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Gordon Brent Ingram essay in Chad States.
2011. *Cruising: Photographs by Chad States*.*



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Cruising on the Margins: Photographing The Changing Worlds of Outdoor Sex Between Males

Why are the photographs of Chad States, that portray men within intimate landscapes, so important? The images are verdant, complex, and intriguing.

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Secondly, the photographs portray out-of-the-way places and kinds of social interaction that are poorly understood outside of certain circles and where many individuals remain at risk from ongoing harassment, arrest, and even violence. In this way, *Cruising*, the photographic essay, is a form of badly needed research. Thirdly, the particular visual conversations, in which States engage, with the men embedded in these outdoor spaces can give us clues for creating new social contracts and communities, for finding new ways of acknowledging and addressing high risk behavior, and, in a world wracked with looming crises, for new ways of having fun through affection and sex.

Along with arguing that essays such as *Cruising* are important projects in contemporary photography and social studies, I explore some ways to read this new photographic genre of small depictions of male bodies, sometimes together, within much broader landscapes in ways that defy the nineteenth and twentieth century preoccupation with panorama and vista almost as ways to claim and to begin to control territory. States is working in and only half departing from central movements in portrayal of American landscapes, depictions of gay men and homosexuality, and documentation of minorities and what some would still view as social problems. The photographs, that at first glance might appear voyeuristic, make it difficult to see the men for the trees. But portraiture, both painterly and photographic, is often about context, and social conflict, and all of us, even those who venture out for public sex in parks, are only playing small parts in a biosphere and a set of social contracts that are increasingly under stress and that warrant careful revisiting. Cultures of public sex are often highly localized and can change drastically every few years, certainly within a single decade. So what can *Cruising* tell us about America and beyond at this point in history?

So why would Chad States want to photograph outdoor sites of public sex? Why does he have the right to photograph individuals who have given their permission and why is this research and exploration of a certain kind of beauty important? In this essay, I am particularly interested in how photographic projects such as these make new space for more diverse and robust sexual cultures able to mobilize in response to threats such as violence and sexually transmitted diseases. To explore the implications the photographs of Chad States for understanding marginalized sexual cultures, I look at some fast-paced and under-recorded histories of cruising in parks and other open space and then consider the wide range of experiences that can be shared through sex out-of-doors. We can then consider a terrible dynamic of outdoor sex between men in the last two centuries: parks as sanctuaries, on one hand, but also as traps where individuals are policed, terrorized, and worse. These days, we are something at physical and digital crossroads in the roles, in deed the importance, of public sex. In concluding, it is important to remember how few photographic projects there have been like this

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one that have recorded particular historical moments of the shifting boundaries of public and private.



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Photographing Sites of Public Sex / Mapping New Relationships / Making Space on the Margins

"[I]t is the map that engenders the territory[.]"

Jean Baudrillard (1983: 2)

When I first viewed the photographs of Chad States, I found them oddly understated. At first glance, the images did not seem to fit into any photographic movement. But then these images came together for me – as part of a strong lineage of photographic theory and framing in the United States. Photographs make maps or rather our minds use photographs to make reckonings of the communities in which we live. Most towns and cities have poorly monitored outdoor spaces such as parks, vacant lots or even wastelands where people express affection that often leads to sex – and some of that intimacy is between

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adult males and a bit of that contact is noticeable to other people. Photography is a particularly good way to make sense of the "eroticized topographies" (Bell 1997: 81) of poorly understood local subcultures such as men who engage in public sex.

One of the most important statements in *Cruising* is to confirm, without a doubt, that the intimacy, however fleeting, can be described, even celebrated, without putting those men at risk. While some of the compositions of the photographs might be argued to be a bit coy, and almost camp, the use of the camera to interact with subjects, historically associated with abjection and put at risk through portrayal, is entirely an invention of this and *not* the twentieth century. Today, people do not have to go out to the margins of public space to find and to portray homosexuality. In a voyeuristic culture increasingly built around artificial and digitally assisted intimacy, we know too many personal details about an increasing number individuals by just searching the internet. So photography in this new digital era harkens back to its origins in the nineteenth century, to the panopticon the watchtower so important for social control. But these photographs in *Cruising* are not about social control, and Chad States is not attempting some sort of social assessment, but instead harkens back to an almost nostalgic search for beauty. Chad States reminds us that public sex, even when the images do not convey many of the corporeal details, can be beautiful. For the sizeable demographic who engage in these acts, this reconfirmation is wonderful, is an important new contribution to culture, and can even be cathartic. And as much as I enjoy sifting through the imagery, with the layers of spaces and activities in *Cruising*, I am also struck by what a departure is this work from contemporary of genres of both portrayal of males, including men celebrating homosexuality, and American parks and open space.

Much of our current conception of the uses of and potentials for photographing gay males was shaped by a small number of photographers who came of age in the 1970s and who had left us by the mid-1990s. Robert Mapplethorpe (1990) was largely a studio photographer who mainly focused on beautiful bodies with considerable attention to highly sexed genitalia. Even Mapplethorpe's (1993) portrayal of flowers were highly sexed and context deficient. Peter Hujar (1994) who died just a year and a half before Mapplethorpe showed gay men and sexuality within the kinds of contexts typical of a long tradition of North American portraiture. And one of Hujar's lovers, David Wojnarowicz who died little more than two years after Mapplethorpe, further reconnected portraiture practices, that acknowledged and explored place and context, back to both traditions of political activism and collage (David Wojnarowicz 2002).

While no one in the world today who is seriously photographing men and male sexuality can avoid the influence of Mapplethorpe, and to a large extent George Platt Lynes (Lynes and Leddick 2000) whose work going back to 1930

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anticipated the photographic revolution of 1980s, the work of Chad States in *Cruising* speaks of a parallel movement in American photography. Organized by William Jenkins for the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Salvesen 2010) established an alternative to the transcendent panoramas that typified the first century of American landscape photography. Much of the first century of American landscape photography was part of a process of documentation of poorly known territories, domination, and consolidation of political and economic control. New Topographics, as a photographic movement, was about celebrating the matter-of-fact rather than the spectacular: placing value on country road, backyards, and clearcuts as much as on the sublime. An underlying set of practices acknowledged layered cultural landscapes with under-stated signs along with social contests and outright conflicts that in turn gave space to acknowledge public sex and policing. The early concerns in *The New West* of Robert Adams (2008 (1974)) included acknowledgement of a range of both bland places, such as suburban sprawl, and poorly understood social groups including minorities. In his own work, Robert Adams has been particularly concerned about both questions of truth and authenticity (Adams 2010a), as played out in the landscape, and conversations around loss and nostalgia (Adams. 2010b).

The central figure in New Topographics, Robert Adams, has shown little interest in portraiture in the landscape and none in sexuality and sexual minorities. The early work of Lewis Baltz held a potential for social criticism as in his work on the construction of Park City, Utah (Baltz and Blaisdell 1981). But little of the work of the New Topographics photographers has directly confronted contests over land ownership, unresolved Native legacies, intolerance, and the creation of new disparities within communities. But crucial for *Cruising*, New Topographics planted some seeds for a new century of conversations about the American landscape but avoided acknowledging the debates over the shifting lines of private, public, and propriety (Habermas 1991: 74) never going near sexual politics. Instead, portrayal of male sexuality in the landscape has been split, almost schizophrenically, between alternative and utopian tendencies, such as Alvin Baltrop's distant shots of anonymous men having sex on New York City's West Side piers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and advertising as with Bruce Weber's mythic spread on pale males, *Bear Pond* (Weber 1990). To his credit, Weber, who revolutionized the portrayal of male bodies through bold advertising of underwear, developed that portfolio of male nudes in the Adirondacks as a benefit for an AIDS charity. But like nearly all of the major photographers of unclad males in the twentieth century, Weber had very little to say about the landscape – or sex – or sex between men. Weber's photographic cul-de-sac create a space to enjoy desire for the male body, for women and for men, for a price that was high-priced consumer goods. There is a massive retail economy imbedded in Weber's aesthetics with little room for edgy sexualities that still get

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too many people in trouble. Almost diametrically opposite to the males of Bruce Weber, is the work of Montreal photographer Evergon who for several decades has documented outdoor male cruising areas in various parts of the world (Dalton 2004). But in contrast to the work of Chad States, Evergon's enchanting essays are highly stylized and often operatic.

In *Cruising*, Chad States portrays not so much a parallel universe but one just down the street and only partly camouflaged. He begins to describe a social overlay where the interplays between assertion and marginalization of male sexualities are in constant flux and while regular public sex is being expressed the forces that directly harm, discount, isolate, ghettoize, and assimilate erotic outsiders are, at least for a few moments, kept at bay (Trebay 1997: 36, Ingram 1997a: 40 - 41). I argue throughout this discussion on the portrayals in *Cruising* that the photographs allude and partly constitute a set of alternative erotic maps – that depart from the gay male subcultures and self-images of even a decade ago.

In contrast to much of the experience of the twentieth century, the men in his photographs are not afraid and do not show a great deal of interest in being portrayed. The men in *Cruising* are getting on with meeting, maybe talking and maybe silent, and having sex if they happened to feel like it. These men are not hiding; they have chosen these quiet margins of public space because these places are pleasant and probably convenient. While none of us are completely at ease with ourselves, the men in these places show few outward signs of distress, self-hatred, and shortage of information. We cannot be sure, of course, but there is no basis, in these photographs at least, to suggest despair and alienation. Similarly, there is no basis to assume that the photography was looking for images to support highly contrived notions of public sex. This because public sex, whether between women and men, between women, and between men is many things to each individual and shifting social network. Men who engage in public sex do not constitute a singular community but rather groups of individuals, defined by desires and identifications that are occasionally "fused" (van Lieshout 1997: 341), thus forming intercultural crossroads.

Why photograph sites of public sex? Why photograph people happy to be documented in places where public sex has taken or is taking place? There are many answers some quite different for an artist than for a social activist, police officer, and landscape architect. For an artist, making a personal statement resonating with their own experience, photographing sites of public sex may well be about what has inspired or frustrated them. But artists nearly always wear two hats, if only to pay the bills, and some other motives come into play. For the social documentarian, cultures of public sex shift every five to ten years so a little bit of historical documentation can be very valuable. In this vein, public sex areas become laboratories for good (and bad) behaviour that anticipate broader social changes. If there was one 'space' that anticipated the promises and pitfalls of

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the social world of Facebook, it has not been Harvard University but rather the sites of outdoor sexual contact – down the road in most towns and cities in the world.

Aside from celebrating the beauty of landscapes and physical expression, some other projects in photoessays of parks and public sex become apparent. Photographing open space with public sex is part of documenting social and environmental change in a community and a landscape. Photographic essays such as *Cruising* can sometimes better identify communities at risk. For example, sexual health educator Eric Estuar Reyes (1993) documented locations of public sex for "queers of color" in Los Angeles in order to better target the placement of safer sex information in a wider array of languages. Similarly, photographs of public sex areas help identify the communities, as community stakeholders, that have an interest in particular sites. For example, Maurice van Lieshout (1997: 339) stated that,

"In the Netherlands, cruisers [who have sex in parks and rest-stops] are no longer members of 'a silent community'."

So in exploring this ideal of photographic essays such as the work of Chad States as part of mapping and better asserting the experiences of marginalized communities, we can now examine some of the social and political conversations over public sex as these diverse experiences have been shaped by the modern world and in turn have pushed and transformed dominant understandings of sexualities and communities.

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Towards A Modern History of Cruising in Parks & Other Open Space

"We proceed directly from the meaning of "open": free to be entered or used, unobstructed, unrestricted, accessible, available, exposed, extended, candid, undetermined, loose, disengaged, responsive, ready to hear or see as in open heart, open eyes, open hand, open mind, open house, open city. Open spaces in this sense are open to freely chosen and spontaneous actions of people..."

Kevin Lynch (1991: 396)

In virtually every city and suburban park in the world today some kind of affection, with erotic dimensions, take place in the course of a day. And tentative investigations suggest that many individuals have and sometimes act on fantasies of public sex (Em & Lo 2007). As with most beds that are shared, some of that contact is more romantic and some activities are more carnal. And to try to separate the more tentative forms of affection and sexual contact, such as the hug, kiss, nuzzle, or grope, from various kinds of genital arousal and rubbing of skin is highly academic (and futile). Public open space sees a lot of affection, a

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lot of sex – and tragically a still underestimated amounts of intolerance and violence.

Public sex outside goes back a long way – probably as long as there have been cities. Descriptions of public sex out-of-doors have not often been by those actually involved. Why 'kiss' and tell? For many men who engage in outdoor public sex, it has usually been more fun to go back for more. So many of the descriptions of public sex that we have today are the police and other who objected to those intimacies. Michael Rey (1985) found that, at least as far back as 1714, the Paris police were actively involved in the surveillance of "popular rendezvous sites" of gay men. And the history of modern policing has been marked by attempts to justify ever bigger budgets through highlighting new dangers and specters. So over the last century, entrapment and arrests in public sex areas have been used regularly to justify greater budgets for municipal police forces. One of the worse examples that I have found was a particularly intimate and 'hands-on' kind of entrapment by the City of Vancouver Police a century ago as part of a vicious, twenty year campaign against recent male immigrants from India (Ingram 2003). What is more important is that these immigrant males, who mainly spoke Punjabi, organized and often won court cases often through disputing slim evidence against them – and through arguing that this kind of police harassment was illegal. In a curiously understated way, the organizing of hundreds, probably thousands, of legal defense strategies to resist prosecution for supposed public sex, especially in parks, in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to preparation of sexual minorities for the activism of the second half of the twentieth century that continues today.

One of the earliest descriptions of a homosexual community was in Donald Webster Cory's 1951 *The Homosexual in America, A Subjective Approach* written in the years leading up to the repressive McCarthy years. Cory talked of a "submerged world," (Cory 1951: 114) and developed an analogy to the concept of an ethnic community with his use of "gay society," mentioned strategic public sites, including for male cruising, as a basic sort of unit of community. With accelerating urbanization after World War II, cruising sites appear to have often proliferated and expanded in use. The 1950s also saw growing interest in outdoor public sex areas by police, with presence in and nearby cruising areas used as a way to automatically criminalize homosexual males, and by mental health professionals who often conflated so-called "impersonal sex" with pathology. Probably the majority of park users, who engaged in sex with other adult males, were never detected. In many large city parks with woodland, police officers could never penetrate too far and the level of cooperation between the men cruising could allow them to minimize exposing themselves to police officers. But just in the 1950s and 1960s, hundreds if not thousands of men in North America alone were arrested with many trialed publicly, ostracized by their families and work-mates, and imprisoned – persecution that continues in most parts of the world today. Fortunately, many park users were

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brave and organized. In one of the least documented and celebrated of early episodes of gay militance around cruising areas, a group of men enjoying Kew Gardens in New York City, responded to the vandalizing of a cruising area by police and neighbourhood residents who resented the homosexuality by planting trees in a short-lived organization calling itself Trees For Queens (Bird 1969a and 1960b, Teal 1971: 26 – 27).

Today, we often think of the late 1970s and early 1980s as the zenith of public sex cultures in North America. But there is little data to suggest that public sex areas are less numerous and less used today – and some suggestions that the opposite is true. But largely oblivious to diseases and with limited medical and psychological information available on the breadth of erotic expression, "clone" (Levine 1992) was naïve compared with today. Self-conscious promiscuity as a response to repression as a driving force in the formation of geographies of communality was illustrated in John Rechy's 1977 *The Sexual Outlaw*. Rechy's cultures of public sex in Los Angeles were car-oriented extending from the beaches (Rechy 1977: 22) to Griffith Park to the east. (Rechy 1977: 140). Perhaps the end of the line for Rechy's idealized "hypermasculine" homosexuality (Mosher and Tomkins 1988) in public parks was one of the later works of Touko Laaksonen known widely as Tom of Finland. In the 1984, Laaksonen sketched his fantasy of a public sexual space in *Kake Pleasure Park* a fantasy of great cooperation and affection -- and exaggerated sex organs. But that world quickly changed in the mid-1980s as many were told or came to assume, wrongly so, that HIV was being transmitted by public sex rather than learn the correct story that transmission was through exchanges of body fluids and *unprotected* sex. This misrepresentation was to provide even more excuses for persecuting men who engaged in public sex for yet another generation.

Over the last two and half decades, empirical knowledge of and theory for understanding the dynamics "public (homo)sex" (Bell 1995: 305), in areas such as city parks as localized but globalizing set of subcultures, has expanded rapidly. The sexuality and space research networks have been exceptionally influenced by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and his concept of "social reproduction of space," (Lefebvre 1991). The first of the sex-positive, research-based scholarship on public sex was by Jeffrey Weeks in his 1985, *Sexuality and Its Discontents* (219 – 223). David Bell's 1995 essay, "Perverse dynamics, sexual citizenship and the transformation of intimacy," was also pioneering. In my 1997 essay, "'Open' space as strategic queer sites" (Ingram 1997b), I explored why these sites of public sex were not just important for gratification but broader kinds of community, exchange of knowledge, and self-protection.

Controversies over public sex, just within self-affirming communities of gay men, have raged, publicly, in the gay communities since at least the activist decade leading up to Stonewall. For example, Larry Carlson edited a lively and often self-hating debate around sex and privacy for San Francisco (Carlson 1967). And just

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before the recognition of AIDS as an epidemic, there was a raging debate (Califia 1992). Today there is more tolerance of public sex but it is often because commercial establishments are becoming increasingly expensive. For example, Henry Urbach described a dilemma for gay men in Southern California.

"In his 1977 book, *The Sexual Outlaw*, John Rechy wrote about public gay sex in Los Angeles. Rechy's characters endlessly rove...They constitute a loose coalition of renegades united in rituals and codes of sexual practice...The scenes described by Rechy may continue to occur somewhat, but, in the context of AIDS and increasingly violent gay-bashing, sex clubs have emerged as an alternative: for a fee, queers gain access to enclaves of semi-public sex that are free of police, bashers, and unsuspecting passersby." (Urbach 1993: 93)

So with many new options for public sex, indoors and away from harassment, why do outdoor spaces of public sex still draw so many? The photographs in *Cruising* give us some clues. These outdoor locations are beautiful, complex, and mostly tranquil – all qualities that heighten the pleasures of making new acquaintances and engaging in physical contact.



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Space & Movement:**Male Sexual Expression Outdoors**

"Whatever its dangers and disappointments, public sex is here to stay -- at least until the next health crisis or tabloid-inspired crackdown." Steve Weinstein (2002)

Virtually every person, at some point in their life, will engage in some form of affection that could be considered to be "public sex." And most of us will get so affectionate in a public park, at some point in our lives, to have some form of public sex. But why are areas where affection is expressed between heterosexual and even lesbian couples more often associated with romance and tolerable levels of erotic expression and abandon but areas frequented by gay men are more often portrayed, in popular media, as rife with promiscuity, exhibitionism, violence, and disease – and are therefore often the subjects of police scrutiny and community hostility?

Margins of parks and other open space where men make intimate contact are utterly sex positive. A person does not need to buy alcohol for admission or go into debt to dress for success. Cell phone contracts are optional and there are few apps of any use. And if a person can ejaculate while standing up or dangling from a tree, they can usually figure out when and how to put on a condom.

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Moreover, such remote public areas are a good place to see, learn about, and practice a wide range of sexual skills ranging from intimate expression including hugging and kissing as well as sucking and fucking, achieving and enjoying various kinds orgasms, and making overtures, rejecting and disengaging from scores of individuals over short periods.

Outdoor areas with exceptional presence of gay men, or areas with other groups of sexual minorities for that matter, are not just about sex. In one of the more populated public sex areas in Canada, the forest edge along the south end of Wreck Beach, near Vancouver, field work on one summer afternoon in 2001 found only 10% of the males encountered actively engaged in public sex (Ingram 2001: 206) though that percentage may have become higher near dusk. When not having sex on a summer afternoon, men are seen chatting, eating, playing, and reading. And some, if not many, of the males having sex with other men have strolled down and better engage in other areas of the beach marked by heterosexuals and youth.

Outdoor public sex areas do not comprise communities of like-minded males but rather are crossroads linking very different networks only sometimes marked by language, ethnicity, shared culture, and sexual practices. Here, Aaron Betsky's concept of "queer space" as "a space of doubt" (Betsky 1995: 199 – 201) comes into play. Similarly, Elizabeth Wilson's vision of twentieth century cities as spaces of both freedom and danger for women (Wilson 1991: 6 – 8) has some relevance for males who have sex with other men. There are often curious tensions in both the sites and the sex between highly random and yet scripted behaviours "a mixture of accidental and purposeful" (Ingram et al. 1997: 295) that shift the boundaries of public and private. And these fluid boundaries still remain contentious and continue to be debated in municipal management of outdoor areas.

Today what intrigues me the most about the liaisons and ephemeral 'cultures' of public sex areas is that while sexual interactions are not always nice they rarely nasty. "Trolls" and "twinkies" often co-exist much better in the bush than on dance floors and in bars. The spaces of outdoor areas, if only because of the layers of vegetation, provide opportunities to creatively make territory and sometimes to share it. To try to understand how outdoor public sex, whether or not the individuals were previously known to each other, provides a laboratory to re-envision the lines between public and private, friendly and hostile, and propriety and obscenity, I turn to a classic in philosophy: the 1986 *Nomadology*. In the minds of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the spaces of outdoor public, at least in the twentieth century, can be categorized as both "smooth" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 34) allow for relatively fluid and unregulated erotic expression and "nomad" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 51). They went on to argue that,

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"One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space." (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 51)

and cautioned that,

"[S]mooth space...[does] not have an irresistible revolutionary calling, but change[s] meaning drastically depending on the interactions they are part of and the concrete conditions of their exercise or establishment." (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 62)

What this last point suggests is the public sex areas have different social functions in different eras and for various social groups. When homosexuality is illegal, well-hidden outdoor areas are some of the only places to go. In the digital hookup gay.com-cum-Facebook era, outdoor areas may be strategic for two very different groups: those who do not have as much access to digital technologies and in their preferred languages and those who are so "connected" that visceral, physical contact as an introduction is the most scarce element of social intercourse. In *Cruising*, Chad States explores the spaces of intimacy and distance played out with men's bodies across the landscape. There may be distance and temporariness of the contact but these recorded instances of intimacy are far more tangible than marriage vows. Before reflecting on the resilience of public sex areas, I want to talk about the historical and contemporary importance of open space as sanctuary and then as battlegrounds between men who have sex with men and hostile individuals, organizations, and government agencies.



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Policing of Parks:
Past, Present & Trends

"Despite its bludgeoning absolutions, its vicious wars, the Twentieth Century may yet be known as the age of sexual efflorescence...The home, the garden, the park, must be planned for lovers and love-making: this is an essential aspect of an environment designed for human growth."

Lewis Mumford (1938: 431, 433)

While virtually no parks in the twentieth century were ever planned for 'love-making', urban open space has seen an increasing amount of sex – as well as intolerance, harassment, and outright violence. In fact, the twentieth century probably saw the most selective, organized, and violent repression of public sex in human history – much of the hostility directed at men engaged in consensual contact with other adult males. Sex in parks disrupt unresolved aspects of the ever-shifting social acceptable lines between public and private as well as sexual propriety and sex crimes (and criminals). And one of the major locales where people are still arrested and criminalized for consensual sex between adults are public open space.

Today, we see a range of levels of monitoring, scorn, policing, violence, and resistance to intolerance, and assertion and actualization of erotic desires. Today, nearly every outdoor site on public land, that sees sex especially between adult males, is something of a battleground over competing notions of morality, propriety, safety, community policing, and risk management. The foliage that obscures various trysts and acts is there due to both the plans of landscape designers and maintenance officials, on one hand, and a range of park users, on the other. Today, networks that engage in outdoor public sex typically co-exist with walkers, joggers, picnickers, bird-watchers, and not to mention petty criminals, most notably drug dealers, and the police.

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There are four kinds of controls and constraint that are often placed on public open space to minimize or at least hide the more obvious aspects of the sexual expression: cultural stigmatization, homophobia by design, formal policing, informal vigilantism and violence. These limiting operations form the base for what theorist John Paul Catungal has termed the "governance" of sexuality in park space (Catungal and McCann 2010: 77 - 79). In turn, there are a number of forms of resistance and "place-making" by individuals and networks that engage in public sex: reconnaissance and information sharing thus effectively knowing the landscape better than sex-negative authorities; avoidance and hiding; and constructed visibility and exhibitionism which, while often rude and inconsiderate, creates a temporary space for sexual expression. But today exhibitionism is increasingly the new excuse to continue to police public sex where community members and peace officers claim to not be homophobic nor hostile to sex as long as they do not have to witness certain intimacies.

Disparaging a park location, effectively stigmatizing it, as when James Howard Kunstler called the public sex areas at London's Hempstead Heath, an area that requires a considerable work and is rarely found by mistake, a "somewhat sordid destination" (Howard 2003) repels some and attracts others. Homophobia by design comprises practices, still common throughout the world, where an area is made less accessible or attractive for sex with a wide array of possible alterations and interventions that like those that contribute to women experiencing vulnerability in public space (Weisman 1992) push same-sex male affection out of the obvious public realm. In these times where municipal governments are often being forced to scale-back basic services, it will be interesting to see if these kinds of often expensive obstructions and additions, such as extraneous lighting, can continue to be justified. The amount of funds that many parks departments in hundreds of cities around the world put into obstructing and discouraging sexual expression, often at the expense of needs for increased public safety, could, over a decade, build quite a number of schools and homes. More problematic is the disruption to the entire community when a beloved park is mysteriously rebuilt for the supposed public good. In her manifesto for urban activism, *The Life and Death of the Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs acknowledged but was unwilling to confront the costs trying to suppress a bit of affection and sex.

"Several decades ago Washington Square became Philadelphia's pervert park, to the point where it was shunned by office lunchers and was an unmanageable vice and crime problem to park works and police. In the mid-1950s, it was torn up, closed for more than a year, and redesigned. In the process, its users were dispersed, which was the intent." (Jacobs 1961: 92 – 93).

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Policing against even the most discreet forms of public sexuality still occur in the large majority of the public parks throughout the world. In April 2009, the Oklahoma City police used undercover officers to target gay men in city parks and arrested 16 for public lewdness. The police went so far as to prosecute these individuals and to publish their photographs in the local newspaper. Again, many aspects of the physical form of modern parks, in much of the world, are the results of these efforts to police and to avoid detection and arrest. And it will be increasingly difficult to justify related expenditures for municipal police while basic services are being cut. Over the last several decades in just about every major city in North America, murders have taken place in outdoor sex areas mostly which have received little media attention. But police are also under increasing pressure to reach out to sexual minorities in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2007 city police reached out to the gay male community in response to two murders in public sex areas (Moore 2007). Perhaps the most horrific example of murders and homophobic violence continuing in a time of often growing tolerance of public sex was in Vancouver's Stanley Park where in November 2001 Aaron Webster was found naked and brutally murdered on the edge of the largest outdoor cruising area in the region, if not the country. Four young men eventually confessed to traveling from their homes in the suburbs with golf irons, a pool cue and possibly baseball bats to look for and kill a 'peeping tom'. The group had invaded this area several times before and that night had chased and viciously beaten Webster (Catungal and McCann 2010: 85 - 86). The subsequent response of Vancouver, where the adjacent neighborhood had developed a strong gay visibility in no small part because of the beauty of this park, its trails and perennial population of loitering and friendly men (Ingram 2010: 258), was of such trauma and rage to generate numerous demonstrations and scores of public discussions. The young killers received only mild prison sentences most likely influenced by Webster having been found (and murdered) naked and in a public sex area. But the public rage around the light sentences pushed the local judiciary to begin to be more purposeful and precise in hate-crimes designations. And as for police forces that put their resources into harassing men into having public sex rather than protecting them from violence, there will be many more discrimination challenges where gay men are targeted for arrest while intimacies between women and men, nearby, are more often ignored. Photographic essays such as *Cruising* begin the difficult processes of gather evidence about the extend and robustness of these locales and intersecting networks.

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Shifting Cultural Attitudes Towards Cruising & Sex Between Men in Public Open Space

"[O]ur sexuality is *something we make* in our every day experimentation with sex and pleasure. Hence, homosexuality is a historical creation developed out of the nineteenth century through the complex interplay between individual's erotic practices and sexual regulation, control, "scientific" knowledge and labeling."

Michel Foucault (1987)

"[T]he demand for the 'right to privacy' can transcend its liberal antecedents and become a radical demand for change in the relationship between private and public life. This is the real threat posed by so-called 'public sex'."

Jeffrey Weeks (1985: 223)

Today, there are general trends towards tolerance of public sex and protection of sexual minorities from hate crimes. But there are plenty of exceptions and in just

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about every community are outspoken individuals, and sometimes entire organizations, that want to see more arrests for sex and little protection from homophobic violence. Just a decade ago in Britain, police monitoring of and arrests for "cottaging," as in sex in toilets and adjacent areas, was finally curtailed by the Labour government. There are now police-declared, "public sex environments" in the United Kingdom. In 2008, Amsterdam legalized public sex in its largest, central city park (Hoffman 2008). This change has only been in part because of recognition of the century of tremendous waste of social resources for control of a little bit of sex. But in October 2010, Málaga Spain passed a bylaw prohibiting sex in public places within 200 meters of residential areas, schools and businesses. And there have been waves of repression directed at gay males expressing affection in public in a number of countries.

In terms of community intolerance the core complaint against public sex has shifted from objections against homosexuality to exhibitionism. And this was anticipated back in 1978 in *The Silent Community*,

"Public sex,' when perceived as a threat to society, refers to sexual acts so situated as to result in the involuntary accessibility of others as sex objects or witnesses." (Delph's 1978: 159)

And everyone has a basic right to not be exposed to a sexual situation unless they have expressly desired that information and contact. So outdoor public sex will continue to be a source of public debate and a kind of "canary in the mineshaft" for the quality of public space and that balance between protection of the vulnerable (including those engaged in public sex) and freedom of expression.

As the older, twentieth century controversies around public sex fade, if only for a while, new social possibilities can be explored in public sex areas. And with less intolerance, the value of public sex areas are increasingly appreciated. In this vein, José Esteban Muñoz has been exploring for two decades the "utopian longings" and associated modes of communication embedded in some public sex (Muñoz 1996: 363 – 367, Muñoz 2009). And given the social skills around physical interact that some young people in the era of Facebook may not be acquiring (Turkle 2011) areas of public sex may become important to a new generation. Again, careful photographic essays such *Cruising* not only record beautiful landscapes and moments of social interact but begin the process assessing a range of issues, for particular communities, with huge implications for the future of respective communities.

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Conclusions:

Redefining the Boundaries of Public Private

"[P]laces like itsy-bitsy pieces of parkland, backrooms in gay bars, and dark and abandoned alleys are not a lot to ask for[.]"
Garth Barrier (1997)

"[T]he demand for the 'right to privacy' can transcend its liberal antecedents and become a radical demand for change in the relationship between private and public life. This is the real threat posed by so-called 'public sex'."
Jeffrey Weeks (1985: 223)

Public sex where everybody is respected and can express themselves respectfully remains a utopian vision one that is often obscured with more pressing needs, based on practicalities, such as for marriage rights, sex education, and health care. There is a rhetorical question casting a shadow across many of the intimate landscapes of *Cruising*. Why are some forms of furtive affection and sex in public space, such as between men and women, considered relatively innocent, effectively private, and largely a good thing, what were once called "Lovers' Lanes," while other acts and locales, such as cruising areas of parks where males meet, still often conceived as dirty, depraved, alienated, and risky? The answer is

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in the beauty of these photographs themselves. Since the invention of photography, suggestions of public sex between males were censored or, in a few exceptions, over-staged. Today, there is no need to show that public sex between adult males is particularly good; these encounters are sufficiently enjoyable and satisfactory, the company of some of these strangers evidently amusing and occasionally delightful, or such cruising would not have been taking place. And that understatement about something pleasant, the disclosure of which a few years back would have destroyed careers and marriage, goes back to the core of a century of both the landscape and social documentary strands of photography. These landscapes are not spectacular; they are simply pleasant places in which to meet, share some fleeting intimacies, and occasionally to defend.

The perspectives in *Cruising* comprise a modestly revolutionary development in how we portray people, intimacies, communities, and landscape. The very normal bodies of these men, not hobbled by freakishness and a desire for publicity, are not lost in either a hostile or bacchanalian landscape. Instead, these men are finding their ways to each other as their desires and circumstances permit and generate pleasure – and occasionally some friendship.

The lines dividing the public and private are always shifting and require a certain amount of vagueness when it come to sexual expression. Police officers are the first to admit the considerable discretion that goes into searching out and arresting supposed offenders. Regardless of what repressive and often discriminatory laws may still be on the books, in the localities portrayed in *Cruising*, the essay describes a new matter-of-factness about gay male sexuality that ultimately will be proven to be 'private' unless obviously broadcast to many – as much erotic expression is broadcast to perhaps the majority of homes that have access to the internet. And what we see in *Cruising* are not terrible places, though dangers largely linked to remaining intolerance do lurk, but people trying to find a place for themselves in nature. Gone are America's twentieth century pretensions of empire, modernism, and even of an exceptional notion of affluence. These are new, relatively peaceful spaces of America in turbulent times – after a century where the inverse was more the case.

Chad States has brought us to some tranquil places where spontaneous contact, that is only sometimes highly sexual, largely functions on the basis of respect and self-protection. And like any social arena, the interventions of police officers are sometimes necessary and their presence is occasionally justified to minimize harm (but not to do harm to those adults engaged in consensual acts well away from public view). I hope that you will find a way to enjoy these quiet and fleeting moments of affection and celebration of the male body in the American landscape of the twenty-first century. These frames are not often theatrical but instead quietly record and affirm. These explorations of desire, consensuality and communality may be as important for the coming decade of social and cultural

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change than were the various dramas around homosexuality that erupted a few decades back. And once again, when there are fewer options for indoor public sex (Weinstein 2008), a new group of the more adventurous will prefer to be together out-of-doors in open space that is the most central for desired demographics, more pleasant, less dangerous, and the least policed. **Cruising** is a road-map to that inevitable future.



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Gordon Brent Ingram is an environmental planner and designer with a 1989 doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. He has authored scores of articles, chapters and reports on design and management responses to social conflicts in networks of open space with a focus on gender, sexuality, and marginalized social groups. He has conducted studies in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and parts of Africa and began his first field work on conflicts around public sex in 1980 at San Francisco's Buena Vista Park.

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