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RENEGOTIATING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

Nancy Duncan

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I offer a general introduction to the issues of regulating and negotiating gender and sexuality through the opposition of the public and the private. I argue that the binary distinction between private and public spaces and the relation of this to private and public spheres is highly problematic. Although it is a distinction encoded in law and deeply rooted in North American and British cultures, it is nevertheless unstable and often problematically conflated with related distinctions such as that between domestic or familial autonomy and public spheres. Increasing privatization, commercialization and aestheticization of public space has tended to depoliticize space and shrink public spheres. However, I will discuss various ways that the spatial and political practices of marginalized groups such as abused women and sexual minorities (lesbians, gays and sex workers) work to undermine the (always already unstable) coherence of this binary and related binaries. The destabilizing of this boundary is a countervailing force working to open up not only private space but to reopen public space to public debate and contestation.

One could choose other groups such as the homeless¹ with an interest in transgressing the public/private dichotomy. However, I have chosen abused women and sexual minorities because members of such marginalized groups have experienced acute spatial dissonance and in some cases have found workable strategies for resisting the spatial framework and dominant spatial practices of Anglo-American society. I will also discuss various spatial practices that work to reinforce this boundary and some of the tensions surrounding the concept of privacy implied by the boundary. By pointing to examples drawn from these marginalized groups I attempt to show some of the complexities and subtleties of oppression on the basis of spatially constituted gender and sexuality. I then conclude with a discussion of the need to further unpack and destabilize this binary distinction. My focus will be on contemporary North America and Britain.

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

The distinction between the public and the private is deeply rooted in political philosophy, law, popular discourse and recurrent spatial structuring practices.

These practices demarcate and isolate a private sphere of domestic, embodied activity from an allegedly disembodied political sphere that is predominantly located in public space. The public/private dichotomy (both the political and spatial dimensions) is frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structures.² Although the social and political problems to which I refer clearly have spatial (material, corporeal) components, the solutions to these problems will by no means be purely spatial or environmental ones. There is no question, however, that confinement (voluntary and forced) in private spaces contributes to a reduction in the vitality of the public sphere as a political site and diminishes the ability of marginalized groups to claim a share in power.

It is clear that the public-private distinction is gendered. This binary opposition is employed to legitimate oppression and dependence on the basis of gender; it has also been used to regulate sexuality. The private as an *ideal type* has traditionally been associated and conflated with: the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the 'shadowy interior of the household', personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, 'the good life', care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence.³ The public as an *ideal type* has traditionally been the domain of the disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, the market place, waged labour, production, the polis, the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence.⁴

The idea of privacy is deeply embedded in Western political theories of freedom, personal autonomy, patriarchal familial sovereignty and private property. Traditionally there have been spatial and corporeal components to the idea of autonomy. The linkage between individual, family and group autonomy and privatization, localization and other exclusionary spatial strategies is one of the most important and interesting aspects of political geography. However, this linkage is one that is often taken for granted and therefore tends to be naturalized or depoliticized. The idea of spaces (material and metaphorical) hidden from the light of public view in which autonomy is most effectively enacted is widely respected. However, this idea is also highly charged and tension filled for many across the political spectrum.

Lawrence Stone and others have suggested that the perceived need for increased privacy in domestic spaces arose with the European nation-state. Attempts were made by both the state and private households to strengthen the institution of the family and to limit the space of state authority over the reproductive family unit (Stone 1977: 133-42). The home was accordingly considered a microcosm of the political order with the male head of household as ruler.⁵ While modern liberal notions of *individual* freedom and rights within the family or household as well as within society clearly differ from these earlier ideas of paternal dominance, the latter are still quite evident in contemporary culture and the administration of justice. As Judith Squires (1994: 394) puts it:

the preliberal antiliberal patriarchal tradition of family sovereignty has, for reasons not inherent to the liberal tradition itself, been incorporated

– tortuously – into the liberal rhetoric and legislation on privacy rights. Individual autonomy, which is the bedrock of liberal theory, has in practice been conflated with family autonomy.

Historically, in legal terms at least, women have been treated as private and embodied, in the sense of apolitical. They have long been treated as if not fully capable of independent disembodied political thought and objectivity as evidenced by the fact that it was relatively recently that women were given the vote. Still today most men⁶ move between public and private spaces and spheres with more legitimacy and physical safety (see Pain 1991; Valentine 1989), and less burdened by responsibilities as caregivers of children and the elderly than most women.

Both private and public spaces are heterogeneous and not all space is clearly private or public. Space is thus subject to various territorializing and deterritorializing processes whereby local control is fixed, claimed, challenged, forfeited and privatized. In some cases this may have socially progressive results in terms of providing a safe base (site of resistance) from which previously disempowered groups may become empowered. On the other hand, isolation in a private or quasi-private space or sphere may have an undesirable depoliticizing effect on a group, fortifying it against challenges from, and allowing it to inadvertently assume independence from, a wider public sphere. However, as Brian Massumi, in his interpretation of the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, says, there is an important difference between ‘entrenching one’s self in a closed space (hold the fort)’ and ‘arraying one’s self in an open space (hold the street)’ (Massumi 1992: 6). The street serves here as a metaphor for sites of resistance that are part of a rhizome-like process of deterritorializing and a progressive opening up to the political sphere. The fort signifies territories, securely established centres of domination. (On the political ambiguity of place and localizing processes and whether they are conservative or progressive see Massey 1993.)

There are many privatized or quasi-privatized, commercialized public spaces including shopping malls and exclusionary suburbs. This privatization of ostensibly public places has very uneven consequences for the population as a whole because groups with greater resources can more easily privatize spaces. Such privatizing of space is often accompanied by aestheticization as for example when urban space is cleared of marginalized people and political activities and redesigned as a spectacle for the consumption of affluent classes. Furthermore by privatizing (depoliticizing) these spaces, the owners and users of such spaces more easily free themselves from various types of public surveillance, regulation and public contestation.

The private is a sphere where those families who are not dependent on the state for welfare have relative autonomy. Those who *are* dependent, however, are often subject to unwarranted intrusion and surveillance.⁷ In general, however, liberal political and legal theory can be seen as a territorializing spatial practice that attempts to differentiate the public and private by erecting a boundary around a private sphere of *relative* non-interference by civil society or the state.

PUBLIC SPHERE

The public sphere is not just the site of state politics and regulation, nor is it limited to the market place or the economy;⁸ it is also the site of oppositional social movements. In fact, under many definitions, the public sphere is a political site separate from, and often critical of, the state and the economy.⁹ As opposed to the private sphere, it is the discursive and material space where the state and its powers, as well as oppressive aspects of the dominant culture (misogyny, homophobia, racism), are open to challenge by those who have been marginalized in various ways. Don Mitchell gives an example from Berkeley, California.

The People's Park was working as it should: as a truly political space. It was a political space that encouraged unmediated interaction, a place where the power of the state could be held at bay.

(Mitchell 1995: 110)

According to Mitchell ideally public space is 'unconstrained space within which political movements can organize and expand into wider arenas' (Mitchell 1995: 115). However, he says that most often public space is constituted as 'a controlled and orderly *retreat* where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city'. In this view public space is seen as politically neutral. Although somewhat more likely to become a site of political organizing than private space, public space is very often planned and controlled for non-political purposes. Public spaces and public spheres often do not map neatly onto one another.

As a normative ideal the public sphere is open to all; in practice, however, it is much more restricted. In fact, Habermas (1991) would argue, the public sphere no longer functions effectively in the interest of any group. Examples of recently increased restrictions on the public sphere as a place where groups can meet to protest and publicize their views is the introduction in Britain of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994. This law includes limitations on the right to assemble for peaceful political protests. It is noteworthy that such increased regulation of public behaviour (*allegedly* for fear of *potential* violence) is not matched with a similar increase in the regulation of *actual* violence in the private sphere.¹⁰ This is not to say, of course, that violence in public is adequately controlled or that provisions should not be made to control politically motivated violence.

Moreover, the ideal of a single public sphere that serves as a site of political contestation is considered by some to be either utopian or deceitful in its pretence of homogeneity and inclusiveness (Fraser 1993; Howell 1993; Robbins 1993; Young 1990). There are some very persuasive arguments for the expansion and repoliticization of the notion of public sphere into a multiplicity of heterogeneous publics also known as 'alternative or counter public spheres' or 'counterpublics' or 'critical publics' (Cohen and Arato 1992; Fraser 1993; Robbins 1993). Such counter public spheres can be seen to develop out of social movements. Iris Marion Young (1990: 120) states that:

the concept of a heterogeneous public implies two political principles:
(a) no persons, actions, or aspects of a person's life should be forced into

privacy; and (b) no social institutions or practices should be excluded a priori from being a proper subject for public discussion and expression.

Although in practice various critical publics would never be equal in influence or legitimacy, they could ideally all have access to the public sphere and public spaces (where they could challenge, and be exposed to challenges by, members of other counterpublics).

PRIVACY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Paradoxically the home which is usually thought to be gendered feminine has also traditionally been subject to the patriarchal authority of the husband and father. Personal freedoms of the male head of household often impinge on, or in extreme cases, negate the rights, autonomy and safety of women and children who also occupy these spaces. The designation of the home as private space limits the role of political institutions and social movements in changing power relations within the family. 'A man's home is his castle' – this familiar expression reveals the important historical link between masculinity, patriarchal autonomy and its spatial expression in the form of private property. As a relatively unregulated sphere the private is a place where men have traditionally dominated their families and the privacy to do so has been jealously protected. Legal definitions of privacy thus gender space and tend to reproduce inequalities. As Schneider (1991: 978) put it:

the interrelationship between what is understood and experienced as private and public is particularly complex in the area of gender where the rhetoric of privacy has masked inequality and subordination. The decision about what we protect as private is a political decision that always has important public ramifications.

Although legal ideas of privacy were established to protect civil liberties under certain circumstances they can also:

mask physical abuse and other manifestations of power and inequality within the family . . . The belief is that it is for family members to sort out their personal relationships. What this overlooks is the power inequalities inside the family that are of course affected by structures external to it.

(O'Donovan 1993: 272)

The private home has been historically seen as a place where men have assumed their right to sexual intercourse. Problematic questions of genuine consent on the part of partners have only recently begun to be addressed with any frequency. The private space of the home can also be a place where aggressive forms of misogynous masculinity are often exercised with impunity. It is a place where rape and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity take place more often than many people realize (see Edwards 1989). Although I recognize that the private space of the home is a place where some men use violence as a way to control women,¹¹ I wish to distance myself

from arguments made by radical feminists such as Brownmiller (1975) and MacKinnon (1989) who argue that violence, especially sexual violence, is used by men collectively as a way to control women. This is to implicate many innocent men who abhor violence and it assumes a narrow view of power – one that sees it as primarily coercive. (On this issue see Pain 1991: 425; however, Pain does not take a stand on whether there is a conscious conspiracy among all men and not just sex offenders to intimidate women.)

Instead, I would choose to explore the idea of a complicity which includes men and women who fail to act decisively against both public and private sexual violence, resorting instead to staying at home at night or encouraging wives, daughters and women friends to do so. Here I am not suggesting that individuals place themselves in the 'sucker position' of risking their own safety. Quite the contrary, I am suggesting that such violence directed against women in both public and private spaces is a problem requiring highly organized, structural solutions, not isolated individualistic ones. The feminist slogan 'Take Back the Night' should be seen as a suggestion not for women to disregard personal safety, but for all those who can (not just women) to organize and ask for public funds to transform public spaces to make them safe and accessible to everyone at night as well as during the day.

Because it is very often invisible and inaudible, domestic violence remains a privatized problem. Unanswered questions remain: to what extent is the home an oppressive site of sexual power and pathological types of masculinity? To what extent is domestic violence explained by historically persistent perceptions of masculine autonomy and entitlement within the space of the home? To what extent does the privacy of private property allow or even legitimate misogynistic violence? One reason why the underlying explanations and motivations of domestic violence are unclear is that such abuse has generally been a private and hidden problem. It is a good example of Berger's dictum elaborated by Soja, that it is space more than time that hides the consequences from us (Soja 1989: 22).

Feminists 'discovered' wife beating in the late nineteenth century as they attempted to open up the realm of the private and patriarchal family affairs to public discourse (see Cobbe 1868). Although since the nineteenth century wife beating has been formally outlawed,¹² the issue still does not receive the public attention it deserves. Enforcement of laws is highly inadequate.¹³ According to the Surgeon General of the United States, the battering of women by partners and ex-partners is the 'single largest cause of injury to women in the US' accounting for one-fifth of all hospital emergency cases (Zorza 1992: 83). According to the FBI, roughly 6 million women are abused and 4,000 women are killed by their partners or ex-partners in America each year (Saland 1994). These statistics suggest that domestic violence cannot be dismissed as something private and beyond the scope of public responsibility (Thomas and Beasley 1993: 45). Clearly there are contradictions between ideas of privacy, which assume autonomy of male heads of household, and the prevention of 'the violence of privacy' (Schneider 1994).

Police officers in many places are given a great deal of discretion in dealing with 'domestic disturbances'. Often such 'domestic' calls are not taken

seriously. When the police do go to a house, they usually do not make an arrest. Wives may not decide to press charges fearing the alien world of courts, police stations and publicity, even more than the familiar, private violence of the home. The police may understandably fear for their own safety or even their lives.¹⁴ Furthermore the police sometimes share the misogynous views of the batterer, believing, for example, in corporal punishment for 'nagging' wives or at least sympathizing with an overstressed husband.

Many programmes to aid battered women have focused on establishing outside moral as well as material support in order to counter the batterer's often strenuous attempts to privatize the problem by cutting his partner off from contact with relatives, friends and public institutions (Pence and Shepard 1988: 291). One can clearly see spatial strategies at work in the abuser's attempt to isolate his partner from extended family and other social networks by confining her in private spaces. This makes it difficult for her to seek outside support or to organize politically with other battered women. Answers may lie, in part at least, in deterritorializing public and private spheres – that is in questioning the links between individualism, privacy, autonomy and allegedly apolitical private spaces.

Making contacts and establishing outside support networks is a crucial step for a woman who seeks to escape a violent home. It is often difficult to break the financial and emotional dependence on the family home and husband. The need for alternative housing is paramount. Women's shelters often provide temporary accommodation. Daycare, peer and professional counselling, and various training programmes are sometimes available through such organizations.

Women's shelters provide a site of resistance against the imprisoning strategies of the battering partner. While the names of shelters sometimes convey the idea of much-needed social networks – Friends of the Family, Woman to Woman and Good Neighbors Unlimited – often they reflect this spatial dimension – Womanspace, Women's Survival Space, Safe House and Safespace.

Beyond the lack of sufficient funding for shelters and limited space availability, and beyond psychological and economic dependence of women on abusive partners, there are many other reasons why shelters do not always provide an effective solution to isolation and violence. Many women do not take advantage of the opportunity to remove themselves physically from violent situations for various geographical reasons. Women from rural areas may have to travel long distances to find a shelter and women from non-English-speaking communities may be reluctant to leave a neighbourhood where they have some degree of language and cultural support. However, a much more pervasive sentiment that affects not only the willingness of a woman to go to a shelter, but also interest in funding such shelters, is the individualism and privatism of British and North American society. People who must depend on the help of strangers often feel shame. The ideal of the private family home is so deeply ingrained that even temporary residence outside of such private spaces can be highly embarrassing and stigmatizing. The idea of communal living and sharing of tasks which is encouraged in such

shelters is unfamiliar. The fact that shelters are outside the norms of Anglo-American society is also reflected in the names of the shelters – many of which make reference to the temporary, crisis-induced nature of these shelters: Women in Crisis, Transitional Living Center, Assault Crisis Center, Crisis Intervention, Guest House, Emergency House, Sojourn Women's Center, Victim's Crisis Center and Women's Transition House.¹⁵

While many feminists wish to expose the abuses of masculine privilege in the home, others worry about the opening up of the private to public surveillance, because it could simultaneously open up the realm of individual reproductive rights to state interference. However, Elizabeth Schneider argues for a right to privacy that is not 'synonymous with the right to state non-interference with actions within the family' (1994: 53). Recalling Justice Douglas' opinion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) she suggests that the concept of privacy has the potential to be defined affirmatively as the right to autonomy for all family members which requires freedom from battering and coercion by partners.

Judith Squires also argues for a notion of privacy closely linked to individual autonomy on empowerment. She writes:

there are very strong grounds for articulating a specifically embedded and embodied conception of privacy as a means of conferring autonomy. For the body can be viewed as one of the core territories of the self: control over one's own body is crucial to the maintenance of a sense of self and hence the ability to interact openly with others. To have control over own's bodily integrity (to regulate access to it) and to have this integrity recognised, is a minimal precondition for free and equal social interaction. To ensure the possibility of such an embodied autonomy for all persons in contemporary society – with all its multifarious mechanisms of observation and control – we will need a political defence of privacy rights.

(1994: 399)

Others argue for the necessity of private spaces for protection against an overly aggressive state. However, despite this very real consideration, I would argue that the existence of relatively unregulated spaces is a political arrangement that tends to hide the causes as well as the consequences of oppressive power relations within the family from a wider public. It protects particularly those who have the resources to most effectively privatize space. Intrusive or even fascist state practices (and all their hidden and privatized manifestations) might better be opened up to scrutiny in the public sphere (or counter public spheres) under more informal, unconstrained and inclusive conditions of discourse and debate within civil society.

I suggest, then, that there is a positive concept of privacy related to the autonomy of individuals which allows for and may even require the opening up of private spaces to the public sphere in order to protect individuals whose autonomy is compromised by the concept of unregulated private space, especially when that space is constituted by unequal power relations or outmoded ideas of domestic patriarchal sovereignty.

Early feminism concentrated so much energy on opening up the public sphere to women through the use of sex-discrimination legislation that the question of how the private sphere might be reconstituted through law was rarely addressed. Only a few basic steps have been taken in this direction. An example is the elimination of spousal exclusion from the possibility of rape.

A broadly Foucauldian conception of (albeit highly uneven) relations of power as suffused throughout society and across space can aid in undermining the public/private dichotomy. 'The personal is the political' is a proclamation commonly heard among feminists, gays and lesbians that challenges the public/private dichotomy as it has traditionally been formulated. This phrase serves as an evocative reminder of the artificiality of such a clear-cut distinction despite its long history and naturalization in legal discourse. It is a statement of the fact that personal relationships are also power relationships and that everyone is implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations. Domestic and even intimate relations are political relations that can be transformed through political means. Although places may be more or less overtly politicized, there are no politically neutral spaces. Similarly, whether or not embodiment is explicitly recognized – whether or not a *dis-*embodied, allegedly objective perspective is claimed – the spatial and social situatedness which comes from necessary corporeality is inescapable. Foucault (1980: 187) argues power relations emanate not only from state or juridical sources, but concern:

our bodies, our lives, our day-to-day existences . . . Between every point of a social body, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil . . . there exist relations of power.

Furthermore, Foucault argues, such power is met with a multitude of points of resistance throughout a network that encompasses the whole of a society.

One important form of resistance is to bring issues of privatized power relations into a public forum where efforts to bring about structural change in these relations can be more easily organized. There has always been a close relation between the degree of women's confinement in private space and their relative exclusion from the public sphere of organized social movements and political action. Thus a smoothing out of the public/private boundary and an opening up of privatized problems to public contestation is necessary despite risks of facilitating undue state intervention. Non-progressive state intervention into private lives can theoretically be prevented through the increased use of the critical functions of publicity and strengthened, increasingly heterogeneous public spheres.

PRIVACY AND RESISTANCE

Doreen Massey (this volume) speaks of the problematic boundary between workplace and home as reinforcing the gendered distinction between transcendence and immanence. Transcendence is the use of Reason in the production of History, Knowledge, Science and Progress; immanence is 'the static realm of living-in-the-present', of reproduction, of servicing those who

make history. Contrasting this public/transcendence private/immanence correlation in the US and Britain with examples from Eastern Europe, Joanne Sharp (this volume) points to cases in which the identification of private space with immanence and public space with transcendence was inverted. During the communist period a major site of resistance and political organization was in the private space of the home. Civil society was spatially marginalized by powerful governments forcing it into a repoliticized private sphere of the home: 'It was here rather than in any formally public sphere that the possibility for transcendence occurred.' She adds, however, that the opposition of family to state served only to deflect attention away from uneven power relations within the family.

bell hooks offers another destabilizing perspective on the idea of the traditional home as a place of immanence rather than transcendence. She says that because public space can be very hostile to African Americans (men as well as women), the home can be an important site of resistance. She sees the homeplace as having a radical political dimension. It's a place where, as she says, 'we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world' (hooks 1990: 42). hooks, however, makes it clear that while the home *can* be a site for organizing subversive activity, it is often viewed as a politically neutral space where the political role of black women is devalued (hooks 1990: 47). She blames the influence of white, bourgeois norms (which produce domestic space as an aestheticized space of consumption and reproduction) for redefining the home as a depoliticized site.

hooks acknowledges of course that the black home can also be the site of patriarchal domination. Kimberlé Crenshaw sees it as a site of multiple oppressions where women of colour sometimes face an 'intersectional disempowerment of race and gender'. She states that women of colour who are subjected to domestic violence are often reluctant to call the police as there is:

a general unwillingness among people of color to subject their private lives to the scrutiny and control of a police force that is frequently hostile. There is a more generalized community ethic against public intervention, the product of a desire to create a private world free from the diverse assaults on the public lives of racially subordinated people.

(1994: 103)

But, as Crenshaw states: 'this sense of isolation compounds efforts to politicize gender violence within communities of color, and permits the deadly silence surrounding these issues to continue' (1994: 111).

Nevertheless, hooks argues for the need to reaffirm the home as a site of organizing, affirming political solidarity and regrouping for resistance in spite of the fact that from the standpoint of the relatively more powerful this may seem a minor political resource. hooks (1990: 45) argues that: 'the devaluation of the role black women have played in constructing for us homeplaces that are the site for resistance undermines our efforts to resist racism and the colonizing mentality which promotes internalized self-hatred'.

Habermas (1991) also sees certain private sphere institutions as having served, in the past at least, important political purposes. He points to the

literary salon, club, cafe and lodge as semi-private political spaces with a public sphere critical function. I cite these various examples to show that there is often no clear-cut distinction between the private as a site of immanence and the public as a site of transcendence. These examples should not be interpreted as showing that private spaces (which have a tendency to be exclusionary and isolating) are ideal sites of liberation struggle, however.

Supportive home environments can, of course, also reproduce white racism. Iris Marion Young argues that private, homogeneous, and exclusionary spaces provide autonomy that should be distinguished from empowerment. While she sees autonomy as a closed concept referring to non-interference, empowerment is an open concept allowing agents to participate in democratic decision making (Young 1990: 251). Possibly a distinction should be made between private spaces that are sites of empowerment and resistance (becoming open, publicized and political) and private territories that are exclusionary or oppressive (remaining closed and private in the sense of spaces where the privacy of some to oppress others – who for various reasons may share the privatized spaces – is protected from public or state regulation). This distinction may be useful in conceptually opening up the boundary between the public and private.

THE SPATIAL REGULATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Like gender, sexuality is often regulated by the binary distinction between public and private. It is usually assumed that sexuality is (and should be) confined to private spaces. This is based on the naturalization of heterosexual norms. Naturalized heterosexuality makes sexuality in public spaces nearly invisible to the straight population (Valentine 1993). Surveys have shown that the majority of respondents have no objection to homosexuals as long as they 'do not flaunt their sexuality in public' (Herek 1987 as quoted in Valentine 1993). 'What they do in private is nobody's business', is a commonly heard, well-intentioned expression. However, as Gill Valentine puts it, the idea of homosexuality as appropriate only to private spaces:

is based on the *false* premise that heterosexuality is also defined by private sexual acts and is not expressed in the public arena . . . This therefore highlights the error of drawing a simple polar distinction between public and private activities, for heterosexuality is clearly the dominant sexuality in most everyday environments, not just private spaces, with all interactions taking place between sexed actors.

(1992: 396)

While public space appears heterosexist to gays and lesbians, many expressions of sexuality are so naturalized as to be virtually invisible to the straight population. As Valentine points out: 'heterosexuality is institutionalized in marriage and the law, tax, and welfare systems, and is celebrated in public rituals such as weddings' (1992: 396).

Valentine and others have pointed out that suburban housing developments as sites of overtly heterosexual as well as familial sentiments and rituals are generally considered alienating environments by lesbians and gays. While the

home may be a haven for some gay couples, the family home is often an extremely heterosexist and alienating site for gays.

Gloria Anzaldua speaks of a former student, a lesbian, who said that she connected the word homophobia with 'fear of going home' (Anzaldua 1987: 20). Here, in the home, the patriarchal, heterosexist exercise of territorialized power and regulatory practices freed from public intervention and political contestation may be especially threatening, keeping gay identities in the closet. The spatial metaphor of the closet is a particularly telling one in this context where gays may not be 'out' even to their own families within their own home.

Although many would think of workplaces as generally asexual (except for occasional sexual harassment) these are nevertheless also heterosexual and often heterosexist spaces. Nearly invisible because it is universalized and naturalized, heterosexuality is inscribed in public as well as private spaces as the dominant ideology. Like trying to convince WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) that they have an ethnicity, it is difficult to make heterosexuals aware that their spaces invoke a sexuality. Naturalizing one's own heterosexuality means imposing one's own inability to see him or herself as Other on one's surroundings. Failing to notice your own difference as heterosexual is an act with significance. It leads to the heterosexing of space.

An interesting article by Bell *et al.* (1994) addresses the issue of various ways the heterosexuality of public space might be resisted. The authors examine the performance of two types of homosexual identities, the hyper-feminine 'lipstick lesbian' and the hypermasculine gay 'skinhead' that serve (often unintentionally) to parody heterosexual identities. They ask, however, whether such stylistic transgressions of popularly held stereotypes of lesbians and gays can actually have any significant destabilizing effect on heterosexism and the assumption of public spaces as generally asexual. They worry about the danger of celebrating transgression for transgression's sake. I share the latter concern and argue that there is a danger of the aestheticization of politics whenever style is used as a mode of transgression. However, I argue, once again, that significant social change requires organized action in the public sphere and access to various resources, including the media, rather than individualistic, privatized action.

Thus, I suggest that lesbian and gay practices which potentially denaturalize the sexuality of public places could be more effective if they were widely publicized. If they were made more explicit and readable then contests around sexuality would become more visible to the straight population. Furthermore, one would expect that such denaturalizing tactics would work for the gay population as well, by pointing to the fluidity of identity and helping to transgress clear-cut heterosexual/homosexual dichotomies including stifling codes of dress and behaviour sometimes imposed in an attempt to stabilize an internally coherent identity politics.¹⁶ The media could also do more to publicize some of the complex and challenging questions about the performance and the reconstitution of gender and sexuality in public spaces that are raised in this article and in the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1994) upon which Bell *et al.* (1994) draw.

Public space can be used as a site for the destabilization of unarticulated norms, or as Munt calls it, the 'politics of *dislocation*' (Munt 1995: 124). Deconstructive spatial tactics can take the form of marches, Gay Pride parades, public protests, performance art and street theatre as well as overtly homosexual behaviour such as kissing in public. An example cited by Bell and Valentine (1995) of such tactics is the 'queering' of space by Queer Nation Rose (QNR) and ACT-UP who refused to allow the Montreal Pride Parade to be ghettoized in the gay village as it had in past years. Instead they marched through the downtown streets. Furthermore, they ignored the anti-drag, anti-leather parade rules by declaring 'If you're in clothes you're in drag': 'irreverent combinations of identities proliferated, including fags posing as dykes, dykes dressed as clone fags, and bisexuals pretending to be fags pretending to be lipstick lesbians' (Bell and Valentine 1995: 14).

Tim Cresswell makes the important point that it is difficult to get people to recognize normative geographies until these are transgressed. 'By looking at events which upset the balance of common sense', he says:

I let events themselves become the questions. The occurrence of 'out-of-place' phenomena leads people to question behavior and define what is and what is not appropriate for a setting. The examination of common-sense becomes a public issue in the speeches of politicians and the words of the media.

(Cresswell, 1996)

When spatial tactics of queer politics become what Cresswell (in another context) calls 'crisis points in the normal functioning of everyday expectations' for the mainstream heterosexual population – then normative heterosexual geographies become more clear. This is the first step towards destabilizing and eventually overturning such repressively striated geographies of gender and sexuality.

SPATIAL MARGINALIZATION OF SEX WORKERS

Prostitutes also offend the aesthetic sensibilities of the upholders of the public/private dichotomy. They upset the 'everything in its place' mentality that reproduces the public/private spatial dichotomy. They threaten notions of 'respectable' and 'orderly' behaviour on the part of women who, it is thought, should be escorted at night in public spaces. Because of women's traditional exclusion from the political sphere, the term 'public woman' in dominant discourse has traditionally meant 'not respectable', a prostitute, whereas a public man was a statesman (Matthews 1992). To be a respectable woman was to sexually serve one man – a husband at home. While this ideal need no longer be strictly adhered to for a woman to be considered respectable in Anglo-American society, all forms of commercial sex are generally considered beyond the bounds of respectability.

Glenna Matthews (1992) surveys many sites of resistance against this definition of public woman that have accompanied the rise of women in the public sphere. However, there are other agents and sites of resistance against

the gendered public/private dichotomy. There are many women with a strong sense of agency who are proud to be public women in the traditional sense of the term. In many cases they would not wish to join the ranks of establishment feminism or the political elite. Many (but certainly not all)¹⁷ adult prostitutes and other sex workers freely choose¹⁸ marginal or eccentric locations from which to claim their rights as sexual minorities and challenge the very structures which elite women employ to get ahead. They also challenge the narrow definitions of politics and power employed by those who seek public office. However, their views have only just begun to be heard as they have long been silenced by members of the dominant culture, including many prominent feminists who see their work and lifestyles as epitomizing oppression by men.

Prostitution is a good example of a practice both spatially and socially marginalized by societal attitudes and the law. There are complex spatial implications in the laws regarding its practice. The laws in Canada and Britain make prostitution itself legal in principle but all but impossible to practice without breaking one of many laws. These laws regard such issues as solicitation or procuring in public places, where prostitution may be practised and who may benefit from the profits gained.¹⁹ This latter restriction makes it illegal for a prostitute to live with members of her family if they benefit from her earnings.

These externally imposed spatial limits to the legal practice of prostitution again deny the sexuality of public places by imposing greater spatial restrictions on sexual minorities than on those who conform to the societal standards. In some places these limits serve to hide from public view and thus privatize many of the aesthetically and morally offensive physical, psychological, medical and social problems surrounding the highly marginalized identities of prostitutes. In other places, they force prostitutes onto the street where they can be subjected to surveillance and segregating practices of the police.

The state and public morality (the latter represented by the religious right and certain radical feminists²⁰ among others) define prostitutes as either deviant and immoral or victims suffering from false consciousness who symbolize the oppression of all women by all men. Such characterizations succeed in cutting them off from having an effective role as public women in the political sense of speaking on their own behalf and reclaiming their civil rights. These include their right to citizenship,²¹ to work in safe conditions, their right to exercise control over their own bodies and to earn respect as healers, sex experts and business women as well as the right to freedom from harassment by police and self-proclaimed upholders of public morality (Bell 1994: 100).

If prostitutes could safely 'come out' in the public sphere and speak on their own behalf there would be many benefits, including the opportunity to add some new, knowledgeable voices to the debates over the meaning of choice and consent, personal autonomy, sexual exploitation, victim identities, false consciousness and power relations, structural explanations for what are all too often seen as individual problems.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would say that the public/private distinction is still among the most important spatial ordering principles in North America and Britain today. Public space is regulated by keeping it relatively free of passion or expressions of sexuality that are not naturalized, normalized or condoned. It is further regulated by banishing from sight behaviours that are in various cases repugnant either rightly (as in the case of domestic violence) or wrongly (as in the case of publicly expressed homosexuality or unforced adult prostitution) to many members of the dominant groups in society. The institutionalized dividing off of critical public debate and political expression into specialized and increasingly controlled spaces allegedly allows for the possibility of disembodied dispassionate rational discourse and formal political decision making under conditions of public order. This has left the private domestic sphere to remain invisible, relatively unregulated (i.e. selectively regulated) and generally free from public scrutiny. However, we argue that certain so-called private issues need to be deterritorialized, that is more thoroughly public(ized) and legitimated as appropriate to public discourse. As Benhabib puts it, 'the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice' (1992: 94). This should *certainly* not be taken to mean that justice is *necessarily* served when an issue becomes publicized. It is, however, more *likely* to be served in a truly open public debate where no parties affected by an issue are excluded.

Subversive discourses first articulated in private spaces may eventually become public. Members of various marginalized social movements eventually learn to negotiate their way into the public sphere. However, feminist political practice has begun to tackle the problem of the public/private sphere distinction *itself* as a gender-biased spatial practice which facilitates what are largely gender-specific abuses and also the marginalization and enforced privatization of sexualities which do not conform to dominant ideas of 'natural' dynamics of heterosexual love. Their explicit intent is to reveal exactly how disempowering it can be for those who differ from the *allegedly* neutral norms and therefore cannot act with the same degree of autonomy or protection assumed by established models of the democratic society.

The goal is to mount a multi-pronged attack on the spatial and discursive boundaries that regulate behaviour and discipline difference. This would entail among other things an 'outing of everybody'. By 'outing' here I do not refer to the highly problematic practice of the outing of individual gays. I think that the practice of publicly identifying the sexual orientation of individuals against their wishes cannot be considered a just or effective solution to the problem of homophobia. Nor do I mean to say that privacy should not be respected when it does not harm others. Rather, I suggest that the boundaries between the private and public can be destabilized by being actively questioned and placed in the public consciousness through the media, through challenges in the courts and through the efforts of social movements. The physical design of our societies' highly privatized landscapes however, have been shaped not only to protect those whose privacy should rightfully be respected, but also to secure the privacy and autonomy of the abusers of the women and children who share their domestic spaces.

By 'outing', then, I am talking in very general terms about a transformed spatiality – an empowering deterritorialization, the creation of smooth, less striated space. Here I refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notions of smooth or open-ended space as opposed to state space which they describe as striated or gridded. Smooth space is contrasted with defended, exclusionary, confining spaces where oppressive patriarchal and heterosexist practices can become entrenched. These terms are highly abstract and meant to be evocative. Allowed to wash over one, listened to like music, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, their writings provide inspiration to rethink conventional notions of space. I refer to a potential spatial revolution that would conceive of physical and political or discursive space as less clearly divided between publicly recognized territories of formal power, depoliticized spaces of urban spectacle and protected domestic spaces of uneven privatized power relations. This would enable the consequences of our individual and collective actions to be made more visible and accountable to critical public debate and oppositional social movements. To quote Seyla Benhabib once again:

All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered 'private,' non-public and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, [and] as sites of power.

(1992: 100)

Although privacy has always been a contingent rather than an absolute right, it is widely cherished and seen as indispensable for the protection of individual autonomy. However, privacy is closely associated with highly privatized spatial arrangements and social codes of 'civil inattention' which facilitate the violation of the rights of a significant percentage of the population. Thus we must stop to ask ourselves if there are not better ways to control the abuses of state and other public manifestations of power. Should each individual and social movement be left to individually renegotiate the public/private spatial and discursive boundaries for themselves? Or should this deeply rooted division (so sacred and central to understandings of personal freedom) be radically rethought? I would argue for the latter.

I do not endorse spatial or political anarchism. There is clearly a need for effective government at a range of scales (see Penrose 1993: 46), various types of regulation, a progressive redistribution of power and resources, and expanded, multi-scale welfare programmes. However, the ideal geography would work to minimize: household autonomy as opposed to the empowerment of its individual members, place-based identity and privilege, local control which has highly uneven consequences for social justice across communities,²² nationalism, and other territorializing and confining exclusionary processes. The creation of progressive geographies would require deterritorialization – the creation of open-ended, proliferating and inclusive sites of empowerment and resistance against exclusionary, reterritorializing processes: place essentialism and homogenizing identity politics or coerced assimilation. These would be sites of 'radical openness' as bell hooks (1990)

puts it – sites which may be nurturing – which may serve as havens, but which are opened up to the public sphere and politicized (or repoliticized) as the case may be. On the other hand while deterritorialized geographies would encourage heterogeneity they would also discourage the naturalization, reification and ghettoization of differences – including, importantly, differences of gender and sexuality. Fluid geographies would construct and in turn be constructed by fluid identities.

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NOTES

- 1 A study which looks at the homeless as an example of another marginalized group which has developed spatial strategies that transgress the public/private distinction, politicize space, and attempt to claim sites of resistance against the regulation of behaviour in public spaces is Mitchell (1995).
- 2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988: 103) consequently goes so far as to claim that 'the deconstruction of the opposition between the private and the public is implicit in all, and explicit in some, feminist activity'.
- 3 On immanence as distinguished from transcendence see de Beauvoir (1974), Lloyd (1984) and Massey (this volume).
- 4 There are in fact a number of different public/private distinctions; these include the state versus the market, citizenship versus both the state and the economy, and domestic versus waged labour. See Robbins (1993: xiii) who draws on an essay by Jeff Weintraub.
- 5 It should be noted that over the centuries the role of the male head of household as well as the very notion of masculinity itself has varied considerably, and it differs by class as well. See Tosh (1994) for a review of the literature on this subject.
- 6 But see Myslik (this volume) on the limitations placed upon the free movement of gay men by those who harass and violently attack them.
- 7 Such intrusion points to the downside of increased state regulation of the private sphere. One would hope however that this might be rectified through more enlightened public policies which distinguish between areas of public concern and people's legitimately personal affairs.
- 8 As stated in note 3, the public is sometimes defined as the state in opposition to civil society, sometimes the public includes the market. The market sometimes is seen as private, however.
- 9 On the history – and normative theory – of the public sphere see Habermas (1991). For debates around Habermas's concept see Calhoun (1993) and Robbins (1993).
- 10 Ironically, while rape and assault is often ignored if it takes place in private spaces,

consensual and private sexual practices among gays are sometimes not tolerated. Operation Spanner was a recent police operation in Britain designed to catch and arrest men participating in sadomasochistic activities in private spaces. Sixteen arrests were upheld in court on the grounds that sadomasochistic practices among consenting adults can not be afforded protection by laws of privacy (on this see Bell 1995: 305).

- 11 In fact it was not until the twentieth century (1922) that wife beating had become illegal in all US states (Pleck 1987: 108–21).
- 12 For example in Britain the Matrimonial Clause Act which dates from 1878 (see Hammerton 1992).
- 13 Buel (1988: 217) states that police officers fail to arrest in the majority of cases where battered women request an arrest be made. Some policemen say that they arrest depending upon the reason the man hit his partner, perpetuating the notion that some women deserve to be beaten.
- 14 According to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (1982: 12–22) a majority of the police who have been killed on duty were handling 'domestic disturbance' cases.
- 15 Women's shelters first opened in Britain in 1971, spread to Europe and then to the US. It is not surprising that the US would be slower to accept the idea of shelters in that individualism and privatism are even stronger than in Britain. And the public spheres are weak in comparison with Britain.
- 16 Oppressive dress codes was the topic of a paper by Gill Valentine presented at the Association of American Geographer's national meeting in San Francisco, April 1994.
- 17 The World Charter of Prostitutes' Rights distinguishes between voluntary and coerced prostitution: 'Voluntary prostitution is the mutually voluntary exchange of services for money or other consideration; it is a form of work, and like most work in our capitalist society, it is often alienated, that is, the worker/prostitute has too little control over her/his working conditions and the way the work is organized. Forced prostitution is a form of aggravated sexual assault' (quoted in Bell 1994: 114). It calls for the decriminalization of all aspects of voluntary adult prostitution. The Charter also states the need for help and retraining for prostitutes wishing to leave prostitution. It states, 'The right not to be a prostitute is as important as the right to be one' (quoted in Bell 1994: 116).
- 18 By using the words 'freely choose' here I am not suggesting any kind of radical freedom. Freedom to choose work in a capitalist society is of course highly contingent. Most choices are accompanied by some degree of alienation and contradictory consciousness. Furthermore, prostitutes typically (but not always) have fewer choices than the majority of individuals in society.
- 19 Prostitution is illegal in 49 out of 50 states of the US.
- 20 The MacKinnon–Dworkin wing of feminism is often referred to as radical feminism. It is known for its campaigns against pornography and prostitution and their affinity with the organization WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution and Engaged in Revolt). Such feminists construct prostitutes as victims of male oppression by definition and thus seek to end prostitution. They stand in opposition to prostitutes' rights groups which seek to empower prostitutes and politicize sex work (Bell 1994: 99–102). The latter are represented by the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights and two World Whores' Congresses and groups such as the San Francisco-based COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) and Toronto-based CORP (Canadian Organization of Prostitutes' Rights).
- 21 Various prostitutes' rights groups in North America and Europe have been campaigning for legal and human rights including freedom of speech, travel, immigration, work, unionizing, marriage and motherhood, employment insurance, health insurance and housing. *The World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights* seeks decriminalization of 'all aspects of adult prostitution resulting from individual decision' (i.e. based on either free choice or necessity) (see Bell 1994: 113).

- 22 This is especially true in the US as opposed to Britain. In Britain local government is far less dependent upon locally generated funding for various community projects; local control means control over funds largely generated at the national as opposed to the local level, thus there is not the same inequality between communities.