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## Book Section:

## Representations of Public Sex in Crime, Media, and Popular Culture

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**Summary**

Public sex is a term used to describe various forms of sexual practice that take place in public, including cruising, cottaging (sex in public toilets) and dogging. Public sex has a long history and wide geography, especially for sexual minorities excluded from pursuing their sex lives in private, domestic spaces. Social science research has long studied public sex environments (PSEs) and analysed the sexual cultures therein, providing a rich set of representations that continue to provide important insights today. Public sex is often legally and morally contentious, subject to regulation, rendered illicit and illegal (especially, but not exclusively, in the context of same-sex activities). Legal and policing practices therefore

produce another important mode of representation, while undercover police activities utilizing surveillance techniques have depicted public sex in order to regulate it. Legal and moral regulation is frequently connected to news media coverage, and there is a rich archive of press representations of public sex that play a significant role in constructing public sex acts as problematic. Fictionalized representations in literature, cinema and television provide a further resource of representations, while the widespread availability of digital video technologies has also facilitated user-generated content production, notably in online pornography. The production, distribution and consumption of representations of sex online sometimes breaches the private/public divide, as representations intended solely for private use enter the online public sphere – the cases of celebrity sex tapes, revenge porn and sexting provide different contexts for turning private sex into public sex. Smartphones have added location awareness and mobility to practices of mediated public sex, changing its cultural practices, uses and meanings. Film and video recording is also a central feature of surveillance techniques which have long been used to police public sex, and which are increasingly omnipresent in public space. Representations as diverse as online porn, art installations and pop videos have addressed this issue in distinctive ways.

**Keywords**: public sex environments (PSEs) / cruising / cottaging / tearooms / dogging / policing / news media / movies / surveillance /

**Introduction: Fleeting Glances**

To begin, two contrasting visual representations of particular public sex encounters. The first is a film called *Tearoom* (2007) by artist William E. Jones, making use of covert police surveillance footage of men having sex in a public toilet ('tearoom' in US slang, 'cottage' in the UK) in Mansfield, Ohio in 1962 (see Biber & Dalton, 2009). Installing a camera (and

cameraman) behind a two-way mirror in the restroom, the police filmed numerous brief encounters of men in the toilets, and the footage was used in over 30 convictions. Jones 'reclaimed' the police footage in the 2000s, retrieving and restoring the filmed material, editing it together to make a 56-minute silent film installation shown in art galleries. While some critics have questioned the ethics of this 'reappropriation' of the footage, and particularly raised concerns over the potential harm to those filmed, *Tearoom* provides an example of 'evidentiary voyeurism' – the use of undercover surveillance and entrapment as a common policing tactic to deal with the 'problem' of public sex – as well as giving audiences a fleeting glimpse of the tearoom as a social and sexual space.

While the men filmed by the police in Mansfield in 1962 could not themselves 'reclaim' this shaming and sometimes life-wrecking experience (though that is in part Jones' intent), others caught by police in public toilets have turned evidentiary voyeurism back on the watchers, highlighting the complex sexualization of such surveillance practices. One prominent example concerns the pop star George Michael, arrested in a public toilet in Los Angeles in 1998 after allegedly exposing himself to an undercover police officer. While the British tabloid press attempted to make this a matter of personal shame for Michael, the singer himself took a different path: he released a single and accompanying video, 'Outside', later that year, that explicitly addressed this episode, mixing grainy surveillance footage with scenes of Michael dressed as a cop dancing in a public toilet that turns into a gay disco (see Holert, 2002). Throughout the video we see brief scenes of public sex, gay and straight, caught by CCTV or by police helicopter cameras. Towards the end of the video, many of these sex scenes are interrupted by police arrests, but in a final twist we see two male cops – who we first think are about to make an arrest in keeping with the narrative – kissing each other on a rooftop.

3

These two visual representations are in many ways wildly different: one is a serious artwork, the other a pop video. One uses real footage filmed by real police officers of real men engaging in real sex acts, the other is staged, acted, constructed – and made 'safe' enough to air on MTV. One is a 'combatively unapologetic' coming out by its star (Holert, 2002: 566), the other a reuse of footage unlicensed by any of the men depicted. But in other ways the two pieces have a lot in common: they directly address the question of police surveillance and covert activities focused on particular sexual acts in particular locations. They both, in short, address the policing, pleasures and politics of public sex. The themes and issues raised by these two visual representations will recur through this article. But first it is important to attend to the question of definition.

## Public Sex: Definitions and Ambiguities

At first glance, public sex seems like a fairly self-evident thing: it is sex that takes place in public. But 'public' and 'sex' are in fact both contested categories, and this is doubly so when they are brought together. What is 'sex'? What (and where, and who) is 'public'? Does the meaning of one word change when it is joined to the other? These are important questions that frame the definitions of public sex in different contexts and registers – in law, in public opinion, in media and popular culture.

The question 'what is sex?' becomes complicated in the context of public sex because some sex acts change their status when they take place in public; moreover, public sex makes possible forms of sexual act that only really make sense in public – voyeurism and

4

exhibitionism, for example. Does watching other people have sex constitute a sex act itself? And what about enjoying having sex while strangers watch? As we explore the specific contexts and settings of public sex in this article, issues of voyeurism and exhibitionism will be a repeated motif. But not everyone watching (or seeing) sex in public is a voyeur (if by voyeur we mean someone who derives sexual pleasure from watching). From a legal and policing perspective, there is a non-voyeuristic public whose viewing of sex acts causes harm or disgust or fear – hence the need for intense policing, sometimes in the form of 'evidentiary voyeurism'.

So the 'public' in public sex sounds like it refers to people, especially a public who do not want to encounter sex acts in public toilets (to stay with the setting of *Tearoom* and 'Outside'). But a public toilet is a public toilet even when no-one is using it. The 'public' in public sex refers to public space, then – and draws a distinction between public and private. This distinction is at the heart of many policing, moral and legislative definitions of public sex: public sex is sex that takes place in public space. Public space means space that can be accessed by the public – it is not private space, domestic space or commercial space (except in some cases, commercial space can be redefined as public, for example when people have sex in cinemas, bookstores, shopping malls). For some sexual practices – especially those between participants of the same sex – *where* sex takes places comes to matter a lot in terms of this public/private divide. For many sexual minorities whose sexual practices are either illegal or morally proscribed, public space offers advantages for sex – it is anonymous, constantly moving, and there are perfectly ordinary reasons for being there that can serve as alibis against unwanted exposure: anyone is free to enter a public toilet or take a walk in a park. It is an irony that, in the words of George Chauncey (1996), for members of sexual minorities, oftentimes 'privacy could only be had in public'.

The publicness of public sex – sex that takes place in public space – is in fact highly contingent. As we shall see, the nature of the sex and of the participants can in part define whether its publicness is considered problematic – an affront to 'public decency'. From the mention of sexual minorities above it might seem like this is a simple question of the sexual orientation of those taking part, defined by the heterosexual/homosexual dyad. But while this remains true in some contexts – especially where the legality of sex acts is also defined by this dyad – the question of the problematic publicness of sex is often site-specific, situational. The example of indecent exposure ( flashing) is a case in point, as are opposite sex practices such as dogging, discussed below.

Public sex is, in the end, a social and cultural construct, with a long history and a wide geography. Despite the multiple ambiguities and complexities outlined above, there is a long tradition of social science research on forms of public sex and on the settings in which it takes place, as well as valuable historical work uncovering past cultures of public sex from often fragmentary archival records (diaries and journals, police and court records, literary accounts). Socio-legal scholars have in particular contributed greatly to analysis of the role of policing and law in defining (and outlawing) public sex, while media scholars have discussed the representation of public sex across news media, film and television, internet and new media. Throughout this article, key examples from these bodies of work will be drawn on and drawn together to provide an overview of the main threads of scholarship. My focus is limited mainly to Anglophone research and to Western media, and jurisdictionally centred on the UK and USA, with some signposting to other contexts. In the discussion that follows, I do not provide a systematic literature review that sketches the field of inquiry; rather, I enter into

a thematic analysis of key representations, legal frameworks, sexual practices, and academic research.

**Public Sex Environments**

One prominent analytical focus in social science research on public sex has been to study particular sites or locations in which particular forms of public sex take place. This work is discussed here as providing a particular set of representations of public sex which, at least in some cases, do representational work beyond academia – they can become source texts for journalists, law-makers and for would-be participants in the settings they describe. Much of this work has until quite recently focused on male-male same sex practices, principally those of cruising and cottaging, and settings such as public toilets, parks and urban green spaces, highway rest stops: settings associated with what is often constructed as impersonal, anonymous sex (though numerous in-depth studies have disputed this). Described by one early researcher as 'erotic oases' (Delph, 1978), these sites have elicited considerable social science fascination, despite concerns among researchers about the potential impact on their careers and reputations of researching 'deviant' sex (Irvine, 2003). While this strand of research can be traced back to at least the early twentieth century, it gathered pace especially in US sociology and urban anthropology in the 1970s, when a number of studies were published, perhaps the best-known being Laud Humphreys' (1970) *Tearoom Trade*. Useful summary discussions of work in this period can be found in Irvine (2003), Rubin (2012) and Tewksbury (2008).

*Tearoom Trade* has become notorious for its methods and ethics, which have to some extent overshadowed its contribution to understandings of public sex. Humphreys has defended his approach -- which included observing men in public toilets, then identifying them via their car licence plates and visiting their homes under the pretence of conducting a broader social survey – and *Tearoom Trade* can now be approached as a valuable record of a sexual context and a detailed and rich description of the interactions between men in toilets at a particular time and place (see Nardi, 1999). And just as William Jones repurposed police footage in *Tearoom*, subsequent scholars have gone back to Humphreys' finely nuanced descriptions to help them analyse other representations of public sex, such as police and court reports (see Desroches, 1990; Moran, 1996).

Reflecting on social science research from the 1970s, Tewksbury (2008) delineates the main settings studied: public restrooms (toilets), highway rest areas and parking lots, public parks, and commercial sex locations such as adult bookstores, pornographic cinemas and peepshows, bathhouses and sex clubs (note that these are commercial spaces, often requiring membership or payment of an entrance fee, yet still classified as 'public' when they become sites for male-male sexual encounters). This tradition of studying the particular sexual cultures of different public sex environments continues to the present. For example, Flowers et al (2000) describe how the locale and setting of public sex both shapes and is shaped by the sexual practices that take place there. Contrasting 'the bars, the bogs, and the bushes' – sexual cultures in commercial gay space, in public toilets and in parks – they show how setting influences every aspect of public sex, from partner selection to the specific sex acts. This study, like many in recent decades, is in part aimed at informing more site-specific sexual health promotion through attentiveness to the distinctive sexual cultures present in toilets, parks, gay bars and other spaces. In fact, in the HIV/Aids era, much research has been

undertaken to understand who participates in public sex, in order to target health promotion campaigns effectively. The term men who have sex with men (MSM) was coined to describe men who do not identify as gay and who participate in forms of public sex such as cottaging (see for example Huber & Kleinplatz, 2002). Health promotion is itself a representational practice, and campaigns work to devise appropriate representational tools to speak to men who do not identify as gay, and so can be 'hard to reach' (Lee, 2007).

Most of the work carried out in the USA in the 1970s was focused on interactions between men, and had less to say about settings and the affordances (and limitations) of different public sex environments (PSEs). Subjecting this work to a comparative analysis begins to hint at the diverse sexual cultures described, as well as opening up questions of research methods and ethics. Most of the work is qualitative and/or ethnographic, and so it provides a rich representational resource for ongoing analysis (and reading pleasure), and it includes some refreshingly candid, confessional accounts of the fieldwork process, including Joseph Styles' (1979) discussion of his gradual move from 'outsider' to 'insider' while researching gay bathhouses – a discussion which prefigures later 'auto-ethnographic' accounts of participant observation in PSEs (see for example Brown, 2008).

More recent work has explicitly considered the specifics of setting, describing the 'micro-geographies' of PSEs, even offering design advice (Brown, 2008; Lindell, 1995; Richters, 2007). As noted, some of the more recent discussions have also contested the idea of public sex as anonymous and impersonal, showing how friendships, relationships and a sense of community can often form from these settings (Jarman, 1991). A smaller body of work has also shown than PSEs are not only frequented by men interested in same-sex encounters.

Sasha Albert (2011) and Denise Bullock (2004) have conducted studies on public sex between women, finding from interviews that women do engage in practices such as cruising, though in important ways this is distinctive from gay men's practices. And there is an emerging body of work on opposite-sex users of PSEs, especially those associated in the UK with the scene known as dogging (Ashford, 2012; Bell 2006; Byrne, 2006). In this sexual culture, singles and opposite sex couples meet in isolated car parks to engage in exhibitionism, voyeurism, partner-swapping and group sex. A network of dogging sites has emerged across the country, though specific sites are often transitory and are subject to forms of policing and regulation. In common with other public sex practices today, the internet and social media play a prominent role in organizing dogging encounters.

Summarizing our current understanding of PSEs, Paul Byrne (2006, 74) writes:

> Public Sex Environments (PSEs) are not a new occurrence. Places where people meet and engage in sexual acts have been part of the urban fabric for hundreds of years … PSEs are incredibly varied in their size and structure and there is no clear definition of the physical characteristics, indeed it may be said that it is the user(s) who create and delineate a PSE.

He adds that PSE users are often brought into conflict with the law and local communities, as well as being common fodder for sections of the news media. Conflict with the law is the focus of the next section of this discussion, and the issue of representations of public sex in news media follows on from that.

**Policing, Law and Representations of Public Sex**

As noted above, one of the richest representational resources, especially for mapping the histories of public sex, comes from documents and records of law-making and law enforcement. Police and court records, legal pronouncements, debates surrounding the making or changing of laws all provide representations designed to do particular work: to prove guilt, to make the case for law reform, to criminalize or decriminalize. Of course, they are representations made for particular audiences, too – but socio-legal scholars have been able to access and interrogate these records, uncovering their representational strategies. The discussion below mainly focuses on examples from British policing and law (and British scholarship), though there are many other studies in different geographical contexts (see, for example, Dalton, 2007).

The first example comes from Leslie Moran's (1996) *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, and concerns what he calls the 'somatic techniques of policing'. Here, Moran reads a number of police records of undercover operations in British public toilets from the 1910s to the 1990s; he reads these partly in the context of Humphreys' (1970) delineation of interactions in *Tearoom Trade*. As Humphreys himself stated, until his work in the seventies, "the police and other law enforcement agents have been the only systematic producers of knowledge about these encounters between men" (quoted in Moran, 1996, 142). For historical analyses, therefore, these records are a vital archive of representations (see Hornsey, 2010; Houlbrook, 2005). The knowledge produced and archived is in the form of written (and later visual) representations of these men – representations captured by covert surveillance, most commonly by undercover, plain-clothes police officers who were deployed to spend time in

and around public toilets, observing sex acts therein, and making arrests. Moran is interested in these records, he writes, because they work to "produce a representation of the male genital body in its genital relations with other males bodies in the law" (134) – and, we might add, in its genital relations with other male bodies *of* the law. Moran is especially attentive to techniques of entrapment – the use of *agents provocateurs* and how police officers might solicit sexual interest from men in public toilets -- though he shows how the records are sometimes notably silent on some aspects of the situations they describe, especially any suggestion of entrapment or of participation in sex acts (often, the moment that a man touches a police officer is the moment in which the latter declares his true identity and makes the arrest). Here is an example from 1933 that Moran analyses, its setting a London public toilet:

> "After a few minutes the prisoner made a half-turn towards me, stretched out his
> left arm and placed his left hand on my person and commenced rubbing it. I
> immediately took hold of his left arm, his left hand still being on my person. I
> said to him 'I am a Police Officer and I am going to take you into custody for
> indecently assaulting me'" (quoted by Moran, 1996, 147).

Yet for the successful prosecution of uncover policing, Moran argues, the police officers have to appear as insiders to the sexual culture, since it is in fact the privateness of the acts, not their publicness, that the police have to penetrate. If they appeared to be clearly outsiders – members of the public – they could not hope to so effectively police sex between men in public toilets. As noted, Moran in part reads these accounts through the lens of *Tearoom Trade,* in particular its delineation of the sequence of interactions typical of sex between men in public toilets: approaching, positioning, manoeuvring, signalling, contracting, foreplay,

pay-off, clearing the field, and dealing with intrusions. Moran suggests that undercover police officers follow the same script, in order to maintain their cover and to thereby allow sex acts to take place (and maybe even encourage them). Yet, he says, the police officers' actions are largely invisible in their own written accounts, wherein they are merely observers and unwilling 'victims' of the offences. This is the troubling problem at the heart of these reports, and other agents of the law such as judges and magistrates voiced concern about these tactics, though often their concern was the potential effects of such deep insiderhood on the individual police officer and on the police force as a whole. Ultimately, Moran writes that policing public sex through these 'somatic techniques' *produces* the male genital body in law – these representations 'catalogue its form, maps its movements, verify its obscure truth through practices of surveillance and examination' (167).


The public toilet continues to be an especially fraught PSE. In the UK, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 introduced a new statutory offence of 'sexual activity in a public lavatory' into law. Paul Johnson (2007) has examined the story of this law's passing, in the context of this moment of sex law 'reform' – a reform in which other forms of public sex were separated out and reframed as only illegal if demonstrable harm to others can be proven. The amendment also removed the gender bias in the law, making it 'gender-neutral' (though in its implementation it continues to exclusively focus on male-male sexual activity). Johnson reads the lead-up to the Act, and two key moves are a central analytical focus: the implicit decriminalization of some forms of public sex, and the intensification of legal and policing focus on public toilets. The documents and debates around the Act constitute another rich archive of representations, showing how debates are framed in particular ways by key actors such as the police, courts and parliament. While other forms of public sex were to be classed as offences only when demonstrable harm could be shown to have occurred, debates about

sex in public toilets concluded that this was a special case; Johnson quotes the House of Lords debate: 'activity that takes place in a public lavatory, that is not witnessed and that does not outrage public decency when the event takes place, is still an offensive activity' (quoted in Johnson, 2007, 531).

To return to the question of definition at the start of this article, we see here that the public is invoked through the notion of its decency having been outraged. This is the deciding line for all other cases of public sex: if no-one's decency is outraged, no harm has occurred to the public, and no offence has taken place. But in a public toilet, no-one needs be outraged, or even present, for what takes place to count as an offence. Sex in a public toilet is automatically criminal, and can never be private. By contrast, the Law Lords' debate rather romantically described courting couples who 'have for centuries pursued their romances' in isolated public spaces out of sight and who are now, under the 2003 Act, not automatically criminalized (quoted in Johnson, 2007, 532). 'Courting' is not something imaginable as taking place in a public toilet, therefore. And a public toilet, Johnson argues, can never be thought of as an 'isolated' public space out of sight (even if in reality it is exactly that). From the perspective of representation, this Act and the various discussions around it provide a reframing of the publicness of forms of public sex that do not take place in toilets – these are now largely permissible, so long as no-one witnesses the act and has their decency outraged – and sex that does take place in a public toilet, which is offensive by definition irregardless of the presence/absence of any 'public' (and whether or not their decency is outraged). It is as if the very naming of the *public* toilet is enough to justify criminalization.

While it was noted above that forms and settings of public sex beyond those in public toilets have been subject to relaxation of legal and policing regulation, some forms of non-toilet public sex do sporadically generate a sufficient moral panic to elicit a police response. And, in the light of the 2003 Act, it is noteworthy that these are not always centred on same-sex activity. Chris Ashford (2012) discusses the policing of dogging in the context of police activities across PSEs in the UK. A draft document from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in 2008 shows, on the one hand, an interesting shift in policing's focus more towards protecting users of PSEs, and on the other that policing to stop PSE users could still be deployed in the light of a specific complaint. The report specifically mentions dogging, an activity that has in recent years generated considerable press and public interest in the UK, including complaints from non-dogging users of the locales in which dogging takes place – complaints that have prompted police activity to warn doggers away from sites or to disperse activity underway at dogging sites. The relationship between news media coverage, public opinion and police and law responses is, in fact, a common theme in discussions of public sex. It is to representations in news and 'factual' media that our attention now turns.

**Public Sex in the News**

Paul Byrne (2006, 74) wryly summarizes that 'sectors of the media either perceive PSEs as an indication of society's moral decline or a subject for titillation' – often both at the same time. And he is right that the history of public sex has been shadowed by its reporting in media texts of various sorts. Given the secret nature of much public sex activity, the public whose decency must be outraged must sometimes be made aware of public sex by media coverage, whipping up a moral panic that demands action from the law and state. To take a

trio of examples: from 1985 to 1988, the Canadian news media extensively covered arrests of men having sex in public toilets. When some newspapers published the names of the accused, a wider debate across media and public opinion mushroomed – public sex was now the subject of radio and television talk shows, newspaper headlines, public conversations (Desroches, 1990). More than a decade later, an undercover reporter from Hungarian state TV shocked audiences by revealing through hidden camera footage that men were having sex in one of the city's Turkish baths, a major tourist attraction. The exposé led to a clampdown on male-male activity in the city's baths, mainly policed by bath attendants (and patrons). And back in the 1950s, tabloid newspapers carried out extensive campaigns covering 'male vice' on London's streets, onto which a whole host of post-war anxieties were projected – though more liberal and serious minded newspapers reported more compassionately, basing their position on the emerging medical model of homosexuality (Hornsey 2010). In all three examples, the news media has played a pivotal role in revealing something hidden in order to demand its prohibition or policing. And, of course, the tabloids attempted to generate hostility towards George Michael for his 'shameful' arrest in LA – his response was to use the media, too, by talking about his arrest and his sexuality very openly on talkshows, and by making 'Outside'.

In a systematic analysis, Sean Hennelly (2010) surveyed 541 local and national UK newspapers from 2004 to 2008. His research uncovers countless media outcries about cruising, cottaging and dogging, and he looks in particular at how newspaper headlines convey key messages to their readers, and use particular words to describe those who participate in public sex, the most common seeming to be 'pervs' (short for perverts). Headlines such as 'PERVS IN OUR PARKS', 'BEAUTY SPOTS ARE 'DOGGED' BY PERVS' and 'PLAGUED BY PERVS' provide a kind of journalistic shorthand that defines

those people who take part in public sex as different from everyone else: we are not pervs and pervs are not us. Moreover, the very 'perviness' which defines the pervs and which sets them apart from us necessitates intervention and policing. Newspaper headlines do very important representational work: they are designed to be eye-catching, to draw us in and to give us a sense of how to feel about the story they introduce. Hennelly also shows how newspapers often disclose the location of PSEs, prompting concern that this could incite violence and criminal targeting of participants. A headline from the national paper the *Sunday Mirror*, 'SEX SITES DOGGED BY THUGS', suggests concern about anti-dogging violence but, in giving details of the locations where such thugs are attacking doggers, the story does little to protect the victims of the thugs.

Of course, public sex is not always newsworthy enough to make the headlines. But it invariably is when it involves a celebrity. Hennelly compares newspaper coverage of the George Michael incident (and later similar incidents featuring the singer) with stories about the footballer Stan Collymore, caught dogging by a British tabloid in 2004 (Ashford, 2012). The language used is familiar: seedy, sleazy, perv, grubby, sex shame. Both celebrities were subject to forms of tabloid analysis, attempting to root their 'shame' in deeper psychological problems. Their public responses were different, however, and elicited different tabloid readings: as before, Michael defended his action on talk television, causing outrage by discussing cruising for sex while on a 'teatime' show that, the press worried, children could have been watching. Collymore was far more repentant, offering a public apology and stating "what I have done is disgusting and I'm so ashamed", before adding "but I'm only human" (quoted in Hennelly, 2010, 87). This last phrase was seen by some commentators to effectively undermine the apology, in suggesting that any human could find themselves dogging – that the pervs are us, after all.

As Hennelly shows, across UK newspapers – and especially the tabloids – there was in the early 2000s an explosion of interest in dogging. Cruising and cottaging continued to feature, but were obviously less newsworthy, especially in the national press, unless a celebrity was involved. But dogging even without celebrities could capture the headlines, making the practice a central preoccupation of newspaper readers. Attempting to represent dogging in a different light, in 2013 British TV's Channel 4 broadcast *Dogging Tales*, a documentary by Leo Maguire, watched by 1.9 million viewers. The film featured a number of dogging participants talking frankly about their activities, their identities partially disguised by animal facemasks. Footage of dogging sites captured using infrared cameras equally frankly depicted the practices of dogging. The film avoids sensationalizing dogging and does not judge its participants; it represents dogging as a sexual culture that is ordinary, domestic, democratic and potentially empowering – participants talk about sexual recovery and liberation. Footage at dogging sites mixes sex scenes with shots of nature – foxes, deer, squirrels, otters are all captured on film and this, together with the animal facemasks, suggests something 'natural' about dogging. When Maguire asks one interviewee, "Do you like the animalistic nature of dogging?" the reply is affirmative.

One of the central participants in *Dogging Tales*, Terry, provides a particularly endearing representation. We meet Terry and his girlfriend Sarah as novice doggers, and they are interviewed at home, eating KFC and toffees, watching *X-Factor*. Going dogging is described as a way to "spice things up" and as a way to address Sarah's infidelity. Later they have been joined by Ann – Terry describes "going with two women" and "every bloke's fantasy". The three go off to the woods, where "anything can happen". It is muddy, dark and cold. By the

light of Terry's smartphone the three haltingly "play", though Terry complains that the cold has affected his prowess. As the two women fondle each other half-heartedly, a couple of male strangers appear out of the darkness, and attempt to join in. Almost immediately, Terry intervenes: "I'm not comfortable with this… I'm cold… I want to go home". The next time we see Terry and Sarah (no Ann), we learn that they no longer go dogging, that Sarah now knows that Terry loves her, that "we're better than that". *Dogging Tales* lets participants tell their own stories and explain their involvement in the scene and the pleasures it offers. And as Maguire has written, the filming techniques "imbued the nighttime woodland landscape with a magical and sometimes sinister quality. The effect is a fairytale-like world, inhabited by creatures of the night" (channel4.com). Other visual representations of PSE similarly evoke magical, fairytale worlds and depict creatures of the night, including some controversial representations in feature films.

**Public Sex at the Movies**

In 1980, Hollywood provided one such controversial cinematic representation of (gay male) public sex in the shape of *Cruising*, directed by William Friedkin and starring Al Pacino as Steve Burns, a New York cop who goes undercover in the city's leather and SM scene in the hope of catching a serial killer targeting gay men. The film was controversial even before it screened, with large protests by US gay rights groups who were outraged at the exploitative depiction of the scene and of the plotline that the killer was himself a repressed homosexual with unresolved father issues (Wilson, 1981). Setting aside these protests, viewed today the film is a messy and ambivalent text, with a confused storyline and some bizarre set pieces. But its representations of sex in leather clubs and – more significant for our discussion here –

its depictions of cruising on New York's streets and in its parks, share something with

*Dogging Tales* and its fairytale worlds.


D.A. Miller (2007-8) and Guy Davidson (2005) are among those who have re-evaluated

*Cruising*; Miller celebrates the many tracking shots in bars and cruising grounds, peopled by

extras hired from the very scenes the film depicts, calling this new Hollywood representation

of a hitherto hidden gay world a 'superabundant spectacle' of bodies, spaces and sex (Miller,

2007-8, 70). Davidson, meanwhile, describes it as 'a compelling and historical envisioning of

the libidinal intensities of the 1970s New York leather scene' with an '"ethnographic" mode

of representation' (Davidson, 2005, 25). Certainly, the cruising scenes in Central Park are

bathed in an amazing, unreal light that gives them an aura that can rightly be described as

romantic, pastoral, even utopian – despite the threat of becoming the killer's next victim. The

depictions of cruising in Central Park also clearly show the complex interactions involved in

picking up men for sex, like those described by Humphreys, but add in an almost cosy

sociality among the men out in the park at night, echoing other representations of cruising in

urban green spaces, such as British filmmaker Derek Jarman's autobiographical accounts in

his journals (eg Jarman, 1991, 83-84).


The central storyline of *Cruising* has many resonances with the issues discussed earlier in the

section on policing, centring as it does on an undercover cop who must become an 'insider'

to a sexual subculture as a technique of crime prevention (Dalton, 2000). A highly significant

difference is that he is not there to police same-sex acts of the 'male genital body', though he

encounters plenty. He is there to protect the men of the leather scene from a single predatory

killer. But, just as the magistrate quoted by Moran worried that going undercover might affect

the officer's sense of self and even undermine the police force as a whole, one narrative arc concerns Burns' increasingly insider status, hinting that like Joseph Styles, he might have moved from observer to participant. The film also knowingly plays with the gay fetish for the police – a theme repeated in George Michael's 'Outside'. One night Steve, dressed in his new undercover uniform of leather gear, enters a bar to find it is hosting 'Precinct Night', with all the clientele dressed as cops: Burns is accused of being a cop by the bar owner on the basis that he is *not* in police uniform, and he is expelled from the bar.

A key part of the ongoing 'mythology' of *Cruising* is the cutting of 40 minutes of the original film footage in order to pass the censors and not be given an 'X' rating (which would have prevented the film from getting general release). This mythology is revisited by James Franco and Travis Matthews in their 2013 film *Interior. Leather Bar*. Here, the two filmmakers embark on a 'reimagining' of this lost footage, and in a parallel arc, the straight actor they hire to play Al Pacino (playing Steve Burns) undertakes his own voyage to insiderhood, hanging out with the extras (also recruited from the leather scene) and ultimately drifting off into the night, missing a date with his girlfriend.

The issue of certification and censorship similarly dogged the German film *Taxi Zum Klo* (*Taxi to the Bogs* ie public toilets), also from 1980, made by and starring Frank Ripploh (playing a loosely autobiographical role) and set in pre-Aids West Berlin. "Do you want to come cruising with me?" Frank asks at the start of the film, adding "Don't be afraid if I take you to public lavatories or baths. You see, I like men". I first saw this film in 1983 when it was yet to receive official certification in the UK and was on only very limited release in members-only arthouse cinemas and film clubs, and it spent many years going back and forth

to the British censors (for an overview of its certification troubles in the UK, see http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/taxi-zum-klo). From the perspective of representations of public sex, the most interesting scenes centre on the titular 'klo' and Frank's exploits in cottaging. Frank is a schoolteacher, and in an early scene he leaves his school and visits a public toilet, sitting in a cubicle to mark some of his pupils' work. To his left at eye height is a glory hole – a hole between cubicles that is a common feature of public toilets used for sex between men. He glances through the glory hole and sees a man in the next cubicle baring and parting his buttocks. Frank sticks a piece of toilet paper over the hole, only to have this pushed aside by an erect penis pushed through the hole.

Later in the film, Frank is in hospital having contracted hepatitis, but discharges himself and hails a taxi, which takes him from public toilet to public toilet in search of sex, ending up with what looks like an unsatisfying encounter with a leather queen in the Tiergarten (its toilets are closed). The film shows how troubling Frank's promiscuity is for his relationship with Bernd, who he initially picks up at the cinema where the latter works. In the end, Bernd breaks up with Frank – Frank had earlier told his lover "When I take a walk in the street, it's like an adventure for me, things can happen", only to later confess his worry that he might become "an old fag who hangs around in bogs". The film is ambivalent on the topic of public sex, therefore: Frank clearly enjoys his many encounters, though the central taxi ride depicts something more like a compulsion, as does the end of his relationship with Bernd.

*Cruising* and *Taxi Zum Klo* are both remarkable, even now, for their frank, 'ethnographic' representations of public sex between men. In earlier cinematic eras, such explicit depictions were not possible, and filmmakers interested in raising issues of 'forbidden love' had to find

acceptable ways to represent them on screen. The British film *Brief Encounter* (1945),

directed by David Lean and written by Noel Coward, could be seen as a case in point. The

film concerns the growing relationship between a man (Alec) and a woman (Laura) after a

chance meeting in a railway station café. As they grow closer, they initially only meet in

public, later attempting a rendezvous in the privacy of a friend's apartment, but the friend's

unannounced return and judgemental attitude leaves their affair unconsummated. They break

off their relationship, Laura returning to her husband and Alec leaving for a job abroad.

Chance meetings at railway stations, inability to find privacy in domestic space, anxieties

about being found out, doomed love – these motifs are readily amenable to a 'queer reading'

that sees *Brief Encounter* as really a story about homosexual love – a reading made even

more amenable by Noel Coward's homosexuality. As Andy Medhurst (1991, 198)

summarizes, in this reading:


> *Brief Encounter* shows Noel Coward displacing his own fears, anxieties and
>
> pessimism about the possibility of a fulfilled sexual relationship within an
>
> oppressively homophobic culture by transposing them into a heterosexual
>
> context. The furtiveness and fear of discovery that end Laura's and Alec's
>
> relationship comprise a set of emotions that Coward would have felt with
>
> particular force and poignancy, and which gay men ever since have responded to
>
> with recognition and admiration.


While Medhurst is ambivalent about this rather simplistic idea of transposition, and about

connecting gay writers to gay narratives, it is nevertheless important to note that traces of

public sex and forbidden pleasure can be found in representations both explicit and covert.

For audiences, films offer up potential readings and identifications that resonate with their experiences, or that offer a fantasy escape from their lives – going to the cinema can be a way to encounter public sex, either on or off screen. Remember that in *Taxi Zum Klo* Frank met Bernd at the cinema, as noted above, adult (porn) cinemas have long been listed among public sex sites, though their publicness is contingent (you have to pay to get in, for example). But mainstream cinemas have also long been sites for 'courting couples' to enjoy the darkness and close bodily contact. In May 2016 the *Manchester Evening News* reported that a man and a woman had been arrested after being caught engaging in a sex act in a city centre cinema during a screening of *Batman vs Superman* (Rucki, 2016). The couple were spotted on a CCTV camera used to detect people filming the movie to make pirate copies. Confronted by cinema staff, the man punched an usher (this punch was later redesignated as a 'flick'), and the police were called. The man was arrested for assault, and both were arrested for outraging public decency. They later claimed in court that they had nowhere they could be together, and this fact was, according to newspaper stories, used to mitigate a custodial sentence (Baker, 2016). The CCTV that caught this pair having sex at the movies reminds us of the omnipresence of surveillance, and raises questions about what this means for the publicness of sex.

**Public(ity) Sex, Surveillance Porn & Public Sex 2.0**

The filming of public sex acts has been a recurring theme in our discussion; from *Tearoom*'s reuse of surveillance footage to the night-vision images of *Dogging Tales*, and all points in between. Of course, a crucial difference between these two films (or their source material) is the question of context and consent: while Maguire spent six months building up the trust of the interviewees in *Dogging Tales*, the original footage used in *Tearoom* was filmed covertly

– and, indeed, when it became an art installation, the consent of those originally filmed was not secured (Biber & Dalton, 2009). And there is another important difference: the participants in the dogging scene are well aware of the likelihood of being watched (and even filmed) having sex; indeed, this is for many part of the sexual experience, a form of exhibitionism. While tearooms/cottages may allow some occasions for exhibitionism and voyeurism (including in the latter that of sociologists and undercover cops), the interactions in public toilets are not staged for the visual pleasure of others.

The increasing availability of technologies of moving image recording and distribution – now epitomized by the smartphone – and the ubiquity of surveillance technologies (especially CCTV) have expanded the visual culture of public sex, and in this section we will survey a number of different representations (and sexual cultures) arising from this heightened visibility and recordability. The first is the sex tape. Private sex acts caught on video by their participants (for their own archives and reminiscing) have a long history, but the availability of digital recording devices has made this a far more available option in people's sex lives. Of course, recording a private sex act for purely private viewing does not sound like public sex: the publicness materializes when those recordings move from the private to the public, either knowingly or unwittingly, and reach audiences beyond those in the film – as depicted in the plotline of the Hollywood comedy *Sex Tape* (Kasdan, 2014). Such films have achieved special notoriety when the participants are celebrities (Hayward and Rahn, 2015). Iconic examples of this genre, which mix home movie and porn movie, include *Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored* (1997), starring actor Pamela Anderson and musician Tommy Lee, and *1 Night in Paris* (2004), featuring heiress and reality TV star Paris Hilton (like *Dogging Tales*, making use of a night-vision camera). Both entered the public via different routes – one stolen, the other leaked – and have long, convoluted stories surrounding

their ultimate release on video/DVD. The apparent eagerness among audiences for such recordings is partly attributable to the celebrity status of their stars – in parallel with the increasing popularity of paparazzi photographs of celebrities, including intimate images such as 'upskirt' and 'downblouse' shots (Bell et al, 2006). It is also attributable to the reality of the sex on screen – this is footage of people really having sex, and doing so in an unscripted, 'real' way, not like the staged performances of conventional pornography. Widely available recording devices have, in fact, led to a proliferation of such 'amateur' or 'reality' pornography (Barcan, 2002), especially online. Digital video technology has paved the way for new genres of sexual representation, some of which are made in the context of their future public circulation, while others are not.

In the latter case, genres such as 'revenge porn' have been the focus of considerable contemporary anxiety, and attempts at legislative control (the practice was made illegal in England and Wales in 2015). Revenge porn refers to the practice of circulating private sexual images as an act of revenge, most typically upon the break-up of a relationship, and most typically films of women circulated by male ex-partners (Hayward & Rahn, 2015). Revenge porn often makes use of sexualized 'selfies' – mobile phone self-portraits that have also blurred the private/public divide beyond their use for 'revenge' and which have, in other contexts, been seen as important sites for negotiations of sexual self-image (Tiidenberg & Gomez Cruz, 2015). Technologies of image capture, sharing and copying have made this practice part of the sexual repertoires of many people, especially younger generations – leading to anxieties about the technologically-mediated 'pornification' or 'sexualization' of young people via the practice labelled 'sexting' (Bond, 2010; Moran-Ellis, 2012).

Beyond selfies, sexting and revenge porn, as noted above the availability of digital recording devices has opened up sexual representation to 'amateur' users, ordinary people (as opposed to porn stars) who knowingly produce and distribute public representations of their sex lives online. Within the endless amateur porn genres available are those that also depict forms of public sex, exhibitionism and voyeurism, doubling the publicness (and doubly sexualizing it). Even here, however, we can find interesting moments where intentional publicness is disrupted by the unplanned or unintentional. To take one example: a popular subgenre of amateur public sex videos online is footage of public masturbation – an update on the older practice of 'flashing'. Here, both men and women are filmed, often by themselves, engaging in public exposure/nudity which then leads to acts of autoerotic stimulation. A prominent set-up is masturbating in one's parked car, while passers-by cross the field of vision. For men in these films, the possibility of being seen by a passer-by clearly heightens the sexual frisson, often provoking ejaculation (the usual payoff in such films). In an interesting twist on this recurrent set-up, in one video hosted on a major porn website with plenty of 'amateur' content, we see a man's torso and erect penis, seated in his car's front passenger seat with the window wound down. The camera does not capture his face, but does let us see the faces of people walking past. Most passers-by either do not look or pretend not to have seen, until two young women walk by, clearly seeing into the car, and then return, smartphones in hand, giggling. They proceed to film the masturbating man – and this evidently disrupts his performance, as the expected pay-off is foreclosed and the film ends abruptly.

This short video raises a number of interesting issues: the man wants to be seen, but wants 'ownership' of the representation (perhaps to maintain anonymity). He expects passers-by to have their (public) decency outraged, but is himself disturbed by the young women's response, both their laughter and their filming of his filming of his masturbation. This is a

representation he cannot own or control, one that risks exposure of his identity and circulation that he does not authorize (maybe even into the hands of the police, or for its own form of revenge porn). He wants to be caught on his own camera, not on theirs. The presence of this video on the porn site, among many others that are not disrupted by an unruly onlooker, shows that there is still the promise of sexual pleasure in the scene that unfolds; it is not framed as a warning, but simply uploaded among many other public masturbation videos. Maybe the extra filming in some ways adds to the sexual charge, adding the thrill of unauthorized voyeurism and confirming the 'reality' of the desire for exhibitionism on the man's part.

This question – of who films, and what this means for the 'sex life' of the image – has become central to discussions of the sexualization of surveillance. On the one hand, the increasing presence of surveillance technologies in public space renders public sex increasingly filmable, with various consequences from repurposing as porn to use as evidence (McGrath, 2004). And, while some have argued for the need to regulate surveillance and protect privacy, others have suggested that exhibitionism and voyeurism can be seen precisely as responses to surveillance that, by sexualizing it, challenge its representational power (Bell, 2009; Koskela, 2003). In much the same way as George Michael's 'Outside' sought to take back surveillance and turn it into pop culture, the subgenre of surveillance porn can be seen to tackle head-on the intrusions of surveillance into our lives, not by hiding but by (over-)exposing ourselves. Even that potent symbol of surveillance penetration today, the drone, has been repurposed as a sexual technology, not least in the porn movie *Drone Boning* (2014). Here, staged scenes of public sex, often in remote and natural settings such as beaches, are captured using aerial camera drones. More artfully made than the endless

'caught-on-CCTV' footage of public sex, *Drone Boning* gives us a new chapter in the ongoing story of the interplay of bodies, technologies and spaces in public sex.

The role of technologies in mediating or enabling forms of public sex is, in fact, a popular theme in contemporary analyses, given the increasing interpenetrations of sex and technology, especially information and communications technologies such as the personal computer, internet and smartphone. These technologies have been both adopted into pre-existing sexual cultures, including those centred on public sex, and created new forms of sexual practice. When Richard Tewksbury (2008) sought to uncover the types of public sex environments used by MSM in the USA, he turned on his computer and headed to www.cruisingforsex.com, using the website's many postings to typologize and quantify PSEs state by state. And interviewees in *Dogging Tales* repeatedly talk about the role of the internet and especially smartphones in organizing dogging activities, although at least one bemoans the loss of spontaneity caused by excessive pre-planning online. So while technology has in some senses democratized public sex – it is far easier to find out where to go cruising online than it was in a pre-internet era reliant on secret knowledge – some critics have argued that it has also led for various forms of privatization of public sex.

Mobile media such as smartphones have brought numerous technological affordances to the organizing of public sex encounters, notably those around location-awareness: mobile phones with GPS technology provide data about the geographical location of the user, and this has been bundled together with the self-presentation practices of online dating in mobile apps such as Grindr and Tinder. Both apps (the first aimed at the gay user, the second for heterosexuals) enable users to identify potential dates/sexual partners by proximity as well as

personal attributes (visibilized in a profile photograph). Grindr thereby enables cruising via smartphone, enabling users to select a potential sexual partner who is known to meet selection criteria but who is also, crucially, easily accessible by being local. Some critics worry this has led to the demise of gay bars and PSEs as people meet first online and then at home: there is no need to waste (and money) time cruising bars or travelling around cottages like Frank in *Taxi Zum Klo*. The app allows the user to find a match and arrange to meet without leaving home (Blackwell et al, 2015). At the same time, using a mobile app like Grindr makes the everyday movements of ordinary life – commuting to work, going to the mall – into sexual possibilities, as the app constantly located other proximate users. As Licoppe et al (2016, 2) summarize:

> By combining the kind of immediate availability that was the mark of public spaces colonized by male homosexuals for sexual purposes with the spatial disembedding of spatial contexts afforded by online social networks, Grindr can be argued to 'afford' and 'privatize' quick sexual encounters with strangers, harnessing daily mobilities as a resource for this process, and deeply reshaping the urban experience of that particular community along the way.

Such mobile spontaneity and 'privatized' sexual encounters have recently been brought together with practices of sexualized drug use and group sex among men in a sexual culture known variously as 'chemsex' or 'party and play' (Race, 2015). Practices such as mutual sexualized drug use shared over videoconferencing software continue to blur notions of public and private, giving us another example of the definitional ambiguity with which we opened this discussion. It seems there are always new ways to bring 'public' and 'sex'

together, and new modes of presentation and representation of public sex. "Let's go outside",

as George Michael sang, "Take me to the places that I love best".

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