



**Reviews in brief: Cities of pleasure: sex and the urban  
socialscape. Edited by Alan Collins. London: Routledge.  
2006. 248 pp. £70.00 Cloth. ISBN 0415360129**

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► **To cite this version:**

Gavin Brown. Reviews in brief: Cities of pleasure: sex and the urban socialscape. Edited by Alan Collins. London: Routledge. 2006. 248 pp. £70.00 Cloth. ISBN 0415360129. cultural geographies, 2008, 15 (3), pp.401-402. 10.1177/14744740080150030708 . hal-00572034

**HAL Id: hal-00572034**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00572034>**

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

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premises. The first is that the West has typically been seen as modern, rational and dynamic, in contrast to a 'traditional' non-West. The second is that technology in general, and 'new media' in particular, tend to be pegged to the future while 'old media' and ritualized practices are relegated to the past. His headline argument, then (his 'geography of the new'), is to argue against such false binaries, demonstrating continuities and overlaps between East and West, tradition and modernity, and magic and technology (although not, for the most part, economy and culture – but see pp. 322–3 on gift economies). This is all very well, yet as Morley himself notes (p. 175), ironically, of one such binary (the conflation of the West with modernity), it is also very well-established ground.

*Media, modernity and technology* should, however, prove of interest in a number of regards. It provides a good historical introduction to British cultural studies (particularly insofar as cultural studies has been concerned with the media), to Morley's relationship with key figures in that tradition (e.g. Stuart Hall), and to the trajectory of Morley's own work. In relation to the last of these, it recalls his seminal work on the ways in which 'local' spaces and technologies (the sitting room, home, family television) are bound up with the constitution of much wider cultural identities (e.g. 'nation'). Indeed, some of the book's most insightful passages occur where he nudges this work forward, as in Chapter 7 on identity and the 'mediated home'. Unfortunately, such passages are somewhat peripheral, the main thrust of the book predicated largely – and self-consciously (p. 327) – on reviews of what other writers have had to say on historical geographies of modernity.

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**Cities of pleasure: sex and the urban socialscape.** Edited by Alan Collins. London: Routledge. 2006. 248 pp. £70.00 Cloth. ISBN 0415360129.

*Cities of pleasure* draws together economists, geographers and other social scientists to consider the growth of sex-based businesses and markets in contemporary cities. This book, which began life as a special issue of *Urban studies*, is attempting to offer something new to the study of urban sexual geographies – namely a focus on economic processes and a theoretical perspective that is not solely reliant on queer theory. These are both important and much needed developments, but neither theme is necessarily explored in ways that will inspire cultural geographers.

Many of the arguments offered in the book by contributors from geography (Bell and Binnie; Hubbard) and sociology (Skeggs et al.) are fascinating and insightful, but they will be familiar to many readers. However, this work sits a little uneasily beside the work of the editor and other contributors writing from a more traditionally economic perspective. Collins attempts to apply a rational choice economic framework to the search for marriage and sexual pleasure in contrasting urban and rural settings. Similarly, Cameron applies a 'club goods model' in his ideal-typical modelling of the evolution of sexual markets in 'tolerant' cities. In pursuing these theoretical explorations, both authors rely on sociobiological perspectives on

human sexuality that seem politically suspect after two decades of queer critique. In other respects, both authors have valuable new perspectives to offer on the interaction of micro- and macro-economic processes in the development, towards 'maturity', of markets in sexual transactions and the growth of gay urban villages.

The chapters in this book tend to fall into one of two camps. Either they proclaim contemporary cities to be tolerant, emancipatory spaces that celebrate and enable sexual pleasure and diversity; or, they buy into a revanchist model that sees sexual freedom being curtailed at every turn. Sadly too few of the contributors develop a more nuanced exploration of the complexities and contradictions of the both/and dialectic between these two positions.

It is time that sexual geographers take economic processes, transactions and markets more seriously in our consideration of the sexualization of urban spaces. However, this book demonstrates that economists could benefit from engaging with many of the critical insights developed by cultural geographers, feminists and queer theorists, if they are going to study the sexual pleasures of contemporary city dwellers.

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