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GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Volume 18, Numbers
2-3, 2012, pp. 387-405 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press



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QUEER HISTORIES AND THE GLOBAL CITY

Robert G. Diaz

Metropolitan Lovers: The Homosexuality of Cities

Julie Abraham

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 244 pp.

Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong

Helen Hok-Sze Leung

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009. 149 pp.

Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity, and Interaction in Cape Town

Andrew Tucker

Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 256 pp.

San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, London, Cape Town, Prague, Taipei, Hong Kong, Bangkok: the list of cities that have, in the last decade, been touted as catering to a gay consumer continues to grow. In its 2009 Autumn–Winter issue, the Singapore-based magazine *PLUTO: People Like Us Travel Orbit* added Copenhagen to this list.¹ *PLUTO* promoted the city’s tolerant nature and “queer friendly” tourist amenities. These characteristics provided the perfect environment for the 2009 World Out Games (the largest gay-themed international sports and cultural event held in the area), which consequently cost 4.5 million dollars to host. The magazine also focused on John Goss, the inventor of Utopia-Asia (www.utopia-asia.com), a website that provides detailed descriptions of gay business and social services (saunas, bars, clubs, and restaurants) found in a gamut of Asian

cities. Goss, a white gay man, invented the site after falling in love with Bangkok as a tourist.

PLUTO embodies the coupling of neoliberal politics with queer cultural discourses. It highlights the emerging importance of the globalized gay subject in the formation of queer life in the city. Goss eerily echoes this fact in his interview. When asked about the challenges that gay businesses face, he responds by saying: "Maintaining quality! Too many businesses fall flat fighting for scraps at the bottom of the budget barrel. Aim for high quality and you can maintain higher prices for quality service. Gays are famously picky but they are going to spend money for fun no matter what. I think that's the reason they prove more resilient than their straight counterparts. An economic downturn is the time to promote your business: not only will it help you survive, but you'll be reaping the benefits when cash starts flowing again."² Goss registers the homonormalizing impulses of capitalism in the contemporary moment. His remark encourages the acceptance of particular forms of queerness as long as juridical and economic liberation would further the production of material wealth. Absent from his statement are the many issues queer- and non-queer-identified subjects experience as they are directly affected by economic inequity, uneven development, and poverty. Goss sees a future where only the stylishly spendy queer mobile cosmopolitan will survive, for he is the only one who matters. Interestingly, this cosmopolitan is oftentimes male.

Amid this backdrop, how might we locate other conditions of possibility for the queer subject who does not fall into the "gay consumer" category? Could the histories of these cities themselves beg further complication?³ Is it possible to imagine the "gay subject" in the postcolonial Third World as not merely mimicking the West? How might we resist seeing the homogenization of queer subjectivity through a more thoughtful unpacking of the hybrid practices and disparate communities present in the postcolonial metropolis? How might the local and the global intersect? Could we reimagine the city as still producing the possibility of queer intimacies, knowledges, and interactions that challenge dominant forms of heteronormative and even homonormative culture, even if the latter continues to shape the urban landscape? How might recent scholarship in the field examine linkages between queer politics and the continually evolving transnational metropolis?

To varying degrees, Andrew Tucker's *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity, and Interaction in Cape Town*, Helen Hok-Sze Leung's *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong*, and Julie Abraham's *Metropolitan Lovers: The Homosexuality of Cities* all center on the city as the key site for unpacking disparate queer cultures. Discussing Tucker and Leung's works more thoroughly and

Abraham's more briefly, I argue that the first two authors are more successful at deterritorializing and reshifting queer studies as a theoretical and political project outside the West. In a moment of intensified counterterrorism, necropolitical nationalism, and resurgent yet covert forms of empire, both Leung's and Tucker's projects have much to say about queer subjects who are simultaneously affected by and resist Western imperialism's effects. Thus they also enter into an ongoing political discussion in contemporary queer studies, the thrust of which is to challenge the normalization of queer politics as a product of expanding capital both locally and abroad.⁴ Although these projects cover distinctly different metropolitan spaces and populations (Cape Town, Hong Kong, and such US cities such as New York and Chicago), I would also argue that they nonetheless show us what is still possible within the field, as we continue to think about the relationship between queer identity and cosmopolitan life. As a general (and of course, limited) schematic, all three books focus on the following analytic nodes: (1) the city as having a local history that is inherently linked up to national history, (2) the urban landscape as fostering an array of queer resistances and queer intimacies and, (3) queer performances of the everyday that, in their very acts, destabilize and expand the limited understandings of their respective cosmopolitan and national imaginaries. In differing detail, the works elaborate all these schematics as they seek to locate what, in these particular cities, queer communities look like.

Tucker's *Queer Visibilities* examines the many facets of queer cultural life in South Africa's "most liberal" city. Although serving as the metonym for the country's turn away from a history of systematized racism into a more tolerant future, Cape Town could also be characterized as a space filled with contradictions stemming from this vexed history. For instance, although gay-owned businesses are generally open to everyone in the queer community, these businesses still discriminate against "black" and "colored" South Africans. Inhabitants embody these contradictions as they navigate and interact with each other. The exclusionary history of the past affects socializations of the present, in that national, racial, linguistic, and class boundaries shape Cape Towners' everyday lives. As Tucker notes, "In a country like South Africa, queer experiences are further complicated by the extraordinary way in which communities have historically been spatially regulated by the state. The use of 'race' as the basis of a system of discrimination has left the country with deep social, economic, and political scars. Queer communities today have therefore also remained strongly influenced by the way colonial and later apartheid mechanisms compartmentalized, regulated, and manipulated groups" (2). Being a geographer, Tucker is ultimately interested in the relationship between Cape Town's racial history and its urban spatialization. The

project moves through various enclaves, beginning with the most “visibly” queer space in the city (De Waterkant) to the larger outlying townships (moving from a predominantly “white” community to “colored” and “black” ones). Although the book’s chronology makes sense, I did wonder whether starting from the city’s center and most visibly gay area (which is also, consequently, the “whitest” area) does not repeat the very privileging of whiteness that *Queer Visibilities* seems to resist. It seems that in Tucker’s attempt to contextualize whiteness, he also centers the book’s overarching narrative thread on it. What I do find useful about the project’s beginning is that the author makes a point of contextualizing the various polarizations in the city. He asks: How might these specific queer spaces bleed into and regulate each other? Tucker notes that “a study of queer visibility in Cape Town must consequently be seen both as a project that draws on geographical concepts of sexuality and race and also an attempt to offer a new perspective on dealing with cross-cultural queer communities in postcolonial environments” (26). Of particular interest are the ways racial enclaves produced different queer cultures. The theoretical move here is reminiscent of ethnographic projects that acknowledge how postcoloniality creates new queer vocabularies and queer modalities.⁵ *Queer Visibilities* adds to this growing archive by shifting the subject and site of inquiry outside the West, to find new ways to think about queer subjectivity delinked from Western epistemologies.

Visibility and invisibility become key frameworks for the book. Instead of marking a process whereby queer persons make themselves legible to the state, visibility is understood as a form of sociality between and within competing marginalized groups. “Queer visibility” is an “attempt to explore why difference may or may not exist within and between communities and how visibility and appreciation of difference depends on how groups have developed elsewhere. It therefore also initially shifts that argument away from the ‘global’ or ‘the local’ and instead focuses on how difference becomes possible when communities interact internally” (5). Although this framework does not seem all that new, given that queer scholarship in the last few years has begun to unpack how queer communities get stratified according to various boundaries of affiliation and kinship (the most recent works on state-sanctioned queer narratives that espouse gay marriage at the expense of queers of color, noncitizens, and the underclass are the most concrete example), what I do find refreshing about Tucker’s use of visibility is that he specifically thinks of it as inter-/intracommunity contact marked by the city’s (and nation’s) specific historical legacy. The evolution of localized queer subjectivity is always already connected to national practices of racism. This is especially relevant in South Africa, since “visibility” is one of the most oft-used

identifiers for classifying individuals as “white,” “coloured,” or “black” by the state in the first place.

The first few chapters discuss Cape Town’s queer groups as they have settled in disparately located areas. In the first chapter, Tucker focuses on white gay men in De Waterkant and the outlying suburbs. Although similar in their racial classification, white gay men are separated along class, linguistic, and migratory lines. Tucker suggests that “in Cape Town, class divisions between white queer groups have been perpetuated by a uniquely South African (and unique to Cape Town) historical factors” (56).⁶ This perceived ethnic and linguistic divide shapes their interactions. The assumption, he argues, is that Afrikaans speakers (who are of “Boer” ancestry) possess lower class status than their English-speaking (and thus British) counterparts. English speakers are seen as more wealthy and urbanized than Afrikaners. This discrepancy is palpable when Tucker observes Gat parties and the individuals who participate in them. Gat parties are gatherings (*Gat* is Afrikaans for “hole”) where Afrikaner men who live in the suburbs meet to create opportunities for mingling and networking. Tucker interviews those who frequent these events and those who shy away from them. He comes to the conclusion that “for some men from the City Bowl or Atlantic Seaboard, Gat parties and the lives of men who inhabit the suburbs (especially the Northern Suburbs) appear at times incongruent with their own lifestyles” (64). The parties signify a move away from the cosmopolitan vibe of De Waterkant, since they do not require one to buy into the city’s consumer culture.

Tucker then shifts his attention to the predominantly colored (and larger) areas outlying Cape Town in the next chapter, “Coloured Visibilities.” Similar to the historical contextualizing of De Waterkant and the northern areas of Cape Flats, he begins with a discussion of how “coloured” enclaves formed during apartheid. He specifically tracks this formation by focusing on the vibrancy and destruction of District Six (which is now called Zonnebloem). District Six at its peak “was home to a vibrant coloured community. It had come into being during the late nineteenth century as a racially mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artists, labourers, and new migrants” (69). These populations were then moved as a consequence of the 1966 Group Areas act, since the area was deemed white only. Relocating these communities into the sand flats destroyed their way of life. Colored communities had provided a space for queer persons to act as visible participants. In a sense, “such relocations affected the lives of coloured queer men who, alongside merchants, shop owners, labourers, and mixed-race families, had also found an open and accepting space to express a very visible and unique culture” (74). Moffies and their accompanying drag are the remnants of

this vibrant culture. Even though both terms have come to mean any queer man, in common parlance, *Moffie* and *Moffie drag* trace their roots to the practices of queer effeminate men in District Six and similar colored communities. Tucker argues that in District Six, colored queer men “were freer to experiment with different social configurations” (77). This openness is tied to the fact that colored areas were made up of a conglomeration of other marginalized groups, whereby a family could live side by side with sex workers, or merchants beside “gangs.” Even “coon carnivals” (a minstrel festival held annually on January 2), which often promoted the way of life in colored areas, featured Moffies and cross-dressing men as active participants.

This “acceptability,” however, was also policed according to outward signs of gender difference. Tucker notes that effeminate queer men could have relationships with heterosexually identified men, as long as both parties conformed to performances of masculinity and heteropatriarchy. Discussing gang members and their taking on of cross-dressing sexual partners, Tucker concludes that

the reinforcement of gender roles plays an important part in the social and sexual relationships that occur within these coloured communities. Similar to cross-dressing men who lived in District Six, these men’s attempt to emulate the social mannerisms and dress of women marks them out as a very visible and unique category of individual. . . . The very “obviousness” of many queer men in drag tied to the femininity inherent in such acts, permits these men a degree of social safety when socializing with the “straight” community. (86)

In other words, the seeming openness of colored enclaves comes at the expense of particularly rigid notions of masculinity that these intimacies nonetheless uphold. In terms of Tucker’s reading of drag and queer identity, I have some hesitations about his constant valorization of the “obviousness” of the cross-dressing these men enact. Continually referring to the cross-dressers as men, or *only* as gay men dressing in drag, he does not really consider the fact that these might not be “gay men in drag” at all. Moffies in drag, and those who cross-dress in general, could also claim positionalities that exceed normative notions of homosexuality and Western gay identity. Moreover, throughout the chapter, Tucker seems to suggest that dressing as women offers these men some safety from retribution within the community (86), yet he does not seem to question how this safety is brokered on an assumption of both appropriate “female” attributes and strict gender codes. In many ways, this safety already conforms to social structures that allow patriarchal

assumptions about women (and other sexually marginalized people) in the first place—through male patronage and notions of a kind of helplessness in need of relief. What does resonate in this chapter, however, is the interesting notion that “in some coloured communities, concepts of sexual identity and gender identity, tied to a specific spatial appropriation of heteronormative space, have led to different ways of becoming visible than in some historically white communities” (99).

In this regard, Tucker also focuses on black African townships and their accompanying queer communities. He studies how black queer men have strategically deployed unique visibilities. He historicizes the creation of black townships to show how residents in these areas “inhabit a totally different world to that of many coloured and white individuals” (106). Although little research has been done on black townships and queerness, Tucker writes that documented narratives of mining towns suggest close same-sex relationships. During the mining period, young black men who had taken part in “mine marriages” were referred to as “wives.” These individuals performed the domestic labor associated with women in the larger community (108). Same-sex activity, penetrative and otherwise, would also occur in these couplings. Tucker uses these data to contradict the assumption during the 1990s (made most infamous in Winnie Mandela’s speech) that homosexuality is inherently “Un-African” and that it was brought on by colonizing powers from the West. He notes that such an assumption “not only attempts to foreclose the discussion of how same-sex sexual relations have been part of black African communities in southern Africa, it also robs contemporary queer-identified groups of any ‘authentic voice’ with which to speak” (112). Contemporary examples of a black queer culture could also be seen in Xhosa communities, for instance, through the figures of the Ivy and Pantsula. As Tucker notes, “Ivys were seen ‘to take care in appearance’ and Pantsulas were men who dressed and behaved in more overtly masculine ways” (116). After apartheid, the figure of the Ivy “developed in unison with ‘Pantsula’” to “denote music, dance, fashion styles rather than sexualities” (116). Tucker’s research suggests that aside from being aesthetic figures that conformed to gender norms, the Ivy and Pantsula were also sexually active in their communities (116). Compared with other queer communities, black Africans also experience the most homophobia. Tucker argues that “it is among black African township men that this violence is most forceful. Cases of gang rape against black African queer men, along with premeditated beatings and frequent verbal attacks, were often documented during the research period” (129). He attributes this violence to the conflict arising from black visibility and contact with Xhosa community values. Although understandable, I find Tucker’s automatic paralleling of violence to cultural values also suspect. He locates vio-

lence in “tradition,” which in the end might limit other possible explanations for the intensification of homophobia in these spaces. Is it not plausible to imagine that precisely because Xhosa communities (and other black townships) have experienced the worst forms of violence from the state, this violence is then displaced onto queer bodies within the community? It would be as easy to see this aggressivity as stemming from the systematic oppression that the state enacts on black bodies (both before and after apartheid). I would have hoped for more thorough analysis of these possibilities, which Tucker does not provide.

The book’s last chapters are grouped according to the theme of invisibilities. The chapter on social invisibility suggests that although apartheid had officially ended, immense material disparities continue, which shape queer interactions. There is a sizable difference in income between groups formerly classified as white, colored, and black. This disparity has affected how queer populations both perceive each other and move between queer spaces within Cape Town. According to Tucker, “The most basic and limiting factors that can stop some coloured and black African queers accessing the gay village is simply the distance” (146). The city’s spatialization is a remnant of apartheid, and thus it shapes the economics of the seemingly “cosmopolitan” gay village. When nonwhite queers do reach De Waterkant, traces of material unevenness come to the fore, as businesses informally limit their clientele to white gay men, whom they perceive to possess the most capital. The chapter “Political Invisibilities” tracks the life of specific activist groups. It particularly follows the development of Cape Town’s Pride parade. Similar to other Pride celebrations in Western cities, Cape Town’s parade shifted from being a grassroots event to a profitable endeavor that also fosters South Africa’s image as a newly tolerant nation-state. The chapter “The Costs of Invisibility” centers on the lack of contextualization around Cape Town queer populations, even within the contemporary moment. It specifically uses the outbreak and subsequent representation of HIV/AIDS as a marking point for this lack. If, in the United States and in other European countries, the queer body has stood in as the metonym for AIDS, in Cape Town HIV/AIDS has predominantly been associated with images of women and heterosexual relationships. Tucker suggests that by providing in-depth analysis of queer lives and sexual practices in Cape Town, his work subtends the overrepresentation of HIV/AIDS transmission through heterosexual contact in South Africa. He writes what would at best be perceived as a gross generalization (190).

If in Tucker’s *Queer Visibilities* the spatialization of Cape Town becomes a key trope for analyzing national history and local queer life, in Helen Hok-Sze

Leung's *Undercurrents* cinema becomes the focal site for unpacking Hong Kong's history and queer culture. While discussing Asian Pacific films that highlight urban scenery, in *Geopolitics of the Visible* Roland Tolentino suggests that, on the one hand, "the city is the space against which to symptomatically read the affects of historical and geographic developments of late capitalism as experienced in the Asia Pacific. On the other hand, the 'city' films map out tensions between the hegemonically planned (city developers and urban planners) and those who struggle with it every day (individuals and groups). Thus, the city is the space where individual subjectivity and group or national identity are to be deciphered and contested" (137). In Hong Kong cinema's case, deciphering these contestations requires an understanding of the city as a (post)colony. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine an allegory for capitalist development in Hong Kong film without linking this allegory to the anxieties that the 1997 handover to China produced, especially because of the immense capital amassed during British rule. These historical linkages are certainly felt through the pages of *Undercurrents*. As Leung notes in her reading of Wong Kar Wai's *Days of Being Wild*, which for many Hong Kong film critics is *the* most influential Chinese-language film of the 1990s, "the film's obsession with time, dates, and memory—a theme that recurs in all of Wong's subsequent films—mirrors a collective fixation in Hong Kong during the time leading to the handover" (25). She indexes Aihwa Ong's notion of "flexible citizenship," since the narrative of departure from and inevitable return to the city post-1997 has been the predominant model for thinking about how its inhabitants connect to the urban space during this period.⁷ However, Leung moves away from the notion that the city's value is tied only to these migratory flows. Decoupling her framework from this stereotype, Leung challenges the temporal logics that equate Hong Kong with outward postcolonial migration. She examines how queer subjects navigate Hong Kong from within, thereby utilizing queerness and queer performance as effective ways to reinvigorate the seemingly fixed urban landscape. She locates peripheral spaces within the metropole— islands, nooks, spaces for cruising, outlying undeveloped or soon-to-be-developed areas—to think about how these reflect local forms of queer cultural life that seek to escape their cultural constraints. She argues that in many postcolonial Third World cities, the rural and the urban commingle, and thus she espouses, following the work of Judith Halberstam, a persistent critique of "metronormativity." She questions queer theory that has traditionally privileged limited understandings of the city as the locus of a liberatory queer life.

In the first and meatiest chapter of the book, "Sex and the Postcolonial

City,” Leung goes through a gamut of films—from Stanley Kwan’s *Still I Love You* to Yonfan’s *Bishonen*—to highlight “how queer relationality strains to (mis) fit the cityscape, and, in so doing, reveals the city’s secret nooks and crannies, its margins and borders, its unreality and its possibilities” (39). She begins the section with the city’s most visited tourist area, Victoria Peak, noting how the historian Lu Wei-Luan writes of the peak’s view, which the latter characterizes as a certain “opaqueness.”⁸ Leung suggests that even in one of the most often traveled (and marketed) areas in Hong Kong, which should provide a clearer view of the metropolis, Lu re-vision this perspective as ironically unable to fully capture the complexity of the urban space. Leung uses this metaphor quite powerfully, as an effective metaphor for the possibilities inherent in trying to “find” queerness in a city as overdetermined as Hong Kong. She suggests that it is precisely this opaqueness amid the networked or “efficient” landscape that allows for furtive and unexpected queer encounters. Supporting this argument, she then reads Kwan’s *Still I Love You* as the director’s rumination of a queer subject’s ambivalence as he reflects on how postcolonial Hong Kong has shaped both his Chineseness and his queerness. The film, made during the months preceding the handover, is preoccupied with notions of passing as Chinese, and of the act of navigating the urban space through uncertainty and detachment. Leung remarks on a statement by Kwan that “in Hong Kong, we know that we are ‘Chinese’ but also that we are distinctly different from Chinese in other places” (13). Kwan also recalls his inability to connect with Cantonese and English tunes being taught in school. In both these instances, Leung locates the queer subject’s mourning, stemming from the inability to fully embody appropriate modalities of nationality, ethnicity, and sexuality. Instead, what Kwan ends up valuing in the film are his experiences of transience and fleeting connections with the city. According to Leung, this movement allows Kwan to play on the ironies effected by his ambivalence. For example, reading the director’s mentioning of various Hong Kong streets that have colonial names (such as Princess Margaret Road and Tonkin Street), Leung writes that

what comes across as queer in *Still I Love You* is thus not Kwan’s certainty of being gay (or Chinese) but his loving evocation of a disappearing time-space that is not bound to such reassurance. . . . In *Still I Love You*, Kwan attempts to map, through his camera, this queerscape as Hong Kong’s postcolonial space—the hybrid everyday locales, caught up with speedy changes and traces of half remembered histories, that contribute to their inhabitants’ sense of being somehow “distinctly different” from people whose identity they otherwise share. (14)

Borrowing from Gordon Brent Ingram's notion of queerscape, Leung sees this ambivalence as an interesting counterpoint, noting that "just as the globalization of sexuality results not in the homogenization but in intricate processes of trans-cultural exchanges, translations, and appropriations, urban queer spaces that are produced at the confluence of global and local forces do not necessarily replicate a predictable metropolitan sexuality but most likely result in hybrid spaces that retain varying degrees of local traces" (15).

In another section of the chapter, Leung links this notion of movement to cruising. Cruising becomes an important act that opens up the central business district in Hong Kong, as a film like *Bishonen* demonstrates. In Yonfan's work, Leung seizes on the character Jet's various points of connection with the people he cruises (first a man he encounters and he sleeps with, then a couple who beckon him after the sexual encounter). These quotidian moments in Lan Kwei Fong (a street that has become synonymous with gay bars and bohemian trendy establishments) open up the entire city to a different reading, one that suggests that even within the business district's rigidity, it is still possible to foster queer interactions and unscripted adventures. As Leung notes, "*Bishonen* is most interesting when it uncovers latent queer spaces of the neighborhood and shows in unexpected ways how they become activated by sexually adventurous inhabitants" (23). In many ways, then, the city's queerness is precisely dependent upon the performance of queer sociality by its citizens, in the act of cruising, for instance. Leung also focuses on Hong Kong's geographically marginal sites, such as Mayfly Island. Particularly in the movie *Island Tales*, she connects the film's looping nature and the inability of the island's inhabitants to leave (again, an effective allegory for Hong Kong during this moment) as a way to think about enforced contact between individuals and what these contacts offer them. Leung's usage of contact reminds me of how Samuel Delany thinks about the term when he describes sexual subcultures in Times Square porn theaters. According to Delany, while often nonnetworked, fleeting, and random, moments of contact nonetheless offer crucial conduits for queer knowledge production, interclass interaction, and survival amid governmental policies of erasure.⁹ As Leung notes when she observes the film, "Once the option of leaving has been taken away, there is little else for the characters to do than to give in to spontaneous and accidental encounters. The philosophy behind such an impetus offers an alternative perspective on Hong Kong as a community" (28).

In the next two chapters ("Between Girls" and "Trans Formations"), Leung focuses on topics that have often been ignored in the queer studies of postcolonial cities: female intimacies/kinships and transgender identity in the urban space.

She examines “films with subplots that portray girls in intimate relations with each other: they are daughters, neighbors, or best friends of the main characters. While their sexual intimacy often remains underdeveloped or unresolved, their very presence significantly troubles the main plots, especially in relation to adult heterosexuality” (50). What is refreshing about this section is that it recuperates films that do not necessarily have explicitly “queer” characters. In fact, the queerness of these films is directly linked to the intimacies of the women in them—intimacies that escape codification as heteronormative melodrama. These intimacies then question the pejorative quality of stories that depict women coming of age, a common theme in Hong Kong cinema. Even lesbian characters in films like Sylvia Chang’s *Tempting Heart* proudly display their inability to have children, thus flaunting what Leung refers to as an inability to follow repro-time. “These stories, while often truncated and unfinished, are traces of what has been obscured, overshadowed, or bleached out of existence in the inexorable narrative of heterosexual womanhood” (64). Leung is also concerned with rethinking notions of transgender identity. She borrows from Peter Jackson’s “pre-gay/post-queer” as markers of sexuality in Asia: *pre*, meaning a sexuality that predates the advent of lesbian and gay politics in the West, and *post*, meaning sexuality that confounds Anglo-American constructions.¹⁰ Offering a rereading of the film version of *Swordsman 2*, Leung suggests that through the figure of the aggressive, manipulative, and ever-present Dongfang Bubai (who consequently is given more importance in the film than the novel), the film gives “a spectacular display of transsexual femininity that has successfully eclipsed the centrality of masculine heroism in the genre” (77).

In the most moving chapter in the book, “In Queer Memory,” Leung reflects on Hong Kong actor Leslie Cheung’s legacy. She follows the actor’s iconicity and the criticism around his ambivalence in the public eye. Cheung never “came out” as a gay man, and thus he has been accused of strategic concealments by the press and his fans. Leung asks what the value of such concealment would be in reconfiguring expectations around sexuality and kinship within the local culture. She writes that “by exploring these aspects of his legacy, I want to suggest that Cheung is a queer icon *because*—not in spite—of his ambivalence” (88). In this regard, Leung provides a good counterpoint to narratives of visibility such as Tucker’s, in that she calls for a more nuanced understanding of practices of queer identity that cannot be simply categorized as either visible or invisible, out or not out. What of visibility that has its delays, hesitations, and playfulness? What is fascinating about Leung’s reading is that the constant desire for Cheung to be out, and the latter’s refusal to state definitively that he is gay, produces a ver-

sion of queerness that refuses pejorative connections to knowledge or authenticity. Queerness in this instance is a process of refashioning and re-creation. Studying the gossip around Cheung (in the form of blogs and magazine articles), Leung is “interested in the way gossip can function through the mass media as a site of *self-making*, both for the celebrity whom the media is bent on ‘outing’ and for the queer spectators ‘in the know’ who must read between the lines to wrest queer meanings out of ambivalence” (91). Leung also suggests that Cheung’s depictions of his queerness demand reconsidering traditional notions of kinship and family within Hong Kong society. In another moving moment in the chapter, Leung narrates a concert where Cheung thanks both his mother and his partner, Daffy Tong. In *Across 1997*, Cheung stuns the audience by referring to Tong as his mother’s “bond son” (*qizai*) (98).¹¹ According to Leung, Cheung reconfigures familial scripts within Hong Kong culture through this act. In doing so, he has also subtended the most dominant stereotype around queer coupling in the last decade: gay marriage. As Leung notes:

The struggle for gay marriage imposes parameters for figuring queer lives, and as a result, renders what falls outside of these parameters not only illegitimate but also *never* (to be) legitimate. By contrast, Cheung invoked a much older form of relational practice whereby kinship terms within the family are appropriated to accommodate affective and sexual relations not intelligible within the familial and social order. (100)

Cheung’s displacement of the marriage narrative with an older kinship structure legitimates queer intimacy through moments of self-making that also go beyond Western familial models. Even in Cheung’s death, his family refers to Tong as a “quasi kin.” This, according to Leung, opens up the kinship structure, since “the ‘quasi-kin’ relations of nonblood ‘brothers and sisters’ bestow a certain fluidity and openness on the familial structure, whereby queer relations may be accommodated from within rather than reinvented from without such as a parallel structure (such as gay marriage)” (100).

Similar to Tucker’s *Queer Visibilities* and Leung’s *Undercurrents*, Abraham’s *Metropolitan Lovers* offers a reading of how queer life has been affected by the ever-changing urban landscape. Abraham focuses much of her attention on the historical shifts occurring in major cities in the United States, Britain, and France since the nineteenth century. The representations of these shifts—whether celebratory or ambivalent—then depend on accompanying “representative” sexualities. Departing from Tucker and Leung’s projects, however, Abraham seems to

make a larger claim about the functioning of metropolitan queerness in the perceptions of modernity itself (Western modernity specifically). She “maps the convergences, the exchanges of meaning, the transfers of value, and the intertwined fates of the understanding of homosexuality and the city that have in turn shaped our comprehension of modernity” (xvii). Throughout the book, one gets the sense that although the times have indeed changed, the fate of the homosexual continues to be tied to the city’s evolution. This is especially true within the Western literary and sociological tradition that Abraham reads. *Metropolitan Lovers* examines the works of figures such as Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Oscar Wilde, James Baldwin, Alfred Kinsey, and Ebbing, moving from a discussion of lesbian sexuality in Balzac’s *Girl with the Golden Eyes*, to the presence of prostitution in Zola’s *Nana*, to the discussion of secrecy in Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray*. In all of these gestures, Abraham suggests that the quintessential tension between what is “natural” and what is “artificial” affects notions of the urban (152). These notions of authenticity and artificiality have plagued notions of queer intimacy and sociality from the onset. Abraham also writes that “it is possible to argue, in fact, that despite the tectonic shifts in social and intellectual possibilities initiated by gay liberation and feminist politics in the late 1960’s, there has been a remarkable consistency in cultural conceptions of homosexuality in the West, from the era of Wilde and James to the present” (44).

While it is certainly possible to argue for the consistency of such figurations of homosexuality in the West, I wonder about the politics of such an assertion when it does not provide a more thorough critique of how this historical consistency matters in the contemporary moment—especially outside these major cosmopolitan centers. Although Abraham provides a lucid tracing of how these authors and their works affect each other’s notions of homosexuality—how the notion of secrecy in James differs from that of Wilde, how the notion of “overstimulation” differs in the study of various Chicago School sociologists—I often felt like the project’s main purpose is to provide a lengthy comparative description of the queer representations of various artists without noting the significance of such a move theoretically. I am left to ponder, even after finishing the book, what these revelations do. In light of Tucker’s and Leung’s writing, I wish that Abraham had placed her work in larger conversation with critics within postcolonial, ethnic, and queer studies, beyond gesturing toward Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of the closet and David Harvey’s take on the “postmodern” city.¹² While Abraham does discuss the writings of Martin Manalansan and Delany in her afterword, this citational practice deploys their work to exemplify the presence of minority communities in New York rather than mobilize their theoretical claims (i.e., Manalansan’s

claim that the Filipino diaspora, especially in urban areas, is also a queer one and Delany's work on the functioning of "contact" in understanding knowledge production in Times Square). Nor is there discussion of HIV/AIDS except for a passing mention of *Angels in America*, and a description of how AIDS representations reiterate narratives of migration out of cities into small towns (280). This seems rather odd to me given that her study is concerned with large-scale tropes and their effects on queer representation. Moreover, given that Abraham favors the literary, I was perplexed by the lack of discussion of HIV/AIDS literature and performance. In the United States, HIV/AIDS and the dying of a large population en masse was the strongest catalyst for understanding queer politics, activism, and policing. HIV/AIDS is one of the flashpoints of the urban queer population in the United States that forced a rereading of the history of the past—around issues of sexuality and populations, and how narratives of disease are used to police others.¹³ Instead, Abraham seems to be concerned with the chronology of queer representation as a linear mapping of changes and representative affinities, rather than with, say, thinking about how queerness itself affects the project of historiography or even, as many have argued, the very notion of time.¹⁴ Thus when Abraham ends her introduction by saying her book is "an exploration of how we arrived here" (xix), I am left wondering whom she means by "we" and if indeed *arriving* is the most effective term to use when thinking of queerness in these complex times.

What is a notable, however, is that Abraham presents a strong and valid critique of current queer scholarship that focuses mostly on gay men. She even critiques Delany's own anecdotes in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*. She suggests that in one encounter with a woman in the theater, Delany's lack of curiosity highlights a certain illegibility of the female subject before him. This argument, which is consistent through the book, is enlightening. She shifts our attention to lesbian sexuality and the role of women within urban spaces. She writes that "women, and especially lesbians, were at the center of this complex of understandings of cities—whether the terms of discussion were vice and capital or nature and history—because of the ways in which dominant cultural understandings of gender and sexuality allowed for the entangling of these terms" (21). Abraham rightly criticizes the unchallenged centrality of gay subjects in historical discussion of queerness in the city (as manifest in the writings of such historians as Martin Duberman). In one chapter, she works through Balzac's description of the lesbian in *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*, an image of Paris as an urban hell obsessed with artifices and gold. Through the secretive character of Paquita, Balzac locates the city's falsities: "Balzac's novella turns on a particular set of ideas about lesbianism, which he draws on to express most fully—most personally—the threat

of his hellish Paris and the ultimate baselessness in this threat” (8). Lesbianism also becomes a key space for discussing intimacies between prostitutes, which she locates in Zola’s depiction of *Nana*. According to Abraham, *Nana* is a threat to Parisian social order precisely because her sexuality is uncontrollable. Thus “lesbianism as the vice of whores, sexuality at its most abandoned, does not simply confirm the utter degradation of prostitutes but represents the fundamental threat of vice itself to the social world of the city, which is the possibility that even gold might cease to control pleasure” (12). Outside the literary, Abraham also focuses on the figure of Jane Addams and her building of Chicago’s Hull House. As Abraham suggests, Addams “lived the model life of lesbian social political engagement that came to be described with praise by Carpenter and Hirschfield and with suspicion by Ellis and Freud” (117). Her life and activism produced a gamut of interpretations of female sexuality from key sociologists of her day. These interpretations are closely tied to the city, in that both Addams’s choosing of where to place Hull House and her activist work are affected by Addams’s views of Chicago’s metropolitan landscape. In almost all of the chapters, Abraham makes a point to discuss lesbian sexuality as shaping and being shaped by representations of the city. The new cosmopolitanisms promised by North Atlantic centers are certainly alluring to those living under geographic and ideological constraints. As Pheng Cheah declares in his treatise on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and human rights, they purport to connect individual freedom and the “power of transcendence with travel, mobility, and migration.”¹⁵ In arguing that this ruse fails, Cheah writes that

in each of these cases, the freedom that is promised is inaccessible to the world’s populations, who inhabit the other side of the international division of labor and are unable to move to OECD countries and top tier global cities. It is also severely undermined by the fact that the efficacy of these new cosmopolitanisms is generated by, and structurally dependent on, the active exploitation and impoverishment of the peripheral majorities.¹⁶

Given Cheah’s warning, how might queer studies offer useful correctives to actively engage cosmopolitan life within major cities in the West while also being attentive to queer communities within the peripheral majorities, the peripheral cities, and the marginal urban locales? How might we examine unequal queer communities and their cultural practices in relationship to varying notions of what it means to be a “queer cosmopolitan?” Could queer subjects in the global South resist the ruses of these new cosmopolitanisms through their everyday actions? How might they contradict, enact, and complicate these desires? These three works highlight

the possibilities of re-viewing the metropolitan through a queer lens. While their studies span multiple cities deemed “global” in nature, Tucker, Leung, and Abraham also show us the inherent contradictions and fissures within these “global” spaces. Queer inhabitants—their policing, their active engagement, their vocabularies, and their ways of surviving—reflect the local and historical shifts experienced by the city and the nation-state. As Tucker notes, “To assume that a global queer culture is usurping all those it encounters around the world could be to deny the possibility of hybridization and an appreciation of diversity” (60). By refusing to accede to the axiom that queer subjects are always being homogenized by cosmopolitan cultural norms, Tucker, Leung, and Abraham offer us a rich archive of queer practices that, I would hope, encourage future debate and analysis.

Notes

1. For the full story on the Gay Games on Copenhagen, see “Out Is In at Copenhagen,” *PLUTO: People Like Us Travel Orbit* (Singapore: Neu Ark Multimedia) Autumn–Winter 2009, 52–67.
2. Koh, Amos. “Finding Utopia,” *PLUTO: People Like Us Travel Orbit* (Singapore: Neu Ark Multimedia) Autumn–Winter 2009, 41.
3. *PLUTO* skipped over Manila as it located queer businesses in other Asian cities. Having been to queer spaces in the city (spread out over Malate, Pasig, and Ortigas), I wondered whether this elision could be connected to what critics such as Neferti Tadiar have argued as the geographic incommensurability of metropolitan Manila and the refusal of its urban excess to be contained. Even though foreign capital has invested in the city and the local government has attempted to channel the flow of bodies in a more effective fashion, the urban population itself complicates these efforts through its viral proliferation. For more on metro Manila, see Neferti Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
4. Some examples of these studies are Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003); and Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalisms in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
5. Some examples of these ethnographies are Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Larry La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); and Peter Jackson and Nerida Cook, *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand* (Chiang Ma: Silkorm Books, 2000).

6. Ironically, even though De Waterkant's gay clientele states an affinity with other urban queers in the United States or Europe, South Africa's past forces a rereading of this seemingly cohesive urban vibe. Tucker notes that contrary to their counterparts in the cities of Western nations like the United States and Britain, white queer communities in South Africa did not gain recognition through piecemeal confrontation with the state, either through mass protest or the legal contestatory process. Rather, their inclusion in mainstream culture through the granting of such rights as gay marriage, pension, and the right to adopt was a direct result of the government's ratification of the new constitution in 1996, and of the ANC's desire to resist all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on gender and sexuality. Thus, in many ways, it was precisely the shift to a removal of race-based discrimination that then precipitated the inclusion of queer rights in national legislative discourse. As Tucker suggests, in South Africa unlike other countries, "It is debatable how far white queer men themselves were actually responsible for such a shift" (46). In fact, white men did not have to contend with the harsh racial policies of apartheid and thus were not policed (or resistant) in the same way.
7. For a discussion of how "flexible citizenship" relates to economic migration out of and back to Hong Kong, see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
8. See Lu Wei-Luan, *Xianggang gushi: Geren Huiyu yu wenxue sikao (Hong Kong Stories: Personal Memories and Literary Reflections)* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.
9. For more on the differences between "networking" and "contact," see Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The culmination of such erasure in Delany's case is Mayor Rudy Giuliani's cleaning up of Times Square in the 1990s.
10. For a more thorough examination of "pre-gay/post-queer" identities and politics, see Peter Jackson, "Pre-Gay, Post-Queer: Thai Perspectives on Proliferating Gender/Sex diversity in Asia," *Journal of Homosexuality* 40, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-25.
11. See Leslie Chung, "Moon River," in *Leslie Chung Live in Concert 97*, VCD (Hong Kong: Rock, 1997), disc 2, track 8.
12. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).
13. Nayan Shah's research on Chinese immigrants in San Francisco and their representation as medical menace provides us with useful tools for reading the relationship between medicalizing discourse, racism, and heteronormative justifications of government policy around containment. See *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

14. Some examples of work on queer temporality and their relationship to race, class, and nationalism are Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); and Kara Keeling, "Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ* 15 (2009): 565–82.
15. See Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11.
16. Cheah, *Inhuman*, 11.