THE LESBIAN *FLÂNEUR*

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I haven't been doing much *flâneuring* recently. Six months ago I moved from the British coastal town of Brighton, where I'd lived for eight years, to the Midlands city of Nottingham, chasing a job. A four-hour drive separates the two, but in terms of my lesbian identity, I'm in another country.

Geographically, Nottingham is located in the exact centre of England: the land of Robin Hood. This local hero is mythologised in the region's heritage entertainment – next to the (fake, nineteenth-century) castle, one can purchase a ticket for *The Robin Hood Experience*. Nottingham, formerly a hub of urban industry, is nostalgic for a time when men were men, and codes of honour echoed from the heart of the oak, to the hearth, to the pit. D.H. Lawrence is this city's other famous son. English national identity is thus distilled into a rugged romanticised masculinity, an essence of virile populism which is potently enhanced by its attachment to the core, the fulcrum, of England. Its interiority is endemic to the boundaries which entrap it; in its corporeality it is the heart, the breast, the bosom, and to each tourist is offered the metaphoricity of home.

Brighton is on the edge. Thirty miles from France, this hotel town is proud of its decaying Regency grandeur, its camp, excessive, effeminate façades. It loves the eccentricity of Englishness, but laughs at the pomposity of England. Brighton looks to Europe for its model of bohemia, for it is just warm enough to provide a pavement culture to sit out and watch the girls go by. Brighton, the gay capital of the South, the location of the dirty weekend, has historically embodied the genitals, rather than the heart. Its sexual ambiguity is present on the street, in its architecture, from the orbicular tits of King George's Pavilion onion domes, to the gigantic plastic dancer's legs which extrude invitingly above the entrance to the alternative cinema, the Duke of York's. Aristocratic associations imbue the town with a former glory. Its faded past, its sexual history, is a memory cathecting contemporary erotic identifications as decadent, degenerative and whorelike.

The stained window of nineteenth-century permissiveness filters my view of Brighton. Promenading on a Sunday afternoon on the pier, loitering in the Lanes, or

taking a long coffee on the seafront, ostensibly reading the British broadsheet *The Observer*, the gaze is gay. Brighton introduced me to the dyke stare, it gave me permission *to* stare. It made me feel I was worth staring at, and I learned to dress for the occasion. Brighton constructed my lesbian identity, one that was given to me by the glance of others, exchanged by the looks I gave them, passing – or not passing – in the street.

It's colder in Nottingham. There's nothing like being contained in its two large shopping malls on a Saturday morning to make one feel queer. Inside again, this pseudo-public space is sexualised as privately heterosexual. Displays of intimacy over the purchase of family-sized commodities are exchanges of gazes calculated to exclude. When the gaze turns, its intent is hostile: visual and verbal harassment make me avert my eyes. I don't loiter, ever, the surveillance is turned upon myself, as the panopticon imposes self-vigilance. One night last week, I asked two straight women to walk me from the cinema to my car. The humiliation comes in acknowledging that my butch drag is not black enough, not leather enough, to hide my fear.

As I become a victim to, rather than a perpetrator of, the gaze, my fantasies of lesbian mobility/eroticism return to haunt me. As 'home' recedes, taking my butch sexual confidence with it, my exiled wanderings in bed at night have become literary expeditions. As I pursue myself through novels, the figure of the *flâneur* has imaginatively refigured the mobility of my desire. These fictional voyages offer me a dream-like spectacle which returns as a memory I have in fact never lived. Strolling has never been so easy, as a new spatial zone, the lesbian city, opens to me.

The *flâneur* is a hero of Modernity. He appeared in mid-nineteenth-century France, and is primarily associated with the writing of poet Charles Baudelaire; he appears successively in the criticism of the German Marxist and follower of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin, in the 1930s. The economic conditions of rising capitalism that stimulated his appearance resulted in the rise of the boulevards, cafés and arcades, new spaces for his consumption of the city-spectacle. Neither completely public, nor completely private, these voyeuristic zones were home to the *flâneur*, engaged in his detached, ironic and somewhat melancholic gazing. He was also a sometime journalist, his writings on the city being commodified as short tableaux in the new markets for leisure reading. His origin, in Paris, that most sexualised of cities, traditionally genders his objectivication as masculine, his canvas, or ground, as feminine.

Elizabeth Wilson (1992) has taken issue with the predominant feminist opinion that this *flâneur* is essentially male. She writes in the presence of women as subjects in this urban narrative. She also directs us to acknowledge the figure's insecurity, marginality and ambiguity, rejecting the preferred version of the *flâneur*'s voyeuristic mastery:

> Benjamin's critique identifies the 'phantasmagoria', the dream world of the urban spectacle, as the false consciousness generated by capitalism. We may look

but not touch, yet this tantalising falsity – and even the very visible misery of tramps and prostitutes – is aestheticised, 'cathected' (in Freudian terms), until we are overcome as by a narcotic dream. Benjamin thus expresses a utopian longing for something *other than* this urban labyrinth. This utopianism is a key theme of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writings about 'modern life'. In Max Weber, in Marxist discourse, in the writings of postmodernism, the same theme is found: the melancholy, the longing for 'the world we have lost' – although precisely what we have lost is no longer clear, and curiously, the urban scene comes to represent utopia and dystopia *simultaneously.*

E. Wilson 1992: 108

The *flâneur* is fascinated, transfixed and thus trapped into representing wishes, without fulfilment:

> The flaneur represented not the triumph of masculine power, but its attenuation … In the labyrinth, the flaneur effaces himself, becomes passive, feminine. In the writing of fragmentary pieces, he makes of himself a blank page upon which the city writes itself. It is a feminine, placatory gesture …
>
> E. Wilson 1992: 110

Is the *flâneur* someone to be appropriated for our *post*modern times? I don't wish to rehearse the arguments concerning whether the *flâneur* is a good or bad figure, partly because they tend to be articulated within a heterosexual paradigm, reliant upon heterosexual discourses of the city. I'm interested in this observer as a metaphor, who offers at once a symbolic hero and anti-hero, a borderline personality in a parable of urban uncertainty, of angst and anomie. Within the labyrinth, the process of making up meaning in movement becomes the point, and perversely too the pleasure, as we become lost among the flowing images. This act of performative interpretation is crystallised in this early urban tale of lesbian cross-dressing:

> So I had made for myself a *redingote-guérite* in heavy gray cloth, pants and vest to match. With a gray hat and large woollen cravat, I was a perfect first-year student. I can't express the pleasure my boots gave me: I would gladly have slept with them …
>
> quoted in Moers 1977: 12

What happens if the *flâneur* is cross-dressed not just in actuality, here as George Sand vogueing in her butch drag dandy suit, but symbolically too? Writing in 1831, she claimed 'my clothes feared nothing' (ibid.: 12). When she is dressed *as a* boy, she is all-

image, a spectacle of auto-eroticism, desired only by herself – 'No one knew me, no one looked at me, no one found fault with me . . .' (ibid.). *As* such she is a simulcrum, if, as Wilson (1992: 109) continues on to argue 'the flaneur himself never really existed', then there is no material ground of maleness *or* femaleness to be invoked. Is the *flâneur* a transvestite? Can s/he be a cross-dressed lesbian? It's possible the *flâneur* is a borderline case, an example of a roving signifier, a transient wild-card of potential, indeterminate sexuality, trapped in transliteration, caught in desire.

One crucial problem with the conventional line on the *flâneur* is the idea that he roams the streets *untouched*. As pure male essence his visual trajectory-projectile is uncorrupted – he sees windows, not mirrors. To stretch the analogy, even the clearest window will frame the picture, and reflect back the tiniest reflection of self. I'm simplifying, condensing, extracting and probably bowdlerising the *flâneur* here, as a vessel to be filled by the lesbian narrative, in order that I can contribute to the unfixing of the supremacy of the heterosexual male gaze in urban spatial theory.

Preliminary writers to procure the form included Renée Vivien and Djuna Barnes. The poet and traveller Renée Vivien imagined a visionary lesbian city, Mytilène, as an escape from early twentieth-century Paris. The lesbian voyager's imagination is freed from cultural constraints to wander at will, for in this Sapphic paradise all temporal and spatial barriers are excised. The fantasised map of Lesbos has no restrictions, but critic Elyse Blankley (1984: 59) has noted how the *real* island of Lesbos turned out to be Erewhon: Vivien, on her frequent visits, refused to leave her villa, finding the native women 'unattractive and disappointing'.

Both Djuna Barnes' descriptions of the 1920s' Paris salon culture in her novel *Ladies Almanack* (1928), and particularly the character of Dr O'Connor in *Nightwood* (1936), retain elements of the Modernist *flâneur* (Tyler Bennett 1993). Ur-*flâneur*ing is also evident in her journalistic sketches collected together in *Djuna Barnes in New York* (1990), which combine to form a panorama of city life from 1913 to 1919. Predominantly, Barnes is remembered as an expatriot in Paris, thus a traveller, and an outsider ideally located to comment on an alien, European, culture. Her positioning in the New York text as an exile is particularly revealing. She returns to the city not as a native, but retains the inside/outside dichotomy of the alienated raconteuse, rendering snapshots of a foreign territory. She is the first to emigrate the *flâneur*, taking a European-derived model and appropriating it for US culture.

During the 1920s homosexuality was located in New York in two identifiable spaces, Greenwich Village and Harlem. Homosexuality was made permissible by journeying to a time-zone happening: one *experienced* a present event, rather than took one's preformed sexual identity, intact and inviolate, to the party. Social mobility was a prerequisite for sexual experimentation – the bourgeois white *flâneurs* who went 'slumming' in Harlem paid to see in the exoticised black drag acts and strip-shows, a

voyeuristic legitimation of their own forbidden fantasies (Faderman 1992).

Margins and centres shift with subjectivities constantly in motion. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a massive migration of black people from the south to the north of the USA, and many of them came to New York, specifically to Harlem,[1] to make home (Mulvey 1990). Writer James Weldon Johnson dated the beginning of black Harlem to 1900, calling it 'the greatest Negro city in the world ... located in the heart of Manhattan' (quoted in Locke 1975: 301). A character in a magazine story, 'The City of Refuge', printed in *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1925, exclaims 'In Harlem, black was white' (quoted in Locke 1975: 57). This was (and is) black space, not white space. Art and literature has mythologised the migrant's arrival in Harlem into the making of a new black identity, stimulating the emergence of a new consciousness. It is a continuous happening, endlessly repeated with the arrival of each new traveller from the south, emerging from the subway station. Can we read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) as another alienated and invisible *flâneur*?

> This really was Harlem, and now all the stories which I had heard of the city-within-a-city leaped alive in my mind ... For me this was not a city of realities, but of dreams ... I moved wide-eyed, trying to take in the bombardment of impressions.
>
> Ellison 1982 [1952]: 132

The utopian/dystopian paradox of hope for the city is that more pleasure is taken in the journeying towards it, as a process of desire and transformation, than in the (deferred) arrival. Models of the labyrinth, in which the journey is represented as circular, make this explicit. The boundaries of physical geographies are rebuilt in mental images. 'Harlem' operates as a symbol of black consciousness rather like 'Africa' does – as 'a self-created ontology of blackness' (De Jongh 1990: 145), a myth of 'home' which makes home bearable.[2]

Small groups of lesbians congregated in both Harlem and Greenwich Village during the 1920s. These were different worlds of homosexual identification, divided by race and class. Greenwich bohemian life tolerated a degree of sexual experimentation which conferred upon the area an embryonic stature as erotica unbound, a construction much enhanced during the 1950s and 1960s. As Harlem had functioned as the mecca for black people, now Greenwich Village became the Promised Land for (mainly) white homosexuals. Resisting the conformity of 1950s' small-town suburbia, men and women in the post-war USA were drawn to cities as a place to express their 'deviant' sexuality. Their newly-acquired gay and lesbian identities were predominantly urban, emanating from the social geographies of the streets. The anonymity of the city made a gay life realizable in a repressive era. This odyssey is well represented in the lesbian novels of the period (see Weir and Wilson 1992).

Nightclubs were a visible site for women interested in 'seeing' other women, and it is in this literature of the 1950s and 1960s that the bar becomes consolidated as the symbol of home (K. King 1992). Lesbian/whore became a compacted image of sexual consumption in the dime novel of the period, read by straight men and lesbians alike. The lesbian adventurer inhabited a twilight world where sexual encounters were acts of romanticised outlawry initiated in some backstreet bar, and consummated in the narrative penetration of the depths of maze-like apartment buildings. She is the carnival queen of the city: 'Dominating men, she ground them beneath her skyscraper heels' (Keene 1964: back cover), a public/private figure whose excess sensuality wishfully transcends spatial and bodily enclosures. This Modernist nightmare of urban sexual degeneracy is crystallized in the identification of the city with homosexuality. Lesbian-authored fictions of the period, like the *Beebo Brinker* series (1957–62), are less sensationalist syntheses of the available discursive constructions of 'lesbian', but still depend on a myth of the eroticised urban explorer (see Hamer 1990). Transmuting in more liberal times into the lesbian sexual adventurer, this figure can be recognised in diverse texts, from Rita Mae Brown's post-sexual revolution *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) to the San Franciscan postmodernist porn parody *Bizarro in Love* (1986) by Jan Stafford.

Within contemporary lesbian writing we encounter a specific, even nostalgic, image of the stroller as a self-conscious lesbian voyeur. The years of feminist debate engrossed with the political acceptability of looking are the background to these lesbian vindications of the right to cruise:

> New words swirl around us
> and still I see you in the street
> loafers, chinos, shades.
> You dare to look too long
> and I return your gaze,
> feel the pull of old worlds
> and then like a femme
> drop my eyes.
> But behind my broken look
> you live
> and walk deeper into me
> as the distance grows between us.

Joan Nestle's first stanza from 'Stone Butch, Drag Butch, Baby Butch' (1987a) ends with the comment 'Shame is the first betrayer'. The extract epitomises the mechanisms of a necessarily coded visual exchange, in a potentially violent, dangerous and sexualised arena – the street. The pun of the title of the anthology is *A Restricted Country* and the

spatial penetration of the poem recalls this analogy between the streets and the lesbian body. Inside/outside dichotomies break down, both becoming colonised. A subculture made invisible by its parent culture logically resorts to space-making in its collective imagination. Mobility within that space is essential, because motion continually stamps new ground with a symbol of ownership.

Is the butch dandy strolling through the doors of the bar just a romanticised inversion of heterosexual occupation? The *flâneur* may not have to be biologically male for the gaze to enact masculine visual privilege. The politics of butch/femme and their relation to dominant systems of organising gender relations have been bloodily fought over (see, for example, Hollibaugh and Moran 1992), and whilst I am sympathetic to claims that butch/femme constitute new gender configurations which must be understood within their own terms, they are not intrinsically radical forms springing perfect from the homosexual body. Nor are they naive forms in the sense that they express a naturally good, pure and primitive desire. Nestle's poem is interesting in that it represents the push/pull, utopian/dystopian contrariety of the ambivalent *flâneur*, balancing the temptation and lust for the city (embodied as a woman), with the fear of connection and belonging. Note that the narrator of the poem initiates the glance, then returns the gaze and then becomes the owner of a 'broken look' (line 9). The butch penetrates with her gaze ('walk deeper into me' (line 11)) an assumed femme who is only 'like a femme' (line 7). Evading categorisation, this 'almost femme' narrator is the one whose closing comment of the stanza rebukes invisibility and averted eyes. Who is claiming the gaze here? All we can assume is that it is a woman.

The poem describes movement: both characters are in motion on the street, and the looks which they exchange have their own dynamic rotation. Images of mobility are particularly important to lesbians *as women* inhabiting the urban environment. Feminist struggles to occupy spheres traditionally antipathetic to women go back to the imposition of post-industrial revolution bourgeois family divisions into male–public/female–private spaces, an ideological construction disguising the fact that the domestic space, the 'home', as Mark Wigley (1992: 335) has written, is also built for the man, to house his woman:

> The woman on the outside is implicitly sexually mobile. Her sexuality is no longer controlled by the house. In Greek thought women lack the internal self-control credited to men as the very mark of masculinity. This self-control is no more than the maintenance of secure boundaries. These internal boundaries, or rather boundaries that define the interior of the person, the identity of the self, cannot be maintained by a woman because her fluid sexuality endlessly overflows and disrupts them. And more than this, she endlessly disrupts the boundaries of others, that is, men, disturbing their identity, if not calling it into question.

The familiar construction of woman as excess has radical potential when appropriated by the lesbian *flâneur*. The image of the sexualised woman is double-edged, a recuperable fantasy. Swaggering down the street in her butch drag casting her roving eye left and right, the lesbian *flâneur* signifies a mobilised female sexuality *in control*, not out of control. As a fantasy she transcends the limitations of the reader's personal circumstances. In her urban circumlocutions, her affectionality, her connections, she breaks down the boundary between Self and Other. She collapses the inviolate distinction between masculinity and femininity. Her threat to heteropatriarchal definitions is recognised by hegemonic voices, hence the jeering shout 'Is it a man or is it a woman?' is a cry of anxiety, as much as aggression. The answer is neither and both: as a Not-Woman, she slips between, beyond and around the linear landscape. The physiology of this *flâneur*'s city is a woman's body constantly in motion, her lips in conversation (Irigaray 1985b).

Although the lesbian *flâneur* appears as a shadow character or a minor theme in a number of recent novels, I want briefly to offer examples of her appearance as a structuring principle in three New York fictions: a short story, 'The Swashbuckler', by Lee Lynch (1990), *Don Juan in the Village* by Jane de Lynn (1990) and *Girls, Visions and Everything* by Sarah Schulman (1986).

> Frenchy, jaw thrust forward, legs pumping to the beat of the rock-and-roll song in her head, shoulders dipping left and right with every step, emerged from the subway at 14th Street and disappeared into a cigar store. Moments later, flicking a speck of nothing from the shoulder of her black denim jacket, then rolling its collar up behind her neck, she set out through the blueness and bustle of a New York Saturday night.
>
> Lynch 1990: 241

Perhaps the name 'Frenchy' gives it away – this short passage previews a parodic portrait of the bulldagger as Parisian *flâneur*, complete with portable Freudian phallus (the cigar), given a sexualised ('blue') city to penetrate. The fetished butch drag, the black denims, blue button-down shirt, sharply pointed black boots, garrison belt buckle and jet-black hair slicked back into a bladelike DA[3] constitute the image of the perfect dag. The text foregrounds the plasticity of the role by camping up Frenchy's casanova, gay-dog, libertine diddy-bopping cruising. The sex-scene takes place next to some deserted train tracks, a symbol of transience, travelling and the moment. This generic butch then catches the subway home.

On the journey towards home this *flâneur undresses*. In a classic scene of transformation she then makes herself 'old maidish, like a girl who'd never had a date and went to church regularly to pray for one' (260). In a classic conclusive twist the short

story ends with a revelation – she goes home to mother. Fearful of her detecting the sex smell still on her, Frenchy slips quickly into 'the little girl's room' (261) to sluice away her adult self. In the metaphors of change which structure this story, both the closet and the street are zones of masquerade.

The lesbian *flâneur* appears in a more extended narrative as the main protagonist in Jane de Lynn's episodic novel *Don Juan in the Village* (1990). Thirteen short scenes of conquest and submission structure this narrator's sexual odyssey. Kathy Acker has called the book, on its back cover, 'a powerful metaphor of our intense alienation from society and each other. An intriguing portrayal of that strange and trance-like locus where lust and disgust become indistinguishable', a comment which both recalls the *flâneur*'s anomie and highlights the way in which her space is so sexualised. As in 'The Swashbuckler', this novel problematises the predatory erotics of the stroller using irony. In *Don Juan in the Village*, although the protagonist is ostensibly writing from Iowa, Ibiza, Padova, Puerto Rico, or wherever, her actual location is immaterial. The text employs the American literary convention of the traveller in search of (her)self. Delivered with irony, she is a manifest tourist whose every foreign nook temporarily begets a colony of New York City, specifically a Greenwich Village bar, the topos of urbane lesbian identity. Her butch diffidence and boredom unsuccessfully screens a deluded, tragi-comic, self-conscious sexual desperation. Her targets invariably fail to be compliant, and each escapade is a testimonial to her perpetual frustration. This is one moment of supposed sexual triumph:

> As I slid down the bed I saw the World Trade Center out the window, winking at me with its red light. I was Gatsby, Eugène Rastignac, Norman Mailer, Donald Trump . . . anyone who had ever conquered a city with the sheer force of longing and desire.
>
> De Lynn 1990: 186

She is going down on that most evasive of spectacles, the gay Hollywood film star. The star, very politely, but very succinctly, fucks her and dumps her. *Don Juan in the Village* is the solitary *flâneur* stalking the city with the torment of Tantalus in her cunt. Although the narrator confers upon herself the gaze, she is unable to see it through, or through it.

Finally, Sarah Schulman's second novel *Girls, Visions and Everything* (1986) recalls the quest of the American hero/traveller Sal Paradise in Kerouac's *On the Road*:

> Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me.
>
> Kerouac 1972: 14

The pearl, a symbol of female sexuality, is something the active masculine narrator seeks to own. This predatory macho role is located historically in the *flâneur*, it is the story of an alienated, solitary sexuality voyeuristically consuming the female body as a ri(gh)te of passage. Modelling herself as *On the Road* with Kerouac, protagonist Lila Futuransky's adventure is similarly self-exploratory, but based on the *female* experiences urban travel offers. Her comparison with Jack is the dream of being an outlaw, reconstructed by a feminist consciousness. Lila's trip is a constant circling between compatriots. Set in Lower East Side New York, she walks the streets, marking out the geography of an urban landscape punctuated by a city mapped out with emotional happenings. Locations are symbols of connection, and constant references to criss-crossing streets remind the reader of the systematic patterns of neighbourhood, in antithesis to the standard early Modernist images of alienation. *Girls, Visions and Everything* is about Lila Futuransky's New York, 'the most beautiful woman she had ever known' (177).[4]

A sardonic wit suffuses *Girls, Visions and Everything*, but there is also melancholic sadness; a sense of decaying nostalgia for a mythical 'home', for streets filled with sisters and brothers sitting languid on the stoop, swopping stories and cementing *communitas*. This is the feminisation of the street, the underworld with a human face, with its own moral and family code. It is rich kids who beat the gays and harass the poor, the prostitutes and the pushers. The lesbians are on the streets, working the burger bar, cruising the ice-cream parlour and clubbing it at the Kitsch-Inn, currently showing a lesbian version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Lila meets Emily here, performing as Stella Kowalski. The romance between Lila and Emily is the main plot development in the novel, structuring its five parts. The final chapter sees Lila torn between the 'masculine' desire trajectory of *On the Road* individualism, and the 'feminine' circularity and disruption of affective liaisons. Her friend Isobel urges Lila not to pause:

> 'you can't stop walking the streets and trying to get under the city's skin because if you settle in your own little hole, she'll change so fast that by the time you wake up, she won't be yours anymore ... Don't do it buddy.'
>
> Schulman 1986: 178

The text's constant engagement/disengagement with change and transformation is signified by the urban landscape, which is out of control. Even the protective zones are folding, and yet there are pockets of resistance which pierce the city's metaphoric paralysis with parody: Gay Pride is one such representation, fifty thousand homosexuals parading through the city streets, of every type, presenting the Other of heterosexuality, from Gay Bankers to the Gay Men's Chorus singing 'It's Raining Men', a carnival image of space being permeated by its antithesis. The text tries to juxtapose a jumble of readerly

responses, almost jerking the reader into some consciousness of its activity of forming new imaginative space. Lila re-invents New York from her position of other as a heterotopia of cultural intertextuality; she *is* Jack Kerouac, the character not the author, claiming, even as a Jewish lesbian, that '. . . the road is the only image of freedom that an American can understand' (164).

The street is an image of freedom and paradoxically of violence. The female *flâneur* is vulnerable – Lila walks unmolested until the final part of the book whence she is sexually harassed by Hispanics, and saved from serious injury from potential queer-bashers by the black and sick drug dealer Ray. Lila's zone is breaking down: 'People's minds were splitting open right there on the sidewalk' (14).

The fictional worlds start clashing together: Blanche DuBois appears to Emily aged 85 and begging for a dollar. Lila resorts to Emily with a resignation that can only be anti-romance, knowing it is the wrong decision, and nostalgically lamenting the end of the road of selfhood: '*I don't know who I am right now*, she thought. *I want to go back to the old way*' (178).

This whimsical nostalgia also highlights some disillusionment with the post-modernist models of space – wherein the public and private are collapsed onto the street, and the same space is being used by different people in different ways. Hierarchies still exist. Being part of a bigger spectacle, being visible as one subculture among many, may not necessarily create empowerment, only more competition over a diminishing resource.

Three *flâneurs*: Frenchy, *Don Juan* and Lila Futuransky. Each a descendant of eager European voyagers who migrated with their ticket to utopia; each with their separate, feminised, vulnerabilities; each a sexualised itinerant travelling through urban time and space towards a mythical selfhood; none with the sex/gender/class privileges (fixities) of the Modernist *flâneur*. Temporary, simultaneous, multiple identifications mapped out in moments, in the margins, masquerading as the male (and thus *un*dressing him), makes these *flâneurs* engage with the politics of *dis*location:

> And the crucial moment is that brutal instant which reveals that the journey has no end, that there is no longer any reason for it to come to an end. Beyond a certain point, it is movement itself that changes. Movement which moves through space of its own volition changes into an absorption by space itself – end of resistance, end of the scene of the journey as such . . .
>
> Baudrillard 1988: 10

Baudrillard's extended road-poem *America* (1988) is spoken as a man. His narrative of dystopian exhaustion is from the point of view of something being lost. But spatial reconstruction occurs in the moment of presence, however brief. The vacuum sucks us

further in, but we need our fictions of consciousness or we will disappear. Lesbian identity is constructed in the temporal and linguistic mobilisation of space, and as we move *through* space we imprint utopian and dystopian moments upon urban life. Our bodies are vital signs of this temporality and intersubjective location. In an instant, a freeze-frame, a lesbian is occupying space as it occupies her. Space teems with 'possibilities, positions, intersections, passages, detours, u-turns, dead-ends, [and] one-way streets' (Sontag 1979: 13); it is never still. Briefly returning to Brighton for the summer, my eye follows a woman wearing a wide-shouldered linen suit. Down the street, she starts to decelerate. I zip up my jacket, put my best boot forward, and tell myself that 'home' is just around the corner.

NOTES

1 Only one of the twelve chapters in Mulvey and Simons (eds) (1990) *New York: City as text* is written by a woman. Perhaps the urban gaze is male after all.

2 In Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) the Jewish protagonist Jess Goldberg is a he/she, a passing woman, who journeys to New York City to consolidate and make safe her emerging identity. Significantly, as her train travels through the outer urban detritus of NYC, it is seeing Harlem which symbolizes her arrival.

3 'The DA – the letters stand for duck's ass – was a popular hairdo for working-class men and butches during the 1950s. All side hair was combed back in a manner resembling the layered feathers of a duck's tail, hence the name. Pomade was used to hold the hair in place and give a sleek appearance' (Kennedy and Davis 1993: 78).

4 I am aware that I am in danger of entrenching the discourse of 'American exceptionalism'; concentrating my examples in New York encourages the view that it is a 'special' place. It is and it isn't; the myth of New York has a political and cultural specificity in world culture and I am curious about that manifestation. For lesbian and gay people it has a particular set of meanings and associations, and to resist mythologising New York is a difficult practice to perform.

15 It may be worthy of note that the very idea of being marooned with Oliver Reed was sufficiently disturbing, and widely recognisable as such, to be the subject of a joke in a British TV sketch by comedians Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders.

FILMS

Hector Babenco, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (USA, 1991)

John Boorman, *The Emerald Forest* (GB, 1985)

John Boorman, *Hell in the Pacific* (USA, 1969)

Peter Brook, *Lord of the Flies* (GB, 1963)

Luis Bunuel, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (Mexico, 1953)

Francis Coppola, *Apocalypse Now* (USA, 1979)

John Derek, *Greystoke* (USA, 1983)

Caleb Deschanel, *Crusoe* (USA, 1988)

Di Drew, *Trouble in Paradise* (USA, 1988)

Louis Gilbert, *The Admirable Crichton* (GB, 1957)

William A. Graham, *Return to the Blue Lagoon* (USA, 1991)

Byron Haskin, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (USA, 1964)

Harry Hook, *Lord of the Flies* (USA, 1990)

Max India, *Bronze: A Tropical Fantasy* (GB, 1992)

Randal Kleiser, *The Blue Lagoon* (USA, 1980)

Noel Langley, *Our Girl Friday* (GB, 1953)

Frank Launder, *The Blue Lagoon* (GB, 1949)

Joshua Logan, *South Pacific* (USA, 1958)

Nicholas Roeg, *Castaway* (GB, 1986)

SEXUALITY AND URBAN SPACE

a framework for analysis

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Lawrence Knopp

Cities and sexualities both shape and are shaped by the dynamics of human social life. They reflect the ways in which social life is organised, the ways in which it is represented, perceived and understood, and the ways in which various groups cope with and react to these conditions. The gender-based spatial divisions of labour characteristic of many cities, for example, both shape and are shaped by people's sexual lives (especially in Western[1] industrial societies). For example, heterosexuality is still often promoted as nothing less than the glue holding these spatial divisions of labour (and, indeed, Western society) together. But on the other hand, these divisions of labour create single-sex environments in which homosexuality has the space, potentially, to flourish (Knopp 1992).

The density and cultural complexity of cities, meanwhile, has led to frequent portrayals of sexual diversity and freedom as peculiarly urban phenomena. As a result, minority sexual subcultures, and the communities and social movements sometimes associated with these, have tended to be more institutionally developed in cities than elsewhere.[2] On the other hand, the concentration of these movements and subcultures in urban space has made it easier to both demonise and control them (and to sanctify majority cultures and spaces). Hence the portrayal of gentrified gay neighbourhoods such as San Francisco's Castro district as centres of hedonism and self-indulgence, of other gay entertainment areas (such as San Francisco's South-of-Market) as dangerous sadomasochistic underworlds, of red-light districts as threatening to 'family values', of 'non-white' neighbourhoods as centres of rape,[3] or, alternatively, of suburbs as places of blissful monogamous (and patriarchal) heterosexuality.

These contradictions, and many others, are reflected in the spatial structures and sexual codings of cities, as well as in individual and collective experiences of urban life. Yet as David Bell and Gill Valentine point out in their introduction to this volume, there

remains within the discipline of geography a certain 'squeamishness' about exploring these connections (see also McNee 1984). This persists in spite of a relative explosion of work in other disciplines which concerns itself with relationships between sexuality and space, including discussions of urbanism (Wilson 1991; Grosz 1992; Bech 1993; Duyves 1992a), nationalism (Mosse 1985; Parker *et al.* 1992), colonialism (Lake 1994); and architecture/design (Wigley 1992; Ingram 1993).

The small amount of work which *has* been done in this area has tended to reflect the particular concerns and social milieux of those doing it. This has meant a focus on urban gay male and lesbian identities and communities (Levine 1979a; Ketteringham 1979, 1983; McNee 1984; Castells and Murphy 1982; Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985; Adler and Brenner 1992; Valentine 1993c; Rothenberg and Almgren 1992; and Rothenberg in this volume). Much less attention has been paid to heterosexualities, bisexualities, sexualities organised around practices that may be only contingently related to gender (e.g. sadomasochism and certain fetishes), and (particularly problematically) radical, self-consciously fluid sexualities which reject association with such notions as 'identity' and 'community' altogether (but see Bell 1995; Binnie 1992a, 1993a). Also neglected have been connections between particular sexualities and spaces in small-town and rural environments, those between sexualities, space and other social relations (such as race – but see Rose 1993b: 125–7 and Elder in this volume), and issues surrounding sexuality and the spatial dynamics of particular social systems (e.g. feudalism, patriarchal capitalism, etc. (but see Knopp 1992)).

This chapter addresses some of these gaps. In particular, I develop and illustrate a framework for examining the relationships between certain sexualities and certain aspects of urbanisation in the contemporary West. In so doing, however, I implicitly treat 'sexualities', as well as 'the urban' and 'the West', as if they were self-evident and unproblematic empirical 'facts'. This deflects attention from the diversity within these categories, from their often constricting and oppressive effects, and from the complex social processes and power relations which produce them in the first place. However, because people often relate to such categories as if they were self-evident and unproblematic empirical facts, they have a social power which is every bit as significant as that of many more so-called 'material' concerns (e.g. jobs, families, pensions, etc.). This recognition of the problematic yet powerful nature of the categories 'sexuality' and 'urban' guides the analysis which follows.

URBANISM AND SEXUALITIES

Traditional approaches to understanding urbanism can usefully be divided into materialist, idealist and humanist (Saunders 1986). To oversimplify a bit: materialists see the

dynamics of the material production and reproduction of human life as shaping cities; idealists see the interplays between great ideas as doing this (especially the philosophies and decisions of policy-makers); and humanists see cities more as a kind of subjective experience, to which people ascribe meanings. In the 1970s and 1980s, many analysts noticed that in the contemporary world few if any of the material, political or even cultural processes discussed by these three camps are peculiar to definable geographical units that could be called cities (Saunders 1986; Paris 1983). On the basis of this some concluded that 'the problem of space . . . can and must be severed from the concern with specific social processes' (Saunders 1986: 278).[4]

But at about the same time more general social theorists were reaffirming geographers' traditional claim that both space and place matter profoundly in human social life (Giddens 1979; Thrift 1983; Sayer 1989; Lefebvre 1991; Gottdiener 1985). Their arguments drew particularly strongly on a humanist insistence that the experience of *place* is socially very powerful. Now most urbanists, regardless of their philosophical perspective, tend to acknowledge this. Many materialists (including many Marxists), for example, now see the 'image' and 'experience' of the city as important material stakes in the urbanisation process (e.g. Harvey 1989, 1993; Logan and Molotch 1987; Cox and Mair 1988). Urban images and experiences are now seen as manipulated, struggled over and reformulated in ways which are every bit as important to the accumulation (or loss) of social power by different groups as more traditionally material concerns (e.g. control of the production process).

The city and the social processes constituting it are most usefully thought of, therefore, as social products in which material forces, the power of ideas and the human desire to ascribe meaning are inseparable. The same holds true for various sub-areas within the city. I will demonstrate how this approach can be applied shortly, in the context of a discussion of the evolution of contemporary Western cities. Firstly, however, I will identify some particular sexualities which tend to be associated with cities, and particular areas within them, in Western societies.

One of the more detailed general descriptions of Western cities' sexuality, developed from a humanist perspective, is Henning Bech's (1993).[5] Drawing on Lofland (1973), he describes the modern Western city as a 'world of strangers', a particular 'life-space', with 'a logic [and sexuality] of its own'. The city's sexuality is described as an eroticisation of many of the characteristic experiences of modern urban life: anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, consumption, authority (and challenges to it), tactility, motion, danger, power, navigation and restlessness.[6] This kind of sexuality, Bech argues, is 'only possible within the city', because it depends upon the 'large, dense and permanent cluster of heterogeneous human beings in circulation' which is the modern city. It is modern medicine and psychoanalysis, meanwhile, that Bech credits with sexualising these particular experiences. For

ironically, both have, in the process of trying to make sense of modern sexualities, actually contributed to their constitutions, particularly by sexualising objects and surfaces (especially body parts). This, in turn, has been part of modern science's more general response to the anxieties precipitated by changes in various social relations (especially gender relations) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus the city, as a world of strangers in which people relate to each other as objects and surfaces, becomes an archetypal space of modern sexuality.

There are numerous problems with this formulation.[7] But it is nevertheless quite useful, for Bech describes in detail particular ways in which at least some parts of urban areas have been sexualised in modern Western societies. He also offers the beginnings of an explanation for these. His general description, if not his explanation, would appear in many ways to be fair (although it probably applies more to continental European than Anglo-American and other English-speaking cities).[8] There are other descriptions and explanations as well, however. Elizabeth Wilson (1991), for example, sees densely populated urban spaces as potentially liberating and empowering for women. For this reason such spaces are often associated ideologically with women's sexualities, which are in turn constructed ideologically as irrational, uncontrollable and dangerous. Thus the control of 'disorder' in the city is seen by Wilson as very much about the control of women, and particularly women's sexualities. My own work, and that of several others, has emphasised the homosexualisation of gentrified areas in cities by both dominant interests and gays (mostly white middle-class men) seeking economic and political power as well as sexual freedom (Lauria and Knopp 1985; Knopp 1987, 1990a; Castells and Murphy 1982; Castells 1983; Ketteringham 1979, 1983; Winters 1979). A few others have discussed the coding of these (and other) spaces as lesbian or heterosexually female (Rose 1984; Adler and Brenner 1992; Bondi 1992c; Rothenberg in this volume). Mattias Duyves (1992a), Jon Binnie (1992a, 1993a), David Bell (in this volume), Peter Keogh (1992) and Garry Wotherspoon (1991), meanwhile, have emphasised the alternative codings of certain public spaces by gay men for specifically sexual purposes (e.g. cottaging, cruising, etc.). And Davis (1991, 1992), Geltmaker (1992), and I (Knopp 1992) have emphasised the contested nature of predominantly heterosexually coded urban spaces, such as shopping malls, sports bars and suburbs.

The sexual codings of cities, spaces within cities and the populations associated with them, then, are varied and complex. A few generalisations do seem possible, however: (1) Many of contemporary societies' conflicts and contradictions find expression in these codings; (2) these codings emphasise both erotic and more functional conceptions of sexuality, depending upon the particular areas and populations involved; (3) areas and populations which represent failures of or challenges to aspects of the dominant order (e.g. slums; gentrified areas) tend to be coded in both dominant and alternative cultures as erotic (i.e. as both dangerous and potentially liberatory), while those seen as less

problematic tend either to be desexualised or to stress more functional approaches to sexuality; (4) these codings are connected to power relations; and (5) they are (in this latter respect) fiercely contested.

Bech's sociological interpretation of the role of psychoanalysis, and Wilson's of urban design and planning, suggest one link between these sexualisations and power relations: changes in gender relations. Bech argues that modern medicine and psychoanalysis responded to anxieties associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutions in gender relations by projecting them onto infantile cognitive processes and object-relations, including those through which people develop gender and sexual identities. These then became associated with what Bech sees as a very objectified urban experience. People experience the city, he argues, as well as the other people in it, as objects and surfaces in rapid, dense and impersonal circulation, not primarily as people. In a similar vein, Wilson argues that the architects of modern cities projected anxieties about gender relations onto the maps and infrastructures of cities. Certain areas became feminised and demonised, and infrastructures designed, to facilitate the containment and control of women. These are both useful perspectives but they need to be further developed and linked to other changes in social relations (e.g. industrialisation, suburbanisation, racial segregation) going on at the same time.

Harvey's (1992) and my own recent work (Knopp 1992) suggest what some of these further links may be, but in a more contemporary context. We have both emphasised connections between culture (and in my case, sexuality) and class interests, in the sense that cultural (and sexual) codings may now be important elements of a city's or neighbourhood's image and experience. These have in turn become central to facilitating capital accumulation and the reproduction of class relations. Glen Elder's contribution to this volume highlights the importance of race-based power relations, by focusing on the sexual practices and imaginings that are and are not possible under different racialised political and economic regimes in South Africa. And it must also be emphasised that very real *sexual* interests are at stake here, in that those who benefit from certain codings are those whose particular sexual practices and preferences are privileged in those codings. But rather than developing each of these separately I wish now to develop and illustrate a more integrated approach which sees the links between these processes as all-important. For I want to stress that the various sexual codings associated with cities are sites of *multiple* struggles and contradictions, and as such are instrumental in producing, reproducing and transforming both social relations of various kinds (including sexual relations), and space itself.

CONTRADICTIONS AND STRUGGLE: THE SEXUAL AND SPATIAL DYNAMICS OF URBANISATION

In contemporary Western cities, power is still quite closely associated with the production and consumption of commodities, and with white, non-working-class, heterosexually identified men. It is appropriated and exercised, however, through mechanisms in which people who are oppressed in one respect (e.g. as working-class or 'non-white') may benefit from oppression in other ways (e.g. as men). These complex and contradictory patterns have been produced, reproduced and contested in the spatial structures of Western societies. These include importantly the built environments, spatial consciousnesses and lived experiences of cities.

To understand this process, it is useful to consider the nineteenth-century industrial context from which most contemporary Western cities evolved. In the nineteenth century, cities were typically rigidly segregated by class, race and ethnicity, characterised by very traditional gender-based spatial divisions of labour, dominantly coded as heterosexual, and imagined and experienced in terms of public and private spheres of existence.[9] The designs of neighbourhoods, homes, workplaces, commercial and leisure spaces all reflected this. They both presumed and reproduced, among other things, a hetero-sexualised exchange of physical, emotional and material values in the home, and a racial hierarchy in which white families and societies enjoyed most fully the benefits of a social wage paid for, in part, by transfers of value from non-whites (both inside and outside Western societies) to whites.

The contradictions in this arrangement were numerous. One very important one was a tension between the fixed nature of many aspects of the city's spatial structure (including the social and sexual structures of place-based communities) and the tendency of competition among different factions of privileged classes to produce new and more economically productive spatial structures before the investments in the old ones had been fully amortised (Harvey 1985).[10] Another, closely linked to this, was the tension between a reliance on particular class, race, gender and sexual structures and the tendency of these structures to create new, potentially disruptive collective and personal consciousnesses. Bech's psychoanalytic interpretation of modern sexualities' fetishising of surfaces, anonymity, etc., can be seen as a particular manifestation of this latter contradiction. But the collective anxiety which he attributes specifically to changes in gender relations can be seen as arising more generally from the sharp distinction between public and private experience which characterised the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrial city. The growing consciousness of a 'private' sphere of existence facilitated the development of a wide range of new subjectivities and rising expectations of both individual and collective fulfilment and growth (Zaretsky 1976). This meant that people could explore identities and communities based on the possibility of non-

conformist and non-commodified roles and practices. But these opportunities at the same time undermined nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cities' gender-based divisions of labour. They also varied according to people's gender, race, class and sexual locations, as wealth and power continued to concentrate in fewer and fewer hands. Significant contradictions were therefore present in the urbanisation process.

The experience of 'public' life in the city was no less contradictory. Many previously non-commodified public experiences (much theatre and sport, for example) were produced and consumed in commodity form, especially by men. Ironically this was a means for these people to develop their 'personal' identities and 'individual' potentials. But, as I have said, the demand for new experiences included many that were potentially disruptive. As sexual experiences in particular became increasingly dissected, categorised and commodified (e.g. in the ways Bech describes), the possibility of new (but socially disruptive) sexual experiences being profitably produced also increased. The prolifera-tion of commodified homosexual experience, for example, led to a homosexual *consciousness* among some people, and this was very threatening to the heterosexualised gender relations underlying the industrial city.

But these various experiences and contradictions also varied depending upon people's social and spatial locations. White middle-class women and men, for example, were in many respects most likely to experience private life as an opportunity for individual fulfilment through the consumption of experiences and commodities within and outside the home. The white, middle-class and (in the case of gay politics and identities) male biases in much twentieth-century feminism and homosexual consciousness almost certainly reflect this. Working-class white women, on the other hand, were more likely to experience private life as an unwaged world of work and consumption with limited autonomy enjoyed at those times of day when men were away working for wages. The alternative sexual possibilities in this circumstance were, therefore, somewhat more constrained (though still present, since such women often found themselves developing co-operative networks with other women). For working-class non-white women, meanwhile, private life was often experi-enced still differently, as a balancing act between unwaged and waged domestic and non-domestic labour. The alternative sexual possibilities here were in some ways most constrained of all, although in others they might have been quite substantial (e.g. in the spaces they occupied with other non-white women while engaging in waged labour outside the home). For men of all classes and colours, meanwhile, private life tended (though to varying degrees) to be experienced as the exercise of authority and consumption of values in the home, as well as the consumption of commodified experiences outside the home. Consequently the freedom to explore alternative sexualities was perhaps greater for most men, in general, than for most women (although virulently homophobic and heterosexist ideologies emerged in response to this freedom and penetrated the cultures of many male-coded spaces and experiences).

One result of all this was complex race, class and gender-stratified social movements and everyday struggles organised around sexuality. Waves of 'homophile' and, later, gay and lesbian activism (Plate 10.1) dot the histories of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western societies (Steakley 1975; Weeks 1977; Altman 1982; D'Emilio 1983; Katz 1976; Duberman *et al.* 1989). Most have been particularly well developed in cities. But these were structured by cross-cutting and complex internal struggles as well. The various cultural codings of urban space reflect *all* of these struggles, as do various waves of social and political reform and economic restructuring.

Initially, the interests and social power of capital, white people, men and hetero-sexuals can be seen as having converged in such a way as to combat these and other social movements and struggles by coding all non-middle-class, non-white, non-male and non-heterosexual spaces and experiences in cities as in some way sexually depraved and uncontrollable (though in different ways). The social problems associated with

Plate 10.1 Gay and lesbian activists march on Washington
Photograph: Larry Knopp

Plate 10.2 Gentrified housing in a quasi-gay neighbourhood, New Orleans
Photograph: Larry Knopp

nineteenth-century working-class communities (poverty, disease, etc.), for example, frequently were (and continue to be) blamed on the alleged sexual irresponsibility of their residents (Kearns and Withers 1991). Similarly, areas defined as 'black' in Western cities have often also been perceived as sexually dangerous (especially to white women), and this is associated with both black men's and black women's alleged uncontrollable sexualities. Women and women's spaces, meanwhile, have often been presumed by their very existence to be inviting sexual assaults. And homosexual people and spaces have been associated with all manner of depravity and disease, not the least of which, in the contemporary era, is AIDS. In a recent controversy surrounding an alleged 'gay conspiracy to pervert justice' in Scotland, for example, gay spaces such as bars were constantly portrayed as depraved and disgusting by the tabloid press (Knopp 1994).[11]

But even these codings have from the beginning been contested in ways which reflect

struggles internal to these various groups, as well as changes in class relations and other political and economic conditions. In the recent Scottish case, some gays may actually have exploited cultural fears surrounding homosexuality to advance their own personal interests or to retaliate against other gays whom they saw as privileged hypocrites (Campbell 1993a, 1993b). More commonly, relatively privileged sexual non-conformists (e.g. white gay men) have forged networks and institutions which facilitate the practice of their particular sexualities *as well as* the perpetuation of other structures of oppression. The intersection of these networks and institutions with recent industrial and occupational restructurings (the expansion of mid-level managerial, other white-collar and certain service-sector jobs, whose cultural milieux are socially tolerant) have developed into the material bases of the largely urban-based, predominantly white, and male-dominated gay social and political movements (Lauria and Knopp 1985). These movements have taken their own alternative codings of space 'out of the closet' and into the public sphere, but usually within racist, sexist and pro-capitalist discourses (for an example in which these are discussed see Knopp 1990b[12]). They have influenced a wide range of predominantly heterosexually coded realms such as neighbourhoods, schools, government bureaucracies, courts, private firms, shopping areas, parks and suburbs. Their most obvious impact has been the proliferation of visible (but disproportionately white, male and middle-class) lesbian and gay commercial, residential (Plate 10.2) and leisure spaces. Vibrant gay commercial and entertainment scenes, for example, as well as the 'pink economies' of cities such as Amsterdam, London, San Francisco and Sydney, and much gay gentrification, have attracted a great deal of popular media attention over the last decade (see Jon Binnie in this volume). But these scenes have been developed primarily by and for white middle-class male markets, and have been financed by 'progressive' (often gay) capital eager to colonise new realms of experience and to undermine potential threats to its power (Knopp 1990a, 1990b).

CONCLUSION: POWER, SPACE AND DIFFERENCE

The analysis above illustrates one way in which a conception of urban spaces as social products, in which material forces, the power of ideas and the human desire to ascribe meaning are inseparable, can be applied. Along the way, it highlights the contingency, yet tremendous importance, of the connections between particular forms of race, class, gender and sexual relations in the urbanisation process. As the various contradictions within particular social systems begin to destabilise those systems, the various interests at stake scramble to form new alliances and 'new regimes of accumulation' (Harvey 1985) which enhance their power. The sexual interests of otherwise highly stratified minority sexual subcultures are no exception.

But 'power' in this context is an extremely slippery concept. It would seem fundamentally to be about the capacity to produce, reproduce and appropriate human life, and the socially-defined values associated with it, in a way consistent with one's own interests. It would also seem to be about the exercise of control over these processes. Power is realised, therefore, through social relations.

Social relations, meanwhile, would appear always to be organised around some kinds of difference. And while difference is a fundamental feature of human experience, it has no fixed form or essence. What constitutes it, ultimately, is different *experiences*. To make these mutually intelligible and socially productive (as well as destructive!), we associate our different experiences with particular markers and construct *these* as the essences of our difference. These markers may be practices, they may be objects (such as features of our bodies), or they may be abstract symbols and language. Because human beings exist in space, these differences and the social relations which they constitute (and through which they are also reconstituted) are also inherently spatial. The relations of sexuality are no exception.

But power is a strangely contradictory thing. It seems always to contain the seeds of its own subversion. As difference is constructed (spatially) to facilitate the accumulation of power, that (spatialised) difference is also empowered. This is true in even the most asymmetrical of power relations. It is manifest in the seemingly endless parade of struggles and social movements organised around difference as difference itself pro-liferates, and in their spatial manifestations as well.

In a world, then, in which spatiality and sexuality are fundamental experiences, and in which sexuality, race, class and gender have been constructed as significant axes of difference, it should come as no surprise that struggles organised around these differences feature prominently in a process like urbanisation. Their contingent interconnections, their resistance to reduction (one to the other) and their spatial dynamism are testaments to the restlessness, contingency and spatial instability of power itself. As long as human beings continue to exist in space, and as long as our bodies and experiences encompass difference as well as sameness, this contradictory situation will continue.

NOTES

1 By 'Western' I mean strongly associated, materially and ideologically, with Western economic, social, political, cultural and intellectual conditions and traditions. I acknowledge the extremely problematic nature of this term (its erasure of the roles of non-Europeans in making 'European' traditions, for example), but defend its use here as a way simply of suggesting some of the historical and geographical contingencies of my

argument. See my discussion in the second section on 'strategic essentialism'.

2 This is not always true, however. Lesbian cultures and communities in the US, for example, are sometimes more closely associated with areas not seen as particularly 'urban' (Beyer 1992; Grebinoski 1993).

3 I do not mean to suggest here that 'non-white' cultures constitute sexual subcultures, that rape is a sexuality, or that rape's association with certain 'non-white' people (i.e. black men) is anything but ideological. At the same time, I would argue that to its perpetrators rape is a sexualisation of male social dominance, and that white cultures in the West code black men in particular as potential rapists.

4 In almost the same breath, however, he acknowledges that 'all social processes occur within a spatial and temporal context' (278).

5 Actually Bech does not explicitly specify his description as 'Western'. But he does describe it as 'modern', which he in turn defines (implicitly) as Western.

6 Against the charge that what he describes is profoundly 'masculinist' (meaning male-oriented and oppressive to women), Bech invokes the argument of some feminists, including Elizabeth Wilson (1991), that such an objection desexualises women and denies them power, leaving them in need of (male) protection and control.

7 Among these is the fact that Bech attempts (albeit with appropriate caveats) to bracket off power relations from his analysis (except, interestingly, in his most gender-based sociological interpretation of the role of

psychoanalysis in the production of urban sexuality). But in addition, his claim that the city as a life-space has a 'logic of its own' is at best an overstatement. Whatever the 'logic' of the urban 'life-space', it is unlikely that it is completely disconnected from the (non-city-specific) hierarchically organised social relations which constitute it, or other relations of power which emerge in the context of it. Bech's own acknowledgement that public space is 'restricted and perhaps becoming even more restricted by the interventions of commercial or political agents' (6) would seem to bear this out. Along these same lines, the claim that the sexuality he describes is 'only possible in the city' is clearly a tautology, since he defines it in terms of the city in the first place. In fact, all of the sexual experiences he describes can and do take place outside cities as well. Admittedly, many of them usually require a good deal more effort to make things happen outside cities (e.g. anonymous encounters), but this does not link them *necessarily* to such environments. Anonymity, voyeurism, tactility, motion, etc. are all human experiences that can be, and arguably have been, sexualised and desexualised in a variety of places and fashions (and for a variety of reasons), throughout history. Thus they bear no *necessary* relationship to the city. The issue is not, therefore, whether or not a particular sexuality (or sexualities) attaches *necessarily* to the city, but rather how and why urban space has been sexualised in the particular ways that it has.

8 In the American case in particular, the process of nation-building through private profit-oriented land-development (and the associated contradictory ideologies of frontier individualism and utopian communitarianism) has led to a sexualisation of the city which is (arguably) less romantic, less erotic and more

masculine than in continental Europe.

9 I wish to emphasise that this distinction between public and private is one which is profoundly ideological, but which functions as one of those powerful essentialisms (Fuss 1989) which has profound material consequences.

10 See Knopp (1992) for a fuller presentation of this aspect of my argument.

11 One headline read 'Two Judges Visited Gay Disco – But One Stormed Out in Disgust!' (*Daily Record*, Edinburgh, 1990).

12 Unfortunately, I privileged class enormously in that particular piece.

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