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# Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space

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## Toward a Lesbian Habitus

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*This article examines the ways that sexual and gendered identities are played out in space. By tracing a journey from London to Brighton and back taken during ethnographic fieldwork, it argues that the complicated ways in which gendered and sexual identities unfold in space reveal the tensions and contradictions in both the real and imagined spaces of lesbian and gay urbanism. Through focusing on the tensions that arose in this journey, this article explores the imaginary of the queer city and the visual regimes and material and embodied practices that construct and occupy these spaces. By drawing on both Judith Butler's and Pierre Bourdieu's work on performativity, embodiment, and cultural capital, this article offers the concept of the lesbian habitus to make sense of the visual and embodied cultures of lesbian identity spaces.*

**Keywords:** *lesbian; queer; habitus; homonormativity; cities; urban*

### Bourdieu, Sexuality, and Space

Several of the concepts that are central to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, most specifically the concepts of *habitus* and *field*, are useful when accounting for the specifics of lesbian spatiality and the ways that it is lived through the modalities of difference, such as "race" and class. Bourdieu's work offers a fertile interpretive framework for a cultural understanding of the intersections of class, sexuality, and gender. Although feminist theorists have critiqued his lack of explicit attention to gender, they have also examined

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the connections between his theories and some of the central problematics of feminism, including social versus performative agency and the analysis of embodied practices (see Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; McNay, 2000). Bourdieu argues that individuals are born into the world and that, to live in it, they internalize its culture. The world is simultaneously objective and subjective. This objective–subjective dialectic is the focus of Bourdieu’s theory of embodiment and his central concept of habitus. Bourdieu’s habitus offers a theoretical framework for understanding *how* subjectivities are produced and reproduced in everyday experience. It captures the ways in which culture is habitually inscribed on the body and the ways in which individuals develop a *practical mastery* of their situation, which is grounded in the social. It offers a means of understanding individuals’ more or less enduring dispositions as a set of collective internalized possibilities that enable a person to orient himself or herself in the social world. *The Logic of Practice* contains Bourdieu’s (1990) most concise definition of habitus:

The conditions associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor. (p. 53)

Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus captures the nuances of everyday practices and the mundane rationality that informs them. The body is at the heart of Bourdieu’s sociology; it is recognized as a commodified, material bearer of symbolic value that develops in conjunction with social forces and, in this sense, is *central* to the maintenance of social inequality. Bourdieu recognizes the ways in which bodily orientations develop as the body becomes a lifelong project, integral to one’s sense of self. For Bourdieu, bodies bear the imprint of the social because of three main factors: the configuration of a person’s habitus, his or her social location, and the development of his or her tastes.

These themes of embodiment, taste, practice, and distinction are useful in understanding how lesbian and bisexual women experience both heteronormativity and how they receive themselves from similar others in a context of a commodified lesbian culture and the dynamics of *homonormativity*. Drawing on Bourdieu, I want to argue here that the concept of *lesbian habitus*, a *visible expression of embodied lesbian cultural capital*, is useful for thinking about some of these embodied processes and the materiality of contemporary lesbian cultures. The concept of a lesbian habitus is useful for thinking about the moments when subjects do or do not experience a sense belonging, moments when matters of embodiment, visibility, and appearance are at work. Within this theoretical framework, the lesbian bar can be understood as one example of a field of social practice (Bourdieu, 1990) where a lesbian habitus is materialized. The lesbian habitus, then, is a distinct and situated pattern, an embodied expression of lesbian cultural capitals and “cultural resources” (Skeggs, 2004). This is expressed through deportment, for example, ways of walking or holding a drink. It is also a matter of disposition expressed, for example, in a sense of confidence about matters of sexuality.<sup>1</sup> It is also realized in embodied expressions of lesbian distinction, for example, in ways of wearing one’s hair, clothes, or accessories. The lesbian body embodying a lesbian habitus is a site where forms of lesbian cultural resources and capitals are incorporated, performed, and rendered with the *appearance* of being inherent.

A secondary theme in this article is that of the relationship between sexuality and urban space. This article focuses on what I describe as the queer city. In using the term *queer*, I am referring to queer as both a constellation of theories and a set of social identities and sexual subjectivities, including those who describe themselves as lesbian, gay, and bisexual and those who describe themselves as transsexual, transvestite, transgendered, butches, femmes, bois, and gender queers. These are some of the figures that make up contemporary queer urban cultures. *The city* is another term that requires clarification. Urban theorists have argued that there is no such entity as the city per se; it is more the case that interactions of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and consumption, systems of governance, communication flows, and representations that emerge from these interactions constitute the city itself. The imposition of names, boundaries, and the congruences of maps gives an illusion of coherence that hides another reality: that the entity that is the city is, overall, an imagined space (Bridge & Watson, 2000; Keith & Pile, 1993). The ways that cities are imagined and envisioned and the epistemes that accompany these ways of seeing produce the material and lived space of the city. In particular, Lefebvre's (1991a, 1991b) work on the trialectics of spatiality (Soja, 1996) offers a way of theorizing the politics of space as it is lived, perceived, and conceived. Rather than thinking of the queer city as specific sites, buildings, or zones, I am arguing, like Chisolm (2005), that the term *queer city* "demarcates a historical, demographic, geographic and poetic reconceptualisation of the city that places queer . . . experience and exchange at the centre and margins of urbanisation" (p. 10). This is a call for imagining the city in a way that encompasses the lived, perceived, and conceived urban spaces and spatiality of queer lives. Urban lesbian and gay identities and their more spectacular material and spatial expressions have, to some extent, been incorporated into commercial cultures. They can be found in temporary moments of celebration such as annual pride parades and in the urban spaces that have been reinvented as lesbian and gay "cultural quarters" or "villages." Figure 1 is an example of the conceived space of the "gay village." Here, a map of the Kemptown area of Brighton is surrounded by advertisements for specialist gay and lesbian services. Although the gay village is a visible and material expression of lesbian and gay cultures, it is worth remembering that another lesbian and gay city exists alongside these visible and material expressions of lesbian and gay identity. This is the lesbian and gay urbanism found in the everydayness of sexuality as lived practice, found in routine movement through space and the navigation of various injunction, norms, prescriptions, and expectations that affect how lesbian and gay individuals comport themselves in a variety of social and cultural spaces. A focus on this everyday spatiality and movement through time and space offers an alternative to the identity politics of location, position, and territoriality (Keith & Pile, 1993) found in spaces such as clubs and bars. A focus on the everydayness of lesbian and bisexual women's lives reveals the inextricable web of forces that lesbians negotiate on a daily basis. In this sense, my aim is to ground queer theories in the micro politics of personal troubles of working-class women's lives. To evoke the everyday is a micro analysis of "be-ing" lesbian within heteronormative and homonormative cultures. It is in the space of the everyday and daily practices that we negotiate and celebrate the city on a human scale, simply going about our daily business of living in the city: traveling to and from home, working, caring, being with friends and family. The space of the everyday tells us of the micro politics of simply getting by, getting on with it, and finding our own pleasures amid the difficulties of living in the city. I am drawing on a concept of the everyday primarily found in the work of Henri Lefebvre and, later, Michel De Certeau

(1984). Here, the everyday is the locus of domination in a spectacular late capitalist world and, simultaneously, the space that holds the possibility of resistance. For Lefebvre (1991b, p. 97), the everyday refers to the hidden aspects of life, that which remains after the momentous achievements and spectacular occasions, that which is "left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, and structured activities have been singled out for analysis. Lefebvre's concept of "everyday life" is a trope for thinking through the consequences of modernity for the subject and social life that leads to what Debord (2002) refers to as "the reign of scarcity," which governs everyday life, the "scarcity of free time and the scarcity of possible uses of this free time" (p. 299). De Certeau's everyday has a different emphasis. Like Bourdieu, he draws attention to specific practices of everyday life. De Certeau employs Bourdieu's concept of habitus. However, rather than focus on a logic of practice in a specific field, De Certeau's everyday focuses on multiple and contradictory logics in society, small, sometimes fleeting moments of resistance, inventiveness, and agency within a commodified culture. His work does contain a critique of Bourdieu's work as placing too much emphasis on structure and determinism (pp. 45-76). De Certeau is concerned with the political dimensions of everyday practices, but these are not focused on classed practices. He is concerned with subtle moments of creativity and festivity. This is apparent here in my concern with lesbian life on a micro-human scale: emotion, bodily experience, practical knowledge, and the way we live the spaces of the city. Rather than political strategies (e.g., of place making, of gaining political recognition as a minority constituency), the emphasis is on a tactical everyday queerness. De Certeau argues that although strategies colonize a visible and specific space to that serve as a "home base" for the exercise of power, tactics, on the other hand, are dispersed, hidden, improvised in response to the specifics of the situation at hand (p. xix). This suggests prosaic, sometimes veiled and other times explicit, critical thought and practices, an everyday filled with invention, creativity, humor, memory, and hope.

## Researching Lesbian Spatiality and Queer Subjectivities

This article explores these themes and looks at some of the ambivalence central to the promise of "gay or lesbian places" by recounting a journey that took place at the end of a year's ethnographic fieldwork in and around a lesbian and gay community center in London. The research was concerned with the ways in which working-class lesbian and bisexual women experience the meaning of their sexuality and their sexual identities on an everyday basis. The fieldwork involved a variety of methods including participant observation, and activities in which I took part included volunteering at the center and running sexualities discussion groups and photographic workshops with lesbian and bisexual women. I also used visual methods such as photography and video as interpretive methods to explore the spatiality of home, belonging, and inclusion and exclusion. The lived and conceived spaces of lesbian and gay urbanism came into focus in my fieldwork at the end of a series of photography workshops that I ran for nine working-class lesbian and bisexual women (both transsexual and nontranssexual) when I organized a photographic day trip to Brighton for the workshop participants. I arranged this for several reasons: first, to get a chance to simply go out together as a group to practice photography skills and, second, to get some sea air and a respite from London in the middle of the summer. I also organized the trip to mark an end to the course. In the spirit of reciprocity, the

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**Figure 1.** The Conceived Space of Brighton's Gay Village

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course was a way of saying thank you for participating in the research and sharing their lives and experiences in conversation and interviews. The trip to Brighton was, in many ways, uneventful. After cancellations and complications that had characterized my fieldwork workshops and reflected the complications and negotiations of everyday life and the cares and responsibilities it brings for many working-class



women, only 3 of the 9 participants came along on the day: Susan, Tracy, and Lucy. Each of us had a rather complex relationship to lesbian subjectivities and lesbian space. Tracy identified as bisexual and lived with a male partner; she had been a user of the services at the LGBT community center and had come along to the photography workshops to meet lesbian women in a safe space after difficult and unsuccessful attempts at meeting women through personal columns in *Diva* (a U.K. lesbian magazine).<sup>2</sup> I knew that Tracy had only been to gay or lesbian venues once or twice, and this had mainly been on the few occasions when we went to a local Greenwich gay pub on a summer evening after the photography workshops. Lucy is a transwoman and an active member of a local transsexual support group. Lucy's sexual identity always seemed to be an open question. Lucy would describe herself at times as a lesbian and at others as bisexual. This was, in part, because during the time that she had been married to her partner, James, they had both undergone gender transitions. Susan was ambivalent about the term *lesbian* and preferred the term *gay woman*. Susan had been to lots of lesbian and gay venues. Her use of lesbian and gay spaces reflected the ways she managed disclosure about her identity. So, for example, although she was out within the space of the photography group, she was not out at work or in the local pub that she frequented, and she said that she preferred her local "straight" pub to lesbian and gay bars. The sexual subjectivities of the participants had always been central to my fieldwork. However, in this process, my own sexual subjectivity was somewhat queered when I began a relationship with a transitioning female-to-male transsexual about halfway through the fieldwork process. Up until this point, I had identified as and presented myself as a lesbian. Quite suddenly, the security and perceived authenticity of my subject position was under question by myself and others. Like some of my participants, I was rubbing up at the edges of what constitutes a *lesbian* identity and the spatiality of that identity. I was beginning to feel more marginal and less a "cultural insider." I asked myself, What conflicts of meaning would be overlooked if I denied my ambivalent situation? The question is one of ontological and epistemological location. Embracing these queer situations leads to an ethnography that recognizes experience as a nodal point of knowledge, providing useful information about the self, the subjects, and the spaces they inform and are informed by (Probyn, 1993). If, as queer theories suggest, subjectivity is a process of ongoing personal construction rather than a point of arrival, my own experience was of this construction taking place through located engagement within a material field world of experience (of practices, discourses, and institutions) that lent significance (in the form of values, meanings, and effects) to the events of the world. The fieldwork process, and my own continuing journey through sexual subjectivities, has deepened my understanding of queer theory and what it offers to make sense of questions of desire, sexuality, and identity. I had started out being somewhat critical of queer theory. Ironically, it has been the one set of ideas that made sense of the confusing empirical realities that come up in the process of fieldwork. This includes my own experience and the experiences of many people I came across in this process. Identity categories circulate around us; at times, they make sense of the world; at others, they do not. This requires using them with provisionality, recognizing them as complex fictions often necessary to both social being and social becoming. Without this provisionality, attachment to their stability and promise can ironically produce its own chaos.

## Navigating the Materiality of Lesbian Embodiment

Our journey to Brighton was along a well-worn path of queer tourism. Tens of thousands of queer people make their pilgrimage to Brighton for a day or weekend away from London every year. The character, reputation, and regeneration of Brighton depends as much on these spatial flows, and the economy they support and generate, as on the existence of a more permanent queer community who can afford to be part of Brighton's gay and lesbian business and residential population. Neither Tracy, Lucy, or Susan were particularly familiar with Brighton's geography, and for various reasons none of the participants frequented lesbian and gay bars with any regularity. I knew that Tracy identifies as bisexual and had only recently begun to explore her lesbianism. Tracy had not been able to find a safe way of meeting other lesbians through personal advertisements. She had never felt confident enough to go to a lesbian bar and had no lesbian friends who would accompany her. She came to the photography classes because they provided a safe space for her to be "with the girls" and explore "that side of herself." She had only been to gay or lesbian venues once or twice, and this had mainly been on the few occasions when we went to a local gay pub on a summer evening after the photography workshops. Lucy describes herself as a "medically formed female." As an active organizer of her transsexual support group, she had been a regular at her local lesbian and gay pub, on evenings when they had a dedicated evening for cross-dressers and transsexuals. As far as I was aware, she had never visited an exclusively lesbian bar. Susan had been to lots of lesbian and gay venues and had a particularly negative experience when she emerged onto the London lesbian scene. When Susan "came out," she had explored several women's bars in Soho, London; however, she made no friends, found them unfriendly, and felt ignored for almost a year. At the time of the research, she preferred her local pub to lesbian and gay venues. Although I had been to many lesbian and gay bars in the past, I was unfamiliar with Brighton's lesbian and gay landscape. I had been to the London Candy Bar when it first opened, but it was not a place I frequented.

Our walking without a map had an exploratory character described by the Situationists as *derive*, a practice that combines the arts of memory and circumstance (De Certeau, 1984, p. 82). Our journey unfolded in accordance with the knowledge we gathered and as memories returned through our wandering. The participants wanted to go to Brighton's gay and lesbian commercial area concentrated around Kemptown. In particular, they were interested in finding Candy Bar, a lesbian bar, with the intention of having lunch. After asking directions, we finally found Kemptown and walked up the main thoroughfare—St James's Street.

Candy Bar is the nearest thing to a U.K. lesbian brand. In its promotional material, Candy Bar markets itself as a space for a young "up for it" crowd. Its continued presence in Soho as London's first 7-night-a-week "girl bar," which has been running since 1998, marks it out as unusual in its having some stability in a lesbian landscape where women's venues have tended to be temporary in both space and time, moving from venue to venue, 1 or 2 nights per week, quite rapidly opening and closing (see Valentine, 1995). The publicity material for Candy Bar and their other club nights (Bootilicious and Indulgence) is clearly invested with emotion—these are smiley, happy, sexy women. Candy Bar sells itself through the promise of youth, glamour, and hedonism. The emphasis on the uncomplicated sexual pursuit of "girly pleasure," the promise of "wet pussy parties," and the formerly illicit pleasures of lesbian lap dancing and strip nights epitomize a contemporary, young, urban lesbian identity. With its



accent on girls rather than women, sexual opportunity and liberty rather than sexual politics and self-regulation, it promotes itself as a break away from the old-school lesbian feminist 1980s and 1990s, which are implicitly characterized as a humorless, self-righteous, self-reverent, sexually repressive past to be abandoned. Our lunchtime foray into Candy Bar was somewhat uneventful. We sat together at a table, ordered drinks, and did not order food as it was too expensive for Tracy, Lucy, and Susan to afford. The only person who paid any attention to our presence was the waitress. The bar was relatively quiet. We drank our drinks, read some of the free gay and lesbian publications, and left to find a cheaper place to eat. Although this may be a banal tale of visiting a lesbian space, I want to tease out the significance of this trip and the women's experience of lesbian spaces for an understanding of the ambivalence and contradictions at the heart of the promise of gay cosmopolitan spaces, specifically those of both the promise of recognition that rests on embodied expression and the indifference of cosmopolitan urbanism.

The negotiation of lesbian and nonlesbian space was an ongoing theme in my fieldwork. I worked with women who were making sense of the visibility, materiality, and performativity of lesbian cultures. In sexualities discussion groups at the LGBT community center where I conducted my fieldwork, I met working-class women who were contemplating coming out, attempting to navigate some of the places where they might meet other lesbian and bisexual women for the first time. This involved looking at lesbian and gay publications, visiting women's bookshops and cafes, and coming to the LGBT community center. In workshops, I often encountered tensions between those women who were confident in their identities as lesbian and those who were more tentative and less self-assured about expressing their sexual interest in women. These tensions would be played out through joking about sex and sexuality, visible expressions of a lesbian habitus, and ways of inhabiting and taking up space. During my fieldwork, I was struck by the ways in which the performativity of lesbian and gay identities were continuously enacted in an expression of a lesbian habitus. This took many forms, for example, in discussing rumors about which celebrities may be lesbians, discussing sexual and local politics, collectively reminiscing about historical moments in lesbian and gay culture, and expressing an agreed understanding about the effects of homophobia. The lesbian sexuality of space was maintained by sexual humor by the participants using double entendre, sexual innuendo, and sparring, swearing, and playful flirtation. Some members of the group, including Tracy and Lucy, were unable to perform this "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990/1999, p. 179) that cultivates the sign and the sense of belonging. The more "out" lesbians in the group were at ease with their sexuality and discussions about sexuality. The ability to participate depended on the possession of specific kinds of linguistic and embodied capital. In an interview, Tracy described how she found another participant quite intimidating. Although in conversation Tracy would play with (mostly heterosexual) sexual innuendo, she was out of her depth when a lesbian habitus was demonstrated. In a discussion about one of the other women in the group, she said,

Tracy: One thing I can't get over about her. She's such a tomboy. Whenever she's sitting there, she's got her legs wide apart, and especially when we were sitting opposite her. I had to look this way or that way so that I wouldn't be looking at her bush. I remember one day when she had these shorts on, it was like, if she moves a certain way, it's going to be on display.

Alison: I never noticed any of that. Did it make you uncomfortable then?

Tracy: Partly, yes because I thought if she saw me just looking and not looking at her face, she might say something flippantly for the whole group to hear but which would reduce me to about a centimeter in size.

Alison: Ah, right. Were you worried about that? The comeback thing.

Tracy: Yes. Because she's very much a kind of person who could say something as a joke, but somebody not quite on her wavelength would take it a slight. And then she was just so out and proud with it and I thought oh, they seem to be accepting all what she's saying, I could have been like that. And it was like, I saw myself as a wallflower then. I thought, I didn't think I was like that. So it put me in a . . . I saw myself in a different light, comparing myself to somebody more bold and brassy. I think it just showed me that maybe when I'm worried about offending people, maybe I shouldn't be. But when you're with new people, you don't always know how to tread.

In this conversation, Tracy was struck by the way another participant embodies her lesbian gender expression through a rejection of a conventional "ladylike" demeanor. Tracy knows that she does not possess sufficient sexual cultural capital to be able to adequately respond to any quick sexual innuendo about her lesbian desire. In our conversation, she saw herself differently, as a wallflower quietly sitting on the edge of the group, silenced and somewhat marginalized by the expression of confident lesbian sexuality. Belonging, then, is not merely constituted through the provision of policy or open doors. It is achieved at many, sometimes intangible, levels. My work was often trying to create a sense of belonging, to include those women such as Tracy and Lucy in the group, allowing them to express their identities and dealing with the tensions among these identities. This is just one example of how both the production of identity and the achievement of belonging are realized and enacted. This is one example of the ways that the concept of a lesbian habitus and Bourdieu's concept of the *field* offer ways of making sense of some of these tensions and the ways in which some working-class women's experience of lesbian cultures can be theorized.

By offering the concept of the lesbian habitus, I am not arguing that there is a singular and distinct embodied expression of lesbian identity, a static cultural personality that emerges out of a lesbian cultural field, nor am I arguing that a lesbian habitus is only found in more "butch" lesbian gender expression. Clearly, there are many various embodied expressions of lesbian sexuality within these fields (butch and femme). My focus is on the performative modes of relations that are both constituted and dispossessed through these expressions of identity. The lesbian habitus is something that many of the women I worked with recognize and live in relation to. By foregrounding a lesbian habitus, the ways that lesbian identity is made visible, performed, and expressed can understood as a matter of practices and a practical belief or mastery. In Bourdieu's terms, it is "*le sens pratique*," or "a feel for the game." This is not an essential aspect of lesbian expression, nor is it so overriding that it can be described as hegemonic, as these expressions are too subcultural. The lesbian habitus I describe is one recognizable expression of lesbian subjectivity. These are not clearly classed dispositions, however the dynamics of class are at work. It is more the case that these are forms of sexual belonging that are mediated through classed expressions such as Margaret's bawdy humor. In Bourdieu's schema, the body, as a bearer of symbolic value, carries the markers of social class. The body is imprinted with social class because of the development of taste. It is the site where class tastes materialize. As Bourdieu (1986) states,

Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions: it raises the differences

inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions.  
(p. 175)

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu develops a comprehensive analysis of the politics of taste, providing a framework for understanding the ways in which aesthetics, consumption, and lifestyle are all part of the struggle for social distinction, which, whatever its symbolic form, is a fundamental dimension of all social life. For Bourdieu, lifestyles are the “schematic products of habitus” (p. 172); they become socially qualified sign systems. This sense of distinction is embodied: It is found in bodily disposition and deportment, hence learned behavior and the cultural reproduction of distinction are rendered natural, inherent, and therefore legitimate. This has some similarities to Butler’s (1990/1999) theorizing of gender, which, she argues, so effectively and credibly conceals its genesis that it is produced as natural, and a corollary heteronormativity is obscured. The lesbian habitus can be understood as a site of lesbian distinction where lesbian cultural practices are incorporated and rendered seemingly inherent.

## The Field, the Bar, and the Village

The workings of the habitus cannot be understood without the complementary concept of the field. For Bourdieu, the field and habitus can be understood as sets of relations in his theory of social reproduction. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explain,

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form or mental or corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action. (p. 16)

For Bourdieu, the social world is made up of fields of action (or production) that are both material and symbolic—whether they be fashion, cuisine, professional dance, or academia. Bourdieu’s fields are semiautonomous; each has its own logic and possesses its own set of regulative principles. They achieve their form in relation to each other within an overall network of capitalist accumulation. They confer status and legitimacy on sets of values, beliefs, and discursive practices. However, the logic and values of a field are not explicit, preset, or delimited but rather are always at stake, being continuously redefined through struggles over the control over a field’s forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic). Questions of where the field’s limits lie are “always at stake in the field itself” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 100). I carried out my ethnographic fieldwork at an LGBT community center as a way of centering my attention on a queer sociocultural space that is noncommercial and yet has a dialectical relationship to the commercial scene, organized around fashion, alcohol, drugs, and the consumption of queer goods and bodies. The center deals with some of the consequences of the commercial scene as they are felt in the personal lives of its predominantly working-class clients. In this space of workshops, support groups, and outreach services, the meanings of these sexual identities are negotiated. Similarly, spaces such as Candy Bar, and more widely the lesbian bar scene, can also be understood as cultural milieus, or what Bourdieu describes as fields, where a *field-specific* lesbian habitus is performed and interpellated and reiterated. Within the field of the lesbian bar, all practices embodied, spoken, and so on, work to constitute the terms of inclusion and exclusion

(for social and historical accounts of the contestations over embodied cultural practices in lesbian bars, see Davis & Kennedy, 1994; Faderman, 1991; Nestle, 1981, 1987). These are fields of cultural practice where the regulatory logics of lesbian cultures are legitimated. If the lesbian bar is one space where the performativity of the lesbian habitus is at work, it is worth paying attention to the wider socioeconomic and cultural context in which such fields of cultural practice exist.

The fairly recent development of the gay village can be understood as a contemporary manifestation of a longer historical relationship between modern gay identities and capitalist development (Castells, 1983; Chisolm, 2005; D'Emilio, 1983). A corollary development has been a shift in the understanding of lesbian and gay identities as matters of taste and lifestyle rather than political identities or erotic cultures. The materialization of these shifts is evident in the spatial realization of these identities. Quilley (1997) argues that the development of a gay village around the Canal Street area of Manchester in England came about as the gay and lesbian politics or representation were "squeezed off" the local governmental agenda, and this political demographic was reimagined as a cultural and aesthetic presence in the form of a market. The power of these imaginings of lesbians and gay men as possessing significant and influential cultural capital is pervasive. Empirical research in the United States into the "economic geography of talent" (Florida, 2002, 2003) finds that the number of lesbian and gay households is one of the measures that can be used to predict whether a region is able to innovate and attract talented people or the "creative class" and in doing so raise its economic profile, increase property prices, and attract new technology industries. This is now quantifiable through the Gay Index (Black & Gates, 2000; Black & Henderson, 1998). Similarly, the conceived space of the gay village evokes the presence of lesbian and gay bodies and material cultures through the promise of visibility, eroticism, cosmopolitanism, and consumption. In this process, a constituency and the urban spaces these constituents move through and within are produced. The validating promise of these spaces is constituted through a binary that characterizes other spaces as heteronormative, noncosmopolitan, suburban, provincial or rural, limited, unfashionable, and dangerous (see Halberstam, 2005). The conceived space of the queer city can be understood as a field where an ensemble of spatial processes and regimes of cultural, social, and symbolic power are materialized. Those invested in promoting the pink economy produce indices of presence and commercial success that produce particular normalized versions of lesbian and gay sexualities. These developments have paradoxical dynamics. As some queer sexualities that are easily commodified are incorporated into the spectacle and gain a legitimate sense of presence, other sexualities elude these regimes of visibility.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, those queer sexualities that are unattractive to investors, such as public or commercial sex, are further marginalized (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Delany, 1999). Clearly, the commercially mediated conceived space of the gay village is a partial rendering of what constitutes both lesbian and gay space. It is worth noting that lesbian cultures often have a spatial configuration distinct from that of gay male cultures. Lesbian bars, for example, tend not to be places but rather temporary "women's nights" at different venues on different nights of the week or month. Furthermore, lesbian territorialization tends to be different from the patterns that have characterized gay male cultures, being part of the dynamic of gentrification rather than regeneration. Lesbians are often being located in poorer, run-down neighborhoods and reflecting lesbians' inferior economic position as women (Retter, 1997). Chisolm (2005) argues that lesbian urbanism can be associated with bohemia as "a transitory occupation of low-rent districts by cultural and sexual dissidents, who recast the

neighbourhood in their image and neglect to represent long-term residents, who, in turn, are subject to displacement by bohemian-inspired trendiness" (p. 196). Valentine's (1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1995) empirical work has explored the specifics of lesbian spatiality and community found in lesbian domestic spaces and friendship networks rather than territory per se.

Our banal and quotidian experience of Brighton says something about the promises and limitations of place making as a utopian practice. Although we went to the lesbian bar in search of a moment of recognition in a lesbian space, we were met, perhaps unsurprisingly, with indifference. We were not noticed. Our eyes were not met by hostile or welcoming looks. This dialectic between indifference and recognition is at the heart of the promise of the queer city. Queer urbanism thrives in an "indifferent city" where differences are no longer remarkable. Both Simmel's (1907/1971) and Sennett's (1990) descriptions of a blasé or nonchalant urbanism provide models for imagining a queer city. Writing in 1907 on urbanism as a distinct way of life, Georg Simmel argued that density of interactions in the urban environment promotes an intellectual rationality, insensitivity, and blasé approach to experiences and others. This urban sensibility allows for a more highly developed individuality and personal freedom of movement that is not found in a rural setting. In his essays "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and "The Stranger," Simmel explores the sociability urbanism produces. Simmel argues that "what appears in the metropolitan style of life directly as dissociation is in reality only one of its elemental forms of socialization" (p. 332). Similarly, Sennett argues that for the city dweller, the urban sensibility is less one of eroticizing an urban "Other" and more a sensibility of *indifference to difference*. The citizen of the metropolis has a sophisticated competence in dealing with difference. In the city, differences of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and lifestyle are all around, and because of their ubiquity, they are unremarkable. This is the ability to make one's way with a degree of ease within other cultures by listening, looking, and understanding. This is the everyday quality of diversity in the city. In *The Conscience of the Eye*, Richard Sennett traces a walk in New York City, revealing "that difference from and indifference to others are a related, unhappy pair. The eye sees differences to which it reacts with indifference" (p. 129). Of course this "free" urban citizen is gendered and classed and racialized (e.g., Walkowitz, 1992; Wilson, 1991). It is precisely this indifference, distance, and dissociation that have historically allowed gay urbanism to thrive. Gay people are drawn to the potential erotic promise of disappearing into a city with space for sexual exiles, a city of anonymity and invisibility, where sexual difference is, at least, no longer remarkable. Their presence contributes to the formation of a kind of public space which is "open-minded" (Berman, 1986; Waltzer, 1986). In antiurban imaginaries, indifference is associated with anomie, alienation, immorality, discontent, and the end of social order. In queer imaginings of the city, it brings almost its opposite in that it allows a queer urbanism and the possibility for a (dispersed) sense of community to thrive. This is a sense of erotic belonging in urban anomie. Perhaps both of these tendencies are at work for the varieties of queer people who seek out the city in search of its promise of anonymity, the loss of a previous self, and the exile it offers from the opinions of family and neighbors. Crucially, the anonymity of public urban space, movement, and journeying through the city's flows offers the possibility of multiple identities: One identity can coexist alongside another. So, for example, one can simultaneously live a gay and straight life, moving in and out of queerness and queer space. The politics of redistribution and recognition are also realized in queer urban space, in the formation of commercial and noncommercial space. The possibilities that urban

indifference offers have also allowed the growth of political lesbian and gay activist movements with calls for redistribution (of material and cultural resources to enable the development of community facilities, health services, arts, etc.) and those of recognition (being significant to legal and civil rights protection; Butler, 1997; M. Fraser, 1999; N. Fraser, 1997; Hennessy, 1995).

The politics of indifference, visibility, and recognition are also at work in the cultural politics of taste and aesthetics, expressed in the ways that queer bodies are made visible and are materialized. The operations, regulations, and performativity of the gay village as a real and conceived space are complex. Clearly, territoriality is always problematic. The identity of the space has to be continually reproduced to maintain its boundaries. Visual regimes work to make it exactly clear what those boundaries mean while regulating and maintaining their specificity. The boundaries of lesbian and gay bars are maintained several ways. In the past, it seemed that entering lesbian and gay bars was generally an unattractive prospect except for those nongays in search of victims (whether the police or queer bashers; see Davis & Kennedy, 1994; Green, 1997; Nestle, 1987, 1992). Lesbian and gay bars did not have a large public profile, and often a "private function" sign on the door would be enough to deter the accidental visitor. Today, as gay villages are increasingly attractive places with cultural value, the maintenance of gayness of gay space has become far more problematic. Through naming and symbols, through the visual regimes of lesbians or gay users of the space, and through the work of bouncers who may deny entry to people who do not *appear* to be lesbian or gay, the identity of place is stabilized (however temporarily). The performative work of the bodies within these spaces maintains its stability. This is the ongoing work of the spatiality of identity. A visual agreement on *what a lesbian looks like* is reenacted in the repetitions of appearances coming through the door. Susan's experience is somewhat illustrative of the performative work of lesbian spaces. In a subsequent interview, she told me her coming-out story. After being kissed by a woman in a straight pub one night, Susan was shocked but immediately realized that she wanted to meet other women and explore her desires. A few days later, she began going out on London's gay scene alone, specifically to the London Candy Bar and the nearby Vespa Lounge, in the hope of meeting someone. Susan described how she would repeatedly buy a drink and sit alone all night pretending to read the free magazines, *The Pink Paper* or *G3*. It is testament to her determination that she continued to do this alone for almost a year, during which no one approached her or spoke to her. Susan lacked the confidence to approach someone herself. She tried to fit in by changing her feminine appearance, which did not appear to be either a readable embodiment of her lesbianism or coded with any value in this field of practice. She described cutting her hair and starting to wear trousers in an attempt to look "more like that woman from Texas" (referring to the singer Sharleen Spiteri from the band Texas). Gradually, she started drinking before leaving the house to gain some courage. She began feeling increasingly isolated and depressed. Friends and work colleagues became worried. This struggle was endured in complete secrecy, as Susan said, "And all that time I never told a soul." She eventually started going to mixed gay venues, which she found more amiable. Here, she finally managed to find some gay and lesbian friends and later a girlfriend.

Susan's act of changing her appearance was one small example of how those entering lesbian culture gain an understanding of the embodied expressions of lesbian culture. This is one way in which embodied expressions of lesbian cultural capital work to produce the identity of lesbianism, which is maintained and regulated within that space and congeals in a habitus that is seemingly robust and innate. The abundance of



these appearances produces the space *as* lesbian. The regulatory and relational practices that take place in that space affect the bodies and subjectivities of those who pass through it—what Butler would call “performative acts”—showing that *being* lesbian is constantly being produced and is constantly *becoming*. A sense of inclusion is contingent to the extent to which women are able to successfully generate this lesbian habitus and in doing so navigate homonormativity. This homonormativity is of course not as hegemonic of as heteronormativity—as stated earlier, the spaces I am discussing are too subcultural to constitute a hegemony—however, they do have their own “calls to order” (Bourdieu, 1998). In lesbian bars, expressions of difference between lesbians are often played out through nuanced visible expressions and their reading. By embodying a queer sensibility and a sense of taste—by wearing the correctly labeled clothes on the correctly shaped body, sporting an appropriate hairstyle, consuming the right food and drinks in the right places—queers express their distinction from each other and from nonqueer others. This malleable queer body is mobile; it is a site of an incorporated understanding, an aesthetic display of this knowledgeable corporeality, and as such it is a way in which identity is constituted as it sediments on the body.

It is worth noting here that to understand the visual politics of taste and distinction I am describing, it is necessary to avoid thinking of the queer body, which is prioritized in theories of performativity that assume that “a body can be read and known that the performativity can be recognized and people want to actively take up forms of identification via visible classification” (Skeggs, 2004, p. 156). The aestheticization of bodies has sexual and classed dimensions. The emphasis on the aestheticized body accentuates a middle-class, queer identity found in the flexible and self-fashioned, consuming subject who knows the cultural value of certain goods and how to use them (Skeggs, 2004, p. 1360). Simultaneously, the social relations of production and consumption that enable a sense of an aesthetic self possible are obscured (M. Fraser, 1999; Hennessy, 1995, p. 143). Skeggs’s (1997, 2004) work demonstrates how working-class women occupy a complex relationship to this version of the self in terms of both their ability to take up and identify with available forms of identification and the ways these are made visible. Skeggs’s research on the gay village in Manchester shows how the presence of working-class women is repeatedly cited by interviewees as the recognizable disruptive presence and constitutive limit of the perceived cosmopolitanism of the subcultural space of the gay village. Working-class women are coded as tasteless and vulgar, disrupting the safety and comfort of gay and lesbian space and beyond the possibility of appropriation into the multicultural and diverse space of the gay village (Skeggs, 2005).

## The Pursuit of Queer Distinction

Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus foregrounds ways in which matters of taste and classed distinction become embodied *over time*. Bourdieu argues that a sense of distinction, particular dispositions, tastes, and sensibilities, appears inherent, and yet our dispositions are inculcated from birth. He also talks of how enduring dispositions *gradually* coalesce in the body as “collective internal possibilities.” The concepts of the habitus and field capture something of the way that the body is caught between past and present, shaped by an agent but in a structured field of practice. The Habitus is an “*open system of dispositions*, that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that neither reinforces or modifies its structures”

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). Similarly, in Butler's (1996) terms, the body is "the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality would not be constituted. . . . It is a site of 'incorporated history'" (p. 152). Butler (1993) also emphasizes the *temporality* of gendered and sexed subjectivities. In *Bodies That Matter*, she shifts the emphasis from understanding the body as a site or a space from which signs can be read to thinking through the body as a process of materialization. This is the temporal work of performativity and the materiality of bodies. Both Bourdieu and Butler play down a sense of a self-fashioning, intentional self that is sometimes foregrounded in theories of identity. The concept of the habitus suggests a layer of embodied understanding and "practical mimesis" that is not easily reshaped. As Bourdieu (1990) states, "The body believes in what it plays at. It weeps if it mimes grief" (p. 72). In *Excitable Speech*, Butler (1996) draws on Bourdieu's work to ground performativity in the socioeconomic and simultaneously theorizes the performativity of the habitus. Butler argues that the concept of habitus does not give sufficient consideration to the subversive and resistant performative body. She argues, "What is bodily in speech resists and confounds the very norms by which it is regulated" (p. 143). Butler formulates how the performative can break with contexts and assume new contexts, thus refiguring the terms of "legitimate utterance themselves" (p. 150). In this way, Butler opens up Bourdieu's concept of habitus to account for the ways in which queer and resistant bodies materialize. By employing the notion of a lesbian habitus, a distinct and situated pattern of culture and an expressive "structure of feeling" that gives modes of lesbian identity a particular characteristic, we can make sense of the material and social relations in which lesbian bodies emerge and the ways in which lesbian cultures become embodied and embedded over time. The lesbian habitus is a matter of practices, embodied acts, drives, and desires, an underlying embodied grammar. It is a set of cultural competences that simultaneously hold the possibility of situated improvisation both facilitating and shaping social action. I want to argue that the lesbian habitus has a specific relationship to temporality, visibility, and a queer distinction. This is not then a lesbian habitus that foregrounds the extent to which embodied *sexual* dispositions are inculcated from birth. Clearly, within the heterosexual matrix, children are not encouraged to stray from normative and legible genders and sexualities. There is a clear ambivalence at the heart of the ways in which gender and sexuality are socially produced. One of the insights emerging from feminist critiques of Bourdieu is the ways in which women can be the authors of their gender without being symbolically authorized and dominated (see Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Skeggs, 2005, p. 26). The habitus does not always submit to the dominant field of gender and sexual reproduction. In a queer reading of Bourdieu, then, embodied gendered and sexual expressions are not the sedimentation of norms within the body but are rather reworking what it is to live in relation to those norms, for example, by embracing a disresponsible femininity in both practice and appearance. These reworkings take place in subcultural fields where the symbolic value of bodies and practices are always at stake and are produced through competition and conflict between players over which capitals and resources are effective within it. By making the queer body visible through material and aesthetic processes, queer distinction is achieved through the expression of subcultural competence. Crucially, this expression of knowledge, incorporated over time, emphasizes the endurance and stability of a lesbian disposition. The materiality of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities has a particular relationship to time. As Mariam Fraser (1999) points out,

[A] gay, lesbian or bisexual narrative identity is often only grudgingly conferred when, to quote Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity "a certain constancy of . . . dispositions" and a "kind of fidelity to the self" can be demonstrated through the course of a lifetime. (p. 110)

The seduction of the appearance of a lesbian habitus is its apparent stability and innateness. These expressions are powerful as they carry the aura of continuity in terms of bodily gestures and norms. Repetition, then, is about much more than repeating the same classed or gendered dispositions. The lesbian habitus is an expression that is dissonant to the norms of the varieties of a heterosexual habitus. Instead, the lesbian habitus performatively works by offering a way for lesbians to receive themselves in ways that are not familial and yet are classed and gendered. Butler's plea for thinking about the performativity of the habitus offers an understanding of how the underlying instability of this corporeal style and identity is obscured. So returning to Candy Bar and the subcultural field within which it sits, it is worth noting that it occupies a relatively powerful economic position within the wider social formation of the U.K. lesbian economy. It is here that its social and cultural capital is transformed into economic capital through the recognition of and the symbolic power given to such expressions. Here, certain lesbian social bodies have a specific exchange value. In the field of Candy Bar, a certain lesbian habitus is enacted, one that is coded as inherently sexy, cool, and tasteful. Like those who possess class distinction, the lesbians here embody a lesbian aesthetic without seemingly having to even try; this lesbian cool is presented as inherent and authentic and constitutes the basis of belonging in these spaces: "I have always held my beer/held my cigarette/played pool like this." They can be understood as calls to order, *doxic*, unquestioned beliefs, embodied in actions and feelings but rarely articulated verbally. Bourdieu (1998) argues,

The social world is riddled with calls to order that function as such only for those who are predisposed to heeding them as they awaken deeply buried dispositions, outside the channels of consciousness and calculation. (pp. 54-55)

I want to suggest that these calls to order in some lesbian spaces are particularly powerful because of their promise for those whose sexual dispositions have often been "deeply buried" and both internally and externally denied. Ostensibly, the representations of these spaces claim inclusivity on the basis of the common difference of lesbian sexuality, and yet what I am distinguishing is in fact the opposite—an albeit more nuanced operation of distinctions and exclusions. It is by no means straightforward, but exclusions on the basis of class are obviously at work here, not least in terms of the brutal economics of not being able to afford the prices. The visibility of certain types of contemporary lesbian identities shores up their "obviousness." This works to conceal the temporality of the lesbian habitus and its performative work (as in all performative acts) and shows it instead to be a sort of innate, fixed entity. The effects of this on those who will not, or cannot, be called to order means that they are caught among the differences and subtly excluded in the production of this embodiment of lesbian identity. Our rather mundane experience of Candy Bar was, in a small way, testament to these dynamics. As we have seen, Susan, Lucy, and Tracy all lived in relation to these embodied expressions in different ways.

It is worth noting that the aestheticization of lesbian and gay identities and bodies into "lifestyle" (Featherstone, 1991) had become more apparent in the past 20 years. The

lesbian body politic has significantly changed since the 1980s and 1990s. The lesbian feminist critique of "patriarchy" was born out through embodied practices. The lesbian feminist body was unruly, questioning the discourses of appropriate femininity by sprouting hair, changing shape, refusing constraining clothes, and so on (e.g., Roof, 1991). Lesbian feminist culture offered the opportunity to experiment and explore dominant conceptions of gender; it offered a space to rethink heteronormativity and for some the possibility to live, at least temporarily in space and time, outside of its bounds.<sup>4</sup> This can be read as part of a longer continuum of the subversiveness of lesbian gender (e.g., Case, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Munt, 1998a, 1998b; Nestle, 1992). The contemporary lesbian habitus has significantly changed. Our experience that day, and the experience of other women I encountered in the fieldwork process, epitomizes how the questions of distinction and calls to order are experienced. The subtle discomfort and disappointment of the trip emerged in later discussions, through comparisons with the atmosphere of the LGBT community center where we had held the photography workshops and comparisons with local pubs, both "gay" and "straight." I suspect that Susan, Lucy, and Tracy, who, by strange coincidence, were all wearing purple sundresses, did not present the correct signifiers that would invest them with cultural value. They fell short of a recognizable lesbian habitus in more embodied ways. They were not androgynous, gym toned, or tanned or were not displaying the appropriate haircuts. It was not merely that they did not wear the right labels. It was also the case that they did not possess the requisite cultural capital to know which brands should be worn even if they could afford them and how to wear them. In short, the lack of lesbian habitus meant that we were not readable as lesbians. As Walker (1993) argues in a discussion of femme visibility,

While privileging visibility can be politically and rhetorically effective, it is not without its problems. Within the constraints of a particular identity that invests certain signifiers with political value, figures that do not present these signifiers are often neglected. Because subjects who can pass exceed the categories of visibility that establish identity, they tend to be understood as peripheral to the process of marginalisation. . . . The paradigm of visibility is totalizing when a signifier of difference becomes synonymous with the identity it signifies. In this situation, members of a given population who do not bear that signifier of difference, or who bear visible signs of another identity are rendered invisible and are marginalized within an already marginalized community. (pp. 868-888)

There was of course a tension. Lucy, Tracy, and Susan wanted to be read as lesbians in that moment, although, in different ways, we were all ambivalent about the category and did not comfortably fit within it. However, in different ways, the participants recognized the calls to order their lack of fit and desire to fit. This is what Susan referred to when she talked about her attempt to emulate "that woman from Texas" in the hope that she would acquire the right look and then be seen as lesbian in lesbian bars without looking too recognizable as lesbian outside of them. Her attempts to fit in are an example of what Bourdieu describes as an *illusio*, a belief in the game and an engagement with the stakes of recognition that operate within it. In all fields, Bourdieu finds "a profound complicity between the adversaries. . . . They disagree with one another but at least they agree about the object of disagreement" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 78). Within gender and sexual performativity, then, the tacit agreement among players is that the game is worth playing. Its players abide by a corporeal schema, adhere to the rules, and make the game happen through their every gesture. Participation in the game requires both a certain amount of knowledge of how to play the game and the desire to play. The emphasis on visible lesbian identities in commodity culture can be

understood as a circumscribing the legitimate possibilities of lesbian embodiment and the "rules of the game" as the lesbian body is increasingly aestheticized, constructed, and worked on to be seen. As Butler (1999) argues,

Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity, as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly through their repetition within commodity culture where subversion carries market value. (p. xxi)

## Conclusion

Today, lesbian and gay cultures are at their most visible in global cities, where they have become particularly marked with a cosmopolitanism (Bell & Binnie, 2000) that depends on knowingness, sophistication, and distinction within the dynamics of global capitalism dedicated to marketing difference as multiculture or exoticism (Skeggs, 2004; Žizek, 1997). This article points toward some of the ambivalence integral to the politics of location found in gay cosmopolitan spaces—the promise of indifference, where being gay is ordinary and goes unnoticed, along with the promise to be seen and recognized by gays and lesbians, where we are given back our identity, in the street or the bar. As Benedict Anderson (1983) would remind us, community is primarily imagined. I would like to similarly argue that the lesbian and gay community and its spatial manifestations are both real and imagined. Spaces such as the gay village are utopian entities that work to evoke a sense of recognition and belonging in ways that are powerful especially for the queer diasporic migrants to the city. In our search for Brighton's gay village, it became simultaneously real and unreal. The material space of Kemptown was no longer filtered through imagining and was simultaneously reconfigured in our being there. I am not arguing that gay places such as Kemptown, in Brighton, are awful, epitomizing predatory, heartless commercial opportunism aimed at an excessively loyal unquestioning market, nor do I want to argue that gay places are filled with people's obsessed policing of their own bodies as much as those of others. It is more that the actuality of Kemptown is quite ordinary; it is a space where the commercial constraints and aestheticization of much public culture are materialized. The bar we visited is popular as it provides something that a lot of women want, and, like many public spaces, it is filled with difficulty and contradiction. The promise from the outside is that it is a space that is welcoming to those who feel different or who are perceived as different on the basis of their sexuality and gender appearance. The disappointment when positioned on the inside is that questions of difference continue to play themselves out on the basis of age, ethnicity, body size, gender, and sexuality. This experience of being different within difference works to deflate the promises of affinity, validation, common understanding, and belonging that gay and lesbian commercial spaces offer. I have argued that the concept of the lesbian habitus captures something of how the possession of forms of lesbian cultural resources and the possession of a field-specific lesbian distinction is expressed through embodiment. The lesbian habitus offers a way of thinking through the cultural politics of the commodification of lesbian cultures, the symbolic value accorded to classed, gendered, and sexualized bodies, and the lifestyle-ization of lesbian identities. It is a way of thinking through the social relations through which lesbian bodies emerge and the ways in which lesbian cultures are embedded.

It was somewhat ironic that the unspoken promise of recognition in Candy Bar was instead an experience of indifference, as while on the way home from Brighton, we

were recognized as being queer, when we wanted indifference. On the train journey back to London, we had an unpleasant encounter with a slightly drunk young man and his friend. They sat close by and, in a chatty and casual way, asked us about our trip and engaged us in conversation. One young man spoke to Lucy. He recognized that she was transsexual. He asked Lucy her name, continued to question her about her "real" name, mocked and laughed at her, and then ignored her for the rest of the journey. By staring at and questioning Lucy, he simultaneously interpolated and disallowed her female gender. He made the perceived frailty of Lucy's gender visible and problematic; he turned her into a spectacle within the space of the crowded train. Susan was also the subject of their attention. After chatting to find out the nature of the connections among us, one young man asked her if she was a lesbian, to which she replied that she was definitely not. These interactions, classifications, and body and speech acts, then, have the power to shape both the habitus and self-identity. These moments of inter-subjectivity and interpellation that we encountered cannot be separated from the spatial and temporal. These moments are the lived consequences of difference that lesbian women, and queer people more generally, navigate on an everyday basis. It is clear to me that the presence of these young men and their (ocular) body and speech acts are an illustration of how the possibilities of engagement and identity are sometimes foreclosed in the heterosexual matrix. The subjection of queer people is often understood through homophobic and transphobic violence, through hate crime. Policy research shows that this diffused, often subtle, hostility, manifested in casual name calling, ridiculing, and subtle harassment, is a familiar experience for many lesbians, gay men, and trans people. The everyday moment on the train lies on the edges of these categories. This was not a violent situation (and I did not feel that it was going to become violent), nor was it a case of name calling or open aggression. Their manner ostensibly was quite chatty, casual, and friendly. However, beneath this apparent friendliness lay hostility and thinly veiled contempt.

The tensions we each experienced on this journey to Brighton and back are in many ways quite unremarkable. We all had our own ways of dealing with both queer and nonqueer space. The difficulties we encountered on the train journey back to London can be understood as just another everyday moment when the micro-spatial politics of identities unfold within the subtlety of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1999). The matrix is a useful spatial trope—a matrix can be a web, a network of connections or relations between nodal points of power that are invisible and yet ever present. For most queer people, this is the spatiality in which we live out our lives. We cross through and move within these spaces in journeys to and from other real and imagined queer spaces. I think that nodal point on the train shows how the heterosexual matrix is negotiated. We were able to negotiate this because of our familiarity with the omnipresent matrix. Its coordinates of power are knowable, and there is a degree of comfort (or at least a familiar discomfort) in its ubiquity. In many ways, we found lesbian space more difficult. I think the utopian, validating promise of lesbian and gay space lies in an unspoken promise that the coordinates of the matrix will somehow melt away on entry. I want to suggest that it is more the case that they simply reconfigure and coalesce in new ways, producing the peculiarities of homonormativity. The contradiction between the promise and actuality, the imagined and real, makes negotiating the cultural matrix of the lesbian commercial scene particularly impenetrable for those who cannot or do not wish to heed the doxic calls to order that are present in these spaces. The indifference of the city can be a source of comfort and discomfort. I want to suggest that some of these queer moments and spatialities are passed over



and lost in the imaginings of the queer city that emphasize lesbian and gay spatial location and identities as points of arrival rather than the chaotic process that it so often is. Reimagining the queer city requires recognizing these moments of possibility, finding potential in these moments of flux.

## Notes

1. This is a theme that emerged in my fieldwork. Skeggs (2004) argues that heterosexual female respectability is achieved through a distancing from sex. My fieldwork revealed how there is, perhaps, a corollary alternative dynamic of respectability within the *lesbian habitus*, whereby lesbian respectability is achieved by one embracing it and emitting a sense of ease and confidence about matters of sex and sexuality. This works to demonstrate an embodied freedom from the constraints of this classed respectability and "niceness" that Skeggs cites. In contrast to the ethic of care at the heart of a caring (female) self, expressions of lesbian sexuality within lesbian cultures emphasize taking responsibility for one's desires. This can be understood as part of the "sexual ethic of shame" that Warner (1999) argues characterized queer countercultures.

2. LGBT is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans.

3. Samuel R. Delany's ethnography of Times Square argues that the 42nd Street sex cinemas were spaces of complex interclass sexual and nonsexual contact and communication among people of different classes and ethnicities. Delany argues that the Haussmann-like rebuilding of Times Square as a family tourist attraction was justified through discourses of safety: safe sex, safe neighborhoods, and safe relationships (whereby these spaces were represented as dangerous and disease ridden and posing a threat to respectable women).

4. It is worth noting that within these cultural processes, classed versions of the acceptable lesbian body were also at work, as predominantly working-class butch femme expressions were criticized by middle-class "androgynous" lesbian feminists as copying and reproducing heterosexuality (see Munt, 1998a; Nestle, 1987, 1992).

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