

Guest editorial

Sexuality and space: queering geographies of globalization

In 2001, the Sexuality and Space Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies of the City University of New York cosponsored a one-day collaborative conference, “Sexuality and Space: Queering Geographies of Globalization”. Whereas the conference represented the major programmatic undertaking to date for the Sexuality and Space Specialty Group, for the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies the event was one of a series of interdisciplinary endeavors aimed at addressing globalization and sexuality. This meeting was designed to generate conversations between scholars writing on sexualities and space within and outside the discipline of geography.

Over the past twenty years, geographers have produced a rich and increasingly complex body of work on sexualities, building on the work of other geographers as well as theorists outside the discipline. More recently, scholars outside of geography have come to recognize the importance of social space, developing a new self-consciousness around it as an object of study and as a conceptual tool of analysis. Despite this spatial turn in social theory and the concomitant rise in conferences designed to address it, there has been (with some important exceptions) little genuinely interdisciplinary dialogue that takes space seriously. Indeed, after some debate among members of the organizing committee, in the call for papers for the Sexuality and Space conference it was (merely) noted that scholars outside of geography have a concept of space that “is often distinct from that in geography”.

Despite the increasingly rich theorizations of space within geography, outside of the discipline scholars continue to cite a narrow range of theorists, such as Michel de Certeau, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja, with an occasional nod to Doreen Massey or Neil Smith. Although referencing the same writers, and grappling with the same processes of globalization that influence our political, cultural, and socioeconomic landscapes, scholars inside and outside of the discipline of geography are rarely mutually engaged in conversation. Timed to take advantage of the New York City location of the Association of American Geographers meetings, the Sexuality and Space preconference offered an opportunity to generate constructive interactions that might further the cause of true interdisciplinary approaches to space. The conference brought together scholars from a wide range of disciplinary and physical locations. Working on sites from Spain to Egypt to South Africa, and located in programs ranging from geography to literature to art, participants engaged with critical questions surrounding the relationships between globalization and the formation and articulation of sexual identities and landscapes. In reanimating dialogues about local/global paradigms, the presenters challenged static notions of geographical place that sometimes plague queer theorizations of identities. Transversal circuitry and alliances, as well as multiple formations of scale—home, body, neighborhood, community, region, to name but a few—predominated in the discussions of nation, immigration, tourism, public policy, legislation, consumption, and gentrification. The papers included in this issue represent a small cross-section of the works presented at the conference. Other contributions have been published in other venues, including in the *GLQ* special issue on “Queer tourism: geographies of globalization” (Puar, 2002).

Within geography, the earliest studies on sexuality and space focused on defining and mapping gay landscapes and communities, working to make gay bodies and zones visible and highlighting forms of resistance. With rare exceptions, this work examined urban spaces, primarily located in North America and predominantly inhabited by white, middle-class or upper-middle-class gay men. This early work tended to reinforce notions of dissident sexualities as an urban phenomenon, with cities as the centers of innovation and transgression. More recently, scholars have extended the analysis of gay and lesbian geographies to explore the power relations and discursive and material processes and structures that underlay the simultaneous production of space and sexualities. This more recent set of work has succeeded in drawing attention to the implications of the ‘heterosexing’ of everyday space (and of the discipline of geography itself), interrogating the production of lesbian and rural spaces as well as those outside North America, and examining the intersections of global capitalism and spatialized sexualities.

In this issue, papers by Larry Knopp and Michael Brown, Christopher Reed, and Gill Valentine et al further extend the scope of analysis. In their paper on “Queer diffusions”, Knopp and Brown bring a nuanced understanding of the notion of diffusion, a concept that has been central to geographers’ work on spatial interaction, to the field of queer studies. In doing so, they not only ask us to think more broadly about what constitutes resistance, but call into question the equation of metropolitan locations with queer subjectivities. Although focused on the continental United States, their analysis can be extended to complement work that interrogates the notion of a ‘global gay’ which hierarchically diffuses from the West to the rest of the world. Reed’s case study of a neighborhood in Chicago moves beyond the mapping of bounded gay space to consider the implications of the ways in which the local state seeks to differentiate space to compete in a world of increasingly mobile capital and in which the particularities of place (and what and who is valued) take on heightened significance. In his analysis of the debates surrounding the city government’s marking of the district as ‘gay’ in a manner equivalent to its earlier bounding of similar spaces as ‘ethnic’, Reed helps us to rethink earlier work that tended to apply unproblematically frameworks of ethnic segregation to the production of gay space. Finally, in Valentine et al’s paper (the only one in the issue that was not a part of the 2001 conference) the reader is asked to reconsider both the question of the home, often presented as either gay/lesbian or heterosexual, and our understanding of the coming-out process. Noting that sexuality is often presented as an individual choice—whether in terms of individual mobilities or in terms of performativity that disrupts the naturalized heterosexuality of everyday space—Valentine et al move to ground individual decisions in the context of the family.

There has been significant progress in the study of the geographies of sexuality in the past decade, and the realm of analysis has expanded to include sexualities in non-Western contexts, the differential mobilities of specific bodies, and a more nuanced consideration of power relations characterizing queer geographies (see Nast, 2002). Despite this scholarship, there has been relatively little work within the discipline that challenges the implicit assumption that gays are white or that interrogates the intersection of globalization processes with space and sexuality. Here, geographers have much to learn from scholars outside the discipline, who have produced an extensive body of work on queer diasporas, racialized sexualities, and transnationalism; nationalisms and the policing of borders; global capitalism and gay subjectivities; and the heteronormative foundations of development ideologies and imperialism. At the same time, researchers outside the discipline, who have worked so hard to disrupt binaries and fixed categories, could usefully apply geographers’ recent work on the social construction of scale to escape the reproduction of a local/global binary in which

both the local (cultural and passive or the site of resistance) and the global (economic and active) are taken as given.

Here, papers by Meredith Raimondo, Erica Rand, and Katherine Sugg offer ways to think about how we might begin to bridge these differences. Raimondo brings together an analysis of racialized, gendered, and sexualized representations of the AIDS crisis with a nuanced understanding of notions of 'home', 'safety', and the construction of borders. In doing so, she explores the sometimes contradictory links between identities and place within a dynamic context of enhanced mobilities and shifting sociospatial relations at a range of socially constructed scales. Sugg explores the linking of sexual and national identities in the work of two Cuban-American artists which challenges conventional understandings of 'homeland', cultural memory, and nationality in diasporic communities and spaces, issues also examined in performance artist Coco Fusco's comments on the closing plenary at the conference. Finally, Rand asks us to question the ways in which Ellis Island, so linked with the processes of nation-building and citizen-making, is represented and produced as a desexed space. This approach resonates with the call that some geographers have made for a geography that takes not only sexualities but also sex into account, doing some of the 'stirring' that Jon Binnie contends must be done to produce a 'queer epistemology' in geography (1997).

The papers chosen for this issue represent the wide array of methodologies that may be mobilized in researching the conjunction of space and sex. As an aggregate, the grouping is intended to meld more interpretive approaches with more empirical approaches, eschewing the drawing of sharp lines that has plagued the humanities—social science split. For the papers that include firsthand interview data—Knopp and Brown, Rand, and Valentine et al—the commentary is often directly quoted and read closely as textual material. Such close reading also characterizes the use, in papers by Reed and Raimondo, of policy and journalistic statements. Raimondo, Rand, and Reed, in particular, employ archival material as well in their treatments of historical developments. For Sugg, dealing with artistic productions, the tools of textual criticism are her most central resources. In addition in papers by Knopp and Brown, Sugg, and Valentine et al much of the argument is constructed around engagements with existing theoretical literatures. Finally, several of the authors explicitly offer their own experiences, observations, and subjectivities—both spatial and sexual—as material for analysis. For the purpose of this issue, the deliberate construction of such a variegated methodological landscape resists privileging any one approach, reflecting instead the generative eclecticism that typically characterizes transdisciplinary sexuality studies.

Taken together, these pieces demonstrate that spaces are sexualized as an active and often contentious process of place-making. Raimondo's work illustrates the way that US AIDS discourse implicitly created a heterosexual and nonpromiscuous zone of safety in the US heartland while demonizing Africa and the urban United States as sexually dangerous. Reed's case study of the urban planning for a gay neighborhood in Chicago, by contrast, recounts mayoral efforts to mark positively a space as sexually nonnormative as part of a diversity program. Meanwhile, the vociferous spinning of Ellis Island as asexual, or as strictly reproductive in its sexual character, makes Rand's point that we should resist assuming sexual neutrality for any place and instead unpack the contrived erasure of sexuality from certain place identities. The sexual or asexual marking of places, in other words, is not only relevant to obvious zones such as red light districts or monasteries, but reveals itself to be virtually ubiquitous and hence deserving of much more consistent critical reading.

It is not only those who fashion identity *within* a place that are relevant to processes of place-making, of course, as we see only too clearly in the distancing strategies of US AIDS discourse vis-à-vis Africa or Haiti. These papers show that people on the move

across spaces may also be key contributors to the sexual characterization of places. Sugg's treatment of artistic narratives of return to Cuba by diasporic lesbians resident in the United States suggests that, for these transcultural producers, the homeland is a place of family and historical memory which becomes desexualized, partly through its association with childhood, by contrast to the queered United States. The asexual here, as with Rand, emerges as the artifact of particular structures of spatial feeling. Interestingly, for migrant sexual minorities, the homeland may be the desexed zone, whereas for the Ellis Island discourse that desexed zone is precisely the point of entry, of family reunification, of repronormativity. In both cases, history is sanitized vis-à-vis the erotically embodied present.

Knopp and Brown's exploration of the subjectivities of gay men in the Seattle–Duluth circuit finds these men, like Sugg's artists, to be agents in the production of differentially sexual spaces. These spaces are portrayed discrepantly by interviewees, who do not always favor urban centers as sites for sexual fulfillment, but rather in some cases find small or nonmetropolitan communities to be preferable according to certain criteria. Knopp and Brown deploy this finding to interrupt static notions of spatial hierarchy and to deprivilege the metropolitan scale. Taking aim at unidirectional theories of diffusion, they push us to recognize that any mapping of sexualities that holds hubs or cores constant as sites of sexual liberation in contrast to repressive or heteronormative peripheries is overly rigid. This insight, of course, is of crucial importance to discussions of sexual 'flows' at the global scale, where activists in Euro-American 'centers' are at risk of dismissing the non-West as behind (in a unilineal sense) with reference to sexuality politics and the embracing of categorical queer identities.

The theme of exile emerges here as a point of conjuncture for sexual minority and diasporic subjectivities. In both instances, a community of origin is lost and perhaps unrecoverable because of the identity shift that has taken place in the subject of exile. This community is mourned, recalled with nostalgia, but also rejected and deliberately left behind. It is a community that registers as home, whether it is a natal family, a hometown, or a native country. Importantly, however, as Valentine et al show, the relinquishment of home (in their case, the immediate natal family) may be inflected by the specific reactions of those at home to a given subject's sexual dissidence. Nonetheless, what the notion of conjuncture underscores is that nonnormative sexuality is often tantamount to spatial displacement, that we should not overlook the importance of spatial mobility for sexual minorities. Such spatial mobility spans a range of scales, occurring at the subnational scale between neighborhoods, towns, and cities, and at the international scale between countries.

What papers such as Sugg's or Knopp and Brown's emphasize is the ongoing hybridity that may be generated out of experiences of exile. For Sugg's transnational migrants from Cuba, there is an ever-renewed rejection of the "claims of monological US identity" (2003, page 465); both gendered and sexual self-fashioning are always in dialogue with the Cuba left behind and ambivalently revisited through artistic exploration. In a highly generative formulation, Knopp and Brown identify a "tacking back and forth" (2003, page 417) in sexual subjectivities, suggesting that people experience being queer differently as they move between places. Pushing beyond the notion of a one-time move away from a site of sexual oppression to one of greater actualization, they argue that the shuttling between is an ongoing activity that occurs not only across physical space but also within the sexual subject.

In pondering not only the spatialized, scaled, and globalized relations of sexuality, but also what exactly is queer about globalization or geography, this collection seeks to question some of the methodological mainstays of the field of geography at

the same time that it insists upon the importance of taking space seriously. Queering geography, then, invites an elaboration of progress already made in social and cultural geography in interrogating positivist paradigms that rely upon bounded territories, discrete identities, statistical absolutes, and neocolonial mappings. Simultaneously, however, geographers' rich understandings of place, space, and scale offer queer studies the possibility of grounding theorizations of sexual politics and identities in material and everyday landscapes. Although each contribution foregrounds different disciplinary and interdisciplinary agendas, taken as a whole these works demonstrate the ongoing commitment to underscoring the intertwined and multifaceted mode of temporality, identities, and space.

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