

# Introduction, or Why Have a Book on Geographies of Sexualities?

Gavin Brown, Kath Browne and Jason Lim

*Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics* seeks to address some of the most recent developments in geographies of sexualities and to gesture towards a number of initial questions, directions and tensions that are currently emerging from this exciting and proliferating field of study. The book considers these ongoing developments in light of the continuing influence of ‘queer theories’ upon geographies of sexualities, and it asks what possibilities are offered by this intersection of ideas. It explores a host of themes – sexualised difference, social relations, institutions, desires, spaces – but does so through the framework of three interlinking perspectives: theory, practices and politics. Sexual geographers work in a diverse theoretical and political terrain, often dominated by different aspects of queer theory. Their eagerness to engage with concrete social relations and practices in their research means that their insights are materialistic, spatialised and affective. It is through this focus on the materialistic, spatialised and affective that sexual geographers help to contribute something both distinctive and innovative to broader thinking on sexual difference, relations and desires. One of the aims of this book is to create a space for a consideration of the emerging implications that are raised by such contributions, theoretically, empirically and politically.

This book has come into being because we feel that the relatively young field of geographies of sexualities has blossomed over the past decade or so. This proliferation of ideas, insights and knowledges across an ever-widening range of concerns warrants concentrated attention. *Mapping Desire* – the first (and still most significant) major edited collection to address the breadth of geographies of sexualities – was published in 1995. Since then, the importance and influence of geographies of sexualities has spread steadily, although not without resistance, throughout the discipline of geography and beyond. Within geography, geographies of sexualities are now taught on many, if not most, undergraduate courses, at least in the UK and US; the amount of research being carried out has witnessed an explosion; and ideas from geographies of sexualities are becoming increasingly influential elsewhere in the discipline.

In this introductory chapter the groundwork for understanding these developments in geographies of sexualities will be laid out. For students, it will provide an overview of the major strands of thought comprising the field and will explore the development of its most important concepts. For researchers and teachers, this chapter, in particular the latter parts, will also highlight important points of debate and conceptual tensions that exist between different theoretical approaches and between different writers. The next section of this introductory chapter will address the mutually constitutive relationships between sexualities, spaces and places. It will also explore how geography is important in attempting to understand contemporary

sexualities and will consider how geographers and others have considered the spatialities of sexualised relations. The third section of the introduction will provide an overview of the development of geographies of sexualities since the 1980s, starting with earlier geographies of prostitution, running through geographical investigations of gay ghettos and lesbian appropriations of urban space, and moving on to the continually developing encounter with queer theory, including its effect of reinvigorating concerns with heterosexual geographies. The fourth section of the introduction will outline the organisation and themes of the contributors' chapters that comprise this collection.

### **Sexualities and Space, or What Exactly Have Geographies got to do With Sexualities?**

While geographies of sexualities emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, the past decade or so has witnessed an increase and diversification of writings on sexualities, space and place. This proliferation has not only occurred within the boundaries of the discipline of geography, but it has also taken place outside it, as sociologists, anthropologists, cultural theorists and others have started recognising the importance of spatial and temporal context and fluidity (Hunt 2002; Kuntsman 2003; Conlon 2004; Eves 2004; Jacobs 2004; Skeggs et al. 2004; Taylor 2004; Grosz 2005a; 2005b). The central theme of this explosion of work has been the exploration of the relationship between sexualities, space and place – questions about the ways in which sexualities are geographical, or the question of how spaces and places are sexualised. There are, of course, many such ways in which sexualities are geographical, but here we will discuss a few examples that show a number of important themes and that highlight the importance of thinking about both politics and practice in order to understand these themes. The first set of examples draw attention to how, in various ways, everyday spaces are produced through embodied social practices – that is, we are starting with bodies and what they do. In turn, it is often through these practices that the norms regulating such spaces – and the sexualised relations between bodies, selves and others that constitute these spaces – become enacted. The second set of examples suggest how sexualities can usefully be understood through the institutionalisation of spaces at a variety of scales, from the national to the transnational.

The norms regulating acceptable sexual behaviour in public or shared spaces are an example of how everyday spaces are sexualised. Public spaces are normally governed by unspoken understandings, enforceable by both official authority (for example, the police) and by the verbal interventions or looks of passers-by. These constrain displays of sexual desire: a kiss might be acceptable on a busy street, but rolling around on the ground with a lover might not be. As Gavin Brown (forthcoming; Chapter 16, this volume) considers, however, participants in sex parties at Queeruption<sup>1</sup> gatherings attempt to constitute different understandings of what is acceptable in shared and public spaces.

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1 Queeruption is the name adopted by a series of international radical queer DIY gatherings that have taken place (almost) annually since 1998. Every gathering is a little

The sexualisation of space, however, does not only apply to spaces where people might expect to engage in explicitly sexual activity of some kind. Many other banal and everyday spaces are structured by sexuality. Many geographers have written about the ways in which home (Valentine 1993a; Johnson and Valentine 1995; Elwood 2000; Gorman-Murray 2006) and work (Valentine 1993b; McDowell 1995; 1997; Kitchin and Lysaght 2003; Kawale 2004) are sexualised. Home, for many people, is taken for granted as a place of comfort, a retreat from the world, a place to be oneself. For many lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans identified people, however, home can be uncomfortable and alienating, shaped by the assumptions of heterosexuality that are present in their social relations with parents, siblings, neighbours and others in and around the home. Such heterosexual assumptions often structure familial relations at home. Hiding lesbian or gay sexual desires and practices from parents is an understandable strategy when ‘coming out’ as lesbian, gay or bisexual might turn the home into a space of violence – violence meted out by parents and other family members. Even without the prospect of such physical violence, the everyday regulation of normal behaviour, identity and practice may still have to be negotiated. Such regulation might take the form of direct political and social injunctions against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and other sexual minorities (for example, overt social disapproval in housing policies, social security assumptions etc.). Or it might take place through indirect means: for example, assumptions about ‘normal’ sexuality that structure conversation (how do you refer to ‘a partner?’); discussions of life aspirations that presume a heterosexual relationship and marriage (‘are you not married yet?’); disparaging comments about ‘gays’; and jokes that presume all present share a common distaste for those who do not conform to the heterosexual norm, backed up by labelling those who do not want to ‘get the joke’ as ‘spoilsports’. These everyday contexts, discussions and practices not only create an ‘Other’ to heterosexuality, they also constitute spaces as heterosexual and, indeed, constitute heterosexuality itself.

The spaces that we can understand as structured by sexuality, however, are not just these kinds of everyday spaces. Rather, these everyday spaces intersect with various other scales of spatiality, including national, international and transnational spaces. Luibhéid (2005) has reflected upon the history of the regulation of international migration to the US. Through various legislative acts and practices of interpretation and enforcement of those acts, the US has sought to exclude what Luibhéid calls ‘queer’ migrants. It is through this exclusion of ‘queer’ migrants that a normative construction of nation, citizenry and citizenship is produced. Even though explicit discrimination against lesbian and gay immigrants to the US was removed in 1990, lesbian and gay relationships are not recognised as a legitimate basis for legal permanent resident status. Such implicit exclusion forces these immigrants to resort to other means. Turning to other kinds of visas – student, tourist or work – offers less stability of immigration status and nothing of a secure basis for a long term relationship. Still others turn to heterosexual marriage as a way to gain entry, raising the possible irony of a lesbian leaving a home country to avoid marriage,

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different to the rest, responding to the possibilities offered by its location and to the creativity of the community of people who plan it and who turn up to make it happen.

only to end up in a sham marriage in order to stay in the US and other 'safe' countries (Poore 1996).

What these examples demonstrate is that sexuality – its regulation, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires – cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practised and lived. Sexuality manifests itself through relations that are specific to particular spaces and through the space-specific practices by which these relations become enacted. The example of 'queer' immigration to the US suggests how sexualities are both lived and regulated through a contested moral economy that becomes expressed as an imagined geography: a centring of heterosexuality as 'American' and a positioning of 'queer' subjects as a moral threat from abroad. Such a sexualised imagination of the US and abroad becomes instituted not only in national and international laws, but also in how it is practised and enacted. It is this institutionalisation of sexualised imagined geographies (the centring of heterosexuality and the 'moral threat' of queer) that becomes contested politically. What is at stake in such political contestations is the power to define who belongs and to define what bodies are allowed to do, when and where. This example, then, suggests how imaginative, representational and figurative spaces become related to material effects that make a difference to people's lives (e.g. whether people can enter a country or not; whether they can be safe in particular spaces; what they can and cannot do in safe or unsafe spaces; what channels of immigration are open to them; what tactics they might employ to negotiate the policing they are subject to). This relationship between, on the one hand, the figurative, representational and imaginative and, on the other hand, the material also pertains to other kinds of sexualised spaces. On one level, 'closet space' might be thought of as a metaphor for the concealment and denial of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transsexual (LGBT) lives and desires, yet 'closet space' is also lived in very material ways through countless practical and political acts and through experiences of threat and marginalisation (Brown 2000).

The consideration of the 'everyday' spaces of sex parties and of the home also points to the ways that participants' experiences of spaces are regulated by norms regarding what is acceptable or expected sexual practice. These norms and expectations are not set in stone, but can be challenged and renegotiated. The spaces, whether sexualised, heterosexualised or even homosexualised, are constituted through the enactment, negotiation and contestation of norms of appropriate sexual conduct, even where the sex act itself may seem to be 'irrelevant'. What we do makes the spaces and places we inhabit, just as the spaces we inhabit provide an active and constitutive context that shapes our actions, interactions and identities. A consequence of this set of ideas is that we can never take a given space or set of practices for granted or assume that they are fixed. A home, a nation, a bathroom, a workplace – no space exists in a timeless state. Each is created in particular ways, often associated with sexualised and gendered norms and conventions that are historically and geographically specific. Not only are the places we inhabit made through our repeated actions such that we take their normality for granted, but these places produce us precisely because we so often do what we are *supposed to do* – what is 'common sense' in a given place. Nonetheless, although, for example, there are a set of hegemonic gendered and sexualised norms about what to do in

a public lavatory, activities such as cottaging (that is public sex in toilet spaces) suggest that it is always possible to follow the desire to do something differently. In (repeatedly) doing something differently, this can become established as ‘the norm’, even if temporally.

### **Sexualities in Geography: A Historical Overview, or How Did We Get to Here?**

Geographers have commented on the discipline’s approach and attitude towards human sexualities (and homosexualities in particular) since the mid 1980s. Initially, some geographers addressed the absence of discussions of sexuality within geography by contesting the discipline as a heterosexist institution (McNee 1984). Over the last two decades, the range of geographical engagements with human sexualities has proliferated to the point where many recognise the geographical study of sexuality to be an emerging sub-discipline within geography with its own internal tensions and identifications of hierarchies. Nonetheless, the growth of geographies of sexualities is still an uneven process both within the discipline as a whole and amongst national academies. Most work by sexual geographers is still located within the broader sub-discipline of social and cultural geography, although this book also includes work by scholars who locate their research primarily within urban, political, economic and health geographies. There are also those who could be defined as ‘sexual geographers’ who do not work within the discipline of geography.

This section of the introduction seeks to chart the development of geographical studies of sexuality and the expansion of geographical knowledge about the mutually formative relationship between sexualities, space and place. For the sake of simplicity, we present the history of geographies of sexuality through a broadly chronological sequence of thematic concerns, moving from studies of gentrification in the gay ‘ghetto’ through to the most recent engagements with poststructuralist queer theory. It is not our intention that this sequence should be read as implying that each new development was either an inevitable progression from that which preceded it, or that earlier theoretical models and objects of study do not continue to have valence for geographers of sexualities. Although we believe that a certain theoretical orthodoxy is beginning to develop within the sub-discipline at the expense of earlier approaches, we still believe that there exists a healthy theoretical pluralism within the work produced by geographers of sexualities.

Neither academic theories nor the spatial practices that constitute sexual identities and spaces develop in a vacuum. Both influence and are influenced by politics. By ‘politics’ we mean not just the formal political power and practices of state institutions, but also broader contestations of power and, in this context, heteronormative power relations in particular. We understand power as an amalgam of forces, practices, processes and relations (Sharp et al. 2000, 20). Power might be understood as myriad entanglements of resistance and domination that are mutually constitutive of one another. Power is not just something that happens to us; we are always engaged in these entanglements. Power operates through how we interact with one another, how we regulate each other’s behaviour and consequently make the spaces that we inhabit. Rather than an ethereal force, power is something that we

are all located within. In this way, power can be productive and can take many forms. Of course, political beliefs and practices are historically and geographically located. In the remainder of this section, we analyse developments in the field of sexual geographies within the political contexts in which the research was undertaken. We believe that these broader contexts, as much as academic trends, explain some of the developments within geographies of sexuality and the specific concerns that have arisen amongst geographers in different countries at different times. Of course, these connections are never that straightforward or complete, but we still believe there are connections between (sexual) politics, theory and practices. In many ways, this is particularly clear in the case of early work on the gay ghetto.

### *Geographies of the Gay Ghetto*

Some of the earliest work that sought to understand the relationship between sexualities and the creation and uses of space were studies of the residential concentration of gay men in inner city areas of American cities (Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985). This work attempted to map these gay residential and commercial clusters in the tradition of American urban geography at the time and, by so doing, legitimise the study of gay lives as an appropriate topic for geographical research (Knopp 1987). Although clusters of gay bars and other businesses had existed in many major European and Australian cities for some time, by the mid 1980s the co-presence of residential concentrations of gay men with these businesses was most visible in the United States. Initially, this was read as a result of gay men moving from rural and small town America in search of more liberal environments that would offer some respite from the pressures of heterosexist society. As geographers explained at the time, this appropriation of territory in major urban centres served as a defensive base where gay men could feel safe (Castells 1983; Knopp 1987; 1990; Warren 1974). However, the structures of the American political system also encouraged the residential concentration of gay men as a means by which they could exercise political power in pursuit of civil rights (Lauria and Knopp 1985; Knopp 1987; 1990). The urban geography of gay space in British cities throughout the 1980s was more uneven (Bell and Binnie 2000), although the dominance of 'municipal socialism' in some British cities throughout the period (Cooper 1994) offered a limited political voice to gay people against the vicious homophobia of the Thatcher government. It was not until British local governments began to take a more entrepreneurial and competitive approach to place-marketing in the 1990s, most notably in Manchester (Quilley 1997; Whittle 1994a), that significant gay centres in Britain's major urban centres began to be studied by British urban geographers.

The majority of the early work on gay space was focused on urban enclaves (in North American cities) and primarily analysed fixed territorialisations in the form of gay bars and other businesses as well as (gentrified) residential clusters. Podmore (2001) has argued that this focus is problematic for the study of lesbians' uses of urban spaces because although specific places might be identified as 'lesbian', these sites are less likely to utilise the visible signifiers that usually mark an area as 'gay'.

*(Re)placing Lesbians in Geography*

The approach to lesbians within gay male geography can perhaps be summarised by Quilley (1995, 49) who states “[b]y gay community I refer mainly to men.” Castells (1983) and Knopp (1990), amongst others, argued that lesbians were less likely to be able to afford to concentrate their homes in a given neighbourhood and were less likely to achieve local political power (again, in an American context). Castells (1983) believed that the power relations between women and men visible in society were reproduced within gay spaces. He believed that these were due to men’s essential need to claim space, an innate need that women did not possess. Similarly, although they acknowledged that it was easier to live as ‘gay’ if you were white, male and middle class, Lauria and Knopp (1985) contended that gay men appropriated urban space more than lesbians did because gay men were more oppressed *as men* in relation to heterosexual men and consequently had a greater need for ‘safe’ spaces in the city. There are, however, an increasing number of explorations of lesbian appropriations of urban space in North American cities that contest these assumptions. As early as 1978, Ettorre’s work challenged the assumption that lesbians were not involved in urban politics. Geographers have also contested the assumption that lesbians could not or did not wish to appropriate urban space at a neighbourhood level (Rothenburg 1995; Winchester and White 1988).

In a British context, Valentine (1993a; 1993b; 1993c; 1995b) demonstrated how women living in a small English town created lesbian spaces, ranging from more materially grounded spaces at a neighbourhood level to the temporary appropriation of heterosexual spaces such as bars and clubs. For Valentine, ‘lesbian landscapes’ incorporated more than just appropriations of space; these geographies consisted of complex time-space relations where different places took on different meanings over time. This work recognised that space could not easily be categorised as either ‘gay’ or ‘straight’, but that particular groups made differential uses of space (for example, when an occasional lesbian night is held in an otherwise straight bar). Building on ideas about the temporal constitution of spaces, lesbian geographies broadened the focus of the geographical study of sexuality and space beyond the inner city and incorporated discussions of home, work and street (Johnston and Valentine 1995). These geographies recognised the sexualised construction of particular spaces, such as home, as well as considering the complex negotiations of public spaces by lesbians. Moreover, this work opened up a discursive space for the study of rural sexualities (Bell and Holliday 2000; Kramer 1995; Phillips et al. 2000), although this is an area of work that is still under-developed.

More recently, Podmore (2001) and Peace (2002) have contended that it is how urban space is analysed and understood that excludes explorations of lesbian uses and appropriations. They critique (gay) urban geography for its narrow focus on territoriality and on singular identities and for an over-investment in the importance of ‘visibility’. Podmore suggests that lesbians have very different means of making themselves visible (to each other) than gay men and that to properly explore these practices, geographers need to (re-)integrate the domestic sphere into their interpretations of urban space (see Jay 1997). Furthermore, both Podmore and Peace both argue that the artificial separation of public and private space from each other masks the multiplicity of different identities that can be found within a given

neighbourhood. Instead of the concentration on residential clusters and commercial premises that has typified much gay geography, they propose that geographies of lesbian space can only be advanced through an attention to women's social networks and their daily circulation through quotidian urban space. We believe such a project would not just enable a better understanding of lesbian space, but would also reveal the complexities of the everyday geographies of queers of colour, gay men who do not participate in the commercial gay scene, and others who are rendered invisible through the focus on fixed territories (see Casey, Chapter 10, Nash and Bain, Chapter 13, this volume).

### *Early Encounters with Queer*

Although what we now call 'queer theory' was largely developed by academics working in humanities departments in US universities, this diverse set of ideas was first taken up within geography by British rather than American geographers of sexualities (Bell et al. 1994; Binnie 1997). Knopp (1998) has suggested that this was partly a reflection of the more conservative outlook of American geography departments, but also a measure of the different political and cultural traditions of gay 'communities' on either side of the Atlantic – a British 'cultural politics of resistance' versus American attempts to spatially consolidate gay economic and political power. As Binnie (1997) noted, the work of Knopp, Valentine and others had successfully added lesbian and gay concerns to the pot of geographical analysis, but there was still a considerable amount of 'stirring' needed in order to challenge the heteronormativity of space and the many ways in which everyday spaces reinforce the invisibility, marginalisation and social oppression of queer folk. Queer is a highly contested term, one that has a variety of uses, applications and, some would argue, misuses. Throughout this introduction and in the conclusion, we (the editors) will take the position that queer is not just synonymous for lesbian and gay. We therefore challenge one use of queer, which is as an umbrella term for LGBT. Instead, we consider queer to question the supposedly stable relationship between sex, gender, sexual desire and sexual practice. This challenge to the supposed correspondence between desires, identities and practices consequently disrupts the stability of heterosexuality that this correspondence shores up. Queer theories do not only understand sexuality as varying historically and culturally, an insight arising from historical studies of the invention of the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality in late nineteenth-century Western societies. Queer theories also challenge heteronormativity – "the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organize homosexuality as its binary opposite" (Corber and Valocchi 2003b, 4). Heteronormativity allows heterosexuality to go unmarked and unremarked upon – to be thought of as normal – by making homosexuality operate as heterosexuality's binary opposite. Homosexuality is made to function as the marked, abnormal Other of heterosexuality. The categories of 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' are, thus, mutually constitutive and cannot be understood autonomously. The intelligibility of the categories of 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' is also reliant upon the opposition between 'male' and 'female' and upon the supposedly natural sexual desire between these two sexes.

Throughout this book it is clear that the term ‘queer’ is not used homogeneously. Here, in focusing on how ‘early’ geographies of sexualities have developed into ‘queer geographies’, one can see how this diversity begins to emerge. These initial queer geographies initiated a discussion about how sexed and gendered performances produce space and, conversely, how spatial formations shape the ways in which sexual dissidents present and perform their sexualities in public spaces. This discussion drew on theories of performativity developed by Judith Butler (1990; 1993a; 1997), which suggested that identities, for example the gender identities ‘male’ and ‘female’, are not simply ‘there’, always-already existing as an expression of natural sexual difference. Rather, it is through the reiteration of social and discursive conventions that our actions (speech, practice etc.) transform bodies so that they become recognisable as male or female. Building on this performative approach, geographers have contended that space is not simply the vessel in which things happen, but is actively constituted through the actions that take place. Work on sexualities in this mode challenged how the everyday repetition of heterosexual relations becomes normalised such that quotidian space is not assumed to be sexual at all (Bell et al. 1994; Binnie 1997). Geographers have sought to explore not only how spaces come to be hierarchically sexualised, but also how racialised, classed and other forms of social hierarchies come to structure seemingly unitary categories of sexuality such as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ (Nast 2002). This most recent queer geographical work looks not just at the hegemonies of heterosexuality, but also at the multiple diversities between those who identify as ‘gay’ (see Haritaworn, Chapter 8, this volume).

One of the first geographers to publish an extended consideration of an appropriate epistemology for the analysis and understanding of queer geographies was Jon Binnie (1997). He argued that the production of geographical knowledge had excluded sexual dissidents and that the (then) ‘new cultural geography’ was as marked by heterosexism as earlier positivist strains of geography within the discipline. Binnie advocated that sexual geographers should place a greater emphasis on the lived experience of sexual dissidents, but that, in doing so, their work should also “include a greater critical awareness of the material conditions for the production of ‘knowledge’ about sexuality” (1997, 224). To achieve this awareness, Binnie proposed that a queer geographical epistemology would need to have at its centre a renewed commitment to an honest acknowledgement of the embodied positionality of the author-researcher and “a recognition of the value of camp” (1997, 228). ‘Camp’ works because it is simultaneously knowing and innocent. It resists fixed and definite interpretations. In this respect, camp operates in similar ways to much queer space, where the delineation of identity boundaries and gender roles is constantly blurred and in flux. In Chapter 2 of this volume, Binnie revisits, extends and interrogates some of the ideas from his earlier paper.

A related approach to the fuzzy distinction between gay and straight space has been offered by Hemmings’s (1995; 1997; 2002) work on bisexual spaces. To her, bisexuals occupy both lesbian/gay and straight spaces and have played a role in the construction of both. Bisexuals may think of either gay or straight spaces (or both) as ‘home’, but a bisexual identity is never predominant in either set of spaces, and although the presence of bisexuals may be acknowledged, it is seldom fully included.

For Hemmings, this posed several theoretical challenges as, by implication, bisexual space is neither gay nor straight space, and the presence of bisexual identities in space is always partial. Her solution to this problem was to focus on witnessing the spatial enactment of embodied acts and desires, although she accepted that these seldom easily correlate to a self-identified bisexual identity. She examined the production of bisexuality and the negotiation of bisexual desires in relation to other queer bodies in particular queer spaces. By taking this approach, it was Hemmings's intention to re-emphasise that desire is "enacted through our bodies" (Hemmings 1997, 149) and is site-specific.

In attempting to write queer geographies, these authors drew both on queer theory and on broader social theory. In doing so, they produced an interpretation of queer that was quite distinct from that in other disciplines. In particular, their concern with the production of space, everyday social relations and the materiality of embodied queer performances differed from other forms of queer theory that relied heavily on more discursive analyses and metaphorical understandings of space (Brown 2000). Nevertheless, this body of geographical work still remained primarily concerned with the performance of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. It seldom followed through the logic of the concern with the site-specific embodiment of desires to offer a more thoroughly queer critique of the production and performance of all sexualities.

### *Geographies of Sexualities: Taking Heterosexuality Seriously*

Although feminist geographers have long examined the ways in which patriarchal social relations are seen to reinforce and be reinforced by heterosexist relations within the home, the work-place (McDowell 1997; Gregson and Lowe 1994; WGSG 1997; Domosh and Seager 2001) and elsewhere, it took geographers of sexuality some time to turn their attention to the spatial production of heterosexual identities and desires (Nast 1998; Hubbard 2000). Latterly, however, these geographies of heterosexuality have highlighted the heterogeneity of different forms of heterosexuality and have demonstrated that these too are contextually specific. This work has recognised that heterosexual space is variously sexualised or desexualised by and for different people at specific times, with heterosexuals caught up in various modes of self-production and self-surveillance. In using queer theory to deconstruct normative heterosexuality (see Hubbard, Chapter 12, this volume), there has been a recognition that some heterosexualities are 'queerer' or more dissident than others and can themselves pose a challenge to established heteronormative power relations.

'Prostitution' and the vilification of 'red light districts' have been used to highlight the diversity of heterosexualised spaces, the ways in which these spaces are regulated and the moral panics that play a pivotal role in these processes of regulation (Hart 1995; Howell 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2004; Hubbard 1998; 1999; 2002; Hubbard and Saunders 2003; Tani 2002). The internationalisation of spaces of sex work, including sex tourism, points to the geographical complexity and multiple forms of power that constitute the 'sex trade' (Brown 2000; Law 2000; Hall 1994; Nagle 1997). Central to these discussions have been the complexities of agency, coercion and processes of regulation by which 'moral' and 'immoral' heterosexual geographies become differentiated (Hubbard and Saunders 2003). However, the focus on more dissident

forms of heterosexuality, such as sex work and prostitution (Hubbard 1998; 1999), sex tourism (Law 1997), BDSM (Herman, Chapter 7, this volume) and ‘dogging’ (Bell 2006), means that much work still needs to be done to understand the mundane processes by which everyday expressions of heterosexuality are (re)produced in social space. This is particularly important for the study of all sexualities because, as Blum and Nast (1996) have suggested, the construction of heterosexuality is central to the construction of all forms of alterity and difference.

The ‘unremarkable’ hegemonic status of heterosexuality is beginning to be remarked upon and deconstructed. Like lesbian and gay geographies, most of this work focuses on urban and suburban space, with little attention paid to the construction of rural heterosexualities (although see Little 2003). As the cracks of heterosexuality begin to become investigated, exposed and considered, Hubbard (Chapter 12, this volume) argues that there has been a proliferation of work on heterosex and he argues that “straight geographies have gone queer too”.

### *Taking Queer Further*

The social and political terrain on which geographical critiques of sexualities take place has changed significantly over the last fifteen years. There have been significant advances in civil rights for some lesbians and gay men in Britain, many other European states, Canada and elsewhere (with, some might pointedly argue, a decline of such civil rights in the US). The commercial gay scene has grown in size, scope and location in these countries and others too (for example, see Matejskova, Chapter 11, this volume). Positive representations of gay people are now far more common in the mainstream media as well. However, this progress has not been uniform or universal; it remains uneven within and across national borders. Queer theorists and activists have interrogated such apparent achievements. They have suggested that such rights are only granted on the condition that lesbians and gay men conform to the normative model of a monogamous, long-term, consumerist (and, more often than not, white and middle class) relationship. The price paid for such rights is the reproduction of these norms, hence delegitimising those whose sexual lives do not conform. In this context, geographers have recently engaged critically with these changes in sexual citizenship (Bell and Binnie 2000) and the uneven spread of a ‘global gay’ identity across the world (Binnie 2004). Such work has questioned who benefits from these changes and at what cost.

As Boellstorff (2003) demonstrates in relation to the Indonesian context, this questioning considers the specific articulations in local and national spaces of the transnational circulation of ‘queer’ discourses and discourses about ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ identities. Boellstorff notes that many men he encountered during his research in Indonesia identified as ‘gay’, their initial exposure to such understandings reportedly occurring through globalised mass media. Despite identifying as gay, most of these men retained an expectation of getting married. Unlike in many contemporary Western contexts, this expectation of marriage was not understood to conflict with a ‘gay’ identity or lifestyle. Indeed, it was seen as a source of potential fulfilment. The expectations held by ‘gay’ men in an Indonesia context need to be understood as a specific articulation of various *contemporary* globalised and local norms. Indeed,

these discussions, along with others that explore nationalities and sexual practices (Lambeviski 1999), illustrate that although the terms 'lesbian', 'gay' and 'bisexual' often connote 'common sense' ideas about desire, relationships and gender, the links between actions, identities and labelling processes are far from homogenous and are not easily definable. Questioning the transnationalism of identities such as 'gay' or 'lesbian' (see Hacker, Chapter 5, this volume) exposes the construction of these sexual identities and illustrates their historical (Faderman 1981; Weeks 1985) and geographical specificity.

Whereas 'queer' is used by some as a short-hand, umbrella term for all lesbians, bisexuals, gay men and transgendered people, it is increasingly being used as an appellation for sexual positionalities that contest not just heteronormativity, but also homonormativity. As with 'queer', the concept of 'homonormativity' has a range of meanings and is used to understand how homosexuality is constructed within class, racial and ethnic norms. As Nast (2002) has stressed, some white, middle class gay men have achieved a certain degree of 'liberation' because of their inclusion into more mainstream capitalist social relations, whilst many working class gays and queers of colour are still denied access to these privileges. Homonormativity, in this sense, has been used to extend the queer analysis and contestation of the practices and privileges of those gays and lesbians (in the main) who are prepared to assimilate on the basis of largely capitalist and heteronormative values.

Queer activism can explore a distinct set of politics, and these can conflict with those who seek to advance lesbian and gay rights claims (as they are currently formulated). Queer's emphasis on deconstruction and the desire to question heteronormativity calls into question the tenets of these rights arguments. Whereas mainstream gay politicians may seek formal equality with heterosexual institutions (such as marriage), queer questions the uneven application (even amongst straight people) of the 'rights' that gay rights activists want equal access to. It asks 'equality to do what and with whom'? In contrast, queer political projects can be productive, experimental and utopian. They are often associated with creativity, fun, playfulness and the contesting of gendered, sexualised and racial norms in order to produce new forms of sociality, practice, desire and affect (see Gavin Brown, Chapter 16, this volume). This does not, however, mean that contemporary queer activism never deploys rights claims nor ever utilises more established identity categories to advance certain strategic causes (for example, to enable 'queers' from the Global South to claim political asylum in the European Union by asserting 'gay' identities that may have little currency or meaning in their countries of origin (Luibhéid and Cantú 2005)). It does, however, mean that, in contesting normativity, queer politics can be strategically deployed and that certain activities once seen as 'queer' can become mainstreamed.

In parallel with queer activism's turn towards a more productive and utopian politics that transcends straightforward civil rights claims, queer geographers and others have begun to engage with queer theorisations of becoming. Knopp (2004) has re-evaluated conceptions of gay migrations through the ontological lens of actor-network theory and more-than-representational geographies. He considers queer movements and placelessness to be part of an on-going quest for belonging and identity, which offers the opportunity to continually experiment with alternative

modes of being and to engage in active processes of reinvention (see also Knopp, Chapter 1, this volume). Such queer movements and placelessness reveal the perpetual incompleteness of a queer identity. It is this continual process of becoming that challenges essential or pre-determined bodies, identities or spaces. It also prompts questions about how things come to be materialised and about the regulation of such materialisations. More broadly, then, these theoretical engagements with ideas of becoming explore how bodies come to take shape and the importance of emotions and affects in these constitutions (see Lim, Chapter 4, this volume). In challenging the rigidity of gender and sexuality, academics have explored how categories of gender are enacted and reiterated in a plethora of ways that move, for example, between pleasurable playing with drag through to the painful policing of gender ambiguous bodies in toilet spaces (Browne 2004).

The queer interrogation of gender and sexual difference not only problematises the idea that one's gender identity should match up with one's biological sex (male or female), but problematises the very idea there are (only two) immutable and natural biological sexes. This interrogation of gender and sexual difference is in contrast to the rigidity of dichotomous conceptions of gender within earlier lesbian and gay geographies. The queer problematisation of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality is important, for instance, in understanding the relationships 'trans' subjectivities, bodies and practices have to prevailing ideas of sexuality. Queer understandings of gender in such contexts have been complex and far from homogeneous. Trans theorists and activists have argued for the right to be recognised as their chosen gender (McCloskey 1999; West 2004) and have simultaneously deconstructed the idea that gender must be embodied within a man/woman binary (Halberstam 1998; Hird 2000).

### *Here is Queer?*

The narrative so far might suggest that all sexual geographers have been enthusiastic adopters of queer theory. This is not the case. Many scholars, both inside and outside geography, have pointed out the limits of queer or have affirmed the value of other political and theoretical stances (Jackson 1999; 2003; Jeffreys 2003; Witz 2000). The value placed on these other political and theoretical stances often arises in the context of a broader appreciation of the longer histories of sexual dissidence and the movements that have agitated for rights for those who are othered by the dominant norms of heterosexuality (Nash 2005; see Gavin Brown, Chapter 16, this volume). Given that queer theory is a body of work that has largely, although not exclusively, been developed within the humanities, its adoption within a predominantly social science oriented geographical arena has presented both problems and interesting points of departure. A focus on discourse and an inheritance of poststructuralist conceptions of power has added depth to the analytical tools available to geographers, but has by no means supplanted social science concerns with how institutions regulate social relations in material ways. Some of the major challenges, then, faced by sexual geographers over the past decade or so have been how to materialise and spatialise the insights of queer theory and how to combine the insights offered by

queer theories with considerations of power that focus on institutions, practices and material social relations.

Indeed, the development of queer theory and its adoption and furtherance by geographers can only be understood within a much wider political context. Queer activism arose from older traditions of sexual dissidence, traditions that continue to be important today. Elsewhere around the world, the globalised circulation of queer understandings of sexualities and of other Western discourses by which lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans identities become comprehensible has intersected with many other local, national and regional understandings of non-normative sexual desires, practices and identities (Boellstorff 2003; Blackwood 2005; Collins 2005). To say we are all now 'queer' would be to dismiss the complexity of queer, its uneven use across geography and those geographies of sexualities that contest and challenge assumptions about the wholesale adoption of specific discourses and concepts. Throughout the book the diverse uses of 'queer' are apparent, as is the non-linearity of geographies of sexualities, which continues to engage with concerns that were originally brought to the fore in the 1980s, albeit now with a wider range of theoretical tools at its disposal.

## **Geographies of Sexualities**

This book encompasses both queer geographies and other approaches to the geographies of sexualities. The work presented here not only explores lesbian and gay identities, lifestyles and embodied practices, but also seeks to question heteronormativity and other modes of sexualised power relations. What is also apparent is that the authors' research and insights cut across the distinctions we have elaborated in this introduction. We think that this crisscrossing is important because it illustrates that categories are not finite but fluid and that there are potentially important intersections, overlaps and crossovers between distinctions such as heterosexual and homosexual, gay and lesbian, or gay/straight and queer.

In reflecting upon and intervening in current theoretical debates, as well as examining contemporary issues and historical manifestations of sexuality, this book offers accessible insights into 'desire' and the spatiality of both heterosexualities and homosexualities; yet, it also seeks to move understandings of sexualities beyond these tropes. One of the goals of this book is to show how geographers' efforts to address the challenges and potentials offered by queer theories have modified the theoretical terrain on which studies of sexualities take place. Not only have geographers shown how queer theory can be applied to social scientific questions, but they are starting to show how queer theory might be taken forward, enriching the theoretical terrain shared with others outside of the discipline. There are four chapters (those by Bell, Knopp, Hubbard, and Michael Brown) within this book in which the contributor has responded to our request to reflect upon developments over the past decade or so in the parts of geographies of sexualities in which they work.<sup>2</sup> Not only do these

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2 It is with regret that, despite our efforts, there are no contributions by female writers amongst these reflective pieces. Please see the Conclusion for our discussion of this problem.

chapters provide a succinct overview of these parts of the sub-discipline, but they also provide a number of contrasting insights into the impact that queer theory has had on geographies of sexualities during the past decade. They offer a view of how queer theories have posed new questions and new problems for geographers and of how geographers have contributed to the development of new queer ideas and of ideas at a tangent to queer. Most interestingly, these chapters ground these insights in the context of particular sets of research questions and concerns.

Defining the structure of a book is a necessary evil. We have chosen to divide the contributions to this book into three categories – theory, practices and politics. As editors, we are conscious of the artificiality of these categories and recognise the overlaps and intersections between them. We chose to define this book in terms of these three broad areas because they offer specific foci that enable an exploration of the breadth and diversity of contemporary geographies of sexualities. The themes also intersect with other divisions that might have been chosen to structure the contributions to this book, such as spatial scale or specific substantive issues. However, the division into theory, practices and politics allows a flexibility enabling the authors to work with and through different spatial scales and enabling us to include diverse issues within each section.

### *Theories*

The ‘Theories’ section of the book comprises two reflective chapters that engage with a wide breadth of theoretical developments within geographies of sexualities and four chapters that offer more specific and focused explorations of theoretical debates both within geography and in cognate disciplines.

Larry Knopp’s chapter starts off this section by suggesting some nascent theoretical developments that might be pursued by sexual geographers. He calls for a further queering of the geographical imagination, envisioning such a queering to involve a move beyond the divides that oppose materialist view of the world to discursive ones and that oppose emotion, affect and desire against the rationality of the mind. Knopp also explores the possibilities for queer spatial ontologies. Rather than offering fixed ideas of place, such ontologies stress ephemeral connections, movements and gatherings.

Jon Binnie’s chapter explores the political and erotic relationships between sex, sexuality and knowledge. In the chapter, Binnie raises questions about the relationship between sexuality and ‘the field’. He revisits his 1997 paper on queer epistemologies, problematising the earlier interrogation of heteronormativity and also extending his analysis to considerations of homonormative relations to the field. The chapter also challenges the ethnocentricity of queer knowledges and debates, and the sexualised assumptions that surround teaching and other pedagogic practices.

In his chapter, Vincent Del Casino Jr. seeks to bring together ideas from sexuality studies and those from health and medical geographies. By doing so, he attempts to open up space for questions about how heteronormativities shape and are shaped by issues of morality and constructions of various disabilities. Del Casino attends to the construction of HIV+ bodies and the effects such constructions have on HIV policies.

He also explores how biomedical discourses construct abilities and disabilities in relation to the pregnant body and to erectile dysfunction.

Jason Lim attempts to bring into conversation two bodies of theoretical thought: queer theories and (Deleuzian) theories of affect. He examines ways in which theories of affect might offer insights into the politics of events and encounters, and might offer insights into embodied memories of how to desire. He also considers the implications of theorising affect for thinking about the nature of political change and for fostering ethical and reparative stances alongside our critiques of heteronormative practices and institutions.

Hanna Hacker's chapter problematises the ways in which development discourses frame what counts as acceptable desires, a framing that has the effect of globalising Western ideas about sexuality. In the context of development funding for community organisations or HIV projects, for example, the desires of those who are deemed to be 'less developed' are compelled to orient themselves to the identities and categories offered by Western development discourse. Against this, Hacker explores the potentials for transnational enjoyment or *jouissance* that resists such development discourse. Such *jouissance* offers a way of thinking about how to form transgressive zones and networks of connections between cultures, while also acknowledging, tapping into and unsettling the potential for violence and domination that arises in the context of such transnational connections.

David Bell finishes off the 'Theory' section of the book with his retrospective look at how geographies of sexualities have fared over the past decade and a half and at how the influence of queer theories have spread within geographies of sexualities in that time. In particular, he writes of the continued need to queer the discipline of geography and to transgress the sexualised norms of enquiry. These moves are of particular importance given the ongoing difficulties in getting material on sex and sexualities published.

### *Practices*

This section focuses upon empirical research regarding how sexualities are practised and policed, and how these practices and processes of regulation (re)make sexualised spaces and spaces of sexualities.

Douglas Herman's chapter explores BDSM (bondage and discipline, sadism/masochism, although Herman explores the problems of this term) in the United States, arguing that these practices can be considered queer in the sense that many of these practices lie outside of the mainstream. He follows Hubbard in arguing that queer is not solely located within LGBT lives, experiences and identities. In exploring the spatialities of BDSM, Herman explores the regulation and performance of the 'perverse'.

Jin Haritaworn offers a critique of Butler's (1990) 'Gender is Burning' – specifically Butler's exploration of interracial desire – and uses this critique in an exploration of the experiences of people of Thai decent who had non-Thai social or biological parentage. Jin shows how for racialised queer bodies being identified as (or mistaken for) heterosexual does not offer privilege and how queer is not necessarily

a 'safe' site. Jin's examination of the complexities of Thai multiracialities in the UK and Germany shows how specific hegemonies are created that belie the possibility of a single 'queer' space.

Kath Browne explores the (re)constitution of femininities, arguing that rendering sex fluid contests the very tenets of sexualities. She uses an incident at Dublin Pride 2003 (in the Republic of Ireland) to examine the hierarchical deployment and deploring of diverse forms of femininities across sexed embodiments amongst those who define as lesbian and gay.

Mark Casey examines the differentiation and hierarchies within the use of 'the scene' in Newcastle, UK. His contribution complements Matejskova's by arguing that other forms of difference than de-sexualisation work to produce, marginalise and exclude those who might be termed the 'queer unwanted' from increasingly visible and hegemonic 'gay' scenes. In this way, Casey offers insights into the effects of operationalised power relations for those who are deemed undesirable with respect to strategies of capital accumulation.

In examining the negotiation of heterosexualities within the Groover bar in Bratislava, Tatiana Matejskova offers a critique of the literature that solely problematises the presence of straight women in these gay bars. She argues instead for a more nuanced conceptualisation of the negotiation of such presence and for a diverse understanding of how heteronormativity can be contested.

Phil Hubbard's reflections conclude this section by examining how queer has become 'a game for all the family'. He argues that using queer to explore heterosexualities renders the boundaries between straight and LGBT problematic and contestable.

### *Politics*

Building upon the previous considerations of sexualised spatial theory and of empirical engagements with the performance of sexualities in space, this section considers the politics of geographies of sexualities. It attempts to both theorise the impact of political power on the production of sexualised spaces and to consider the activist engagements of sexual geographers in their academic and affective communities.

Catherine Nash and Alison Bain explore the grassroots political response to a police raid on the Pussy Palace, a women's bathhouse event in Toronto. They explore how, through the defence campaign, the 'queerness' of the event and the practices it sought to foster were 'normalised' by mainstream gay (male) activists who offered practical support to the women defendants. Nash and Bain offer a study of the differently gendered geographies of queerness and homonormativity in Toronto in the early 2000s.

Farhang Rouhani utilises Oswin's (2005) concept of 'queer complicities' within the context of his study of the recent development of a transnational queer Muslim movement. Rouhani's chapter seeks to tease out the complex politics of assimilation and differentiation, capitulation and resistance, within sections of this transnational social movement. He positions the emergence of queer Muslim identities in relation

to Islamic scholarship on sexuality and to forms of radical-progressive Islamic activism and spiritual practice.

In his chapter, Matthew Sothorn interrogates the rhetorical figure of The Child as it haunts queer and, more particularly, HIV+ bodyspace. For him, The Child represents everything that queer is not. He examines homonormative evocations of the family through a close reading of a series of advertisements produced by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation.

Gavin Brown's chapter examines queer autonomous spaces created by radical queer activists as a model of alternative means of being queer beyond the reach of the commodity. Brown proposes an alternative understanding of 'queer' on the basis of these ethico-political practices. He suggests that participants in these autonomous spaces *become* queer precisely through their active participation in the creation of prefigurative experiments in post-capitalist means of engaging with sexual and gender difference.

This section concludes with Michael Brown's reflections on the development of political geographies of (homo)sexuality. He questions whether queer theory and broader poststructuralist critiques now operate as restrictive orthodoxies within sexual geography. His concern is to explore the potential for a tactical use of quantitative methods, GIS and other 'scientific' methods by critical sexual geographers in order to better intervene in policy debates from which we too often exclude ourselves. Brown's chapter offers a timely reflection on the politics of doing research on sexuality that is relevant beyond the academy.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusion offers a polyvocal exploration of how this book has come together in the way that it has. It also offers some thoughts about possible future directions for geographies of sexualities. It comprises three sections each written by one of the three editors, and it represents an attempt to highlight the diverse writing styles, opinions and theoretical orientations that are often hidden in co-authored pieces of work. In offering divergent and potentially conflicting narratives, the conclusion finishes a book that does not seek to prescribe or dictate but rather attempts to embrace the possibilities of multiple ways of thinking about and doing geographies of sexualities.