

# ULTRA

## Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Image: Michaelmore, Roeger & Russell, *Chester House*, Belair 1966, State Library of South Australia BRG 346/28/6/2.

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# Queer Terrain: Architecture of Queer Ecology

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## Keywords

Queer theory  
Ecology  
Queer space  
Assemblage  
Body  
Architecture

## Terminology

Authors quoted or discussed in this text may have varied definitions but more commonly describe queer in reference to people of gender and sexual diversity, including but not limited to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, intersex. I use this term similarly, although my preferred terminology of 'queer' refers to a state of being and action that encompasses an approach to broadly resisting instituted violence to people and the environment.

## Abstract

This paper seeks to ally the interdisciplinary frameworks offered by 'Queer Ecology' with an architectural inquiry to expand both fields. Queer theory alone offers scant discussions of material and architectural practices, while environmental discourse in architecture fails to address its role in ecological and social-political violence.

A clothing-optional / cruising beach in rural Victoria, Sandy Beach also known as Somers Beach, exemplifies how the queer body's navigation of space responds to complex ecological, urban, and social conditions. A queering of architectural definitions allows this site to be researched as a historically significant urban/architectural site of social and environmental value.

It is suggested that the subtle yet complex practices of site transformations enacted through occupation are an architecture of environmental connective possibility. 'Queered' corporeality orientates the body and material practices towards assemblages where boundaries between humans and nature are transgressed, ultimately constituting a 'queer ecological architecture'

## Introduction

1. Kellogg Brown, 'Western Port Ramsar Wetland: Ecological Character Description,' n.d., 189.

2. Beat, is an Australian term used to mean public places of sex.

Some seventy kilometres southeast from Naarm (Melbourne), in the lands of the Boonwurrung nation, is Western Port Bay, a Ramsar (International significant wetland) area.<sup>1</sup> Somers Beach is a thin stretch of picturesque coastline strewn with seaweed and driftwood. Pods of dolphins are occasionally seen in the clear water. Travelling along the coast a reasonable distance away from the closest settlement, an ominous sign warns of 'live firing' and the prohibition of trespassing on Navy grounds. During the warmer months of the year, a cove or two beyond the warning sign, one may find naked bodies along the beach and perhaps a few more hidden amongst the forested dunes of the nearby beat.<sup>2</sup>

3. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

This paper explores strategies and approaches for alternative modes of architectural analysis through a queer ecological reading of Somers Beach. This framework allows for a broader approach to architectural analysis through its inclusion of queer, social, geographical, ecological, and post-colonial studies. The queer practices that take place within Somers Beach demonstrate how queer orientation of bodies extend the limits of corporeality to include the surroundings, a construction of the psyche that loosens the dichotomous boundary of the human and nature to encompass both natural and human-altered terrains.<sup>3</sup> This paper will argue that the resultant queer occupation demonstrates an architectural practice of environmental connective possibility.

4. Sandilands, Gordon Brent Ingram et al., 'Undercurrents: Queer Nature,' *North York*, May 1994.

Queer ecology was first coined by Catriona Sandilands in the 1994 journal *Undercurrents* title called *Queer Nature*. Sandilands applies a queer theoretical approach to environmental politics with the intent to queer the "politics of nature [to] no longer be an articulation of [the] white, male, heterosexual ..." and subvert a heteronormative narrative of the queer as being "unnatural".<sup>4</sup> Queer ecology highlights essential connections between material, cultural and environmental issues. At the time, the term gained little traction, but now a growing body of publications combine the respective concerns of queer ecology with many other fields reflecting the growing concerns for socio and environmental catastrophe. Despite this rise in publication relating to queer ecology, there remains an omission of any queer ecological publications combined with an architectural inquiry.

5. Sandilands, Gordon Brent Ingram et al., 'Undercurrents: Queer Nature,' *North York*, May 1994, page 8.

This paper is not alone in combining the concerns of 'queer ecology' with other socio-spatialised inquiries, Gordon Brent Ingram's literary contribution to the field of queer ecology also began with a contribution to the 1994 *Undercurrents* issue. Ingram's concerns focused on the loss of specific queer landscapes of Los Angeles and the denial of safe access to them. Ingram made a call to "contextualise queerness" He saw "a difficulty of the Lesbian and Gay community to take leadership roles on environmental issues until there is a better awareness of the spatial context in that community."<sup>5</sup>

20 years later, the conversation surrounding the contextualising of queerness and the role of queers to take leadership roles in ecological discourse has vastly altered. Geographer, Mathew Gandy, offers a thorough examination of the topic of queer geology via the study of Abney Park, London, an unkept cemetery which is also a popular

6. Cruising is the U.S. term for the seeking of sex often in public locations. Cottaging is a British term but usually involves toilets.

7. Matthew Gandy, 'Queer Ecology: Nature, Sexuality, and Heterotopic Alliances,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 4 (August 2012): 727–47, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d10511>.

8. Timothy Morton, 'Guest Column: Queer Ecology,' *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 273–82, page 6.

cruising site.<sup>6</sup> Forming an alliance between 'queer ecology' and urban ecology Gandy suggests that a queered spatial theory "hold(s) a wider implication for the material characterises of urban spaces."<sup>7</sup> Gandy dismisses the 'political limitations' associated with public sex failing to acknowledge how 'the intricate terrain' of such beats is formed and constitutes the material characteristic of the site at the sub-urban level. That is to say, Gandy while looking at the urban condition of the park misses a discussion surrounding any agency the users have in actively maintaining the park's heterotopic quality. This paper posits that such an 'intricate terrain' is a communal practice of queer ecological architecture.

Architectural training informs an analysis that acknowledges the importance of the urban context and works at the scales that relate to the intimate occupation of space. It is also a discipline that has yet to fully acknowledge its devastating impact on the earth's surface. To happen upon the labyrinth of desire lines (the informal paths made in the earth by bodies), to encounter curled bodies under trees or within sandy burrows with little delineation between an architecture for the human or fauna is to find a rare archaeology of queer practice oriented towards nature. Tim Morton might describe such scenes as a "queer ecological alliance of nonlocalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the non-living, between organism and environment."<sup>8</sup>

## History

9. Boon Wurrung: The Filling of the Bay – The Time of Chaos - Nyernila', Culture Victoria, accessed 6 October 2021, <http://www.cvvic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/nyernila/boon-wurrung-the-filling-of-the-bay-the-time-of-chaos/>.

10. Agriculture Victoria Victorian Resources Online, '7.1 Central Sunklands', text, Victoria, accessed 19 July 2021, [http://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/landform\\_geomorphological\\_framework\\_7.1](http://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/landform_geomorphological_framework_7.1).

11. Richard (Richard M.) Cotter, 'No Place for a Colony : Sullivan Bay, Sorrento and the Collins Settlement' (Melbourne : Essien, 2001).

12. 'Settlement at Western Port | Ergo', accessed 6 October 2021, <http://ergo.slvvic.gov.au/explore-history/colonial-melbourne/convicts/settlement-western-port>.

It is crucial to acknowledge the relevant environmental social and geological conditions that have contributed to the current condition of the researched area. The Bunjil Dreaming Story tells of the area's fluid nature, with the Boon Wurrung people recounting the creation of Port Phillip bay only 1000 years ago.<sup>9</sup> The area, now known as Western Port, is a depression between two faults. Rising waters from the end of the last ice age flooded the sunklands and thus transformed much of the surroundings into marshlands.<sup>10</sup> Within this low-lying zone of the Koo-wee Rup Depression, Somers Beach offers a rather unique stretch of sandy terrain.

European colonisation movements were heavily influenced by these geological patterns, as access to major rivers and firmer grounds were essential for larger settlements and Western farming practices. The British made several attempts to set up colonies closer to current day Somers. In 1802, the British invaded Boon Wurrung land to establish a convict settlement and later abandoned it due to a lack of fresh water and suitable soils.<sup>11</sup> Several years later, in fear of a French invasion, a British fort was created on Phillip Island and abandoned in 1826 for another failed attempt to settle the mainland. William Hovell reported the Westernport area being entirely unsuitable for settlement.<sup>12</sup> It was not until 1835 that permanent occupation in Boon Wurrung / Wurundjeri land took hold in Melbourne, some seventy kilometres from these areas. Topographical features and the high value of recently discovered gold deposits resulted in a rush of colonisation further west, making Western Port somewhat peripheral to European settlements, yet this did not prevent huge amounts of damage in the draining of marshland up until

13. Parks Victoria, Victoria, and Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Western Port Ramsar Site: Strategic Management Plan*. (East Melbourne, Vic.: Dept. of Sustainability and Environment, 2003).

14. Alan Gregory, 'Cultural Advice', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed 19 July 2021, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/somers-arthur-herbert-tennyson-8578>.

15. 'LORD SOMERS GREETES THE SOMERS LADS', *Australasian* (Melbourne, Vic.: 1864 - 1946), 1937.

the 1970's. In 2003, the entire bay area was recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) *Man and the Biosphere (MAB)* Program.<sup>13</sup>

The Somers township and beach are named after Lord Arthur Herbert Tennyson Somers, a former Governor of Victoria. Described as an "all-around athlete", in 1931 Somers set up the Lord Somers' Camp and later became the chief commissioner of the scouts.<sup>14</sup> Historic photos of Lord Somers visiting the camp in 1933 showed festive scenes of young men and boys cross-dressing in a sea-themed women's attire, described as being 'dressed for battle'.<sup>15</sup> Lord Somers Camp still operates all-male programs today, with 100 or so 'groupers' committing to team-building exercises and notably strict rules. Mr Hammond, a volunteer and former attendee, remarked in *The Age* that "bikini-clad girls at the beach occasionally posed a distraction" and that "section 92" of camp rules banned talking to girls and included the punishment of being branded by paint for being caught.



IN BATTLE ARRAY.—The Powerhouse Group in "fighting kit" for the purpose of receiving new entrants. Copyright: National Library Australia

16. corporateName=Royal Australian Navy, 'HMAS Cerberus', accessed 19 July 2021, <https://www.navy.gov.au/establishments/hmas-cerberus>.

17. Victoria and Land Department of Environment Water and Planning, *Western Port Ramsar Site Management Plan*, 2017, <http://hla.gov.au/lnla.obj-528336422>.

18. Kristen Davis, 'Bondi's Underbelly: The "Gay Gang Murders"', 2007, 7.

In 1911, land surrounding Hann's inlet, which forms the isthmus of Somers Beach, was purchased for the fledgeling Royal Australian Navy. The Navy training facility HMAS Cerberus operates to this day and boasts on its official website that "The beach and bushlands around the bay provide beautiful surrounds for walks and expeditions ... canoeing and kayaking are fun ways to spend the weekend."<sup>16</sup> The 1517-hectare facility has multiple conservation overlays protecting the sensitive surroundings from further naval or developmental expansion. The Navy base legislatively shelters important remnant ecosystems sharing it with some of the 330 native species, 89 of which are threatened.<sup>17</sup> The specific area along Somers and Sandy Beach where the cruising takes place is protected by the Navy and sometimes referred to as Navy Beach, anecdotally the base supplying the cruising beach with recruits seeking other 'fun ways to spend the weekend.'<sup>18</sup>



Sandy Beach, Image courtesy of geostudies

## Queer History

19. 'Anger Swells over Bid to Gay-Proof Beach,' accessed 19 July 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/anger-swells-over-bid-to-gay-proof-beach-20110604-1fmdh.html>.

20. 'Five Way Summer Shape Up', Klick!, October 1979, Archives of Sexuality and Gender.

Queer histories are often personal and drawn largely from anecdotal experiences with material evidence of queer histories sadly often destroyed or unarchived by mainstream institutions. Commonly archived material regarding beats/cruising grounds or ephemeral queer places sadly takes the form of police arrests or raids and homophobic 'community concerns' in local papers.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the beach's 'unofficial' nude status on property managed by the Armed Forces contributing to minimal material, homophobic or otherwise that relates to this site.

Notwithstanding the continued illegality of public sex and nudity, there are some published historical insights of the Somers area as having a nude or gay beach. The earliest mention found in the gay press is in 1979, one year before the State of Victoria legalised gay activity and well before police brutality ceased. *Klick Magazine* featured an article about getting fit for summer mentioning 'Somers' as being a place you would be 'stripped down' and need looking your best.<sup>20</sup> The article is vague about what happened at Somers, but a sexual/exhibitionist undertone

is present yet subtle enough not to draw too much attention from the authorities that would often stake out such spaces to arrest or harass.

21. Stephen Mattsson, 'What a Beach', *Campaign Australia*, November 1987, no. 143 edition, Archives of Sexuality and Gender.

22. 'Somers Nude Beach - Sandy Point, Miramar', Somers Gay Mornington Peninsula Cruising Areas', accessed 19 July 2021, <http://www.cruisinggays.com/mornington-peninsula/areas/56001-somers-nude-beach-sandy-point/>.

23. 'Timeline: 22 Years between First and Last Australian States Decriminalising Male Homosexuality - ABC News (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)', accessed 19 July 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-24/timeline:-australian-states-decriminalise-male-homosexuality/6719702?nw=0>.

24. Gott, Robert, 'The Summer I Saw Norman Yemm Naked', accessed 19 July 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/the-summer-i-saw-norman-yemm-naked-20160106-gm0fw7.html>.

25. Bill Parsons, 'Erotica Australian Style', *Outrage: A Magazine for Lesbians and Gay Men*, October 1990.

26. Morris, Meagan. 'On the Beach,' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Triechler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, pp. 450–78. New York: Routledge Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies* (Hoboken: Hoboken : Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1992).

27. Alex McKinnon, 'Even without Private Clubs, the "egalitarian" Australian Beach Is a National Myth,' *The Guardian*, 12 October 2020, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/12/even-without-private-clubs-the-egalitarian-australian-beach-is-a-national-myth>.

28. Michele Lobo, 'Affective Energies: Sensory Bodies on the Beach in Darwin, Australia,' *Emotion, Space and Society* 12 (August 2014): 101–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.12.012>.

In 1987 *Campaigns Australia* published a list of now mostly extinct Melbourne 'gay beaches'. It mentions, for "those more adventurous in spirit and mobility Somers Beach has a gay section just past the Commonwealth land".<sup>21</sup> Important in this reference is that both distance and jurisdiction are mentioned - urban factors that are important to the site's queer usage. There is also a short mention in the gay press from the '90s reporting that the Commonwealth (Federal) 'Police [were] moving people on', but not making arrests at Somers; this is seen as preferable to potential harassment by State Police. The Cruising Gays website adds to that perception stating that "[the beach] is still Commonwealth land and therefore out of (the) jurisdiction of local police if they bothered to walk there."<sup>22</sup>

Given its unofficial nature, it is not known when Somers Beach became widely known for being a beat or a nude beach. Liberation movements began in the early 1970s, and male homosexuality only became legalised in Victoria in the 1980s, with harassment by police continuing well after then.<sup>23</sup> However, there is evidence that nudists had frequented the site prior to this period. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Columnist Robert Gott mentioned that when he was brought to Somers (Beach) by a nudist friend, commented on encountering actor Norman Yemm naked, as "a fine figure of a man". Yemm was the first Australian actor to appear nude on television in 1973.<sup>24</sup> It was the 70's after all, and Australia was not immune to liberation trends from other parts of the world that advocated for relaxed attitudes to sexual freedoms and greater environmental awareness, a political linking of the queer and ecological.

In *Outrage Magazine*, publisher and pornographer Bill Parsons reminisced on how prior to the '70s, pornography had not been legal in Australia. However, he recalled how imported adult content presented as 'nature' magazines were more likely to bypass the 'draconian censorship of the time. It is not mentioned why the censors deemed nudity in nature more palatable than in the bedroom, but Parsons used this oversight, and the market's familiarity with imported nature porn, to produce similar local content and mentioned Somers beach as a location where he would bring both male and female models to photograph in all sorts of 'naked abandon'.<sup>25</sup> Somers beach had become a haven against mainstream eco and erotophobias, the political counter

## Beaches

Meagan Morris discusses the beach as a problematic site where myths of national culture are written,<sup>26,27</sup> Australian-ness is performed at the Beach,<sup>28</sup> "The beach was and remains a heteronormative white masculine space entailing performances of sexuality, wealth, voyeurism, class, and possession."<sup>29</sup> coming at the expense of the non-normative, non-white body which is excessively 'othered' on the beach. The Cronulla and the Reclaim the Beach (Cite) riots are obvious and extreme examples of this in action, a colonial violence targeting brown bodies. Non - white bodies seek the "Shady groves in the bush (as) places

30. Michele Lobo, 'Affective Energies: Sensory Bodies on the Beach in Darwin, Australia,' *Emotion, Space and Society* 12 (August 2014): 101–9.

31. Davis, 'Bondi's Underbelly: The "Gay Gang Murders."'

of voluntary withdrawal from the disapproving white gaze and the whiteness of public spaces."<sup>30</sup>

When discussing beach violence directed to towards 'the other' the 'Gay Gang Murders' of course come to mind, with dozens if not hundreds of murders of queer carried out at Sydney beachside locations with police complicity later exposed.<sup>31</sup> Resultantly the queer body becomes highly attuned to social urban conditions, a knowledge gained from a lifetime of navigating environments with an acute awareness of the potential hostility present in both public and private spaces. On the beach social policing, violent or otherwise, gets compounded to a small strip of sand. Just as the displacement of the queer and LGBTQI from the most accessible parts of the beach leads to the deliberate occupying of other parts, sometimes the rocky parts or less desirable areas that are farther away.

### Queer Orientations and Cruising heterotopias

32. Sara Ahmed, 'Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others' (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), /z-wcorg/, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>.

This withdrawal of the queer from the urban areas of the beach and the occupying of Somers Beach by queers is how, as Sarah Ahmed would describe, "queer orientation" builds space. In *Queer Phenomenology (2008)*, Ahmed discusses in highly spatialised terms how a collective "turning away" from places and "turning towards" other places build queer spaces.<sup>32</sup> Gayle Salamon's *Assuming A Body (2010)* also disuses materiality this time via the trans body and how the psyche can redefine and extend one's own corporeal limits. (Cite) The combination of Ahmed's and Salamon's work describes how the psyche is responsible for the body's pliability and responsible for the contribution of what objects and materials build queer spaces. Within the sand dunes of Somers and along the beach frontage is such an example of a communal building of queer space, evidenced by how bodies inherit, use and modify it.

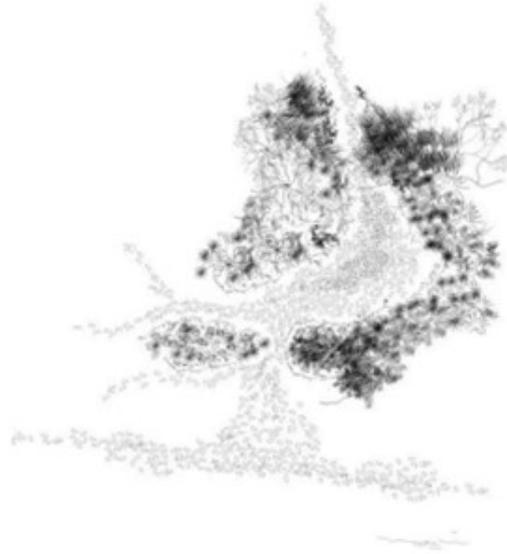
33. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46–49.

The conception of communal queer space parallels concepts discussed in a 1967 lecture by Michel Foucault regarding 'heterotopias', published in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* leading many to link the material and spatial language used by Foucault to emerging discussions on queer space.<sup>33</sup> As discussed queer occupation does have a material condition, one that is formed and curated to assist the site's heterotopic qualities. Queer occupation has a material condition that is neither discursive nor theoretical with respect to the building of queer space. Queer occupation is a material transformation of a site by a queer body.

It is the careful and recurring navigation of the beach and the surrounding dunes that create the topographical modifications integral to the maintenance of this as a queer site. Footprints become signifiers leading to the naturally forming sea wall which is breached by a soft siege ramp of sand formed by the recurring use of humans and animals. The locations of otherwise discreet thresholds into this other space are only half a meter or so wide and lead to pathways that connect a handful of clearances behind the sandy ridge. The area behind the ridge is made of mostly low-lying grasses and shrubs with small circular clearances formed by bodies pressing into the terrain. The clearances are often large enough for two or three beach towels arranged side by side. The

34. Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, 1st edition (New York: William Morrow, 1997).

chosen location of the clearances are such that when laying down users become enveloped in the topography, an embrasure of dune ridges, coastal grasses and shrubs that “provide(ing) multiple barriers to intervention and observation” so desired for discretion.<sup>34</sup> The natural protection from the elements allows people to spend longer periods at the beach in relative comfort, and from these areas, one can also survey those who seek intimacy by venturing into the labyrinth of the dark woods just beyond.



Map of beach dunes, Image by Luca Lana

35. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46–49.

Non-verbal communication amongst cruisers where an exchange of a glance or nod becomes a “certain permission(.) and ... certain gesture(.)”<sup>35</sup> to move inland, towards the denser vegetation of trees that have formed light topsoil. A changed atmosphere gives rise to other senses, here the sounds of waves soften, absorbed by distance and foliage, and soil. Darker, cooler, damper conditions permeate below the canopy of small trees, twisted tree trunks, shrubs, and grasses, bends and forks in the path, an undulating topography signposting the routes to follow. It is an ecological equivalent of a mirror maze, the body and context become inseparable. One follows another’s body deeper into an intricate architecture of trunks and shrubs that form vaulted arches, coinvent branches become armature to hold, the grasping hand of users long gone still worn into the surface of the bark.



Map of bushlands, Image by Luca Lana

36. Dirk van den Heuvel and Robert Gorny, 'Trans-Bodies/Queering Spaces', *Footprint* 11, no. 2# 21 (2017).

The definition of architecture needs then to be queered so as then the description of the cruising grounds offered, which details a considered system of material manipulation through occupation can be read as type of collective and anonymously constructed architecture. "Queer theory unsettles architecture as an embodiment of essentialist categories."<sup>36</sup> It works to undermine dialectic architectural categorisations that marginalise particular peoples and forms of matter, critically reconsidering what constitutes architecture itself. This operation does more than just re-categorise queer sites as being worthy of architectural enquiry. It allows for, in a post-colonial manner, queer sites and practices as offering an alternate form of occupation that undoes or acknowledges where architecture is complicit in violence towards people and the environment.

### Queer Ecological Architecture

37. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2006).

38. Catriona Sandilands, 'Queer Ecology', in *Keywords for Environmental Studies* (New York University Press, 2016., n.d.), <https://keywords.nyupress.org/environmental-studies/essay/queer-ecology/>.

Western discourse positions the human and the nonhuman in a dichotomy between nature and culture. Nature is seen as the feminine other, something to be objectified, commanded by men for exploitation.<sup>37</sup> This dialectic results in patriarchal violence directed to the 'other' of the environment and gender nonconforming. Queer ecology undermines false heteronormative arguments levelled at queers for being "unnatural" (just as feminist eco criticisms do for gender biases). Nature is anything but heterosexual, and queer ecological discussions wrestle nature away from the heteronormative domain.<sup>38</sup>

39. Robin Evans, 'Translations from Drawing to Building', *AA Files*, no. 12 (1986): 3–18.

Victorian era reforms of architecture "limited indiscriminate use of undifferentiated rooms." Sex was to take place entirely within the domestic realm of the married (heterosexual) couples' private bedroom.<sup>39</sup> The linkage of morality with dirtiness has ever since influenced an expectation that architecture excludes dirt and confine within, sex. The cruising grounds of Somers beach, host sexual practises immersed in nature's dirt unmediated by walls and doors. A transgression of typical social-spatial conditions reinforced by traditional architecture.

40. Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* (Indiana University Press, 2010).

41. Tema Milstein and Elizabeth Dickinson, 'Gynocentric Greenwashing: The Discursive Gendering of Nature: Gynocentric Greenwashing,' *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5, no. 4 (December 2012): 510–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01144.x>.

42. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.*, 2017.

43. Arsenale See on Google Maps, 'Biennale Architettura 2021 | David Gissen, Jennifer Stager and Mantha Zarmakoupi', La Biennale di Venezia, 15 April 2020, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/stations/david-gissen-jennifer-stager-and-mantha-zarmakoupi>.

44. David Gissen, *Subnature: Architecture's Other Environments* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2012).

45. Graham Willet, Wayne Murdhoach, and Daniel Marshall, *Secret Histories of Queer Melbourne* (Australian Lesbian Queer Archives, 2017).

When recounting a historic nude protest on melting polar ice caps, Stacy Alaimo writes how nakedness in this instance had helped “cast off the boundaries of the human, allowing us to imagine corporeality not as a ground of static substance but as a place of possible connections...”<sup>40</sup> Being naked or erotic within nature is the queer ecological act that critique types of occupation that come at the expense of the planet. Stacy Alaimo, Tema Milstein and Elizabeth Dickinson describe elements of the cruising practices described above, as an “immersed multisensory perceiving to relate to/within nature.”<sup>41</sup> A Queer immersion in nature can redescribe and alter the material conditions typically associated with human occupation as it can invite discussions on cohabitation. Anna Tsing and Donnah Harroway describe ruinous worlds in which the human and otherwise are learning to co-inhabit.<sup>42</sup> This vestige landscape, home to migrant birds, rare flora, and a range of imported species including the queers all share the precarity of making homes during the Anthropocene.

Architectural researcher David Gissen does not explicitly mention queerness in his publications. Nonetheless, his advocacy for ‘crip rights’, an investigation into historical, social struggles such as the Paris Commune places his work within an intersectional queer field.<sup>43</sup> In *Subnature: Architecture's Other Environments*, Gissen critiques modern architecture’s exclusion of “other environments” and discusses ‘modern’ architecture’s obsession with expelling a range of material and atmospheric conditions such as the damp and the dirty. The revival of classic Roman grottos in the 19th century is an example where dark and dank conditions were intentionally produced to form a subversive architectural type designed for ‘salacious’ use.<sup>44</sup> Many such grottos and the dark meandering paths surrounding them became cruising grounds, in many respects their intended usage.<sup>45</sup> The queer sexual practices that took place here do so wholly immersed within this highly ‘othered’ atmosphere of a constructed nature; one that mimics the spatial and material patterns of cruising seen within less urban spaces such as Somers.

## Conclusions

The exclusion of minority groups and Indigenous peoples from architectural conversations has for so long rejected the significant contributions to design discourse. Given urban and architectural practices involvement in current environmental crises perhaps the inclusion of the queer and ecological can contribute alternate perspectives. Early queer movements were allied with environmental ones, intentional communities, protests, festivals, the aesthetic production of that era. One can ask whether present in the patterning of this cruising ground is a contemporary aesthetic of queer ecological design.

Borrowing interdisciplinary methods from spatialised vocations, such as urbanism, assists in the better understanding of queer places. In addition, architectural methodologies of site analysis, mapping and an expanded application of architectural terminology allow for a more nuanced appraisal of the material spatial practices found within queer places. The illumination of communal yet anonymous designing affords a greater agency to those involved in the production.

The Somers beach cruising grounds was born from the illegality of queer desire and an intentional turn towards being immersed within nature. This site has been active for a half-century and (prior to covid-19 restrictions) still endures yet like so many queer spaces it is precarious potentially lost to rising seas, or the desire to remain indoors. The resulting structures described are made up of no more than the earth and or branches. The architecture described here may not resemble others typically discussed, perhaps because such an architecture is not involved in the ownership of land, nor has it necessitated vast amounts of material displacement and the associated ecological destruction.