

From Nightlife Conventions to Daytime Hidden Agendas: Dynamics of Urban Sexual Territories in the South of France

Laurent Gaissad
University of Toulouse le Mirail, France

This article focuses on the space-time dynamics of sexual encounters in city neighborhoods associated with sex work and cruising. The data were collected as part of a multisite, longitudinal ethnographic study conducted in major cities of southern France. The results suggest that there is a continuous interaction between these sexualized public spaces and urban planning. Urban planners, however, are not the only actors shaping the location and the use of the space. Participants create a dialectical movement from night normative worlds to occult practices interwoven with daytime activities. They also create subtle social rules governing actors and their practices.

Using locations to discuss secret sexual encounters is a deliberate choice, a rejection of a wide range of beliefs that concern the night world and stigmatize its dwellers or their sexual habits as “other” or “queer.” In the times of AIDS, discussion of such issues has hardly departed from an epidemiological version of *scientia sexualis* (Foucault, 1976) to which sociology and anthropology have sometimes added their own elements (Herdt & Lindenbaum, 1992; Pollak, 1988; Rybicki, 1994). Thus, the study of sex and sexual orientation has mostly been grounded in well-established definitions and categories (Bolton, 1992; Keogh, Holland, & Davies, 1998; Leap, 1999; Mendes-Leite & De Busscher, 1997; Parker & Carballo, 1990; Proth, 2003; Welzer-Lang, 1997; Welzer-Lang, Barbosa, & Mathieu, 1994; Welzer-Lang, Dutey, & Dorais, 1994).

This article is based on a research project in which, from the very beginning, talking about locations meant turning away from exotic individuals and essentialized identities to focus on when and where the action was: what made up such a settlement, how it appeared or disappeared, how it was organized. How did such a place move throughout the dense networks of urban life? The notion of *circulatory territory*, developed by French sociologist Alain Tarrus in his work on migrations (Tarrus, 1992, 2000a, 2000b),

appeared quite relevant in these environments. However, its adequacy for understanding secret sexuality in public space needed to be examined and assessed more carefully, in particular if the idea were to follow Foucault’s ideas on heterotopias (Foucault, 1984/1994):

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (pp. 755-756)

In fact, the places described in this study clearly correspond to some of the principles elaborated by the philosopher in his attempt to define heterotopias as “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1984/1994, p. 758). Also, they “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (p. 760). And, last but not least,

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. (Foucault, 1984/1994, p. 759)

At the same time, other researchers note that while the extension of human activities to nighttime in big cities catalyzed sociological and social work expertise, attention generally focused on the development of the most marginal and suspicious activities (Matza, 1969). Murray Melbin’s empirical work (Melbin, 1978), for example, compares social activities observed in nighttime Boston in the 1970s to those described at the end of the 19th century on the mobile frontier of the North American continent. According to his data, the expansion of settlements into the time and space of the frontier relied on groups that were more isolated and more homogenous, especially in terms of gender:

This article is dedicated to past and present contacts in the field. As a former coordinator of an action-research study of HIV and health promotion among street sex workers in Marseilles, I am also particularly grateful to the community organizations mentioned in the article. The doctoral research on which it is based received financial support from the French National Agency for Research on AIDS (ANRS) and was led under the stimulating direction of Professor Alain Tarrus, in the Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherches Urbaines et Sociologiques, Centre d’Études des Rationalités et des Savoirs (CIRUS-CERS). Special thanks to Anne Lovell for her precious help in reviewing the initial manuscript in English. Thank you to Michael Reece from the University of Indiana and to my two anonymous reviewers for their comments. I am indeed very grateful to Mindy Fullilove and to Moriah McSharry McGrath for their advice and assistance all the way through to the final version. I also wish to thank Eve Lanchantin and Wolf Jäcklein for their constant support.

Address correspondence to Laurent Gaissad, CIRUS-CERS, Maison de la Recherche, Université de Toulouse le Mirail, 5 Allée Antonio Machado, 31 058 Toulouse Cedex, France; e-mail: gaissad@univ-tlse2.fr.

The proportion of males in the population is higher on the frontier. Just as this part of the total is largest in Plains and Mountain States (71%), males comprise the largest part of the street population (89%) in the middle of the night. (Melbin, 1978, p. 8)

Night, as the frontier, also seemed to shelter stigmatized groups and to favor new behavioral styles (p. 10). However, over time it developed its own specific legitimacy, orders, and norms. Other authors stress that patterns of urban development and daily routines implement a moral regulation of space (Cauquelin, 1977, 1980), showing that city nights, just like days, create institutions that determine the spatial acceptability of behaviors (Farge & Foucault, 1982). The existence of “moral regions” (Park, 1952) simultaneously segregated and allowed by urban life had to be reexamined:

To describe the separate “moral regions” or “social worlds” became one of the major task of the Chicago sociologists. But the fact of the coexistence of these worlds in the city could also lead to further questions about the relationships between them. (Hannerz, 1980, p. 26)

Indeed, early 20th-century Chicago School ethnography included sufficient data and analyses of this issue to stimulate later research on secret sexual activity (Bech, 1997; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Chauncey, 1994; Delph, 1978; Humphreys, 1970). Following these perspectives, this study concentrated on a series of discrete locations in the south of France, more particularly on male cruising and clandestine prostitution areas in three regional capital cities (population 300,000-1 million) in the western region of Mediterranean Europe: Toulouse, Marseille, and Montpellier. It also included three smaller cities (under 300,000 people): Nîmes and Avignon, located on the main national and international routes connecting the region northbound through the Rhone valley; and Perpignan, close to the Pyrenees mountains and the Spanish border.

This article presents and confronts different levels of moral regulation of urban space and the way they structure sexual territories.¹ The field research on which it is based progressively led to the reconsideration of the relation between center and periphery in both spatial and temporal dimensions. I argue that attention to norms and constraints only produces incomplete analyses of how sex and desire are manifested in public space. Further, I propose that a nighttime and daytime urban ecological perspective is needed for understanding secret sexual behavior.

METHODS

We defined the research field so as to avoid well-established and notorious places, such as gay scenes, swingers clubs, porn cinemas, or the most central red-light districts. We deliberately avoided sites with constraints to general access, such as entry fees, lack of anonymity, age restrictions, dress

codes, or membership requirements. In addition to observations in selected locations, the study collected data based on interviews, city council decisions, police interventions, and press coverage. In this way, local urban historical context could be described for each case, focusing on public space conflicts and transformations in particular locations.

Some observations were conducted under the auspices of an evaluation of two HIV prevention and health promotion programs run by local nongovernmental organizations, with the assistance of their outreach teams: *Perles* in Montpellier (1997-1999) and *Autres Regards* in Marseilles and Avignon (1999-2001). The ethnography of men's cruising sites is part of a broader doctoral research project started in 1997, initially sponsored by the French National Agency for Research on AIDS (ANRS). For all research components, long-term participant observation helped to identify the less notorious or visible places and to gradually outline typical forms that sexual territories take and the dynamics of their transformation. Interviews, many of which were carried out informally during participant observation, enabled the researcher and the interviewees to coanalyze data from both territorial and biographical perspectives. The study's objectives were also disclosed and discussed. Various demographic information, such as sexual orientation, age, and matrimonial and professional status, was collected and 15 in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted focusing on secrecy, transitions between different spheres of life, local face-to-face interaction, and risk management. Similar formal interviews were conducted with male, female, and transgender sex workers in Marseilles, Avignon, and Montpellier. Emphasis was placed on gathering data and information outside of hours when the community organizations were open or outreach teams worked, and efforts were made to establish and maintain alternative street-based networks.

Finally, quantitative data were gathered on the number of vehicles and their license plates in the parking lot of a wooded suburban recreation area on the outskirts of Toulouse. This later part of the survey involved a preoperational phase of observation to identify the extent of the cruising sector, local walking circuits and sex spots in the bushes, and parking places, as well as the most relevant time slots for further investigation. Observation was carried out from 7 to 9 a.m., from noon to 2 p.m., and from 5 to 8 p.m. on a daily basis during a week in June 1999. The total sample was comprised of all cars entering or leaving the park during these time slots ($N = 6,570$). Of these, 11.5% ($n = 377$) could be linked to “cruising for sex.” The aggregate number of observed arrivals over the considered period corresponds to 226 different cars during the week. Of course, some of these cars were identified more than once.² In addition to previous identification of car drivers in the woods, the definition of cruising for sex was based on specific uses of the place: informal parking by the edge of the

¹ This research draws from material previously published by the French urban planning review *Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine*, 87, in September 2000 (Gaissad, 2000a).

² I identified 377 cruising-for-sex cars during observation time slots, which approximately corresponds to $2 \times 377 = 754$ arrivals and departures, thus 11.5% of the total sample ($N = 6,570$).

trees, walking directly into the bushes, explicit attitudes, or dress codes. In fact, such qualitative profiling reduced error by limiting the sample of men cruising for sex to its most visible part, and consequently excluded more discrete or indirect access to the cruising zone (e.g., using parking lot for sexual activity, cruising while jogging or cycling). The relationship between the total sample of cars and the specific conduct of a subsample identified as cruising for sex certainly helps to make clear local shifts from one situation to the other. Yet, as our goal was to explore inner dynamics of sexual territories, the results presented here remain very general.

RESULTS

The Transformations of Urban Sexual Landscapes

The most striking findings from the analyses of data collected in various sites of large and average-sized cities in the South of France concern the interaction between urban planning and locations dedicated to (sexual) desire. An increase in the number of cars driving around a block near a public garden at night in downtown Marseilles, for example, was connected to the recent destruction of public bathrooms on Sebastopol Square, a few streets away. The constriction of spaces available in the dark bushes of a small park and the flooding of every corner with halogen light were linked to the relocation of men's traffic to narrow neighboring streets. A return to the original cruising area was noted when the lamps were turned off: Cars started to slow down and park next to the park gate, as before. Obviously, men cruised for sex in an area according to how the public space fit their habits. If a place ceased to fit, another spot was found. Over time, the initial place might become fit once again, as a local account made clear:

There used to be a lot more bushes and more sex inside. There were many "bedrooms" in there. Now there's only one left, so it's always busy. Then, there was this campaign when the district council said "Let there be light!" And there was light like in Versailles! But not for long and it's off now. So the cars have come back and the place is crowded again.

The district council's idea was indeed a "renewal of the gardens for safety" as a local newspaper, *Le Méridional*, claimed in a headline. It called for police forces to fight "prostitutes, junkies and crooks of all types hiding in perfect impunity in the deep bushes of the garden where they commit their reprehensible acts" ("Espaces verts," 1996).

During the same period, the well-to-do southern neighborhoods of Marseilles showed similar signs of open conflict in a local petition calling for the closing of a ballet school's gates and of the paths to the woods of Borély Park, momentarily leading to more regular and intense police control. Security equipment, like fences in private driveways or motion-sensitive lighting of the nearby shopping center's alleys, became standard in the area. Yet the abandoned garden of an old mansion that opened directly onto a nearby street came to shelter the all-night cruising

for sex. Similar adaptation to environmental constraints was also observed in average-sized towns like Nîmes, where the stone wall of the Jardins de La Fontaine could be easily climbed at a precise spot when the gates were closed. It also appeared that the padlocks of this ancient park had been broken several times at night.

In Perpignan, the once-wooded public garden near the historical center was greatly affected by the building of a new convention center. Of particular importance was the construction of well-lighted wide lanes that were opened all over the perimeter. A few steps away, the thick bushes of the Ronsard walk that had started to attract men cruising for sex were dramatically pruned to expose the ancient wall, now highlighted with brand new spotlights. Although not accessible by car, the palm lined walk behind the park had meanwhile become very active, as indirect light and low fences enhanced the ambience for sexual activity.

The Toulouse components of our study showed that the small woods located on the main island of the Garonne River near the city center have been occupied by people engaging in clandestine sexual activities for at least 2 decades, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At the beginning of 1998, the police made a sudden effort to "clean up" the entire area before the Football World Championship, the stadium being next to the cruising zone. However, though the whole area was closed to individuals during the games, the cruising area was only temporarily deserted and quickly returned to its previous functions after the July championship ended.

In all the urban centers observed between 1997 to 2003, the sex industry went through periods of dispersal followed by territorial resettling. This movement was propelled by inner-city preservation and rehabilitation policies. In Marseilles, for example, a media campaign by the city council to "reclaim" the Canebière—historically Marseilles' main boulevard—and more generally the downtown districts was reinforced with the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean development project.³ Besides targeting the ancient streets of the centrally located Belsunce neighborhood, where a North African commercial network of international dimensions settled in the late 1970s and has prospered in the ensuing 20 years (Tarius, 2000a), city planners' continuous attacks have progressively eradicated the famous red-light district once established in that area.

When Avignon, the historical walled city of Popes, was chosen European Cultural Capital by the European

³ Euroméditerranée (the Euro-Mediterranean development project) is a long-term state-approved operation (1996-2010) that aims to make Marseilles a metropolis of the first rank within the shared prosperity zone that comprises the European Union and 12 countries of the Mediterranean region in the framework of the Barcelona process. It involves 13,000,000 square feet of new constructions, the creation or development of 50 acres of open spaces, and the reshaping of the transport infrastructure, including the coastline viaduct. With almost € 3 billion of public and private sector investment over 15 years, its "plan for the management of public spaces" includes huge works on structuring facilities in centre Marseilles, like the modernization of Saint-Charles railway station (website: <http://www.euromediterranee.fr>).

Commission in 2000, the city center was given a drastic facelift. Transvestites recently arrived from Marseilles and other newcomers to the dark streets along the outer fortifications spurred violent riots in the old Saint Michel district where, as it is said, “every square foot of the sidewalk is expensive and under control.” Consequently, groups of young women are forced to do their street walking during the day. Our study indicated that many of them were reduced to very discreetly soliciting under the Rhône or Durance river bridges; most of the main roads of the area constituted an old and well-kept daytime territory reserved for local women.

A Deeper Understanding of the Making of Sexual Territories

On the one hand, the actions of local officials constantly altered the locations of interest to this study. On the other hand, close observation revealed a number of processes at work in the organization of sexual territories.

An example from Marseilles is the change in the sex industry over last decade. A whole branch of the industry moved to the upper end of the central avenue and spread out into the city’s southern districts. In the late 1980s, the first transvestites arrived from Algeria and took over the streets around the nearby Saint Charles central railway station, greatly disturbing the traditional setup among local sex workers (Chaffi & Gaissad, 1992). Interviews with community organization staff members and clients in Marseilles (and, more significantly, the information gleaned from networks followed on the streets throughout last decade of fieldwork) revealed that many of these Algerians now own businesses—often bars or groceries—in Marseilles or elsewhere along the Mediterranean coast. Some now also have wives and families in France. They occasionally return to the streets to pay off loans owed on a new car or a villa built “over there,” on the other side of the Mediterranean. Some have now conquered new corners of the best sidewalks in the city, and sometimes they organize profitable weekends on the streets of Cannes or Nice, on the French Riviera. Most agree that “there’s work for everyone” and do not mind newcomers settling around Saint Charles railway station. Thus, over time, there has been an evolution in the people making the scene and the ways in which they make it.

Time works in other ways to shape sexual territories. As we observed, in most cases, city center public gardens and wooded parks dedicated to cruising and sex at night involved other social uses during the day. A place like the Ramier Island Park in Toulouse, by contrast, being both isolated in the middle of the Garonne River and easy to access from the beltway around the city, had full-time, night and day, men-to-men sexual activity. In this context, small groups often standing at the park’s entrance near the parking lot identified with the gay commercial venues of central Toulouse. Part of a narrow network of acquaintances, they imposed the norms of closed, customary circles. But further observation confirmed that this cruising-

for-sex territory is also determined by general trends related to casual urban mobility during the day. In other words, although young gay men heavily frequent the site, especially when bars and nightclubs close in the middle of the night or in the early morning on weekends, it is clear that the park is also occupied during the day. The patterns of this occupation are linked to daily trajectories and transitions between home and work, taking place in the morning, during lunch break, and in the early evening.

Such configuration may at first seem oversimplified, yet it is consistent with the findings of previous ethnographies of similar mobility contexts (Corzine & Kirby, 1977; Pickering, Okongo, Bwanika, N’nalusiba & Whitworth, 1996) as well as our own earlier work on the A9 motorway near Montpellier. Observations in that setting led us to the same conclusions: In the middle of the night, certain picnic areas are used exclusively by men from the Montpellier gay scene. Cruising is both very visible and normative. Conversely, during daytime rush hours, cruising is nearly invisible, and the population of men cruising and having sex is more mixed (Gaissad, 2000b). In fact, various categories of people can be observed in all of the motorway picnic areas along the Mediterranean coast between Montpellier and Nîmes. However, the increase in general traffic during peak travel times generally corresponds to an increase in the number of men cruising for sex. It contributes to make them less visible and more diverse in age, status, and origin, including tourists (especially during holidays), truck drivers, businessmen, commuters, and gay men wanting to cruise “outside the ghetto” (regardless of what categories they fit into). But the heterogeneity among these men seems to be specific to daytime secret encounters in the spacious and wooded areas of the motorway.

Observations of a park on the outskirts of Toulouse provided an example of another pattern of cruising traffic that we discovered while following the scene in Ramier Island Park, an isolated spot that (as noted above) is used at all hours for cruising for sex. While the stadium was being restored in Toulouse, men cruising in the Ramier Island Park and meeting on the main parking lot met new forms of police control. Patrols on mountain bikes began to ride through the narrow muddy footpaths, deep into the heart of the bushes. Men found there might be fined or charged with indecent exposure. We heard that it was better to go to La Ramée, a vast well-equipped leisure and sport complex located in the nearest wooded area outside Toulouse between the active business resorts and fast-expanding towns of the outskirts. Access to the park, like travel among local industrial sites and nearby residential zones, was facilitated by the four-lane “Rainbow” speedway opened in the mid-1990s to connect factories and services industries of southwest Toulouse to the suburbs of Colomiers and Blagnac, homes of the aérospatiale and air-bus industries.

We followed up on this proposal, but a first phase of observation showed that only a small and well-delimited

part of the forest was used for cruising and sex, and that most men accessed this sector by a secondary lane across from the main entrance recently opened at one end of the speedway. More importantly, the expected exodus to this peripheral place due to the repression in Ramier Island could not be confirmed.

In fact, observations at La Ramée discerned no nighttime sexual activity. Rather, the busiest times for cruising were related to the timetable of nearby neighborhood professional activities (i.e., 7 to 9 in the morning, noon to 2 p.m., and 5 to 8 in the evening). On a weekly basis, though the most traffic was observed on Wednesdays (schools close down on Wednesdays in France) and weekends, those days had the lowest rates of cars identified as cruising for sex. By contrast, other days of the week had markedly more traffic dedicated to men-to-men sexual encounters.

La Ramée's location in the heart of the rapidly expanding western suburbs of Toulouse plays an important role. Among the men we met during observations of the informal parking place near the woods at lunch break, suits and ties were not unusual, nor were departures just before 2 p.m., as this participant statement shows:

There's an important meeting at my head office this afternoon. I can't come after work, because it's hard to get organized. It was easier when the shopping center's parking lot next to work was still busy. Nothing going on there any longer, so I come here.

As it happened, that parking lot had become notorious and the local press had reported how "indiscreet the meeting point for men had become." Police repeatedly showed up following neighborhood complaints ("Colomiers," 1997). The anecdote of the participant previously frequenting this parking lot may be an exception. After all, in most of the cases we followed, a sexual territory that intercalated with daily routines, as in the case of La Ramée Park, tended to endure independent of city preservation and rehabilitation or police repression in other areas in town.

When Discretion is the Better Part of Courtship

Given the search for sexual partners in an area that serves a variety of functions, how did the men negotiate their interactions? This required closer examination. In fact, men who came for anonymous sex might also come to do violence. A young man waiting at 3 a.m. in Nîmes' Jardins de La Fontaine related this experience:

OK, it's different just now because I'm on my own, but I'd better keep it like no one knows. I come here with mates to mess up the fags. You got to watch yourself with the other guys.

Although data indicated how great a cross-section of the general male population these men were, belonging to a wide variety of groups with different values, it remained very hard to establish a general model determined by either cross-cultural significance of sexual spaces—in a Mediterranean context for instance—or by urban mobility patterns and the conjunction of different scales of space

and time. But, as a matter of fact, other situations collected during the field research phases of the study gradually led us to alter our view of diversity in a cruising spot as easy and consensual. Indeed, a bored man would declare out loud in the main parking lot of the Ramier Island Park that "There's nothing around tonight, just old trolls!" Similarly, outside the park in Nîmes, a 40-year-old man once briefly explained,

There are some tough clans [groups of people] down here. You don't want to know the others over there, you do as I did when I cross some of them like tonight: I turned up my nose at them.

In conversation, another regular and younger man declared, "I don't want any hookers and transvestites on this side of the canal. That sort, they always mess the place up and drag the cops in."

Some said they had seen the owner of a local gay bar naked in the bushes with a couple that came from Avignon every Saturday. On the motorway, a man in a suit and tie described the other picnic area as "crowded with fags escaped from the scene! They chase off the quiet guys who want discretion and who don't hang around for a chat."

In most cases, the context appeared to be marked by an almost village-like sociability in which, as ethnography clearly indicated, commitment was an obstacle for those seeking to remain clandestine and anonymous. Generally, belonging to a group or a network added on other normative requirements such as following the rules of close circles of regulars, or commercial places' criteria of discrimination according to age, race, class, lifestyle, reputation, seniority, etc.

At that stage of the study, the most notorious districts of stationary sex work (sex shops, houses, and hotels used by sex-workers, etc.) also deployed a strong sense of membership and shared values that tended to exclude diversity and circulation. Interviews in Marseilles stressed a trend toward ordinary segregation linked to struggles over place in street life: "We don't want any junkies or any of the filth working with no condoms and slashing prices. This corner won't be wrecked, no way!" Another noted the following:

Just Arabs up there near the main railway station, cheating customers, coming and going, staying for a month. Listen, why don't they just put all of us working clean in one place together, and the others who want to know nothing about nothing, together in another place?

It was therefore deduced that, on some streets, legitimate order and hierarchy are based on similar criteria established as professional codes: In this case, the sex trade and its rules systematically operate as strict norms, superimposing parallel territorial order and ethics on the logic of city development plans and on the moral regulation of urban space.

Discernment affecting some forms of male and female prostitution occurred as well. These, too, were difficult to observe, precisely because they relied on being nearly invisible in the street crowds. But tracing networks around

the street work of community organizations generated descriptions of young foreign women in breach of regulation (i.e., whose papers were not in order) walking among the crowds of downtown markets in Marseilles, for example, or waiting at bus stops while their clients furtively shook a few coins in their pockets as they passed by.

A young man, a participant in another discreet form of sex work, explained his habits in the luxurious cafés of Montpellier Place de la Comédie, where contacts with distinguished ladies can be made at tea time:

It's hard to be on the game at night if you're not gay because you only get men for tricks. See that one over there, Yves Saint Laurent suit. That's worth a smile. See her watch? The necklace's no junk either.

DISCUSSION

In a movement of wandering, settling, and resettling in space and time (Lovell, 1992), fringe sexual activities generate new discrete locations, here and there, not only in the heart of urban nights but, so it seems, further and further on the edges of what becomes established, organized, and sedentary. Various forms of public intervention actively contribute to the transformation of "moral regions." Contemporary "do-gooders"—to borrow the term Robert Ezra Park used with students to differentiate social work from sociology (Raushenbush, 1979, p. 96)—also modify the uses of sex places. AIDS prevention and other outreach teams, for example, may operate very far out on the margins of social welfare activity (Lovell, 1996), developing strategies to trap or engage what they call their "target populations." In so doing, they provoke not only mass departure from these areas (Jäcklein, 1998) but also simultaneous flows of men into other cruising spots in the city. Evaluations of the ecology of men who have sex with men in urban public space curiously neglect this reflexive aspect of empirical research biased by service intervention goals (Somlai, Kalichman, & Bagnall, 2001). Organizations' perception of their role is often that of a self-legitimated educational performance in which sex in the bushes is mostly considered precarious and risky. Ethnography of spatial conduct from this perspective may be accurate and well-informed, and discussions of cruising for sex sometimes postulate psychological and physical risks. However, they are often not grounded in data likely to reveal concrete attitudes about risk taking in the participants (Gaissad, 2001).

In our study, at most sites, men cruising for sex in the bushes at night had to migrate to another place (usually the closest public park) because every corner of the former place was suddenly flooded by the bright lights of some new street equipment or simply because the bushes were no longer there. Sociologist Pierre Sansot (Sansot, 1993) considers that the bushes "introduce an intermediate perspective between the ground field, the lawn and the trees" (p. 77) and assimilates their absence in the latest squares and parks of our cities to a strategy of control of public space uses. Empirically, there is no difficulty in identifying and

describing the causes of such objective transformations. And of course, it is important to analyze the way urban planning and secret sexual activity seem to be playing hide-and-seek, especially if in the process, a precise account of local contradictory designations of space can be given.

Yet, is a simplistic analysis in terms of repression versus transgression satisfactory? The dispersion of sex workers throughout urban or suburban space may well be related to the most coercive measures of the French Republic rule of law, where new sanctions against sexual soliciting have just been introduced,⁴ or under other regimes of regulation elsewhere. It is nevertheless undeniable that understanding such transformations also requires a specific attention to the role of internal institutions. The cultural rules of established sex work, like those of most legitimate locations for clandestine sex, obviously contribute to the emergence of new, mobile, and discrete margins: Keep a place on the corner, serve clients according to strictly defined verbal contracts, apply the prices fixed in the area for each sexual service and for defined amounts of time, never kiss a client, always use condoms, show solidarity with others workers on the corner, defend it against newcomers or rivals, impose the rules of the game and, consequently, chase away those who do not respect them.

Another example of inner constraints is the great visibility of those who occupy cruising-for-sex locations in the middle of the night, often transferring onto them the codes and values of gay men's worlds. As shown in this study, it is not rare for regular men to belong to networks of acquaintances widely extending beyond the cruising zones. And if their presence produces new discreet spots on the cruising perimeter, those spots sometimes become quite notorious in just a few weeks. In some cases, in fact, the place may turn out to be so saturated that the cruising for sex also seems to cross the boundaries of nightlife—dusk and dawn. Finding new tricks outside constituted networks also expands the sexual territory in space or time, along with strategies to remain anonymous. As a constant trait of the ethnographic phases of the study, the fact that cruising for sex is expected to be without consequence to other areas of life contributes to territorial transformations, just like it redefines the rules of avoidance or commitments in face-to-face interactions. In such a context, it remains very hazardous to present a model of the "primary capacities" (Goffman, 1967) required to handle situations, as well as those necessary to shift from one norm and/or place to the other.

And yet, our results show that the development of secret sexual territories cannot be simply sketched out as a reaction to outer and/or inner constraints but also involve a capacity to circulate that is not limited to Park's classic "marginal man." The proposal to consider the city as "a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate" (Park,

⁴The Sarkozy Domestic Security Act (Loi sur la Sécurité Intérieure) of March 18, 2003, lists "passive" soliciting among the felonies of Article L. 225-10-1 of the French penal code.

1952, p. 47) is seriously contradicted by the daily sexual territories observed in the south of France in the busiest time slots. Far from being peripheral or marginal, these are not simply contiguous to other social spaces but overlap, that is, occupy the same place at the same time. It has been emphasized that early Chicago School ethnography did not pay much attention to “the ordinary facts of *transiency*” (Matza, 1969, p. 70). As Matza wrote,

[The ethnographers’] appreciation of overlap was minimal. They exaggerated the separation between deviant and conventional worlds, drawing barriers too densely. (p. 70)

In opposition to a static version of mainstream and deviant careers, a fuller comprehension of biographic complexity needs to consider subjects across a life-cycle (Matza, 1969, p. 71), and the possibility for them to shift from one social world to the other across time. Our study radically changes the temporal framework. The way work timetables and typical routines can conceal discrete sexual activities suggests the possibility of belonging to different social worlds simultaneously. To explain the degree of involvement in social relationships and direct person-to-person accessibility made possible by the city, later urban anthropology added on to geographic determinations of urban life “a species of demographic possibilism” (Hannerz, 1980). However, Hannerz argued that traffic relationships “are often only a *side* (italics added) involvement of people at the same time engaged in other activities” (1980, p. 113). Instead, our results plead for a framework of *continuity* between center and periphery and suggest constant attention to the movement between different spheres of experience. Nightlife, as a disruption of daily norms, allows the expansion and the visibility of sexual territories, while the constraints of daytime mass mobility lead to unsuspected secret sex.

Once as mythical as the wilderness of barely explored territories of the American West, night worlds and their locations may well have, in their turn, become saturated with normative effects and internal boundaries. Murray Melbin already contemplated the future rather anxiously, noting the limited availability of time in one day and considering the possibility of a 24-hour day congested with human activity (Melbin, 1978, p. 21). Constantly resettling and conquering new territories, skirting out, anticipating or taking advantage of urban temporal planning and development schemes—does secret sex contradict Melbin’s dark perspective? In any case, the fluidity of desire engages an affirmative capacity to flee from legitimate and institutionalized nightlife locations in order to annex discrete places and moments of ordinary daytime.

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