

H-France Forum

Volume 15 (2020), Issue 2, #5

Ross, Andrew Israel. *Public City/Public Sex: Homosexuality, Prostitution, and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019. Xi + 248 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 (pb and ebook). ISBN: 978-1-4399-1489-2

Author's Response by Andrew Israel Ross, Loyola University Maryland

I would like to begin by thanking Jack Censer for inviting me to participate in this forum on my first book, *Public City/Public Sex: Homosexuality, Prostitution, and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, and especially for finding such excellent respondents. I would also like to thank each of the reviewers for taking the time to engage so thoughtfully with my arguments and claims about nineteenth-century prostitution and homosexuality. Their sharp analysis, even where we disagree, provides opportunities for deepening readers' engagement with the book. In this response, after I briefly summarize my arguments, I will address Jill Harsin and William Peniston's thoughts, as my own research could not exist without their foundational scholarship within the history of sexuality.[1] I will then engage with the critiques offered by Victoria Thompson and Norma Broude, both of whom point to some of the remaining ambiguities, questions, and avenues for future research raised by my book.

*Public City/Public Sex* places female prostitution and male homosexuality at the center of the history of nineteenth-century Paris. I do so by making a number of interrelated claims that situate the relationship between public sexual activity and urban change as dynamic, the one constantly shaping the other. First, in Part 1 of the book, I argue that efforts to manage the sexual and social life of the city in the early and middle parts of the century provided new opportunities for men to seek sex both with female prostitutes and with other men. The "regulationist" system that argued that female prostitution was a "necessary evil" in large cities made the sale of sex more, rather than less, visible on city streets, largely, but not exclusively, by the state sanctioning of brothels. At the same time, hygienic concerns that propelled the construction of thousands of public urinals provided new spaces for men to also seek out sex with other men. This turn to the public urinal and the confusion there between men who sought sex with other men and those who did not, I conclude, challenged many of the assumptions that undergirded regulationist thought.

In Part 2, I turn my attention to the ways prostitutes and "pederasts," as they were most often called, were conceptualized by police authorities and interacted on the streets of Paris. Here I show that the distinction between prostitute and pederast and between heterosexual and homosexual does not accurately capture the dynamic at play. The public life of nineteenth-century Paris encouraged, indeed demanded, various forms of intermixing that challenged these categories. I argue therefore, second, that the transformation of Paris during the middle part of the century provided opportunities for those seeking sex and those who did not to interact and intermingle, creating a public sexual culture that shaped the nineteenth-century city.

Finally, Part 3 addresses how Parisians responded to the creation of this public sexual culture

during the last third of the century. On the one hand, some Parisians used evidence of public sex to make claims on the state as they demanded that the police intervene more forcefully in the sexual life of the city. On the other hand, some took advantage of the apparent popularity of public sexual enticement, placing sex at the center of commercial ventures such as cafés, dancehalls, and even early gay and lesbian bars. Regardless of their own reaction, these processes made sex more central to an emerging mass politics and culture of the fin-de-siècle. That both relied on the rather ambiguous identities of those who engaged in public sexual activity only highlights the ways that the emergence of the modern city did not necessarily entail the rise of particular and distinct subcultures, but rather offered the opportunity for a more diffuse and nebulous sexual culture to emerge as well.

As William Peniston notes in his review, my arguments depend on the work of prior scholars even as I question some of their assumptions. Since two of the scholars whose work proved so foundational to my own graciously participated in this forum—Peniston himself and of course Jill Harsin—I want to begin by emphasizing how their scholarship informed my own. Harsin’s *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (1985), argued that the regulation of prostitution in nineteenth-century Paris captured working-class prostitutes in a never-ending cycle of “criminal marginality... a cycle of imprisonment, impoverishment, and crime.”[2] Efforts by the morals police to manage female prostitution, and especially control what they saw as a pandemic of “clandestine prostitution,” eventually expanded to put all working-class women at risk of police abuse.[3] Harsin thus showed how the the regulationist system so famously described by Alain Corbin actually shaped the lives of women, despite the difficulties presented by the source material in the police archives that she acknowledges in her review here.[4] Similarly, Peniston’s *Pederasts and Others* (2004) described the subculture of “pederasts” documented by the Paris police in the 1870s. Primarily utilizing the dossier the police labeled “Pédérastes et divers,” Peniston showed how men who sought sex with other men constructed social networks, even as they remained under the eyes of the authorities.[5] Ultimately, Peniston argues that these networks constituted a discrete subculture comprised of young men whose “primary goal was the pursuit of sexual pleasure...[which] differentiated them from other young, single, working-class men from the provinces, who courted women or visited prostitutes.”[6] Building on the work of other historians, especially that of Michael Sibal for the nineteenth century, Peniston’s work thus demonstrated depth and breadth of male same-sex sexual life in the late nineteenth century.[7] Both Harsin and Peniston thus wrestled with the experience of those who lived on the margins due to their sexual practices, behaviors, or identities and show how they navigated a world that sought to repress, confine, or even just ignore them.

As I describe in a recent article, when I first entered the Paris Police Archives to complete the research on what was then my dissertation, I had every intention of following in these footsteps with an examination of gay subcultures in nineteenth-century Paris.[8] I planned to write a book much in the vein of Peniston’s work or that of George Chauncey for New York City, investigating the relationship between the development of Paris under Haussmann and the emergence of gay male subcultures.[9] However, as I engaged with the archives, primarily those of the Préfecture de Police, I became aware of a different set of questions than those asked by Harsin and Peniston. If we shift our point of view away from particular sets of people and instead toward the spaces they used, do we arrive at a different understanding of these two groups? How did those who met with and/or interacted with prostitutes and pederasts understand those

interactions? Did prostitutes and pederasts, through those interactions, therefore shape how modern Paris was understood more broadly? Could we, put simply, integrate, rather than separate, the “marginalized” prostitute or the gay “subculture” into the history of Paris itself? These questions drove one of the central innovations of the book: addressing the relationship not just between prostitutes and pederasts, but also between those groups and the broader urban population. Ultimately, a perspective on space and how space was used revealed that female prostitutes and male pederasts stood at the center of nineteenth-century urban culture, as they solicited sex, appeared on the streets, and forced anyone who came across their path to wrestle with their own sexual desires. In this way, I draw on the implications of Michel Foucault’s analysis of the productive capacity of power, as well as recent debates within queer studies and history regarding the role of “identity” in the history of sexuality, to highlight the unstable contours of all of these groups of Parisians.[10]

In her review, Victoria Thompson questions some of these claims arguing, basically, that while some of my interpretations may be true, “it is possible to imagine other reactions to solicitation that might reinforce pre-existing identities.” I completely agree, as I do with her conclusion that my argument about identity “remains suggestive rather than conclusive.” This is, I think, precisely how it should be. I cannot know much about the identities of the women and men I describe in this book because I do not have access to them. I can only make suggestions of possibilities. Here, I follow queer critical history, and in particular the work of Laura Doan, who encourages us to acknowledge “at the outset the unknowability and indeterminacy of the sexual past.”[11] Indeed, I would argue that my refusal to foreclose other interpretations is essential to my emphasis on “the unstable and fluid nature of public sexual culture” that Thompson finds convincing. Key to my contention that we should recognize the permeability of the subcultures comprised of prostitutes and pederasts is precisely an acknowledgement not only that we should not impose our own categories on them, but also that they will be unable to impose their categories on us.

This perspective drew me to the mechanisms through which urban police forces, public hygienists, and urbanists sought to manage the city, and the opportunities these efforts nonetheless opened. *Public City/Public Sex* is very much about the men for whom the city was intended and for whom the management of sex was accomplished. Put differently, as Peniston points out in his comments, the book recognizes the ways that “men who bought sex, whether from women or boys, were at the center of this whole struggle [over the city], but because of their privileged position in society, they have not received the attention that they deserve — not then and not now.” These were often the men who wielded power—over women, over other men—that existed outside the forces of the state or the police. At the same time, however, I try to show how the exercise of this form of masculine privilege did not just constrain, but was also shaped by, the ways in which supposedly marginalized women and other men interacted with it. The subject here, in other words, is the multivalence of male desire and the way it has, on the one hand, been accommodated by state authorities, cultural and social assumptions, and patriarchy itself, while also, on the other hand, been molded and disrupted by those on the outskirts of society, “reverse” discourses, and the objects of patriarchy. By centering sex and sexuality, we are able to witness how the very assumptions on which patriarchy was built—namely, heterosexual power over women—were not as strong as they seemed to be. Rather, they were contingent, dependent on systems, such as regulationism, that often failed to sustain themselves

either on the individual level—as men recognized their desires for other men, as well as or in lieu of women—or on the structural level, as the business of prostitution became less a police matter and more a mainstream commercial one.

These are very much cultural, rather than economic or even social, claims. They are claims about how sex and sexual activity shaped the way people perceived the world. They are not claims about how people actually experienced it. In this regard, at least some of Norma Broude’s desire for a more thorough analysis of “patriarchal power and the control that it exerted over the lives and identities of all classes,” as well as “the lived experiences of these women” could be answered by referring back to Harsin’s work, rather than my own. Implicit in Broude’s critique is my own participation in the discourses and practices that I describe. That I too “consistently sexualiz[e]” the women I depict, as I displace the ways that sex served “as a tool of control over their [women’s] agency.” Broude’s critique, I would argue, speaks to a different conception of power than my own. I reject a false dichotomy between control and agency, consistently refusing, for instance, to depict my subjects as enacting resistance against, say, patriarchy, and instead emphasize the ways that working-class women worked within the regulationist assumptions that so shaped nineteenth-century Paris.[12] In doing so, I show that we do not have to wait for the arrival of bourgeois women to claim that women shaped public life. They had already been doing so.

As Victoria Thompson recognizes in her insightful review, one of my main claims is that efforts to manage public sex was not simply about repressing sexual deviants, but also about making sex “legible” to Parisians. Thompson also points to one of the main goals of the book: to help us think differently not just about women and men, homosexuals and heterosexuals, but also about the city itself. In fact, I hope that my book goes some way toward encouraging more historians of Paris to pay attention to work in gender history and sexual history, in ways that for instance Richard Hopkin’s recent book on greenspaces does, cited by Thompson here.[13] Thompson also points to one of my main challenges and difficulties as I wrote the book: the tension between continuity and discontinuity. She is absolutely correct that I ultimately see my story as one of continuity, one that draws attention to the long reach of regulationism over essentially the entire century. That said, I do argue that Haussmannization began a broader process where people reconceptualized what it meant to live in Paris. The claims that letter-writers made on the police during the early Third Republic relied on an understanding of the public city, accessible to and essentially made for the rising middle class, that I do not think existed earlier in the century.

Both Broude and Thompson conclude their reviews by addressing a final moment of rupture depicted in the final chapter of the book, where I argue that the rise of commercial entertainments and their deployment of forms of sexual activity that once characterized the streets disrupted the more fluid publics of the nineteenth century. Thompson points out that despite these processes, opportunities would always exist for using “public spaces in unintended ways,” while Broude critiques the depiction of women in nascent homosexual subcultures and implies that I treat them as “tools.” My arguments here remain somewhat tentative, but I remain convinced that the rise of queer male space entailed greater separation from the street life that characterized the prior decades, as men who sought sex with other men were increasingly able to do so on their own terms. Those terms, however, often involved their own participation in and perpetuation of the patriarchal assumptions about the sexual availability of working-class women

in public. Men who feigned heterosexual interest in order to gain access to queer space in public often did so by participating in the same forms of toxic masculinity as their straight neighbors. I hope my next project, on the rise of transnational sexual politics in fin-de-siècle Paris, will more fully address the relationship between the rise of queer public culture and debates over regulated prostitution.

I hope it is clear from my response how much I appreciate the incisive comments — especially the critical ones — from all four reviewers. That many of their concerns revolved around issues that I had wrestled with throughout the process of writing this book speaks, I would argue, to the book's success at bringing out a set of issues of interest to historians and art historians of gender and sexuality and urban life. But it also speaks to the quality of the comments and the willingness of each reviewer to engage with my argument on its own terms. I write this response in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, as I “social distance” in my small apartment. It has been gratifying to feel nonetheless deeply connected to this intellectual community as we debate and discuss the issues raised in both my book and in these comments.

## NOTES

[1] Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); William A. Peniston, *Pederasts and Others: Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004).

[2] Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 206.

[3] Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 248.

[4] Alain Corbin, *Les filles de noce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution (19e siècle)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982).

[5] “Pédérastes et divers,” BB6, Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris.

[6] Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*, 68.

[7] See for example Michael Sibalis, “The Palais-Royal and the Homosexual Subculture of Nineteenth-Century Paris.” *Journal of homosexuality* 41, no. 3-4 (2001): 117-129. Peniston's book came out just prior to another important examination of this male subculture: Régis Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines à Paris, 1870-1918* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

[8] Andrew Israel Ross, “Sex in the Archives: Homosexuality, Prostitution, and the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris,” *French Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2017): 267-290.

[9] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[10] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley

(New York: Vintage, 1990), 73; Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[11] Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 61.

[12] I explore this binary more thoroughly in my article-length treatment of the brasseries à femmes: Andrew Israel Ross, "Serving Sex: Playing with Prostitution in the *Brasseries à Femmes* of Late Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 2 (2015): 288-313.

[13] Richard S. Hopkins, *Planning the Greenspaces of Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

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