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Sexual learning and the seaside: relocating the 'dirty weekend' and teenage girls' sexuality

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This paper explores the geographical constitution of the 'dirty weekend' and teenage girls' sexuality by interrogating the cultural habitus of the seaside resort. It reidentifies the littoral pleasure zone as an active agent in sexual learning and disrupts taken-for-granted inscriptions of the seaside as an inert backdrop against which only traditional family holidays or hedonistic youthful activities take place. In the cultural imaginary of Britain, the seaside assumes centre-place as a site of normativity. At the same time, it indexes the social and spatial limits of disorder and connects coastal towns with diverse moral panics. While this place–image binary resists other interpretations, closure can be challenged by re*cognizing* the seaside as a cultural text that is to hold open the possibility of further re-readings and re-writings. In alignment with this broadening, two liminal sexual/textual topographies are narrated that cohere around the heterosexual carnivalesque of Brighton and the local experiences of adolescent girls in Margate. Issues are raised about the ways in which the specificity of place inflects sexual learning and how geographical insights can contribute to sex/sexuality education.

Stirring pebbles

> If you are squeamish
>
> Don't prod the
>
> beach rubble. (Sappho, fragment 84, translated by Mary Barnard, 1958)

Geographers insist that humans are 'intrinsically spatial beings' (Soja, 1996, p. 1) and argue that the tropes of space and place are of analytic importance in understanding the enactment of life. Taking the contention seriously, this paper foregrounds space and place as interpretive threads in an exploration of the subtended sexual landscapes of the seaside. It quarries beneath western representations of the coastal resort as a site of traditional values, such as those identified with

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heteronormative family holidays. It also unsettles stereotyped place-images of the littoral pleasure zone as a location where excesses are permitted during institutionalized periods of rest and recreation. In an attempt to articulate the socio-cultural construction of the spatial, it is through an interrogation of two relatively under-explored sexual cultures that the paper disorganizes the binary between the 'wholesome' and the 'raffish' to show how disorder is both accomplished and domesticated in coastal resorts.

It is posited that the seaside is not an inert or incidental surface variation, but a landscape that connotes social, moral and cultural values and meanings that are territorialized. Offering examples of how meaning generates spatial arrangements, which then impinge on meaning, it can be demonstrated that the seaside is not neutral but a site of contest and conflict where social relations, moralities, and cultures are made and remade. In the same way that these realms of consciousness and being impact on the routines and practices of daily life, it has been argued that 'understandings and concepts of space cannot be divorced from the real fabric of how people live their lives' (Shields, 1991, p. 7). In what follows, selected coastal resorts are enmeshed with the seaside's cultural symbolism and this material–mental dialectic or relationship between 'real-and-imagined' places (Soja, 1996) is mobilized to explore how the cultural habitus or disposition of a place (Lee, 1997) influences the sexual activities and learning that takes place there and how these in turn influence place-images. The specificity of space and place in sexual learning suggests that geographical insights can contribute to sex/sexuality education.

Avoiding the cultural pathologization of the sexual relations commonly associated with Brighton, perhaps Britain's foremost 'dirty weekend destination' (Shields, 1991, p. 106), and adolescent girls' sexuality in the Kentish resort of Margate (Emin, 2004a, b), the paper casts aside 'squeamishness' (McNee, 1984, p. 16) to show the importance of space and place in the production of sexual cultures and, in turn, their centrality in constituting specific cultural and discursive spaces. Specifically, both seaside and sexual behaviour are read as cultural texts. Facilitated by description and interpretation, textualization, as a mode of analysis, emphasizes the meditative and relational dimensions of culture across diverse axes of human existence. Just as culture is 'constructed' and 'deconstructed', it can be argued that landscapes are 'written' and 'read'. The usefulness of textualization as an investigative tool, and the multiple readings and re-readings it invites, has democratising potential since reading texts is not only 'a schematic for critical thinking', but, more significantly, it is 'a journey with no end' (Forbes, 2000, p. 141).

Reading sexual/textual landscapes

> The activity of reading [is] an endless, tantalising leading on, a flirtation without consummation, or if there is consummation, it is solitary, masturbatory. (Lodge, 1985, p. 26)

Since landscapes, such as the seaside, are 'authored', they can be understood as a kind of cultural text (Mitchell, 2000, p. 121) through which self-generated stories are told and re-told. Along with other signifying practices, texts can be read and re-read; and one commentator has argued that texts are 'written to be rewritten' (Rosenau, 1992, p. xiv). Cultural texts are diverse in form and embrace not only the familiar films, books, and artworks, but also theories and laws. They 'can include social practice' too (Shurmer-Smith & Hannam, 1994, p. 219); for example, holidaymaking and sexual activity. Imagined broadly, a text is a cluster of signs that range from manifest content and meaning to latent and hidden meaning. The unstraightforward nature of texts suggests that they are open to an infinite number of interpretations from a variety of perspectives. This deferment of resolution, expounded for instance by continental literary critics (Macherey, 1978), has prompted others to write sceptically of 'textuality as striptease' where conclusion, if achievable, is at best onanistic (Lodge, 1985, p. 20ff). Those of an overtly critical persuasion, however, attempt to mobilize the progressive possibility of diversity. In recognizing that 'a plurality of cultures also implies a multiplicity of landscapes' (Jackson, 1989, p. 177), orthodox consensus is displaced and the politics of place and space challenged.

In that the seaside may be regarded as a culturally produced text, it is telling stories about the world and, therefore, has a politics as well as a poetics. The geographically contextualized politics of the seaside are bound up with inclusion/exclusion (Sibley, 1995), about whose stories are told and whose occluded, and whose place-images circulated and whose impeded. The following interrogation focuses on two often under-articulated sexual/textual stories and, in raising issues about cultural, spatial, and sexual matters, it enters into the politics of recognition and possibility. It is argued that because life is inherently spatial, the work of sex/sexuality educators might benefit from connecting to a greater extent with geographers whose pioneering investigations into everyday life have challenged the largely asexual academic habitus. This point, brought home by Eagleton's observation that 'intellectual life for centuries was conducted on the tacit assumption that human beings had no genitals' (Eagleton, 2003, pp. 3–4), is borne out by the coyness of Carl Sagan's Pioneer space programme drawings of a naked male and female where the female has no genitalia, not even a line to represent the pudendal cleft. The less blushing habitus of scholars working in the field of spatial science, particularly in the burgeoning subdisciplinary areas of social, cultural and health geographies, are attending ever more critically to sex/sexuality and the ways in which it is geographically constituted and expressed (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Hubbard, 2000; Brown & Knopp, 2003).

Habitus—the culture of place itself

> The culture of a location, I want to suggest, is the cumulative product of the collective and sedimented history of that location, and like any history cannot be readily or easily dissolved but manifests a certain durability, marking its presence onto the

> contemporary social and physical landscape of the location in question. (Lee, 1997, p. 127)

The concept of habitus, concerned as it is with class cultures and configurations of taste and conduct, is intensely spatial and indicates how places and behaviours are enmeshed (Bourdieu, 1986). The habitus of a place (i.e. its disposition, culture or personality) mediates what happens there in very particular ways. The concept of habitus is mobilized here in order to explore the relationship between the seaside and its identification with sexual activity. The spatial aspects of cultural structures and value-systems come to the fore when considering the ways in which demeanour is influenced by pre-formed ideations or perceptions of specific places, from monuments and physical landscapes to resorts. These place-images, informed as they are by cultural productions including poetry, myths, postcards, and films, shape people's attitudes towards Brighton, Margate, and other British resorts. As Shields explains:

> The world is cognitively territorialised so that on the datum of physical geographic knowledge, the world is recoded as a set of spaces and places which are infinitely shaded with connotative characteristics and emotive associations. (1991, p. 264)

Place-images function alongside other structuring frameworks, for example systems of education and governance, to predispose the behaviour and action of inhabitants and visitors. These continual social processes, which operate subconsciously, help construct the cultural character of a place. They are, however, non-deterministic in that the habitual practices of permanent citizens and temporary denizens modify the personality of a location 'in an ongoing state of generation and regeneration' (Lee, 1997, p. 133). Places, from this perspective, are dynamic rather than fixed and have agency as articulated in an analysis of the city habitus of Coventry (Lee, 1997, pp. 136–140).

In foregrounding space as a key interpretive strand in social inquiry, this paper references Bourdieu's notion of habitus. More widely, it draws on spatialization that has been advanced through geographical inquiry, among other scholastic fields, from the 1990s. This 'vital discursive turn' (Soja, 1996, p. 96) encompasses more than a lexicon of spatial metaphors and registers, although these are used liberally throughout the paper to indicate how place and space are taken-for-granted in everyday life. Rather, spatialization contextualizes the diverse political arenas of human existence from the established axes of social identity—namely, class, race, and gender—to the newer alignments of age, culture, and sexuality.

The spatial logic of transgression: Brighton and the 'dirty weekend'

> On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time. (Orwell, 1951, p. 111)

The coastal fringe is not just a topographic margin but a site of marginality where 'immoral' leisure activities, which hitherto were only permitted during regulated intervals of reinvigoration, can take place all year round. The bourgeois

displacement of transgressive behaviours to the seaside town (Mitchell, 2000, p. 163) exemplifies what might be called 'the spatial logic of apartheid' (Bell & Haddour, 2000, p. 4), and in Britain this real-and-imagined separateness is epitomized by the south-coast resort of Brighton. Its very name is evocative of 'fighting, drinking, sex, misdemeanour—the pure pavilion of transgression' (Jenks, 2003, p. 169) and, as 'the location of the dirty weekend', it has 'historically embodied the genitals, rather than the heart' (Munt, 1995, p. 114). The cultural positioning of Brighton as a signifier of adult pleasures, associated with both hetero-sexual and homosexual freedoms, has a long history dating from the eighteenth century, and its erotically charged habitus is publicly displayed in its architecture, 'from the orbicular tits of King George's Pavilion onion domes, to the gigantic plastic dancer's legs which extrude invitingly above the entrance to the alternative cinema' (Munt, 1995, p. 114). It is possible to argue, however, that Brighton's 'raffish' celebrity (Shields, 1991, p. 106), sexual infamy and reputation as England's 'capital by the sea' have been lubricated by its proximity to London, relative ease of access by road and rail, and media hyperbole.

Perceived as the nation's premiere 'dirty weekend' resort, Brighton's reputation for promiscuity was at its height during the 1920s and 1930s when the laws governing divorce were significantly different to those of today and middle-class couples seeking separation required proof of adultery, which relied in the main on costly photographic evidence and witness statements from hotel staff (Shields, 1991, pp. 105–112). These 'sham' events (Shields, 1991, p. 107) were highly ritualized and often staged in hotels, such as the Metropole, which became familiar in courtrooms. They were also parodied in comic postcards where the humour worked at several levels:

> JUDGE: 'You are prevaricating, sir. Did you or did you not sleep with this woman?'
>
> CO-RESPONDENT: 'Not a wink, my lord!' (Orwell, 1951, p. 101)

Even though sexual licence in today's cultural climate does not require such geographic ghettoization, the enduring prominence of Brighton as a site of decadence not only maintains the moral adage that there is 'a place for everything and everything in its place' but reveals 'the conservative robustness of place-images' (Shields, 1991, p. 256).

The impulse to 'label' and identify resorts with sexual recalcitrance finds locally specific responses as demonstrated here in analyses of Brighton and Margate. As public enclaves of dissipation, coastal towns cater not only for unruly conduct that cannot be eliminated, but they also enable the surveillance and supervision of social, moral and cultural 'Other'. Containment of dissidence, whether the twentieth-century 'dirty weekend' or various other momentary suspensions of order, has for long been a prime aim of carnivals. As a social 'safety valve' dating from pre-industrial times in Europe (Jackson, 1989, p. 80), the symbolic inversions of the carnival function as a controlled means of social protest. The reversal of binary opposites, such as those of mind/body, sacred/profane, adult/child, day/night, rich/poor and male/female, are also spatial as in right/left, up/down, centre/margin,

private/public, high/low, inside/outside and frontstage/backstage. The dualisms are frequently found in combination as in this description of carnival:

> Men and women commonly cross-dress; peasants are king for a day; the divisions between private and public space are ignored and the genitals and orifices of the body are celebrated at the expense of the head. (Cresswell, 1996, p. 123)

It is not only Brighton and the 'dirty weekend' that reveal the carnivalesque. The upside-down world of the seaside is mobilized to disclose the 'growing pains' of one of Britain's favourite fictional characters, the teenage diarist Adrian Mole. It is at the east-coast resort of Skegness, while on holiday with his father and pregnant mother, that Adrian's life is overturned when he learns of the birth of an illegitimate half-brother. Disrupting the front-room appearance of respectability associated with 'wholesome' family vacations and bracing August weather, Adrian writes how 'we sat in a wind shelter on the promenade and he informed me and my mother that he was the father of Stick Insect's one-day-old baby boy' (Townsend, 1985, p. 74). In this topsy-turvy summer holiday, it is the 15-year-old Adrian who, having been deserted by his father both literally and figuratively, reverses the adult/child dualism and takes charge of events, 'I packed all the suitcases and made my mother wash her face and do her hair, then we sat and waited for Mrs Braithwaite' (Townsend, 1985, p. 75). Although this poignant back-room vignette micro-maps Adrian's and Mrs Mole's unique experiences of adultery, it is at the same time a shared encounter in the public imagination. In that the seaside resort is a spatial code for promiscuity and disarray, the events portrayed are not to have been wholly unexpected. The seaside, here, signals and contextualizes illicit adult desires and their outcomes. It also demonstrates 'how places become "labelled", much like deviant individuals' (Shields, 1991, p. 11) such as Adrian's father. The seaside provides an emblematic space where unseemliness is expected to happen and a real 'out-of-the-way' place that contains and domesticates disorder.

While Adrian Mole's learning cohered around the mundane consequences of faithlessness and betrayal that attend many sexual relations, a romanticized view of infidelity is seen in the Oscar-winning film *From Here to Eternity* (Zinnemann, 1953). The much lampooned sexually symbolic and sanitized beach scene, where Hollywood stars Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr kiss on a beach as waves break over them, fails to take into account the realities of outdoor sex where couples are subject to voyeuristic and other forms of surveillance (Shields, 1991), and sand can impact negatively on sexual intercourse, or at least be blamed as the reason for not using a condom, as one young woman in a recent British study revealed (Measor, 2006, p. 397). These and other inhibitory factors, however, have not prevented the 'labelling' of the seaside resort as a prime location for immorality and licentious sexual behaviour. Along with Brighton's reputation as the pre-eminent 'dirty weekend' resort, the reputation of many other seaside towns overrun their reality. A gauge of this dominating cultural inscription of the spatial is the mass production, circulation and consumption of the 'saucy' seaside postcard.

'A stick of rock, cock?'

> Who does not know the 'comics' of the cheap stationers' windows, the penny or twopenny coloured post cards with their endless succession of fat women in tight bathing-dresses and their crude drawing and unbearable colours, chiefly hedge-sparrows' egg tint and Post Office red? (Orwell, 1951, p. 99)

Postcards, as a symbolic representational form, or 'way of seeing', create boundaries that make reality manageable and an object of conversation. A range of discourses can be called upon to make sense of representations. In the case of the mass-audience 'saucy' comic postcard, the discourses have sometimes been legal as indicated by the 1954 lawsuit against Donald McGill, 'the king of the saucy postcard', when he was found guilty of breaking the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. Much of McGill's artwork, which Orwell described as 'the most perfect in the tradition' (Orwell, 1951, p. 99), depicts corporeal excess, an established symbol of carnivalesque inversion. McGill produced an estimated 12,000 illustrations and ranked each according to its vulgarity. The coarser the postcard, the greater the sales. The notorious 'hard rock' design must surely, by McGill's own taxonomy, have fallen into the category of 'strong' and therefore been a best seller (Wikipedia, 2006). The 'hard rock' postcard, involved in one of McGill's prosecutions (h2g2, 2005), portrays a steeply inclined sandy beach, backed by sheer chalk cliffs topped with grass. It is clearly not Brighton, but is still south of the Exe–Tees line that divides highland and lowland Britain where many seaside resorts are located. The beach is populated by swimwear-clad women with the exception of one fully clothed man who holds against his groin a gigantic stick of pink seaside rock at an angle of 60 degrees, the cellophane wrapper of which is unfurled at its distal end. He faces the reader, lewdly asking, 'a stick of rock, cock?' Typical of its genre, the caricatured priapism depicted by the postcard is symbolic of the grotesque associated with carnival and stands in contradistinction to the miniaturized genitals of the uncoloured male nude associated with classical convention (Addison, 2002, p. 175). The spatial aspects of inversed bodily norms detailed by McGill's artwork are made explicit in Shields' analysis:

> The foolish, undisciplined body is the most poignant symbol of the carnivalesque—the unclosed body of convexities and orifices, intruding onto and into others' personal space, threatening to transgress and transcend the circumscriptions of the body in the rational categories of Individual, Citizen, Consumer, Worker or Owner. (Shields, 1991, p. 95)

While the holiday surfeit illustrated by the 'low' humour of the 'hard rock' cartoon identifies the coastal resort as a zone lacking in moral probity, middle-class fears also focused on proletarian unrestraint extending beyond the seaside and into the working environment. Eagleton reasons that 'old-style puritanical capitalism forbade us to enjoy ourselves, since once we had acquired a taste for the stuff we would probably never see the inside of the workplace again' (Eagleton, 2003, p. 5). The prophylactic of choice was censorship. The expurgation of 'obscene' books and artwork militated against the 'declining morals' that followed the Second World

War, and each resort established its own 'Watch Committee' to which sightings of lewd postcards were reported (Jones, 2004). In that the cards gave expression to the earthly 'Sancho Panza view of life' (Orwell, 1951, p. 108), they pointed in the opposite direction to the 'moral compass' that guided and continues to guide the middle classes.

Writing of the comic postcard as a form of social safety valve, where the dirty joke is 'a mental rebellion, a momentary wish that things were otherwise' (Orwell, 1951, p. 109), Orwell concludes that 'the corner of the human heart that they speak for might easily manifest itself in worse forms, and I for one should be sorry to them vanish' (1951, p. 111). This patrician 'bread and circuses' view of the 'saucy' postcard is one that many would share and reinforces real-and-imaged versions of the seaside as a container of sexual dissidence. However, Addison cautions that 'when art is made to serve as mirror, as if it denoted literally the habits and customs of an age' it becomes an historical resource that is 'dangerously naturalised' (Addison, 2002, p. 172). This caveat suggests that the comic seaside postcard that helped to locate Brighton as the capital of the 'dirty weekend' during the early decades of the twentieth century should not be read uncritically. From another perspective, Shields also queries the representational reliability of postcards when positing that the 'raffish' status of resorts such as Brighton are in part attributable to 'postcard-borne place-myths', which, he goes on to argue, are capable of overwriting 'the disappointing experience of the town' (Shields, 1991, p. 32). It is the coastal resort as a site of disenchantment, where sexual learning can be more pain than fun, that is considered in the next section, which explores the sexuality of teenage girls through the celluloid confessions of the 'Young British Artist' Tracey Emin, one of Margate's most infamous citizens.

On the brink—reeling Margate girls

> Confined to sex, we pressed against
>
> The limits of the sea. (*A Thousand Kisses Deep*, lines 21–22; Cohen, 2001)

In Shields' spatialization of places on the margin, he writes that 'sites are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone and of something' (Shields, 1991, p. 6). The contention is pursued in this section, which briefly charts the sexual geographies of adolescent girls in the Kentish resort of Margate, home town of the confessional artist Tracey Emin, an *enfant terrible* of 'Brit Art'. *Top Spot*, Emin's autobiographical first feature film (Emin, 2004a, b), is mobilized here to examine the ways in which the resort's cultural habitus, for 'Margate is definitely the star' of the film (Emin, 2004a), dis/locates its teenage citizens, as portrayed by Lizzie, Helen, Frances, Katie, Keiri and Laura, whose interwoven narratives reflect the events of Emin's seaside upbringing. These personal stories, which are mediated by the experiences of others and retold by teenage protagonists, disclose various facets and moods of Emin's life. They also show how the social, cultural and economic climates of Margate impact on lived experience, indexing that places, like

contexts, 'structure how differing selves are differently valued' (Cloke *et al.*, 1999, p. 207).

Although an avowedly pedagogic film produced for 15-year-old girls, *Top Spot* failed to reach its intended audience. This was due to its 18-certificate 'labelling' by the British Board of Film Classification on account of the accuracy with which Emin depicted the suicide of the pregnant Laura. As a result, Emin withdrew the film from general cinematic release and its début was on terrestrial television following the nine-o'clock watershed (Emin, 2004a). After this it was privately screened until released as a DVD complete with monoprints of Margate and acts of sex (Emin, 2004b). What marks the aired version as the more interesting cinematic experience is the inclusion of an introductory monologue by Emin. She looks to camera and declares her agenda:

> I've made this film for women [and] it's about the moment of understanding that you're not innocent any more, understanding that you're walking into an adult world, which means sex, which means often violence, which means that you may suddenly have some perspective on your own life that you've never had before. (Emin, 2004a)

The directorial strategy of using six girls to portray different aspects of Emin's life enables audiences, particularly the young women for whom the film was made, to empathize more easily with at least one of the girls' characters or experiences whether of manipulative sex games, rape, romantic escapism, delusion, promiscuity or pregnancy (Fanthome, 2006, p. 38). The almost total absence of adults in the film extends customary cinematic representations of youth and assists in constituting and structuring the girls' outsiderness, the main topic with which Emin is concerned.

Outsiderness—what kind of location?

> *Top Spot* was here. Here somewhere. Giant ballroom with chandeliers and red velvet curtains. We'd snog and kiss, be fingered, titted up. It was a place to experiment. You know what top spot is, don't you? Top spot is when a man has sex with a woman, or a girl, when the penis hits the neck of her womb. That's when it hits top spot. I mean, who would ever call a teenage disco *Top Spot*? (Emin, 2004a)

As in the poem *Why I Never Became a Dancer*, which forms part of Emin's written account of her youth (Emin, 2005), *Top Spot* disrupts the silence that commonly attends teenage girls' sexuality (van Roosmalen, 2000). Specifically, it articulates the realities and messiness of adolescent lifeworlds. Emin confesses that while 'I had an unhappy childhood, or adolescence, I feel extremely lucky to have grown up in a beautiful place like Margate', where there was 'always room to explore. And one of the explorations was to sexually explore' (Emin, 2004a). The sexual landscapes that Emin reproduces have the ability to disconcert. This is not due to their explicitness, for the intimate female confession has precedents in, for example, the memoirs of the imaginary Fanny Hill (Cleland, 2000) and the accounts of Catherine Millet's sexual life (Millet, 2002). Arguably, it is because of the multiple types of outsiderness presented, such as embodied imperfections, mental anguish and lack of local prospects. The teenage Fanny Hill describes the unrelenting sexual enjoyment and

guaranteed satisfaction of herself and other young prostitutes who are graced with perfect and unrealistically responsive bodies that are never misshapen, diseased or pregnant. However, Emin's realities in *Top Spot* and the collected volume *Strangeland* (Emin, 2005) show incidents of unenjoyed forced sex, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and unappealing physical imperfections. Whereas Catherine Millet's uninhibited tales of libidinous excess relay the libertine enjoyments of an educated, monied and cosmopolitan insider, Emin's adolescent outsiderness is less privileged and immobilizing.

Raped at 13, Emin wants to leave Margate and the past, impossibilities given her autobiographical genre. This psychological entrapment is mirrored by the violated Katie who was 'broke into' and thereafter truants from school and lingers at a bus stop merely watching the traffic. Since Emin's past cannot be erased, she uses art to turn her outsiderness to advantage. She offers hope to her audience:

> I've also made the film for the outsider, because I know when you're growing up, if you feel like you're on the outside of things, it's very difficult. So, I want this film to actually relate to those people and let those people, young people, know they're not on their own. There's tonnes of us out there. I was, and I probably, even though I'm forty-one now, I'm still out there. I'm still an outsider in some ways. When you're growing up, things can look really desperate and really totally bleak. And I'm here to tell you it doesn't have to be like that. You can turn everything around. You can turn your experiences into something positive and that's what I also hope the film gives to people, a positive outlook in the end. (Emin, 2004a)

Emin argues that negative experiences can be turned round, and says that:

> throughout the film one of the important things I've tried to do is to have Margate looking as beautiful as possible [...] Margate has the most beautiful sunsets in the world and that's why artists such as Turner spent so much time there. (Emin, 2004a)

Emin's reading of her home town as a place of loveliness that offers room to explore stands in stark contrast to the ugliness and containment represented in *Last Resort* (Pawlikowski, 2000), where Margate 'impersonates' the fictional resort of Stonehaven. In this despairing drama of political asylum-seekers, Margate is described as a 'Kentish gulag' and 'an untended boil on the backside of Kent' (Gibbons, 2001, p. 2). It is a physical prison camp to which transgressors are dispatched, kept out of sight and bypassed. This seaside detention centre is inhabited by would-be immigrants, 'feral kids' and 'misfits and no-hopers', for whom 'the only currencies are blood and tobacco' and 'cyberporn' (Sinclair, 2001, p. 17). Margate is 'a paradigm of the unbrochured' and 'the unpitchable', a place that is 'off-highway' and 'out of mind' in the British imagination (Sinclair, 2001, pp. 16–18). Pawlikowski's representation shows the aftermath of neo-conservative government policies since 'all through the 1980s, London councils dumped the mad and the bad—their undeserving poor—into the empty bucket-and-spade guesthouses along its broad bay', a place where 'even they didn't stay' (Gibbons, 2001, p. 2).

This real-and-imagined version of Margate situates the resort far from its heyday when metropolitan holidaymakers and day-trippers came to enjoy the town's fine beach and 'coarse proletarian pleasures' (Gibbons, 2001, p. 2).

Emin's psychological outsiderness makes reference to Edvard Munch's *Der Schrei*, a painting that famously absorbs her. The girls' screams of excitement on the roller-coaster turn to silent inner screams after sexual abuse. The extent of Emin's estrangement is staged in a comically innocent three-in-a-bed scene when Helen admits, 'let's face it, normal left us a long time ago.' From another perspective, Pawlikowski's portrait of outsiderness is located in physical imprisonment where Margate is a literal 'holding bay'. A third type of outsiderness, one that is positive, relates to Margate's 'progressive sense of place' (Massey, 1993). This geographical framework rejects the notion of place as bounded, as an enclosure that is unconnected with other places and cultures. Massey's celebrated reading of London's Kilburn High Road shows how it is interlinked with places across the globe, from Ireland and India to the Gulf and beyond (Massey, 1993, pp. 64–65). Lee's version of interconnectedness is historically inflected and the habitus of a place is seen as a movement through time where local history is the cumulative and continuing product of dialectical interactions (Lee, 1997, p. 134).

The non-unitary cultural habitus of Margate and its environs is shown throughout *Top Spot*. In one scene, a protagonist eats the archetypal seaside fare of fish and chips in front of an obelisk that commemorates a visit by King George IV, thereby intertwining the area with nineteenth-century foreign affairs. Links with Britain's colonial past are shown by the panoramas of African game in nearby Quex House (Merfield with Miller, 1957) and reflect the savagery of the girls' sexual experiences, particularly the perversions that accompanied the acquisition of Keiri's love-bite. Margate's Lido registers the town's leisured past and elegant visitors and also identifies the location of the disco *Top Spot* where Emin's sexual explorations began. The aerial bombing of Margate's seafront hotels and penny-arcades connects to the Battle of Britain that was fought above the chalklands of the south-east, and also suggests cultural, sexual and economic war zones. In terms of Emin's past, the bombardment may symbolize an attempt at cathartic obliteration. The vintage aeroplanes draw attention to the military history of Manston airfield and the cohort of illegitimate children left by American GIs at the close of the Second World War. The film's opening shots of Margate show mixed generations enjoying traditional sun, sea and sand holidays for which the resort is nationally renowned.

Throughout *Top Spot*, Margate's famous sands are featured. Visual images of sandy expanses are used to transport audiences to the deserts of Egypt where the delusional Helen searches in vain for a boy who is really incarcerated in borstal. It is through the desolation associated with desert wastes that Emin evokes T. S. Eliot's epic poem on defilement, the bulk of which was drafted in 1921 at Margate at the start of a rest cure.

Knees raised in dumb complaisance

> "On Margate Sands.
>
> I can connect

> Nothing with nothing.
>
> The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
>
> My people humble people who expect
>
> Nothing.'' (T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Part III, The Fire Sermon, lines 300–305; North, 2001)

Desolation and disillusionment underpin T. S. Eliot's 1922 work *The Waste Land*, which stemmed from the waste of the First World War. The title of *The Fire Sermon*, the third part of his intensely allusive poem, is derived from a sermon by Buddha in which all worldly things were figured as consuming fires. This point of reference accounts for the virulent misogyny of part three where Eliot's concern with 'materials of abjection' focuses on bodily parts such as dirty hands and parted knees and acts of violence including rape and abortion (Armstrong in North, 2001, p. 286). There are obvious overlaps between Eliot's trodden women and Emin's misused girls, all of whom belong to 'the great class of Dostoyevsky's ''poor folk,'' the ''insulted and injured''' (Gardner in North, 2001, p. 88), described in the poem as 'humble people who expect nothing' (lines 304–305).

It is while sitting on Margate sands, in a suit and boater as contemporary photographs show, that Eliot is haunted by 'the broken fingernails of dirty hands' (line 303; North, 2001). The line refers to the defiled body of a woman who was raped in London, a woman whose expectations are so low that she 'made no comment' and only queries 'what should I resent?' (line 299; North, 2001). Katie's alleyway rape is not reported to the police, her unseen mother simply washes the soiled coat after which no more is uttered. Eliot's victim who 'consents to degradation as if it were foredoomed' (Ellmann in North, 2001, p. 266), says 'I raised my knees/Supine …' (lines 294–295). It was only the perpetrator who wept (line 298; North, 2001). The abasement of Eliot's women is such that one commentator has observed how 'no one in *The Waste Land* raises her knees in any other spirit than that of dumb complaisance' (Hamilton cited by Ellmann in North, 2001, p. 266). Emin's girls similarly accept their lot and, following the pregnant Lizzie's suicide, the five remaining protagonists listlessly comment on events and circulate teenage myths about human biology. In a wind shelter they pass between them a bottle of nail varnish. Reminiscent of the 'broken fingernails' of Eliot's casualty of rape, each girl paints one nail, 'an act which apparently binds them together' (Fanthome, 2006, p. 38), surely in surrender.

The portrayal of teenage girls' sexual learning in Margate that *Top Spot* offers is one of abjection. The freedoms and excitement popularly associated with the resort's funfair *Dreamland* and Golden Mile of sand and amusement arcades are enjoyed by many visitors during the carnivalesque of annual holidays. However, the same attributes hold less promise for Emin's protagonists for whom they are daily experiences. Emin's romantic view of summertime Margate is based on its natural features, sunlight, open skies, beaches, sea and nearby cliffs. These are used to good effect in evoking the possibility of a better future. However, little heed is given to the economic base of the resort, its high rate of unemployment, poor infrastructure, and

cashless groups of the elderly, sick and homeless. These aspects of Margate, which are nearer to Pawlikowski's representation of outsiderness in *Last Resort*, are not incidental to the sexual experiences of the girls since there is little else for them or others to do. This is not to devalue Emin's work, for the achievement of *Top Spot* is to have brought to the attention of the wider public a commonly unscripted, unseen and unheard aspect of teenage girls' lives. Unlike conventional academic research that has not always enfranchised young people, Emin's work has attempted to place teenage girls at the centre of debate and encourage them to enter into discussion about their own lives, an aim partly thwarted by the 18-certificate that *Top Spot* attracted.

... to travel with a different view

The philosopher of education R. S. Peters famously wrote that 'to be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view' (Peters, 1964, p. 47). This paper has endeavoured to travel differently by suggesting that a spatial problematic is relevant to the field of sex/sexuality education. In arguing that sexual learning is bound up with place and space, the habitus of the seaside resort was mobilized to show the geographical constitution of culture and how the idea of culture works in society. The culturally constituted desire to establish schematic 'separateness' as well as social and geographical 'distance' from those who transgress perceived boundaries was also explored through two brief case studies.

In an attempt to remove place from the realm of the assumed and challenge discursively invented place myths, the 'low cultural' topographies of Brighton and Margate were used to illustrate that landscapes are not so much functionally defined as culturally constructed. The validity of Brighton's association with the 'dirty weekend' was unsettled and it was shown how 'saucy' seaside postcards maintained the relationship between images of England's 'capital by the sea' and images of the carnivalesque. The experienced environment of teenage girls in Margate indexed their lack of agency and revised the reputation of the resort as a hedonistic pleasure zone. The complicity between place and how young people live their lives was facilitated by the film *Top Spot*. Both seaside resorts revealed that 'geography matters' in the context of sexual learning, and that since place is not a fixed given it is subject to processes of change.

Research by academic geographers in the field of sex/sexuality is now well established and its diverse trajectories have included explorations of the politics and production of sexualized places and spaces. Geography educators, who have long included population control in their syllabuses, are well positioned to make a more explicit and determined contribution to sex education. Also available are the conceptual frameworks enabling geography teachers to engage in forms of sexuality education that do not rely on producing maps of pathology (Hemingway, 2005). There has, however, been somewhat less interest in geography from those working in sex/sexuality education, and it is the progressive potential of working beyond familiar subject territory that has informed this paper. While the case studies of two

well-known British resorts were outlined, it is not suggested that all seaside towns undergo systematic review, for this would be to accept that accreted knowledge leads to total knowledge. Instead, further research that considers the cultural importance of spatial concepts and their related practices might interrogate different constituencies of people in order to displace the narrow either/or thinking of traditional dualisms.

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