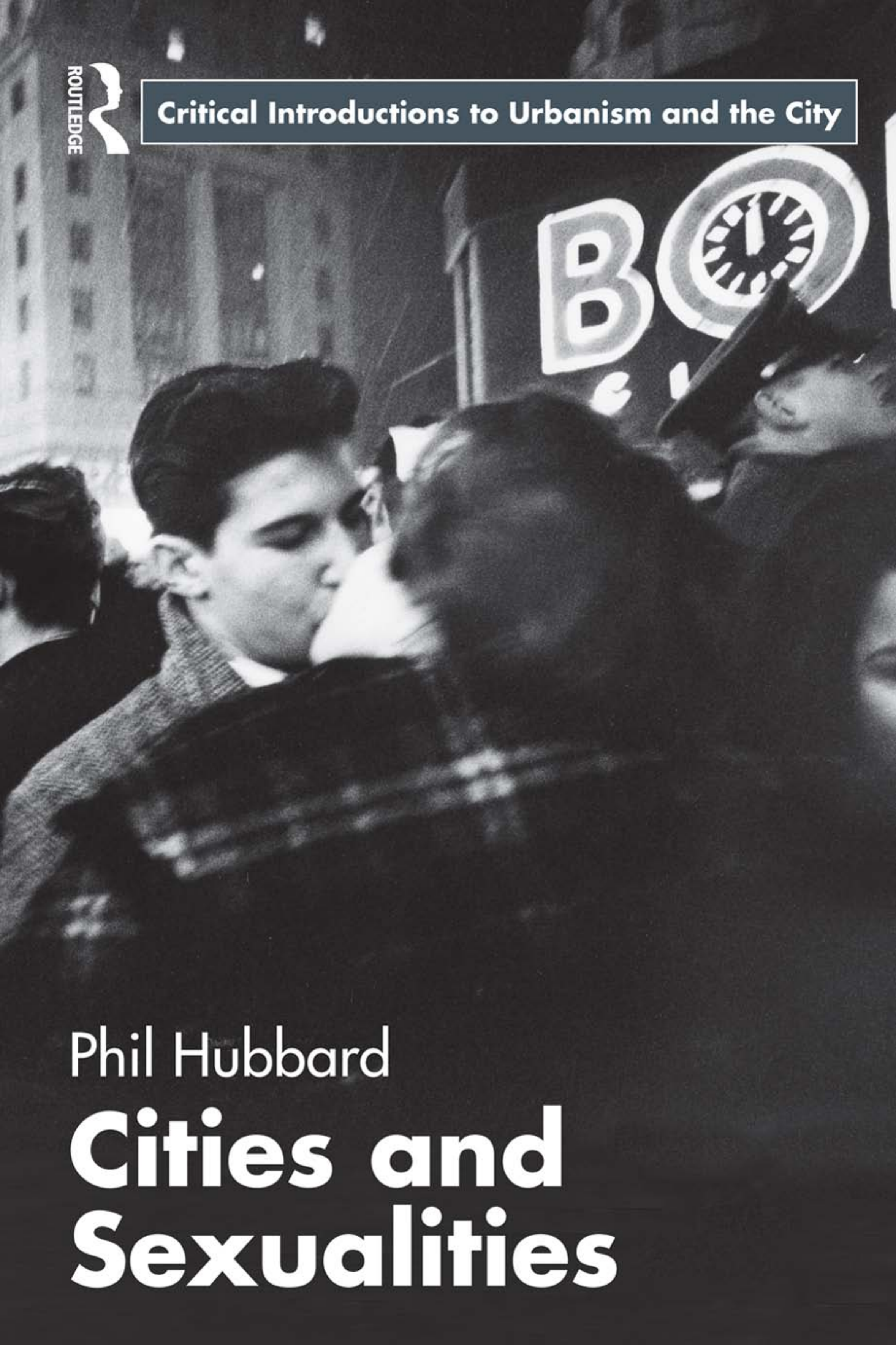
ROUTLEDGE
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Phil Hubbard
Cities and Sexualities

Cities and Sexualities

From the hotspots of commercial sex through to the suburbia of twitching curtains, urban life and sexualities appear inseparable. Cities are the source of our most familiar images of sexual practice, and are the spaces where new understandings of sexuality take shape. In an era of global business and tourism, cities are also the hubs around which a global sex trade is organized and where virtual sex content is obsessively produced and consumed.

Detailing the relationships between sexed bodies, sexual subjectivities and forms of intimacy, *Cities and Sexualities* explores the role of the city in shaping our sexual lives. At the same time, it describes how the actions of urban governors, city planners, the police and judiciary combine to produce cities in which some sexual proclivities and tastes are normalized and others excluded. In so doing, it maps out the diverse sexual landscapes of the city – from spaces of courtship, coupling and cohabitation through to sites of adult entertainment, prostitution and pornography. Considering both the normative geographies of heterosexuality and monogamy, as well as urban geographies of radical/queer sex, this book provides a unique perspective on the relationship between sex and the city.

Cities and Sexualities offers a wide overview of the state-of-the-art in geographies and sociologies of sexuality, as well as an empirically grounded account of the forms of desire that animate the erotic city. It describes the diverse sexual landscapes that characterize both the contemporary Western city as well as cities in the global South. The book features a wide range of case studies as well as suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter. It will appeal to undergraduate students studying Geography, Urban Studies, Gender Studies and Sociology.

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Cities and Sexualities

Phil Hubbard

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Preface

It begins with footsteps. Bare feet – a man's, then a woman's – leaving a bedroom and heading for a shower. The same shower? It's not clear. The scene splits. Shots of teeth being cleaned, hair gently tousled, make-up applied. Wardrobes open, towels drop, clothes are chosen. The wearers admire themselves in the mirror, she in a stylishly cut dress, he in open collar shirt, a black jacket. Two people getting ready; separate lives.

Cut to: a metro station in Paris. The woman and man enter the station, from either end, and stand on the platform, five metres or so apart. Two strangers, standing alone. The man glances at the women, looks her up and down. She notices, smiles back. The train arrives.

On the train, they are sitting in the same carriage, alone and silent. The man ignores the woman, but glances in the window where he catches a glimpse of her legs, crossing and uncrossing. He starts to imagine what those legs look like when she is undressed. He turns away. She looks across, noticing him again, and imagines the curve of his back.

A montage of shots follow: the man and woman talking in a square by a fountain; caressing by the River Seine late at night; in a nightclub, drinking; in a cinema; in a restaurant: a glamorous couple, in love.

The woman's phone rings, breaking this sequence and returning us to the metro. Was this her fantasy? Or his? We can't tell. Yet the phonecall attracts the man's attention back to her, and he starts to imagine her with another man, plain-looking. He laughs to think that someone so beautiful is with someone like that, and not with someone like him.

Another metro stop passes. The woman smiles at him, and we see more images. His cigar burning a mark on a carpet; a row on the street; getting into a nice car; getting into a cheaper car; rows in traffic; driving to their flat; a ring on a finger.

She smiles at him, he smiles again. A final montage: the couple on a bed, touching, caressing; her dress falling from her shoulders; her hand stroking

> his neck; passionate kisses; feet entwining; the couple naked, fucking, him on top, then her.
>
> The metro draws to its destination, shaking them from their reverie, they get up, move to the door, he behind her. We see their reflection in the metro door, where they appear as a couple. But when the doors open, they depart in different directions, two separate lives.

Florian Sela's short film – *L'amour dure Trois Minutes* – ('Love Lasts Three Minutes') is a play on Frederic Beigbeder's (1997) novel *Amour dure Trois Ans* ('Love Lasts Three Years'), and charts an encounter between two protagonists who, drawn by mutual attraction, fantasize about a (sex) life together. No words are exchanged, no bodies touch, yet in the movement of an eye, a slight smile, a shift in posture, we can sense that there was the possibility that this encounter could have been more than it was, just one of the thousands of random encounters that animate everyday urban life.

In drawing attention to the possibilities of the city as a space in which to find and experience sex, romance and love, Sela's film effectively underscores several of the themes that this book explores. One is that cities – and especially big cities – are sites where disconnected people, perhaps from different cultural and geographical backgrounds, are drawn into sexual relationships bound by the rules of attraction. These relationship can be real or imagined, and are of varied duration – from a one-night stand to a lifetime of companionship – but are united by the fact that they involve people sharing forms of personal and bodily intimacy. This means that their relationship moves from the realm of normal sociality and friendship into a 'socio-erotic' domain. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that their relationship is any more meaningful than any other of their relationships or acquaintances, and it might not be characterized by any element of emotional reciprocity or empathy, but it certainly means that their relations are experienced as being of a sexual nature. As such, the city can be seen as a site whose inherent heterogeneity and difference is bound together through the promise, pursuit and practices of sex itself.

Sela's film is telling to the extent that it shows how strangers can come together, drawn by sexual attraction, within a city of millions. It shows that even within the confines of our banal urban lives – a three-minute journey – the city provides a stage for performances that are sexual or sexualized. The public spaces and streets of the city, in particular, are spaces where people dress, walk and talk in ways that they hope will attract the sexual attention of others: attracting welcoming glances while repelling the gaze of the unwanted and undesired is a key urban skill, involving forms of body- and

face-work that render bodies coherent and desirable to selective audiences. Other pseudo-public spaces, such as retail, office and leisure spaces, can also be important as spaces where bodies are, to lesser or greater extents, being appraised in sexual terms, and where people modify their dress and appearance according to how they might like to be perceived. This is not to say that bodies are not sexualized or sexy in the rural – far from it – but that the sheer density and busy-ness of city life means that the city offers multiple possibilities for sexual encounter, and provides a theatre for sexual display.

Significantly, Sela's film also perpetuates the idea that certain cities are inherently sexy. It seems reasonable to assume that two passengers on a metro in Paris are no more likely to be attracted to one another than if they are sitting on a metro in Tokyo, Moscow or Newcastle. Yet for all this, Paris has a reputation as a city for lovers, and is celebrated as a honeymoon destination (the Eiffel Tower is known as one of the world's most popular spots for people to propose to one another). Just exactly what it is about Paris that makes it romantic is difficult to discern, though clearly media images and advertising exploit this reputation. But irrespective of such representations, it is unquestionable that Paris's boulevards, cafés, nightspots, parks and restaurants feel – or have been made to feel – sexy and chic. In short, the city has an ambience that lends itself to sexual encounter, and remains a major focus for forms of 'sexy tourism' and sexual commerce.

Putting some of these themes together, we can begin to understand why there is a need for a book considering the relations between sexuality and the city. Put simply, cities have long been recognized as spaces of sexual encounter, as sites where bodies come together, mix and mingle. They are known as sites of sexual experimentation, radicalism and freedom, as places where individuals can pursue or purchase a rich diversity of sexual pleasures. Historically, the city has been regarded as a space of social and sexual liberation because it is understood to offer anonymity and an escape from the more claustrophobic kinship and community relations of smaller towns and villages. For such reasons – and not just the lure of work – young single people tend to congregate in cities, making urban areas the most vibrant of all settings in which people search for sex partners. This is understood to be especially important for individuals identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual, who historically have gravitated towards larger cities:

> Cities offered a larger selection of partners than smaller towns and villages. Crowds provided anonymity and, where homosexual acts remained illegal, a measure of safety. Migrants could break out of the strictures imposed elsewhere, locating new 'sub-cultures' to satisfy reprobate desires . . . Libido, hope for friendship and romance, and a need for money, drove

> them to search out casual, situational or long-term partners or patrons. Cities have provided venues where men who have sex with men (and women who have sex with women) can meet: pubs and clubs, cafes and cabarets. In times of clandestine homosexuality, public baths and toilets, parks and back streets were especially hospitable to trysts.
>
> (Aldrich 2004, 1725)

Often contrasted with a rurality that is deemed sexually conservative and even backward, the city is hence widely regarded as a site of sexual liberation, with key cities (such as Paris, but also San Francisco, London, Amsterdam, Sydney and New York) playing host to visible lesbian and gay communities characterized by alternative, extended and voluntary kinship patterns (Adler and Brenner 1992; Forest 1995; Knopp 1998; Podmore 2006; Doderer 2011). This association between lesbian and gay sexuality and the metropolis is effectively captured in the title of Weston's (1995) article about the gay geographical imagination: 'Get thee to a big city'. Cities are also sites where both the meanings and practices of sex itself have been transformed and, in recent times, where particular forms of sexual consumption and leisure have been normalized and encouraged. Sexual commerce abounds in most (if not all) cities, whether visibly in the form of lap dance clubs, peep shows, sex shops and areas of street sex working, or in more clandestine and privatized forms off-street. Whatever one's sexual predilections, the city seemingly provides places where one's desires can be fulfilled (albeit often at a price).

Yet this representation of the sexually liberal city does not tell the full story, as while the metropolis has been a notable location of sexual experimentation, it has also been the site where sexuality is most intensely scrutinized, policed and disciplined. It is a location where sexual orders have been worked and reworked, and where ideas of the 'normal' and 'perverse' have been both instituted and contested. This is because cities are not just comings-together of people in the interests of social and economic reproduction; they are also sites of governance from which power is exercised through various apparatuses of the state. Cities are indeed host to the key institutions that have a vested interest in regulating sex as part of a project of maintaining social order: the police, local government, departments of planning and housing, the courts, hospitals, probation services, social services and so on. These institutions are rarely discrete or isolated, extending their reach from metropolitan centres out to the provinces and the countryside through *geographies* – as opposed to simply *geometries* – of power (Howell 2009).

All of this is to suggest that the relationship between cities and sexualities is ambivalent: the city both enables and constrains sexuality, intensifying desire and repressing it in different ways. However, to state this is not enough, for

it fails to grasp what is truly at stake in the relationship between sex and the city: as Mort and Nead (1999, 7) argue, to maintain that space is constitutive of sexuality is at once to 'say everything and nothing at all' given this is a broad, theoretical abstraction. Mort and Nead instead contend there is a need to examine how the city distributes and regulates sexual subjects and populations, and to explore how those subjects and populations negotiate and live out their sexual lives *within* urban spaces. The city is therefore far from being a neutral backdrop against which sexual relations are played out: it is an active agent in the making of sexualities, promoting some and repressing others. To map the urban geographies of sex is to expose the ways in which sexuality is subject to discipline and the exercise of knowledge and power. To put this in simple terms: each time sex takes place, and occupies space, it territorializes a particular understanding of sexuality (see Perreau 2008). To paraphrase Michel Foucault, a history of sexualities is therefore a history of spaces.

As Houlbrook (2006) insists, the city and sexuality are thus conceptually and culturally inseparable. In the public imagination, the association between sex and the city is axiomatic: for example, television crews cruise the city's streets seeking to pair people up (*Streetmate*), expose the diverse sex scenes of different cities (*Sexcetera*) and celebrate the sexual exploits of the city's inhabitants (most famously, perhaps, in *Sex and the City*, whose representation of sexually voracious women pursuing pleasure in New York cemented its reputation as an enlightened city of sexual opportunity). Yet in academic circles, there are still many who explore the dynamics and socialities of human sexuality without considering the importance of *space* and *place* in the making of our sexual lives (not to mention those who even seek to strip sexuality of its social and cultural context, considering it as a solely biological imperative). This book shows that exploring the sex lives of the city without noting the role of the city in shaping those sexualities is to miss a crucial dimension of human sexuality: the city is not simply the context for sex but plays an active role in the shaping our desires. Conversely, this book also argues that we cannot hope to understand the city without considering the importance of sexuality. Any urban theory that does not acknowledge the importance of sexuality ignores a vital dimension of social life – and one of the key factors that shapes our experience of the city.

Detailing the relationships between bodies, places and desires, this book accordingly explores the role of the city in shaping our sexual lives. At the same time, it describes how the actions of urban designers, planners and governors produce particular types of city in which some sexual predilections and tastes are catered for but others excluded. Highlighting the inescapable

relationship between sex and the city, and emphasizing its gendered dimensions, it thus presents a series of linked case studies that explore how the city celebrates or represses particular sexual desires. Unlike many works in the field, it does not seek to privilege a specific set of sexual relations or identity positions but takes a broad overview of human sexualities. This will entail a consideration of the urban lives of those who identify as heterosexual, lesbian or gay as well as those populations who less readily identify with these discrete sexual identity positions (e.g. those who identify as bisexual, or resist labelling altogether). Importantly, the book will also move beyond questions of identity to consider questions of *practice*. Here, analysis of sex work, the consumption of pornography, the pursuit of anonymous sex and non-monogamous lifestyles will suggest that some sexualities are socially and spatially marginalized, while other sexualized practices (and bodies) are made to appear normal through their repeated and ubiquitous performance in urban space.

While there are now a number of important collections that explore the relationship between sexuality and space (for example, Bell and Valentine 1995a; Browne *et al.* 2007; Johnston and Longhurst 2010), this book aims to make a significant intervention in the cross-disciplinary field of sexuality studies. It seeks to do this by moving beyond binaries of straight/gay identity, offering a wider overview of the ways that the city shapes our sexual and intimate lives, encouraging us all to perform sexualities that are, in some sense, ‘normal’ and comprehensible within the socially dominant models that suggest sex is something that is most appropriate, and rewarding, within the context of a consensual, and preferably loving, long-term relationship (Hubbard 2000). To make these arguments, it draws on a diverse range of empirical material, using case studies to explore particular spaces of sex within the contemporary Western city as well as some cities in the global South. These case studies are, by their very nature, limited in scope and depth, but are designed to be more than simply illustrative: they are intended to inspire readers to further explore these – and other – stories of sex and the city.

1 Introducing cities and sexualities

Learning objectives

- **To understand that sexuality is simultaneously biological, psychological and social.**
- **To appreciate why place matters in an understanding of sexualities.**
- **To gain an understanding of some of the key processes that serve to sexualize the city.**

Traditionally, sexuality has been of relatively little interest to urban researchers, who have appeared remarkably reluctant to explore the way that people's sexuality shapes, or is shaped by, their urban experiences. There are a number of possible explanations for this, aside from the general prudishness that is often evident about sex. One possible explanation is that sexuality, if conceived in its narrowest biological sense, can be seen to concern our sexual behaviour and the physiological and psychological basis of our sexuality. Viewed in this way, sex might be understood as a solely biological imperative, worthy of investigation by the clinician, the medical professional or the sex therapist, but something that seems to be little influenced by a person's surroundings. Whether one is born, or lives, in a sprawling metropolis or tiny rural hamlet seems to have little bearing on the materiality of the body, or the sexual desires that we possess, given we are born into bodies that determine our subsequent sexual development.

However, if viewed from an alternative, sociological perspective, sex can be regarded as the product of social forces that need to be explained, with people's sexuality shaped by their gender, age, class and ethnicity, as well as the cultural influences to which they are exposed in their everyday lives. A sociological perspective hence views sex as not something dictated by our physical needs

and urges, but embedded in multiple institutions, networks and organizations that shape our desire. This does not mean that social science approaches ignore the biology or physicality of the body. Far from it. Sex itself is always embodied and visceral, involving fleshy, desiring bodies, touches, looks, tastes, smells, bodily fluids, sperm, saliva, sweat. But sociologists argue that the embodied experience of sex can never transcend the social, with sex always being informed by the images of eroticism that circulate in the media, the conversations we have about sex and the guidance we are given about what sex is supposed to be. When we have sex, or claim a sexual identity, we are thus positioned within the social.

While not discounting ideas about the science of sex, this book is hence grounded in social science literatures that explore the *social construction* of sex. Such literatures suggest that while sex is always a matter of biology (i.e. embodied acts and physical processes), the fact that specific bodily actions and performances are understood as 'sexual' or 'erotic' means they take on a *meaning* that ripples out to encompass all dimensions of our identities and practices. To take an example: virginity might be understood biologically as having not had penetrative sex with another person, but socially it is surrounded by a complex range of assumptions and understandings of purity, cleanliness and innocence. Moreover, there are seen to be 'right' and 'wrong' ages at which to start having sex, and 'good' and 'bad' ways to lose one's virginity. These social myths and meanings have important consequences for what it means to be a virgin, and what it *feels* like to be a virgin. Moreover, they also have an important influence on decisions to 'lose' one's virginity, or perhaps to perform a celibate identity that celebrates the decision to remain a virgin in the face of social pressures to the contrary (Abbott 2000).

This type of example suggests that not all sexual acts or identities are regarded as equivalent in contemporary society. As Gayle Rubin (1984) argued in her essay 'Thinking Sex', some sexualities are socially privileged, others marginalized. As such, it is possible to speak of 'good sex' – that which the state, media and law suggests is normal, natural and healthy – as well as 'bad sex' – that which is depicted as 'utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance' (Rubin 1984, 117). Writing in the context of the mid 1980s, Rubin (1984, 117) argued that the latter encompassed the 'most despised sexual castes . . . transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries'.

In situating particular acts and identities as immoral, and thus on the 'margins' of acceptability, the moral 'centre' is defined. The boundaries between

moral/immoral and good/bad sex are never clear cut, however, with changing understandings of sex being circulated, and contested, via social representations of different sexual practices and lifestyles. Some sexualities have shifted from being 'bad' to 'good': for example, while Rubin spoke of homosexuality's marginal and even criminalized status in the 1980s, this has been transformed by the efforts of homophile and, later, queer activist groups since that time, with many nations now recognizing same-sex civil partnerships and offering lesbian and gay identified individuals protection from homophobic discrimination and abuse (McGhee 2004). By the same token, however, sexualities can move from the centre to the margins of society: for example, in classical times, it appears that Athenian society revolved around male-dominated and homosocial notions of bonding that encouraged older men to take younger boys – of between twelve and eighteen – as lovers (Halperin 2002; Clark 2008). Today, as Rubin notes, such behaviour would be widely condemned as paedophilia.

Rubin (1984, 116) hence argued that 'all erotic behaviour is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established, with the most acceptable excuses [being] marriage, reproduction, and love'. This argument has subsequently been developed by researchers exploring how a particular, coupled, form of heterosexuality is made to appear natural and normal, something captured in the concept of *heteronormativity*:

> By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged . . . It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations – often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might *not* be heteronormative. Heteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality.
>
> (Berlant and Warner 1998, 178)

This concept of heteronormativity has proved important given it develops Rubin's idea of a hierarchy of sexualities and explores the normalization not of heterosexuality per se, but a form of heterosexuality based on coupling, reproduction, consensual sex and love. This is also the form of sexuality privileged by the state, with most nations granting certain rights of citizenship to coupled, reproductive individuals which are denied to 'bad' sexual subjects (Richardson 2000).

Exploring shifts in social understandings of what is sexually 'normal' is important in any examination of sex and the city, for it underlines that understandings of what sexuality is – and which sexualities are 'normal' – can vary across both time and space. Despite the fact that we live a global world, where there is some degree of cultural homogenization, it is obvious that there are different understandings of 'appropriate' sexual comportment and manners between East and West, and between the global South and the global North, with significant variations apparent within these broadly defined areas (see Hastings and Magowan 2010). This suggests that although it is possible to make generalizations about the sexual life of cities, there are certain dangers in imagining that all cities promote the same sort of sexualities (see Brown *et al*. 2010 on urban sexualities beyond the West). Bearing this in mind, this chapter will begin to trace the connections between sex and the city by exploring how nineteenth-century European urbanization triggered new understandings of 'good' and 'bad' sexuality. The first section hence explores how the emergence of large, modern cities (such as London, Berlin and Paris) prompted anxieties about the sex lives of their citizens. A key idea in the second section of this chapter is that these anxieties fuelled attempts to order the city via acts of planning, environmental modification and health reform which were ultimately about disciplining the city's diverse sexualities. Acknowledging that such acts have tended to produce heteronormative cities, the final section of this chapter stresses that the city nonetheless remains a site where sexual norms can be questioned or exceeded, offering diverse spaces for the performance of alternative, residual or 'queer' sexualities. Urban space is hence shown to be highly significant in shaping the sexual life of its citizens, distributing bodies and desires to produce cities where particular forms of sexual conduct dominate: as Mitchell (2000, 35) notes, 'like any social relationship, sexuality is inherently spatial – it depends on particular spaces for its construction and in turn produces and reproduces the spaces in which sexuality can be, and was, forged'.

Diversity and danger: urbanization and sexual anxiety

While the first cities emerged thousands of years ago, it was only in the nineteenth century that the city began to be taken seriously as a distinctive and important academic object of study. One of the main reasons for this was that, until that time, the overall share of the global population living in cities was small in both absolute and relative terms. The rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century changed this, evident first and foremost in the economically dominant states of Europe and then in the cities of the so-called 'New World',

notably the US. What was particularly significant about this process of urbanization was that it produced cities that contemporary commentators struggled to describe using existing language: their size, appearance and apparent complexity rendered them a new *species* that demanded to be classified, catalogued and ultimately, diagnosed.

In its nascent form, urban studies was concerned with describing the distinctive social, economic and political life of these cities, noting they were more crowded, diverse and individualized than rural settlements. The idea that the city represented the antithesis of traditional ruralism became particularly associated with Ferdinand Tonnies' (1887) distinction between *gemeinschaft* communities – characterized by people working together for the common good, united by ties of family (kinship), language and folklore – and *gesellschaft* societies, characterized by rampant individualism and a concomitant lack of community cohesion. Though Tonnies couched the distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* in terms of a pre-industrial/industrial divide rather than an urban/rural one, his description of *gesellschaft* societies was deemed appropriate for industrial cities where the extended family unit was supplanted by 'nuclear' households in which individuals were concerned with their own problems, and seldom those of others, remaining indifferent even to those in their immediate neighbourhood.

Though caricatured, the idea that urban settlements were less cohesive than their rural counterparts was a persuasive one, and resonated with discourses that figured the modern city as cold, calculating and anonymous. Friedrich Engels' (1844) work is of particular note in this respect given it documented the *inhuman* living conditions experienced by workers in cities that increasingly served the interests of industrial production and the property-owning classes. In a more general sense, Georg Simmel (1858–1918) described the impacts of urbanism on social psychology, suggesting that the city demanded human adaptation to cope with its size and complexity. In his essay 'The metropolis and mental life', Simmel (1903) argued that the unique trait of the modern city was the *intensification* of nervous stimuli with which the city dweller must cope. Describing the contrast between the rural, where the rhythm of life and sensory imagery was slow, and the city, with its 'swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli', Simmel detailed how individuals psychologically adapted to urban life. Most famously, he spoke of the development of a blasé attitude – the attitude of indifference which urban dwellers adapt as they go about their day-to-day business (something that remains evident in the etiquette of urban life, where adopting modes of 'civil inattention' enables the pedestrian to negotiate encounters with the innumerable strangers passed in the street) (Smith and Davidson 2008).

The idea that the urban experience is essentially 'managed' through a transformation of individual consciousness that involves a filtering out of the detail and minutiae of city existence remains an important foundation for urban theory. So too does the idea that city life debases human relations, and renders contact between urban dwellers essentially superficial, self-centred and shallow, based on surface appearance. For Simmel, the impersonality and depthlessness of urban life was related to the fact that the industrial city served the calculative imperatives of *money*. Simmel essentially suggested this encouraged relations based purely on exchange value and productivity (and thus dissolved bonds constructed on the basis of blood, kinship or loyalty). This, he argued, encouraged a purely logical way of thinking which valued punctuality, calculability and exactness. The corollary was a city that moved to the rhythms of industrial capitalism, and was marked by a ceaseless transformation (Berman 1983). This was to have important consequences for the sex life of modern cities, as Brown and Browne summarize:

> These new forms of urban life and the anonymity and freedom afforded by large, concentrated populations enabled unorthodox sexual practices and the development of new subcultures based around minority sexualities . . . [with] sexual adventure to be found in the circulation of the crowd, the comingling of different classes in public space, and the spectacle of the electrified city at night.
>
> (Brown and Browne 2009, 697)

Despite an evident reticence to situate sexuality within the realm of the social, the pioneers of urban sociology began to note that the great metropolitan centres were characterized by distinctive sexualities (Heap 2003). This led to the development of numerous theories linking sexual 'perversion' to the social turbulence and disorganization of the modern city (see Case Study 1.1).

The attributes deemed characteristic of modern cities – anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, consumption, tactility, motion and restlessness – hence played a role in facilitating a more diverse range of sexual behaviours than those evident in traditional rural societies. Freed from the constraints of rural kinship networks, the urban dweller could explore new sexual avenues and negotiate new sexual identities (something clearly evidenced in the example of Berlin, where both women and men found multiple opportunities for sexual encounter outside the traditional confines of marriage). For Iris Marion Young (1990, 224), city life began to *eroticize* difference 'in the wider sense of an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one's secure routine to encounter the novel, strange and surprising'. The coming-together of individuals from different backgrounds and origins therefore not only provided the possibility of forging new sexual identities

CASE STUDY 1.1

Sex in the metropolis: Weimar Berlin

The third largest city in the world after London and New York, Berlin transformed dramatically in the boom years of the 'Golden Twenties' between the inflation crisis of November 1923 and the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. One symptom of this was the emergence of an extensive night-life district centred on a diverse range of theatres, opera and, most famously, cabaret clubs. Another was creativity and experimentation in art, literature, design and architecture: the outward appearance of the city betrayed this, being characterized by a new 'objective' style of architecture – pioneered by Gropius, Taut, Mendelsohn and Mies van der Rohe – which made a virtue of structural integrity, functional, clean appearance and lack of ornament. Berlin thus became known as a truly *modern* metropolis, thoroughly of the moment: in the words of journalist and social commentator Siegfried Kracauer (1932, cited in Frisby 2001, 64), 'it appears as if the city had control of the magic means of eradicating memories. It is present day and makes a point of honour of being absolutely present day.'

Summarizing the socio-spatial transformation of 1920s Berlin, Ward (2001) comments on its evident 'surface culture', suggesting that the new objectivity hid nothing. All was on display, so to speak. From its department stores to the streets themselves, the city offered an excess of commodities that were fashioned, packaged and displayed in an aesthetic manner to increase their 'external appeal', and Ward suggests that this extended to the body itself. In its commodified form, the body took on the attributes of the city, with bodies culturally – and economically – valued for their efficient, modern, stylish appearance. This was most evident in the emergence of new fashions for men and women, particularly those associated with the *Neue Frau* ('New Woman') whose short bobbed hair, penchant for smoking and relaxed, almost masculine clothes, emphasized the new-found freedoms of the modern city and the sexual liberation this implied. Indelibly associated with the Berlin cabaret scene – captured in Christopher Isherwood's (1939) *Goodbye to Berlin*, and the film it inspired (Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*, 1972) – the New Woman was located imaginatively in the decadent all-night clubs that satirized dominant political mores and often flouted normal conventions around nudity and dress. In such settings, the *Neue Frau* was presented as an object to be visually and sexually consumed by men, despite her education and evident mobility.

The idea that the modern city accentuated the visible and the visual through an exaggerated and intense emphasis on surface form suggests Berlin was a stage where new sexualities were not just performed, but *produced*. Writing

in 1903 on the processes of commodification and spectacularization associated with the rise of modern urban culture, Berlin-based sociologist Georg Simmel argued that human emotion was being reduced to a sexual and economic exchange, with the traditional ties of kinship being subsumed by a more individualized culture that allowed for sexualities that transcended traditional gender, racial and class boundaries. One obvious symptom in Weimar Berlin was the development of well-known 'sex zones' where as many as 30,000 prostitutes worked after the decriminalization of sex work in 1927. The most infamous 'red light area' was that around Alexanderplatz, which contained upwards of 300 brothels, but throughout the city streetwalkers signified they were for sale through provocative modes of dressing. Overlapping these sites of prostitution, Berlin was also host to some of the first openly gay and lesbian bars (with the foundation of gay rights organization Berliner Freundesbund in 1919) (Evans 2003; B. Smith 2010).

Internationally, Berlin hence became known for its sexual experimentation and liberalism. The mood was well captured by George Grosz (1893–1959) and Otto Dix (1891–1969), artists whose caricatures and paintings provided some of the most vitriolic social criticism of their time. They depicted a city populated by prostitutes, bloated businessmen and disfigured war veterans (see Figure 1.1). Tellingly, many of their paintings were of the act of *lustmord* – the sexual murder of women. Though Berlin was not especially characterized by sexual crimes of this type (in fact more occurred in the rural), the representation of murdered women functioned as 'an aesthetic strategy for managing certain kinds of sexual, social and political anxieties' (Tatar 1995, 76). Retrospectively, it has been argued that such depictions of Berlin as decadent and depraved were especially associated with male fears of a city reigned over by the free-roaming libido of women, and a sexual laxity celebrated in the nightclub scene (Rowe 2003). Equally, emerging sexological discourse suggested that while men were naturally polygamous, the city was causing more widespread moral corruption of women: 'The problem lay with the city itself, whose anonymity, artificiality and rampant commercialism over-stimulated the libido and distorted the balance of nature within and between the sexes' (Forel and Fetscher 1931, 34).

Ultimately, it has been suggested that such exaggerated reactions to the 'threat' of untrammelled female sexuality figured in the censorship and repression of the cabaret scene under the Nazis in the 1930s. However, the flowering of sexual diversity in the Berlin of the 1920s underlines that the city is no mere backdrop against which our sexual lives are played out, but can play an active role in the production of sexuality.

Further reading: Ward (2001); B. Smith (2010)

Figure 1.1 ***Suicide*****, George Grosz, 1916 (courtesy of the Tate Collection).**

in the midst of an anonymous crowd, it also provided the opportunity for challenging traditional ideas of sexual conduct. However, few urban scholars paused to dwell on this at the time, beyond noting forms of 'sexual immorality' that dwelt in 'bohemia, the half-world and the red-light district' (Park 1915, 612): often it was assumed that immorality flourished in the city's *transitional zones*, populated by immigrants, working class itinerants and street people (see Chapter Two).

The connection between 'sexual deviance' and the city remained a significant focus of urban sociology and ethnography throughout the twentieth century (Kneeland and Davis 1917; Cressey 1932; Reckless 1933; Symanski 1981). However, it was not until the 1980s that wider issues of sexuality began to feature prominently in urban studies, particularly in literatures exploring the emergence of lesbian and gay neighbourhoods (Levine 1979; Weightman 1980; Castells 1983), as well as in various ethnographies of sexual meeting grounds (Humphreys 1970; McKinstry 1974; Warren 1974). Subsequently, research exploring the relationship between sex and the city has proliferated, encompassing studies not just of the urban geographies of lesbian and gay identified individuals, but the sex lives of a more diverse range of urban dwellers, whether they identify as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, monogamous or non-monogamous (for overviews, see Binnie and Valentine 1999; Knopp 2007; Hubbard 2008; Perreau 2008; Johnston and Longhurst 2010). This has often blurred into discussions about the gendering of urban space, with emerging work on transgendered spaces posing important questions about the assumed connections between sex and gender identities (Doan 2004; Browne and Lim 2010).

One recurrent theme in the literature is that the materialities of the city encourage sexual encounters by intensifying desire (Brown 2008b; Johnston 2010). For example, the lighting of the city masks and reveals different sights in ways that can evoke anticipation, anxiety or longing (see Chapter Five), while ever-present images of sexualized bodies on billboards, signage and advertising hoardings effectively remind viewers that the city is a sexual marketplace where bodies are constantly on display and all is for sale (Rosewarne 2007). Such examples stress that *vision* is crucial in the sex life of the city and the making of urban sexual subjectivities (Pile 1996). Yet the 'erotics of looking' (Bell and Binnie 1998) must be considered alongside other sensations and experiences of the urban – for example, the ways cities sound, smell, taste and feel – and the ways these haptic and sensory geographies are connected to the movements of bodies, the rhythms of streetlife, the appearance of buildings, urban microclimates, the design of public spaces and so on. Combined, these can effectively *sexualize* space:

> Space and place work together in the formation of sexual space, inspiring and circumscribing the range of possible erotic forms and practices within a given setting. The atmospheric qualities of a given locale are thus both hard and soft, immediate and (potentially) diffuse: location . . . architecture, décor, history and site-generated official and popular discourses merge into a singular entity (though there may be multiple interpretations of it). The immediate properties of a given space's atmosphere suggest to participants the state of mind to adopt, the kinds of sociality to expect and the forms of appropriate conduct. They also facilitate or discourage types of conduct and encounter.
>
> (Green *et al.* 2008, 5–6)

Iris Marion Young (1990, 224) made a similar point when she argued that 'the city's eroticism . . . derives from the aesthetics of its material being, the bright and coloured lights, the grandeur of the buildings, the juxtaposition of architectures of different times, styles and purpose . . . its social and spatial inexhaustibility'. The idea that cities are eroticized 'via the constant titillation of the senses by sex' (Mumford 1961, 24), has given rise to one of the enduring dimensions of the imagined urban/rural binary: the notion that the countryside is staid, conservative and moral in its sexualities, whereas the city is sexually experimental, liberal and promiscuous (but see Phillips *et al.* 2000). Depending on one's perspective, the city can be a sexual utopia or a site of unrelenting sin and immorality, its importance as a place of bodily contact and pleasure-seeking having being used to prop up anti-urban myths of the city as Sodom, as well as bolstering a pro-urban sentiment connecting sexual freedom to the emancipatory politics of the city. This latter emphasis is one perpetuated in much academic writing on urban sexuality, particularly accounts which highlight the pivotal role of the city in the making of lesbian and gay communities (d'Emilio 1998; Aldrich 2004; Chisholm 2005; Abraham 2009). But while such literatures note the city's apparent capacity to accommodate sexual difference, they also note the limits placed on that freedom, and the curtailment of particular sexual pleasures. Accordingly, a key theme in studies of sexuality and space is that the city is a key site in the control and *disciplining* of sexuality.

Disciplining the metropolis: regulating sexuality, spatially

Urban histories of Berlin, Paris, London, New York and the other metropolitan centres of the nineteenth century suggest cultural anxieties about sex intensified in response to the rapid social and economic changes associated with urban growth. Put simply, linked processes of urbanization (increasing

numbers living in cities), modernization (the increasing importance of new scientific, technological and cultural innovations) and secularization (the associated decline of religious influence) created large urban centres where individuals appeared more able to pursue more diverse sexual pleasures. Coupled with this, innovative architectural forms, spectacular spaces of leisure and new topographies of urban space provided an ambience more conducive to sexual encounter, providing multiple spaces of seduction and raising the spectre of inappropriate sexual mixing (Howell 2001; Cook 2003). Rapid urbanization in the nineteenth and early twentieth century therefore seemed to be associated with shifts in sexual sensibilities (a trend that seems to hold true in the context of the hyper-urbanization experienced in China and East Asia in the twenty-first century, where new spaces of sexual identification appear to be opening up – see Farrar 2002; Zheng 2009).

Periods of rapid urbanization hence appear to be times when sexual life shifts in significant ways. Often, these changes are disorientating, requiring the production of new sexual knowledges. Indeed, the identification of 'sexuality' as a specific, erotic aspect of human life was arguably something that was triggered by the rise of modern, large cities. This is not to deny that sex took diverse forms in smaller, pre-modern cities, with different taboos concerning particular types of sex evident long before modernization took hold. Rather, following the work of Michel Foucault, it is to insist that sex began to develop a series of specific meanings beyond its sheer physicality as new, modern ideas emerged about the relationship between pleasure and carnality. These ideas were traced in Foucault's unfinished three-volume history of sexuality, which described how, in pre-industrial European societies, sexual practices were primarily subjected to moral and religious scrutiny and categorized in relation to sin, with non-reproductive sex represented as immoral. In contrast, Foucault described how in the modern, industrial era, varied 'technologies of sex' began to explore sexuality both within and beyond marriage, subjecting a more diverse range of bodily acts and practices to scrutiny as part of 'scientific' consideration of people's sexual lives that took shape at the interface of psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Sexology – the 'science of sex' – accordingly emerged in the latter years of the nineteenth century as a set of diagnostic practices and knowledges that sought to understand sex as motivated by, and related to, pleasure. This tended to conceptualize sexual behaviour as the outcome of physiognomic drives, with scientific research exploring the biological basis of different sexualities, whether normal or 'deviant'.

Foucault hence examined the histories of sexuality as a concept, noting that, unlike sex itself, sexuality is a cultural production that *appropriates* the human