Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

A geographer reads Geography Club: spatial metaphor and metonym in textual/sexual space

Brown, Michael

Postprint / Postprint
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
www.peerproject.eu

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Brown, M. (2006). A geographer reads Geography Club: spatial metaphor and metonym in textual/sexual space. *Cultural Geographies*, *13*(3), 313-339. https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474006eu362oa

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter dem "PEER Licence Agreement zur Verfügung" gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zum PEER-Projekt finden Sie hier: http://www.peerproject.eu Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.
Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:
This document is made available under the "PEER Licence Agreement ". For more Information regarding the PEER-project see: http://www.peerproject.eu This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use.All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.
By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-232797

cultural geographies 2006 13: 313–339

A geographer reads *Geography Club*: spatial metaphor and metonym in textual/sexual space

Michael Brown

Department of Geography, University of Washington

In this paper I offer a geographer's reading of Brent Hartinger's American teen novel *Geography Club*. My intellectual aim is to extend work on the spatialities of the closet, especially those that appreciate both its fixity and fluidity in space. I do this by drawing out the spatial metonymy around closet space, alongside its metaphoric–material dimensions. Specifically, my reading focuses on four themes to achieve this aim: (a) the ubiquity of spatial language throughout the text, of which closet space is one part, (b) the materiality of the closet space in the narrative, (c) the metaleptic and synechdochal qualities of metonymy between the closet and the world, and (d) the placeless and fluidity as important signifiers of the closet in the main character's experience. These insights are not only meant to advance spatial understandings of the closet in more complex and dynamic ways, but also to prompt conversation between cultural studies, queer theory, and human geography.

Brent Hartinger's 2003 teen novel, *Geography Club*, is a coming-out story set during a few weeks around a contemporary high school in a small, generic American city.[1] During a pivotal scene, a small group of queer teenagers find one another and want to form a mutual-support group at their public high school, without coming out of the closet to their homophobic classmates.[2] They strategize over its name:

> 'Too bad we *can't* say it's a gay club,' Terese said. 'That'd keep everyone away.' It was a joke, but it didn't sound like one, because she sounded so bitter.
>
> 'Kevin hadn't said anything in awhile, and I figured it was because he'd changed his mind and now he didn't want anything to do with this club thing. Or me.
>
> So I was surprised when his face suddenly lit up, and he whispered, 'I got it! We just choose a club that's so boring, nobody would ever in a million years join it!' He thought for a second, 'We could call it Geography Club.'
>
> We all considered this. This time, I saw smiles break out all around.
>
> Geography Club, I thought. No high school students in their right minds would ever join that.
>
> In other words, it was perfect.'[3]

And so 'geography' becomes a textual metaphor for abject boredom, but in this text is also a *spatial* metaphor for the closet. Now it is true that geography in the United States

© 2006 Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd 10.1191/1474474006eu362oa

is sometimes a benighted discipline, and cries of geographical illiteracy amongst high-school students are perpetual, thus Kevin's cunning plan should work.[4] Especially in the US, geography *is* often treated as a sort of intellectual closet. It largely has been folded into the historian-dominated 'social studies' in American schools, where it is often reduced to dry, static descriptions of almanac facts, compared to history's relatively more exciting sense of process, unfolding causality and dynamism.[5] And with adolescents so typically in an intense stage of self-absorption, a subject that frequently explores foreign people in faraway lands surely loses appeal. The metaphor can be the reality.

Yet academic geography is more a way of seeing the world, rather than a specific body of knowledge about it.[6] It is a vantage-point that emphasizes the spatiality of social relations and identities. And it is along these lines that I argue that the far more interesting geography in *Geography Club* can be gleaned from the text. It is not the clever metaphor of the discipline-as-boredom that strikes me as paradigmatic, but the way the spatial metaphor – and metonym – of the closet is worked through by Hartinger's text. While it has become a bit of a dead metaphor, we must recall that the closet itself is a spatial metaphor: one that stands for the concealment, denial, erasure and oppression of queer people and culture, and a central category in queer theory and analysis.[7] Yet it also is a material, spatial form of oppression. It geographically delineates and demarcates homophobia and heteronormativity.

In what follows I offer a reading of the closet in *Geography Club* that emphasizes the metonymic and material dimensions of the closet. Though short and simply written, the text powerfully and richly captures the world of the high school, with all of its component places in all their cultural complexity or simplicity, as the case may be. High-school life is an intensely lived milieu for adolescents and its cultural geographies must be carefully decoded and navigated for social and emotional success.[8] As queer teens resist their more destructive forces, and ultimately rework them into more truly democratic spaces, we can appreciate both the fixity and fluidity of closet space without sacrificing its materiality.

By focusing on the metonymic and material dimensions of closet space in the book, I extend two related strands within critical and queer geography that seek to develop more fluid, dynamic, and processual framings of queer space generally: the long-standing but not generally queer-theory influenced body of geographical work on writing, representation and literary texts[9] as well as spatial metaphor specifically,[10] especially that which deconstructs the metaphor/material dualism,[11] and the more limited work on closet space itself[12] and critiques thereof. While there may well be implications of this analysis for the growing geographical literature on children's and adolescents' sexualities as well, it was not my goal here to explore these.[13]

My argument proceeds as follows. First I introduce the text by offering a brief summary of the plot and introduction to the main characters. The concepts of spatial metaphor and metonym are explicated next, with an emphasis on the ways that metonym in particular is underemphasized in the context of work on the closet. I also show how implicit assumptions about the materiality of the closet, and the worlds within and outside it, are textually marked by these figures of speech. I then trace out these claims textually. Four themes are traced: the ubiquity of spatial language throughout the text overall, the materialization of metaphor (in particular, the significance of material spatial arrangements and practices in closeting), the materialization of metonym (displacements between the closet and the world, in terms particularly of synecdoche – the closet as a material space in the world – and metalepsis – the material world within the closet), and a sense of placelessness and mobility that also connects the closet and the world within *Geography Club*. The broader implications of my geographical reading of the novel for both geographers and cultural critics are discussed in the concluding section.

Geography Club and closet space

Geography Club is written in the form of a first-person narrative by Russell Middlebrook, a 16-year-old gay student at Robert L. Goodkind High School in a fictional small American city (see Table 1).[14] Closeted Russell discovers that the handsome high-school jock, Kevin Land, is also gay. Soon after that revelation, his best friend, Min, also comes out as bisexual. Along with Min's girlfriend, Terese, and alternative-radical Ike, they form a small mutual support group to survive the heteronormativity endemic in high-school culture. Their challenge is how to hold these secret meetings surreptitiously in the structurally heteronormative spaces of the high-school world. They each come from different cliques, and being seen together would raise suspicion. They decide to meet in a classroom after school, but call their association 'Geography Club' because the name is so unappealing to their peers that no one else would want to join, and thereby learn the real point of their gathering.

Russell's romance with Kevin blooms, and his popularity skyrockets as he joins Kevin on the school baseball team. The club's closet-strategy, however, is put to the test when the straight, bubbly African American Belinda Simpson insists on joining the club – even after she learns of its true purpose. The relations in the club are further tested as Russell must still cope with heteronormative pressures to date the annoying Trish Baskin, so that his straight friend Gunnar (who doesn't know Russell is gay) can date her gorgeous-but-shallow friend Kimberly Peterson. Angered by her unrequited affections, Trish spreads rumours that Russell is the secretly gay kid students have been whispering about in the hallways.[15] This ironic outing destroys Russell's popularity. It also causes Kevin to spurn Russell's affections publicly, in order to preserve his own popular-jock status.

Meanwhile, Russell alienates Min by refusing (along with Kevin) to invite the bullied and ostracized loser of the school, Brian Bund, into Geography Club because he is also ostracized so mercilessly for his low status. In an attempt to salvage his popularity, Russell goes along with the jocks in their hallway teasing of Brian Bund, which Min

TABLE 1 Dramatis personae (in order of appearance)

Russell Middlebrook	The protagonist, who is gay, and part of the 'nerdy intellectual crowd'.	Member of Geography Club
Kevin Land	Russell's love interest and eventual boyfriend, a handsome baseball jock.	Member of Geography Club
Min	Russell's close friend, who is bisexual. She is Chinese American. She goes out with Terese Buckman. Is part of the 'nerdy intellectual crowd'.	Member of Geography Club
Gunnar	Russell's close friend, who is straight. Is also part of the 'nerdy intellectual crowd'.	Knows about Geography Club, but not its true purpose. He is not a member.
Brian Bund	The school loser, who is mercilessly harassed by everyone. Eventually Russell himself teases Brian to preserve his newfound popularity. Brian heroically and selflessly claims that he is the mysterious gay student. He is the only one to befriend Russell after he alienates club members and loses his popularity.	Not a member, but because of his constant harassment by many students, Min argues to Geography Club that they should extend him membership.
Terese Buckman	Min's girlfriend. Kind of butch. Girl jock.	Member of Geography Club
Ike	Gay student. Part of the 'lefty intellectual crowd'.	Member of Geography Club
Kimberly Peterson	Gunnar's love interest, a straight girl.	Not a member
Trish Baskin	A straight girl, Kimberly's best friend. Wants to date Russell. Eventually Trish and Russell double date with Gunnar and Kimberly.	Not a member
Belinda Sherman	Heterosexual member of Geography Club, African American. 'Bubbly' personality.	Member of Geography Club
Ramone, Nate, Nolan, Jarred Gasner	Jocks, friends of Kevin Land. Live in 'the land of the popular'.	Not members

witnesses much to her disgust. Min spurns Russell for his defection and homophobia. When Brian surprisingly takes the heat off Russell by declaring (falsely) that he's the gay student, Russell comes to realize the true meaning of friendship and moral integrity. He must break up with Kevin, despite his desires. Finally, Russell and the rest of Geography Club come out publicly to form the Goodkind High Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance. The book ends abruptly there, and we do not know how the 'outed' club is received at the school.

Metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and metalepsis

While critics have declared *Geography Club* a particularly apposite story of adolescent alienation, and the author has characterized it as a morality tale,[16] I read the text as an example of the complex ways in which closet space is always simultaneously discursive and material, with each of these dimensions depending upon, and working through, the other. Here I extend my own previous work on the closet as a spatial metaphor for the denial, concealment and erasure of queer lives and experience. As a spatial structure of heteronormativity, the closet can be a fixed site of oppression – yet it can also be a site of resistance and creativity. Working through that point, however, left my own scholarly renderings of the closet rather static and fixed in my haste to materialize it,[17] as several insightful critics correctly noted.[18] Indeed, this fluidity has long been underscored by the more literary-theoretic approaches in textual analyses of the closet. Sedgwick's theorization, in particular, exemplifies such duality, yet at the expense of spatiality.[19] Thus, building on their insights, and those of others, I want to suggest that further spatializing the literary concepts around metaphor (namely, metonym, synecdoche and metalepsis) provides a helpful way forward. They are signifiers that capture and represent the multiple and often paradoxical spatialities of the closet, yet they do so in ways that appreciate simultaneously the fixity and the fluidity of the closet, without negating its materiality.

If metaphor is the substitution of meaning based on an implied comparison of one thing with another, metonymy is allusion based on displacement and spatial (*inter alia*) associations. Translated from Greek, 'metonym' literally means 'beyond (or after) the name'. It describes a linguistic situation where a name is used for something with which it is somehow culturally or spatially associated.[20] Common examples would be, 'The White House said today...' or 'The pen is mightier than the sword'. In the former, a physical structure displaces politicians and their spokespeople. In the latter, pen displaces written communication and rhetorical argumentation, while the sword commonly displaces the military, or physical force. It is these associations between a physical structure and a political administration that is transferred in metonymic rhetoric and cognition. Furthermore, this transferred association may not necessarily be crucial to the meaning itself. Strict definitions of the term posit that whereas understanding is the central function of metaphor, metonymy has an allusive or referential quality.[21] Rather than working on points of similarity (as metaphor does), metonym works on contiguity or proximity. The literal translation 'beyond the name', of course, belies the spatial rhetoric ubiquitously used to explicate the term. Critics agree that metonyms transfer meaning by *displacement* rather than condensation, as in the case of metaphor. And that displacement is based on 'context' rather than the structure of meaning.[22] Context can comprise any logical sequence or cultural relationship between signs.[23] Yet often these relations are unmistakably spatial, as in the more specific cases of a synecdoche or metalepsis.

Linguists have parsed out types of metonymy that are useful in specifying the spatial dynamics of such rhetorical displacements. 'Synecdoche' is a narrower, more precise description of metonymy where a part of something being signified textually displaces a whole (or sometimes vice versa), as in the command, 'All hands on deck!' where 'hands' refers to the parts of the body of labouring sailors. With synecdoche, there is often the intent of communicating that this piece or portion is the most important piece of the phenomena being described in the context of the author's narrative. Thus there are many facets and dimensions to being a sailor on a ship, but this call suggests that physical labour should be expected if this command is given.

Metalepsis is still another dimension of metonymy. It is where there is considerable distance or remoteness between the elements in a metonymic couplet, or where cause is displaced by effect (or vice versa). A US example is 'He's such a leadfoot'. To comprehend this metonym we would travel a great imaginative distance between the element lead, its weightiness, the impossibility of a part of the body made from an element, the force of lead on a gas pedal, and the consequent effect of accelerated speed of a car. Such protracted travels in comprehension of this expression are what 'metalepsis' signifies. But the 'distance' can also be spatial. For example, the expression 'The world is your oyster' juxtaposes micro- and global scales, material opportunity and fortune with harvest and appetite.

We can think of contiguity and displacement in terms of locational theory based in Euclidean space. A place that is closeting, since it encloses as it hides, suggests an outside, or 'elsewhere', on a map that is not so concealing or confining. Perhaps it is close by, perhaps it is far away. What I find interesting with closet metonymy, however, is that *spatial scale* is often the context or spatial contiguity or the sequence through which signification operates. Here the framing is not based so much on location as on situation. The closet is situated in some broader scalar context (or vice versa). Spatial scales are social constructions that frame either the object under analysis or the domain of the object itself. These framings are often so tacit as to go unnoticed by interlocutors. Still, they are politically potent for their epistemological and ontological powers.[24] Scale metonyms have garnered disparate yet increasing attention in geography and cultural studies, and they are typically framed along a local–global axis of displacement.[25] In the closet metaphor, for example, the closet is metonymically demarcated from the world in which it is located. As a synecdoche, the closet is a part of the world that often stands for a world in itself. Thus the closet is often displaced by a sense of 'worldliness' within it. As metalepsis, the closet signifies the great span of scalar distance between a small, highly localized place like a closet and the widest possible domain of human existence: the world itself. Through synecdoche and metalepsis, the presumption is that the interlocutors will share an understanding of both the place and situation of the event. In other words, they can interpret the nominal, absolute or relative location, but also the cultural and social saliency of that location.

Recognizing the scalarity of the closet metonym is furthered with two current insights from feminist and queer geographies, which show us what is at stake in recognizing metonymy around the closet. First, from feminist geography, there has been an argument for paying close attention to the political possibilities where public and private spheres are confounding one another. Staeheli, for example, notes that these transgressive possibilities emerge where 'private' actions occur through public spaces, or vice versa.[26] This spatial confounding of public and private shows the utility of treating space as a performative. From queer geography there have been urgent calls for modes of representation that evoke the fluidity, simultaneity and processual nature of identity–space relations. For instance, several geographers have astutely identified transnational queer experiences as identity–space relations that are difficult to reconcile with a fixed and static representation of 'the closet'.[27] This point is similar to Doreen Massey's recent critiques of scale in geography that are akin to Russian dolls, each smaller version fitting wholly in a larger one around it.[28] Likewise, if we accept the aphorism that 'coming out is a continual process', static spatial renderings of the closet are at odds with the ways that the closet is performed throughout the life course. Knopp in particular argues compellingly for a more processual and flexible sensitivity in the sexuality and space literature. He calls for queer geographers to study with a 'topological imagination':

> A topological imagination focuses on connections, flows, simultaneity, situatedness, contingency, and 'becoming' rather than on fixed spaces, surfaces, or dimensions onto which grids and other forms of logical order are superimposed.[29]

We can thus demarcate closets in space, and note carefully their fixity; but we cannot just do that. We must also take care to note how those closets are metonymically – but still materially – situated in worlds, and conversely, how worlds are contained in (and thus displace) closet spaces. Rather than being a mere inert stage for action, this topology is metaleptically constitutive of closet space. Coming out of the closet and staying in it can be spatial processes of movement and fixity, but they may also involve a confounding of public and private spheres. They are not singular, fixed or absolute, but rather are multiple, relative and recurrent moves. This reading captures a sense of movement and motility not only within but between closets and worlds in the course of human life. Moreover, it does so without relinquishing the simple yet powerful point that so motivated me in my earlier work: sometimes material closet spaces do work in simple, direct and brutal ways.[30] Foregrounding the power of metaphoric and metonymic representation around 'the closet', I argue, gets us some way towards further dissolving the material/metaphorical dualism. Furthermore, it spatializes the closet in ways that are sensitive to both fixity and fluidity.

The geographies

Spatial language in the text

Spatial metaphors and references are particularly common in the English language, since they cardinally describe a sense of situatedness, between or within events, contexts, and social structures. Since location is ultimately always relative (either to some culturally agreed-upon but ultimately arbitrary coordinate system or to some other location), spatial metaphors and references can convey the relational sense of social relations (class, gender, sexuality, 'race', etc.) and the identities that pole them. Thus they ground abstract or ineluctable psychologies and social relations by recasting them in terms of proprioception and corporeality.

So it should be no surprise that a book about adolescent sexuality and morality is saturated with spatial metaphors and references, large and small. Consider the names of the main characters. Russell Middlebrook's name suggests he's in the middle of a flowing stream. He can move with it or against it, but he is unlikely to stay where he is. He is fording a turbulent environment. His name is a metaphor for the gay boy trying to get through the emotional and developmental turbulences of adolescence – especially fraught given his gay desire. By contrast, Kevin Land is coded as almost inert, fixed and immovable. As a popular jock, Kevin is unwilling to expose himself by standing up for Russell. Indeed, he ignores him and even joins in on some of the teasing of his own boyfriend in the cafeteria, lest he be exposed as queer and thus lose his status and popularity. Even the name of the school, 'Goodkind High', seems like an ironic appellation made by adults who have little sense or worry about the ways the high school is not a good place. It is rigidly hierarchical, and brutally torturous for outcasts, nerds and nonconformists. All students feel this pressure: from popular Kevin to nerdy intellectual Russell and his best friend, Min, right 'down' to the outcast Brian Bund.[31] Some of the most abject scenes in the book deal with the teasing and harassment Brian must suffer for his very existence in an environment that is neither good nor kind. Brian is constantly physically assaulted and humiliated. In the cafeteria, he has food thrown at him. He is publicly harassed and ridiculed. He is forced to wear lipstick, and a bra over his clothes, in one particularly disturbing cafeteria scene. For Brian Bund (and to a lesser extent his peers) this high school is not the good kind.

Tropes of landscape and territory describe the rigid social hierarchies in high school. Exile from the world is how Russell describes his option of choosing Min (and Geography Club) versus going along with the jock clique in teasing Brian Bund:

> . . . well the Land of the Popular was pretty much paradise. I'd only been in paradise for two days, and I sure as hell wasn't ready to go back home just yet.[32]

Even more evocative of a world, at the climax of the book, when the entire school suspects that Russell is the mythical gay student at Goodkind High and Min is angry with him because he would not let Brian into the club, he offers us this itinerary:

> Over the past few weeks I'd been exploring the Land of the Popular, and the Landscape of Love, but they weren't the only two places I'd visited. I'd covered the whole terrain of a typical high school. I'd gone from the Borderlands of Respectability, to the Land of the Popular, and now to Outcast Island, also known as Brian's lunch table. I'd made the complete circuit.[33]

Hartinger himself has stated that he deliberately used 'geography' as a metaphor for a complex emotional situation adolescences typically experience in high school. As he explained to a reviewer:

> I did intend for [Geography Club's members] to learn about a 'geography' of sorts – specifically, the rigid social terrain of most American high schools. I knew this had to be done with a light touch, because I hate heavy-handed metaphors. Frankly, I'm not sure I succeeded – but I definitely did try![34]

And in a press interview Hartinger notes that he deliberately left the city in which *Geography Club* is situated unnamed because he wanted the reader to focus on the 'emotional geographies that are universal'.[35]

Thus *Geography Club* is a book replete with spatial metaphors and references that perform a typical cardinal function in language. They are used in ways that link psychological states of mind and being with physical location, situation and movement. They allude to the psychology and trajectory of main characters and to the socially hierarchical geography of American high-school culture. Here Hartinger uses material geography as a metaphor for emotional geography. We can appreciate the materiality of the closet, and especially its metonymic dimensions. It is to that discussion that I now turn.

Materializing the metaphor: closet space

The closet is most clearly materialized in Geography Club itself, where privately oriented action occurs in public space. Performatively claiming one's queerness brings the private self into the public sphere.[36] Geography Club is located in the classroom of a social studies teacher. The teacher, Mr Kephart, is described as 'one of the most uninvolved teachers at the school!'[37] He is someone who does not pay close attention to student goings-on, and so the club feels that his territoriality over his own classroom will be the weakest and allow them the greatest privacy compared to other teachers and their rooms. He never attends the meetings, so Geography Club members have the room all to themselves, outside adult surveillance. The classroom is never described in great detail (though we do know there's a poster of Julius Caesar on the wall),[38] so we are left with a fairly ordinary and stereotypical image of the space: a room with a chalkboard, a teacher's desk, and several student desks. Perhaps it is precisely this quotidian geography that helps the room spatialize a closeting homophobia and heteronormativity. It, too, must pass for straight space. And it is only through territoriality that Geography Club can queer this space, by making it privately a sanctuary. Kevin notes this quality of closet space by marking its boundaries explicitly: 'Whatever anyone says in this classroom stays in this classroom. No talking about the club with anyone outside.'[39] It is a self-enclosed space in a broader spatial setting of surveillance.

The cover of the book perfectly illustrates this space as a material geography of the closet (Figure 1). Here we see an institutional blue door with a mesh-glass window. The club's name has been handwritten on a piece of copy paper in magic marker and

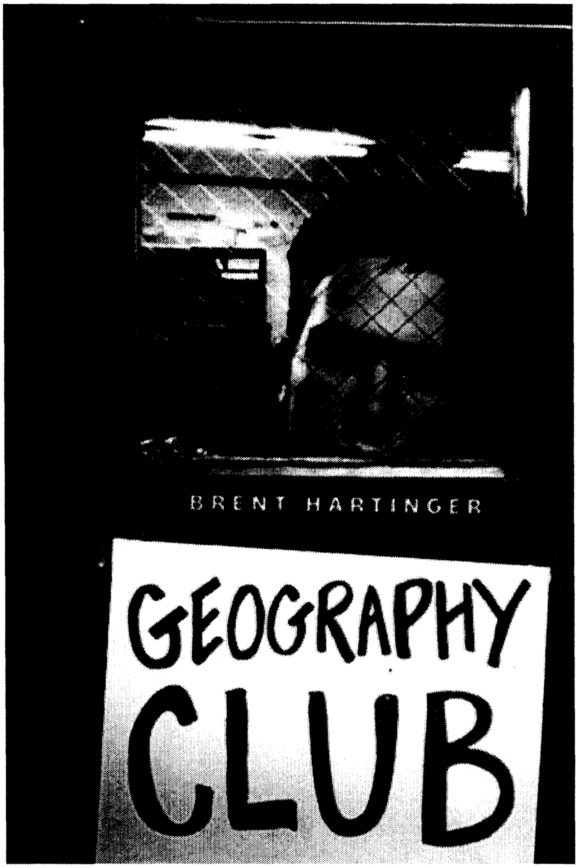

FIGURE 1 The closet as material space. (Jacket design from *Geography Club*, reproduced by permission of HarperCollins.)

attached with torn masking tape to the dark door, suggesting the room is not dedicated to the group *per se*. It is a space that is only queer temporarily. A cute teenage boy stares expressionlessly from the other side of the door's wire-mesh window (thus even glass has a barrier between closet and world), but we do not see his whole face, just his eyes and the top of his head. The tips of his right hand touch the frame of the glass, suggesting a sense of confinement. Behind him, the institutional fluorescent lights lend an eerie glow to the dark classroom. We see empty chairs and bookcases behind the figure. It is not a warm or inviting or sexual space. It is a cold, generic public high-school classroom. The space of the classroom is closet space materially in the text. Geography Club's classroom materializes the interiority of the closet. It is a private space of emotional, though not physical, intimacy. It is a zone of secrecy, but also of safety, creativity and nurturing.

Materializing metonym: the closet in the world and the world within the closet

The closet in the world

Leaving my materialization of the closet metaphor here oversimplifies its spatiality, however. It treats it as *ad hoc* and isolated, rather than dynamic and situated. Therefore, following Knopp's topological imagination, we must note that the classroom as a material expression of the closet only comes into full relief when situated metonymically in a broader world: one that is not simply constructed as a constitutive outside to the closet, but through which the closet also operates. Both in terms of synecdoche and metalepsis, the closet is a piece of the world, and vice versa. The world produces the closet, and the closet itself produces a world.[40] It has other closet spaces in it, and has its own social milieus, its own differentiated social topologies. It is a spatial structure through which characters travel in and out of closet space. The 'world' also captures the extent to which places themselves may change over time. That situation has both temporal and spatial dimensions. Geography Club meets in a classroom after the official school day has ended, for example. While there are students still around the school, as other clubs meet, there are vastly fewer students around who might see them together and become suspicious. We know that they meet with the door closed. Belinda's first appearance, for example, startles the members of the club, who did not see her enter the classroom, and did not hear the door open and close.[41] Min apologizes, believing the only logical reason Belinda has entered the room is to scold the students for being too loud.

We can appreciate the situatedness of closet space in the world by further considering the textual space of the novel outside Geography Club. The book is structured conventionally in three acts. It runs to 226 pages in length and the story is divided into 16 chapters, including an epilogue. Within these chapters are 64 typically short scenes, lasting three pages each on average. These scenes are always placed in some physical location, and since it is written in the first person, Russell is always physically present. Given this organization, we can describe Russell's topography – in part – by using some very simple descriptive statistics and graphs of abstract space.[42] Now I am well aware of the dangers of using quantitative techniques and representations in textual analysis. They have a tendency to establish an 'epistemology of the grid', and are often freighted with modernist certainties of perfect mirrors of the objects they describe. They nevertheless provide efficient and insightful means to describe the relations between parts and wholes, which is the intellectual thrust of my arguments about spatial metonyms. I follow Barnes's arguments, however, about mathematics being a mode of representation to be treated like another language – no less weighted by instabilities between signifiers and signified, and certainly one with its own textual aporias.[43]

There are a total of 24 different locations in the book, about half (46 per cent) of which are only ever visited once by Russell (see Figure 2). Geography Club is the second most visited place in the novel, but it is the setting for only 13 per cent of the scenes. The rest take place elsewhere in the typical adolescent world of the high school. High school is a world unto itself, and the spatial structure of the book

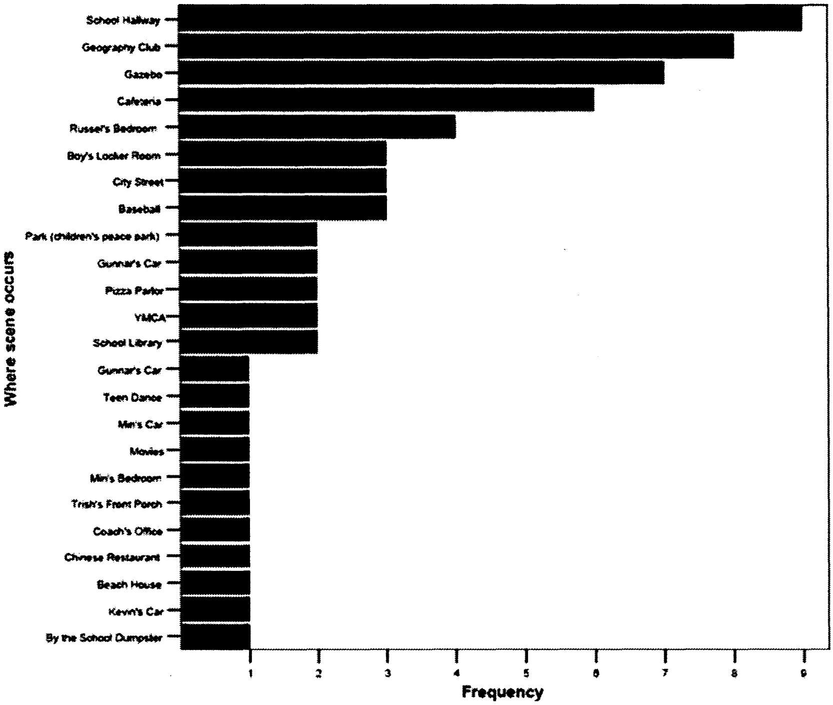

FIGURE 2 Frequency of places in the text (in number of scenes)

reinforces this truism. Ninety-two percent of the time there are no adults in the scenes, for example. This is a world of teenagers, where adults are present, but in the background. The world of Goodkind High School surrounds Geography Club, and yet none of its inhabitants (except club members) knows it is even there. With the classroom door shut when Geography Club is meeting, the closet door is shut to the outside world.

Russell's world is quite fully populated. He is hardly ever alone in the book, appearing with other characters 92 per cent of the time. He is most frequently with his boyfriend, Kevin (in 47 per cent of the scenes), or with his best-friend, Min (in 31 per cent of the scenes). Since he is in the closet, this populated world presents a series of challenges to Russell. The book opens, for instance, in the boys' locker room. Russell refers to his positionality as 'deep behind enemy lines' since he was trying to pass for straight, yet confronted with his strong desire for the handsome nude and semi-nude boys all around him. These bodies are 'visual land mines' for Russell.[44]

The ubiquity of public space in *Geography Club* is yet another theme that marks closet-world metonymy. Public spaces where there are likely strangers present (like the school hallway, the mall, the movie theatre, and city streets) set the stage far more frequently in the narrative than private spaces like Russell's bedroom, or the club itself (69:31 per cent). As Figure 2 illustrates, the most frequent setting in the book is not

Geography Club, but the school hallway. Scenes in the book occur in the halls just slightly more often the club's classroom. The hallway is represented as a public space of interaction amongst students while they move from class to class. It is a setting of intense interaction for Russell in the story, where there is considerable stress and strain between closet and the world. The most frequent motif in hallway scenes is a secret being told or exposed. The hallway is a part of the world that threatens to expose the closet space of Russell (and the club). It is in the hallway outside the Principal's office, for instance, where Russell overhears the health teacher mentioning the need for sex education, and where he reads in the school newspaper her knowledge of a gay student, frightening him into believing that someone has 'outed' Geography Club from the closet. Later, it is where Jarred (a jock) tells him that rumour around the school is that Russell is the gay kid that the health teacher mentioned.

> 'Thanks!' I said, and before I could stop myself, I stepped forward and kissed him. But my lips barely touched his when he pulled back. 'We should get back,' he mumbled. And as he turned away, I couldn't help but notice that he was still flipping the baseball in the air, even faster than before.'[45]

Most dramatically, it is in the hallway that Russell must choose between going along with the jocks and teasing Brian Bund or doing the right thing. Even when he thinks he's only being witnessed by the jocks (and Brian), he succumbs to the weight of peer pressure. Only later does he realize that the whole encounter was witnessed silently by Min, the character who represents the most utopian and progressive elements of Geography Club.

We can further appreciate the metonym between closets and worlds when we notice how other potential meeting places for Geography Club are considered, and ultimately rejected, by its cautious members. Originally, Russell and Kevin meet in an anonymous gay-teen chatroom online. Such an atmosphere preserved their anonymity, but the characters found it limiting, especially when they found out they went to the same school. Cyberspace is, of course, a hybrid space between closet and world for many queer folk.[46] This is a safe environment because of the maintenance of privacy in the public sphere, but ultimately the safe, cyberspace-as-closet limits their interaction, and they must meet in real space. Here they choose a smelly, underused gazebo in a public park, at night. This spatiality, of course, echoes the sexual territoriality of gay beats and cottaging that often marks sexual space for queer men.[47] Privacy is obtained in public space, but just enough so that the closet may become a world of desire, albeit a highly contingent and temporary placement. Russell discovers Kevin while in the privacy of his own bedroom, while he is publicly in an online gay-teen chatroom. Only when 'GayTeen' admits to attending the same school – being part of the same world as Russell – do they agree to meet at the park gazebo at night. This spatial strategy decidedly places the closet in the world, but safely at night, so Russell and Kevin can physically meet. Indeed, this is where they have their first kiss and where they have sex. This placement echoes Chauncey's own metonymic play with closets and worlds when he notes that 'privacy could only be had in public, in pre-Stonewall New York since it was only in public space that gay men would encounter one another'.[48]

When the founding members (Russell, Min, Kevin, Terese and Ike) first meet together in time-space, it is at a local pizza parlour after school. This is an interesting choice. As a place of business, it is public space in the sense of a place of the market, but also in the sense of a place where people must quite visibly perform their public selves. It is a place where it is not uncommon to find a group of teenagers socializing. Yet it is outside the immediate world of Goodkind High, being off campus. The potential for strangers and 'aliens' perhaps dilutes or hides the strange grouping of such different types of students. Yet Russell describes it very much as you would a closet:

> But here we were in this little hole-in-the-wall pizza place with no windows, and booths made of orange vinyl and we couldn't agree on a pizza. .... Then we took the booth farthest in the back, like we were spies having a rendezvous to talk about something top secret, which I guess we kind of were. ... Of course what I'd meant when I'd said 'We're all alone' was that there were no other customers in the pizza joint.[49]

The emptiness of the pizza parlour becomes a material expression of closet space. It is at once safe and alienating for Russell. Here, the members get a chance to meet one another face to face for the first time. Here they first recognize their gender, class and racial differences alongside their common sexual orientation. For example, each member attempts to start a conversation by talking about a topic that only someone in her/his clique would find interesting, thus alienating the other members. More metaphorically, the members cannot decide on which toppings to get on their collective pizza, each one wanting a different topping. Towards the end of the meal, the members seem to agree that the pizza parlour is not an optimal situation for their club. Adult strangers sit close to them, and this stilts conversation, and raises the spectre that at any moment some of their classmates may also walk in and question their congregation. Members have to get home, suggesting the parlour is enough removed from their daily lifeworlds as to be inconvenient and raise suspicion of parents and peers.

They next consider the school library as a meeting site. Now libraries have a long cultural saliency as havens for queer folk. Many oral histories have recollections of queer youth searching quietly but intrepidly in the stacks for information about 'homosexuality', but for these teenagers Goodkind High School's library certainly does not serve as a good closet. Located inside the school, each student would have a ready alibi for being there. It is convenient in time-space since it is readily accessible to all of them. Nevertheless, it is rather too public a space in its demand for normalcy and the ubiquitous surveillance that impels it:

> This is so stupid,' Ike said. 'We shouldn't have to hide like this, like political dissidents or whatever. Why can't we be seen together like normal people?'
>
> As if in answer, Candy Moon walked by the end of the aisle. I thought I saw her slowing down ever so slightly. Suddenly, this didn't seem like such a good meeting place after all. Five people in the same aisle was a pretty big coincidence.'[50]

The library is a space so public that it cannot guarantee privacy for the group. Thus eventually they decide the safest place to meet is in an empty classroom, after school, under a fake club name. Belinda 'opens the door' by insisting on joining the club, even after its members 'come out' and reveal the true nature of the club.

The world within the closet

If in the above I sketched a metonymic geography where material closet space gains part of its power from its situatedness in a broader social world, here I want to consider the opposite direction of the closet-world valence: that there is a world within the closet. This exemplifies the metaleptic dimensions of the closet, where cause and effect displace one another. If a heteronormative world produces closet space, so too does closet space produce a world within itself. While the Club itself is the second most frequent location in the novel, its scenes last the longest in the book, giving it a certain textual sense of fullness and weight.[51] The scenes in the novel spend the greatest amount of time there, so more complex actions and exchanges have time to play out there.

By arguing that Geography Club is a world, I mean it is a social sphere that has a totality unto itself for its members – just as high school is a world unto itself for teenagers more generally. In Geography Club, the students are connected to something larger than themselves or their own feelings. This sense of totality is marked by a duality that connotes a fullness and complexity to the social space of the club. It is a place where there is both similarity and difference. It is also a place that is both experientially utopian and ordinary for club members. Such dualities signify a complexity that any full totalistic world must have.

Similarity confronts difference in this world along several axes. At the first meeting, for example, Russell narrates the awkwardness and difficulty the members have during their first meeting together. The members each try to talk about something relevant to their own worlds, but find it difficult to talk outside them. They differ by race, gender, class, even sexual orientation. Most importantly to their world, they come from different and quite separate social strata in the high school: the jock, the alternative, the nobody, the intellectual etc. (see Table 1). These dualities suggest more than a homogeneous subculture, something larger and more complex: a social world that exhibits similarity and difference, cooperation and conflict, lust and friendship, jealousy:

> Here we were, halfway through our pizzas, and it was suddenly clear that, as a group, we had nothing in common whatsoever. We were just five random people. Why should we hit it off just because we all happened to be gay? It was stupid. Ridiculous.[52]

And yet, Russell learns that this point of similarity is enough for empathy and mutual support. For the next line in the passage Russell says out loud, 'We're all alone', meaning that there is no one else in the pizza parlour except the group. But his statement is reinterpreted by the group around the shared sense of alienation coming from being gay.

> 'Man is that true', Terese says. 'Sure can't tell your family,' Kevin said. 'My dad would go feral.' 'Mine too', Min said. 'I'm not even sure my mom knows what "gay" is.'.... 'Can't tell your friends either...even if they're radical. They're not radical about this. Not when they're still in high school'.[53]

This sense of solidarity around oppression gets quite complexly interpreted by Geography Club. Ike, for example, discloses a suicide attempt that the other club members seem to understand, even if they themselves have never attempted it. They understand because they share his sense of helplessness around homophobia and heteronormativity.

The similarity and difference pivots not merely on sexual identity. For when Belinda Simpson, the overweight, ebullient black girl, realizes the true purpose of the club, she sees herself as fitting right in. In this scene, the frustrated club members are waiting for Belinda to arrive in the classroom – frustrated that they cannot exclude Belinda without revealing the true purpose and content of the club. Russell exclaims,

> 'It's not fair! . . . . Why can't there be just one place for gay kids, where we don't have to hide who we are? Hell, straight people have the whole rest of the world! They go around holding hands and kissing and talking about "my-girlfriend-this" and "my-boyfriend-that". And they say *we* shove our lifestyle in *their* faces? That's a laugh!'[54]

The club members, however, do not realize that Belinda has opened the classroom/closet door, and now knows the truth about Geography Club. When Min asks her if she will out them, Belinda replies with a complex empathy:

> 'My mom is an alcoholic. . . . . People are always talking about families . . . how they all went out to Chuck E. Cheese for pizza, or how they just got back from their latest trip to Disneyland. The whole world has to tell me over and over again how normal they are, and how different they are from me. And I have to just sit there and listen, because no one wants to hear the truth, that my family has never been to Disneyland and never will go. . . . . So I know what you mean when you talk about people always shoving something in your face. And I know what it's like to have to hide.'[55]

Her empathy is complex because it does not turn on the most obvious, visible markers of her other(ed) status: her race and body. It turns on the heteronormative exclusivity of a particular form and content of family norms that she can never attain.

This radical democratic suturing of identity politics is pressed the most by Min, who is the most progressive of the club members. She proposes that the club should invite Brian Bund to join – not because he's alleged to be gay, but because he suffers from exclusionary oppression too. In weighing Min's argument, Russell suddenly recognizes the club's broader function:

> What *was* the purpose of Geography Club? On that first day in Kephart's classroom we'd talked about a lot of things, but we'd never really talked about that. It hadn't seemed important at the time, but now I saw it kind of was.[56]

For Min, Geography Club must admit Brian because its mission is providing support not just to gay, lesbian or bisexual students but to all those who, because they are in some way 'queer', get violently marginalized in the world.

If Geography Cub is a complex world where similarity and difference coexist, it is also a world that is both utopian and ordinary. As a utopian environment, it certainly is a better place than the one outside. As noted above, it is a place where they overcome difference and provide each other with empathy. In terms of a constitutive politics, it is a world where members struggle for the kind of society they deserve: one of mutual respect, equality and social justice. And it is an agonistic struggle. Members were reluctant to let Belinda join. The club all but dissolves because Min is outvoted on Brian's admission. Yet it is a place where Russell experiences love for Kevin, which gets witnessed publicly in this private space. It is a place where Russell's friendship with Min is strengthened; they become closer. In one joyful scene during a club meeting, the members play 'baseball' with a ping-pong ball for a ball and an eraser as a bat, and students' desks as the bases. 'We all started laughing, and I honestly couldn't think of another time when I'd felt so close to a group of people.'[57] It is a place where they have fun.

If the world within Geography Club has these utopian elements, it is one balanced with a thorough sense of the quotidian. The club is also a grounded, ordinary place, and the juxtaposition of utopian and ordinary characteristics contributes to its sense of fullness, variegation and complexity – a place that is more than the sum of its (different) parts. Much of the time is spent, for instance, in setting up rules of order that are meant to structure how these different people can fairly and equitably relate to each other. Most substantively, the central rule is that the club begins with each member having five minutes to say whatever they like. It is a utopian world, one that is radically democratic. Moreover, 'whatever anyone says in this classroom stays in this classroom. No talking about the club with anyone outside.'[58]

The merciless, abject world of the high school is juxtaposed nicely with a utopian, multicultural world through scenes in the park. Near the gazebo, there is a children's peace park, decorated with small wooden figures representing children of various races and ethnic geographies. Reflecting on how Geography Club made them more vulnerable, Russell and Min walk through the park. Russell notes:

> The painted wooden cutouts were all these horrible ethnic stereotypes of the children of the world. But it had changed since I'd seen it last. Someone had taken a black marker and drawn tits on the wooden cutout of the Polynesian girl in the grass skirt, and they'd given the grinning, sombrero-wearing Mexican boy a hard-on. But the rosy-cheeked Eskimo boy had it worst. They'd pulled him off his base, kicked him in half, and knocked both pieces clean out of the garden.[59]

The vandalized figures of the other (probably by some anonymous peers) publicly warn Russell about the consequences of bringing the world of the closet into the world of high school. Later, in the midst of the novel's climax, after Min confronts Russell about his betrayal of the group in order to be part of the jock clique, the figures have been removed entirely from public space.

> Now it was just a flower garden, with lots of tulips and azaleas and irises, all in full bloom. It reminded me of a cemetery, which seemed fitting somehow. It could have been a memorial for the death of Geography Club.[60]

It is as if the world of Geography Club, with all its difference and community, has been destroyed by the closeting homophobia of the real world. Russell has betrayed the world inside the closet of the club.

The constitutive power of this world within the closet is nowhere better exemplified than in a scene where worlds literally collide. After the club's official first meeting, its members find themselves in the cafeteria the following day. They attempt to sit together, to cluster publicly. Since they are each from different castes, their clustering in time-space creates confusion and suspicion amongst their fellow students. So much so, in fact, that Kevin refuses to sit with them, since he has the most to lose. I quote the passage at length to give a full sense of how each member experiences the clash when the worlds within and outside of the closet collide.[61]

> Terese was the first to step up to our table.
> 'Hey,' she said. She had her lunch in a greasy brown paper bag, but she didn't sit down.
> 'Hey,' I said, trying to sound all excited, despite how I felt. 'Have a seat.'
> She looked both ways, like she was about to cross a busy street. Then she barreled straight ahead, pulled out a chair, and sat.
> Min immediately looked down at her food. That's when it occurred to me that the two of them hadn't ever been seen together at school before. It had to be weird for them.
> Ike came by next, sidling up to our table like a cat burglar trying to evade the police.
> 'Great,' he said. 'You guys made it.' But he didn't sound like he thought it was great.
> He sounded like he sort of wished we'd forgotten.
> Ike took a seat, but with an empty chair between him and everyone else.
> .... This wasn't the back booth in a dark, deserted pizza parlor. This was the high school cafeteria. And in high school, everyone eats lunch with the same people every day. The people like them. Birds of a feather and all that? The four of us were birds of a feather, but no one knew that, and they couldn't ever know that....
> 'Sup?' It was Kevin, towering over us with his heaping tray of food and its three cartons of milk..... I hadn't been sure Kevin was going to show..... But now that he had come, I wasn't sure if he was actually going to sit..... Kevin didn't sit. He didn't look nervous, but then I saw that he had such a firm grip on his tray that his knuckles were white.[62]

This is the risk they face when the world within the closet collides with the world outside it. Each character undergoes a profound sense of alienation. They cannot acknowledge their peers outside Geography Club any more than they can acknowledge their fellow members. Ike sits at the table, but one seat apart from Min, Terese and Russell in a sort of plausible deniability. Kevin performs his jock coolness as his public self, but his private self is terrorized. And he does not sit. As Russell laments in characteristically spatial language,

> We were all citizens of different countries. Did we really think we could just pull up chairs and sit down together? There was no neutral territory on a high school campus. The land was all claimed, and the borders were solid. We couldn't just cross them at will.[63]

Placelessness and mobility

So far, I have illustrated the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions of the closet as a material space. Yet another theme emerges that also aids a topological imagination to the text, which is to see the liminality between closet and world. To leave my discussion here risks reinscribing static either/or notions of space ultimately. In what follows, I want to note an important sense of fluidity and betweenness for the places. As a morality tale written in first-person narrative style, it is temping to interpret *Geography Club* as a single, linear journey. It is a tale of growing moral maturity for a teenage gay boy. The book overall is a coming-out tale, a movement from privacy in the public world to publicness in the public world, where Russell moves from being out to himself, to coming out to other queer students, to coming out to his friend Gunnar, and being in the Gay-Straight-Bisexual alliance. But that resolution masks a more complicated spatiality of both placelessness and movement that Knopp argues must be considered to advance understandings of queer geography.[64]

If we plot Russell's 'spatial self' where time is the chronology of scenes in the text and place is the location in which the scene is set, however, we get a very different geography of *Geography Club* (see Figure 3).[65] What I find interesting about Figure 3 is not the fact that Russell moves through space, but rather the *way* he does so.

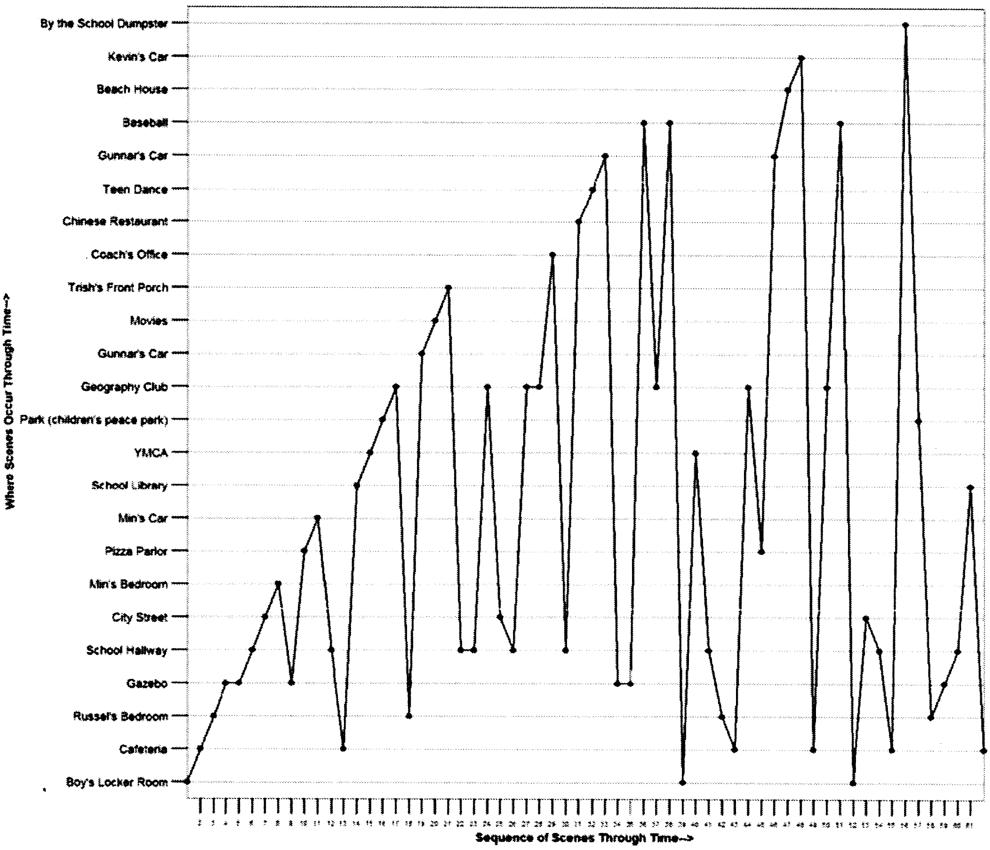

FIGURE 3 Russell's mobility through the novel

Represented in abstract space, it is a zigzag, rather than a sloped line or arc.[66] He moves between a rather wide – albeit typical – variety of places in his world. Russell's geography is roughly split evenly between the locations in and around the school and other places that would be typical of a high-school boy (his room, a teen dance, in a friend's car, etc.), yet the types of places he visits are not clustered in space and time. He never spends extensive, continuous amounts of time in a single closet space, but nor is he always out in the world. Russell moves between public and private spaces, in and out of the closet and the world as the novel progresses. So, for example, between scenes 1 and 6, Russell moves between the boy's locker room, the school cafeteria, his own bedroom, and the gazebo at night. In scenes 22–28, he moves between the private space of Geography Club and more public spaces like the school hallways and city streets. Such a processual juxtaposition of inside/outside the closet contributes to the sense of the closet as spatial metonym.

Several spaces are also quite liminal in the text, and this gives a sense of mobility and fluidity to the geographies in *Geography Club*. They rest strategically between inside/outside the closet, as they are difficult to parse definitively into either public or private space. They are what Soja might call 'thirdspaces': places of bothness and betweenness that resist simple dichotomized coding.[67] Several key conversations, for example, take place while the characters are driving in cars. After his aborted petting session with Trish, Russell storms out of the cabin and walks towards home. Crying and frustrated, Russell makes it to a phone and calls Kevin, who comes and gets him. In the space of Kevin's car, Russell sobs in the safety of Kevin's arms.

> I'd never cried in anyone's arms before, but I have to recommend it. It felt really good.
>
> ....
>
> He just listened, and when I was done, he told me that I'd done the right thing by leaving, and that I didn't have anything to be ashamed of by crying. Then he kept holding me and stroking my hair and telling me that everything would be all right.[68]

While visibly out in public, they retain the privacy where no one else can hear the conversations. This point is sharpened when we contrast the gay-themed conversations in the cars with the more heterosexual ones Gunnar has with Russell on the sidewalk, where anyone can overhear. Furthermore, this liminality is also expressed when he returns to places, and they themselves change. The locker room goes from being a place of exclusion for Russell to a place of acceptance and popularity, for instance. Most notably, perhaps, Geography Club itself goes from being a closeted haven for outcasts to a hostile forum for debate over the relations between universal tolerance and the limits of identitarian politics, and then back to a utopian space. Indeed, at the very end of the book, we know that Geography Club has become the Goodkind High Gay-Straight-Bisexual Alliance, suggesting a major change of place; but we are never actually taken there.[69] The announcement takes place in the (now happy) school cafeteria. We do not know how the club changes now that it is less concealed. Does it retain the nurturing and protective dimensions of closet space? Taken as a whole, the narrative moves from closet to world, by tacking between public and private spheres.

Finally, Knopp has noted placelessness, in particular, as one of the fluidic spatial ontologies that gay men inhabit yet which remain underappreciated in queer geography.[70] In geography, placelessness typically connotes locations that are often ignored, are generic, or mundane. They are devoid of any salient character, or weighty cultural, symbolic weight.[71] Here, however, I follow Knopp and take placelessness to refer to the *elsewhere* of the closet and the world in Geography Club. Places that are alluded to, but to which we are never taken to by Russell. They are nowhere in the sense of not being now/here. Placelessness forms of a sort of closet in the world of the text. In Geography Club there is an especially noteworthy closet around sex. While sexual relations between Russell and Kevin, as well as between Min and Terese, are attended to in the text, sex itself is absent in the text. We know that it takes place, but it is placeless; it is off-text, elsewhere, in private; beyond the public eye of the reader. Min tells Russell that she and Terese have sex in an old warehouse. Even in the climactic scene on the double date in the cabin, Gunnar and Kimberly are intent on having sex, and Trish is making advances on Russell, but they do not actually get that far before Russell flees the cabin. We know that Russell does have sex with Kevin, but he refuses to go into detail:

> We kept kissing, only this time there may have been some groping and fumbling and hugging. I think I'll end this scene here, though. After all, a guy should be allowed to keep some secrets, shouldn't he?[72]

He himself claims a right of privacy against the reader. While the club is a closet for emotional support and community, it is not a closet for sex and desire. They take place privately in public space in other locations. Nevertheless, we can detect some spatial metaphor and metonymy, as this placelessness to the sexual encounter is etiolatically troped in the here and now of Russell's baseball practice with Kevin:

> Kevin would slam the ball into my mitt (*thwap!*), and I'd do my best to heave it back at him (*thwumph*). At first it felt stilted and awkward. My aim was lousy, and even though Kevin was obviously going easy on me, his pitches still hit my mitt so hard, they stung my hand.
> *Thwap!*
> *Thwumph*.
> *Thwap!*
> *Thwumph*.
> But then something strange happened. It was like we fell into some sort of groove. The ball kept whizzing back and forth, and it felt like we were connected some how – like it was electricity zipping back and forth on a shiny copper wire. The ball itself was alive, and suddenly so were we – fresh and alert and raw.[73]

The closeting of sex in the novel no doubt makes sense under the present conservative cultural climate in the US, and the general moral panics around adolescent sexuality, but its placelessness in the text, along with the strong sense of Russell's back-and-forth mobilities in the text, contribute not just to the sense that the closet can be thought of as material space, but also to the idea that thinking about it metonymically shows us its spatial complexity without sacrificing a materialist analysis.

Conclusion

My purpose in this paper has been to read *Geography Club* from a decidedly geographic perspective. More specifically, this reading has emphasized the metonymic and material dimensions of the closet to extend our understanding of closet space as both material and metaphoric. The components of my reading are threefold.

First, I extend work done within geography on writing and representation. Like all social sciences with a positivist legacy, geographers remain confounded by how to represent 'the world' (or pieces thereof) if it is always, already discursive and produced. Some geographers have turned to non-representational theory or other epistemological strategies to work productively within the crisis of representation. I suggest that a careful consideration of how representations work is also required. For example, the deployment of metaphors and metonyms is part of the process of producing closets, which do trap and conceal in very concrete, material ways. But these deployments also, ironically, nurture and protect. They produce places within the heteronormative world, but also worlds within the world, in which sexuality is never divorced from class, gender, race and other axes of difference. We can be both inside and outside these places, but that does not imply that space is incidental. In these ways, oppressive spaces and places in *Geography Club* capture both a fixed and a dynamic spatiality that queer geographers are trying to understand and represent.

Second, I have extended work specifically on spatial metaphor and metonym. This reading suggests that it is productive to consider metonymy as well as metaphor – in this case, the ways in which spatial language and representations are not just metaphors for oppression but also material spatializations of it. In the novel, we can see spatial structures and practices that materialize signifiers such as the Geography Club, and the practices of living within and between them (e.g. coming out, staying 'in' and moving through hallways). Materializing the metaphor need not mean insisting on a clunkiness that belies the irony and complexity of spaces like the closet (their 'knowing-by-not-knowing' or 'inside/out-ness'). We see this in the mobility around the various material and textual spaces of the novel, and the trajectory of the narrative itself, as the main character moves from inside to outside the closet, and from closet to world. There is a productive displacement of closets and world in the novel that captures the full complexity of these spaces and their power. These displacements are readily witnessed when we consider how the publicity or privacy of the main character is anachronistically placed in public or private space.

Third, this paper has applied these insights to critical geographies of sexuality and the closet itself. It insists that the closet, as a means of heteronormativity and homophobia, must be conceptualized and investigated as simultaneously a material and discursive phenomenon. Furthermore, I have suggested that linguistic signs of metonymy, synecdoche and metalepsis provide an efficient means to capture and convey the duality of the closet as both material and discursive, as well as both static and fluid. Perhaps linguistic terms that hone in on how signs do their signifying work (e.g., metaphors condense; metonyms displace) can provide some useful vocabulary, and thus research trajectories, for making better sense of sexuality's spatiality, especially closet space. In particular, given the relatively scant attention paid to spatial metonymy, it is productive to explore the nuances of synecdoche and metalepsis in the production of closet space. While geographers like Sharp have warned us to be sceptical of written, fictive geographies as privileged representations of space and place,[74] my point here is to suggest that writing laden with spatial metaphor and metonym can help us to understand closet space, and its scalarity, with greater ease and flexibility.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks go to each of the referees and Mona Domosh for some of the most engaged and insightful comments on previous drafts that I have ever had the pleasure to receive. For their insights and critiques, thanks also to Gail Durbrow, Lucy Jarosz, Larry Knopp, Vicky Lawson, Richard Phillips, Dick Morrill, Sally Mundt, Matt Sothern, Claire Rasmussen and Chandan Reddy. Finally, thanks to Brent Hartinger for speaking to me about the novel and his own geographical imaginations.

Notes

[1] B. Hartinger, *Geography Club* (hereafter *GC*). (New York, HarperCollins, 2003).

[2] Since part of my argument hinges on definitions of public and private, I should note here that 'public school' here is used in the American – rather than British – sense: administered by the local government and open to all students in the district.

[3] *GC*, pp. 62–63 (emphasis original).

[4] For recent examples see C. Jenkins 'Placing learning priorities on places', *St. Petersburg Times*, Florida (2 Sept. 2004), p. 1; P. Recer, 'Where in the world are we? Young people have no clue', *Chicago Sun-Times* (21 Nov. 2002), p. 4.

[5] S. Schulten, *The geographical imagination in the United States, 1898–1950* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001).

[6] Kant, for example, distinguished both history and geography in this manner. For a recent expression and example of this view of the discipline see P. Hubbard, ed., *Thinking geographically: space, theory, and contemporary human geography* (New York, Continuum Press, 2002).

[7] A dead metaphor is one that has become so common that speakers forget its metaphoric qualities. See G. Lakoff, 'The death of a dead metaphor', *Metaphor and symbolic activity* 2 (1987), pp. 143–47.

[8] For a recent empirical example, see M. Bamberger, *Wonderland: a year in the life of an American high school* (New York, Grove-Atlantic Press, 2004).

[9] For example, Y.-F. Tuan, 'Literature and geography', in D. Ley and M. Samuels, eds, *Humanistic geography* (Chicago, Maaroufa, 1978), pp. 194–206; G. Olsson, *Bird in egg; egg in bird* (London, Pion, 1980); D.C.D. Pocock, ed., *Humanistic geography and literature* (London, Croom Helm, 1981); J. Duncan and D. Ley, eds, *Place, culture, representation*

(London, Routledge, 1993); J. Sharp, 'A topology of "post" nationality", *Ecumene* 1 (1994), pp. 65–76; M. Brosseau, 'Geography's literature', *Progress in human geography* 18 (1994), pp. 333–53; J. Sharp, 'Towards a critical analysis of fictive geographies', *Area* 32 (2000), pp. 327–34.

[10] N. Smith and C. Katz, 'Grounding metaphor: towards a spatialized politics', in M. Keith and S. Pile, eds, *Place and the politics of resistance* (London, Routledge, 1993), pp. 67–83; G. Pratt, 'Spatial metaphors and speaking positions', *Society and space* 10 (1992), pp. 241–44. G. Pratt, 'Geographic metaphors in feminist theory', in S. Aiken, A. Brigham, S. Marston and P. Waterstone, eds, *Making worlds: gender, metaphor, and materiality* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1998), pp. 13–30; P. Price-Chalita, 'Spatial metaphor and the politics of empowerment', *Antipode* 26 (1994), pp. 236–54; N. Duncan, 'Renegotiating gender and sexuality in public and private spaces', in N. Duncan, ed., *BodySpace* (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 127–45; J. Smith, 'Geographical rhetoric: modes and tropes of appeal', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86 (1996), pp. 1–20.

[11] Geographers have been working with spatial metaphors productively, often by tracing their material effects in creating new geographies, from questions of colonialism, immigration, to the globalizing economy, to virtual reality and cyberspace. See: L. Jarosz, 'Constructing the Dark Continent: metaphor as geographic representation', *Geografiska Annaler* 74 (1992), pp. 105–15; T. Cresswell, 'Weeds, plagues, and bodily secretions: a geographical interpretation of metaphors of displacement', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87 (1997), pp. 330–45; M. Ellis and R. Wright, 'The Balkanization metaphor in the analysis of U.S. immigration', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998), pp. 686–98; J. van Loon, 'Social spatializations and everyday life', *Space and culture* 5 (2002), pp. 88–95; P. McHaffie, 'Surfaces: tacit knowledges, formal language, and metaphor at the Harvard Lab for Computer Graphics and Spatial Analysis', *International journal of geographical information science* 14 (2000), pp. 755–73; J. Tyner and O. Kuhlke, 'Pan-national identities: representations of the Philippine diaspora on the world wide web', *Asia Pacific viewpoint* 41 (2000), pp. 231–52; P. Kelly, 'Metaphors of meltdown: political representations of economic space in the Asian financial crisis', *Society and space* 19 (2001), pp. 719–42; P. Werbner, 'Metaphors of spatiality and networks in the plural city: a critique of the ethnic enclave economy debate', *Sociology* 35 (2001), pp. 671–93; J. Duruz, 'Rewriting the village: geographies of food and belonging in Clovelly, Australia', *Cultural geographies* 9 (2002), pp. 373–88; A. Mihalache, 'The cyber space–time continuum: meaning and metaphor', *Information society* 18 (2002), pp. 293–301; M. Budd, 'Musical movements and aesthetic metaphors', *British journal of aesthetics* 43 (2003), pp. 209–23; P. Fleming and A. Spicer, 'You can check out anytime, but you can never leave: spatial boundaries in a high-commitment organization', *Human relations* 10 (2004), pp. 75–94.

[12] M. Brown, *Closet space: geographies of metaphor from the body to the globe* (London, Routledge, 2000).

[13] For excellent examples, see G. Valentine, T. Skelton and R. Butler, 'Coming out and outcomes: negotiating lesbian and gay identities with, and in, the family', *Society and space* 21 (2003), pp. 479–99; M. Thomas, 'Pleasure and propriety: teen girls and the practice of straight space', *Society and space* 22 (2004), pp. 773–89.

[14] In reviews, Hartinger has noted the autobiographical tendencies in the novel. See e.g. C. Goodnow, 'Tacoma writer's gay-theme novel offers insights into young adults', *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (7 Apr. 2003), p. E1.

[15] We never find out who this student actually is, or even if s/he really exists.

[16] Goodnow, 'Tacoma writer's gay-theme novel'; D. Barton, 'A novel approach to the world of gay teens', *Sacramento Bee* (11 June 2003), p. E2; K. Howell, 'Gay YA novel, *Geography Club*, goes to the head of the class', *Publishers Weekly* (21 Mar 2003), available online at http://publishersweekly.com; last accessed Sept. 2004; N. Garden, 'Geography Club', *Lambda book report* 12 (2003), p. 41; R. Gray, 'Book review of *Geography Club*', *School library journal* 2 (2003), pp. 141–42; S. Gianelli, 'Book review: new in the Northwest, gay teens find support in "Geography Club"', *Oregonian* (12 July 2003), p. D-7.

[17] Brown, *Closet space*.

[18] Critiques include: J. Puar, review of *Closet space*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002), pp. 344–46; M. Hannah, review of *Closet space*, *Society and space*, forthcoming; G. Elder, review of *Closet space*, *Gender, place, and culture* 11 (2003), pp. 476–78.

[19] E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the closet* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990). For example, she emphasizes the closet as a mindful 'knowing by not knowing' or 'the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption' (p. 68). She is at pains to stress its ubiquity and indeterminacy, rather than its spatiality or fixity. I have elaborated on this point in Brown, *Closet space*, pp. 12–16.

[20] My understanding of metonymy is informed by the following sources: D. Lodge, *The modes of modern writing: metaphor, metonymy and the typology of modern literature* (London, Arnold, 1977); G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980); R. Jakobson, 'Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances', in L. Waugh and M. Monville-Burston, eds, *On language* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 115–33; R. Selden and P. Widdowson, *A reader's guide to contemporary literary theory* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1993); T. McLaughlin, 'Figurative language', in F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, eds, *Critical terms for literary study* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 80–90; T. Eagleton, *Literary theory: an introduction*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996); J.A. Cuddon, *Penguin dictionary of literary terms*, 4th ed (New York, Penguin, 1998).

[21] Logically, the premise of intertextuality suggests that while any spatial metonym might indeed carry additional, allusive meaning, part of that 'extra' meaning helps our understanding too. See Lakoff and Johnston, *Metaphors*.

[22] Lodge, *Modes of modern writing*; Selden and Widdowson, *Reader's guide*.

[23] While Selden and Widdowson, *ibid*., suggest any sequence provides a contextual frame, Lakoff and Johnston, *Metaphors,* have suggested seven common contexts that may produce metonyms: a part for a whole (synecdoche), a producer for a product, an object for a user, an institution for the people responsible, a place for an institution, and a place for an event.

[24] S. Marston, 'The social construction of scale', *Progress in human geography* 24 (2000), pp. 219–42; D. Delaney and H. Leitner, 'The political construction of scale', *Political geography* 16 (1997), pp. 93–97; H. Kurtz 'Scale-frames and counter scale-frames', *Political geography* 22 (2003), pp. 887–916.

[25] P. Stock, 'Dial "M" for metonym: Universal Exports, M's office space, and empire', *National identities* 2 (2000), pp. 35–47; D. Perlmutter and G. Wagner, 'The anatomy of a photojournalistic icon: marginalization of dissent in the selection and framing of "a death in Genoa"', *Visual communication* 10 (2004), pp. 91–108; L. Appleton, 'Distillations of something larger: the local scale and American national security', *Cultural geographies* 9 (2002), pp. 421–47; S. Wastell, 'Presuming scale, making diversity: on the mischiefs of measurement and the global:local metonym in theories of law and culture', *Critique of anthropology* 21 (2001), pp. 185–210.

[26] L.A. Staeheli, 'Publicity, privacy, and women's political action', *Society and space* 14 (1996), pp. 601–19. Staeheli recognizes that there are multiple forms of the public–private couplet in democratic-capitalist society.

[27] R. Phillips, 'Writing travel and mapping sexuality', in J. Duncan and D. Gregory, eds, *Writes of passage: reading travel writing* (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 70–91; M. Cieri, 'Between being and looking', *Acme* 2 (2003), pp. 147–66; J. Puar, 'A transnational critique of queer tourism', *Antipode* 35 (2002), pp. 935–46; D. Rushbrook, 'Cities, queer space, and the cosmopolitan tourist', *GLQ: a journal of gay and lesbian studies* 8 (2002), pp. 183–206; K. Sugg, 'Migratory sexualities, diasporic histories, and memory in queer Cuban-American cultural production', *Society and space* 21 (2003), pp. 461–77; M. Sothern, 'Unqueer patriarchies, or "what do we think when we fuck?"', *Antipode* 36 (2004), pp. 183–91.

[28] D. Massey, 'Geographies of responsibility', *Geografiska Annaler* 86 (2004), pp. 5–18.

[29] L. Knopp, 'Ontologies of place, placelessness, and movement: queer quests for identity and their impacts on contemporary geographic thought', *Gender, place, and culture* 11 (2004), pp. 121–34.

[30] I thank Scott Whitlock for emphasizing this point to me and other queer geographers.

[31] Here we might read Brian as the abject signifier of homosexuality in the novel. Of course, this is very clever because, in fact, he is not gay. Yet it reveals the fantastic, projective quality of homophobia. I thank Sally Munt for pointing this out to me.

[32] *GC*, p. 159.

[33] *GC*, pp. 195–96.

[34] C. Leitich-Smith, 'The story behind the story: Brent Hartinger on Geography Club', available online at http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/storyhartinger.html, last accessed Sept. 2004.

[35] D. Michiko Florence, 'Interview with debut young adult novelist Brent Hartinger', available online at http://debbimichikoflorence.com, last accessed Sept. 2004.

[36] See Brown, *Closet space*, ch. 2.

[37] *GC*, p. 61.

[38] *GC*, p. 74.

[39] *GC*, p. 75.

[40] See e.g. J. D'Emilio, *The world turned: essays on gay history, politics, and culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, Duke University Press, 2002).

[41] *Ibid*. p. 137.

[42] See T. Barnes, *Logics of dislocation* (New York, Guilford Press, 1996).

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] *GC*, pp. 1–4.

[45] *GC*, p. 192.

[46] On this point see M. Brown, 'Sex, scale, and the new urban politics', in D. Bell and G. Valentine, eds, *Mapping desire* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 245–63; C. Wincapaw, 'The virtual spaces of lesbian and bisexual women's electronic mailing lists', *Journal of lesbian studies* 4 (1999), pp. 45–59.

[47] W. Leap, ed., *Public sex/gay space* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999).

[48] G. Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York, Basic Books, 1994). See also Brown, *Closet space*.

[49] *GC*, p. 38.

[50] *GC*, p. 59.

[51] Admittedly this is a somewhat problematic measure of 'intensity'. Nevertheless, I am using it suggestively, rather than definitively. And since all of the novel's scenes are set consistently in real time–space, the number of pages a scene covers is not an unreasonable marker for the

temporal duration. Geography Club, while not the most frequent setting, is where scenes are the longest.

[52] *GC*, p. 39.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *GC*, pp. 136–37 (emphasis original).

[55] *GC*, pp 138–39.

[56] *GC*, p. 167 (emphasis original).

[57] *GC*, p. 105.

[58] *GC*, p. 75.

[59] *GC*, pp. 71–72.

[60] *GC*, p. 205.

[61] Indeed, several critics specifically note just how painfully accurate the cafeteria's social geography is in the book. See: H. Rochman, review of *Geography Club*, *Booklist* (1 Apr. 2003), p. 1387. Anon., review of *Geography Club*, *Publishers Weekly* (3 Feb. 2003), pp. 76–77.

[62] *GC*, p. 53.

[63] *GC*, p. 54.

[64] Knopp, 'Ontologies'.

[65] I am inspired by time-geography to plot the actual locations over time. For similar representations from within literary studies, however, see F. Moretti, 'Graphs, maps, and trees: abstract models for literary history 1', *New Left review* 24 (2003), pp. 67–93; F. Moretti, 'Graphs, maps, and trees: abstract models for literary history 2', *New Left review* 26 (2004), pp. 79–193; F. Moretti, 'Graphs, maps, and trees: abstract models for literary history 3', *New Left review* 28 (2004), pp. 43–63.

[66] On abstract space see H. Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992).

[67] See E. Soja, *Third space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996).

[68] *GC*, p. 139.

[69] Hartinger is planning a sequel to *Geography Club* called *The Order of the Poison Oak*. It is set at a summer camp and will discuss what happens to Russell, Min and Gunnar. See S. Leeper, 'Meet Brent Hartinger', available online at http://www.outminds.com, last accessed Sept. 2004. He has also mentioned another sequel, *Grand and Humble*, that may discuss the meeting of 'a popular kid and a loser'. See J. Graves, 'Brent Hartinger makes his mark focused on the plot', *News Tribune*, Tacoma (15 Feb. 2004), p. E-1.

[70] Knopp, 'Ontologies'.

[71] The classic reference is E. Relph, *Place and placelessness* (London, Pion, 1976). For a more recent sense, see Cresswell, 'Weeds'. Outside of geography, see M. Augé, *Non places: towards an anthropology of modernity* (London, Verso, 1995).

[72] *GC*, pp. 129–30.

[73] *GC*, pp. 130–31.

[74] For example, Sharp, 'Fictive geographics', p. 331.