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Age and male sexuality: 'queer space' in the Roman bath-house?

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Scholars have conceived of the life-course stages of the boy and adult male by way of a typically dichotomous construction of active/passive male sexuality. This binary scheme, presented uncritically in much modern scholarship, dictates that boys assumed the passive rôle in male-to-male sex until roughly the age of 18-20 or the occasion of their first shave, while adults took the active rôle. This view implies that male sexual relations were pederastic and could be viewed as part of a rudimentary sexual development of a boy to a man, from passive to active, provided he was of free status. Conversely, men who behaved as boys (i.e., were passive) were regarded as 'abnormal', and men who slept with free boys were regarded as criminal.

I wish to suggest that the current model, in which *adulescentes* and *iuvenes* (at roughly the ages of 17-25) followed these proscribed rules according to their age, is too simplistic and does not succeed in encapsulating or explaining a young man's development, in terms of both sexual and personal identity, prior to marriage. The emphasis within the modern literature on a 'power play' dynamic, in which one person is active and the other passive, denies the possibilities of the existence of male intimacy, rôle reversal, or reciprocal sex amongst this age group. The existence of boys and/or men who did not conform to these active/passive rôles needs to be investigated, rather than to remain absent from the modern literature. Free boys and their sexual development or learning of sexual rôles is a particularly relevant area of study for the understanding of the life course. This paper will focus particularly on modern scholarship's misrepresentation of sexuality between males with regard to the stage from boy to man.¹ Male sexuality at Rome continues to be presented by scholars with reference to texts, written by a male élite, that lampoon men whose sexuality did not follow accepted practices. From M. Foucault onwards, this has caused them to understate or avoid creating alternatives to a perceived 'normative' definition of male sexual practices, including the possibility of a queer reading.

The first steps towards a deconstruction of the assumed patterns of sexuality at Rome have been taken by A. Richelin and R. Taylor who have shown, through a nuanced examination of the texts, that subcultures of passive males did exist, that the assumed rôles according to age and sexuality were subverted, and that numerous references to couples comprising adult and free boy exist.² Taylor goes further in suggesting that there were specific places for subversive behavior, such as the public bath-house where 'cruising', passive male sex, and rôle reversal could take place anonymously with patrons or prostitutes.³ Such a locale where normative views of age and male-to-male sex are transgressed becomes a 'queer space'.

I will explore the idea of a 'queer space' through an analysis of one type of locale, the Roman bath-house. While bath-houses were not exclusive or primary venues of queer space, these buildings merit investigation in that they contained not only physical but also social and sexual spaces, or 'architectures of desire'. I will employ the bath-gymnasium at Sardis, a prime example of an urban monumental bath of a type common in W Asia Minor. Well-excavated, meticulously planned and restored, it allows its architecture to be brought to life beyond the physical or monumental. Yet reconstructing queer social and sexual space out of the empty shell

1 A second area that remains neglected is an understanding of the sexuality of slaves and relationships between slaves.

2 A. Richelin, "Not before homosexuality: the materiality of the *cinaedus* and the Roman law against love between men," *J. Hist. Sexuality* 3.4 (1993) 523-73; R. Taylor, "Two pathic subcultures in ancient Rome," *J. Hist. Sexuality* 7.3 (1997) 319-71.

3 Taylor *ibid*.

of a building is a difficult exercise. Contemporary scholarship often fails to move beyond the technical aspects of these buildings. Queer approaches to archaeology, on the other hand, presuppose that the “juxtaposition of unrelated fields or unlikely bedfellows can often help thinking about new problems, or approaching problems in new ways”.⁴ In order to explore this idea further, I have taken the model of a modern gay bath-house, a contemporary paradigm of queered sexual space whose bathing culture can be taken as a model for social and spatial behavior. I am certainly not suggesting the ancient and modern bath-house functioned in similar ways, only that we can use the modern example to begin to imagine the possibilities for an ancient case-study. Beginning with an examination of male-to-male sexual relations, with particular attention paid to the age of the males involved, I will examine the rôle of queered, gendered, and sensory spaces within the Roman bath-house by juxtaposing the architecture of Steamworks, a modern gay bath in Chicago, with the complex at ancient Sardis. I wish to suggest that the bath-house created a progression of public to private gendered space that allowed, and perhaps even fostered, a space where boys, youths, and adult men could interact sexually, regardless of age, sexual position or status. This approach allows for an evaluation of whether the Roman bath-house was a queer space, in which the ‘architecture of desire’ might overcome the norms of age-related sexual behaviour.

Frameworks

Spatial erotics

Madam: my little book, so far, /in its entirety/up to this point, has been for you;/from now on, it's for me. /The gym, the locker-room, the baths/are next; you'd better skip/this part and go away, my dear, /The men are going to strip ...
Mart., *Epig.* 3.68⁵

In these lines the satirist Martial demarcates clear divisions of space in the bath-house while observing a fundamental dichotomy in how these ubiquitous structures were understood. Martial, who frequently injects same-sex eroticism into his poetry, describes the bath-house's spatial erotics. He makes very little pretence about his own indulgence in same-sex behavior. He is not warning the woman away from the baths because it is gendered space *per se* but rather a sexual space that is, for him, queered and so off-limits on the grounds of desire: “from now on, it's for me.”

The bath-gymnasium is not merely a physical setting with a hygienic function, arranged along a gendered binary scheme, but a sexual environment whose space is constructed out of the building blocks of desire and attraction. These ‘architectures of desire’, operating within an existing physical framework, create a sexualized use of a public space, ‘queering’ it. On the one hand, baths are public buildings whose physical and social architecture dictates the use of space; on the other, the expression of erotic desires by individuals or groups can create added social and sexual boundaries within the building.

Was the Roman bath-house a ‘queer’ space? The word ‘queer’, when applied to a pre-modern society, is problematic and can be anachronistic: it is largely a modern ideological construct that fixes a group of people and sexual practices as ‘other’ — as non-hetero-normative. In Roman and Greek thinking, this notion did not exist; instead, there was an implied “non-Roman-normative” (those who subverted traditional active/passive, age, sex, and class rôles). I will suggest that an interpretation of certain Roman spaces as ‘queered’ should not be seen as problematic or anachronistic.

In a modern definition, ‘queer’ has become a signifier of anyone who engages, whether in thought or action, in non-normative desire or sex. Thus, a queered space is an inferred area superimposed over a physical space co-opted for this purpose. Sexual desires and activities

4 G. Rubin, “Sites, settlements, and urban sex: archaeology and the study of gay leathermen in San Francisco, 1955-1995,” in R. A. Schmidt and B. L. Voss (edd.), *Archaeologies of sexuality* (New York 2000) 80.

5 Transl. D. Wender, in J. P. Sullivan and P. Whigham (edd.), *Epigrams of Martial englished by divers hands* (Berkeley, CA 1987).

occur there with some regularity and are understood as embodying the nature of the space. According to J. Ricco and A. Betsky, queer spaces are ephemeral spaces created by sexual experience; they are invisible to those who do not participate:

If architecture sublimates, queer space expresses. If the interiors within most architectural structures accommodate, queer space seduces.⁶

Queer space also creates an environment where non-normative sex and desire is not only accepted but fostered.⁷ Queer space in the bath-house (ancient or modern) is not to be found between the heavy black wall lines of an architectural plan: it is a metaphysical, imperceptible, and ephemeral plane that is given meaning and substance by the *use* of space. It is visible only to those who share in its communal experience and knowledge. As a socio-cultural ‘interstitial moment’, its palpability is comprised of individual expressions of desire, attraction, and sex. These spatial erotics which combine and resonate within the established space are powerful enough to redefine it as architecture of desire.⁸

If the elucidation of this invisible transient space is achieved only through recognition of and participation in its erotic manifestations, then its investigation will require a certain degree of imagination and sensory sensitivity beyond the visual. As K. Croucher says, a sensory analysis and interpretation of the past, through not just the eyes of the actor and archaeologist but through the ears, nose, mouth, and hands, is in itself a queer archaeology, one that departs from traditional archaeological and art-historical ways of privileging seeing.⁹ The ways and means of deciphering an archaeology of queer space become a heuristic device, which departs from the norms of the discipline and, for a brief moment, allows the past to resurface and be ‘felt’; the scholar (who is located in the present) enters an artificial and self-reflective milieu, which is in itself a queer space. Upon entering the bath-house, the search for queer space was a journey of sensory progression provoked by a combination of the physical space and the expressions of those who communally understood it to be a place for desire and sex.

Subversive identities

Who were the individuals or groups who created these ‘queer spaces’ by subverting normative Roman sexual practice and desire? In Roman society, sex and relationships were strongly linked with age, the life-course, and class. I will focus on the life course of the male and on male-to-male sexuality. Most scholarship on Roman sexual practices espouses a singular view of male-to-male sex and age.¹⁰ It sees same-sex relations as acceptable in Roman society, co-existing quite happily alongside opposite-sex or marital relationships. It was not the act itself but the actors that could incur social taboo. Emphasis was placed on whether one was the active (*vir*) or passive (*cinaedus/pathicus*) partner, social acceptance resting with the former. These rôles were further complicated and governed by social status and power differences. Many relationships involved older men and younger boys at ‘the flower of youth’, roughly between the ages of 12 (puberty) and 20 (the ceremony of shaving).¹¹

6 Quote by A. Betsky, *Queer space: architecture and same-sex desire* (New York 1997) 20; see also J. P. Ricco, *The logic of the lure* (Chicago 2002).

7 The supposition that space is queered because of degrees of intimacy is difficult to support; it is created by an emotional milieu informed by modern hetero-normative thinking. Desire and attraction are plausible within public space: L. Berlant and M. Warner, “Sex in public,” in L. Berlant (ed.), *Intimacy* (Chicago 2000) 319-26.

8 Ricco (supra n.6) 6-7.

9 K. Croucher, “Dying for a change: a discussion of mortuary remains from the Neolithic ancient Near East,” in *Que(e)rying archaeology. The proceedings of the 37th Annual Chacmool Conference* (Calgary forthcoming).

10 I will not include discussion of the primary sources and the ongoing debate in scholarship over Roman male sexuality. For a synopsis, see Taylor (supra n.2) 319-23 and T. K. Hubbard, “Introduction,” in id. (ed.), *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: a sourcebook of basic documents* (London 2003) 1-20. See also supra n.2.

11 Richelin (supra n.2) 533.

The literature on man-to-boy pederastic relations implies that boys (free or slaves) underwent a rite of passage in their sexual development from being the object of older male affection, physically and emotionally, to assuming, later on, the adult rôle with younger boys. This development follows clear trajectories and hides the potential for more complex sexualities. The stages between boyhood and manhood vacillate between different chronological ages.¹² Boys ceased being children and took on sexual potential at the age of puberty, or at around 12-13 years. At this stage they were frequently passive sexual partners (*pueri*) and continued to wear the *bullā* as well as the *toga praetexta*, marked with a purple stripe. At 17, a boy often shed his boyhood garments and took up the *toga virilis*, although the age at which this occurred was chosen by his father or guardian. The ceremony of shaving was another marker of the transition to adulthood; it often occurred in the early 20s, when the boy could grow a full beard. Prior to that, beards were not shaved, so the stages of a beard's growth were visible as signs of early or late adolescence.¹³ Marriage often did not come for young men until roughly the age of 25. This created a gap or phase in which the boy was identified as *iuvenis* or *adulescens*.

Some sources suggest that this stage occupied a longer span between the ages of 20 to 40.¹⁴ It could be a dangerous and reckless period, "that time of life that is suggestive of its own accord and, moreover, vulnerable to the lust of others".¹⁵ It was also a transitional period where boys would begin to assume the active rôle in sex, but this moment of simultaneously being an older boy and a young man reflects a sexual ambiguity that coincides with the peak of sexual drive.

To provide an outlet for their sexual energies and the opportunity to develop sexually, youths were often encouraged to go to brothels or bath-houses. M. Harlow and R. Laurence suggest that baths were similar to brothels, places where youths could venture unchaperoned. As places where youths and men commingled nude without obvious age-markers, baths were the scene of voyeuristic activity and desire.¹⁶ An even earlier age may be suggested for such activities since boys over the age of 14 might not bathe with their fathers.¹⁷ This was presumably because boys over 14 were no longer seen as children but considered sufficiently developed biologically to be sexually active, and were even encouraged to be so at places like baths. Social improprieties of this kind were still alive in late antiquity when Augustine expressed anxiety that his father saw his erection at the age of 16 while they were at the public baths.¹⁸

To protect free boys at this stage of life, we hear of the *Lex Scantinia* (only vaguely understood) which mandated that free citizens could lawfully engage in male sex only with slaves or prostitutes.¹⁹ Some scholars have interpreted it to mean that men and free boys never had sex.²⁰ The status of boys was ambiguous in these readings.

12 M. Harlow and R. Laurence, *Growing up and growing old in ancient Rome: a life course approach* (New York 2002) 65.

13 Ibid. 72-74 for further discussion on male shaving and hair with regard to age. Exceptions to men appearing deliberately unshaven did occur (see below); Octavian remained clean-shaven into adulthood.

14 Richelin (supra n.2) 548.

15 Cic., *Cael.* 10 (transl. M. Skinner, in J. P. Hallett and Skinner (edd.), *Roman sexualities* (Princeton 1997) 136, n.11.

16 Harlow and Laurence (supra n.12) 73-74.

17 Cic., *Orat.* 2.224, and *Off.* 1.129.

18 Aug., *Conf.* 2.3.

19 Male prostitutes (usually lower-class men, foreigners or slaves) were sanctioned by emperors and fetched a high price. Male prostitutes could be found in mixed or same-sex brothels and bath-houses. Castrated boys (*ektomias*) from all over the empire were also desirable. Sardis was particularly known for its pretty castrated boys: F. Malik, "Born eunuchs: homosexual identity in the ancient world," (1999), <http://www.well.com/user/aquarius/section4.htm> (viewed Dec. 27, 2004).

20 See, e.g., D. F. Greenberg, *The construction of homosexuality* (Chicago 1988) 120-22; J. Walters, "Invading the Roman body: manliness and impenetrability in Roman thought," in Hallett and Skinner (supra n.15) 34; E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the ancient world* (New Haven. CT 1992) 100.

Older paramours often courted free boys, as seen in the relationships of Catullus and Juventius,²¹ or Cicero and his freed slave Tiro.²² In these cases, the ages of the older and younger men need to be clarified. When writing of Juventius, Catullus was probably roughly 27 years of age, while Juventius was a boy somewhere between 12 and 17 years.²³ Tiro's exact age is not known, but around the time he was manumitted Cicero refers to him as an *adulescens*, suggesting he was in his 20s when Cicero was 52.²⁴ Satire sometimes reveals the best truths: in the *Satyricon*, Eumolpus visits his friend in Pergamon and attempts to seduce his friend's son in the baths; the free boy, however, uses his youthful appeal as a weapon and manipulates the guest into giving him material possessions and sex, threatening to tell his father if he does not get his way. Although he plays the passive rôle in sex, his seductions and voracious stamina reveal a more nuanced age/sex/class dynamic that shatters male-to-male sexual taboos — a free boy at the height of his sexual peak who seduces a free man and enjoys being passive, yet is active in the sense that he manipulates the man into sex:

I enjoyed his favors and then slipped off into postcoital slumber. But the boy was ripe for pleasure — at that age, they're insatiable — and he wasn't satisfied with a mere repetition. So he woke me up saying, 'Well, don't you want something?' And I admit, it was no unpleasant task. So somehow I panted, sweated, and banged away till he got what he wanted, then I fell asleep again, exhausted with pleasure. Less than an hour had passed when he started jostling me with his hand and said, 'Why aren't we doing it?'²⁵

While by most modern scholars it is assumed that boys often played the passive rôle, the above passage raises the question of who was seducing whom. The text provides a variation on the assumption that Roman sexuality and pleasure was derived from a power-play formula, in which one partner was dominant and one was passive, and that the active partner was older. The orgasmic pleasure insinuated by the 'passive' boy and his voracious appetite further breaks down the active/passive dichotomy. Conventional views might have dictated that the active male reached orgasm first, while the passive partner is merely a vehicle for the other's pleasure. Here the boy is clearly enjoying himself and, though penetrated, is active in seeking what he wants. Sex and pleasure are reciprocal here, demonstrating variation on the simplistic passive/active dichotomy that it is mapped on to the dichotomy of younger/older. In terms of the development of the boy, the text reveals knowledge of sex, its use and sex appeal that raises questions about the simplicity of the active/passive dichotomy and offers a glimpse of the sexual awareness of the Roman *iuvenis*.

The next stage towards sexual maturity in a boy's life course was perhaps not so clear. Young men past the age of shaving were expected to be active sexually. Passive males, even if inhabiting the transitional stage of *iuventus*, were thought to be 'un-Roman' and often satirized. Invectives against men who enjoyed passive or reciprocal sex implies that such behavior did exist and that "accusations of effeminacy may have been intended to tap audience prejudice against nonconformist lifestyles, including those of alternative sexual subcultures".²⁶ Furthermore, M. Skinner suggests that the public rhetoric of humiliation and hostility towards passive adult males shows an anxiety on the part of mainstream society to pressure young men to move from passive to active.²⁷

21 Cat. 15.24.

22 Plin., *Ep.* 7.4.3-6.

23 Hubbard (supra n.10) 326.

24 S. Treggiari, *Roman freedman during the Late Republic* (London 1969) 260-61. Previous scholars dated Tiro's birth to 103 B.C., putting him close in age to Cicero. Treggiari finds this untenable given the nature of Cicero's relationship with Tiro, the age at which he was manumitted, and the term *adulescens* used by Cicero.

25 Petr., *Sat.* 87 (transl. R. Bracht Branham and D. Kinney in Hubbard [supra n.10] 415-16).

26 Skinner, "Introduction," in Hallett and Skinner (supra n.15) 5. While adhering to a normative grid of active and passive sexuality, H. N. Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid," *ibid.* 54, shows that such dichotomies are stereotypical and necessitate an 'antitype'.

27 Skinner (supra n.15) 136.

Active/passive rôles with regard to seduction and sex were blurred. Some other groups presented ambiguities in age, sexual rôle and class. Young men in their 20s and adults could shave and adopt other modes of dress so as to appear like boys. *Exoleti* were passive males fully developed sexually and beyond their teenage years, but they still occupied the transitional period of adolescence.²⁸ Their masters probably sold them, as former slaves and even prostitutes, to older men as semi-free concubines. R. Taylor argues that, since they were neither prostitutes nor the object of pederastic love but were kept as lovers, the relationships with their patrons may have been more reciprocal,²⁹ perhaps a Roman version of today's 'kept-boy/sugar-daddy' gay relationship. Taylor's analysis of an epigram by Martial shows a subculture among *exoleti* who would gather at baths with their patrons for sex:

Syriscus pulled in the full ten million showered on him by his patron recently, Maximus, just by hanging about on cantina barstools down around the four bath-houses. Oh, what a gorge to gobble down ten million! Yet how much greater a feat not even to recline with him!³⁰

That sex often occurred between *exoleti* and patron is indicated by surprise at the absence of it in this particular situation. A similar character, the *draucus*, was a freeman or privileged slave who sought out potential patrons for sexual contact at the baths.³¹ Bands of passive men (*Galli*) who found young men in the baths for sex are mentioned at least twice. The first concerns the *Satyricon's* Encolpius who suffered from impotence.³² In the second, the *Galli* picked up a well-endowed country *iuvenis*, the out-of-town lad who gets taken advantage of in the city or in the wrong part of town.³³ These encounters start to fill in the picture of the kinds of male-to-male interaction that could occur at the baths.

Slaves are another social group usually omitted from male-to-male sexual relations. Slaves were often thought to accompany their masters to the baths, but possibly they were also able to enjoy the baths separately. G. Fagan has shown, through textual evidence and graffiti at the Suburban Baths of Pompeii, that slaves not only bathed together with their masters but also went to the baths solo and had sex,³⁴ while Horace has a master admonish a slave for enjoying the seedy pleasures of the bath.³⁵

The life course of the adult male also contains some subversive examples. The voice of the active man can be heard in Martial, whose epigrams often make fun of passive or otherwise subversive male-to-male sexuality. He writes of his ideal boy,

and let him often force me when I don't want to, and deny me when I do, /Let him often act more like a free man than his master.³⁶

In the bath-house, the rôles of active/passive with regard to seduction and desire are flexible, as are the traditional boy/man and slave/master formulae. Taylor, whose fine analysis brings to light these subcultures, concludes that functionality superseded desire for two reasons. The sexual preferences of the men solicited in the baths are rarely mentioned. Those who appear "homosexual or bisexual in inclination" and subvert active or passive rôles might have been young men in the reckless transitional stage before marriage.³⁷ While this schema might be a possibility, male-to-male sexuality encompassed the emotions of love and desire, among others, and male-to-male sexuality was not entirely constituted via sexual behaviour.

28 Taylor (supra n.2) 361.

29 Ibid. 360-64.

30 Mart., *Epig.* 5.70 (transl. Taylor [supra n.2] 363).

31 Taylor (supra n.2) 369.

32 Petr., *Sat.* 23.

33 Apul., *Met.* 8.29.

34 G. G. Fagan, "Interpreting the evidence: did slaves bathe at the baths?" in J. DeLaine and D. E. Johnston, *Roman baths and bathing* (JRA Suppl. 37, 1999) 25-34.

35 Hor., *Ep.* 1.14.14 ff.

36 Mart., *Epig.* 4.42 (transl. Richelin in Hubbard [supra n.10] 424).

37 Taylor (supra n.2) 370.

Because of an emphasis on social and sexual status, several scholars have diluted the potential for an emotive response in Roman sexuality. For D. Greenberg, the Roman was "indifferent" to the sex of his/her partner; J. Boswell describes sex as "proprietary" and "dispassionate".³⁸ However, to view Roman male-to-male sexuality merely as unfeeling and mechanical denies the existence of desire and love between men. Marriage in Roman society was normally arranged; it involved matters of economics and social standing important to both families.³⁹ Similarly, bearing children was considered a civic duty and the desired outcome of an arranged marriage. On the other hand, countless references to male beauty and boy love suggest a degree of intimacy and real attraction that in some cases superseded heterosexual relations. W. Roscoe reacts to these assumed Greco-Roman sexual axioms of hierarchical status with regard to age and lack of intimacy, stating:

Similarly, to show that Greek youths and women were not believed to enjoy the experience of penetration is not to prove that no youths or women did enjoy such contact. ... In the end, given the human propensity to deviate from or exceed, or simply misunderstand, formal rules and regulations, drawing overly sharp distinctions based on official beliefs becomes hairsplitting. Only the most mechanistic functionalism would lead to the conclusion that behavior and emotion were unilinearly determined by what a society "believed" or did not believe — or project "societies" as entities that hold beliefs. Further, if practices vary from ideals, if significant and regular contradictions between sexual ideology and sexual practice exist, then a more complex model of causation is needed than one in which normative social forces are the only variable.⁴⁰

Bath-houses

The answers sought in this "model of causation" for subversive sexuality, if such structuralist answers indeed exist, will not be treated here. Instead, I will contextualize the particulars of subversive male sexual behavior and male desire within the bath-house, using it as an enabling architectural framework for studying queered space. An examination of specific queered spaces⁴¹ such as bath-houses can give greater insight into the attitudes, behaviours, desires, and very existence of those who frequented them. When Encolpius meets the slave Giton in the bath, he takes him down a dark passage where he expresses his love:

I took him in my arms and brushed my face against the tears on his cheeks. We were both speechless; his lovable breast was still shaking with sobs. 'What a disgrace!' I said. 'To think that I was abandoned by you whom I love, and there is a gaping wound in my heart, but no scar!⁴²

While admitting a homosexual love that happens here in private, the expression of male love could have occurred in an environment of a male sexual space that was both open to the public yet anonymous and to a certain extent private. Sexuality is subverted within these spaces that are delineated physically and metaphysically, with regard to age, sexual rôles, and class.

At this juncture, the individual characters with their desires must be placed back within a spatial context. As an imaginary and heuristic exercise, we will travel through the bath-house,

38 Greenberg (supra n.20) 155; J. Boswell, *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality* (Chicago 1980) 62.

39 E. Cantarella, "Marriage and sexuality in Republican Rome: a Roman conjugal love story," in M. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (edd.), *The sleep of reason* (Chicago 2002) 274.

40 W. Roscoe, "Precursors of Islamic male homosexualities," in S. O. Murray and W. Roscoe (edd.), *Islamic homosexualities: culture, history, and literature* (New York 1997) 78 n.1.

41 Many of the same types of queer spaces that exist today were similarly used in antiquity. Other queer spaces for 'cruising' are in ruins or suburbs on the edge of Athens, the Temple of Apollo and the gymnasium at Thera, the Tiber wharves and key streets in Rome: see Hubbard (supra n.10) 4. Today the Acropolis and the forested slopes continue to be 'cruising grounds'. See B. Boyd, "Cruising with Swan Hellenic: archaeological sites as queer spaces," paper given at the 37th Annual Chacmool Conference (Calgary 2004).

42 Petr., *Sat.* 91 (transl. R. Bracht Branham and D. Kinney in Hubbard [supra n.10] 416).

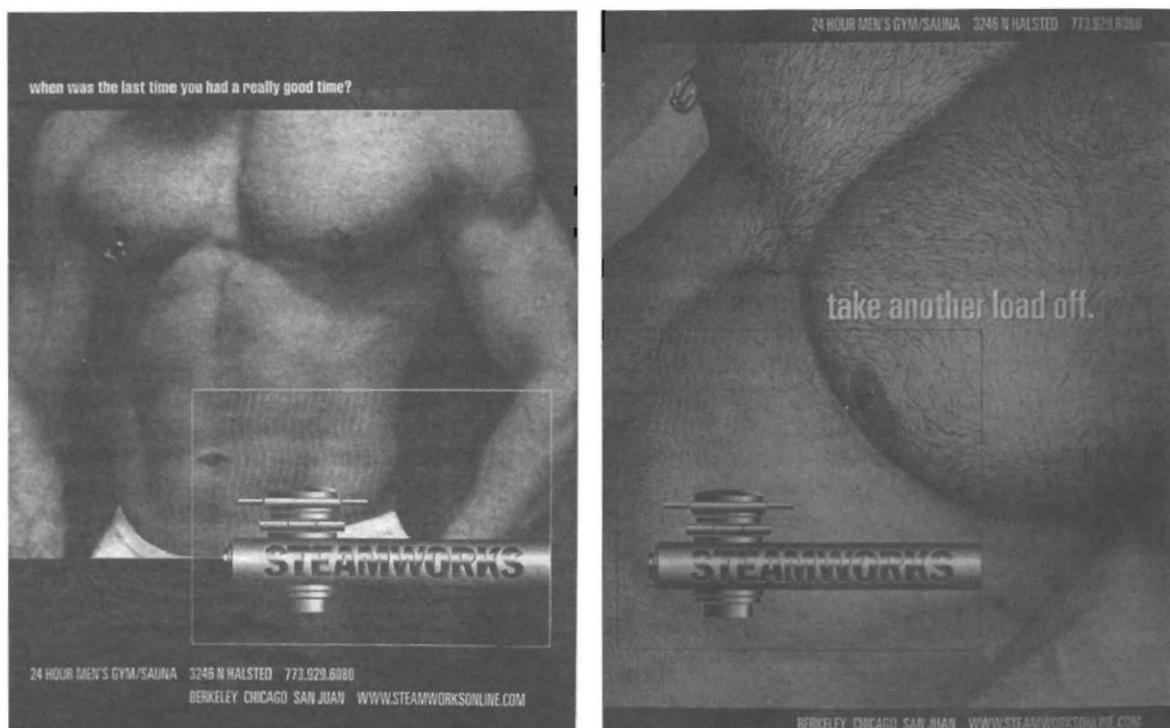


Fig. 1. New City newspaper, Chicago (April 2003).

room by room, examining the potential for queer, gendered, and sensory space that comprised an 'architecture of desire'.

Entrances

Physical space

The public bath-house functioned as a space of social significance in Roman towns. Though at times sprawling and maze-like, the sequence of rooms was formulaic and, for the most part, identifiable on a functional level from one bath to the next. The bath functioned chiefly in two capacities: for hygiene, and as a social gathering-point. Archaeologists have tended to stress the former. With regards to their social significance, bath-houses have been compared with the modern-day YMCA, sports facilities or athletic clubs because of the level of community interaction that takes place.⁴³ The modern comparison can help to provide a hypothetical reconstruction of ancient practice if we keep in mind the pitfalls of cultural incongruity and anachronism. The danger is that the comparison falls prey to the conservative view that often strips sex and sexuality out of academic discussions. Thus, while YMCA centers have often been considered queer spaces and associated with gay sex, scholars have not suggested this point of comparison with ancient baths. A closer comparison will be the modern gay bath-house; it can flesh out the social, sexual, and eroticized interactions at the bath that are intimated by Martial.⁴⁴

Steamworks (at 3246 N Halsted St., the entrance to the neighbourhood of East Lakeview, known locally as Boystown) is arguably the most established and renowned gay bath-house in Chicago; it is part of a chain of baths located in San Francisco, Toronto, and San Juan. It is advertised as a men's gym/sauna, announcing officially that the space is used for purposes of health and hygiene (fig. 1). However, when one enters, the space and social interactions quickly establish it not as a place to get clean and pump iron, but to meet men and have sex. The bath

⁴³ G. de la Bédoyère, *Voices of imperial Rome* (Charleston 2000); F. Yegül, *Baths and bathing in classical antiquity* (Cambridge, MA 1992) 31.

⁴⁴ Queered space in contemporary ethnic baths (Korean, Russian, or *hammams*) certainly exists, but an analysis would exceed the scope of this paper.

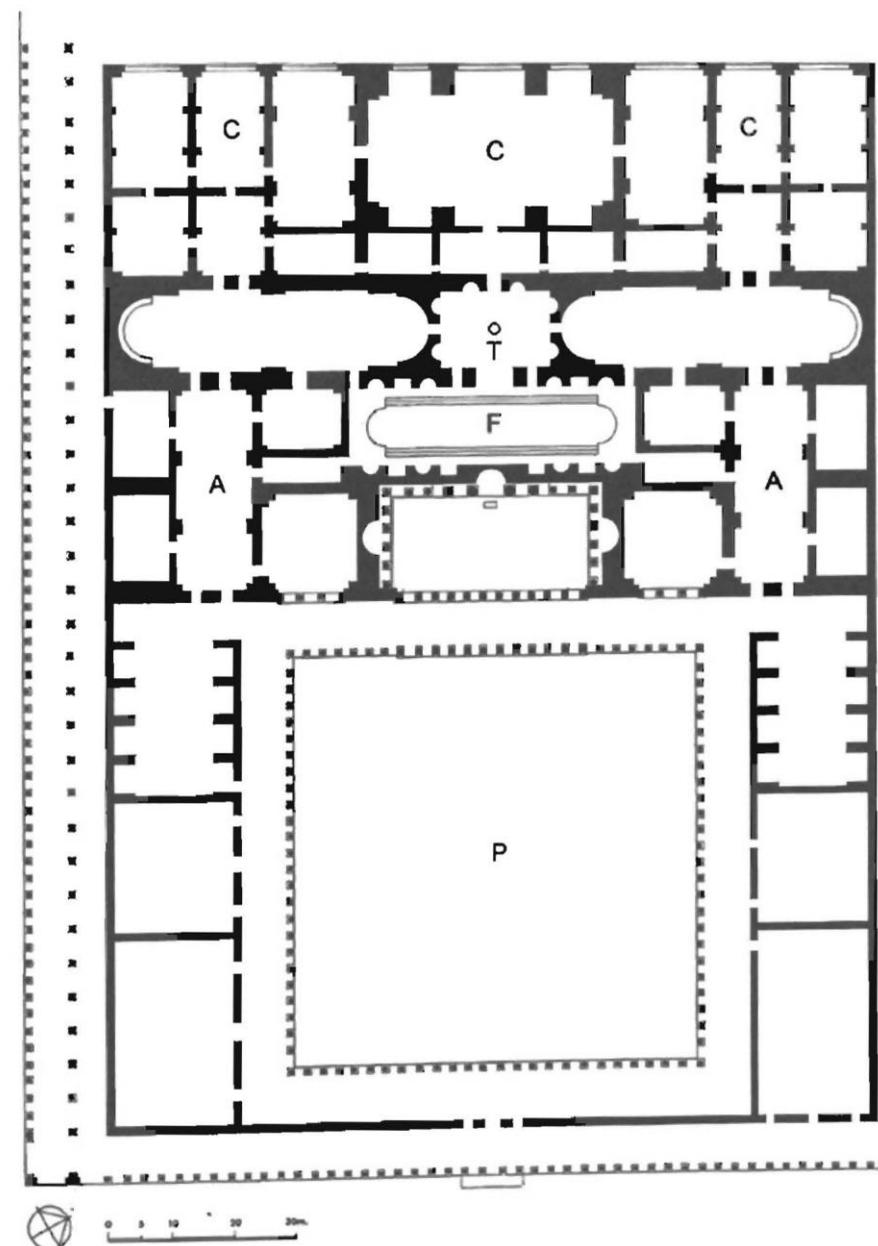


Fig. 2. Plan of the Bath-Gymnasium at Sardis (Yegül [n.43] fig. 8, © Archaeological Exploration of Sardis): P = Palaestra, A = Apodyterium, F = Frigidarium, T = Tepidarium, C = Caldarium.

attracts men of all social classes and sexualities, with a wide range of ages, races, and body types. One 'straight' man from out of town with whom I spoke knew to come to the bath to meet other men: for him, the overall quiet, dark and languid atmosphere was relaxing. Sexual space is re-defined from room to room; different environments are created through the internal architecture, lighting and sound, and by the community's understanding of the codes they carry.

Among Roman bath-houses, the Imperial bath-gymnasium complex is found chiefly on the W coast of Asia Minor. The public building combined a high, vaulted bath with an open, unroofed athletic field (*palaestra*). It consciously evoked the imagined spirit of the ancient Greek gymnasium within the monumentality and architectural innovation of a contemporary Roman bath.⁴⁵ The Bath-Gymnasium at Sardis (fig. 2) is one of the best-preserved examples.

⁴⁵ Yegül (supra n.43) 250-51.

Built in the mid-2nd c. A.D.; it encompassed 20,756 m² (5.5 acres). Located at the center of the city, it was by far the grandest and most conspicuous public building.⁴⁶

The importance of Roman bath-houses for social, political, and sexual purposes is undeniable. A central location granted a degree of social significance to the space that belies any kind of 'hidden' or 'seedy' practices within. The 'architecture of progression' of the Sardis building led the bather from the gymnasium deeper into the bath-house, where one could wander into any room in any order. A triple gate led into a large colonnaded *palaestra* (unroofed), flanked by three large rooms on either side that would have related to the function of the gym.⁴⁷ Athletic exercise as practiced by the Romans was lighter than the Greek, less formal and undertaken independently, yet the Roman *palaestra* connected to the Greek tradition of the gymnasium as a home for male-to-male sexual behavior.⁴⁸ Its use as a sexualized space carried over in the Roman period, as was suggested by the story in the *Satyricon* of the man at Pergamon who took his friend's son to the *palaestra*, which we may assume was attached to a bath.

The spatial context of male-to-male encounters within the bath-house is best articulated in the fictive tale of Apollonius of Tyre, based presumably on a story of the imperial age. A sexual encounter between the poor shipwrecked Apollonius and the king of the Pentapolis in Cyrenaica occurs first in the *palaestra* of the bath-house. Upon entering the bath, Apollonius takes off his sea-soaked, filthy fisherman's cloak. After changing (or washing), Apollonius, a stranger to the town, joins in a ball game with the king and impresses him with his athletic abilities. The nudity of the baths allows him to become a man of unknown past and present. The sexual encounter begins in the *palaestra* and then moves deeper into the baths.⁴⁹ The king praises Apollonius' skill displayed in the *palaestra* and we then find Apollonius massaging the king with oil in a sexual act that occurs deep within the heated section of the baths (see below).

Two points are salient. First, the scenes in a *palaestra* at Pergamon and in Cyrenaica suggest that male-to-male sexual activity was unlikely to take place in the sunlit outdoor public space; rather, desire and the pursuit of flirtation began at the entrance, and the desire and intent for sexual activity progressed as they moved deeper into the baths. Second, Apollonius' desire to wed the king's daughter and to appear as a nobleman allowed him to approach the king audaciously and challenge him to a ball match. But how is Apollonius able to engage with the king in such a bold fashion that the king tells his attendants to leave them alone: "Go ye hence; this young man, as it seemeth to me, is my equal"?⁵⁰ Clearly, the norms of social status were no longer relevant: athletic prowess and nudity created equality.

In the bath-house, social status, normative class and homosocial relations were transcended on two levels: male-to-male sexual relations occurred within the bath-house because of a communal nudity which was the cause of arousal whilst at the same time causing the norms of class and age to become ambiguous.

46 Ibid. 282-84. Throughout its five centuries of use, the bath underwent several internal changes; here the original 1st- and 2nd-c. plans will be used.

47 *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis* (Cambridge, MA 1986) 5. While the first two of these rooms opened out to the field (the closest to the entrance being the latrine), the last opened to the bath, and was divided into rectangular niches that created smaller, semi-private spaces probably used for changing or oiling the body before a workout. A second door on the S wall provided direct access through a row of shops built against the exterior wall to the changing rooms of one half. Conceivably this was a separate entrance for women and thus related to the gendered divisions of the bath discussed below.

48 Yegül (supra n.43) 35. The association between the Greek gymnasium as an arena for the masculine ideal and male-to-male relations is fundamental.

49 C. Ball, "Apollonius of Tyre, XIX," http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/apt/apt_mne.html (viewed Feb. 2, 2006). The story is adapted from 3rd-c. A.D. versions and was later transformed into Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.

50 Ibid.



Fig. 3. Painting from the Apodyterium of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii (courtesy Michael Larvey).

Pursuits

Queered space

The discussion so far has delineated the nature of encounters within the queer space of the bath-house. At this point we need to examine how such encounters might occur and could perhaps even be facilitated by the architecture of a bath-house such as Sardis. A heavy wall penetrated with openings separated the bath from the gymnasium. Symmetrical entrances to either side led the bather into a complex of interconnected rooms that functioned as *apodyteria* (changing and lounging rooms). An *apodyterium* was the first communal and social space in a bath-house. A long, large hall governed the area, flanked by smaller side rooms. As they contained no bathing basins or pools of water (although there were central fountains), they were viewed as dressing/undressing spaces before and after bathing. Markers of age, such as the *bulla* or *toga praetexta* that signified a free boy, or the *toga virilis* of the man, would be shed, making desires and sexual interaction more ambiguous and anonymous. Although other signifiers, such as bearded or unshaven faces, would suggest a certain age within the life course, these could have been, and at times were, deliberately subverted by men or boys who wished to appear differently. With regard to status and social class, clothes were the main signifier, and the lack of them made possible great ambiguities, as in the scene of Apollonius and the king. Further, communal nudity began to eroticize the space, creating a necessary first foundation for the architecture of desire and queered space.⁵¹

Decoration at Sardis is known only from the preserved lower portions of walls and these often belong to late-antique renovations. The absence of original decoration here leads us to turn to other bath-houses for guidance. The Suburban Baths at Pompeii show what wall decorations may have been like in the changing room. A series of 7 erotic paintings in the *apodyterium* (room 7) over the bins for clothes is suggestive of the close relationship between bathing and sex (fig. 3). Some of the scenes depict male-to-female sexual intercourse; one shows two females,

51 There is one story of a bath whose initial function was as a sexual and queer space: Elagabalus supposedly constructed a public bath so that he could fill it with well-hung men of his choosing (SHA, *Heliogab.* 8.6). Two epigrams by Martial imply baths known as queer spaces: "I prefer Nero's *thermae* to the baths of a pathic" (7.34.9-10) and "Does he bathe in the *thermae* of Titus or Agrippa or in the bath of shameless Tigillinus?" (3.20.15-16; transl. in Taylor [supra n.2] n.157). It is curious to note that the baths of Tigillinus and the pathic are *balnea*, whereas the seemingly more reputable ones are the larger *thermae*.

two show group scenes — in the first of which a man kneeling penetrates another man in the center, who in turn is penetrating a woman. As J. Clarke points out in his keen formal analysis of the frescoes, the penetrated man is holding the hand of the 'dominant' man in the sex scene:

This gesture increases in significance if we consider that every other option would emphasize the mechanics of lovemaking. If the artist had him grasp his partner around the waist or chest, the viewer would read this as an attempt to increase penetration or contact. Instead he holds his partner's hand: the only tenderness, yet significant, in this otherwise acrobatic display of lovemaking skills.⁵²

The scene is further subverted as the two participants are shown both to be men, similar in stature, size, and skin color.⁵³ In the second, one man penetrates another who is receiving *fellatio* from a woman, while another woman is performing *cunnilingus* on her. Some of the figures turn to face out and engage the viewer, establishing a voyeuristic connection. Despite the reciprocity of sexual enjoyment shown by the hand-holding men, Clarke postulates that these 'locker labels' are meant to amuse rather than arouse, as they depict scenes which include men in compromising 'unmasculine' positions.⁵⁴ Clarke's assessments of the frescoes, though giving voice to ordinary Romans through non-textual and non-élite male evidence, remain grounded in the same social attitudes toward sex conveyed in the texts. Interpreting the erotic frescoes as comedy prioritizes the views of Roman authors that male-to-male sex was as an unemotional act infused with active/passive notions of power play. The paintings may have elicited an amused response but they also played on deeper arousals. It would be difficult to argue that same-sex desire and attraction were felt only when free men were exclusively tops and slaves and prostitutes were exclusively bottoms. The human *eros* is not limited by such artificial constructions of status.

However, the visual image in its context, like the bath's architectural framework, can act as its own category of evidence, independent of the written word. Parallels for similar erotic imagery are found over the doors and inside individual rooms of the brothel (*lupinarium*) at Pompeii, as well as in the small, enclosed bedrooms (*cubicula*) of houses.⁵⁵ The small rooms of brothel and house are both private spaces within a more public structure. In the brothel, the frescoes over bedroom doors are meant to advertise the space and to arouse. According to M. Myerowitz, paintings in the house were meant to be mirrored reflections of the occupants, which sharply contrasts with Clarke's depictions of the images as grossly alien to the viewer.⁵⁶ They were located in the rear of the house off the main axis, in confined areas which helped to create a private space.⁵⁷ Cicero criticizes those who have sex within the privacy of *cubicula*, thereby implying that sexual activity within these spaces was somehow subversive, being extramarital and/or involving slaves.⁵⁸ In an *Epistle* of Seneca, a reversed master-slave relationship is suggested, although only in the privacy of the bedroom. The adult slave must alter his appearance and appear more youthful and less masculine in public:

A beardless slave with a soldier's stature, his hair rubbed away or plucked out by the roots, he has to remain awake all night and divide his time between his master's drunkenness and lust, a man [*vir*] in the bedroom [*cubiculo*], but a boy [*puer*] at the feast.⁵⁹

52 J. R. Clarke, "Look who's laughing at sex: men and women viewers in the *apodyteryium* of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii," in D. Frederick (ed.), *The Roman gaze: vision, power, and the body* (Baltimore 2002) 171.

53 Ibid.

54 *Looking at lovemaking: constructions of sexuality in Roman art*, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250 (Berkeley, CA 1998) 231-35. Clarke also states (2002 [supra n.52] 156) that the laughter which the scenes evoked would have had an apotropaic effect in dispelling the evil eye.

55 M. Myerowitz, "Domestication of desire: Ovid's *parva tabella* and the theater of love," in A. Richelin (ed.), *Pornography and representation in Greece and Rome* (New York 1992) 140-41.

56 Ibid.

57 A. Riggsby, "'Public' and 'private' in Roman culture: the case of the *cubiculum*," *JRA* 10 (1997) 50-51.

58 Harlow and Laurence (supra n.12) 30.

59 Sen., *Ep. Mor.* 47.7 (transl. Hubbard [supra n.10]).

In their own fashion the erotic paintings of the *apodyterium* are pornography, affirming sex in the bath, promulgating a visual sexual arousal, and perhaps allowing the viewer to identify with either or both of the (active or passive) men depicted. The images in the *apodyterium*, a room that falls early in the bathing sequence, may have served to advertise and remind the Roman bather as to the nature, and perhaps the degree of tolerance, of the public bath-house.

Other decorative elements may have included portable objects brought into the *apodyterium*. Many vessels for bathing (*instrumentum balnei*) have been found on the W coast of Asia Minor. They include a homoerotic type of bronze vessel that carried oil. It is in the shape of the bust of a nude beardless boy or youth, the lid set on top of his head. Some depicted the likeness of Antinous, the iconic and public beloved of Hadrian. The busts frequently wear an amulet, thought to be apotropaic. They are reminiscent of the *bulla* of the youth, which might be worn to keep away older male suitors intent on seducing a boy. A mould for manufacturing terracotta vessels (late 2nd c. B.C.) from Sardis depicts a man having sex with a boy who is lying on his right side.⁶⁰ In earlier Greek vase-painting bath implements appear in homoerotic scenes: they could be 'sex toys', such as containers of olive oil (a lubricant), and sponges and strigils, associated with the *palaestra*.⁶¹

Gendered space

While the *apodyterium* space is symmetrical on either side of the bath, its two halves connect at certain points. Proceeding from the *apodyteria*, the bather could enter either into another non-bathing social space or could travel through one of the small rooms (halls) in the *apodyteria* into the *frigidarium*. The non-bathing social space, an elliptical hall with an apse at either end, was mirrored symmetrically on the other side.⁶² The *frigidarium* or cold pool occupied the middle of the complex. It had a very long and large bi-apsidal stepped pool (1.1 m deep) at the center, with alternating circular and square niches holding individual pools, fountains, and basins. The bather was thus presented with a choice of communal bathing in the large pool or bathing for individuals or couples in the niches ringing the hall. A third centralized space lay at the heart of the complex, connecting the mirrored sides and accessible from virtually every space. This smaller rectangular room, lined with protruding niches, held basins (*schola labri*). It was probably the *tepidarium* (warm room), being situated between the heated portion of the baths and the cold pools. F. Yegül's comparison of this room to a *tetrapylon*, which occupied a city's central square, is appropriate, for in this space not only were temperatures equalized, but also the two symmetrical and social halves of the bath joined and access was given to the heated areas.⁶³

The internal symmetrical divisions of space found at Sardis and in other bath-gymnasia of the Imperial type created a framework that was not only a queer space but also a gendered space. The subject of gender in baths has been frequently debated, leading to a number of different interpretations.⁶⁴ The main issue is whether Roman baths at any one time had mixed

60 Clarke (supra n.54) 36-37, n.31.

61 E. Blum, "The history of gamecocks and homoerotic images in Greek vase painting," <http://www.geocities.com/jjansentiger2/lamecocksports/histgamecocks.html> (2001) (viewed Nov. 8, 2005); M. F. Kilmer, *Greek erotica on Attic red-figure vases* (London 1993) 81-96.

62 Yegül (supra n.47) 8. The spaces were opulently decorated with marble floors and statuary. No water features were discovered in these rooms, leading the excavators to interpret them as public meeting areas, possibly for ceremonial purposes. Certainly a public and social group space is suggested, but it is a mistake automatically to see this space, firmly positioned in the center of the bath, as ceremonial or official because of an imperial statue and its rich ornamentation. By this point the bather would be unclothed (or nearly so) and ready to socialize and/or bathe.

63 Ibid. 7.

64 To name two: Vitruvius (5.10.1) wrote: "care must be taken that the warm baths of the women and men adjoin, and have the same aspect; in which case the same furnace and vessels will serve both", implying from a functional standpoint two separate but adjacent baths. Varro (*LL* 11.41.68) agreed that the first

or same-sex bathing.⁶⁵ Often a cultural bias is imposed on our understanding of bathing habits. Notions of modern bath-houses and of Mediterranean derivations of the Roman bath (Islamic *hammam*) usually adopt clear distinctions between male and female use. For example, Yegül, while noting that both the Stabian Baths and the Forum Baths at Pompeii had separate entrances for men and women but shared a *palaestra* and heated rooms, considers this arrangement uncommon;⁶⁶ instead, he follows the practice employed by most modern bath-houses and *hammams*, that of making the baths available to men and women at different hours of the day. Faced with evidence for and against mixed bathing, G. Fagan voices the cautious opinion that rules of gender for bathing varied by region, period, or particular bath-house, and that it was a matter of personal choice.⁶⁷ Their explanations are reductive and difficult to prove; they are further problematic in that they view same-sex and mixed bathing as mutually exclusive and often remove the discussion of gender from the architectural analysis.

Bath-houses did have mixed bathing. Frequent bans on mixed bathing by various emperors show that the practice occurred.⁶⁸ Ancient authors also indicate that women were present with men at baths.⁶⁹ In another epigram by Martial, a bathing space for women is established but not rigidly defined:

Does Lattara shun the baths where crowds/of women go? It's true. /And why is he so particular?
/He does not wish to screw...

If he's so scared of women/(that contaminating crew)/why is he fond of cunnilingus?/He does not wish to screw.⁷⁰

Although the bathing space is female and decidedly sexual, as poor Lattara discovers, it is his choice not to enter. For him the space is defined sexually. We return to the opening quotation — "... you'd better skip/this part, and go away, my dear, /the men are going to strip ..." — that not only recognizes a specific point where mixed bathing ends and same-sex bathing begins, but implies sexual divisions. Such literary creations can fuel a perception of Roman lifestyles as 'decadent', suffused with orgies, drinking, and nudity regardless of gender. Similar stereotypical views of modern gay male spaces are rife with such orgiastic elements. In rejecting the same-sex model of Roman bathing, we must avoid the clichés of a modern age that constructs a 'decadent', orgy-filled world. We must offer a more sensitive reading of sexuality in the bath-house.⁷¹

At Sardis, one can detect a clear separation of bathing spaces that mirror each other perfectly: the changing/lounging and the hot steam/sweat rooms. The points of shared interaction are the *frigidarium*, *tepidarium*, and the main *caldarium*. The architecture is thus arranged to create same-sex spaces on either side, which focus on non-bathing socialization in smaller clusters of rooms, and mixed gender spaces in the center, where the main public bathing occurs. The hot rooms share both qualities: a communal main chamber, and a smaller network of same-

baths of Rome were built separately for each gender but connected. Inscriptions explicitly refer to a division between the male baths (*balneum virile*) and female baths (*balneum muliebre*).

65 See R. Ward, "Women in the Roman baths," *HTHR* 85 (1992) 125-47, for discussion of the literary evidence. Although demonstrating that mixed bathing did occur, Ward states (133, n.24) that, after the 1st c. A.D., bath-houses such as the complex at Sardis were planned axially, which "did not lend itself to separate facilities for men and women".

66 Yegül (supra n.43) 33.

67 G. G. Fagan, *Bathing in public in the Roman world* (Ann Arbor 1999) 29.

68 O. Kiefer (transl. G. and H. Highet), *Sexual life in ancient Rome* (New York 2000) 162; Ward (supra n.65).

69 Martial's references to bathing with women are far fewer than those with men, and usually impart a measure of disdain. Yegül (supra n.43) p. 33 and others speculate that they would suggest women of ill repute, prostitutes and the like, although Ward (supra n.65) 135 shows that free and reputable women frequented the baths.

70 Mart., *Ep.* 11.47 (supra n.5); see also *Ep.* 7.35.

71 See the sensitive readings put forward by Ward (supra n.65) and Clarke (supra n.53).

sex rooms. Public baths had a functional and social importance regardless of gender and status. The sources refer to both same-sex and mixed bathing; slave, freed, and free bathers of any age (the baths as an equalizer of age and class); and sexualities and attractions freely explored. It stands to reason, then, that public urban bath-houses were built with separated but adjoined spaces for men and women.

Desires

Sensory space

The hot areas, the culmination both climatically and architecturally, were arguably the most sought after. The heated block was separated from the remainder by a long thick wall pierced only in three places to allow entry. From the *tepidarium* a small passage led through a hallway consisting of 5 small rooms to the main *caldarium*. The *caldarium* was a very large space with 5 niches for heated plunge baths. Doors on either side led to a set of 5 interconnected and symmetrical rooms which echo the *apodyterium* area.⁷² The W wall of the *caldarium* complex was pierced with large windows which would have allowed the most light in during the late afternoon and evening hours, waning to give dim lighting by nightfall. The heat and steam of the hot rooms would have reduced visibility. The hot areas were also the most spatially confined, creating an environment in which bodies were in close proximity.

Questions immediately spring to mind about the use of this heated, labyrinthine space. Yegül posited that many of these rooms would have been used as service areas for bath maintenance and for the furnaces (*praeurnia*),⁷³ but to relegate two-thirds of the most valuable area of the bath to maintenance and operation by slaves seems wasteful. There might be other types of heated rooms in addition to the *caldarium*, such as a dry sweat room, a wet sweat room, and warm rooms for oiling and massage.⁷⁴ The divided symmetry is again echoed.

Perhaps, then, we should approach the analysis by way of models of human interaction. Apollonius and his seduction of the king, which began in the *palaestra*, helps provide an explanation. After receiving praise for his athletic prowess, Apollonius massages the king with oil so well that the king instantly feels younger and greatly rejuvenated.⁷⁵ In a close reading of the Old English text, D. Townsend has shown that Apollonius's act of rubbing down or "swinging the top" of the king with "skilled hands" was a sexual one: a massage with a 'happy ending'.⁷⁶ The scene portrays male-to-male sexual relations in a nuanced way that subverts age and class. Apollonius's age, though not specifically stated, is that of a 'young man' or transitional adolescent, while the king is older but becomes metaphorically younger through the sexual act. Age is only a part of the significance of class subversion (the poor foreigner seducing a king), made possible by the communal nudity. Townsend points out that massaging the king at the baths was a service normally reserved for bath-attendants or slaves.⁷⁷ The scene is complicated in that Apollonius actively seeks to seduce the king in an otherwise passive act, by pleasuring him with sex, much like the *exoleti* or *drauci* did with potential patrons at baths. The location is not specifically mentioned, but I suggest that this sexual and subversive activity would have occurred in the smaller and darker massage or anointing rooms (*elaeothesium*, *aleipterion*) located in the heated section.⁷⁸

72 Excavations were not completed in this portion; a plan of this space was reconstructed from the few remains and on the basis of strong parallels with *caldaria* rooms found at other bath-gymnasia of this type, especially at Ephesus. For the parallels, see Yegül (supra n.43) 273, 280, 281 and 284.

73 Ibid. 8.

74 Ibid. 38-39.

75 Apollon. Tyr. XX (supra n.49).

76 D. Townsend, "The naked truth of the King's affection in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*," *J. Medieval & Early Modern Studies* 34.1 (2004) 186-90.

77 Ibid. 183.

78 It is also possible that this activity occurred in the small, semi-private, covered rooms to either side of the *palaestra* (cf. n.47 above), but evidence is lacking.

Medical writers associate massage and anointing with oil as activities that occurred just before bathing. Galen mentions massaging and oiling as pre-bathing rituals regardless of whether someone exercised.⁷⁹ Celsus says that after physical activity and exercise, particularly in the sun, it was recommended for the bather to get oiled up in the hot bath.⁸⁰ Since Roman bathing included exercise as an option for some but incorporated massage and oiling as part of the ritual for all, the rooms where these activities occurred were probably located in the bath rather than the *palaestra*. The association between oiling and hot baths suggests that Apollonius and the king sought to culminate their desire in the privacy of the small rooms off the main *caldarium*.

An additional point is suggested by the writings of the medical authors on hot bathing and same-sex subversive activity with respect to age. According to Galen, the stages of the life course were based on the conditions (or humors) of the body, which changed from hot, moist, and soft in infancy and childhood to cold, dry, and hard in old age.⁸¹ This translated into specific bathing habits depending upon age. Medical texts instructed infants and children in the first (ages 0-6) and second stages (7-13) up to puberty to be kept moist and bathed often in warm waters. Beginning in the third stage (ages 14-20), boys were expected to forego bathing after exercise or to bathe in cold water:

Therefore he ought to go straight to the bath-tubs (*solium*), he ought not linger (*immorari*) in the sweat-room (*laconicum*) just as those who stretch (*elixant*) themselves without exercise. But there is no need for this male to delay in the pool (*piscina*); rather, having washed, as it has been understood, let him hasten toward the cold water (*frigidam*); and let the cold water also be moderate, as is natural for a body of medium heat.⁸²

Cold bathing continues in greater duration for the next life-course stage of male *adolescentia* (21-27):

In age let it be at about the middle of its fourth 7 years ... And let the youth who is going to use the cold bath be both courageous and cheerful, always if possible, and especially then.⁸³

Galen states that this was to toughen and thicken the skin, implying that hot baths and those men who took them in the third or fourth stages of life were 'soft-bodied', dispensing with exercise. This view also appears in Livy, Seneca, Plutarch and Dio Cassius in connection with frequent bathing in the hot baths and their association with weakness, softness, and effeminacy.⁸⁴ A soft person (*mollis*) was a euphemism for a passive male.⁸⁵ Like the satirists and

⁷⁹ E.g., Galen, *San. tuend.* 3.13 with R. M. Green, *A translation of Galen's hygiene (de sanitate tuenda)* (Springfield, IL 1951) 137-39, mentioning the therapeutic benefits of morning and evening massage.

⁸⁰ Celsus, *Med.* 1.3.10.

⁸¹ Galen 1.5, Green's transl. (*supra* n.79) p. 18, and 1.10, Green's transl. p. 33. Galen came from Pergamon, not that far from Sardis, and wrote when the Sardis and other similar baths were built.

⁸² The bracketed Latin text is added to draw attention to the bath-house rooms. The adolescent can thus go to either the *solium*, which may be a communal pool, or the cold pool; he should not go to the *laconicum*, which is the sweat room, nor to the *piscina*. The identification of the last room is ambiguous, for *piscina* refers to a generic pool. Fagan (*supra* n.67, p. 370) identifies it as a cold pool, which does not work in Galen's text, since he then directs the youth to cold waters. Fagan (*ibid.* 181-83) also says that the communal *solium* can be heated, which again, in the context of Galen's instructions to avoid hot water and the gendered symmetrical divisions of the Sardis bath-house, does not correspond. The term *immorari* can be suggestive of more sexualized activity if lingering at an activity such as stretching or massaging (*elixant*). Green translates this word as "rubbed down". I am grateful to K. Sleeler for translating the Latin text of *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* (ed. Kühn, Leipzig 1823) vol. 6, 185.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 3.4 (Green's transl. pp. 111-12).

⁸⁴ Livy 23.18.12; for Seneca, see below n.89; Plut., *Mor.* 785F; Dio Cass. 27.94.2. For other references, see Fagan (*supra* n.64) 88 n.15. This notion also comes from Greek ideas about bathing, as in Aristoph., *Nub.* 1045.

⁸⁵ Juv. 2.45-47 (transl. P. Green, *Juvenal, the sixteen satires* [New York 1998] 10): "men do worse, but their numbers protect them. They all close ranks, shields overlapping, and queers [*mollis*] stick together like

rhetoricians who targeted their opponents with accusations of effeminacy or passivity, medical authors used scientific explanations to mask a moralizing message that was used as an admonition against conventional social ills and improprieties.

In the context of the bath-house these messages had several underlying meanings. From the above passage, Galen associates the communal rooms with the cold-water rooms as being permissible for youths, suggesting that the hot-steam rooms were same-sex. Bathing in the communal cold rooms was not just good for adolescent skin but was a societal mechanism that safeguarded against transgression of sexual taboos by keeping the youth well within public view. Another reason for encouraging sexually active youths to bathe in cold baths, although not explicitly stated, could have been to restrain sexual urges.⁸⁶ That such anxiety might be expressed over sexually active youths and men spending time in the hot portion of the baths, and its conflation with subversive behavior, suggests that the gender-divided hot, dark and steamy *caldarium* at the end of the sequence was the likeliest space for male-to-male sexual activity. The sensory overload of the hot baths converts into virtual anonymity the arousing images of naked men already seen in the bathing progression. In this way some young men, upon becoming sexually active, may have deviated from the mixed cold baths and experienced the queered bathing journey for the first time. At this juncture, when the ancient sources fall silent, one must turn to the modern gay bath-house as an example of human social interaction within a progressive architecture of desire and sensory space.

The obvious architectural difference between a Roman bath-house and our modern example is that Steamworks is laid out over three floors,⁸⁷ each decidedly different (fig. 4), but this planimetric difference should not distract us from the possibility that Steamworks may reveal the sensory experience of bathing. The first floor, in three parts, reveals subtle changes to the bathing experience as the bather progresses deeper inside. Initially, priority is given to entering this space and undressing completely (save for the towel) by the wider repeating entranceways to the lockers and by the bright lighting; beyond this point nothing in the bath is fully lit. The next area is a transitional space comprising a social lounge area with dim but clear lighting; it consists of a central hallway and a side room furnished with couches, a television, and a fireplace. Bathers continue to the end of the first floor hall where the actual bathing rooms are located. It is here, at the back of the building, that dark lighting, full nudity, and higher temperatures provide a more desirable space for social and sexual interaction. This complex is walled off from the rest of the floor, except for the bank of showers within the bath area, separated by glass bricks which provide a steamy, vague and tantalizing view that surely beckons the bathers in. The bath area is dominated by a large whirlpool to the right, fitted with nooks and niches that are quite dark. This is the first space where towels are shed and the bather can 'immerse' himself in the bath-house experience, surveying the scene, before entering into the smaller, more sexualized bathing rooms. While nudity occurs in the locker-room, the suggestive wet and darker space, coupled with the split dynamic of partakers ('jump in, the water's fine') and observers ('it's not the water I'm thinking about'), creates a space that is relaxing while charged with erotic gazing (rather than with sex). To the back is a small bathroom, well-lit, and a dry steam room that is quite small and dim. While penetrative sex is rarely practiced here, mutual masturbation is a fairly common activity. A third space is the wet steam room, about twice as large as the previous room and completely dark. Benches are set on the side walls and on a central pier. The hot, wet and black environment produces a sensory overload:

glue. Besides you will never find *our* sex indulging in such detestable perversions ...". See also Richelin (*supra* n.2) 531.

⁸⁶ Josephus, who himself took cold baths twice a day for purification, comments on the Judaeans who took cold baths after nocturnal emissions (*Vit.* 11; *AntJ.* 3.263).

⁸⁷ Yet archaeological preservation can sometimes distort the evidence. Some baths such as the Suburban Baths at Pompeii did have upper storeys which may have functioned as a brothel.

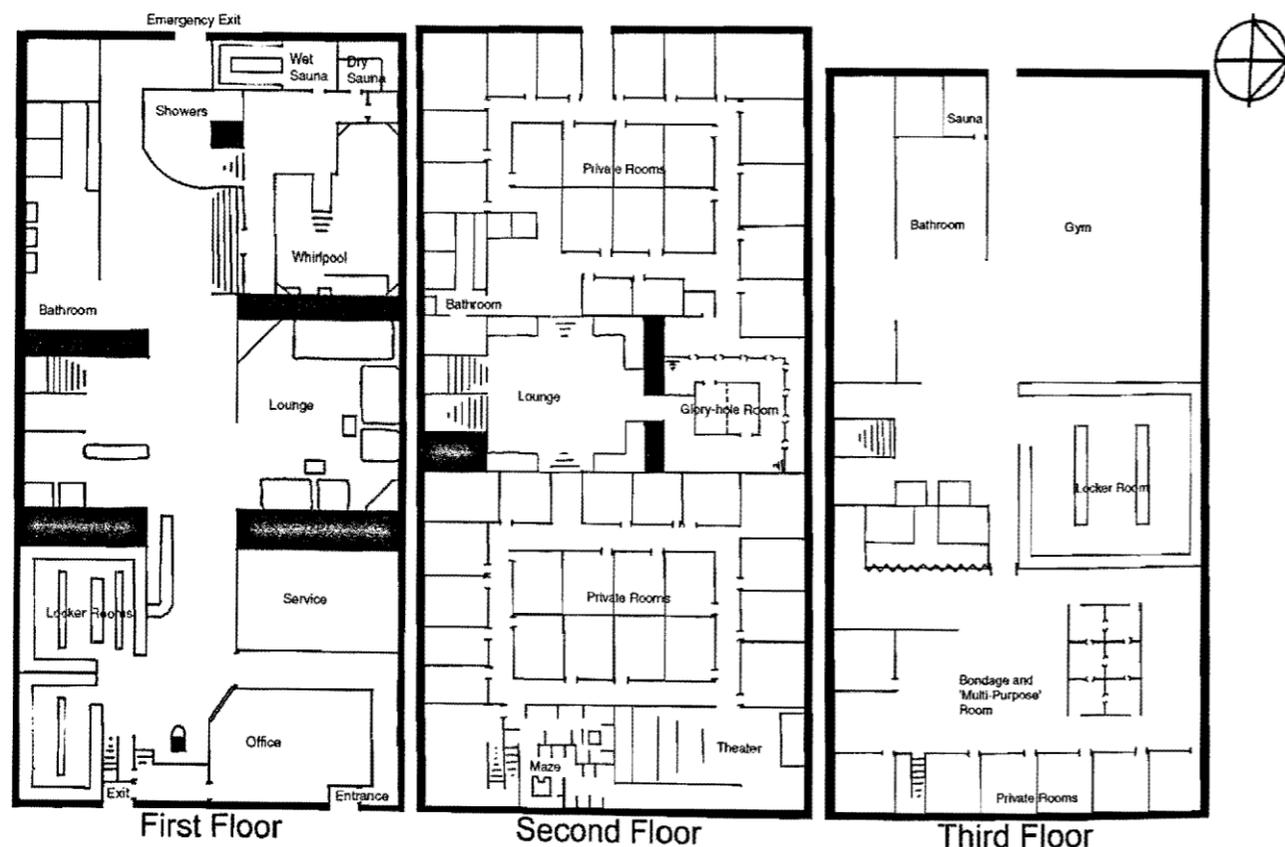


Fig. 4. Plan of Steamworks, Chicago (rough sketch by the author).

... The more direct homosexual expression is reserved for the steam rooms. There, in an atmosphere murky with steam — so murky, indeed, that one cannot see more than a few feet ahead — with benches around walls, fellation and pedication are not at all uncommon. ... If one stumbles over a pair in the act, one mutters a hasty apology and goes on quickly in another direction.⁸⁸

The virtual blindness in the room creates the ultimate anonymity: it is not uncommon to be touched or groped by a passing figure. The experience may not be dissimilar to that encountered in the bath-houses of antiquity. Seneca describes the sweat rooms and dark heated portions of the bath:

... pleasure you will most often find lurking around the baths and sweating rooms [*sudatorium*], and places that fear the police, in search of darkness, soft [*mollem*], effete, reeking of wine and perfume, pallid, or else painted and made up with cosmetics like a corpse.⁸⁹

Most suggestive is Seneca's coupling of the dark heated parts of the baths with a subculture of passive boys or men and illicit and subversive sexual activity (i.e., sex between men and free boys).

The second floor at Steamworks, while lacking bathing facilities, mirrors the progression from public to private space seen on the first, but on a more intimate level. Again, the social lounge areas are confined to dimly-lit transitional spaces near the stairs or in the multiple

88 Description of Stauch's Bath, Coney Island, NY, from an interview "The prostitute," by T. Painter (1941), housed in Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, 65-67 and quoted from G. Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York 1994) 210-11.

89 Sen., *Vit. beat.* 7.3 (translation by C. Edwards, "Unspeakable professions: public performance and prostitution in ancient Rome," in Hallett and Skinner [supra n.15] 84).

hallways. Mirrors at the ends of the corridors serve both to confuse the bather and to provide a glimpse of who may be following or of activity up ahead. Along the corridors are private rooms that are fitted only with a cot and sometimes a television showing pornography. These private rooms, however incongruous they may seem with ancient baths, evoke the dark hallway scene in the *Satyricon* where Encolpius admits his love for Giton. This area also reminds us of the association between baths and brothels in antiquity.⁹⁰

On the second floor, there are two main sexual spaces reached from the lounge areas (fig. 4). The first is an L-shaped dark room, built on two levels; separating the levels is a wall pierced with glory-holes that allow anonymous oral sex. Two small cubicles separated by clear plastic provide small spaces for voyeuristic sex. The second sexual space is a dark carpeted room with tiered levels and pillows for viewing pornography shown simultaneously on 5 video screens. Rather like the Roman frescoes, the pornography includes depictions of all types of gay sex and fetishisms, as well as a screen showing 'straight' sex, to appeal to the uncertain, married, and/or bisexual patrons. It is not common for sex to happen in this space. Rather like the open whirlpool, the porn space perpetuates the erotic flavor of the back area and arouses the bather visually before he enters into the most sexual public space: the maze. The maze is completely unlit and consists of small dividers inserted along the walls and mirrors, creating a total effect of confusion and vulnerability. Men hover along the sides and touch each other, signalling interest and attraction; they can engage openly in anal sex either in the small wall divisions or on a cot placed on the floor.

A brightly lit gymnasium lies at the entrance to the third floor (fig. 4). Unlike the Roman bath, it figures last in the entire progression, a token relic of what the building purports to be, its prominence lying only in the public image it presents. The social transitional area is another dimmer locker room. The main attraction lies beyond a door to the right, a room enclosing a huge space half the size of the building. Within this darkened room are various sexual areas, including three bunk beds with a chain link fence for separation from or interaction with the rest of the room, bondage apparatus, and small cubicles pierced with holes for anonymous oral or anal sex. The dark lighting is supplemented by a blue light and flashing colored lights of the kind found in a dance-club.

As in the Roman bath, each floor of this gay bath-house features a progression: from public areas that are larger and brighter to increasingly private, smaller and darker rooms and, in the case of the first-floor baths, hot, wet and steamy rooms. As noted by P. Califia, these 'private' spaces are not private, in the sense that sex is still performative and can be viewed by others, but private in a relative sense, allowing sex to occur with greater ease than in the other 'public' areas.⁹¹ Visual perceptions gradually give way to other sensory experiences, such as touch, taste and smell. Besides the horizontal progression on each floor, a vertical progression encompasses the entirety of the building: non-sexual spaces become smaller and less important, while

90 The private small rooms are more suggestive of the architecture of a *lupinarium* (brothel), such as the Pompeian brothel known for its erotic imagery on the bedroom walls. Men may leave doors open and lie on the bed naked, face up or down, simultaneously inviting in passers-by and communicating (non-verbally) which position they prefer. Others hover around the halls and corridors, eyeing passers-by. Both Steamworks and the *lupinarium* are explicitly for sex. However, prostitution, while certainly a possibility at the modern bath, is normally unlikely as the clientele function as both seekers of sex and sexual objects. Still, the association between brothels and prostitution in Roman baths cannot be ruled out. At the Baths of Vedius in Ephesus, built in the same style as the Sardis complex, and on the upper level of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii, at the entrance to the city, texts mention a brothel. Two rows of small rooms flanking the *apodyterium* in Pompeii's Sarno Baths have been interpreted as possible rooms for prostitution sex: Fagan (supra n.67) 67 and T. McGinn, *The economy of prostitution in the Roman world* (Ann Arbor 2004) 212. As Fagan (36 n.309, 335-36) notes, the bath- and brothel-operators shared similar jobs: they guarded clothing and employed slaves who were also prostitutes. For further discussion of the association between baths and brothels, see McGinn 204-12.

91 P. Califia, *Public sex: the culture of radical sex* (San Francisco 2000) 17.

the sexual activities follow a hierarchical progression along the vertical and horizontal planes; the deeper one goes, the more one can see or do.

In the Sardis bath, the bather's journey could have been a sensory experience, with each stage acquiring elements that form the ingredients for a recipe of sexual behaviors. The itinerary began with the visual (the lighting and the decorations), then moved to the visual gaze (nudity and same-sex intermingling) before reaching the tactile (hot temperatures, sweat and water); finally, the visual sense is suppressed, giving way to anonymity and touch. The experience of the bath-house may be understood via sensory perception:

One participated in activities that offered a variety of connections, a broad association of sounds, touches, tastes, and smells. The imagination of the space offered a continuous experience ...⁹²

— a rather different vision of the use of space from that traditionally employed to interpret the architecture of the Roman bath-house.

Conclusions

Space needs to be understood on as many levels as possible, including how it is used or appropriated. Space can reveal much about the social and sexual attitudes, behaviors and desires of the individuals or groups within. On space M. Foucault writes:

Let's imagine a community of unlimited sexual practices that might be established there. It would once again become a place of freedom. I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try and dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other.⁹³

This is particularly true for ancient societies where archaeological or architectural evidence and textual sources, which represent the dominant social voice, often disconnect, leaving unexplored gaps and unheard voices. These gaps and unheard voices can only be filled when each form of evidence is held up as a mirror to the other; when spaces are fleshed out with identities; and when identities are localized within spaces. Only then can a greater understanding be gained about the social customs and laws that governed those who used space and the ways in which those customs and spaces may have been 'queered'.

This raises a fundamental academic problem that concerns how ancient societies and their spaces are either viewed as 'top-down', politically-dictated constructions or are imbued with ideological and hyperbolic stereotypes. 'Queer' interpretations of ancient society may be able to inform our understanding of how non-traditional and marginalized aspects of human behavior dictated thought and action and how, by extension, that is reflected on our own social mechanisms and ideologies.

This approach, in itself a 'queer archaeology', has broadened the focus beyond the visual, to include the other senses and ultimately to examine how the past might have been felt. It expands upon R. Taylor's investigation of sexual male subcultures in Roman bath-houses which uses literary sources. Most writings on Roman 'queer' sexuality have actually sublimated the potential for a queer existence by taking the mainstream primary sources at face value. The queering of space could only have relevance to the subversion of understood same-sex norms, which were clearly defined on the basis of age, the life course of the Roman male, and his status. Roman mainstream culture promoted strict dichotomies of active/passive, older/younger, free/slave male sex that suggested mechanical, sometimes punitive, and often unemotional responses to sexual relations. The anxiety of the Roman approach to sexuality was also manifest in the moralizing laws and invectives that, on the one hand, 'protected' free youth

92 I. Tattelman, "The meaning at the wall: tracing the gay bathhouse," in G. B. Ingram, A.-M. Bouthilette and Y. Retter (edd.), *Queers in space* (Seattle 1997) 399.

93 M. Foucault, "Space, knowledge, and power," in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault reader* (New York 1984) 246.

from men and, on the other, encouraged them to become active sexually — concerns directed specifically at boys when they reached the age of puberty and on throughout adolescence.

Indeed, adolescence's often ambiguous stage of self-discovery, in the transition from boy to man, was a challenge to the Roman sexual model. Visually, boys at this stage could appear more boyish or more manlike, depending on growth of beard and other physical changes to the adolescent body. Sexual maturity and experience differed immensely within this age group, leading to a vague definition of this stage of the life course and a disagreement over its precise ages (somewhere between 17 and 25). Much ink was spilled over how to treat these 'boy-men'. The attempts to preserve a rigid ethic of male-to-male sexuality with respect to age and class imply that a non-normative behaviour was being practiced. Ancient texts contain individual instances or subcultures of men, such as the *exoleti*, *drauci*, and *Galli*, who actively subverted sexual norms; these behaviors, subversive identities, and subcultures are often located within a specific 'queered' space such as the bath-house.

A journey through a Roman bath-house, with a modern gay bath as a kind of ethnographic guide, has suggested a queered space that progressed from public to private. A combination of communal nudity with normative and non-normative sexual depictions on the walls contributed to an environment that was both arousing and equalizing with respect to age and/or status. One can also argue that nudity created a universal experience of an eroticized queer space confined within the bath-house. Admission to this space began with the shedding of clothes in the *apodyterium*. Symmetrical gendered spaces further eroticized the bathing experience as they allowed the bather to construct a specific bathing experience. Mixed company could be found in the large public communal rooms, such as the *frigidarium*, and same-sex bathing in smaller, more private rooms of the *caldarium* towards the rear. The progression from public to private was accompanied by a change in the nature of the sensory experience. The most deeply-set spaces were hot, dark and intimate, creating a sensory environment where bathers were in close physical contact yet shrouded in a virtual anonymity that allowed for, and was appropriated as, a subversive sexual space where desires could be fulfilled. Authors from medical writers to satirists cautioned against the use of these hot baths by sexually active boys and men. The ancient acknowledgement of a queer space within bath-houses reminds us of a comment made by L. Berlant and M. Warner concerning the sexual and 'cruising' customs of the gay community of New York,⁹⁴ which may equally be applicable to the Roman bath-house: not everyone who went to the baths went for sex, but all benefited from the idea that some did. These spaces are not part of the functional architecture of the bath but are 'queered' in that they are created from, and expressed, metaphorical architectures of desire. The bath was one of the few public areas where a man, youth or boy, whether rich or poor, free or enslaved, prostitute or visitor, could interact in the sexualized and gendered dark spaces with relative anonymity. He was free to gaze as an observer or to participate in any sexual act in any rôle. The 'queer spaces' of the bath-house allowed normative Roman male-to-male sexuality to be subverted, as well as conventional ideas of age and social behavior that were understood to be part of the stages of the male life course.

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94 Berlant and Warner (supra n.7) 326.