This volume of essays in *Antipode* begins by taking to task something that many people believe of same-sex sexuality: that simply by virtue of the desires they practice or feel, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender folk are egalitarian, liberatory, politically radical. The writers whose essays are collected in this volume believe that sexuality is not produced in a vacuum, nor is it produced in some simplified notion of Newtonian space–time. This truism that sexuality is not produced in a vacuum is often considered banal. It is usually just the assumption which underlies discussions where sexuality is addressed and constituted as the site through which good political futures are imagined and interrogated and its practices subjected to the eye of a person who researches sexuality. In this narrative, sexuality is always constituted in the density of other configurations and allegiances, such as capital, class, nationalisms, politics, or religiosities. But despite this assumption, and despite this belief held by many who work on the area of sexuality, these researchers often slip into the neutral mode as they envision their areas of inquiry. All the writers in the essays I will talk about here refuse these assumptions: that same-sex sexuality is necessarily liberatory by virtue of its practice, necessarily antihetero (normative/sexual), and that sexualities constituted through the space–times of their productions offer universally beneficent futures.

Heidi Nast and Virginia Blum fold their essays around intersubjectivity, and how subjects—queer subjects—form their relationships in the context of consumer capitalism. What a focus on consumer capitalism seems to pull one towards is a production of personhood that emerges from highlighting consumption over labor. Lines of sight constituted under consumer capitalism produce people under conditions of commodity fetishism, where, in the inimitable language of Marx (1979:72), the

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\text{measure of the expenditure of labor power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the products of labor; and finally, the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labor affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between}
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the products. ... There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

When the fantastic form of relations between things is reconstituted to demystify that particular form of relation, so as to put people back into the equation under the newest incarnations of global capital, consumer capitalism, something strange seems to happen. Instead of seeing analyses of labor and labor power, one sees analyses of consumption and consumption power. Emergent assessments of this form of capital in the familiar language tropes of recent economic discussions include the measurement of consumer confidence and consumer satisfaction. Recent forms of capital take the shapes of niche marketing to consumers, at the heart of which is the flexible—flexible design, flexible goods, flexible identities, new services like the financial, but also like buying and selling parenthood (flexible parenthood).

Identity, then, is produced through the marketing, sale, and purchase of goods, and not merely through the goods, but as a good itself, as a kind of thing, through which intersubjectivities take shape. Identity is also produced through the consumption of goods—“you are what you buy.” How, then, under these conditions, can desire be articulated?

One’s access to goods becomes the measure of one’s success as a person. Possession of property, derived from the dictates of principles of possessive individualism, drives the forms of measurement of personal worth (financial, social, and—to some extent—political). Sexual or paternal power is driven by one’s access to capital (cultural, political, financial, debt, raced, classed and gendered, nationalized). At its most quotidian, sex is shopping (Blum this issue). Ability to buy—market virility—is one form of exchange through which desire can be constituted (Nast this issue).

Capital, then, is linked to libido, and the libidinal logic of roaming desire focuses on freedom of choice, which becomes the mode through which egalitarianism is instituted. The inequities of access and of how the objects of consumption are constituted, the uneven relationship between labor and access to goods, are the underside of this constitution of egalitarianism (Blum this issue). In these particular scenes of late capitalism, the idealized, fantasized consumer is one who has immediate access to unfettered capital with which he/she can constantly buy new updates of goods and services—an upper-middle-class gay white man. Goods and services, as Nast, Papadopoulous, Puar, Bachetta and the Anonymous prose writer make clear in this issue, include: tourism; racialized and sexualized bodies sold for pleasure and advertised as objects through which other pleasures are offered; urban spaces and property; wombs as property- (children-) making machines. Under these regimes—continuing practices initiated under conditions of slavery and colonialism (Ghosh forthcoming)
—through bodies bought and sold as commodities, forms of identification take shape. Both Nast and the Anonymous narrator of her own story offer a cautionary tale that elaborates one particular form of identification—that of a gay male parent. If the gay white male consumer is the most perfect form of the consumer, the very ideas of the consumer, then what happens when this consumer buys a child from a mother in order to become a father? The exigencies of inequality initiated under capitalism win out, as they must. For a gay man, interpellated into the position of a virile masculine patriarch, whose virility is ensured by his ability to buy and whose patriarchal status enabled through his ability to purchase a child, the narratives offered by this issue must be given due attention. Neither being gay nor being merely attentive ensures good politics (Anonymous this issue; Blum this issue; Nast this issue).

Democratization is produced through market competition. Political, economic, erotic, and affective investments pull one towards intimacies, which are implicated in the reproduction of hierarchies. The anonymous narrative in this issue (and it is essential that it remain anonymous because the womb in the story is precisely one that must not have a name) explores the buying and selling of babies. Here, a desire for egalitarianism—initiated by the fathers, who want the “womb” from which their child has come to visit with them when they share social space with other gay parents—falls short. Its failure is necessary. It must fall short in the face of gendered, sexualized, and classed differences produced through access to capital (if the mother had been able to afford her girl child, she would have kept her). The relationships between mother, child, and consumer fathers resonate with those Durba Ghosh (forthcoming) has explored in her powerful article on early nineteenth-century British colonial capitalist state formations.

This issue of *Antipode* also offers counterpoints to the serious critique of the liberatory possibilities of sexuality it performs. Blum proposes risk of the loss of self, articulated through Leo Bersani’s and Alan Sinfeld’s attempts to entangle discussion of desire through necessarily and impossibly obdurate and politically out-of-balance libidinal economies. Risk, risking oneself and loss of self in face of the given unevenness of subjectivities and refusing egalitarianism caught in the political economy of sale and choice, is the turn Blum’s essay takes. Risk, however, is also the modality through which capitalism constitutes its investments. But Blum’s essay provides a necessary return to desire as that produced in incommensurability.

Paola Bacchetta and Jasbir Puar turn to India. Puar’s essay addresses the production of the presumed sexuality of space as always already heterossexual, and tourism as the traversal of space through either male homosexual desire or heterossexual desire. Puar turns to a lesbian tourist venue in Delhi, Naari (“woman”) as the place that
allows her a complicated, resistive negotiation with return to a nation that had recently seen genocide directed at Sikhs, the community from which she comes. Naari reconstitutes the mobilities available to traveling subjects, offering access to local communities as well as kinds of access conducted through the Internet (and with it, a turn to the questions of privilege in the scenes of late capitalism). Bacchetta also finds the subjects she describes in a complex relationship to global capitalist ventures with allegiances to British colonial legal practices. Her subjects are gendered and sexualized in a series of collusions with and refusals of capital. Gathering places, places where communities of women are constituted outside homes, include local coffee shops and McDonalds. Women deploy the word “lesbian” and others in a kind of intransigence that Bacchetta seeks for new possibilities for sexual subjects, turning to the category single woman. Religiosity and nationalism appear as colluding devices that refuse to suture one lesbian body to another.

Finally, Alex Papadopoulos gifts us with the instance of contemporary Greece, where national intimacies and affiliations have been pressed into being through a long history of Greek community formation in the Ottoman empire. Nation comes to be through diaspora, through movements of peoples and capital. The particular desexualization of the Greek past that nationalist ideologies proposed is also interrogated by the women to whom Bacchetta speaks. Papadopoulos takes readers to urban spaces in Greece and gives us the formations of sexual imaginaries that come into poetic being at the nexus of immigrant and rural lineages of desire.

This particular collection of essays is quite splendid, especially in the terrains it seeks to investigate. Its insistence in confronting the difficult issue of power and privilege through the production of gay male white patriarchies offers necessary object lessons about desires for liberatory egalitarianisms. The collection is remarkable in that it does not merely critique, but takes readers to places, spaces, temporalities, and possibilities of being and desire that address questions of complicity directly but do not offer false liberatory hope.

References