

Regulation and the Tactics of Soft-core Urbanism

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, hypersexuality has proliferated across a range of media. Sex has become a focus of civic concern, with technologies facilitating sexual communication, and its movement into urban space extending access to pornographically styled representations. As media presence continues to be unavoidable and as urban space becomes less differentiated from media space, there is a need for urban policy to contextualize and critique the role of hypersexuality in neo-liberal cities.

Contrary to the position that 'soft-core urbanism' is either pastiche or satire, this article examines a hypersexualized case study to suggest that the 'harmless fun' of hypersexual representations underestimates the infiltration of porno-chic media in cities. Using a combination of theoretical, historical and visual analyses as well as feminist theory and analytical drawings, the research demonstrates how the hypersexualisation of urban space is taking place in subtle yet pervasive ways.

Key Words: hypersexuality; soft-core urbanism.

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Overview and method

Urban space has acquired increasing significance as a medium for provocative hypersexualised communication, making the general public a captive audience (Roseware 2005) to soft-core, pornographically styled images. I distinguish the term hypersexual from more fashionable and recognized terms such as 'raunch' and 'raunchy,' made famous by journalist Ariel Levy.¹ Populist terms such as 'raunch culture' have helped to make the phenomenon of hypersexuality more seductive and disguise the deeper social issues a play. 'Porno-chic' is a useful description as it neatly couples the mainstreaming of pornography with popular culture, referring specifically to the uptake of stripping and pornography aesthetics in fashion, music and popular culture (McNair 2002, 61). 'Hypersexuality,' by extension, denotes a more critical position and problematizes contemporary sexualization as a moment of excess.

Media studies professor Feona Attwood has asserted that attitudes towards sex have taken on 'new forms of expression' (Attwood 2006, 80). Within her discussion she assembles the territory of what I describe as 'hyper'-sexualization where the combination of more permissive attitudes to sexuality, the mainstreaming of sexual services and sex 'work,' pornography and sexualized communication technology, have all extended sexual discourses and feed an extensive discussion of sex which can be described as an 'excess' or hypersexuality.

Others have adopted this word too; for example, Kenneth C. W. Kammeyer associates hypersexuality not only with academic scholarship and research into sex therapy but also with legislation and judicial rulings, the entertainment world, and increasingly with the cyber world. His use of the word fits routinely with what he describes as the sex-saturated culture specific to North America. With Jean Baudrillard at the centre of his analysis, Kammeyer extends the definition of hypersexuality to suggest that the images of mediated simulations 'undermine and take the place of unmediated sexual experience' (Kammeyer citing Baudrillard 2008, 12).

It is estimated that over twenty-five percent of advertising includes sexualised content, and with the influence of novel, dynamic and mobile advertising typologies, engagement with hypersexualised images in urban environments is complex and multi-faceted.² These images and events – which some view as 'harmless', passive, or nostalgic sexual representations – are increasingly critiqued as actively hypersexualised occurrences with subtle yet concerning consequences (Kalms 2014). Of particular interest here, and indeed the aim of the research, is to reveal the way that infrastructures materially express the production of hypersexuality. Over the past decade traditional advertising tactics and infrastructure have been 'made new' in the neo-liberal media city (figure 1). With media reconfigured, I propose that a hybrid 'technology of sexiness' (Evans, Riley, Shankar, 2010) emerges that reinforces gender stereotyping and hegemonic heterosexist behaviour.

By looking in detail at a controversial advertising case study, I examine four interrelated media: the hypersexualised advertising photography; the activation of hypersexualised 'promotional' salespersons; hypersexualised social media; and the press media coverage generated by the controversial campaign – all operating across the mediascape infrastructure of cities. The issues and questions addressed by this research include how the expansion of consumer media into new and novel typologies may help to disseminate and promulgate hypersexual encounters that construct a particular type of heterosexual relations and limit diverse, inclusive participation in cities. I also discuss

¹ This term was coined by Levy (2005).

² This statistic is from Whipple (1992). This research develops a key argument that the conflation of media with architecture is a dominant aspect of neo-liberal cities.

how the use of media results in a distributed and mobile hypersexualised culture that resists legislation and planning policy as well as revealing gaps in the self-regulated advertising standards system. I conclude that rigorous critique of sexualised content, of novel infrastructures and of urban contexts will allow for better understanding of how these hypersexualised and highly mediated sites contribute to shaping social space and gendered behaviour.

A series of limits has been imposed on this research. Firstly, the research is limited to analysing heterosexual hypersexuality, and more specifically, limited to hypersexuality as it affects women. As such, it does not extrapolate the impacts of hypersexuality on men or the ways that men are hypersexualized in contemporary culture as well. Secondly, there is no doubt that hypersexuality has implications for those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or intersex. While aspects of queer culture and practice develop alternative positions and potential antidotes to the problem of hypersexuality, the effects and methods for analyzing non-heterosexual hypersexuality have specific nuances and, as such, are not directly incorporated into this discussion. Thirdly, while the current media-driven sexualized culture affects children, and many researchers are working diligently in this arena, these issues demand a different lens of investigation that is beyond the scope of the paper.

While primarily addressing architectural scholarship, hypersexual issues are raised from an expansive position that understands architectural praxis as inherently interdisciplinary and contingent. Therefore, responses to my questions and concerns are developed with evidence not only from architecture but also from aligned disciplinary fields such as media studies and gender studies. What is foregrounded in this approach is how the hypersexualization of urban space affects social interaction and legitimizes heterosexist attitudes that favour opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. These attitudes problematically presume that heterosexuality and opposite-sex attractions are normal and superior. As such, heteronormativity serves to endorse heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

My method aims to manage the critique of academic approaches to feminism *and* architecture via the textual *and* visual appraisal of architectural phenomena and via the use of case studies. The use of methods that bridge architectural language with pop-cultural language also aims to unite the theoretical concerns with the practical in a way that moves beyond the limiting opposition between theory and lived experience. With a position preoccupied with 'pop and commercial culture, a mixture of anthropological and aesthetic interest' (Fausch 2011, 376). *Learning from Las Vegas* (1977) provides an analytical method for understanding the metropolis, involving 'information graphics, aerial photographs, snap shots, signage, diagrams, all manner of maps, plans, elevations, sections, heraldry, graphs, sketches, charts, and lists' (Vinegar and Golec 2009, 31). Photographer Ed Ruscha's work sets a precedent for this book in the manner in which the Las Vegas studio engaged with the unfamiliar content. Ruscha's 1960s documentation of Las Vegas experimented with the size and scale of representing the urban landscape of North America. The photographic compendium by Ruscha (1966), *Every building on the Sunset Strip*, is focused on the documentation of the buildings' façades. The images are each shot front-on and from across the street. Composed into an 8.2-metre accordion-folded compendium the images reveal an approach that is both at-a-distance but also alert to minute detail. At the time his work profoundly impacted Venturi and Scott Brown's practice and studio research. In *Learning From Las Vegas*, Venturi et al. used Ruscha's pop culture technique to identify previously undocumented urban phenomena in the city of Las Vegas. Interpretations of Ruscha's serial black and white images are given in the case study examinations of hypersexual urbanism and are

understood as a type of ‘unlearning’ where the distanced and ‘dead pan’ format means that phenomena are examined as if for the first time.³

In 2009 the many legacies of *Learning from Las Vegas* were collated in a collection edited by Michael J. Golec, that suggests the selection of image types used by Venturi et al. were influenced by ‘media studies, sociology, urban studies, and pop art’ (Vinegar and Golec 2009). Golec suggests that Ruscha’s methods of stitching the elevation as a continuous stretch serves to resolve the problem of conveying the ‘vivid disorderliness, or semantic dimensionality, of the Strip.’ Venturi et al. consciously borrow this method and similarly apply it to their analysis with the aim of bringing cohesion to the urban sites of Las Vegas. The technique imparts an ‘aura of objectivity’ and a ‘tone of scholarly dispassion’ and conveys the distance created by perceiving the entire strip at once (Ibid). My own taxonomy and drawings in this paper replicate this style. Scott-Brown states that she wanted *Learning from Las Vegas* to reveal a ‘scientific paradigm’ and championed the use of ‘outsider’ disciplines as catalysts for interrogation (Ibid). Taking cues from Scott Brown, the research that follows focuses on literally ‘drawing out’ gender and media. For example, the human body (usually emptied from architectural documentation) is included. The architectural drawing (usually viewed as irrelevant to advertising) is used to critic this medium. This decision has a two-fold affect. Firstly, to draw the hypersexualized female figure or advertising graphics into architectural drawings presents a sense of new relationships for architecture. Secondly, to include the image of women as it appears in the material fabric of urban form signifies its existence and begins to forge a dialogue with the cultural spaces of the neoliberal city.

Rise of soft-core in media cities

In the ten years since Levy published *Female Chauvinist Pigs: The Rise of Raunch Culture*, the incorporation of ‘porno-chic’ into mainstream culture has launched a new regime in urban aesthetics. The crossover of sexualised images from the pages of magazines to the outdoor advertising campaigns of billboards and digital mediascapes has become central to the pervasive modes of contemporary media (Winship 2000 and Kalms 2014). Yet unlike a magazine or the television, where the content can be ignored or simply turned off, the exposure to hypersexualised images is more difficult to dodge. In the ‘attention economy,’ (Devenport and Beck 2001) outdoor advertising space is framed as ‘the only medium you can’t turn off’ (Iveson, citing Hampp 2007).

Today, outdoor advertising formats include the traditional sheet billboards and ‘spectaculars,’⁴ but are also built into street furniture, bus shelters, public toilets, rubbish bins, buses, scooters and an array of variables that increasingly include display-animated advertisements (figure 1). The transformation of cities as a result of the rapid integration of advertising infrastructures is not limited to wealthy cities, and constitutes ‘one of the first and most visible instances of what we would today call the commercialization of public space’ (Baker 2007, 1188). And while the ways consumer media change social life are well documented (McQuire 2008; Cronin 2000) there is a gap in the study of consumer media as it pertains to urban space and architecture.

Highlighting this gap, sociologist Anne Cronin states that scholars have explored the political economy of cities, yet there is a lack of investigation into the importance of representational aspects (Cronin 2010, 4). Other scholars have noted the transformative effects of mediated cities too. Architectural critic Beatriz Colomina suggests that both

³ Leon van Schaik (1991) discusses this idea of documentation.

⁴ A spectacular is a large infrastructure both in size and stature and is usually sited on main arterials and inner city streets. This is opposed to a ‘landmark’ billboard that may be associated to a building or particular site. Advertising Federation Association ‘Outdoor Advertising advisory paper and checklist’ (2013).

media and architecture are altered by the consumer landscape, where, in the past twenty years the integration and occupation of consumer media in and as the space of architecture has created new hybrids and typologies (Colomina 1994, 73). McQuire (2008) discusses mediascapes and how neo-liberal cities are transformed by the co-constitution of media and architecture. The 'increased convergence with mobile and pervasive media' (Klausen 2012, 559) suggests that contemporary cities are dominated by exchanges between architecture and advertising as well as between infrastructure and screen (figure 1). Hypersexualised representations are frequently part of advertising campaigns for the retail industry, entertainment, and leisure brands, where women's images dominate in brandscapes. These industries amount to a significant proportion of the 'out-of-home' advertising encountered in urban space.⁵ As consumer spaces increasingly privilege 'co-constituted' urban materiality, it follows that hypersexualised representations are also increasingly privileged. As such, subtle forms of hypersexualisation are normalised and accepted as characteristic of participation in neo-liberal cities. Post-feminist rhetoric assists the acceptance of hypersexuality by conflating female empowerment with porno-styled representations of women who appear 'up for it' (Gill 2007, 151).

The mediated simulation of hypersexual representations is visually similar to soft-core pornographic content and 'pin-ups' found in privately viewed forums such as magazines, and invites socio-political comparisons (Rosewarne 2007). Lauren Rosewarne views pin ups and other categories of pornography as focused on the display of women with a sexualized appearance; in the case of both pin-ups and pornography, the appeal is primarily sexual. While pornographic representations exist routinely across many and varied private arenas such as men's magazines and adult DVDs, this research specifically engages with the inevitable intersection of hypersexualized content, media and architectural praxis in neoliberal cities. These contemporary urban spaces form both the context and a significant mode for the visual delivery of hypersexual representations and signal a shift in contemporary experiences of urban spaces.

While feminism has many multiplicities and a singular surviving 'feminism' is an impossibility, the postfeminist view presently dominates neoliberal cities and seems to suggest that urban life is undergoing a territorial transformation that echoes women's expanding sexual empowerment and liberation.⁶ But there remain tensions between different modes of feminist thought.

In these instances, consumer sites are spaces that borrow the discourse of post-feminist empowerment but are also spaces where women's behaviour is narrowly produced and regulated through hypersexualised images. Jean Gagnon's analysis of heterosexual pornographically-styled images suggests that the city is a 'cultural reservoir where individuals draw the representation that they more or less consciously incorporate into their lives and value system,' and indicates a flow between the hypersexualised image and the occupant of the space (Gagnon 2005, 25). Similarly, Winship argues that advertising campaigns entering urban space become events crafted both by the city and by consumer media, where the civic domain is diversely mobilised and occupants become part of a shared currency (Winship 2000, 27). Judith Butler, importantly, takes these observations further and suggests that it is through our sexuality and, by inference, our *sexualisation* we are able to establish our individual value. The

⁵ They are in the top twenty advertisers. See Annual Report, 'Outdoor Media Association' (2012).

⁶ McRobbie (2009) describes postfeminism as playing directly into the hands of corporate consumer culture.

Figure 1: Inventory of contemporary urban advertising types.



Source: Elaborated by Nicole Kalms with Caitryn Daly in 2010.

Note: My categorisation style in this diagram draws directly on and extends precedent examples found in *Learning From Las Vegas*. The duck or ‘novelty building’—as proposed by Venturi et al.—is followed by ten new contemporary advertising types. These types are variations on the traditional billboard but each has its own nuance. The co-constitution of architecture and media becomes apparent where, as McQuire (2008, vii) states: ‘Rather than treating media as something separate from the city—the medium which represents urban phenomena by turning it into an image—I argue that the spatial experience of modern social life emerges through a complex process of co-constitution between architectural structures and urban territories, social practices and media feedback.’ My inventory of contemporary urban advertising types demonstrates how advertising media develop opportunistic ways to contact their audience. These typologies operate through architecture, urbanism, advertising and art practice where, at times, each can no longer be individually defined. Hypersexual media is one aspect of this tactical advertising landscape.

media city assists in this production, where sex is not a static description of what one is but a norm by which one *becomes* viable (Butler 1993, 2). Within neo-liberal cities women live their sexualities through media infrastructure.

Soft-Core tension in consumer urban space

Issues around hypersexualised images are triggered for a variety of reasons, while always as a direct result of their unavoidability, specific offence generated by the content of an image is also a 'combination of a particular advert's content and location' (Cronin 2000, 176). This suggests that despite media researchers striving to investigate their target audiences and their general attempt to weave industry need with public need, there is still a lot of content in urban advertising that will impact people who are outside of the target market (Ibid). In addition, the content of controversial hypersexualised urban advertisements is frequently re-circulated by press media, precisely as a result of their controversial content or placement. Images may range from the playfully 'sexy' to overtly provocative, containing syntax from the sex industry, where icons and symbols such as nudity, suggestive posture, fetish, uniform and sex accessories are used to market consumer products, ideas and regimes. Furthermore, hypersexual images enter the urban realm in various permutations and in high circulation, appearing iteratively in large campaigns across various locations and media formats. What is problematic here is not the content per se, but the relationships that it forges with context and the occupation of that context. The amplification and enabling of stereotyped and gendered behaviour, as well as the ways the hypersexualised urban environments regulate behaviour, raise questions concerning the potential negative impact on women.⁷ The repeated contact with hypersexualised representation construct what Judith Butler would describe as a 'sequence of acts' of a 'repeated stylization of the body' with a regulated framework and a 'script' from which 'we make a constrained gender choice' (Salih 2002). Importantly, recent discussions have elevated alarm about how context can construct conducive environments for violence against women (Kelly 2007; Rossi 2007).

Cronin pointedly observes a temporal connection between image and viewer that reinforces my own position about the impact of hypersexualised images in urban space. She states:

[T]he image is not a static, fixed container of meanings — these meanings are produced in the time of vision ... they reach out for an explicit temporal connection with the viewer. Therefore we must pay close attention to the relation between the temporalities of self in moments of vision and the multidimensional connection of differences (gender, 'race', sexuality, nationality and so on) to the material body of the viewer. (Cronin 2007, 106)

In this statement, Cronin implies that the relationship between the observer and media space can be shaped by their temporal interaction, constructing a material 'support surface' which is 'untethered' and able to generate meaning and effect (Ibid, 105). Hypersexualised media's reductive representations of women as stereotypes of soft-core pornography are objectified and heterosexist, and as such, normalise women's inequity.

⁷ While hyper-masculine images of men are an indication of how hypersexuality resonates with representations across gender and sexualities, the number of hypersexualised representations of men is in no way equivalent to the prevalence of hypersexually-styled, porno-chic representations of women that circulate urban space. This imbalance indicates that hypersexualised sexism is directed at women and is thus the focus for this article. Certainly the equity of women will benefit men too.

Case study

The selected case study incited public comment and contention, indicating visible, even measurable, social tension.⁸ While the example is selected from an Australia city, it reflects similar phenomena and activities in other neo-liberal cities across the world.⁹ In Australia the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB) is a self-regulating body established to set ‘rules and principles of best practice to which the industry voluntarily agrees to be bound.’¹⁰ Although it is not my intent to offer solutions to the complex issues at hand, the ASB – and similar bodies established in cities world wide – is positioned as a key factor in the continued provocation of the hypersexualised mediascape, where decisions are not enforced but only advised.¹¹ As a result of the unaccountability of the ‘self-regulated system,’ the following case study reveals that hypersexualised content remains unregulated and prolific within the co-constituted urban form of contemporary cities, thus perpetuating gender inequity and amplifying heteronormative behavior.

General Pants / Ksubi Jeans, Australia Wide

Just as sex and advertising have long been expedient allies, urban shopping precincts are spaces where advertising, architecture, style and seduction merge and have been primary sites of hypersexualisation. The *Ksubi* jeans advertisement (figure 2) displayed in General Pants stores in Melbourne’s central business district and across Australia in 2011 was, nonetheless, a surprise to some consumers. The ASB describes: ‘A topless young woman with black Electrical tape across each nipple. There is a man behind her but you can’t see his face and he is in the process of removing her jeans. The word SEX appears above her head in huge bold type’ (Advertising Standards Bureau 2014; Rossi 2007).

A number of claims against the advertisement were submitted to the ASB, with more complaints directed against the multi-platform media campaign. One complaint began:

These advertisements are in public places. They contain explicit and highly suggestive material and their huge size in the front windows of stores make them impossible to ignore thereby removing the choice of the consumer to be exposed to these images. (Advertising Standards Bureau 2014)

⁸ This has been documented by the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB), but the press media also follow this area keenly. Therefore, current affairs, print media and picketing politic policy are all used as mediums to analyse.

⁹ Croteau, Hoynes and Milan (2012) argue the undeniable proliferation of North American culture in other countries.

¹⁰ Advertising Standards Bureau (2015, np): ‘Self regulation of the advertising industry has been achieved by establishing a set of rules and principles of best practice to which the industry voluntarily agrees to be bound’.

¹¹ Ibid.

Figure 2: Ksubi Advertising, Melbourne Central.



Source: Picture taken by Nicole Kalms in 2011.

Note: The Ksubi campaign reveals a move towards a ‘porno chic’ advertising style in which the tropes of stripping and pornography are deployed, using the rhetoric of ‘girl power,’ and portraying these tropes as agents of women’s sexual autonomy. These sexualised tactics are often legitimised by the representation of ‘sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever “up for it”’ (Gill 2008, 41).

More than the usual image-based advertising, the Ksubi campaign included young adult retail staff wearing ‘I love sex’ badges (figure 3), and was extended by linking erotic online videos and social media campaigns to the in-store promotion (*The Daily Telegraph* 2011). One of the original forms of billboard infrastructure, the ‘human billboard’ aspect of the Ksubi campaign ‘directs’ the mobile bodies of the salespeople and instructs a sexualised interaction that impacts the urban retail space. *The Daily Telegraph* reported that some staff were uncomfortable about wearing the badges and felt that it was inappropriate to send this message to the teenage customers who frequent the store and mall. The CEO of the company offered an alternative view that it was ‘a bit of a stretch’ to suggest the campaign might encourage teenagers to have sex (*The Daily Telegraph* 2011).

Figure 3: Ksubi I Love Sex Badge, Melbourne.



Source: Elaborated by Nicole Kalms in 2011.

Note: During the Ksubi advertising campaign at General Pants the staff describe how they were uncomfortable wearing the 'I Love Sex' badges. 'It's pretty degrading as a woman but there is nothing we can do' one employee stated (Speranza 2011). The campaign featured the fashion label images as well as an erotic video with all the in-store mannequins topless.

The complaints were upheld by the ASB noting that the 'image overall conveyed a strongly sexualised image.' The complaint was registered on November 5 and the store advised on November 23 of the outcome (ASB 2014). Rather than remove the advertisement as requested by the ASB, the company played into the urban controversy by 'stamping' a more traditional 'old' media-style post across the hypersexualized images with the word 'censored' – thus announcing there was something provocative to see (figure 4). This did two things: it created more publicity for the brand, and it directed consumers to their 'new' media online material that included the campaign's provocative porn-styled and hypersexualised video content.¹² The controversy of the image was re-circulated by other forms of press media and social media hype, potentially contributing to the brand's breadth of hypersexualised impact.

¹² See Media watch report on the prevalence of this in media and marketing (Media Watch 2002).

Figure 4: 'Censored' advertisement by Ksubi.



Source: Picture taken by Nicole Kalms in 2011.

Writing from a gender and politics position, Lauren Rosewarne suggests that 'the ASB rarely upholds a complaint relating to sexist portrayals, and if a complaint does survive adjudication, the ASB has no ability to withdraw the offensive advertisement or punish the advertiser' (Rosewarne 2007, 24). If the advertiser does choose to comply, by the time due process has been implemented the campaign has made its impact. Advertising campaigns designed to run on short but intensive timeframes feel no negative impact from the complaints process. Secondly, there is no disincentive for advertisers to 'edit' or reflect on the representation that they place in the urban realm. More controversy equates to more attention and sales.

Ksubi's campaign is a 'porno chic' advertising style in which the tropes of stripping and pornography are portrayed as agents of women's sexual autonomy and desirability, demonstrating the ways that contemporary media rely on post-feminist techniques where the 'entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas' coalesce (Gill 2007, 149). In this case, the objectified, headless female body speaks to the problems raised by second wave feminism, yet the available and powerful pose of the female body may speak to anti-feminist notions of self-objectification. Part of the acceptability of this hypersexually-styled image in urban space arises from the tactics that are legitimized under a rubric of a 'sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever "up for it"' (Gill 2008, 41). Rosalind Gill offers extensive critique of the sexualisation of culture and its impact on the individual subject, asking if it would be 'more productive to talk about sexism rather than sexualisation?' (Gill 2012, 741). Certainly, for the past sixty years, feminists have

Figure 5: Detailed elevation of Ksubi advertising in context.



Source: Picture and drawing by Nicole Kalms in 2011.

Note: Directly opposite the Melbourne Central entrance and exit to the Melbourne underground train loop where in excess of 39,000 commuters journey through this station on a daily basis. Many would have unavoidably encountered the Ksubi advertisement in 2011 (<http://ptv.vic.gov.au/about-ptv/ptv-data-and-reports/research-and-statistics/> Accessed July 10, 2015).

worked persistently to critique the commercial representation of women and, more recently, the increase in the sexualisation of these images. However, Gill's critique takes a step further by suggesting that sexist public advertising is a form of sexual harassment (Gill 2008, 41). Foucault has theorised that power structures produce urban space but it may equally be stated that urban space produces power structures; in retail spaces where hypersexualised images are prevalent, the power structure is that of hegemonic hypersexuality and sexist commercial objectifications of women's bodies, and indeed, of men's desires and purchasing decisions, and by extension, their potential behaviour towards women. When the pornographically styled images usually seen in men's magazines emerge in urban space, they communicate the acceptance and normality of the objectification of women. This results in a gendered territory that also excites and reinforces heterosexual masculinity 'marking the space as a male domain' (Attwood 2009,97). This is further amplified where single campaigns are repeated across the central business district and in proximity to other sexualised campaigns (figure 6).

Figure 6: Territory of Ksubi campaign.



Source: Nicole Kalms, elaborated in 2011.

Note: In metropolitan Melbourne the General Pants Ksubi campaign was intensified in the inner city with six stores. This amplification of influence can penetrate and shape the city. For retail spaces where sexualised images are prevalent, this structures a gendered and hypersexualised territory that excites and reinforces heterosexual masculinity. With the Ksubi campaign the dispersal is set within a smaller area thereby intensifying the potential impact and iterative contact with the images and product.

The trajectory from the appearance of the single advertising image to the cumulative and iterative impact of hypersexual urbanism can be understood by documenting the pragmatic extent of the advertising campaign (figure 7). The iterative pervasiveness of campaigns like Ksubi indicates that interactions with individualised images are one

aspect of a much larger system of hypersexual instruction across multiple sites and often across multiple media platforms.¹³

Figure 7: Territory of hypersexualised advertisement on Bourke Street.



Source: Nicole Kalms (2014).

Note: In this diagram a typical view of the mall is rendered with the advertising campaign blocked out. This reveals the potential impact that hypersexualised territories and campaigns can have on cities where up to a third of the space is co-constituted by unavoidable hypersexualised media marketing.

In ‘Eroticising Inequality—Technology, Pornography and Young People’, Marie Crabbe and David Corletts (2011) discuss the pervasiveness of the porno chic aesthetic in the public realm and social life. Their argument states that the pornified aesthetic is now culturally present in ‘billboards, music videos and designer stores [that] shape the desires and imaginations of a younger and younger demographic’ (Crabbe and Corletts 2011, 12).

This is also reflected in the way young women are increasingly presented ‘as active, desiring sexual subjects’ (Attwood 2009, 97). Crabbe and Corletts (2011, 13) draw on their positions in sexual education and social research to assert that the cumulative effect of hypersexualised representations in the urban realm is the key determinant for gender stereotyping and unequal gender relations. When urban space is co-constituted with billboard, media and consumer spaces, this mediated architecture typology can facilitate and legitimise gender stereotypes. Young heterosexual men who occupy or journey through spaces of hypersexualised consumption may experience a feeling of sexual entitlement, which may incite sexual aggression and even harassment. Further, women’s occupation of hypersexual space may result in pressure to experiment with the porno chic representations that the media routinely displays, in order to feel valued or valuable, and to see these practices as viable.

Conclusion

Advertising media and opportunistic tactics are part of the urban consumer landscape, and pose challenges for spatial practitioners and policy makers. I argue that these

¹³ Ksubi has media and online video links to the advertising campaign.

encounters with hypersexual representations in urban space, while not new phenomena, are becoming increasingly important to the context of architectural praxis and discourse (Richlin 1992). In this article, I suggest that the hypersexualisation of everyday life shapes sexual identity and social relations. I have examined hypersexuality as a triangulated occurrence where hypersexualised images in urban spaces merge with the co-constitution of the media city to shape city spaces and potentially the occupants themselves. As Cronin states (2006), the organisation and ownership of advertising sites mean that the legislation and policies that enact (or not) the regulation of hypersexualised representation come to be vital components of the analysis as well.

A number of issues have been foregrounded, including: the nuances of hypersexualised advertising campaigns circulating in urban space; the potential consequences of the heterosexist activation across territories of urban space; and the dominance of these heteronormative images. One of this article's overarching hypotheses is that hypersexualised images, events and spaces, acting together and cumulatively, legitimise the objectification and subjugation of all women in urban spaces. Through the Ksubi case study, I have argued that hypersexual culture legitimises stereotypes of women as passively receptive and available for male pleasure. I problematise self-regulation in Australia (and in other neo-liberal cities that rely on the self-regulation of advertising), that take a reactive approach. As outlined in the case of the Ksubi advertising campaign, the process has almost no impact on the length of the advertising campaign and can have the opposite effect of generating more publicity, leading to deliberately provocative advertising campaigns across various media platforms – both traditional and contemporary.

What this research is able to suggest is that the tension brought into urban space by hypersexuality impacts socio-cultural politics and individual behaviours. Further discussion of regulation is required to evaluate the conflicting claims of freedom of expression in advertising versus the suppression of hypersexualised content. At a time when sexual violence towards women and gender parity is central to social and political concerns, the interaction taking place within the hypersexualised media of neo-liberal cities are both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality.

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