

# TOWARDS THE 'GAYING' OF PUBLIC SPACE: PUTTING THE POLITICS INTO THE PUBLIC AND THE SEXUAL INTO SPACE

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# THE MAIN INTRO

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- × **Abstract for After Homosexuality: The Legacy of Gay Liberation Conference**
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- × Title of Paper:
- × **Towards the 'gaying' of public space: putting the politics into the public and the sexual into space**
- × This paper explores the physical, spatial and ideological construction of urban public space with reference to some key conference themes of activism, oppression, liberation and the politics of identity for gay people.
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- × In discussions of public space (with notable exceptions, see Iveson 2000, Watson 2006, Valentine 2004) little attention is given to the role of public space in both contributing to and constraining the liberation and expression of being gay (in all the range of orientations encompassed by the term 'gay'), see further, White 1998, 2005, Malone 2003, Sercombe 2006).
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- × This is a considerable omission in the growing body of research on public space and its various uses and users and this paper attempts to address this deficit by posing the question of whether urban public space is both 'gendered' (Massey 1994,1999) and heterosexual in its governance, design, ordering, surveillance, signage and street furniture (Iveson 2009, 2011).
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- × Critical consideration of these and other questions contribute to an extension of notions of 'Queer Friendly Neighbourhoods' (Knox and Pinch 2006) that will construct 'gay' as more than 'gentrification' or lifestyle economics (Atkinson and Easthope 2009).

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# KEY QUESTIONS...

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- ✘ Is public space gendered and heterosexual in design and intent?
- ✘ If so, how and in what ways does this matter?
- ✘ How can public space be so constructed, ordered and governed so as to encourage gay and non-gay (whatever these terms might actually mean) people of all ages to view it as theirs, as safe to use and enjoy, as an extension/expression of citizenship (see further Marshall 1950 on civil, social & political citizenships, to which might be added sexual citizenship?)

# MORE INTRO....

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# SOME DEFINITIONS

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- ✘ Public Space: could be anywhere in an urban area such as streets, parks, civic spaces and buildings, spaces between spaces, shopping malls (mass private space) Public space is increasingly regulated and contested especially around young people's use of it-see also Occupy.
- ✘ CCTV: numerous kinds, closed and open street surveillance systems, now in colour, microwave enabled, with speakers





# TONKISS ON PUBLIC SPACES

- ✦ A way of categorising public space is suggested by Tonkiss (2005:67) in *the square* indicating “collective belonging”, *the café* “representing social exchange” and *the street*, a place marked by “informal encounter”. The square is any public space “provided or protected by the state” and is open to all “as a simple expression of citizenship”. The second kind of space helps to facilitate contact between humans in a broadly social setting that can be a public or private space. The third and final form of space, the street, is seen as the “basic unit of public life”, a routine if necessary conduit for “marginal encounters” based on equal rights to be in public space (Tonkiss 2005: 68).

# WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO PUBLIC SPACE?

- ✘ Harris (2004:121) notes that much of the “public domain is commercialized and privately funded and run”, even if on an outsourced, contracted nature, on behalf of a branch of government.
- ✘ The comment below by Mizen, Bolton and Pole (1999) about the U.K. is also highly applicable to the Australian context:
- ✘ “Where there were once municipal recreation grounds, youth clubs, community discos, free or below cost sport and extra-curricular activities, as well as subsidized transport to get there in the first place, there now exist private leisure centres, bowling alleys, multi-screen cinema complexes, clubs and theme pubs, accessed by privatized bus companies or taxis. The point to underline is that children’s leisure is increasingly constituted according to the dictates of the market, whose only entry requirement is the possession of money” (p. 433).





# HARRIS ON (2006) 'NEW TIMES'

- ✘ “New times are characterized by a sense of danger and uncertainty about the world, and this is expressed in the management of public spaces. At the same time the new economy has required young people to move beyond their designated spaces of the home, street, and school into other sites such as new workplaces, training programs, and new spaces of consumption. In one sense there are now more places where young people are seen. However, while the number of places that young people are able to occupy has expanded, these are also subject to increased regulation” (p.100).



# SOME VIEWS ON URBAN LIFE..

- ✘ In *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. Jacobs discusses the “daily life of the urban streets” and how social participation is essential to the successful transition by young people to adulthood. She further talks of “sidewalk contacts”, made possible by the provision of comfortable seating and peaceful rest areas, as “the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow” (Jacobs 1965: 41).
- ✘ Writing about the late 1960s and remarking on the drive for urban conformity discernable in a number of American cities, Sennett in *The Fall Of Public Man* (1976), argues that homogeneity should be resisted and diversity and difference encouraged because, in his words, the daily experience of public space “...should be gritty and disturbing rather than pleasant” (Sennett 1976:143).

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- ✘ Much of the discourse on public space waxes on about inclusion and tolerance but there is a price to be paid by GLBTQ people for this (dubious) inclusion
  - ✘ For Altman (1971) the stages of the tolerance paradigm span persecution, discrimination and tolerance, as a stance of non-hostility, pity for a flawed lifestyle and set of decisions (think Margaret Court and her recent pronouncements on the necessary toleration of being gay albeit that individuals might still be cured of such an affliction, given more God time, tennis etc..)
  - ✘ The proliferation of neo-liberal political economies in the West over the last 25-30 years has as a by product, embraced a narrow, stereotypical model of 'the gay' as employed, successful and highly consumerist and affluent.



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