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Sites of Resistance, Sites of Strength:

The Construction and Experience of

Queer Space in Calgary

by

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ABSTRACT

How concretely are marginalized communities tied to their places, their spaces, and their geographies? This thesis challenges the status quo which identifies Calgarian culture as conservative, corporate, and “cowboy,” exploring the construction and experience of queer space in Calgary. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight voluntary participants who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, to collect their responses to a variety of questions about the construction and significance of Calgary’s queer spaces. Their responses are thematically arranged, interpreted, and analyzed using a theoretical framework which incorporates poststructuralist, feminist, and queer theories. Their responses focus less upon the physical appearance of spaces, and much more upon their own experience in and engagement with the spaces -- or, as Michel de Certeau suggests, the concept of “space as practiced place.” Attention is also drawn to the post-modern nature of Calgary’s queer community -- spread out, fragmented, and integrated into the city as a whole.

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Silenced and policed, we congregated in allotted spaces. Borders were marked and real; vice laws, police, and organized crime representatives controlled our movements into and out of our “countries.” But what could not be controlled was what forced the creation of these spaces in the first place -- our need to confront a personal destiny, to see our reflections in each others’ faces and to break societal ostracism with our bodies. What could not be controlled was our desire.

Joan Nestle, “Restriction and Reclamation,” Queers In Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Though lesbians and gay men, as well as aspects of our culture, have existed for thousands of years in every known society and nation, our existence, history, and transformations are rarely represented in any work in the social sciences fields. Our culture has been trivialized as “lifestyle” and our places, spaces, and geography are unknown and invisible to most people. (Wolfe 303)

Maxine Wolfe’s words, spoken specifically of queer culture, echo the experiences of many minority groups within urban spaces. The cases of inaccessible histories, erased cultures, and invisible spaces are innumerable. But in recent decades, as race, class, and gender have been identified as crucial points of intersection in academic research and scholarly writing, research has begun to uncover those histories and make those experiences culturally significant. Most recently, sexual orientation has joined race, class, and gender as a site where identity, community and power are constructed. A recognition of this shift in thinking is propelled by a shift in scholarly attention. Slowly and carefully, individuals within academia are responding to the call for attention to gay, lesbian, and bisexual lives -- and are taking on the challenge of writing “queer” histories and theorizing queer cultures.

However, it is no surprise to discover that the majority of this scholarly work is focusing upon large urban centers with visible and active gay populations. Much has been written on the gay ghettos of Montreal, the gay neighbourhoods of Toronto and Vancouver, and the ever-present “queerness” in the Castro district of San Francisco. But what about the

less visible queer communities? If they are not hanging rainbow flags from a neighbourhood of houses, or dominating the ownership of businesses in a particular area, where are they? If we cannot see the queer community in a city like Calgary, does it exist? How concretely is a culture tied to its places, its spaces, and its geography? My goal, in this thesis, through analysis of theory and a series of interviews, is to explore these questions about queer communities and spaces in Calgary.

I have made the decision, in this thesis, to use the word “queer” to collectively identify sexual minorities. I recognize that this decision is a contentious one, particularly in light of the fact that this work tends to focus on gays and lesbians. The word “queer” is highly contested -- even, in some cases, by those who use it as an identifier. My choice to use it is two-fold. The first reason is ease and convenience. Within academic circles, the word “queer” is considered by some to be an acceptable substitute for the clumsiness of “gay, lesbian, and bisexual,” or “les/gay/bi” in scholarly writing. The second reason is my own acceptance of the word “queer” to speak to people of sexual minorities. I use this term to speak of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, dykes, fags, homosexuals, pomosexuals, butches, femmes, queens, transgendereds, transsexuals, cross-dressers, sadomasochists, and almost any other identity which challenges heteronormativity. I do, however, realize that not all people within academia or broader society will agree with me. The word “queer” is problematic. It is, as the editors of The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (1993) point out, assimilationist (Halperin et al xvii). It erases the significant differences between various sexual minorities. “Queer” is also a less widely-accepted term among the general public.

More people identify as “gay” or “lesbian” or “bisexual” than do as “queer” (Halperin et al xvii). Although the word is used widely within academia, it is not the primary self-identifier among the communities that this thesis investigates. And my use of the word “queer” in this context does not give full recognition to the complexities and stakes that are associated with the term. As Michael Warner (1993) suggests, queer theory is about more than lesbian and gay studies.

For academics, being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy, exude some rut, reimagine the publics from and for which academic intellectuals write, dress, and perform. Nervous over the prospect of a well-sanctioned and compartmentalized academic version of “lesbian and gay studies,” people want to make theory queer, no just to have a theory about queers. For both academics and activists, “queer” gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual... The insistence on “queer” -- a term initially generated in the context of terror -- has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence. (Warner xxvi)

My use of the word “queer” is, then, a limited one. My original research does focus upon gays and lesbians. However, my theoretical framework, and subsequent analysis, does speak to a broader range of sexual minorities. And one of my primary research goals is to challenge popular assumptions of a city’s culture and geography -- a challenge to normativity which fits into accepted academic definitions of “queer.”

In the introduction to their edited book Queers in Space, Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (1997) assert that “queer space enables people with marginalized sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully.” (3) Adrienne Rich has coined the phrase

“politics of location” in speaking of the limitations of movement and self-expression that gays and lesbians have experienced by being “ghettoized.” Michel Foucault speaks of a “desanctification of space” in which definitions and descriptions and boundaries of spaces can be seen as becoming increasingly blurred with gay and lesbian community formation. (in Ingram 13) There is no doubt that places and spaces are very significant in formation of community and development of culture. But in Calgary, those spaces are not entirely visible. Gay and lesbian bars and dance clubs are scattered throughout the four quadrants of the city. Gay male cruising spots range in location from public washrooms to parks in low-income neighbourhoods to the Calgary Zoo parking lot. There is no one definitive gay housing area. And few, if any, of these queer spaces are identifiable by any method other than word of mouth. Considering the conservative social and political environment of Calgary, this is not entirely surprising. Alberta is the last Canadian province to protect sexual orientation under the human rights code -- and that was very reluctantly. The city’s mayor has refused to write or support a declaration of Gay Pride Day. But in the face of such blatant public and political homophobia, queer communities and spaces in Calgary do exist -- which raises many questions. How have gays, lesbians, and bisexuals found one another without public identification of gay ghettos? What has constituted queer communities? Most importantly, how have Calgary’s queers sought out, identified, or created safe spaces for social and sexual self-expression in a city which is commonly recognized as socially, politically, and morally conservative and, in many cases, overtly homophobic?

Chapter Two of the thesis will introduce the literature which has contributed to the questions and analysis in this project. There is a growing body of literature in both the areas of queer theory and social construction of space. There is a smaller, but most useful collection of books and essays which marry the theories. Michael Riordon's Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country (1996) chronicles the lives of queers living in rural areas of Canada, and has proven to be an excellent source in my research, both in terms of providing valuable information, and in offering examples of structures which oral histories can take. Michael Warner's Fear of a Queer Planet (1993) is a collection of essays which examine construction of queer communities in urban centers, as well as the popular responses to queer politics and activism within public spaces. Perhaps most useful in my research has been the collection of essays entitled Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance (1997). This collection has been a rich source of theory, research and insight into the "dialectics of public and private space." The book looks at landscapes, landmarks, regional dynamics, community formation, and the interplay of all of these in signifying and strengthening queer culture. The editors acknowledge that in the increasingly fragmented postmodern urban centers, communities are difficult to identify and even more difficult to maintain, and the essays that they have chosen for the book speak to those difficulties. The body of literature on queer spaces is limited but growing, which speaks both to the interest in the subject and the significance of this project.

Chapter Three provides a road-map of sorts through Calgary's queer spaces. Relying on a variety of sources, including Calgary's Unity Pages, Outlooks magazine, word-of-mouth information, and interview results, I have collected a list of what are popularly considered to be Calgary's queer spaces. They include bars, restaurants, cruising areas, clubs, societies, bookstores, bathhouses, and community service organizations. Included in an Appendix at the end of the thesis are copies of advertisements for some of these spaces.

Chapter Four presents the results of my interviews, arranged thematically according to the topics which were covered. I have conducted in-depth interviews with voluntary participants who self-identify as queer. It is not -- and has not been -- my intention to collect a random sample, or to provide a broad or sweeping representation of the queer population in Calgary. Rather, my interest has been in speaking to individuals who are interested in documenting their experiences with queer community and place in the city. The individuals I have interviewed include members of ARGRA (Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association), performers, entrepreneurs, students, warehouse workers, retail managers, and social activists who range in age from 19 through 40, and have been living in Calgary for short and long periods of time. This chapter gives a voice to my participants, and illuminates the issues and questions which will be explored in the final chapter of the thesis.

In Chapter Five, the "oral histories" are interwoven with a poststructuralist analysis of the particular oppressions and potentialities inherent in the construction of queer community

and place. Politics of location, dialectics of public and private space, issues of construction of space, and differences between legal and spatial equality are discussed, along with connections between the theories which shaped my study and the ensuing results. The chapter ends with an analysis of the research method and some directions for future research.

I believe that the social and academic importance of my research questions is clear. Recognizing how hidden the queer community in Calgary has been, it is crucial that their histories be recorded, documented, and theorized. It is necessary to challenge the status quo which popularly defines Calgarian culture as conservative, corporate, or cowboy. As the turn of the next century approaches, and attention to minority representation is reaching new heights, it is imperative to demand not only that history **can** be rewritten, but that history **must** be rewritten to include the social and political realities of Calgary's queer community.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist theories, postmodern theories, queer theories, and place and space theories have contributed to the research which will follow in this thesis. Perhaps by virtue of the subject matter to which they speak, these theories contribute to, build upon, and slide into one another. Sexuality is slippery business within academia, and the theories which shape studies of sexual identity construction and representation are equally hard to contain. The blending and leaking of one theory into another is the reason why this chapter takes the shape that it does. It would be impossible to organize according to theoretical categorization. This literature review provides a look at some of the most pertinent writers within a variety of theoretical camps -- according to their points of intersection, and the way in which my research questions are indebted to them. It is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the theories, nor of the works of the individual theorists who will be discussed. My intention in this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework -- a road map of sorts -- for the information, analysis, and discussion which will form the chapters that follow.

Feminism Meets Queer Theory

When feminism meets queer theory, no introductions seem necessary. Both academic feminism and queer theory are connected, however directly or indirectly, to political movements outside the academy, in some cases to overlapping movements. Both are interdisciplinary modes of inquiry; both

constitute themselves in critical relation to a set of hegemonic social and cultural formations. (Weed vii)

Elizabeth Weed's observations make the connections between feminist theory and queer theory crystal clear. In the introduction to her co-edited book (with Naomi Schor) entitled Feminism Meets Queer Theory (1997), Weed explores the intersections of these theories, both in terms of their commonalities and their differences.

Before looking at the intersections, however, some background information on the roots of feminism -- particularly feminist poststructuralism -- and queer theory, is necessary. The connections between feminism and queer theory cannot be fully understood until there is a certain understanding of the intellectual context from which these theoretical currents emerge.

Kathryn Cirkse and Lisa Cuklanz (1992), provide a succinct overview of the major feminist theories which contribute to communications and cultural studies. The article begins by identifying that the different feminist theories all have the same basis, in exploring the nature of gender, the relationships between men and women, and the status of women in society, and suggests that feminist theory's ultimate concern is to change the subjugated status of women. The authors suggest that liberal feminism argues that women are free thinkers and are in control of their own lives. The problem is with the past -- women were seen as irrational and emotional, and incapable of handling the responsibilities of citizenship -- which is the reason why they were not formally educated.

The solution is argued to be legal equality, which liberal feminists suggest will bring about an end to gender inequalities. The second feminist framework which Cirksena and Cuklanz identify is socialist feminism, which suggests that class oppression is primary and that its eradication will stamp out gender oppression. Socialist feminists criticize the assumed divisions between public and private spheres, drawing attention to the unpaid labour that has traditionally fallen into the hands of women. The third framework identified is radical feminism, which, according to Cirksena and Cuklanz, is often essentialist in nature, looking at the differences between men and women according to their associations with culture and nature, respectively, and asks the question of whether “women might not be better served by a repudiation of culture as we know it and the creation of completely new forms of social existence” (Cirksena and Cuklanz 29). The authors also point at psychoanalytic feminism and cultural feminism as being significant to communications studies, with respective focuses on the male/subject and female/object split, and the male/mind and female/body dichotomy.

Obviously, although Cirksena and Cuklanz are relatively thorough in their identification and analysis of the feminist theories which contribute to communications studies, they are not exhaustive. They give very cursory treatment to postmodern and poststructuralist feminisms, which contribute heavily to the work of many communications and cultural theorists today. One of the goals of feminist poststructuralist theory is to upset the traditional binaries which have defined discussions of identity, gender, and sexuality. Instead of working for change **within** the categories of male/female, public/private,

gay/straight, feminist poststructuralism seeks to unhook those binaries, and look at the spaces in between. As Roberta Hamilton points out, working within the traditional binary categories poses several threats to feminist theory and action.

By doing this, we fall into two errors. First, we perpetuate the categories of the discourse that once left women invisible. We refer to women and men as if we knew what they were, and we perpetuate the oppositional character of those identities. Women still are defined by what men are not, even though we may now place more value on what-men-are-not. Second, we assume that when we use the word woman we are referring to all women; we collapse the differences among women that accrue from class, racism, heterosexism, imperialism, even the idiosyncrasies of taste and talent. In this way, the theoretical challenges to second wave feminism from women of colour, disabled women, lesbians, bisexuals, and older women converged with those of poststructuralism. The command is “do not tell me what I am.” (Hamilton 27)

Feminist poststructuralism attempts to recognize the importance of standpoints, histories, and lenses through which various experiences are viewed and meaning is made. Meaning is a continuous process, a “momentary stop in a continuing flow of interpretations of interpretations” (Storey 89). Meaning is far from stable. Notions of self, knowledge and truth are continually questioned, and recognized as fluctuating, abstract, and responsive to context. In her 1990 text, Linda J. Nicholson brings together the work of several prominent feminist theorists, all commenting on poststructuralism and postmodernism as they relate to feminist theory. Articles by Sandra Harding (1986, 1987, 1990), Donna Haraway (1985, 1989, 1990), Susan Bordo (1989, 1990), Elspeth Probyn (1990), and Judith Butler (1990), among others, question a variety of connections between postmodern theory and feminist theory, looking at the illuminations and limitations that one brings to the other. Although they all present differing perspectives on postmodern

and poststructuralist feminism, their common ground, inevitably, is in the recognition of the importance of questioning the unity of self (Nicholson 1990), which is immeasurably significant to deconstructing the categories and binaries which have traditionally valued man above woman, and heterosexual above homosexual.

This questioning of popular notions of self is also inherent in queer theory. As a conceptual framework, queer theory provides a theoretical lens through which homosexuality, bisexuality, and other marginalized sexualities -- in the face of compulsory heterosexuality -- can be understood. Queer theory suggests that there is no such thing as a solid, firm, or essential "identity," and therefore, a premeditated and stable identity cannot independently or inevitably shape or direct one's life. As well, like feminist poststructuralism, queer theory recognizes the flaws in speaking in essential terms about sexuality or gender, because such analysis often leaves out the experiences of minorities within the minorities. Much of queer theory has grown out of the work of Michel Foucault in The History of Sexuality (1978), and, in turn, Judith Butler in Gender Trouble (1990), and is now a thriving theoretical current applied to social analysis in a variety of disciplines.

With this brief look at backgrounds of feminist poststructuralism and queer theory, we can now turn back to Elizabeth Weed's (1997) observations on the intersections of feminist and queer theories. As she points out, feminism and queer theory are inevitably linked by virtue of their commitment to studying marginalities and problematizing

stereotypes. Feminism and queer theory are also often linked in their tendency towards academic activism -- bringing the personal into the realm of the political, and demanding changes in societal treatment of groups that are systematically discriminated against on all levels. Both are inter-disciplinary, finding their roots as well as their contemporary academic significance in a variety of disciplines. And both feminism and queer theory are plagued with a constant need -- from within and without -- to clarify, justify, and redefine the terms that constitute their academic and political language. The word "feminism" has been and is as widely debated a term as "queer" will ever be. And semantics aside, most queer theorists of today are quick to acknowledge the roads that were paved by yesterday's lesbian feminists, particularly within the second-wave feminist movement, and the academic recognition of women's studies. As Judith Butler points out,

To restrict the proper object of feminism to gender, and to appropriate sexuality as the proper object of gay and lesbian studies, is either to deny this important feminist contribution to the very sexual discourse in which lesbian and gay studies emerged or to argue, implicitly, that the feminist contributions to thinking sexuality culminate in the supersession of feminism by lesbian and gay studies... (Butler 11).

The connections and intersections are clear. But to suggest that feminism and queer theory are one and the same -- or even necessarily tied -- would be naive. While their large-scale goals might be comparable, even complementary, the differences, points of disagreement, and perceived responsibilities are both significant and contentious. Surface logic would suggest that since the struggles of women are often similar to the struggles of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, the communities should band together and create alliances

to overcome obstacles -- politically, socially, and academically. But looking deeper into the particular oppressions and experiences of each community indicates that such a suggestion is not just narrow-minded -- it is inadequate. As Adrienne Rich pointed out, feminism has not taken responsibility for gay and lesbian representation. Her essay entitled "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) was written in an effort both to inspire academics and feminists to examine heterosexuality as a social and political institution, and to ground their own theoretical frameworks in a perspective other than "unexamined heterocentricity" (203). Rich began this essay by quickly and powerfully asserting that feminist thought, along with the rest of critical theory, has not been adequately active in representing homosexuality and critiquing heterosexism. She posited that it was no longer enough for there to be mere acknowledgment of lesbian existence, saying:

Any theory or cultural/political creation that treats lesbian existence as a marginal, or less "natural" phenomenon, as mere sexual preference... is profoundly weakened thereby. Feminist theory can no longer afford merely to voice a toleration of lesbianism as an "alternative lifestyle" or make token allusion to lesbians. A feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation for women is long overdue. (206)

Rich discusses the ways in which the politics of inevitability have been used to convince women that emotional, sexual, and economic union with men is their only option. She calls this assumption of innate heterosexuality a "theoretical and political stumbling block" which, at that stage, made the notion of an exclusively "queer theory" a near impossibility. With an assumption -- a perceived necessity -- of heterosexuality, those of other sexual orientations are constructed, as they had been by eminent psychoanalysts, as

deviant and deprived. In this essay, Rich makes an overt and insistent call for the establishment of a commitment to a queer theory, suggesting that we cannot fully comprehend the complexities of homosexuality -- the “particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities” -- as long as it is simply bracketed with other marginalized and stigmatized existences (218). She insists that like racism, sexism, and classism, heterosexism is an institution, and that such an oppressive social construction cannot be challenged or deconstructed without specific, focused attention. Granted, her essay challenges the historical context of almost 20 years ago. However, her words are immeasurably significant to the roots of queer theory, as well as to the queering of feminist theories.

Aside from the inadequacies of expecting feminists to take up the cause of queers, there are inadequacies in lumping the two together on a theoretical basis. As Judith Butler points out in “Against Proper Objects,” the flaws inherent in each of the theories makes it difficult to the point of being immobilizing for theorists to position themselves as social or academic critics.

If one analyzes the heterosexist assumptions of feminist theory, one will be construed as “anti-” or “post-” feminist; if one analyzes the anti-feminism of some gay and lesbian theory, one will be construed as hostile to lesbian and gay theory. (Butler 1)

Such criticisms of feminist theories and queer theories are accurate. Many feminist theories **do** tend to focus upon issues of gender within the context of “compulsory heterosexuality.” Sexuality is only a consideration if issue is made of it. And as Butler

goes on to point out, queer theory is often quietly -- and sometimes blatantly -- anti-feminist. Much of queer theory has been written by, for, and about white middle-to-upper class males -- after all, even marginalized groups have hierarchies, and race, class, and gender are still significant playing cards within queer communities. Butler turns to the words of Richard Goldstein, who, in criticism of the gaps between feminists and queers, places much of the blame upon gay conservatives. He says that "it is no surprise that the gay right overlooks this possibility [of cooperation]; their frat is not just male, but masculinist... they worship the sexual hierarchy that affirms male power" (Butler 24).

So as contradictory or counter-productive as it may seem, feminism and queer theory, while meeting on many grounds, do not always share the same space with ease or comfort. In their most positive and least self-absorbed moments, queer theorists express gratitude to their feminist counterparts for laying their academic and political groundwork, while feminist theorists thank queer theorists for filling in important gaps. When the ground is less carefully tread, however, and acknowledgments flow less freely, there is an almost competitive tension between the theories. Negotiating their differences seems, at times, to be too difficult to allow them to embrace their similarities.

But "negotiation" seems to be a key term. Although progress and success are not reliant upon a strict assimilation of feminists and queers, recognition and acknowledgment of the value of each theory is paramount. Perhaps Judith Butler most effectively emphasizes the

importance of allowing feminism and queer theory to intersect, to connect, and to share theoretical ground.

I would insist that both feminist and queer studies need to move beyond and against those methodological demands which force separations in the interest of canonization and provisional institutional legitimation. (Butler 24)

Postmodernism Meets Queer Theory

Fluidity. Multiplicity. Discontinuity. Leakiness. Marginality. Fragmentation. These words and the concepts they represent are the building blocks of what we know as postmodernism. The molecular is privileged over the linear, and traditional valuations of single/unified/one as strong, and multiple/uncertain/fluctuating as weak, are broken down (Hammer 74). When these postmodern notions are applied to construction and representation of self and identity, the connections to queer theory are illuminated. Both theories are full of questions and contradictions, and often focus their energies on questioning and challenging societal traditions and norms.

The most significant works in the development of postmodern theories have come from the theorists whose names resonate through all contemporary cultural theories. Jameson, Baudrillard, Derrida, Lyotard, Cixous -- their work has been groundbreaking in studies of fractures of identity and culture. Postmodernism provides explanations and modes of analysis which provide for factors often ignored in other theoretical frameworks -- factors

such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. Some postmodern theorists assert that in order to most fully and effectively analyze issues of power, repression and resistance, the traditional categories of self and other must be challenged.

Frederic Jameson posits that the roots of postmodernism are in

the shift from an oppositional to a hegemonic position of the classics of modernism, the latter's conquest of the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations, the assimilation of the various high modernisms, into the 'canon' and the subsequent attenuation of everything in them felt by our grandparents to be shocking, scandalous, ugly, dissonant, immoral and antisocial. (1988: 104)

Jameson's description of postmodernism paints it as shocking, disturbing, and subversive -- a way for a new generation to challenge the thinking established by previous generations.

For Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, postmodernism signals a reconfiguration of the notions of knowledge and reality (Storey 174). In Lyotard's book The Postmodern Condition (1984), he introduces his contention that postmodernism collapses the "universalist" metanarratives that organize and justify a variety of narratives. These metanarratives are, in a postmodern age, being gradually replaced by "a plurality of voices from the margins, with their insistence of difference, on cultural diversity, and the claims of heterogeneity over homogeneity" (Storey 174). Lyotard's "collapse of knowledge" can be compared to Baudrillard's "collapse of reality" (1983). Baudrillard

claims that the postmodern age is one of copies without originals, which he calls simulacra. As Storey describes in his analysis of Baudrillard's theory,

The generation of a real without origins or reality is called a hyperreal. Hyperrealism is the characteristic mode of postmodernity. In the realm of the hyperreal, the distinction between simulation and the 'real' implodes; the 'real' and the imaginary continually collapse into each other. The result is that reality and simulation are experienced as without difference. (Storey 178)

Baudrillard's claims seem to support those of Lyotard, in their suggestion that formerly accepted 'cores' of society, like truth, knowledge, and reality, are destroyed or collapsed by postmodern thinking.

The most significant contributions to postmodern theories have come, without a doubt, from Michel Foucault. Foucault's work on the concepts of identity, power, knowledge, discourse, and sexuality is unparalleled (Power/Knowledge, 1980 and The History of Sexuality, 1978). Foucault contends that there is no such thing as a fixed identity; rather, people put names on behaviours that they and others exhibit, or practices that they engage in. And, in turn, power is not automatically held by a particular group or community, but rather, by particular people in various situations and contexts. Power is not possessed, it is exercised. Resistance, according to Foucault, follows. Sexuality is a particular focus of Foucault's later work. His contention that there is no real or fixed identity supports the unhooking of assumptions about male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight, and in turn, makes Foucault an incredibly influential figure in the writings of queer theorists today.

This questioning and challenging of traditional gendered and sexual binaries is the groundwork for the discourse surrounding queer theory. The work of Michel Foucault is central to both postmodern theories and queer theories. Foucault's The History of Sexuality is widely considered to be one of the founding texts of contemporary queer theory. In this text, which argues that discourses of sexuality actually **constitute** sexuality, Foucault is interested in looking at the ways in which society has demonstrated its own contradictions and questions about sexuality. Contextualizing his own research about society's attitudes towards sexuality, he says:

My aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its own hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function. (1978:8)

In drawing attention to these contradictions -- this hypocrisy -- Foucault is identifying both the binaries that society has created in terms of its perceptions of and reactions to sexual discourse, and the dissemination of these binaries which critical thinkers have begun to engage in. Homosexuality, bisexuality and the newly-named "pomosexuality" are the ultimate upsets of traditional sexual binaries; they challenge ongoing and widely accepted definitions of gender and identity along with sexual persuasion. As Carol Queen (1997), who clearly relies on Foucauldian theories, suggests,

Pomosexuality lives in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity reside -- a boundary-free zone in which fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can't be fenced in. It challenges either/or categorization in favour of largely unmapped possibilities and the intense charge that comes with transgression. (Queen 23)

Queer theory, as a conceptual framework, provides a theoretical lens through which homosexuality in the face of compulsory heterosexuality can be understood. Queer theory embraces postmodern methods of looking at the world on philosophical, historical, structural, and aesthetic levels by refusing totalizing or essentializing notions of self and other, by acknowledging the fragmentation and discontinuity of identity, and by creating a space in which sexual selves are recognizable as multiple, varied, and responsive to context. As James Darsey (1994) points out, “the gay liberation movement has a strong claim to being the most thoroughly postmodern, not just in its chronological placement, but in its sanguine acknowledgment of the partiality of the world and the decay of natural law” (47). Like the movement itself, queer theory has a strong claim to postmodernism as the driving force behind the discourse which surrounds both homosexuality and the scholarly analysis of it. Multiple and contradictory meanings are inherent in rhetorical analysis of sexual orientation.

Queer Theory and the “Space” it Occupies

Michael Warner (1993) suggests that countering heteronormativity is only possible through “actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (Warner xvi). Warner’s words echo Adrienne Rich’s assertion that it is simply not enough to voice a **tolerance** of queerness; rather, that queerness must be embraced as a valuable -- even necessary -- component of society. But in order for that “queer world” to move from

imagination to reality, it must occupy real space and real time. It is imperative that queer theorists, queer activists, and queer communities find safe spaces for academic, social, political and sexual self-expression.

The need for such places and spaces informs and inspires the collaborative effort of Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (1997). Ingram's introduction to the text emphasizes the importance of queer spaces in order for queers to fully recognize and develop their strength and influence.

The unique cultures, aesthetic sensibilities, and politics of a particular place must inform and shape its alliances with other groups if 'concrete' improvements in queer communities are to be made effectively. Queer space enables people with marginalized sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully. (Ingram 3)

In speaking to these "unique cultures" and "marginalized identities," the editors of the collection have drawn together a variety of theorists who speak to myriad elements of queer space and its making. The broadness of representation in the book provides a rich source of theory, research and insight into the "dialectics of public and private space," and acknowledge that identification and maintenance of space are the most difficult for marginalized communities.

Although people who experience marginalization might like to be more 'grounded,' inequity in access to public space continues. For minorities, including people marginalized through sexuality, these forms of 'uneven development' have often compounded their sense of isolation and rootlessness... in terms of visibility, most of us remain 'out there,' constrained by marginalization. (Ingram 6)

In the course of the text, such “groundedness” is not presented as an impossibility, but as a challenge. Each author examines a different category of queer space, heralding their creation as a powerful subversion; simultaneously, a site of resistance and a site of strength.

This concept of the subversion of space connects to Foucault’s assertions about the possibilities of resistance in public places. As he suggests in “Space, Power and Knowledge,” although the places themselves are not independently subversive, the *practice* of those spaces is.

I do not think that there is anything that is functionally -- by its very nature -- absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice*. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself. The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because liberty is what must be exercised... If one were to find a place, and perhaps there are some, where liberty is effectively exercised, one would find that this is not owing to the order of objects, but, once again, owing to the practice of liberty. (163)

Foucault’s assertions about the appropriation of space are similar to those of Dick Hebdige, whose 1979 essay, “From Culture to Hegemony,” argues that “subcultures take up the objects, spaces, and signs available to them within the larger system of late industrial culture in order to turn such objects and signs against the system” (During 357). Hebdige’s analysis of culture, like Foucault’s, suggests that space should be seen as

socially constructed, a suggestion that is further developed in an analysis of the work of Michel de Certeau.

De Certeau's 1984 text, The Practice of Everyday Life, has been hugely influential on theories regarding social construction of space. As de Certeau describes it, a place comes to have meaning through its use by people. Those who walk the streets own the space.

The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk -- an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write about without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (de Certeau 93)

According to de Certeau, it is the urban practices which define city space. Like Foucault's practice of liberty, and Hebdige's use of objects, space, and signs, de Certeau's walking the streets signifies the potential for space to be practiced and owned.

The most comprehensive analysis of the distinctions between place and space comes from the recent work of another theorist. In her article entitled "At Henry Parkes Motel," cultural theorist Meaghan Morris turns to Michel de Certeau's classic distinction between "place" and "space." In her words,

A place delimits a field; it is ruled by the law of the 'proper', by an orderly contiguity of elements in the location it defines, and as an instantaneous configuration of positions it implies an indication of stability. (Morris 37)

By this definition, **place** is not owned, or made use of, or negotiated. Place is, as she describes it, stable, unchanging, and independent of context. **Space**, on the other hand, is less solid, less independent.

A space is not the substance of a place, but the product of its transformation. It exists only in relation to vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Space 'occurs'; composed of intersections of mobile elements, it is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. With none of the univocity or stability of the 'proper', it is produced by the operations that make it function... (Morris 37)

Space is what people -- individuals, groups, communities -- make of place. The physical characteristics of a "place" might be continuous and unchanging, but the significance of the "space" can change indefinitely, depending upon who defines a place, how they use it, what it comes to mean. "In short, space is a practiced place," says de Certeau.

And so the question becomes, "Who -- or what -- constructs that space?" The assumption remains, for the most part, that the spaces are constructed by dominant societal forces -- those who succeed in asserting dominance --, by mainstreams, who exercise power in order to keep control over cities, and maintain the margins. Cultural theorist Steve Pile disagrees. In his book Geographies of Resistance, Pile asserts that it is no longer adequate to "begin stories of resistance with stories of so-called power" (Pile 3). He maintains that queer spaces, like the spaces of other marginalized groups, are often

constructed by those who make places their own -- not those who are trying to contain or control them.

Too often, political activism has been seen as the direct outcome of opposition to the things that the powerful do. Too often, the terrain of political struggle has been thought of as being constituted by practices of the dominant... but political identities and political actions take place on grounds other than those defined only through the effects of the powerful... Thinking through geographies of resistance shows precisely that resistance seeks to occupy new spaces, to create new geographies, to make its own place on the map. (Pile 1)

The making of space is not solely the terrain of dominant cultures and forces within societies. Taking ownership of a place -- making it into a significant and valuable space - is an act of empowerment which is frequently exercised by marginalized groups. For queers, choosing their spaces is paramount to their perceptions of strength, influence, and comfort. Queer spaces are not simply places to hide -- ghettos into which queers are forced by the socially and politically privileged mainstream. Queer spaces are to be developed, to be practiced, to be owned.

So, what is this Queer Space?

Having confirmed the significance -- the necessity -- of exclusively queer space, discussion must turn to what, exactly, this queer space is. What does it look like? Where can it be located? What purpose does it serve? At what stage do queer spaces become gay ghettos? And is such ghettoization empowering or oppressive?

Pictures of queer space -- within both queer and unqueer communities -- rely heavily upon stereotypes of gender and lifestyle. People couple their assumptions about queers with their assumptions about the mysterious places queers occupy, and rarely question the validity of the subsequent images. And as Gordon Brent Ingram points out, such attitudes are not surprising.

A tension exists between the roles of eroticism and communality in the formation of queer space. Twenty years ago it would have been easy to accept the false notion that a permanent dichotomy characterized queer space: for men, it was defined by erotically charged, phallocentric experience; for women, by a communal, cooperative, often 'sex-negative' experience. (Ingram 1997:9)

This gendered response perpetuates popularly-held notions of promiscuity among gay men and "special friendships" among women. Leather and chains. Birkenstocks and futons. The presumed differences between gay men and lesbians strongly influenced perceptions of what their respective spaces must look like, and the purposes those spaces must serve. Lesbian spaces are often assumed to be warm, welcoming, sensitive, organic places. Gay men are assumed to occupy spaces which are either campy and trendy, or seedy and designed to facilitate anonymous sexual encounters. But as Ingram suggests, the notions are outdated at the very least, and likely, completely historically unfounded. In these pictures, men's morals are dismissed, women are desexualized, and there is little or no space for bisexuality.

Aside from the narrowness and datedness of such pictures of queer spaces, an inadequacy of purpose is evident. Queer space functions on several levels -- to create spaces of safety

and comfort for queers, but also to create signified spaces of pride. Most queer spaces, along with catering to queers inside the doors, are externally marked by familiar gay and lesbian signifiers. In a city like Calgary, the small rainbow stickers and inverted pink triangles in windows of queer establishments are quite subtle. But in Toronto's Church/Wellesley village, and San Francisco's Castro district, entire neighbourhoods are emblazoned with those familiar signs. For Jean-Ulrick Desert (1997), those signs send an important message to queers and "hets" alike.

Our cities, our neighbourhoods, our homes are loosely defined territories inscribed not merely by the laws of proprietary ownership but by implicitly and shifting inflections of presence, conspicuous or otherwise... Queer space is in large part the function of wishful thinking or desires that become solidified: a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the heterocentric norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape. (Desert 21)

External queer signifiers indicate ownership of space -- not just by the technical proprietor of a business, but by the entire community that the space targets. Queers **own** these neighbourhoods, in the same way that heterosexuals assume ownership of the vast majority of urban space.

From this perspective, queer spaces -- often termed "gay ghettos" -- have the potential for significant empowerment. But not all queer theorists share this view of ghettoization. While some theorists see Church/Wellesley and Castro as safe places created by and for queers, others see the neighbourhoods as ghettos -- areas that gays and lesbians have been

pushed into for years by mainstream society. Gordon Brent Ingram sees the potential for these areas to be quite immobilizing.

With a nod to what Adrienne Rich calls the ‘politics of location,’ we recognize that an underlying homophobia by design constrains and even maims queer people, resulting in a complex limitation of movement and self-expression that has been simplistically lumped into the single term **ghettoization**. (Ingram 1997:3)

This alternative view of gay ghettos does not deny the importance, power, and influence of queer space, it merely questions the roots of the space. The bulk of Ingram’s essay confirms that he heralds the significance of queer space, but that he sees the difference between space that a group chooses to occupy and space that a group is forced to occupy. In contrast to the extreme view of Steve Pile, who suggested that geographies of resistance are created primarily by marginalized groups, Ingram maintains that both dominant and oppressed forces must be considered in any construction of space.

Even Queers in Space, the most comprehensive textual exploration of the construction and identification of queer space, recognizes that there are still significant gaps in the literature. One anthology cannot possibly address -- let alone begin to answer -- all of the questions that arise from analysis of space in queer communities. But one of the key things that the text does accomplish is a strong list of the questions that remain to be explored, above and beyond the limits of their own book. They ask questions about what constitutes queer space, and how the concept is “useful or obstructive” for different groups. They theorize about whether queer neighbourhoods are “effective refuges from

homophobia,” or just places with high populations of lesbians and gay men. They ask about the points of similarity and divergence between gay men and lesbians, their experiences, and their use of public space. Finally, they ask about the importance of queer space, the shape it takes, and the ways in which that space is constructed. These questions, among others, will shape the remainder of this thesis -- in an effort to contribute to the literature which represents the discussion and debate on queer space.

The Methodology

Social theories do not exist in a vacuum. They speak to the limitations, potentialities, and experiences of real people. Keeping this in mind, I felt that the most valuable and informative way to gather information for this thesis would be to speak to the people who I claim to speak **about**. Chapter Four will trace the stories of eight gay men and lesbians who live in Calgary, looking at their perception of and experience with queer places and spaces in the city. These oral histories were gathered in recorded one-on-one interviews, and studied with particular attention to their commonalities as well as their differences.

Although the word “ethnography” is certainly subject to controversy, it does apply to my method of research, according to Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley (1994). They suggest that “ethnography” describes social research having “a substantial number” of the following features:

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
- a tendency to work primarily with “unstructured” data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories
- investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in details
- analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (Atkinson and Hammersley 248)

Describing this work as ethnographic, then, is justified. The emphasis is on the phenomenon of queer space, the data is unstructured, the number of cases is small (in-depth interviews with 8 participants), and the analysis of data is based entirely upon theoretical interpretation of participant responses to questions about the construction and significance of space.

I chose the in-depth interview format for a number of reasons. At the most basic level, oral histories are the richest -- and in some cases, the only -- histories which exist when it comes to marginalized groups. Written and documented history of people and places speaks, for the most part, to the dominant cultures. This is no surprise, considering the fact that white, middle-class, heterosexual men have been afforded the privilege of a historical voice. As Lorraine Code (1995) suggests,

Many of the research methods modeled on scientific methodology that govern conceptions of what counts as knowledge in the academic mainstream have yielded the consequence that women and other socially disadvantaged groups of people are not only invisible in the data from which conclusions are drawn, but can also find no way of making their experiences count as informed or knowledgeable. (Code 20)

The stories of women, ethnic minorities, lower socio-economic classes, and sexual “deviants” have been relegated to the margins, as afterthoughts, given only perfunctory reference within mainstream historical texts. The histories of these communities are passed on from generation to generation largely by word of mouth, making oral recollections the most valuable source of information.

This is a feminist research method. In addition to recognizing the significance of the relationship between researcher and research subject, and the impossibility (and undesirability) of a truly “objective” research standpoint, this qualitative method challenges old, established, “scientific” methods of inquiry.

Coming to see a need to challenge the authority of the textbook, the going wisdom, the paradigm, or the testing or research practice whose efficacy seems to have been proven beyond dispute is no simple matter of saying, “The should have known better.” In other words, the presuppositions that drive such research and the consequent methods of treatment rarely present evidence of a crude conspiracy-theoretical approach, according to which men are wroth studying and woman are not. Nor do they always betray a blatant, overly articulated sexism, racism, homophobia, or class bias. If they did, they might be easier to challenge. But the issues are subtler, more complex; and they are as likely to emanate from a *latent* racism, homophobia, sexism, or classism as to be the products of overt prejudice and discrimination. The problem for emancipation theorists always is that the latent, ingrained bias and prejudgements are even more tenacious and more difficult to demonstrate and to counter than blatant manifestations. (Code 24)

Using a qualitative ethnographic method, based upon loosely structured interviews with open-ended questions allows the subjects who I am studying to make honest and open statements on issues of significance to them -- not just those issues which I, as the researcher, deem to be important.

As Nicholas Jankowski and Fred Wester suggest, the qualitative turn in communications research is appropriate to studying culture as a social construction.

The concept of *verstehen* is fundamental to qualitative research. Briefly, the term refers to an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their social situation and activities. Because people act on the basis of the meanings they attribute to themselves and others, the focus of qualitative social science is on everyday life and its significance as perceived by participants... The notion of role taking, originally formulated by Mead, suggests that in order to study human behavior the perspective of the actor must be established. The researcher's task, then, becomes one of reconstructing and understanding this perspective. (Jankowski and Wester 44)

The in-depth interview format that I chose provides a perspective and voice for the communities which I am studying. Although each interview began with an explanation of my research interest, and was shaped and focused by a script of questions, no two interviews were alike. The interviews were lengthy -- approximately one hour each -- and allowed for exploration of a vast number of issues, concerns, and anecdotes. This format is most conducive to self-direction on the part of the participant. As Nigel King (1995) suggests,

The qualitative researcher believes that there can be no such thing as a 'relationship-free' interview. Indeed the relationship is part of the research process, not a distraction from it. The interviewee is seen as a 'participant' in the research, actively shaping the course of the interview rather than passively responding to the interviewer's pre-set questions. (King 15)

Each person who I interviewed was asked a similar set of questions, but their responses determined where the rest of the interview went. Individuals were encouraged to explore and comment on the issues of place and space which are of priority to them. King (1995) claims that the interview method is most appropriate in cases where a research focus is

upon “the meaning of a particular phenomena to the participants” or “where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed” (King 16). These “oral histories” will be interwoven with theoretical analysis of the particular oppressions and potentialities inherent in the construction of queer community and place. James Carey (1989) has said of the field of communications that we have begun to enter into:

...a process of making large claims from small matters: studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life. (Carey 64)

I have added to Carey’s list a study of particular spaces, and “gingerly reaching out to the full relations” of Calgary’s queer community has been part of the project. Issues of confidentiality and trust are paramount within queer communities, which demands discretion, sensitivity, and flexibility on the part of the interviewer. These issues also demand voluntary participation and a high level of comfort on the part of the participant, which provides further rationale for the methodology that I have chosen.

The individuals who participated in this research were contacted by word of mouth, volunteered to take part in the interview process, and were not paid for their participation. Each individual was given a copy of the project proposal for their information, and signed a consent form which details the research. The form specifically asked whether they wish to have their real names used in the thesis, or would prefer to use pseudonyms. They

were also asked whether there are any other specific identifying details (ie: profession, hometown) that they would like to have withheld or changed in the thesis.

The participants come from widely varied backgrounds. They are academics, executives, office managers, artists, performers, entrepreneurs, manual labourers and students. They range in age from 19 through 40, and have been living in Calgary for short and long periods of time. They self-identify in a variety of ways -- as queers, fags, dykes, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. They have been asked to respond to a variety of questions about their experience with queer places in Calgary. How did they identify a queer community? What are their perceptions of queer community in Calgary? Where are their "safe" places? How do they see queerness/queer places/queer communities within the larger context of the city? The province? Their own backgrounds? Whose responsibility is it to create/maintain/make available the spaces? What do they see for the future of their community's physical spaces? On a broader level, how concretely do they feel that a culture is tied to its places, its spaces, and its geography? How have gays, lesbians, and bisexuals found one another without public identification of gay ghettos? Most importantly, how have Calgary's queers sought out, identified, or created safe spaces for social and sexual self-expression in a city which is commonly recognized as socially, politically, and morally conservative and, in many cases, overtly homophobic?

The stories of the participants echo one another in some instances, and lie in stark contrast to each other at times. These interviews are verbal accounts of personal

experience within the context of queer Calgary, a community which has historically been collectively closeted.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEY'RE HERE, THEY'RE QUEER, WHERE ARE THEY?

In this time of increasing displacement stemming from the globalization of capital and destruction of the biosphere, "queer space," used for refuge, habitation, and play, has expanded and diversified. Global ghettos, villages, nations, alienations, and, most important, global communalities and communities have become possible as never before. In the 1990s, the ghetto-busting of queer nationalism and the rapid globalization of real estate markets have transformed queer space, pushing it beyond the bounds of the ghetto and inspiring new linkages within and among communities... In the fragments of queer-friendly public spaces available today, a basis for survival, contact, communality, and sometimes even community has begun. (Ingram 1997: 3)

This look at the existence of 1990s queer space comes from the Introduction to Queers in Space, and it provided an apt point of departure for my analysis of Calgary's queer spaces. I had a number of questions about the nature of queer space in Calgary, particularly with regards to how it differed from queer space in other cities. In order to pursue this question, along with other questions about the significance of owned spaces for Calgarian queers, I had to first identify the locations that are considered to be Calgary's queer spaces. This chapter provides brief descriptions of those places -- where they are, what they look like, who frequents them. The chapters which follow will pursue the interviews and an analysis of them. This chapter lays the groundwork for that analysis, and is intended to offer a point of orientation; some information on the spaces which Calgary has queered.

Before moving forward into the interview process, I spent some time researching the queer communities in this city, and the places we call our own. In the beginning, my survey of the spaces was very limited. Because Calgary does not have a publicly identifiable gay ghetto, there was no obvious first point of reference. And because Calgary's spaces are often not clearly marked with the most obvious signifiers of queer pride, my initial reliance was upon word of mouth and scarcely published literature. My interviews turned out to be a more rich source of information than I had ever anticipated. My knowledge of Calgary's queer spaces had hovered around the bars and restaurants, which are the most obvious and "public" places that get identified as queer. My participants through the interview stage introduced me to spaces and places that I never would have had access to. Through them, I learned about the cruising spots, the bathhouses, and the grocery stores. Some of these spaces would have been difficult to find, and others would have been difficult to get into.

Several interesting concepts and assertions arose in my interview discussions of queer spaces. All of the participants were able to quickly identify the spaces that were familiar to me -- the bars and the restaurants. But they also provided me with personal stories of less obvious spaces. Most interesting was their identification of "queered" spaces, as distinctly different from "queer" spaces. These are places which have a different makeup, environment, or intention from those gay-owned-and-operated spaces which cater directly to queer communities. In some cases, the places are, by all accounts, straight, but have been appropriated and queered by people or groups within the gay/lesbian/bisexual

communities. Other spaces are primarily mainstream, but are queered once a month for special community occasions. Still other places consider themselves -- and their clients -- to be “alternative” in some fashion, which allows room for queerness, without identifying the space as exclusively queer.

The information which follows provides an identification of some of Calgary’s queer spaces. I say “some,” because I feel certain that as thorough as my research has been, it has not been exhaustive. I am relatively new to Calgary, and cannot expect to know the history of some of the currently existing spaces, or the ones that came before them. I have gathered extensive information on some of the spaces, but my access has been to that which has been published, or publically released in some manner. Not surprisingly, the queerest of spaces don’t have brochures. And although my participants have been remarkably forthcoming with information about the queer spaces which they know of or have directly experienced, they are only 8 people of the thousands that make up Calgary’s queer communities. My research on the spaces comes from a combination of sources, including published materials, interview transcripts, and personal descriptions of spaces that I have visited. In the cases where the information is derived from a source other than the latter, the source will be explicitly identified.

I have divided this chapter according to the general categories of space which are to be described. In some cases, there is cross-over between one category and the next. But for

the sake of clarity and ease, I have identified the following: bars, restaurants, social groups, cruising areas, and miscellaneous spaces.

Bars:

It is not surprising that bars, pubs, clubs, and lounges were identified as the focal point of reference for gay social life. These spaces are the most obvious to the public, quickly gaining a reputation among queer and mainstream communities for the clientele to whom they cater. Calgary's gay bars are no exception.

Rook's Bar and Beanery is popularly considered to be Calgary's premiere lesbian space. Inconspicuously located at 16th Avenue and Center Street S.W., Rook's is a dual-level building; the main floor is a sports pub environment, and the downstairs is a dance club. Although co-owner Renee Dunne claims that the bar is open to anyone, their advertising slogan, "where the girls go," is apt. (Figure 1) Rooks was opened three years ago, in a space that was formerly a Chinese restaurant. It hosts a variety of regular events, including karaoke, live music, sports parties, and Gay Pride Celebrations. Most of my participants described it using words like "comfortable," "relaxed," and "laid-back." The decor of Rook's is simple -- a few big-screen televisions, a pool table, a small bar, and about 25 tables. There are scattered framed photographs of staff members and regulars, and music and beer posters on the walls.

Boyztown, located on 10th Avenue S.W., is one of the most popular gay male spaces in the city, with its upstairs as a dance bar, and the downstairs section, the Rekroom, as a more casual, older environment. It was also one of the locations for which accessing information was most difficult. Boyztown, by design and by policy, caters exclusively to gay men -- women have to be signed in at the door by a "club member." The club also does not advertise in the Unity Pages¹, and, according to my participants, tends not to take part in Pride Week events. Depending on the age of my participants, I heard Boyztown clients described as "very young" and "quite a bit older," but all accounts indicated that it is very loud, very disco, and very cruisy.

Detour and Arena are part of a larger queer complex at 17th Avenue and 3rd Street S.W., which also houses Victoria's restaurant, Goliath's Bathhouse, and the Texas Lounge. Detour and Arena are advertised in the Unity Pages as "Calgary's Gay Bars," under the heading "Double Your Trouble." (Figure 2) It is interesting to note that this is perhaps the most obviously signified ad, and although all of the people I spoke to identified Detour/Arena as a queer space, they all qualified their response by saying that it was the most mainstream -- the least gay. According to Jason, there is a sign at the opening of Detours which warns patrons that "This is a gay bar." He said that he has experienced occasions when the bouncers are instructed to keep out people who look too "straight." But at the same time, most of the people he knows who go there are straight. They are

¹The Unity Pages are published annually by the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Association of Calgary. They provide a list of over one hundred queer and queer-friendly businesses and organizations in the city.

open-minded, and prefer the music, atmosphere, and physical setting of this space -- which, for them, just happens to cater to queers. By physical design, the bar also caters to a mixed crowd, with a dual-level dance floor, and several small, quiet seating areas.

The Backlot, which is located next door to Boyztown on 10th Avenue S.W., is a small, dark, cozy lounge, the interior of which resembles a long hallway. The downstairs portion is almost claustrophobic, with the tables in very close proximity to one another, while the upstairs is quite open and airy, with a second bar, a pool table, and several large windows. The Backlot caters primarily to gay men, perhaps by virtue of its proximity to Boyztown, but is much lower-key, and certainly friendlier to women. The Backlot is the most clearly signified of all the queer spaces in the city; it has a large rainbow flag hanging from a window on its exterior. (Figure 3)

Money pennies Bar and Eatery is known as the friendliest, most casual, gender-non-specific queer establishment in Calgary. Its former location, at 15th Avenue and 1st Street S.W., was a popular happy hour location -- particular for wings on Wednesday nights. The space is open, airy, and bright, with pool tables, a large and private patio, and the Rainbow Mercantile -- a gay pride store featuring merchandise by local artisans. Money pennies is currently in the process of relocating. They have secured a new location, at 10th Avenue and 17th Street S.W., with a pub, a dining room, a lounge, and a rooftop deck. The owner, Lorrie Murphy, has been quoted as saying that she likes to

think of Moneypennies as “a big warm hug -- kind of like the gay *Cheers*” (January 1999: 10) (Figure 4)

Although it is not an exclusively -- even primarily -- gay bar, the Warehouse was mentioned several times as a very queer-friendly space. As Jason describes it,

To a degree, the Warehouse is a sort of queer space. It's a private club, members only, but you can sign people in. I'm a member. There's a generalized alternative crowd. It's not a gay bar, per se, but there's a huge mix of people. Sort of the subculture thing -- you get the goths, you get the skaters, and the punks, and a significant gay crowd. I'd say mostly it is a lesbian/bisexual crowd, but it's definitely never been an area where I've felt uncomfortable revealing my sexuality at all. Particularly the upstairs. Downstairs is sort of hard core, which is open to anyone, but upstairs is more techno -- a pseudogay space. I don't know how open you can be -- I haven't made out with anyone or picked up someone there before, but it feels sort of accepting, as a generalized subculture sort of area, where all sorts of misfits or self-made misfits go.

The Warehouse is located at 733 10th Avenue S.W.

Restaurants:

Restaurants which are identified as queer are an interesting phenomenon. Unlike bars, where the pickup scene makes it obvious that pairings are gendered, restaurants are not as overtly queer. For the purposes of this research, queer restaurants were identified as those which are gay friendly, gay-owned and operated, and advertised in gay publications.

Victoria's Restaurant, although it does not advertise as a queer space, has certainly been adopted by Calgary's queer communities. The restaurant is in the same complex, on 17th Avenue S.W., as Detour, Arena, Goliath's Bathhouse, and the Texas Lounge. The restaurant is dark and intimate, bathed in dark red velvet with gold accents. The small bar in the center of the restaurant is a popular spot for the drag queens who perform next door on Sunday nights.

Folks Like Us Bistro, in Kensington, is another space which is commonly considered to be queer. Although it does not advertise in Outlooks or the Unity Pages, the name, coupled with the inverted triangle on the front door and windows, signifies it as a gay space of sorts. The decor inside is simple and sparse, with a few small tables, a menu board, and no art or signage. A magazine rack near the counter is filled with copies of Outlooks, The Advocate, Girlfriends, Curve, and Out. The tiny patio at the back of the restaurant is much more intimate, with two wooden tables shaded by large trees.²

Three more restaurants which are commonly considered to be queer spaces do not advertise themselves as such. Chickenhawk's Bistro on 11th Avenue S.W. has no physical signifiers which identify it as gay, but it advertises regularly in Outlooks, and is a favourite happy hour destination for many of the people to whom I have spoken. Break the Fast Café, on 9th Avenue S.W. and Andrew's Pizza on Edmonton Trail N.E. both

²In mid-April, as this thesis was being completed, Folks Like Us changed its name and logo. The new name is "Georgia's," the inverted triangle is gone, the decor is slightly more upscale, but the ownership and staff do not seem to have changed.

advertise in Outlooks and the Unity Pages, and while neither has any obvious queer symbols or signifiers, the spaces are favourites among the queer community.

Cruising Spots:

Perhaps the most interesting of the queer spaces I discovered in the process of my interviews were the cruising areas. These are areas, primarily used by gay men, which have been queered as pick-up spots for the gay communities. By virtue of having no experience with queer history in Calgary, I had no knowledge of most of these spaces. By virtue of my gender, I had no access to the culture or the language which defines most of them.

One of the men that I interviewed, Andrew, was a wealth of knowledge when it came to what he calls “cruisy areas.” He has been to all of them. He describes the fact that the cruisy parts of town have to be spread by word of mouth, because they are constantly changing. The gay men who frequent these areas do not want them advertised -- that could invite unwanted trouble from gay-bashers, people in the neighbourhood, or city police.

The cruisy spots... North Glenmore Park. The [Calgary] Zoo parking lot, which is now changed, because they’ve put locks on the parking. The bathrooms at Devonian Gardens. Child Avenue in the North East -- there’s a rest stop that’s quite cruisy right now. Andrew’s pizza, in the North East. A lot of guys go out to the truck stops, just to enjoy the sights... Grabba Jabba [on 10th Street S.W.] is very nice and laid back... and very cruisy. If you want to cruise someone, you go there... And, of

course, the bars. The bar is for cruising. The bar is to go to and get lucky.
(Figure 5)

Other people to whom I spoke identified the men's washrooms in the Education building at the university, and the Safeway on 12th Avenue S.W. (affectionately referred to as the Gayway) as cruising areas for Calgary's queers.

Miscellaneous:

Calgary also has an eclectic collection of queer and queered spaces that do not quite fit into the categories provided above. Some of them were relayed to me by individuals that I interviewed, others became evident through the advertisements in the Unity Pages.

Goliath's Saunatel and Health Club is a private club, located at 308 17th Avenue S.W. With advertising slogans like "In the light of day, men still play," Goliath's is a popular spot for gay men in Calgary. (Figure 6) Like most bathhouses, Goliath's caters to men only, providing locker rentals, single and double rooms, jacuzzis, saunas, and a small private bar called the Texas Lounge. It is spoken of as a major cruising area for the gay male community, and has been successfully operating in Calgary for many years, in contrast to the numerous bathhouses in North America which have closed with the rise of HIV and AIDS.

The Rainbow Pride Resource Center opened in Calgary late in 1998, and is the first gay owned and operated retail and information center which caters to an exclusively queer market. The center sells books, magazines, movies, clothing, and gay pride merchandise, among other things, and offers a wide variety of resource information pertaining to gay and lesbian organizations, health, and support services. The center is one of the most visibly marked spaces in Calgary, and is centrally located at 822 11th Avenue S.W.

Perhaps the only location in Calgary which provides more information and support for the queer community is the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Association. This organization, which is housed in the Old Y Center at 223 12th Avenue S.W. The "OK" campaign, in the summer and fall of 1998, was spearheaded by the GLCSA. Large billboards, as well as posters attached to public transit vehicles, showed the words "OK -- Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Information and Support" on a rainbow background, and could be seen in high traffic areas all around the city. The Association currently offers a drop-in center, a well-stocked library, peer counseling and referrals, and operates "Gay Lines," a telephone support service for queer and questioning Calgarians. Their space is warm and comfortable, and is open for drop-ins from 7-10pm, seven days a week.

The Woman's Place Bookstore and AIDS Calgary are widely considered to be queer spaces, although by no means do they target an exclusively gay and lesbian population. The bookstore, which is located at 1412 Center Street South, advertises in the Unity Pages as "A Lesbian Owned Business," and carries a wide range of books relating to

health, sexuality, spirituality, women's studies, and even, as the advertisement reads, "men's books too." (Figure 7) AIDS Calgary, which provides information, support, prevention, and education, is not an exclusively queer space, by any means, but as their Community Outreach worker, Susan, says, the space embraces people of all sexualities.

Clubs and Societies:

As the 49 pages of the Unity Pages indicate, Calgary has a growing list of queer organizations and social clubs. The Different Strokes Swim Club and Apollo Friends in Sports organizations are just two of many queer athletic clubs. There are support groups for Ageful Lesbians, Lesbian Mothers, Dykes of Colour, Gay Fathers, Gay Sex Addicts, Queer Youth, Women Coming Out, and Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). On a more social note, there is the National Leather Association of Calgary, and WHIPS -- Women Having Interactive Power Surges. Each of these organizations appeals to and provides for a different facet of the queer community in Calgary, drawing attention to the futility of using the word "community" in the singular. And each of these organizations makes queer whatever space they occupy -- no matter how mainstream those spaces may be 6 days of the week.

Some of the more interesting, active, and "out" organizations are advertising widely in print and on the Internet. These organizations are representative of very distinct cultures - queering of mainstream activities, alongside activities that are entirely queer.

ARGRA is the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association. They have taken the pinnacle of Western Canadian culture -- the Rodeo -- and put a whole new spin on it. Once a year, at the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo, 3000 individuals from around the world meet to participate in three days of rodeo activities. Events in this decidedly queer space range from the traditional -- like Calf Roping and Bareback Riding -- to the less traditional -- Goat Dressing and the Wild "Drag" Race -- which were created specifically for gay rodeos. Throughout the year, ARGRA holds fund-raising dances -- perhaps the only times when the Victoria Park Community Center is a space filled with gay men two-stepping. The organization's official mandate, within the context of a mutual interest in western rodeo culture, is to "be an organization for the entire community, barring all prejudices related to sex, nation origin, sexual orientation, religion, race, age, or disability... and to foster a sense of tolerance and togetherness within the community at large" (www.canuck.com/~argra). (Figure 8)

Another organization of queer interest is the BearBack Society of Calgary. The Bearbacks are a social organization for "bears, cubs, and their admirers." When I asked two of my participants about the bear culture, they were very familiar with it. As they describe it, bears are "big, fuzzy men... masculine looking men." Cubs are smaller hairy men, and otters are very smooth-skinned. The Bearbacks have a very well-developed web page, in which they define themselves:

Bearback Calgary [bâr-bak Cal-gâr-ee] n. Bearback Calgary is a predominantly gay male organization for bears, cubs, and their admirers. The group is non-judgmental and does not participate in political

activities. What does this really mean? It means that there are no standards you must meet, except wanting to have fun. Being comfortable with one's masculinity is of great importance to this group. Honesty, integrity, and just plain feelin' good about one's self are our goals.

(www.bearbackcalgary.com)

The group organizes a variety of social events on a regular basis, and even sells merchandise with the Bearback logo. Again, although this group is not tied to a specific location, there is no doubt that they are successful in queering whatever space they do occupy. (Figure 9)

Another widely advertised queer community is the Buck Naked Boys Club of Calgary.

By their own definition, they are:

...guys who enjoy sharing a common bond. We like to spend our time in the company of other men in our most natural attire. We like to participate in non-sexual activities, soaking up the sun, playing volleyball, cards, having barbeques, etc.-- in the nude, and in the process, establish solid, time-tested friendships. (www.members.home.net/bnbc)

Their pamphlet, along with displaying lists of activities and some carefully-shot photographs, answers some commonly-asked questions, such as "Is this a sex club," and "What happens when people get hard-ons?" The club strongly emphasizes it's social, as opposed to sexual, mandate, enjoying naturism and nudity in a queerly unique environment. (Figure 10)

Conclusions:

To conclude, it is interesting to note that the construction and communication of these spaces is almost wholly based on word-of-mouth. The information is out there -- but it is extremely difficult to find. Although word-of-mouth may be a relatively reliable mode of communication within a particular community, it need not be the only one. Of the people to whom I spoke, no one mentioned the key source of information about Calgary's queer spaces -- The Unity Pages. This annual publication from the Calgary Gay and Lesbian Community Services Association acts as a "Yellow Pages" of sorts; a guide to the gay-owned-and-operated, as well as gay-friendly, organizations and businesses in the city. It is comprehensive, thorough, free of charge, and readily available at a variety of retail outlets, yet very few people are aware of it, let alone making use of it. This certainly raises a question about modes of communication within the community. Why do individuals complain about inadequacy of advertising when they aren't making use of the advertising that is out there?

This chapter, while offering details about Calgary's various queer spaces, cannot answer questions about the significance or meaning of these spaces to queer communities. As Foucault, Hebdige, and de Certeau have suggested, it is not the place, but the *practice* that makes space significant. The interviews which follow in Chapter 4, and the analysis of Chapter 5, will look at the use of these spaces, the process by which they have been

queered, and their role in the development of queer identity and community. As well, connections and patterns among the spaces will be illuminated.

CHAPTER FOUR:
OUT THEIR WAY: PERSONAL HISTORIES

Identifying a population for the purposes of my interviews was not difficult. My goal was to speak, in depth and detail, to a small number of individuals who self identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and who were interested in documenting their experiences with queer space in Calgary. My sample, then, can best be described as a snowball sample. I spread the word, among individuals that I knew or had met within the queer community, that I was looking to interview people for the purposes of my thesis. Those people put me in contact with other people, and my contacts spread and multiplied. The group of individuals that finally composed my sample were, of course, by virtue of my method, not as diverse as I would have hoped. For example, none of my participants were originally from Calgary. Although the age range was satisfying -- nineteen through thirty-nine -- and the group split evenly along gender lines, diversity in race and class was virtually non-existent. Several of my participants posited the suggestion that this homogeneity within my sample may indeed be representative of a lack of diversity within Calgary's queer community, as their interviews have suggested.

This aside, the eight participants who shared their stories and speculations with me provided me with a wealth of information about queer community, politics, and space in this city, and in some cases, in this province and country as larger wholes. Each of the interviews lasted between a half hour and an hour, and each was audio-taped. The

candidates were interviewed individually, with the exception of a gay male couple who chose to be interviewed together. The interviews took place at locations which were convenient to the participants, most often their homes, occasionally their workplaces.

In each case, at the beginning of the interview, I shared a condensed version of my research proposal with the participants. I read through the project description with them, and offered to answer any questions that they might have. I then went through the consent form, emphasizing their freedom to withdraw their participation at any time, as well as the efforts which would be made to protect their confidentiality. Each participant was asked to sign the form, and specify whether they would like their real name or a pseudonym to be used, as well as whether any identifying details about them should be changed. Only one participant asked that his full name be withheld, and another requested that just his first name be used. For purposes of ease and confidentiality, I have used first names for all participants.

Participants were asked a variety of questions³, beginning with the basics of name, age, profession, hometown, etc. Participants were then asked about how long they had been in Calgary, why they came here, and what their pre-conceived notions of queer community and space in Calgary might have been. In order to establish their current knowledge of queer spaces in Calgary, participants were asked a “grocery list” question, in which they

³A full list of the questions which were used as the basic script for the interviews can be found in Appendix Two.

named all the places in the city which they considered to be queer spaces. In some responses, the list was limited to bars and restaurants. In others, the focus was upon cruising spots. Some of the participants identified many spaces, while others considered Calgary to be notably un-queer. Once the spaces had been identified, the participants were asked to describe the spaces: how they are marked as queer, what is appealing or unappealing about them, whether they cater to particular sub-groups within the community, their accessibility, and the potential to improve them. Some of the most interesting responses came to the most open-ended questions, such as whose responsibility it is to create, maintain, and advertise queer spaces. Participants had very strong opinions on the issues of straight vs queer politics in Calgary, as well as on the concept of gay ghettos. To close the interviews, participants were asked to describe what constitutes queer space for them, as well as their perception of the importance of queer space in Calgary. In some cases, at varying points throughout the interviews, participants chose to share their personal “coming out” stories, in an effort to contextualize their responses to some questions. In all cases, participants seemed to be very forthcoming and thorough in their responses to questions. Most indicated a keen interest in telling their stories and providing their opinions, and verbalized full support of research into and documentation of Calgary’s queer communities.

The first interview I conducted was with Kristen, who is a 29 year old lesbian from Thompson, Manitoba, who has also lived in Fort McMurray and Lethbridge. Since she completed her B.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of

Lethbridge, she has been employed as an office manager for a coffee company. Kristen is also a widely published poet and a musician. She has been living in Calgary since 1993.

Jason is a 23 year old graduate student at the University of Calgary. He was born in Ontario, spent five years living in Germany, and has been living in Calgary since he was 8 years old. Jason has traveled quite extensively, through Europe and Australia, and does not expect to be living in Calgary for very long upon completion of his Masters thesis.

Clayton is a 21 year old gay man who has been living in Calgary since August of 1995. He is originally from a small town (approximate population: 5500) north of Calgary. Clayton has most recently been working in a café in the city, but at the time of the interview, was about to begin his Bachelor of Arts at the University of Calgary, with the intention of eventually pursuing a Masters in Industrial Design. Clayton strongly identifies himself as a Christian, and has completed a year and a half of bible college.

Jennifer is a 19 year old woman who moved to Calgary with her family less than a year ago. She is originally from Pembroke, Ontario, just west of Ottawa. She works as a stocker at Costco Wholesale in Calgary, and considers Calgary's queer spaces to be few, far between, and completely inadequate to serve the population.

Susan is a 29 year old queer woman who is very active in Calgary's queer community. Born in Ontario, she has lived in Calgary for half her life, and was introduced to queer

Calgary by her older brother, who is gay, when she was quite young. She now holds two professional positions; as the team leader of Community Outreach at AIDS Calgary, and as the service coordinator at Calgary's Gay and Lesbian Community Services Association.

Andrew and his partner, Troy, are a gay male couple who strongly object to the label "queer." Andrew, 36, is originally from Montreal, and has been living in Calgary, "off and on," since he was 22. After taking jobs in Vancouver and L.A., he is now back in Calgary, working in a warehouse. Troy, 39, is originally from Ottawa, and has also been living in Calgary since he was 22. He works as the Western Canadian District Manager for a chain of retail stores. He is not "out" to the people with whom he works.

My final interview was with Renee, better known within the lesbian community as "Ren." Ren is the co-owner of a "community pub" in Calgary, called Rooks, which is widely considered to be Calgary's most popular lesbian space. Ren is 39, originally from Toronto, and has been living in Calgary since 1985. She came to Calgary at that time to complete a Masters in History, and has "always" been in the service industry, previously managing a "straight cowboy bar" in the city. She opened Rooks with her business partner three and a half years ago.

As a final note before I begin to explore the content of and the connections between the interviews, I believe that it is important to mention the issues that arose from semantics.

The word “queer,” as I mentioned in the introduction, which I used for purposes of convenience and commonality within academic contexts, is a politically and personally loaded word. Most of the individuals to whom I spoke, even if they had no complaints about the term, thought it strange that I would choose that word over “gay” or “homosexual.” Most identified as “gay,” “lesbian,” or “dyke.” One person responded quite strongly to the word “queer,” saying that to him, the word suggests “unusual, or abnormal.” Just one person chose “queer” as their primary term of self-reference. For that reason, a variety of terms appear throughout this chapter. My questions were usually formed using the word “queer,” except in the case where it clearly made the respondent uncomfortable. In that interview, I exchanged the word “gay” for “queer.” The respondents’ answers which follow use their own language preferences, and have been organized thematically.

On preconceived notions of queer Calgary:

Since none of my participants were originally from Calgary, it made sense to begin interviews with a question about what brought people to Calgary, and, in turn, what, if any, preconceived notions they had about queer community or space in the city. For some, their knowledge of queer Calgary was minimal when they arrived. Others “came out” after having lived in the city for a while, so their understanding of the city’s queer space developed through their own process of self-discovery. At the extreme end, one of

the participants chose to live in Calgary because of his knowledge of the city's queer spaces and communities.

For Kristen, moving to Calgary had nothing to do with the city's queer spaces. As she describes it,

I hadn't the slightest idea. I was blind. At that time, I was still seeing the same man I'd been seeing in university, so we continued that for a while. But there was always talk of my relationships with women, and my attraction to them. I guess very soon after that relationship ended, I had my first sexual experience with a woman... at a New Year's Eve party in Calgary...

Kristen had moved to Calgary directly from Lethbridge. While at university there, she had begun identifying as bisexual to herself, but not to others. She describes how she would flirt with women at parties, usually when alcohol was involved, because that was an environment with "an adventurous atmosphere," and she didn't worry about negative responses. Growing up in Fort McMurray taught Kristen to internalize a certain homophobia. As she puts it, "gay life does not exist there, at least not while I was growing up. There was no mention of it. There were no groups or anything... I didn't know anyone who was gay at all." Kristen acknowledges her assumption, when she moved, that a larger city like Calgary would have a more active gay population, but she had no knowledge of the queer spaces in the city to support that assumption.

Like Kristen, Clayton came from a small Alberta town with an entrenched ignorance of homosexuality. When I asked him about queer community and space in his hometown, he laughed aloud.

I guess there was the produce guy at the grocery store. I didn't realize that until I was in grade 12. I guess everyone knew, but no one ever talked about it. Then there was also a dentist. I think he was there a few years before I moved away, and he basically got run out of town. I know right now there's an instructor at the local college that is [gay], and there's constantly talk of him seducing young boys and stuff like that. There was one guy who really came out after he left [the town], and everyone in town knew about it. Whenever they ever talked about him, that's all they ever talked about, that he was gay. He had no other identity.

Clayton says that he moved to Calgary mostly because he didn't know anyone here. His desire to be anonymous is understandable, considering the homophobic environment in which he'd grown up. As he puts it,

Even though I always knew, I hadn't told anyone until I left there. Probably because it was dangerous... I mean if people found out! There was no opportunity to date anyway.

Clayton had no notion of what Calgary had to offer in terms of queer spaces. His main concern was getting out of a small town. Geographically, Calgary was an obvious choice.

For Jennifer, the youngest of my participants, her expectations of queer community and space in Calgary were shaped by her knowledge of similar communities and spaces in another large city. In her small hometown of Pembroke, Ontario, she suggests that there was not very much in terms of gay community. But close by was Ottawa, where she had her first introductions to queer space.

Whenever I got the chance, I'd go up there. I was introduced to gay bars when I was visiting friends up there for the first time, but then, I really didn't like it. I felt like an outcast, actually... I wasn't out then, and I thought that everyone would know that I was gay.

Jennifer was not particularly fond of what she saw of Ottawa's queer community, which she describes as very "cliquey." Her assumption, when she moved to Calgary with her family, was that another big city would have a similar atmosphere.

Susan's perceptions of Calgary's queer communities and spaces were shaped by her older brother. She moved to Calgary with her family at a relatively young age, and her brother "came out" long before she did.

My older brother is gay, so my early experiences, when I was about 13 to 18, were seeing him going out with his friends. He was really involved in female impersonation culture, drag queen shows, huge drug culture, and a rave boy kind of thing, so what I saw was a lot of drug use, a lot of late nights, and a lot of lipstick. I spent a tremendous amount of time with my brother and his friends, so when I came out, it wasn't into that welcoming bosom of lesbian community, it was like, a lot of gay men telling me I shouldn't wear red because it made me too pale.

Until Susan came out as a lesbian herself, her main knowledge of Calgary's queer spaces was through gay men. She was also quite athletic, and her involvement in soccer, and eventually the Gay Games in Vancouver, expanded her notion of what kind of spaces queer Calgary had to offer.

Andrew and Troy, who have been together for just over a year, had markedly different notions of queer community and space in Calgary. Troy's knowledge was non-existent. Andrew's was precise. When Troy first moved to Calgary, he "had no idea. I wasn't out

when I came here. I actually lived with a woman [at the time].” Andrew, on the other hand, came to Calgary to live precisely because of his knowledge of queer Calgary. He says:

When I moved back here, I was very tired of the gay scene in Vancouver, and I wanted to meet someone to spend the rest of my life with. I would not find that person in Vancouver. I knew I would in Calgary. I was ready -- I wanted to meet a very masculine individual. I would not find that in Vancouver. I knew what Calgary’s [gay spaces] were all about. I knew all the bars and locations to go. I moved [here], knowing what was here.

Renee’s previous notions of queer Calgary -- or lack thereof -- are perhaps the most surprising. Ren is the co-owner of Rooks Bar and Beanery on 16th Avenue N.W. in Calgary. One would think that as the owner of Calgary’s most popular space for the lesbian community, Ren would have had a long history of knowledge of Calgary’s queer spaces. Her response to the question indicated otherwise.

I’m a real rookie, actually. If you think about how long most people have been out, I’ve only been out 9 years, and I’ve owned this business for 3. So when I came out, I wasn’t really aware of any queer community here. I didn’t know anybody. Basically, the people I knew who were gay were just at the sports end. I didn’t know about all the different little pockets that there are. The friends I had were just through [my business partner] and I. I didn’t socialize a lot. I went to the sporting events, the odd dance, but I wasn’t actively involved.

Ren’s own knowledge of the queer spaces in Calgary grew through her ownership of a “straight cowboy bar” in the city. After she came out, as she describes it, “the novelty wore off.” She sold that establishment and took a couple of years off, a time during which she began to realize how little lesbian space there was in Calgary.

There needs to be a place where we can go, like after sporting events. There wasn't anywhere we could go. We could go to the straight lounge and get gawked at, not that we were really out in the open or anything, but we just weren't comfortable. I had never worked in the community before, so I took on a position at a pub that was gay, and worked there for five months, and then decided that it was time.

Ren's own awareness of queer space in Calgary prompted her to become involved at a very significant level -- in offering a space for Calgary's queer community.

On the Visibility and Advertising of Queer Spaces:

Although none of my participants were originally from Calgary, they have been living in the city for varying periods of time. Some of them were out of the closet before they arrived; for others, Calgary was their first experience with queer community and space. After discussing preconceived notions of Calgary's queer spaces, the next obvious question concerned communication of these spaces to the community and/or the general public. How do individuals -- queer, questioning, or straight -- identify the city's queer spaces? Are they advertised? How are they marked as queer? Are the signifiers visible from the outside? Are they recognizable to the general public, or just to those with intimate knowledge of symbols within queer communities?

Kristen's introduction to Calgary's queer spaces came, oddly enough, through her straight boyfriend. He was good friends with a bartender at Victoria's, which, as he told her, is a gay restaurant/bar on 17th Avenue S.W. Kristen continued to spend time at Victoria's after she had ended her relationship with her boyfriend, and she became quite close to a

number of the gay male staff. They told her about the other queer spaces, and introduced her to Rooks, which Kristen describes as her “first actual lesbian bar.” Her knowledge of Calgary’s queer spaces grew by word of mouth. Eventually, she discovered some advertising, but as she pointed out, gay establishments are only advertised in other gay establishments.

It wasn’t until I got more, well, until I came out as a lesbian, and stopped dating men altogether, that I really started paying attention to the advertising, and when I did, it was like I tried to get everything I possibly could. Every newsletter, every pamphlet, all this information. I couldn’t get enough information about gay and lesbian society in Calgary. But the advertising is strictly within the community. You go into these stores and they have newsstands with the Calgary Straight, Ffwd, and there’s never any Outlooks magazines or QC or anything else. The only place you find those is actually at the gay establishments themselves.

As Kristen suggests, one of the inadequacies with Calgary’s advertising of queer spaces is that one has to be in the loop already to find out about the other locations. When I asked Kristen about the marking of queer spaces, she suggested that they “aren’t any guarantee.” She pinpointed the rainbow flag, which is the most commonly recognized queer pride symbol, but went on to point out that most people outside queer communities don’t realize or appreciate its significance. The rainbow motif has been adopted by many businesses -- with no reference to or implication of gay pride. The only other signifier that Kristen has noticed is the signage in one of the bars, which she does not find particularly appealing.

Oddly enough, the only place that has a sign is Detours, which is the least gay of them all. It says something to the effect of ‘Warning: This is a gay establishment.’ It’s like ‘Warning: Noxious Chemicals.’

Jason also found out about Calgary's queer spaces through straight people -- several of his high school girlfriends. As he describes it, a number of his straight girlfriends (platonic, not romantic) had other gay male friends who knew where to go for good dance music. They brought Jason there, and he found them appealing. He appreciated the way that gay bars seem to have a mix of public and private space, so that "you can go there, but can also hide out if you really want to." From there, other discoveries of queer spaces happened entirely by word of mouth. Jason describes that as the only way to really identify the spaces -- through someone who already knows about them.

With regards to being marked as queer, Jason noticed a number of methods. There was the more subtle use of the rainbow flag in some establishments, but more often, bars take it upon themselves to screen the clientele at the door.

But Detours, specifically, although they claim to be a gay bar and at times, they're very sort of totalitarian about keeping straight people out, it is still a sort of bar that appeals to straight clientele. Sometimes, they'll keep straight people out with 'It's only regulars tonight.' When I first started going there, there were a couple of times when I was turned away, and I knew I had friends who had gone, who told me that this is what they say when they think you don't look gay. Or you're with people who don't look gay, and it was sort of frustrating. It was like 'I'm gay! What do you want? I'll make out with the doorman, just let me in!' It doesn't happen so much now, but I sort of dress differently, a little bit more. I dress up when I go there too, I sort of know the signs. It's almost like you have to look a certain way -- mark yourself as being gay.

This is an interesting reversal to the assumption that it is the space which must be marked. Instead, it is the people who must be marked -- in turn, creating the signifiers by which the space is identifiable.

Clayton found Calgary's queer spaces somewhat by accident. As he puts it, he and his friends were "always out chasing good music," and the gay clubs were where that music often happened to be. With regards to signifiers, for Clayton, the most obvious markers were not the rainbow flags, or even the signs like that at Detours. His sure-fire method for identifying a queer bar was by looking at the staff: "At Boyztown, for example, as SOON as you meet the staff, you know..."

In Susan's opinion, Calgary has a long way to go when it comes to advertising queer spaces and making them more visible. She feels that it is quite important to mark the spaces from the outside, particularly for the benefit of young people just coming out, and people who are just moving to town and have not established a community. She notes that in Calgary, you rarely see the rainbow flag, or interlocking male or female symbols. And, as she puts it, the spaces are very poorly advertised.

We have one publication which caters to gay men, and we only have two or three radio shows, so that's an opportunity area... I think it's a huge problem. Especially the youth... What are they going to do? How do they find resources? How do they get connected to a sensitive community? Where do they find support? Think of what it would do for a 16-year-old gay kid from Western Canada High School to be able to see a sign or logo that says "this is a gay friendly establishment." There is -- and I know this through GLCSA, because we publish the Unity Pages -- a reluctance on the part of gay businesses to advertise. Some of them [specific business names withheld at Susan's request] will not advertise, which is pretty frustrating. They also tend to want to take a lower-key role in gay pride events and stuff like that because their line is that it promotes gay bashing, which is, like, the biggest crock of shit going, you know?

According to Ren, there are many people within the community who share Susan's sentiments. But for her, as a gay business owner, safety is the primary concern.

A lot of people come and ask why we don't put up a big neon sign, and really, it's the same reason why we're here... for safety reasons. I don't want some freak coming in here, you know... We advertise a bit now, but [when we opened] we didn't know where to turn to advertise. There was the woman-run magazine QC, but they were closed down for December and January. Fwd came in and said they were going to write us up as Calgary's new lesbian bar, and I said 'no, you're not. Do you see anywhere in here that says it's a lesbian bar? This is a pub. It's a community pub. If it happens to be for the gay community, then that's fine. But at that point in time, we had 450 blue-collar workers next door to us. These are the people we wanted to educate... We wanted to be really careful about it, in how we presented ourselves, because we're in a residential community, and we didn't want to upset people, and we didn't want any petitions put out on us, or the cops coming down hard on us, or whatever. I think we did it the right way, but some people in the community didn't think it was the right thing. Some places have their pride flag on the windows and stuff. Ours is on the inside. So unless you have gay ties, or know which way to go, like phoning the [gay]lines when you come into town and stuff, you wouldn't know where the spaces are. But in a sense, we're in red neck Alberta here. If that's the way it's gotta be to keep us safe until we're big enough that we don't have to worry about it, or until we have our own little community like they have in Toronto or Vancouver where there's almost like a designated gay area, well, then, that's the way it's got to be.

When I discussed the visibility of queer spaces in Calgary with Andrew and Troy, their focus was more upon gay male cruising areas than upon bars or restaurants. Neither of them is particularly fond of the gay bar scene, as they find it to appeal to a very young, pretentious crowd. But Andrew had extensive knowledge about Calgary's "cruisy" spots. As he pointed out, those kinds of areas have to be communicated primarily by word of mouth.

It all starts from a rumour. I used to go to Glenmore Park all the time. I'd meet people there all the time. The police started to really patrol that, so therefore, the community had to find somewhere else to go. And at that point, just by word of mouth, we heard about the zoo. The parking lot right across from the new entrance. It used to be the entrance at the far end. It had two parking lots there. And that's where people would go. It's dark, it's central, there's a drive around, it's a loop. That's what gay men do. They sit in their cars and they drive around. And in my mind, if you drive around and park, and you have enough guts to get out and walk, that's the person I want to know, or I would take home. Some people just sit in their car, and some people walk. And that's how gay male cruising happens. It has to be dark, fairly safe, there has to be a drive around loop, and there has to be parking space. Oh, the other place is 13th and 14th ave between 6 and 7 street S.W. There's a Red Cross building there, and there's a park where people drive around. That's where a lot of gay men would go on their way home from bars. In respect to cruisy areas, it's the same as North Glenmore park. It has -- had -- a big drive-around area. So you'd pull in, someone would drive by, you liked what they looked like, you'd follow them, they'd pull in, they'd get in, and you'd think, well, yes or no, and if you liked them, you'd get out, go talk to them, and if you didn't, you'd hop back in your car, drive around again, and hope they wouldn't be there when you got back. It was actually a lot of stress! But every community has one. I know Vancouver does, there's a couple of them. Ottawa does. Kamloops had one. When I was trucking, Kamloops area had cruisy parks. Every community has one somewhere. In the US, it's truck stops or rest stops, and you pull off the road. If you pull off and there's someone there with their foot on the brake and parked, so the light was on, that was an indication that someone was in that car. If a location changes, it goes by word of mouth. If the gay population doesn't feel safe in a cruisy area, they're not going to stay. They'll go somewhere else.

Andrew and Troy both indicated that visibility of queer spaces is important -- particularly for the purposes of social activism -- but that it simply is not a reality in the way that the gay community operates.

On the appeal and accessibility of Calgary's queer spaces:

The majority of my participants had very little to say about the appeal or accessibility of Calgary's queer spaces. In terms of appeal, the most popular response was one of apathy: "well, it's all that we've got." A few people had complaints about the lack of money, time, and effort that has gone into making the spaces aesthetically appealing, but as Kristen pointed out, there's not much pressure to perform when you're the only show in town. "I think they're really tacky, and no money is being put into these places. It's because they know they're the only place, and people are going to go. Where else can their clientele really go?"

Some of the most common words used to describe the spaces were "dark" and "dingy." But as Andrew mentioned, "dark" was a defining characteristic of gay spaces. Not being seen was exactly what many of the clientele needed for personal security -- and for private affairs.

The thought that comes to my mind is that they [the bars] are dark. But that's where the gay bars came from. Being very dark, very dingy. You go in, you do whatever you want in the corner. There's even a bar in Ottawa that still has a back room. A dark room where you just go in and play with whoever's there. That's what gay bars used to be known for -- their back room.

Susan was the only person who had any comments on accessibility of queer spaces in Calgary. Perhaps this was by virtue of the work that she does, and her particular sensitivity to issues of accessibility.

Calgary's queer spaces are pretty spread out, segregated, and not all of them are accessible. As a matter of fact, I can't think of one space that is fully wheelchair accessible. Which is really disturbing. I guess because I'm a social worker, I'm working at AIDS Calgary, and I start to see the importance of that for quality of life issues. Like, if you're a gay guy living with HIV, and at the end stages of the illness, you want to go out with your friends, five of them will have to lift you up the stairs at Boyztown. Your wheelchair probably won't fit down the aisle to get into the Backlot.

None of the participants brought up issues of accessibility in terms of transportation, income, age, or race. This is, perhaps, indicative of their own positions of relative privilege within a marginalized community -- all white, all employed, all under 40.

On the community's divisions according to space:

The next question concerned divisions within the community, a look at which spaces catered specifically to particular factions of Calgary's queer communities. Most participants noticed at least a few lines along which the community divided its spaces. Most notable were gender and age, followed by a few references to race and income.

Ren pointed out that even though her goal with Rook's was to create a "people" bar, where most everyone would feel comfortable, the space has been appropriated mostly by young women.

People accuse me of catering to the younger crowd, the kids, 20-21 year olds. I don't think I do, but other people do. But that's the people from Moneypennies, who think 'oh, they cater to the kids up there.' Well, Christ, you're getting old. You stay down there. You don't have to walk far to the bathroom... Yeah, I see divisions. Even in here, even though I've

never said that this is strictly a woman's bar, and we've never perceived it that way, but because of our clientele, and we're two female owners. But we'd like to think of it as a people bar. You come in and everyone's welcome. If you're straight and you're okay with it, and you're comfortable with it, and we're comfortable with you, fine. And we do have people that come in here who like that. But some people tell me it's wrong, some are really strong feminists and get angry if they go downstairs and there's a man. I'm knocked because there's a male DJ. And I respond: you're telling me that if you have a gay male friend, he is not welcome here? That's not right. If these girls feel comfortable bringing their friends in, then this is where they should bring them. But there's definitely people who don't want any guys in here.

Andrew, Susan, and Jason all commented, among other things, on the age divisions within the community in terms of the frequenting of various spaces. It is interesting to note some of the different perceptions of the same spaces. Andrew says:

Well, Boyztown certainly does [cater to a specific population]. Upstairs caters to young men, downstairs is lower-middle aged. It's a more diverse group downstairs. I don't see any of the bars doing an income split. When I think of Mescalero's, it's higher end, but it's not really a place that is frequented by gay population. You wouldn't go there to meet other gay people. You would go out for dinner and know you could feel comfortable with your partner, though. In the bars that are around, Moneypennies is very much male-female equitable. You go in there and you feel very comfortable either way. Boyztown, because of the no-women rules, well, when I was with the rodeo association (Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association), well, we boycotted them quite a bit. We'd take their advertising money, but we wouldn't involve them in anything, because a lot of the women in ARGRA couldn't go in there. ARGRA is almost 50/50. Grabba Jabba is very nice and laid back... and very cruisy. If you want to cruise someone, you go there.

Of the same spaces, Jason says:

Well, physical appearance plays a part, definitely. Although at Boyztown, I think it's an older crowd, and the beauty factor tends to diminish when you're, you know, 60! From what I remember, and from what I've seen at

the Backlot, it's definitely not beauty! Calgary's queer community, from what I've gathered, is a very white community. Very very white. I don't know if class plays into it as much as beauty, and maybe race. I mean at Detours, you get black people, Asian people, but I know from sort of talking to people, that there are perceptions that, you know, white boys don't like coloured boys. Basically, in Calgary, and it's not 'can't be friends with,' but 'wouldn't sleep with.' I know from a number of people that I know in GLASS (Gay and Lesbian Association of Students and Staff) that Asian members feel like there's a stigma attached to that, which is sad. Class, I don't know. I know people who go to Detours who are a step away from living on the street, are working at McDonald's. It's so young, so I don't know if class can actually play into it. Age is definitely a divider.

Susan's perceptions of the spaces were similar:

I think if you go to, you know, Detours, you get kind of more bisexual men and women, more young gay men just coming out, than you do lesbians showing up there. And, I think it's definitely a much more youth-oriented culture, whereas if you go to Boyztown, first of all, you have to be signed in by a man, and 9 times out of 10, it's late 20's-30's men there. I think GLCSA serves people just coming out, and a lot of people who come through that door, like, just moved from Medicine Hat, that are 56, and just left their marriage of 30 years and came out, that kind of stuff. Definitely a lot of people with few resources in their life, like few emotional support systems, financial resources. I'd say places like Grabba Jabba are SOOO white. It's the whitest fucking place in this city. It's like, if you get a person of colour in there, it's amazing. And it's definitely way more gay male friendly than it is towards women.

On the role of municipal and provincial politics:

In a city like Calgary, which is -- rightly or not -- commonly perceived to be socially, politically, and morally conservative, the political environment plays a significant part in the construction and visibility of queer space. When I asked my participants what they thought of the impact of Calgary's politics on development of queer communities and

spaces, most of them responded quickly and convincingly. It is clear, to them, that a region's political landscape can either encourage or hinder the expression of queer sexualities, and that in Calgary, the latter is true.

Jason was probably the most optimistic of the respondents. He recognizes the political difficulties of today, but holds out hope that the situation will improve. He suggests that the changing landscape of Calgary will force politicians -- as well as the general public -- to be more tolerant of queers and their spaces:

I think it's changing. With the oil boom and the vast influx of people, we're getting sort of revitalized inner city neighbourhoods, and a growing arts scene, and you know, new bars opening all the time. So I think there's potential for change there. I do think, still, there is a sort of fear of being too out, outside of certain areas. I think on campus, or in Kensington, or 17th, the trendy areas, you can sit in a coffee shop and not be frightened that someone is going to overhear you talking about the fact that you're gay. That's not a problem. But I don't know that I would do it up in a community pub up in Beddington.

Susan does not see the oil boom, strong economy, and business culture of the city as necessarily being a positive thing for queer community and safe space. As she points out, there are no demands on the government to make changes:

I think this is such a conservative spot, such a business oriented spot. When you get the mayor of the city, in his last term, not willing to take the risk to declare gay pride day, to give it a proclamation, that speaks volumes. What is the political repercussion of that? In this city, there is no repercussion. So, when you get him, even after a situation like the

Delwin Vriend⁴ case, not wanting to show any leadership in celebrating diversity within the city, that speaks volumes to me.

But Susan does not let the blame rest solely on the shoulders of the elected politicians. She goes on to say:

I don't even know if there's huge diversity of thought among the gay activists in the city. One of the things I hear continually over and over here is that if you're gay or lesbian, it's biological. There's not a lot of choice talk. I think that makes a huge difference.

As Susan suggests, it is difficult to broaden the perspectives of government when the most visible of the queer activists are not presenting broad and diverse images of queerness itself.

Andrew and Troy pointed fingers at the Mayor of Calgary, as well. They accuse Calgary's and Alberta's politicians of being "afraid to take a stand."

Our mayor is a prime example. It'll be interesting this year, though. Because in New Brunswick, I think, the mayor of Saint John was taken to court because he would not declare gay pride. And he lost. So it'll be interesting to see what happens. It may change. He (our mayor) wouldn't do it because of public opinion. But look at Vancouver, or San Francisco. The mayors are involved in the parades, and there's a lot of acceptance in the community. Which came first, we're really not sure. Or how long it took. But those two cities, this last year, had their gay pride parade televised live. I know it's a whole developing process. It takes time to get to that point. Calgary may never have -- won't ever have -- that large or supportive a community. The politics here are very conservative. Calgary is much more open and accepting than the rest of Alberta is. That was very evident when the Supreme Court decision [concerning protection of

⁴Delwin Vriend is an Alberta teacher who was fired in 1991 when he revealed that he was gay. The Court of Queen's Bench determined that his dismissal was wrongful, but the Alberta Court of Appeal overturned the ruling, stating that the courts could not rule on provincial jurisdiction. In April 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in Vriend's favour, and the Alberta Provincial Government decided not to constitutionally override the decision.

sexual orientation under the human rights code] came down and Ralph Klein got all those absolutely obnoxious faxes. That's representative of fear mongering in some communities. The Reform Party is a prime example of how that happens.

Ren was able to speak about the politics of Calgary and Alberta on a more specific level. She provided a couple of examples of ways in which the city and its high-profile decision makers have been unsupportive of queer community and space in Calgary, which I have included in full.

It plays a huge role. Huge, huge, huge. As an example, Dave Rutherford has a talk show and he's always putting down the gays. We [Rooks] were holding the first gay grad, and it was very hush hush, which was the reason why we were holding it, because they [the kids] didn't feel comfortable going to their own graduations. So they came to us, Youth Identity [a support group for queer youth], and asked if they could have it here. Great. It was a long weekend, on a Sunday night. We'd sold a hundred tickets for all these kids from as far as Cochrane and Canmore, they were all coming in for their gay grad. The media got wind of it, the headlines in the Herald stated our name, our address, and our phone number. The reason why they were having it here was because of the big gay bashing issue in the high schools that year, and there was a big article about gay bashing, then we started getting phone calls from people who were not gay. And they weren't very nice. Then Dave Rutherford called us, and it was brought up on the radio, and again, on this talk show, our name, our address, and our phone number. Now what is that, an invitation? This scared the living daylights outta the kids. It was in the Sun, the Herald, on the radio, the police were notified -- I didn't notify them -- but they were notified, so we had cop cars out here all night. From 100 tickets sold, 15 kids showed up. They were that scared. So I think it has a huge impact. It's just all politics. Someone got wind of it, and tried to throw a wrench in things. The trustees were all up in arms about the gay bashings. We had a couple of education board trustees saying this is a great idea, fighting amongst themselves, and we were at the head of it. Another example: Alberta Report doesn't like gays at all. And they're forever putting down our gay businesses, our gay lifestyles, our quest for equal rights, and spousal benefits, and when they phoned and asked me if I wanted a subscription, I simply told them, 'you don't like gays. Why would you

phone here?’ ‘Oh, we didn’t know it was a gay establishment.’ Click. And this is the Alberta Report. It’s a business magazine. Another thing: during the election they brought, I think it was Sue something or other, in here, and she was absolutely petrified. This is the alderman of the ward, and it was wing night, and it was packed, she had no idea that there were that many people that were gay in this city. There was only like 100 people here, but she was just overwhelmed. They think we’re all still in the closet. They have no idea.

These responses demonstrate, in part, the frustration that Calgary’s queer community feels at not being fairly or adequately represented within the political sphere. Alberta is, after all, the last Canadian province to protect sexual orientation in the provincial human rights code -- a fact which has not gone unnoticed by Calgary’s queer population.

On gay ghettos:

One of the last questions which I posed to each respondent concerned ‘gay ghettos,’ which is the most common phrase used to describe neighbourhoods, or geographic areas within a city which have been appropriated by queer communities. In these neighbourhoods, like the Church/Wellesley block in Toronto, and the Castro district of San Francisco, the majority of businesses are gay owned and operated, all of the bars and restaurants cater specifically to queer clientele, and rainbow flags hang in the windows of blocks of houses and apartments. The general consensus among my participants was the Calgary does not have a ‘gay ghetto,’ per se. There was no consensus, however, on whether such a neighbourhood is something that Calgary needs, or that queer Calgarians want.

Kristen finds the idea of a gay ghetto very appealing. What she does not appreciate is the connotation of the name:

I don't understand why they're called ghettos. I think that's very negative. Why isn't it just a gay space, a gay subdivision? This whole ghetto thing makes you think of drugs and street people and people sleeping on grates, what's that all about? I think that term comes from the heterosexual population, but we've started to claim it as our own, you know, but I don't think it started out that way. I don't think they are confining, because you don't have to live there if you don't want to. It's a place you choose to live, and I myself might very well choose to live somewhere like that, just because I do think it is liberating. I think something like that in Calgary would be appealing, but I don't think it's ever going to happen. The way this city is set up, it just so happens that the area which is most commonly thought of as being a gay ghetto is 17th Ave and 4th Street, which is the restaurant district, the fancy shops, I mean, it's yuppieville. I don't think it can expand more than it has. Maybe over many years, I don't know. I don't think there would have to be changes in ownership. It's up to the people who frequent the places.

Jason agreed with Kristen on many levels. From his perspective, a gay ghetto would be a brilliant addition to Calgary. But like Kristen, his point of contention is with the language:

I don't think we have one. I wish we did. I would move there! It sort of would make things simpler. Like a little fairy land, pardon the pun. It would be really nice to have a place to go that's not a bar. Like, a place to live where you could just be out, and open about yourself. That would be amazing. And that would be so much more comfortable a way of getting into the queer community. As I've said before, I don't feel like I'm out to the community. I'm out to everyone else, but not to the community. I mean, it would be so nice to live there and meet people who potentially aren't party boys or pool playing lesbians. People who have other interests. That would be great. I don't think we have a gay ghetto. We have gay friendly neighbourhoods, those are the trendy neighbourhoods, 17th area, Kensington, Sunnyside, but I would love a gay ghetto. Ghetto, however, is a very negative word. When I hear ghetto, I think of bullets,

and Jewish ghettos in Nazi Germany and I'm like, no it's not like that. Not now. I think it is empowering to sort of have a community. It doesn't mean you're stuck there, there are no walls. If there was a gay ghetto in Calgary all of a sudden, I'd try to find a place there or near there. But at the same time, it doesn't mean I wouldn't go to the same places I've always gone to. I think, yeah, it's great. And one day, when I get the hell out of dodge, I'm moving me to a big city with a gay ghetto, and I'm getting me a big apartment smack dab in the middle of it.

When I asked Jennifer about her opinion of gay ghettos, she indicated that she liked the idea, but simply didn't think it was a social reality in Calgary. She said:

I don't know if the rest of Calgary would go for that. I mean, it's like, God forbid we should have more than two places to hang out! I don't think it would go over very well at all. Of course it would in the gay community, but the majority of the population of Calgary wouldn't like it one bit.

Susan expressed mixed opinions on the likelihood -- or the benefit -- of having a gay ghetto in Calgary. On one hand, she enjoys the sense of comfort and freedom that she's experienced in Toronto's gay ghetto. On the other hand, she's seen the limitations of living in an unrealistically safe environment.

The only big experience I have is Church/Wellesley in Toronto. And, I don't know. I know for me, when I've been there, it's been a heightened gay time, and that's been pretty amazing for me. The first time I was there was at the height of the Gwen Jacobson thing, about women being able to go topless, so I was there with some friends, and we went to the pride march topless, well that's a hoot. Like that could ever happen in Calgary! When we march here, we get half the street, which is great, because 15 years ago we got the sidewalk, so that's good. But, I see certain people exist only within that culture, and I wonder how healthy that is. I guess maybe that's a judgement, and that's a reflection of where I am in my life, because I've been doing that for quite a bit. I've been existing in really

really really really safe spaces, which is what you need to do, but it doesn't give me a lot of empathy for the rest of the world sometimes. I guess it depends on how people want to define their community. I think if we were to set up a community that was too geographical... I don't know I'd feel.

Andrew echoed Susan's comments about gay ghettos being reflective of where one is in one's life. He described gay ghettos as having a time and a place, but not being for everyone, all the time.

Our downtown core, from 2nd Street to 14th Street, between 17th Ave and 12th Ave, that's a major percentage of the gay population. Housing, that is. It's not as high density as other gay ghettos, but when you first move to Calgary, being gay, that's where you want to be. That's where the bars are, that's where the baths are, that's where the gay people are. That's where the Gayway [the 8th Street Safeway] is! Gay ghettos are very important, because they're the first safe, well, quasi-safe area, for gay men or women to go. Coming out, I wouldn't want to live in the 'burbs. Oh God. It's all development. When you're first out, you have to be there. You have to be able to get to all the bars, all the clubs. You have to be seen. As you get older, you have less and less need to be there. As you find a partner, and you settle down, you don't need to be downtown. Whatever community you move into, you make the conscious effort that people will have to accept you whatever you are.

Ren, perhaps by virtue of being so actively involved in queer community and business, was most optimistic about the possibilities of a gay ghetto developing in Calgary. When she looks at the significant obstacles that Calgary's queers have overcome in recent years, she sees an exclusively gay neighbourhood as a delightful inevitability.

I think they [gay ghettos] are awesome. There's a place just north of San Francisco called Russian River. It's like a gay resort area. It was a beatnik

area in the sixties, and in the early seventies and eighties they started going bankrupt, so the gays went up and bought out the land. So now it's a mix of hippies, and gay people, and it's an awesome site, and a comfortable site, you see people walking hand in hand, shopping, having fun, and they're comfortable. When you walk into these places -- and maybe it's just me being gay -- but there's like an aura of happiness and relaxation, and it's like a breath of fresh air. I'd love to have that here somewhere. From where we've come from to where we are now, I can't see it NOT happening in Calgary. People, when they first had Parkside [a gay bar], the girls have told me that they used to wait for you outside with a baseball bat. The police would hassle you. The liquor board would come in and close you down if you were one person over your limit. Now they don't. When you look at our gay pride dance last year, there were 2500 people. That's great. And I bet there'll be twice that this year. I think Kensington is probably the hotbed of possibility for it now. Or Inglewood. Those two areas, I think. So from where we came to where we are now, it's inevitable. It really is.

On the significance of queer space:

On the issue of gay ghettos, many questions about queer space in Calgary were answered. Just as many questions arose. The final question I posed to my participants, in two parts, allowed them consider all the factors which contribute to the construction of queer space. What constitutes queer space? How important is such space?

In all but one instance, the answers echoed one another. Only Clayton considers queer space to be unimportant. Throughout his interview, he expressed disdain and frustration with queer communities and their politics. I asked him why, for him, queer space was irrelevant -- even undesirable.

I just... I don't feel like my sexual partner -- my sexuality -- should be that big a part of my life. For the most part, a lot of fags, their entire life

revolves around being gay. And I mean, it should be such a minor part. Heterosexuals don't have heterosexual spaces, necessarily. I mean, I know they are the majority wherever they go, and more places are heterosexual spaces, but I think it should be more integrated instead of more separated. By making a space for it [homosexuality], it serves to segregate. To be honest, I haven't really had much experience with homophobia. I do know friends who've been bashed, kind of, but not necessarily because they were gay. They just happened to be the ones that got kicked in the teeth. I haven't had any problems, personally. No discrimination. A lot of people are very insecure about this stuff. So they go to queer spaces and finally feel comfortable. But that's when it becomes their entire life. They're like 'I found a place. I'm going to be there every night.' I think gay ghettos are detrimental. They serve to segregate, and then everyone would flock there and you wouldn't be comfortable leaving there. The safe space makes it more difficult, because people feel like they have to be there to be out.

Clayton acknowledges that a large part of the way he feels may come from his personal background, along with his spirituality. He grew up in a small town, where he did not fit in. He describes spending a lot of time alone, and growing quite comfortable with his independence. He says "I guess that's why I don't feel the need for a safe community. If there's something I feel strongly about, I'm used to standing alone. I guess some of that comes from my religious beliefs." As he points out, being gay is not entirely acceptable within Christianity. Clayton's negotiation of his sexuality and his spirituality has influenced his opinion of the role that one's sexuality should play in their daily life.

However, not surprisingly, Clayton was the exception among the people to whom I spoke. For the others, queer space is quite significant. What it needs to offer is simple: safety in numbers. When I asked Jason what constituted queer space for him, he said:

It needs to have other gay people! That's the biggest requirement. Space, more or less, almost seems to be irrelevant. Anywhere can be a queer space, if you have vast numbers of queer people there. That's the most important thing. The whole idea of these spaces is social, to meet other people who are like you.... The bars that are doing the whole gay thing, like the gay music, and the gay movies... could change everything, and if they could still attract enough gay people, I would go. It would still be a queer space for me. It's the people.

Kristen's sentiments mirrored Jason's. For her, queer space is about comfort in a community of people who share a common sexuality:

First of all, the majority of people there [in a queer space] have to be gay. And I have to be able to appear in those places with my partner, and be openly affectionate if I want to, without people gawking at me. That's pretty much all I ask.

Like Kristen, Troy speaks very plainly -- with simple requests -- of what a safe gay space needs to offer he and Andrew.

I consider gay space to be anywhere where we can sit and do what we're doing now, which is just touching. I mean, our legs are touching under the table. We try to make a lot of space gay, but I'm not as comfortable as Andrew is. For me to be comfortable, it has to be an established gay area. The rodeo is a safe space for me. Any of the bars are safe. A couple of restaurants, and any of our friends' houses. It has to be comfortable to us, and who we are.

The words "comfort" and "safety" were spoken by all of the participants in response to that question. One place where many of Calgary's queers -- particularly the women -- feel that comfort is at Rook's. It is no coincidence that this is exactly the kind of environment which Ren tries to cultivate.

I need to offer people freedom to express themselves. They can come in here with their significant others, and they can hold hands, or have dinner,

and talk to each other, and people know they're a couple. They don't necessarily have to be all over each other, but at least they can be themselves, like they are at home.

Susan's response to the question of queer spaces tied together a number of the sentiments which arose from the other interviews. Her demands for what a queer space needs to offer, as well as her intuitive sense of why queer space is so important in a city like Calgary, are perhaps the most articulate analysis of the significance of this city's queer spaces.

In terms of what constitutes queer space for me, it's pretty big, I guess. I need to be able to hold my girlfriend's hand and put my tongue in her mouth and have that be okay for everyone in the room, and that if it's not okay, they'll turn away and look after themselves, and not expect me to stop because they're uncomfortable. I think that's my criteria... Here [in Calgary] people are only going to feel comfortable being open physically, having longing looks across the table, wearing their T-shirt that says "I'm a dyke and proud of it" in a queer space. I think if you go to a place like Toronto or San Francisco, it's different. My brother lives in Toronto, and I've been back there two years for gay pride. You definitely get the feeling when you enter Dundonald, Wellesley, and Church area that oh, there's a lot of queer people around here, but if you walk through the Eaton center holding your girlfriend's hand, whatever. No big deal. Whereas if you walked like that through the Eaton center here, all the Hutterites would be shoving their kids into Gord's Sporting Equipment saying 'don't look.' I think the importance of queer space depends on the development of the culture itself, and their understanding of their own oppression. I think here, it's pretty important.

CHAPTER FIVE: SPATIAL IN(QUEER)IES

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the interview process was quite frustrating at times, in terms of the lack of detail that they offered, they were simultaneously very illuminating. This chapter draws the interview results together with the theory which shaped this study, allowing me -- requiring me -- to make important connections between and observations about construction of space, the materiality of lived relations in space, the sexualizing of space, the politicizing of location and sites of congregation, dialectics of public and private space, differences between legal equality and spatial equality, and notions of civic rights in this city.

How is space queered?

I was quite surprised to discover the lack of knowledge or interest that my participants had about how space became queer. Their responses to questions about the queering of space were almost always circuitous. "Well, it's queer space because we go there, and we go there because it's a queer space." My respondents rarely, if ever, spoke of the opening of a queer space, or their first memories of a particular space being considered queer. With the exception of Andrew's knowledge of the necessary elements of gay male cruising areas, no one commented on how their queer spaces became queer. Were they opened by gay and lesbian proprietors and targeted towards a queer market? Or were they

appropriated by queer communities with no resistance from management or owners? The circuitous attitudes suggest either an apathetic assumption that queer space “just exists,” or a genuine lack of knowledge about how spaces come to have meaning. Perhaps I should have further pursued those questions with my participants. But the origins of meaning within space did not appear to be a top priority with the people to whom I spoke, and I chose to pursue the issues that they prioritized. This shift from questions about space to answers about personal experience is interesting. However, as Foucault and de Certeau suggest, the significance of space lies primarily in the practice of it, not in its physical layout. Keeping this in mind, it is not surprising that people heard questions about space as questions about personal history -- after all, their **use** of the space is what gives a place meaning.

On the Ambiguities of Queer Space:

Ingram et al (1997) explore many explanations, explications, limitations and potentialities of queer space, in which definitions of the terms “queer” **and** “space” are contested and challenged. Those terms are, not surprisingly, highly contestable, as they mean different things to almost everyone who identifies as queer and appropriates queer space. For some, the word “queer” is interchangeable with “gay.” For others, it is a much more highly political term, suggesting “different than the norm,” “strange,” “twisted,” or “unpredictable.” For some queers, queer space is anywhere they go. For others, the space has to have a queer history. Some require just queer-friendliness, others demand

that their spaces offer queer exclusivity. The language -- like the politics of community -- is contentious. Perhaps this is why, as Ingram suggests, queer spaces tend to be so ambiguous.

Queer sites are usually characterized by contradictions and ambiguity, allowing for a wide range of erotic and other forms of social contact. Rather than constructing sites explicitly for homoerotic communality and expression, much formation of queer space has concentrated on transcending heteronormative constraints. In times of repression and culturally enforced conformity, the least constraining places are those that are neither totally public or private, containing rich striations within short physical distances. (Ingram et al 295)

That contradiction of public and private is notably present within queer spaces. Cruising areas, back rooms of bars, bathhouses -- these are the spaces which combine private activities with public settings -- heightening eroticism and pushing boundaries. The intersection of public and private raises many questions about ownership of space, politicizing of space, and the making of neutral places into meaningful spaces.

William Leap (1999) and Michel Foucault (1984) are both fascinated with the intersection of private acts and public places. Leap tries to understand and make sense of public sex through an analysis of place, space, and landscape. He discusses the way that ownership and politicization of space are topics which are "continually being constructed, negotiated, and contested" (Leap 7). Leap offers the appeal of danger as a possible explanation. Foucault, on the other hand, looks purely at the pleasure of the public places in which sexual encounters were commonplace.

[In Europe] the bath was sort of a cathedral of pleasure at the heart of the city, where people could go as often as they want, where they walked about, picked each other up, met each other, took their pleasure, ate, drank, discussed... Sexuality was obviously considered a social pleasure for the Greeks and the Romans. What is interesting about male homosexuality today -- this has apparently been the case of female homosexuals for some time -- is that their sexual relations are immediately translated into social relations and the social relations are understood as sexual relations. For the Greeks and Romans, in a different fashion, sexual relations were located within social relations in the widest sense of the term. They baths were a place of sociality that included sexual relations. (1984: 167)

Foucault's words indicate a natural connection between the sexual and the social -- a concept which has all but disappeared in most Western communities today. This collapsing of boundaries between private/public, sexual/social is certainly in keeping with the dismantling of binaries which defines poststructuralism, postmodernism, and in turn, queer theory -- and is very much a part of the queering of space.

On How Space Becomes Queer:

Like Michel de Certeau's suggestion that space is practiced place, Jean-Ulrick Desert (1997) asserts that space becomes queer through a combination of practice and wishful thinking.

Queer space is in large part the function of wishful thinking or desires that become solidified: a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape. The observer's complicity is key in allowing a public site to be co-opted in part or completely. So compelling is this seduction that a general consensus or collective belief emerges among queers and non-queers alike. (Desert 21)

As Desert suggests, in queer spaces, queerness becomes the “dominant social narrative” of that landscape. He also describes a “compelling seduction,” which convinces everyone -- queers and non-queers -- that a space belongs to queer communities. Perhaps this seduction provides some explanation for my participants’ circuitous responses about the origins of queer space. If, indeed, a space needs only a “few brief points” or “fleeting moments” to gain its queer status, it is no wonder that individuals find it difficult to explain how spaces are queered. This almost supports the apparent obviousness of the notion that space is queer because queers go there, and queers go there because that space is queer.

The construction of queer spaces that are **intended** as queer spaces is more simply explained. Gay business owners certainly have the option of choosing a queer market as a target market. Although success is never a guarantee, use of queer advertising, displaying queer signifiers, and the old faithful word-of-mouth technique will certainly help the queer proprietor to create a queer space. As several of my respondents pointed out, there is a tendency among any community to support the business owners who treat their clients well and appreciate their business. This is certainly true of queer communities. But the most interesting queer spaces are those which are appropriated -- the “natural” or “neutral” places that are consciously queered. According to Michel de Certeau’s argument, anyone can make a place their own, simply by “practicing it.” As he describes it, “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (de Certeau 117). A city park, then, becomes a queer space when gay

men choose and use it as a cruising area. The editors of Queers in Space suggest that the process is a response -- conscious or unconscious -- to notions of mainstream and heteronormativity.

Just as queer identities are constructed within the context of heteronormativity, queer places have been forged within spaces not originally intended for gay use. Identifying a place as queer is a deliberate action parallel to "coming out." Although certain sites have been the focus of gay activities for many years, the nature of these queer places changes, just as identities and modes of contact do. Without a conscious effort to constantly reinvent the queerness of such places, heteronormative forces in society often overwhelm and push out networks of sexual minorities. (Ingram et al 295)

These spaces "not originally intended" for queer use are made queer quite on purpose. By day, the parking lot of the Calgary Zoo shows no signs of queerness -- except to the practiced eye, or to the person who is aware of the nighttime activities which it hosts. Even more interestingly, the Victoria Park Community Center, the site for the monthly ARGRA dances, is, by Ingram's definition, "outed" on those periodic Saturday nights. This claiming of territory by Calgary's queer communities is evidence of de Certeau's assertions about cultural practice -- through activity, "place" becomes "space."

Michel de Certeau's explanation of space-making has its limits, however. If we followed through on his suggestion that, theoretically, a street can be owned simply by walking it, it would seem that all Calgary's queers need to do in order to cultivate more queer space is choose it and use it. This suggestion undermines the political and social realities of this city -- of any city, for that matter. Inevitably, there are individuals and groups within a particular society who do not want to see expansion of space for queer communities.

Those people will challenge the queering of city spaces. Rarely is a place only practiced by one person, even by one group of people. And when opposing forces contest the same space, in reality, the majority often wins. As Ren pointed out in her interview, she's been very careful to keep Rook's a low profile establishment. She does not want to see the residents of the neighbourhood try and close the place down, or change the clientele. The reality of social and political inequality in this city places limits on the growth and development of queer communities, and in turn, queer spaces. So, while de Certeau's explanation of "space as practiced place" holds true to certain extents, it would be a dangerous claim to extend it to suggest that queers have limited space simply because they are not trying hard enough.

What Queer Space Offers:

Looking at how and why space becomes queer leads naturally into looking at what queer space provides for its clientele. Maxine Wolfe (1997), in her study of lesbian bars of the 1950s, provides an explanation of what queer spaces offer -- an explanation that, according to the responses from my participants, still holds true. She describes lesbian bars as places of comfort and reprieve for sexual minorities.

In a world where most of us cannot openly exist, lesbian bars provide a momentary safe separate place to meet other lesbians. They can be the place where people thrown out of their families can create a new support network or where lesbians can do things they might get hassled for somewhere else, such as playing pool or dancing with other women. Yet they are not really private in the sense of autonomy, or of controlling the

environment, or for many, of choosing them over some other place where we can be “out.” (Wolfe 319)

These words are certainly echoed by my participants, when asked what, for them, constituted queer space. Concepts like safety and support and comfort form the basis for choosing a queer social space, I heard again and again. But, as Wolfe points out, those spaces are not entirely “private” or “owned.” In a city the size of Calgary, where queer spaces are not a booming business, most queer people do not have a whole lot of options in terms of choosing their space. The spaces we frequent do tend to meet our needs in terms of being safe, comfortable, and supportive, but the lack of options make the limitations of safety and comfort glaringly obvious.

Similarly, the concerns of queer business owners, with regards to their responsibilities to their clients, have changed little since the 1950s. Wolfe describes the way that lesbian spaces looked, and the structure they needed to take, in the fifties, but her description could certainly hold true today.

To insure continued patronage and to protect their premises (or if lesbian-owned, their users) from men passing by who might break the windows, or who come in to beat up women or assert their male prerogatives to go anywhere they want, most lesbian bars have no windows, or cover up their windows. The lights are generally very dim to protect their users from recognition should unwanted people enter purposefully or unknowingly. Lesbian bars generally don't have signs or names or other distinguishing outside physical features that might give them away to nonlesbian citizens. Even today, generally the dance floors or even the entire bar are not visually accessible from the front entrance. (Wolfe 318)

Wolfe's words sound remarkably similar to those of Renee, the owner of Rook's Bar and Beanery. There are no windows in this space, the sign gives no indication of the bar's

clientele, there are no obvious queer signifiers, and the dance floor is well away from the door -- in the basement of the building.

The Importance of Queer Space:

So, what's the point? The interviews and the literature have pointed to numerous ways in which queer space is constructed, as well as what the space looks like, and what it offers to its patrons. But why is queer space so important? Why is it necessary to bring sexuality out of the home and into the bar or the restaurant or the park? Why do we insist on blurring the lines of private and public, place and space, personal and political? The editors of Queers in Space offer a suggestion.

Most public space offers little representation of queer experience and imagery. Billboards, statues, memorials, and outdoor art depicting aspects of our lives are scant -- even in those neighbourhoods with large gay communities. Most queer sites, especially those inhabited by racial and cultural minorities, are virtually invisible, and only informed members of those communities know how to find them. This can lead to a sense of cumulative discouragement about claiming outdoor space as queer territory. (Ingram et al 92)

Perhaps it is a desire to challenge the political or aesthetic status quo. Or maybe, it is an interest in forcing people to reconsider the solidity or unity of their own sexual identity. Most likely, it is a combination. But above all, the presence and visibility of queer space challenges popular notions of equality -- legal, civic, and spatial.

In Calgary, all of those equalities are at risk. Alberta was the last of the ten Canadian provinces to introduce legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation -- and that was done under virtual duress from the federal government and the Supreme Court. The province does not recognize common-law partnerships between same-sex couples. No civil servants are entitled to same-sex health or pension benefits. In the eyes of the law and the government, heterosexual unions are the only ones which are recognized. So for Calgary's queers, although on paper, at the most basic level of human rights, there may be legal equality, that equality is not recognized. Its benefits are not reaped. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have their rights threatened on a daily basis.

And the fight for civil rights demands a publicity of self that heterosexual citizens are never asked or expected to display. As Cindy Patton (1993) suggests in her essay entitled "Tremble, Hetero Swine!", the quest for civil equality requires a commitment to "coming out."

If agents in possession of gay identities make demands for minority status within the political sphere, this is not because acquisition of gay identity strips away ideology and allows a homosexual body to realize its desire for civil rights that are simply waiting around for the asking. Rather, the demand for civil rights is an intrinsic effect of coming-out rhetoric, altering both the meaning of civil rights and the meaning of homoerotic practices. Coming-out rhetoric, in effect, articulates gay identity to civil rights practices, articulates homoerotic practices to the political concept of minority. The person who takes up a post-Stonewall gay identity feels compelled to act in a way that will constitute her or himself as a subject appropriate to civil rights discourse, and thus, deserving of the status accruing to successful claims to minority status. In the process of queer enunciation, the meaning of civil rights, indeed, the capacity to hold apart the political and social, the public and private, have been radically altered. (Patton 173)

The performance of queerness is an unfortunate necessity in the struggle for equality. Queers are forced to prove their status as minorities before they can prove their need for equal rights. We must de-normalize our “lifestyles” in an effort to secure the rights and privileges of a “normal” life. Declaring oneself in such a manner reminds everyone involved of the inequalities associated with queer identity.

Queers in Calgary are also made constantly aware of their spatial inequalities. The queer spaces in this city are few and far between, and their existence -- as crucial as it may be -- is a persistent reminder that there is no spatial equality when it comes to sexual orientation. Queer spaces offer safety for social and sexual expression and interaction, but as we walk out of the doors of these spaces, the freedom and safety disappear. Queer spaces are simultaneously liberating and limiting. They create a two-tiered world in which our sexuality can only be displayed in marked and signified spaces. If, indeed, queers make up 10% of the population, why are we limited to such a minuscule percentage of the space?

The New Queer Landscape?

Without a doubt, the socially, politically, and morally conservative atmosphere in Alberta has affected the construction and representation of queer space. At the same time, it would be irresponsible to dismiss the future growth or strengthening of queer space simply because the city’s or province’s politics provide a challenge. As well, it is

necessary to give the queer landscape of Calgary a closer look, considering some of the emerging theoretical currents concerning queer space. As a reminder, Ingram suggested that queer community and queer space is changing significantly with the turn of the next century.

In the 1990s, the ghetobusting of queer nationalism and the rapid globalization of real estate markets have transformed queer space, pushing it beyond the bounds of the ghetto and inspiring new linkages within and among communities... In the fragments of queer-friendly public spaces available today, a basis for survival, contact, communality, and sometimes even community has begun. (Ingram 3)

These words were quite apt as a description of Calgary. They also gave me a new lens through which to view Calgary's queer spaces. I was aware that in some senses, Calgary is an anomaly. Our queer spaces are not centrally located in one distinct neighbourhood. There is no gay ghetto. I had considered Calgary to be backwards or behind the times in this sense -- but perhaps not. If, as Ingram suggests, the "new" queer nationalism is about "ghetto-busting," perhaps Calgary is ahead of its time. Calgary's queer community, particularly with regards to its spaces, can certainly be described as "fragmented." Perhaps such fragmentation will define the queer landscapes of the 21st century.

Ingram et al are not the only ones who think so. In a recent issue of Outlooks, there appeared an interview with Glen Murray. Six months ago, Mr. Murray was elected Mayor of Winnipeg, making him, according to the article's author, the first openly-gay mayor in the world (April 1999: 6). When asked about the state of gay communities on the Prairies, Mr. Murray provided a thoughtful -- and thought-provoking -- response.

I think that places like Winnipeg and Calgary are probably the first two post-urban ghetto centers for gay and lesbian cultures. We don't live in isolation like people can in gay "meccas" like Toronto or Vancouver, we're part of the larger community and we're more integrated. More and more young people are staying in places like Winnipeg and Calgary because of this. We are not "ghettoized" -- our bars and businesses are interspersed here throughout the city. I think a lot of gay and lesbian people early on ran to the ghettos of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, because they didn't think the world was ever going to catch up, that they wouldn't ever actually be accepted. But this is starting to change. People in places like Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Regina, et cetera, have *had* to build stronger communities outside of the ghettos. I think there is a greater sense of inclusion within smaller gay communities because we can't segregate ourselves, we have to be strong in a fragmented way. And I also think that there is a great sense of humanity about people on the prairies -- we have had to work together in isolation from large centers. (April 1999: 7)

The size and visibility of Calgary's queer communities and spaces have long been criticized and lamented. Glen Murray's words put a new spin on the construction of queer space on the prairies. This heralding of fragmentation, in conjunction with theories of "'90's ghetto-busting," provides new ways in which to view Calgary's queer space.

On the Method:

As with any research, it is necessary to reflect upon what it means to use the particular method chosen for ethnography specifically. One must ask the questions that are paramount when it comes to research with human subjects. What did this method give me access to? What did it inhibit? What are the particular potentialities and difficulties with the research that I completed? The interview process was simultaneously richly

rewarding and incredibly frustrating. No research method is flawless -- was my approach the best option?

First, I look to the snowball sample that gave me my population. When I began my research, I recognized that it would not be easy to advertise my research and expect complete strangers to call me and volunteer to discuss their experience with queer space in this city. I expected that trust and apathy on the part of people who had nothing to gain from my work would prohibit a strong response rate if I had chosen such a method. I decided to put the word out among people that I knew, who, in turn, put me in touch with people that I had never met. I ended up interviewing a cross-section of individuals who had been sent to me by mutual acquaintances, which certainly fostered a quicker sense of confidence for them, both in me and the work that I was doing. The fact that someone **they** knew trusted me enough to recommend that they participate in my research helped me to much more easily overcome the most obvious barriers of trust that are inherent in such sensitive and personal subject matter.

On the other hand, my method of choosing participants left me with an expectedly homogeneous group. All of my participants were white, middle-class, and employed, and most had post-secondary education of some sort. None were originally from Calgary, and none were over the age of 40. This lack of diversity **may** be representative of the queer population in Calgary. It is **certainly** representative of the circle of contacts in which I operate. I have no doubt that my own race, class, and background contributed to the

population of individuals who were attracted to my research. So while my selection process certainly made my research easier and more accessible, it also limited the population to whom I had access.

With regards to the research method itself, I feel confident that the in-depth interview format -- which Jankowski and Wester (1991) refer to as “frequently employed as an element of an open research strategy” in ethnography -- made the most sense, and turned out to be the most valuable (53). Granted, I was only able to interview 8 people. But it had never been my intention to interview a broad sample, or to complete this thesis with any grand statements on the state of queer space in Calgary. By working with such a small number of individuals, I was able to devote more time to each interview. Most sessions with participants lasted approximately 60 minutes. Such long and detailed interviews would not have been possible with a much larger sample.

The length of the interview also gave me access to more information than I would have gotten if the interviews had been limited in time. I was able to indulge my participants -- give them chances to tell their own “coming-out” stories -- which might not have been specifically “useful” to my initial research intentions, but turned out to be immeasurably significant. The shift from tales of space to tales of personal narrative is quite in keeping with the theory which emphasizes practice above place in the construction of space. As well, the sometimes tangential -- but again, often crucial -- telling of stories certainly raised the level of trust to the point where open and honest discussions about my

particular research questions became possible. These were certainly advantages of the in-depth interview process.

The particulars of that method were both beneficial and limiting. I chose to construct the interview with all open-ended questions, and to provide very marginal prodding and directing of responses. While this allowed me to get full and honest responses from my participants, it also prohibited me from getting some of the information I was looking for. For example, I was quite surprised -- and disappointed, to a degree -- with the lack of detail that my respondents provided about the physical structures of Calgary's queer spaces. I had hoped that their answers would be rich with detail about space -- the particulars of colour, and decor, and lighting, and physical objects -- that each space offered. But within two interviews, I discovered that this was not going to be the case. People's understanding of "space" was different than I had expected. Their responses focused on clientele, and atmosphere, and comfort levels. No one told me about the photos on the wall at the Backlot, or the location of the pool tables at Rooks. No one mentioned the physical layout of Goliath's, or the lighting at the ARGRA dances. People prioritized their perceptions of the spaces -- the way that they organized meaning in a question of space.

And while this direction of response was frustrating at times, it was also very illuminating, and very much in keeping with the postmodern nature of constructing queer space. People of sexual minorities are concerned about having and owning spaces that

are safe, discreet, and accessible. And they are concerned about the ways in which as communities, and as individuals, they make that happen. The details that I expected -- about proximity of tables to the door of a bar, lighting at a gay and lesbian dance, privacy of booths at a queer-friendly restaurant -- these details were not provided for me. This prioritization of responses doesn't suggest that my participants never think about such elements being present in their space, but it does confirm that physical details take a backseat to creation of and engagement with those spaces.

Academic Activism and Future Research Directions:

Queer landscapes are changing. Queer spaces are significant, but differently so.

Research is heading in a variety of different directions. The importance of activism is clear. As the editors of Queers in Space suggest, queer activism in the late '90s is timely, significant, and shifting in form.

Sexual minorities have often attempted to transform landscapes to create spaces for self-protection, for pleasure, and for building home and refuges for healing. In recent decades this movement has increased in momentum because of greater mobility in populations and more communication links. Queer activism in politics, public space, and art is increasing at a time of conflict concerning 'participation' in design for public space. Queer tactics can extend from creating an ephemeral presence, such as lesbian and gay parades, to concretizing queer interpretations of events, such as AIDS memorial sites. New levels of coordination and planning will be needed to implement reforms in policies and laws to lessen homophobic and economic constraints on the use of designed and natural open space. The needs and interests of specific groups must be analyzed to effect greater social inclusion. (Ingram et al 454)

But activism is not limited to marching in parades, circulating petitions, and lobbying government officials. Academic activism, through queer research and writing, is equally important. I feel that this research has given me many opportunities, and in turn, has left me with many responsibilities.

The participants in my research have invited me into their lives and shown me their spaces. They have indulged my questions, and provided thoughtful and informative responses. They have, in essence, shown me a slice of queer life in Calgary, and opened the doors to the places which they call their own. They have answered my call for attention, and in turn, it is my place to answer their call to action.

Calgary is a city of size and significance on corporate, social, political, and cultural levels. In the rapid pace of the city's development, it is imperative that **all** communities pull weight and exhibit influence over city planning and spatial development decisions. A commitment to the development and nurturing of exclusively queer spaces may appear counter-productive in terms of integration and normalization. But such processes will be impossible without nurturing queer communities. And as the theory -- and the results of the interviews -- suggest, communities are concretely tied to their spaces, their places, and their geography. Queers need the comfort and solidity of owned spaces in order to expand their influence and to challenge homophobia, heterocentrism, and heteronormativity. The practicing of place -- the ownership of space -- facilitates this

battle. Adrienne Rich says that “a place on the map is also a place in history” (Rich 212).

To queer the history of Calgary and Alberta, we need a place on the map.

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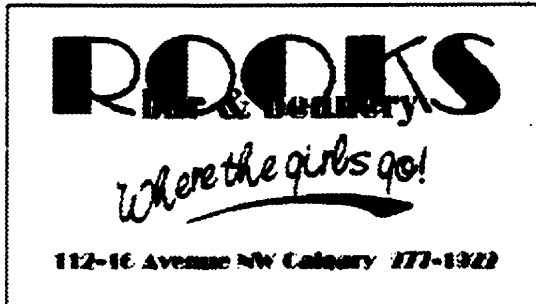


Figure 1

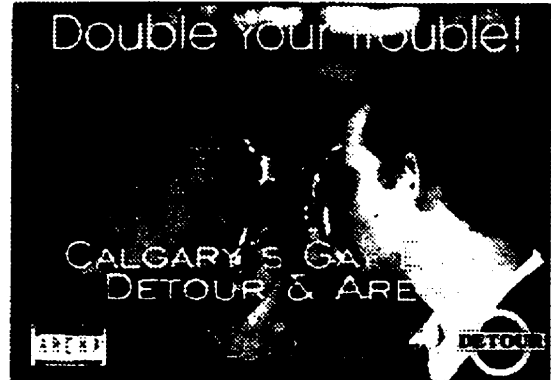


Figure 2

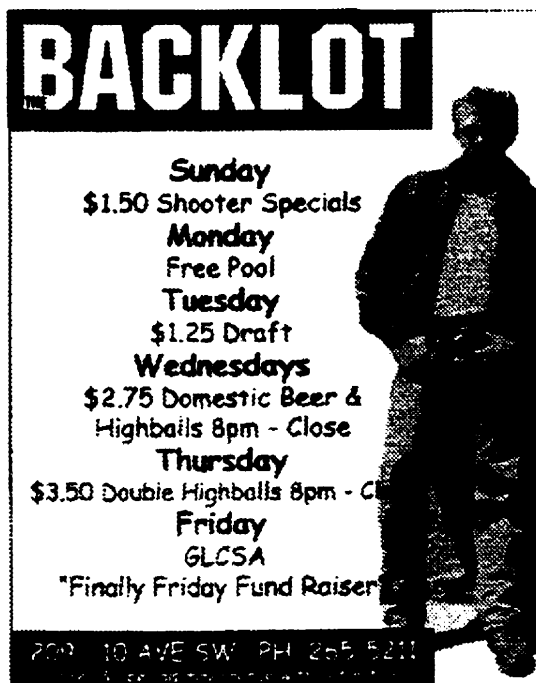


Figure 3



Figure 4

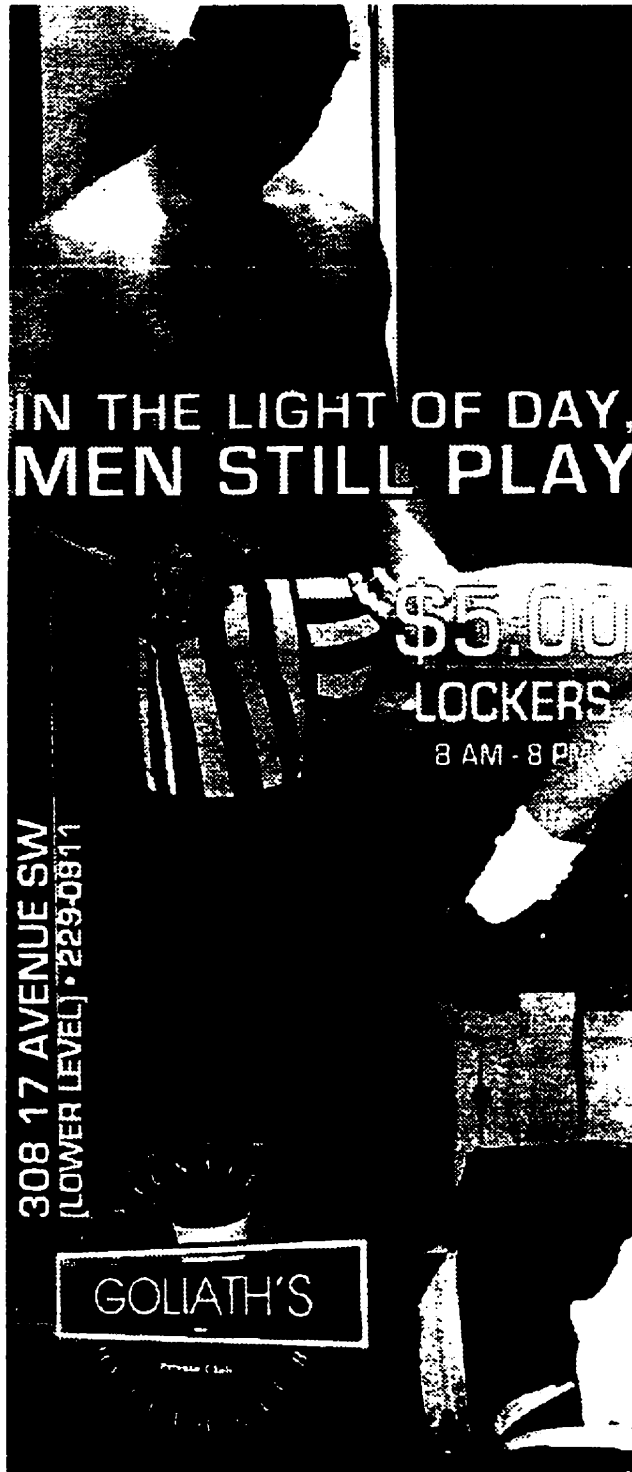


Figure 6

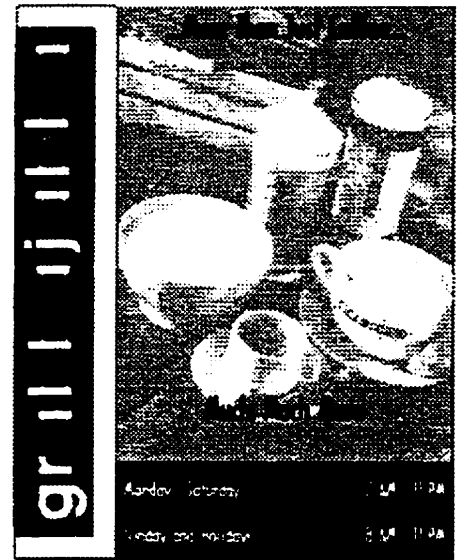


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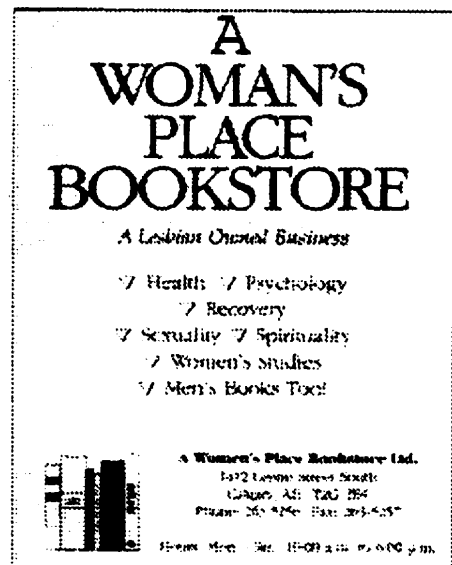


Figure 7



Howdy & Welcome to Our Web Site!

Here, you can learn a little bit about our organization, what's happening at ARGRA, and enjoy a little taste of Western Canadian hospitality.

Why would Gays, Lesbian, and Bisexuals form a rodeo association? Heck, probably for the same reasons straights do. We enjoy the Western lifestyle, and sharing it with others. We also relish the challenge, and camaraderie that comes from putting together Rodeos, Dances, and other Country and Western events. We get our biggest kick, however, out of having fun, meeting new friends, and working together, all for the betterment of our community!

Before you surf off to other parts of the net, we just wanted to remind you of this rodeo lesson, that is applicable to all parts of life:

*Even after a bronco's thrown you, and you're sitting, stunned in the dust.
Pick yourself up. Brush off your britches. It's back to the chores, you must.
Pretend not to feel that bruise on your butt, or that ankle, twisted, just a trace.
Instead, wave your hat at the crowd, take a small bow, all with a big smiling face.*

The Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association is an non-profit group registered under the Societies Act in the province of Alberta, Canada. We eventually hope to become a registered charity

While the primary audience of this Web site is those who are interested in learning about our organisation, and Gay Rodeo in general, all are welcome here. This site is rated "G", and contains no adult oriented material.

Figure 8

Bearback Calgary ON THE WEB

A Social Club for Bears, Cubs & their Admirers



WHAT IS A BEAR?

THEIR DEFINITION:

Bear /bâr/, n. A mammal belonging to the genus *Ursus* or an animal belonging to a certain allied genera. [fig.] A rough, unmannered man.

OUR DEFINITION:

Bear /bâr/, n. [fig.] A furry, huggable, gay man. Found in all shapes, sizes, and varieties. Usually summoned with the words, "WOOF!" or "Grrrr!"

ABOUT

Bearback Calgary /bâr-bak Cal-gâr-ee/ n. **Bearback Calgary** is a predominantly gay male organization for bears, cubs, and their admirers. The group is non-judgmental and does not participate in political activities. What does this really mean? It means that there are no standards you must meet, except wanting to have fun. Being comfortable with one's masculinity is of great importance to this group. Honesty, integrity, and just plain feelin' good about one's self are our goals.

In even plainer English...it doesn't matter what you look like. Bearback Calgary isn't looking for members that fit only a specific body type. Be you a bear or a non-bear, all are welcome! So watcha waitin' for?

We plan many varied activities for our members, ranging from bar nights, dinners, bowling, coffee, camping, just to name a few. Our aim is to provide something that hopefully encourages new members to join, as well as providing a forum to socialize.

Every two months, **Bearback Calgary** produces our club newsletter, the *Kermode Gazette*, which details some of the varied activities we participate in. We also publish a monthly Calendar of Events to encourage members and newcomers alike to join in the fun.

Figure 9



Who Are We?

The Buck Naked Boys are guys who enjoy sharing a *common bond*. We like to spend our time in the company of other *men* in our *most natural* attire. We like to participate in various activities, soaking up the sun, playing volleyball, having Bar-B-Ques, etc.- *in the nude*, and in the process, establish solid, time-tested friendships.

We're a relatively new Club, founded in August of 1995, and already we have established a great core group of enthusiastic individuals. Our membership is expanding at a healthy pace so we can continue to offer exciting alternatives to our busy lifestyles and we try to offer our members a variety of activities both indoors and out.

In November of 1996, the Buck Naked Boys Club of Edmonton was formed. With already a handful of members attending the Calgary meets, we wish them much success and hope that their club will thrive as is the Calgary Club. If you want to contact them to find out what events they have planned or to join them please [click here](#).

Figure 9

APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Name
- Age
- Profession
- Where are you from?
- How long have you been in Calgary?
- Why did you come here?
- Did you have any preconceived notions about queer community in Calgary?
- How did you find out about queer community in Calgary?

- What are Calgary's queer spaces?
- How did you find out about them?
- How are they marked as exclusively (or primarily) queer spaces?
- What is appealing about them?
- What do you see that could improve the spaces?
- How accessible/available are they to you and to other people you know?
- Do the spaces seem to cater to a particular class or sub-group of queers? (Race, class, gender, income, transportation)
- How are the spaces advertised/communicated to people?
- Is there any way for an individual to know, just by walking outside the establishment, that it is a queer space?
- Whose responsibility is it to create/maintain/make available the spaces?
- How have Calgary's queers sought out/identified/created safe spaces for social and sexual self-expression in a city which is commonly recognized as socially, politically, and morally conservative? What role do a city's politics play in the creation of queer space?

- What constitutes queer space/place for you? What does such a space need to offer you?
- How important is queer space to you? How concretely is a culture tied to its spaces?
- How do you feel about gay ghettos (ex: castro, church)? Do you feel that exclusively gay neighbourhoods/housing areas/shopping districts are liberating or confining? Should Calgary have something like this?