains for sexual minorities. So 'ghetto' in Vancouver's West End was a largely white and Eurocentric appropriation of the African-related usage. And as this previously heavily segregated city was integrated through the 1980s, the term became increasingly anachronistic. The use of 'ghetto' was a surrogate label when there was an insufficient level of solidarity between a diverse set of sexual minority experiences in a highly multicultural city. As with other pressured ghettos, there were demographic pressures coupled with repression (and resistance) rather than cohesion that could be termed 'community'. For the West End in the 1970s and 1980s, 'ghetto' became a grab-bag of poorly tested and evaluated perspectives on homophobia and means of defence and community-building particularly

- ✚ the beginning of confronting (but sometimes the avoidance of) inequities around race and citizenship that were not resolved until after the establishment of the Canadian constitution two decades ago;
- ✚ creation of only limited space for discussion of the needs of sexual minorities in the development of the city and particular neighbourhood policy such as around gay commercial establishments;
- ✚ establishment of some of the most extensive human rights protections in North America;

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<sup>111</sup> This is the first editorial of the monthly *Gay Tide* (Walter Blumenthal. 1971. editorial...we name thee... *Gay Tide* (Vancouver) 1(1): 2). Thanks to Don Hamm for his talk, "The lesbian and gay civil rights struggle in British Columbia 1971 - 1980," given at Harry's Off-Commercial on October 14, 1995 as a benefit for Little Sisters Bookstore.

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- ✚ relatively successful confrontations of police harassment and establishment of some of the most successful community liaison programmes in North America;
- ✚ only limited success at establishment and maintenance of a gay and lesbian business district that remains increasingly vulnerable to globalized urban land values;
- ✚ relatively high levels of success at defending outdoor areas of male public sex;
- ✚ relatively high levels of success at creating a range of sites of various cultural and desire-based homoerotic networks; and
- ✚ twenty years after many single women left the West End for safer and friendlier networks, relative gender balance in the presence and use of outdoor public space (except for cruising areas).

As for the three distinct sets of processes embodied in the use of 'The Gay Ghetto', there has been a distinct unevenness in achievements in community formation and construction of interests in urban policy. The confronting of internalized homophobia has been institutionalized through social services and education. The confronting of external homophobia, repression and a wider array of inequities has been largely confined to the courts and limited constraints on police conduct. But in Vancouver, the building of networks and respective institutions for expression of a widening array of homoerotic and respective homosocial expression remains relatively weak compared to Toronto, Montreal and Seattle.

For Vancouver's West End, the use of this loaded term, 'ghetto', signified recognition of the pervasiveness of homophobia **and** the need for activism and institutional-development. The 'ghetto' in this sense in the West End was the sum-total of the internalized homophobia of sexual minorities, combined with continued state repression, some accommodation, along with resistance practices to often violent inequities. The 'ghetto' in the West End was less about place and more about process with occasional allusions to various left and centrist programmes. What is so remarkable is that with such a stretch of this concept of the 'ghetto' and the range of perspectives and priorities, the 'ghetto' as a project was successful at allowing the West End to be transformed into a relatively pleasant and increasingly expensive site to continue to confront homophobia and build various experiences of sexual minority communities.

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