

involved with people of their own sex. While critics may point to the separation as an indicator of a grand failure in this experiment in living, a better interpretation might be that gender, like love, is fluid and ever changing. At any rate the Bems are still on 'very friendly terms', maintain a connection through their children and through supporting each other's writing process. Perhaps the most encouraging evidence for the success of this social engineering project are the interviews with the children, Emily and Jeremy, now in their early 20s. These young adults' words show us their comfort with sexuality, with gender equality, with body hair, with homosexuality, and most of all with themselves. One suspects though, that the Bems' brave social pioneering will impact a far greater audience than just their two special children. *An Unconventional Family* is an excellent reminder that research sometimes does lead to application.

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David Higgs, ed., *Queer Sites: Urban Histories Since 1600*. New York:
Routledge, 1999, ISBN 0-415-15897-4 (hbk) £45.00, 0-415-15898-2
(pbk) £14.99

Most gay men still know very little about the self-defined 'inverts', 'homosexuals' and 'queers', who came of age decades before and who have lived and sometimes still live in our own neighbourhoods and cities. In another effort to fill this blind spot, David Higgs, of the University of Toronto, has compiled *Queer Sites*. This slim volume of short, well-written profiles of seven cities (Paris, Moscow, Amsterdam, London, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco) is a delight to read. The trouble is, these short chronicles can only tell part of the story: the social lives and communal histories of networks of homoerotic males are more complex, and contradictory, than the crisp social narratives that mark each chapter of *Queer Sites*. However, how many of us neither have the time nor the inclination to read thick tomes on the history of homosexual life in, for example, Moscow. For this city, I will stick with *Queer Sites*. And while there are so many cities and such little time, *Queer Sites* begins to explore some questions that will become major themes in the emerging field of queer urban histories.

Queer Sites starts out strong with the history of gay male Paris. Wilfred Laurier University professor Michael Sibilis explores the rise of the comparatively recent tactic of queer visibility. He highlights the ambivalent relationship that gay men there have had with openly marking social space and particularly with Paris' recent strip of tourist-oriented gay establishments. Sibilis also highlights the persisting homophobia in the City of Light that many of us would prefer to overlook. And, while Sibilis carefully chronicles recent Paris city governments attempts to *ban* rainbow flags, we are also given such historical background as 'Only seven Parisian sodomites were burned at the stake in the entire eighteenth century'. This party titbit could be worked into conversation next Bastille Day. Disappointingly, Sibilis practically ignores the more working-class and neighbourhood-based scene that

persists west of the Bastille. University of Amsterdam sociologist Gert Hekma's chronicle of his city is similarly powerful and relates large-scaled social and political economic forces to the risks that not much more than a handful of men took to build a community – well into the second half of the 20th century. Hekma notes that well into the 18th century Dutch protestantism was less concerned with punishing homosexuality than the weakened state. In the expanding mercantile city, there were always a few places that remained outside of the interest of police where 'wrong lovers' could cruise and perhaps even have sex. And a culture of male *vriendschap*, as in friendship, often overwhelmed homophobia. Moving into the modern period, Hekma is chilling in his understatement about the Nazi occupation when he notes 'Notwithstanding the introduction of the harsher German legislation regarding "unnatural lewdness" in the Netherlands there was less prosecution of homosexuals than before the war because the police had other priorities'. The slim offering on gay life and queering of urban space in London is just plain insufficient given the scholarship that is already available. Editor Higgs' own two chapters on Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro are intriguing, especially in how he chronicles homosexuality in societies in the grip of the Inquisition and then the only slightly kinder, gentler (but still exceedingly vicious) homophobia of the Catholic Church that followed. Les Wright completes this journey with a particularly thoughtful history of San Francisco into the 1980s. And the world-view of how queers have transformed urban spaces pretty much stops there, at about ten years back. Still, if we forgive the title and the pretences that these sketches can say something about urban space, this is a book of fine local histories.

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Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-sex Love in America*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 232 pp., \$22.00 (cloth),
ISBN 0-226-73155-3

Historian Leila J. Rupp's newest book fulfills the promise of its title, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-sex Love in America*, with a charming rendering of same-sex love, passion, and sexuality in the New World from the 16th century forward. Relying on the 'meticulous research of historians who have followed bread-crumbs trails out of the forest of ignorance about sexuality in the past', Rupp covers an impressive expanse of cultural, historical and sexual material in this brief, engaging and entertaining work.

The history Rupp weaves in *A Desired Past* is consistent with her earlier commitments to understanding, in the terms of their times, people in whose lives same-sex desires and affections have played a part. In this brief but complex treatment, she carefully contextualizes the sexual and psychological fancies and foibles of dozens of men and women within the historical moments that shaped their experiencing of same-sex desire. From her explanations of the African, North American,