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Jeffery Hearn

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## Sexualities future, present, past ... Towards transectionalities

*Jeff Hearn*

Linköping University, Sweden; Swedish School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland;  
University of Huddersfield, UK

What are the likely most significant developments around human sexualities in the next twenty-five years? How should research address such developments? And what may impede or facilitate these changes, both social-sexual and research? I am not too keen on futurology, but here goes ...

For me, I sum up these future likelihoods in the multiple dialectics of sexuality. Here I focus on six sets of dialectics, their contradictions, and their interrelations. I start from the assumption that sexuality is not a separate or autonomous phenomenon or set of phenomena. Sexualities persist in relations with other social phenomena, social experiences, and social inequalities – around gender, class, ethnicity/racialization, embodiment and multiple intersectionalities. My broad approach might be summarised in terms of the political economies of sexualities, and shifts from intersectionalities towards transectionalities: the “transformulation” of social, and in this context sexual, categories, rather than just their mutual constitution and interrelations.

So what is in store? I am enough of a modernist to think that LGBT sexualities are likely to become more apparent, influential and even accepted to extents and in places, whether geographical and social, that are hard to imagine now. This is likely to increase, probably rather slowly, the problematization of (hetero)sexual normativity. It is likely to promote further limited blurring of sexual categories, most obviously the homo/hetero binary (Brickell, 2006), as well as the growth of bi-curious and other changing sexual practices. These might include more public discourses and sexual practices that drift in quite opposite directions regarding sexual power and inequalities. I see all this happening even with the destructive dismay of various religious fundamentalisms; and this is all part of the dribbling march of positive progressivism.

Second, and on the other hand, dominant sexualities, especially men’s sexualities, and especially dominant men’s sexualities, are likely to continue much of the same way as they are now. This includes the pervasive dominance of various masculine heterosexualities, as well as the associations of some of those heterosexualities with invocations of violence. There is a common violencization of sexuality by men (Hearn, 1998), in addition to an eroticization of dominance or violence (MacKinnon, 1982). These are overwhelmingly negative in form and effects.

This general theme of the relations of gender, sexuality and violence has been addressed across various societies. For example in the book, *Societies at Peace*, Howell and Willis (1990) posed the question: what can we learn from peaceful societies? They found that definitions of ‘masculinity’ having significant impact on the propensity towards violence and sexual violence. In societies where men were permitted to acknowledge fear, levels

of violence were likely to be lower; in societies where masculine bravado, repression and denial of fear defined masculinity, and masculinity and femininity were highly differentiated, violence was likely to be higher. Themes linking with or leading towards interpersonal and inter-societal violence included: most public interaction being between men, rather than between men and women or among women; boys and girls systematically separated at early age; male economic activities and products of male labour prized over female ones; and highly elaborated emotional displays of male virility, ferocity and (hetero)sexuality (Kimmel, 2002).

Most societies are still organised very much along these lines, and this is likely to continue in the future. Violence and sexual violence are unlikely to go away, unless men's dominance also goes away. It is also likely that there will be more explicit articulations of interplays of sexuality and violence, whether 'public domain' war, torture and terrorism, or (inter)personal wounding, B&D and S&M as technologies of the self. Within studies of sexualities the relations of sex, violence and sexual violence remain relatively neglected; future research needs to address this more fully.

Third, and at the same time, there is the ageing of populations and ageing of sexualities, including both relatively dominant and relatively subordinated sexualities. There is likely to be a growth in the age-conscious naming and claiming of older, ageing sexualities, including more focus on the intersections of ageing, disabilities, illness and disease. This theme has been taken up in terms of the complicated and fracturing life course dynamics of the identities and subjectivities of ageing amongst older men and men with disabilities (Jackson, 2001, 2003). Ageing sexualities may challenge bodily (hetero)sexual normativity, and highlight greater discussion and practice of *adult* intergenerational sexual relations. Though ageing is often tough, very tough, and I would not glamorize it, even less disabilities and illness, I see a stronger focus on intersections of ageing and disabilities, illness and disease as predominantly a positive development. The development of crip theory, at the intersection of disability theory and queer theory, may provide a fertile base for further elaboration on the intersections of theory and practice on disability, sexuality, ageing and indeed dying.

Fourth, and somewhat relatedly, there are impacts of environmental changes, not least climate change and associated water shortages, drought, poverty and hardship, in some parts of the world. These, coupled with imperialist adventuring, are likely to ferment wars and conflicts. Additionally, some experts predict that mass global plague-type disease is very likely to occur in the coming decades, made more difficult to control through travel and migration, and greater transnationalization of sexualities. 'Having sex', along with disease, may become more common throughout the world, not only in areas of high HIV/AIDS infection. This is in addition to long established relations of sexuality, illness and disease from STDs.

A fifth likely feature of future sexualities is likely to be the increased problematization of biological sex 'itself', including the very definitions and understandings of "female" and "male", and there presumed inviolable natural "givenness". This problematization of biological sex, and the biological body more generally, in turn undermines references of

sexuality to biological sex, as well as reminding as that 'gender' is not in itself a radical or critical concept (Bondi, 1998). This drastic rewriting of the body is an issue suggested by a range of work from biologists (Roughgarden, 2004) to cultural theorists (Kirby, 1997). This partly a matter of reinvestigation of diversity "in nature" and humans; and partly a question of the deployment of cultural analysis to biological sites, as social sites.

Clearly relevant here is the development of various forms of genetic engineering, or rather socio-genetic engineering, including IVF, foetal monitoring, cloning, and even genetic self-monitoring. These have profound social applications. The 2003 film, *Code 46*, portrays a future world is partly inhabited by clones, and heavy spatial controls and 'mediaeval' separations between those in 'the city' and those outside, and with strict rules and prohibitions on 'inappropriate' for forms of sexual contact between clones. Such a return to mediaevalism is echoed in many futuristic texts. In such possible worlds it is social-biological identification, not identity, which dominates life – and sexuality.

A linked socio-technological area, and sixth arena of dialectics and contradictions, is the move to increasing interrelations of sexualities and sexual violences with information and communication technologies (ICTs). Moves to and interplays of virtualities and surveillances, along with specific changes around (cyber)sexualities at a distance and non-direct physical contact mediated by 'new' technologies, constitute major historical changes with profoundly contradictory implications (Hearn, 2006). These are likely to bring new forms of transnationalization, transpatriarchies, imperialism and neo-colonialism, with virtual imperialist/neo-colonialist exploitation flourishing alongside and supportive of direct non-virtual imperialisms/neo-colonialisms, as in uses of ICTs to facilitate the global sex trade (Pyle and Ward, 2003; Hearn, 2006).

ICTs have produced hugely successful historical transformations in promoting global trafficking and sexual exploitation of women in supplying encyclopaedic information on prostitution, and the (re)constitution and delivery of the sex trade (Hearn and Parkin, 2001; Hughes, 2002). Live videoconferencing is amongst the most advanced technology currently on the Web: live audio and video communication is transmitted over the Internet from video recorder to computer, and back again. This involves buying live sex shows, in which the man can direct the show in some cases, with real time global communication possible. Pornographers are also leaders in developing Internet privacy and secure payment services. DVDs provide increased possibilities for making videos with scenes shot from multiple angles, so the viewer can choose that preferred. Viewers can interact with DVD movies similarly to video games, giving the man apparently more active role. The "real" and the "representational" converge; and the sexual commodification can proceed apace.

ICTs create major opportunities to organize sexuality differently, and for the practice and experience of new forms of sexuality: techno-sex, high-tech sex, non-connection sex, mobile phone sex, internet dating, email sex, cybersex, cyberaffairs, virtual sex, multimedia interactive sex and so on. Virtual communities of interest, whether around, for or against particular sexualities, may appear to offer a safe and trustworthy arena for support, for some, and this may be so in some cases. Yet they also bring their own

contradictions (Wellman and Gulia, 1999). The familiarity of the Web can be deceptive: its increasing familiarity may constitute new hegemony. Comparison may be made with critiques of engineered ‘familial’ corporate cultures (Ezzy, 2001) developed at the same time as greater disembodiment of global corporate institutions. ICTs and the WWW increasingly offer an apparent ‘home’ for members of sexual communities, but are also social sites for the extension and diffusion of disembodied sexual capitalism, sexual consumer cultures and sexual pleasures (Bernstein, 2001). MySpace.com, the networking site and blog community, reported to have c.92 million registered users, widely used by young people to meet virtually, was recently bought from Intermix Media by Rupert Murdoch’s NewsCorp (Behr, 2005). What may initially be self-help social-sexual communities of interest can become exclusionary, pay-to-use capitalist enterprises.

Perhaps most significantly, ICTs do not merely act as media for sexualities and sexualized violences but increasingly can be constitutive of them; they can in effect reconstitute sexualities, and may do so in new ways in the future. For example, sexual activity, without any payment, whether on one’s own (for example, masturbation) or with another or others, is possible in many and various embodied forms, beyond the reach of ICTs, in the privacy of ‘one’s own home’ or elsewhere. On the other hand, sex is increasingly constructed in the context of disembodied social institutions, the state and large corporations, and the laws, controls and ideologies engendered. ‘Private’ sexualities are sites of power and dominance; they may constitute sexual violence, but do not usually constitute prostitution or pornography.

However, such (non-commercial) sex can be recorded, written about, photographed, videoed, televised, placed on the Web (with various access rights), retrieved from ICT interfaces, with or without participants’ permission or knowledge, transferred to other technologies and multimedia. The same or similar sexual practices can be enacted forcibly or non-forcibly, with or without payment (as with homemade ‘do-it-yourself’ pornography’ on the Web). If such sexual practices are enacted with payment this is often called pornography. These possibilities are ever more at hand, and are likely to increase. Moreover, some forms of sexual violation, such as some forms of pornography may be experienced as affirmation of sexuality for some consumers and controllers.

As the modes of exchange, production and communication become more disembodied, possibilities for the reproduction of those sexual texts increases – even accessible on millions of pc screens worldwide through photo- and video-sharing. Various uses of ICTs for sexualities and sexually violent purposes can blur into each other. Representation is pornographized globally; pornography is liable to virtualization, as images once stored electronically can be reproduced and manipulated: “the woman”, and perhaps “the man”, become dispensable. The impact of ICTs increases potential for creating various global/local sexualized cultures and more general pornographizing of sex. If one is buying a car, information on or advertizing of the car do not in themselves comprise the offer of the car. However, with sexuality and sexual violence, information or advertizing of sexuality and sexualized violence can themselves comprise the offer and experience of sexuality and sexualized violence. This is comparable to the covert circulation of formal court and legal statements and other documents on child sexual abuse amongst convicted

child sex offenders in prisons, for their own sexual purposes. With sexuality and sexual violence, there is, for some at least, little separation of sexual information, sexual advertising, production of sexual material, and sexual experience.

There are also greater possibilities for, or rather the existence of, cyber(org)sexualities. These can take relatively mundane forms, such as possibilities of greater sexual activity and exertion through the techniques of heart surgery. Far reaching innovations might be sexually-coded 'implants' that would allow people to seek others with similarly or presumed compatibly coded sexualities (Monbiot, 2006). Such technologizations can be either external to the body skin, in a 'blackberry' or mobile phone-type device, or physically implanted within. ICTs provide possibilities for various forms of sexual experience, such as, as places for meeting by mutual agreement potential romantic/sexual partners (sometimes with less emphasis on physical appearance) or 'safer' sexual experimentation and identity exploration (Leiblum, 1997). There are increasing technical possibilities for many-to-many 'social software' and 'new sexual affordances' for mutual identification (as with the Yenta matchmaker system that combines virtual community, collaborative filtering and web-to-cellphone technology, so people can know who is in their physical vicinity at that moment and who shares certain affinities and willingness to be contacted (Rheingold, 2000; Wellman, 2001; Schofield, 2003).

This links with technological possibilities of making public people's emotional lives and emotional-sexual lives. There are now well-established policy practices and research studies on how non-verbal behaviour conveys information of human knowledge, plans, intentions and emotions. This is being developed by biometrics and photo-tracking of micro-movements of faces, as in security and counter-terrorism applications at airports (Hughes, 2006). Psychology, photography and computer technology may converge to further monitor people's emotional lives, including emotional-sexual lives.

Thus the future possibility appears of 'choices' in conducting social-sexual contact with or without such knowledge or others. In the future, it might be possible to meet people either with or without such knowledge or what they are thinking or feeling, emotionally, sexually. One might be able to meet someone with options of: i) no such information on either side (assuming just two parties for the moment); ii) full knowledge by both parties; or iii) knowledge by one but not both parties, which the other might accept or to block, as in current filtering technology. Social-sexual contacts could be conducted in two parallel social-sexual 'universes' - with or without knowledge of others' sexual or other feelings. Going out on a date could in the future be done *with* or *without* (some degree of) access to the other person's thoughts and emotions, sexual or otherwise.

ICTs also offer possibilities for new forms of sexualities whereby people, individually or in groups, display their sexualities, even the "whole" of their sexual lives. Webcams, mobile phones and television reality shows offer new possibilities for practice, identity and image-making, through "revealing" rather than hiding from surveillance (Koskela, 2004), and thus new possible forms of sexuality in the face of "the disappearance of disappearance" (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). A somewhat related example of the creation of new forms of sexuality through and in relation to new technologies is the

phenomenon of “dogging”, where sexual relations conducted in public are swiftly advertized to large numbers of participants and onlookers through Skype and other mobile phone access (Bell, 2006). This form of sexuality draws on the practices of happenings from the 1960s, public, yet semi-covert, raves of the 1980s and 1990s, and ‘flash mobs’ (‘Flash mob’, 2006), the practice of gathering large crowds for no overt reason, in the 2000s. All ‘privacy’ is now potentially public (Hearn, 1992).

Another aspect of ICTs is sexual surveillance, in turn bringing its own contradictions. Surveillance is generally presented negatively as means for more centralized control of others, qua individuals and social categories, including individual sexualities and sexual violences. While many ICTs are experienced and represented as giving individuals access to “more information”, they also provide means for corporate entities to access far more information “about us”. Google and similar bodies hold masses of information on people’s personal preferences, shown through their virtual inquiries and searches:

... comScore, an independent firm, reckons that the [Google] search engine performed 2.7bn searches by American [US] users alone in July this year [2006].  
... All of this information is stored. Google identifies every computer that connects to it with an implant (... a cookie) which will not expire until 2038. If you also use Gmail, Google knows your email address - and, of course, keeps all your email searchable. If you sign up to have Google ads on a website, then the company knows your bank account details and home address, as well as all your searches. If you have a blog on the free blogger service, Google owns that. ... All this knowledge has been handed over quite freely by us as users. It is the foundation of Google’s fortune because it allows the company to target very precisely the advertizing it sends ... Amazon is hoping to patent ways of interrogating a database that would record not just what its 59 million customers have bought - which it already knows - or what they would like to buy (which, with their wish lists, they tell the world) but [also] their income, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity. (Brown, 2006).

Such compilations of information and surveillances, sexual or otherwise, promoted in tendencies towards combinations of technologies and systems integrated into larger wholes, are part of ‘surveillant assemblages’. These are producing and likely to further produce new forms of the body and commodifications of the self, whereby flesh and sexualities are at least partly reduced to ‘data doubles’ (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000).

These six dialectics interconnect. Put together, LGBT, violence, ageing, environmental change, problematization of sex and biology, and ICTs and virtualization – are likely to produce significant changes in what is meant by sexuality, or sexualities. They exert effects on what sexuality *is*; the political economies of sexualities are likely to be reformulated, even within modernist resistances to change. Sexuality categories are likely to become defined in more complex ways and blurrings, in interrelations with other social categories and intersectionalities, and in the deconstructions, transnationalizations and reformulations of those categories. Thus, we may speak of growing sexual transsectionalities, within more general moves to social transsectionalities.

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