

Introduction: Why Queer German History?*

Jennifer Evans

What does it mean to queer German history? More provocatively, how might queering it move us to ask new and different questions of our work, regardless of whether we write about matters of intimacy, eros, sexuality or love? This special issue presents five articles that, in unique and different ways, critically reconstruct the lifeworlds, struggles and intimacies of same-sex desiring men, women and gender variant people over the *longue durée*. At the same time, in the spirit of two decades' worth of scholarship that sees queer as much as a methodological intervention as an epithet, it seeks to go a step further. If the ultimate point of a queered German history is not simply to chronicle the exploits of same-sex identified people over time for an audience already open to the history of sexuality, then this introduction aims to suggest ways in which queering German history might aid us in thinking more critically about how conventions, ideals, norms and, above all, practices gain traction and resonance in our history writing, often as unquestioned truths. As I'll show, a critical approach drawing on the insights of 'queer theory' sheds light on the processes by which hierarchies of meaning and experience generally are made and remade in different spaces and places, including how it is that they sometimes come to be regarded as unchanging and immutable. A queered history questions claims to a singular, linear march of time and universal experience and points out the unconscious ways in which progressive narrative arcs often seep into our analyses. To queer the past is to view it sceptically, to pull apart its constitutive pieces and analyse them from a variety of perspectives, taking nothing for granted. Keenly attuned to how power manifests as a subject of study in its own right as well as something we reproduce despite our best intentions to right past wrongs, a queer methodology emphasizes overlap, contingency, competing forces and complexity. It asks us to linger over our own assumptions—individual as well as societal—to interrogate the role they play in the past that we seek out, discover and recreate in our writing. To queer history, then, is to think about how even our best efforts of historical restitution might inadvertently limit what is in fact discernable in the past despite attempts to make visible alternative ways of being in the world in the present.

How might history look if we were to render historical categories strange instead of assuming they apply more or less uniformly across time, to all people? To queer history instead of just writing histories of queerly situated or queer identified people is to draw on a wide array of conceptual tools—often from other disciplines—to lay bare common assumptions about the world in which our subjects lived. When we do this, we begin to write histories that chip away at the progress narrative with its overwhelming focus on the twentieth century as that moment when sexual knowledge and practices evolved out of repression and shame to enlightenment, making space for tolerance and diversity. Instead, by taking up one of Laura Doan's arguments in her 2013 book

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Disturbing Practices, that we need critical and self-reflexive histories instead of heroic genealogies of arrival or becoming, we begin to forge real and tangible space for a whole new range of subjects and experiences.

In what follows, I'll sketch out the entry of gay and lesbian history into the academy. Then I'll discuss the different ways in which same-sex desire has been conceptualized on both sides of the Atlantic, in literary studies and history proper, from tenured faculty to activist scholars working at arm's length from the university. Finally, drawing on examples in and outside the field, I will suggest ways in which a queer approach to history might highlight some core conceptual limitations in our current practice. This is vital as we move forward, for as this special issue will also show, there is still much to learn about non-normative self-formations *vis-à-vis* the development of human rights, intimacy and homosociality and the ways in which these changed over time, in relation to the regulation and celebration of pleasure and desire, and to individual subjectivity.

I: The Politics of Recovery

Before there was anything resembling queer history, there was the reappropriation of the term queer, primarily in the 1970s, by same-sex desiring men and women seeking ways to politicize their struggle for rights and representation in the era following the decriminalization of homosexuality in Western European and North American countries.¹ Activist scholars brought these battles to the academy, where they hoped to forge a space within Sociology, English and History departments for studies of unconventional lives in other spatio-temporal settings.² Like members of the New Left, who used the methods of social history to create a counter-canon, these pioneers of what would eventually become known as lesbian and gay studies mined the past for historical forbears to find precedents for contemporary experience. From these early days this 'recovery agenda' used multidisciplinary methods to write queers back into history. Let there be no doubt: there was a tremendous sense of urgency among these early scholars rummaging about in the archives in search of lost stories. For those in the trenches, these hard-fought battles of reclamation were an opportunity to lay claim to the past in order to correct inequality in the present. Deeply political acts of historical restitution, these early histories collapsed time as the quest to right the wrongs of historical occlusion meant finding new and more evidence of contemporary social formations in past form. While some of these early histories were quite extraordinary in scope and detail, such as John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1986), their ancestral genealogical lens was increasingly focused on the notion of identity as a coherent category, as much in past iterations as in the present.³

It is easy to comprehend why this interest in the origins, history and lifeworlds of same-sex desiring men and women might take centre stage at precisely the moment when gay and lesbian students and scholars sought greater visibility in both the

¹ Annemarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, 1997), p. 1.

² Jeffrey Weeks, 'Queer(y)ing "the modern Homosexual",' *Journal of British Studies*, 51, 3 (2012), pp. 523–39; Gary Kinsman, 'The Canadian National Security War on Queers and the Left', in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills and Scott Rutherford (eds), *New World Coming, The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 77–88.

³ Laura Doan calls it 'the history of us'. See Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices* (Chicago, 2013), p. 66.

university and wider society.⁴ Of course, there was interest in same-sex desire before the Sexual Revolution, and in the German university setting, considerable research had already been undertaken early to mid-century in institutions such as the *Zentrum für Sexualforschung und forensische Psychiatrie* at the University of Hamburg and in extra-university research centres such as Magnus Hirschfeld's famed *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. Still, it wasn't until the 1970s that the eminent sociologist Rüdiger Lautmann was able to publish his scholarly examination of social milieu and lifecourse in academic fora.⁵ This ethnographic turn represented a major shift away from the pathologization of the homosexual towards a greater focus on individuality, community, milieu and experience. It would have a tremendous impact on the kinds of questions that historians came to ask of their sources, to say nothing of the political work of humanizing same-sex desiring men and women to a wider public.

Although medical models would remain in force, increasingly homosexuality came to be regarded as a social phenomenon requiring social explanations and solutions.⁶ This change in tack was aided by law commissions in both East and West Germany that explored the origins and consequences of homosexuality in social science terms, taking particular note of possible endangerment to youth.⁷ No longer the exclusive domain of criminal and psychiatrist case files, same-sex sexuality was socialized, as Chris Waters has argued, becoming more than a psychological predisposition. It was a lifeworld, sometimes erroneously called a 'lifestyle', with its own rules and rituals of belonging. Alongside this new emphasis on group identity and milieu, who one was intimate with, and how, took on added meaning as a core expression of the wants and wishes of the essential self.⁸ After decades of scholarship on the subject, from Freud to Hirschfeld, Anna Rüling to Beate Uhse, sex, intimacy and sexual pleasure—gay or straight—became ever more widely accepted as core features of the whole personality.⁹

II: The Great Paradigm Shift, revisited

Just as identity seemed to coalesce as the best way to confront marginalization then and now, enter French philosopher Michel Foucault with two 'paradigm-shifting'

⁴Chris Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945–1968', *Journal of British Studies*, 51, 3 (2012), pp. 685–710.

⁵Rüdiger Lautmann, *Seminar Gesellschaft und Homosexualität* (Frankfurt/Main, 1977).

⁶See Waters, 'The Homosexual as Social Being 1945–68'. See also Greg Egighian, Andreas Killen and Christine Leuenberger, 'Introduction, the Self as Project: Politics and Human Sciences in the 20th Century', *Osiris*, 22 (2007), pp. 1–25.

⁷Robert Moeller, 'Private Acts, Public Anxieties, and the Fight to Decriminalize Male Homosexuality in West Germany', *Feminist Studies*, 36, 3 (2010), pp. 528–52, and Jennifer V. Evans, 'Decriminalization, Seduction, and "Unnatural Desire" in East Germany', *Feminist Studies*, 36, 3 (2010), pp. 553–577. See also Clayton Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany: Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945–1969* (Basingstoke, 2012), and Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁸Moritz Foellmer, *Individuality and Modernity in Berlin: Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall* (Cambridge, 2013) and Greg Egighian, 'The Psychologization of the Socialist Self: East German Forensic Psychology and its Deviants, 1945–1975', *German History*, 22, 2 (2004), pp. 181–205.

⁹See Kirsten Leng, 'Anna Rüling, Michel Foucault, and the 'Tactical Polyvalence' of the Female Homosexual', in Scott Spector, Helmut Puff and Dagmar Herzog (eds), *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault* (New York, 2012), pp. 95–108; Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn Was Legal: the Erotica Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago, 2011).

ideas that would forever change the foundation upon which histories of sexual subjectivity were conceptualized and written. One was historical, the other methodological, and although they are well rehearsed and known by most scholars of history, it is worth going over them briefly here, if only because they were so central to how queer theorists would shift the discussion away from matters of identity to performances of the self. In that oft-cited first volume of the *History of Sexuality* series, originally published around the same time as the first wave of gay and lesbian social histories, Foucault drew the ire of early modernists with his argument that it was only in the late nineteenth century that the coalescence of juridical, literary, medical discourses of sexual deviation rendered homosexuality an identifiable mark of innate identity, not just a sexual practice. For those authorities tasked with regulating norms of behaviour, whether legal, medical or social, what one did with whom was a core feature of the modern self, which was now subject to new, more invasive forms of policing and control.

This line in the sand between premodernity and the modern, between a history of same-sex acts versus coherent self-contained identities, drew no shortage of criticism inside and outside the field of history. And yet, at least in terms of how we appreciate sexology as linked to the development of a gay rights movement, it still animates our analysis all these years later, most recently surfacing in Robert Beachy's bestselling *Gay Berlin*, even as we enter a period *After the History of Sexuality* (to cite the excellent edited volume by Scott Spector, Helmut Puff and Dagmar Herzog).¹⁰ The essays which bookend this special issue, those by Helmut Smith and Craig Griffiths, come at the question of identity from two different traditions to show the various ways in which the concept was understood in relation to the development of patriotic nationalism and human rights. In very different contexts and settings, Smith in the eighteenth century and Griffiths in the 1970s, the authors show that the ways in which identity was taken up by their various actors underscores the mutability of the category; that is, there were then, as there are now, multiple understandings of what masculinity might mean in the negotiation of citizenship, national belonging and participation in the public sphere. Smith's contribution emphasizes the ambiguous yet important place of homosociality in how early patriotic nationalists conceived of and voiced love of country. Whether this bled over into outright expressions of love between men is not the point here; rather, it is the way the language of male bonding, bold, sometimes even romantic, helps explain the intertwining of passion and masculinity in the development of national consciousness. But where early nationalists employed a robust language of brotherhood and fraternity in laying claim to civic virtue, 200 years later, masculinity, pride and common cause were not enough to unify gay rights campaigners, many of whom defined their campaign for rights and recognition on the backs of an earlier generation of homophile activists, men deemed more assimilationist and respectability oriented, who opted to keep their sexuality private, out of the public arena. In other words, homosociality could be platonic yet charged, unifying or dividing. What these two articles remind us is that to think of it as a coherent force of historical identity (national, queer or otherwise) is potentially to overlook the role of ambiguity and fractiousness in how, in these instances, men

¹⁰Spector, Puff and Herzog, *After the History of Sexuality*.

sought entry into an expanded public sphere. A queered history reminds us of the merits of open-endedness, of keeping the analytical threads frayed.

III: When Literature Meets History

For questions such as these, queer theory can be incredibly useful in helping us think through the thorny issue of periodization. Many early texts were penned by literary scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose *Epistemology of the Closet* became a primer of sorts for how to sharpen our analyses of past forms of sexual expression to find a way out of this totalizing ‘acts’ versus ‘identities’/ ‘premodern’ versus ‘modern’ debate.¹¹ Although she has been criticized as not going far enough in debunking Foucault’s ‘Paradigm Shift’, Sedgwick was tremendously successful in showing the applicability of his genealogical method for understanding how present preoccupations colour perceptions of the past. In a nutshell, Foucault reminds us that as long as we fail to denaturalize our current frames of reference, our histories remain suffused with present-day suppositions and concerns. By failing to adopt a critical stance towards our own frames of reference, we risk reproducing some of the same assumptions that made the omissions in the record possible in the first place. Without treating presumptions of normality, power and hierarchy as just as contingent and historical as abnormality, disempowerment and marginality, we risk premising our histories on the expectation of invisibility, precluding the possibility that alternative self-understandings might have held tremendous salience to persons in the past, regardless of their acceptability.¹² Put more simply, what is invisible to us might have been infinitely visible to others, if perhaps in an attenuated way.

In the 1990s, poststructural and queer theory slowly trickled into histories of same-sex sexuality, forcing new considerations about historical practice. Nowhere was this more palpable than in North American and UK universities. Here, medievalists and early modernists chipped away at the certainty of Foucault’s paradigmatic claims—however useful they may have been—exposing to light the wide range of intimacies, relationships and norms that make up any historical period. Merry Wiesner-Hanks has gone so far as to remind us that early modernists were among some of the first to challenge the uniqueness of the nineteenth-century modernity thesis, with seminal texts by Lyndal Roper, Thomas Laqueur, Barbara Duden and Ulinka Rublack showing that gender and sexuality served as important ontological categories to ruminations of self and society, if in different ways at different times.¹³ Whether articulated through juridical or religious texts, anatomy drawings or at the interstices of local knowledge formations and medical professionalization, the pivots upon which we hinge our analyses of the transition from premodern to modern vary from context to context.

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990).

¹² Michel Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (eds), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, 1984), p. 46. For a critique of Sedgwick, see David Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 2002). Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 4 (1991), pp. 773–97.

¹³ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Sexual Identity and Other Aspects of “Modern” Sexuality’, in Spector, Puff and Herzog, *After the History of Sexuality*, pp. 34–5. See also Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1994); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

IV: Queering Time

Interestingly, literary scholars working with queer theory also weighed in on the temporality debate, but from a radically different angle. Indeed, a preoccupation with chronicity has been a major strand of queer theory this last decade, with the ‘temporality turn’ ushering forth renewed interest in medieval and early modern texts as well as new ways of interpreting them in relation to present intellectual and political concerns.¹⁴ At stake is the matter of queer time and its role in the production of sexual selves, an interesting spin-off of which is the historicization of affect as part of the larger project of critiquing knowledge formations. Recognizing that different discourses, sources and registers occasion distinct, overlapping, and sometimes competing articulations of sexual subjectivity, Carla Freccero argues in her path-breaking book *Queer/Early/Modern* that new reading practices might be useful in aiding us to tease apart both the similarities and distinctions in how selves were constituted and understood then and now.¹⁵ At face value, this seems quite familiar to much of the work in early modern cultural history. Yet, in arguing against the emergence of coherent identities in near-linear sequencing, Freccero, joined by medievalist Carolyn Dinshaw, see in the term ‘queer’ a critical practice that interjects in this logic, directing our attention to moments of ‘temporal heterogeneity’, by which they mean the multiplicity of perceptual time frames and temporal consciousness based on habitus and situation.¹⁶ Not all that dissimilar to the notion of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous), although rooted in a different intellectual tradition, their interest is in time’s ‘wrinkles and folds’ as Elizabeth Freeman puts it in her introduction to the special issue of *GLQ* on ‘queer temporality’, as when ‘some minor feature of our own sexually impoverished present suddenly meets up with a richer past, or as the materials of a failed and forgotten project of the past find their uses now, in a future unimaginable in their time’.¹⁷

In his contribution to the current issue, Albrecht Diem demonstrates the value of such a queer reading of the sources. In a textual analysis of two different perspectives on monastic discipline and reform regarding same-sex activity among brothers, Diem makes a strong case against contemporary assumptions about same-sex sexuality in the Carolingian era. Here, he gives evidence of a very pragmatic approach to male erotic

¹⁴See the roundtable discussion in the ‘Queer Temporalities’ special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, 2/3 (2007), pp. 177–95. Also, Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, 2012); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, 2006); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, 2004); Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, 2005) and *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Durham, 2004); J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, 2005) and *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, 2011); Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany, 2009); Tom Boellstorff, *A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia* (Durham, 2007); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, 2009).

¹⁵Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*.

¹⁶Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘All Kinds of Time’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 35 (2013), pp. 3–25.

¹⁷Elizabeth Freeman, ‘Introduction’ to *GLQ* special issue ‘Queer Temporalities’, 13, 2–3 (2007), p. 162. Bloch’s original 1932 essay was first published in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935) and reprinted as Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter, ‘Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics’, *New German Critique*, 11 (1977), pp. 22–38. Reinhard Koselleck, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt/Main, 2000).

love, which may not have promoted eros but deemed it suitably contained within the homoeroticism of monasticism. In finding a third path beyond condemnation and disavowal, Diem maps out the spiritual-social logic of brotherly intimacy in the Carolingian imaginary.

While the new cultural history of the 1980s and 1990s looked back in time to periodize alternative modernities to Foucault's dictum, literary scholars drew on Benjamin, Bourdieu, Williams and Derrida to question the linearity of time in favour of layering, to advance histories of complexity instead of cohesiveness, and to chart third possible paths. This approach hinged on new pivot points to define 'the criteria by which different nonlinear temporalities might meaningfully be brought together.'¹⁸ While Koselleck revealed the layering of timescapes and their distinct trajectories and tempos, queer theorists pointed to time's heteronormativity, based on a model of kinship that until very recently denied queer experience, organized as it was to a great extent around biological, that is, reproductive time: birth, adolescence, marriage, childrearing, death. Queer theory's temporal turn, then, was not just a critique of historicism, it was aimed at the unconscious perpetuation of historiographical truisms without full consideration of how these might actually foreclose our ability to imagine alternative ways of being in the first place. If we learn to 'feel backward' as literary scholar Heather Love puts it, looking backwards in time for the emotions that fail to fit our progressive imagining of how twentieth-century history unfolded, benchmarked as it is now from criminalization to civil union, then a new range of affective experiences might actually materialize, unencumbered by narratives of assimilation and respectability.¹⁹

This would mean looking to the past for examples of erotic subjectivities that don't easily graft onto our own, delinking our historical project from the search for trans-temporal, collective cohesiveness in the name of progress and identity.²⁰ As Elizabeth Heineman pointed out in the early 2000s in an important historiographical intervention on sexuality and Nazism, and again in her book on Beate Uhse, this kind of approach might also hint at why it remains so difficult to write about sexuality's double edge, not just its role as an expression of trauma and pain but also of pleasure and desire. It is not insignificant that the latter focus has been the slowest to be taken up by historians of sexuality, let alone by those working on the 'difficult histories' of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Yet, such a reworking of established paradigms, as Dagmar Herzog has also shown, not only holds the potential to yield insight into the regime's appeal,

¹⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, 2–3 (2007), p. 186.

¹⁹ Attention to normative socialization was first sparked by Leo Bersani in *Homos* (Cambridge, 1995) when he asked, provocatively, 'should a homosexual be a good citizen?' Here, he was not simply questioning whether gay identified men could be bearers of citizenship. Rather, his point was that homosexuality as radical otherness (and here, thought of primarily as non-reproductive sex) held a particular force for destabilizing societal norms as we know them. It's 'antisociality' was in fact its generative power. *Homos* was followed by Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, 2004), which heralded a new schism between those who espoused queer negativity and those—like the late Jose Estaban Muñoz—who preferred to cast the gaze forward to queer's utopian potential for performing new forms of relating. See Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Estaban Muñoz and Tim Dean, 'The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory', *PMLA*, 121, 3 (2006), pp. 819–28.

²⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). On the importance of time and temporality to queer history, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, 2010).

successes and failures, but also nudges us to consider the ways in which particular memories of the Third Reich have been instrumental to how progressive human rights agendas have developed in the postwar period.²¹ An example of this might be the way in which Magnus Hirschfeld has been lionized as the guiding light of a rational, scientifically driven human rights movement for sexual toleration. While there can be no doubt he showed tremendous bravery in dark times, this particular remembering of Hirschfeld as a hero to the cause sidesteps more fraught parts of his legacy, including his embrace, like so many, of eugenic thinking. More importantly, in placing Hirschfeld at the centre of the homosexual rights movement, we forget that there were numerous, often competing visions of homosexual emancipation, some more aggressively masculinist, as in the case of Hans Blüher, and others more radical still, like that of Kurt Hiller. We see Hirschfeld's middle-of-the-road stance in his advocacy for the repeal of anti-sodomy law, the notorious Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, where he stopped short of advocating the decriminalization of male prostitution, seeing it as a symptom of degeneration and not an organic expression of homosexuality. Taking inspiration from Lisa Duggan's assertion that our histories of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries owe more to respectability than to sexual radicalism (gay marriage over a fundamental reworking of societal institutions), we might well ask what is lost as well as gained when we hook our present struggles to a vision of homosexual emancipation that is selective at best and centrist at worst?²²

Birgit Lang and Katie Sutton's essay in this issue forms part of a renewed interest in sexology that seeks to flesh out the ideas of some of these lesser known actors. They explore the role that psychoanalytical approaches to homosexuality played in queering discourses of identity, that is, how they provided a self-conscious critique of governing sexological explanations of same-sex desire as inborn. In providing a new language for the articulation of 'perversity', they argue that psychoanalytic case studies presented new ways of conceptualizing the stable relationship of sexuality to the self promoted in sexological discourse. At the same time that this was revolutionary, it proved to be less practical in garnering the support of legislators and activists, who saw Hirschfeld's biological explanatory model as offering more widespread appeal. Still, psychoanalytic case studies offered great potential for renarrativizing queer subjectivities—subjectivities that fell foul of extant sexological, legal and medical frameworks. More importantly, Lang and Sutton argue, they also provided a language for understanding female same-sex desire on its own terms, as well as something performative, influencing contemporary scholars such as Judith Butler. While this flowering of intellectual inquiry enriched the study of homosexuality between 1890 and 1920, its emancipatory impulses would not stand the test of time, as more conservative, even homophobic ideas seeped into the field in the wake of World War II, providing yet another critique of the standard characterization of the twentieth century as one of ongoing liberalization.

²¹ Elizabeth Heineman, 'Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, special issue 'Sexuality and German Fascism', 11, 1/2 (2002), pp. 22–66. Also, *Before Porn Was Legal: the Erotic Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago, 2011). See here too Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005).

²² Laurie Marhoeffer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto, 2015).

V: The State of Play in Today's Germany

It is not insignificant that anything that might garner the label of queer history germinated in institutional settings outside Germany, where the history of sexuality—as opposed to gender—has made fewer inroads these last twenty years. Indeed, a casual survey of university programmes and research output paints a telling picture. While Austria can boast of Franz Eder at the University of Vienna, in Germany proper the Humboldt University's Claudia Bruns is the only chair who encapsulates gender and sexuality as a focus of inquiry. Important work at the doctoral and habilitation level has come out of other research centres, such as the *Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung* in Berlin, the earlier incarnation of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Women's and Gender Research at the Technische Universität under the directorship of Karin Hausen, and also the Max-Planck-Institut for the History of Emotions. While most of these studies have explored the history of homosexuality, specifically the apparatuses and experiences of persecution in the Weimar and Nazi period, only recently, with Benno Gammerl's work, has there been a blatant shift away from recuperative research towards overtly queer methodologies.²³

Two things bear mentioning here. The first is that the lion's share of scholarship on gay, lesbian and trans lives in Germany has come at the hands of authors with very little formal institutional support, whether in the form of academic positions or funding.²⁴ This helps explain the local character of many of these studies, linked to specific cities and neighbourhoods with their various gay and lesbian scenes. The second is that what has been written has crystalized around two distinct historical moments, Imperial and Weimar-era sexology and NS persecution.²⁵ What Stonewall is for the contemporary

²³ See Benno Gammerl, 'Queer Romance? Romantische Liebe in den biographischen Erzählungen von westdeutschen Lesben und Schwulen', *L'Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 24, 1 (2013), pp. 15–34, part of his larger project on 'Homosexuality and Emotional Life in Rural West Germany, 1960–1990'. Other more empirical work includes Jens Dobler, *Zwischen Duldungspolitik und Verbrechensbekämpfung: Homosexuellenverfolgung durch die Berliner Polizei von 1848 bis 1933* (which is also his 2008 dissertation at the Technische Universität Berlin 2008, 'Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Polizeigeschichte e.V.', 6 [wrongly labelled vol. 1 of the series], Frankfurt/Main, 2008); Claudia Schoppmann, *Zeit der Maskierung: Lebensgeschichten lesbischer Frauen im 'Dritten Reich'* (Frankfurt/Main, 1998); Susanne zur Nieden (ed.), *Homosexualität und Staatsräson: Männlichkeit, Homophobie und Politik in Deutschland 1900–1945* (Frankfurt/Main, 2005).

²⁴ Rüdiger Lautmann, 'Nichts für Ungut! Kommentierende Bemerkungen zur Forschungslage über den rosa Winkel im Konzentrationslager', in *Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen, 1999), pp. 104–11. See also Florian Mildener, Jennifer Evans, Rüdiger Lautmann and Jakob Pastoetter (eds), *Was ist Homosexualität? Forschungsgeschichte, gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen und Perspektiven* (Hamburg, 2014).

²⁵ In addition to the many good city-specific texts outlining the nature of Nazi persecution of gay German men, such as Kristof Balsar, Mario Kramp, Jürgen Müller and Joanna Gotzmann (eds), *'Himmel und Hölle': Das Leben der Kölner Homosexuellen, 1945–1969* (Cologne, 1994), see Günter Grau, 'Verfolgung, "Umerziehung" oder "Ausmerzungen" homosexueller Männer 1933 bis 1945: Folgen des rassenhygienischen Konzepts der Reproduktionssicherung', in his *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993); Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann (eds), *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle* (Paderborn, 2002); Harry Oosterhuis, 'Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality in Nazi Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 32, 2 (1997), pp. 187–205; Hubert Kennedy, *Der Kreis: Eine Zeitschrift und ihr Programm* (Berlin, 1999); Stefan Micheler, 'Homophobic Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex-Desiring Men under National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11, 1–2 (2002), pp. 95–130; Stefan Micheler, *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder der 'Anderen': Männer begehrende Männer in der Weimarer Republik und der NS-Zeit* (Hamburg, 2005).

queer and trans movements, so sexology was for 1970s German activists eager to shape public consciousness about Nazi crimes.²⁶ Formalized in the 1980s with the founding of the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Society by members of West Berlin's gay and lesbian movement, its *raison d'être* was to use the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power to draw attention to the forgotten victims of the Third Reich. Magnus Hirschfeld became the face of the organization, a deliberate attempt to hook current struggles into past mobilizations for social change. The result of their collective effort was a monthly salon where all interested might meet to discuss work in progress. The University of Wisconsin's Germanist Jim Steakley would mix in these circles, only to come back to the United States to pen one of the first English-language studies of the German gay rights movement. Alongside George Mosse's celebrated *Nationalism and Sexuality*, these would remain the only texts in circulation in the Anglo-American academic sphere for quite some time; notably they too were not published by academic presses.²⁷

Meanwhile back in West Germany, under the auspices of the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Society, an entire cohort of activist scholars published missives on topics ranging from lesser known tracts of Hirschfeld's writings to the history of transsexuality.²⁸ They even established their own academic series with Münster's LIT Verlag on *Geschlecht-Gesellschaft-Sexualität*, which has become one of the leading places to publish work on queer theory in German.²⁹ After the *Wende*, even members of East Berlin's LGBT salon and activist group the Sonntags Club joined the Society, expanding contacts over the former dividing line between East and West and finding fertile ground for testing out ideas that would soon become PhD dissertations and first books. Meanwhile, on the heels of the 1984 exhibition 'Eldorado—Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850–1950' in what is now called the Märkisches Museum, friends of the Schwules Museum incorporated as an organization with a mandate one day to provide a space for the aesthetic and scholarly treatment of gay life to combat intolerance. An archive, library and art/museum space soon followed on Mehringdamm in Kreuzberg, which was a home away from home for a host of non-German students as well as everyday people interested in researching Berlin's vibrant non-conformist past.

Thanks to the efforts of legions of volunteers, the museum mounted wildly successful curatorial programming over the years, including aspects of gay and lesbian life over the longue durée from the pages of magazines and placards to the social history of the neighbourhood or *Kiez*. As is perhaps to be expected with ancestral initiatives of this sort, organized as they often are around identity, one issue continued to surface in group meetings and exhibition planning and would soon come to a head amidst deliberations to build a memorial to the victims of Nazi violence: how best should one memorialize gay persecution so as to speak to the different ways in which Hitler's

²⁶See especially Susan Stryker's film *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005), which she also discusses in her book *Transgender History* (Berkeley, 2008).

²⁷James Steakley, *The Homosexual Rights Movement in Germany* (New York, 1974); George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985).

²⁸The publications are numerous and best searched via their webpage: http://www.magnus-hirschfeld.de/publikationen/publikationen-von-mitarbeiter_innen/

²⁹Ursula Ferdinand, Andreas Pretzel and Andreas Seeck (eds), *Verqueere Wissenschaft: Zum Verhältnis von Sexualwissenschaft und Sexualreformbewegung in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Münster, 2005).

victims experienced Nazi oppression? Hitler targeted gay men specifically, resulting in estimates of 10,000–50,000 arrests between 1933 and 1945.³⁰ And, as we now know as well, the anti-sodomy law strengthened by the Nazis in 1935 legal reform remained in force at war's end, resulting in continued prosecutions in the postwar East and West, at least keeping pace with National Socialist policing, if not surpassing it entirely.³¹ How should one understand the plight of lesbians, who frequently wore the black triangle as asexuals, or transsexuals, and whose story remains least well known?³² In the debate surrounding the memorial to gay and lesbian victims in the Tiergarten in Berlin, precisely these kinds of long-standing tensions came to a head, especially how to speak to the diversity of experiences during and after the Third Reich.³³ In other words, the memorial used the Nazi past as a springboard into contemporary human rights concerns, and did this by making identity central to the representation of past and present forms of injustice.

As was the case with the earlier LGBT historiography, here we see the limits of hinging our histories on identity formations. In the matter of the Homo-Monument, as it was called colloquially, to represent lesbian persecution on equal terms to that of gay men is not simply a misrepresentation of Nazi policy in the hopes of making visible women's experiences of persecution, it actually oversimplifies a more complex historical telling in the service of contemporary claims making. More importantly perhaps, it also obfuscates other kinds of oppressions. As we saw earlier, this kind of ancestral genealogy flattens the very real textures of difference—whether class, gender, gender performance, place, race, ethnicity or age—that coloured how the Nazi apparatus functioned in meting out punishments for those who transgressed the regime's moral and sexual economy.³⁴ For as we know, unlike for the Jews, who had no means of mediating the murderous effects of Nazi racial policy, there were times in which it was less important whether one was in fact gay, lesbian or transsexual. Geoffrey Giles has shown with his work on the police and SS, joined now by Andrew Wackerfuss on the SA, that homoeroticism certainly existed among the rank-and-file of virtually all Nazi

³⁰Günter Grau (ed.), *Hidden Holocaust? / Gay and lesbian persecution in Germany 1933–45*, with a contribution by Claudia Schoppmann, translated by Patrick Camiller (London, 1995); *Lautmann and Jellonnek, Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle. Verdrängt und ungesühnt* (Schöningh, and Paderborn, 2002).

³¹Jennifer V. Evans, 'Bahnhof Boys: Policing Male Prostitution in Postwar Berlin', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 12, 4 (2003), pp. 605–36; Moeller, 'Private Acts, Public Anxieties'; Günter Grau, 'Return of the Past: The Policy of the SED and the Laws against Homosexuality in the GDR between 1946 and 1968', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37, 4 (1999), pp. 1–21.

³²Jane Caplan, 'Gender and the Concentration Camps', in *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* edited by Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (New York, 2009), pp. 82–107; Inge Eschebach (ed.), *Homophobie und Devianz*, ('Forschungsbeiträge und Materialien der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten', Berlin, 2012); Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison, 2006); Schoppmann, *Zeit der Maskierung*.

³³This scandal is outlined in Jennifer Evans, 'Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops: Making Space for Queer Place in 21st Century Berlin', in Jennifer Evans and Matt Cook (eds), *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe Since 1945* (Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. See also Corinna Tomberger, 'Wessen Gedenken? Geschlechterkritische Fragen an das geplante Homosexuellen-Mahnmal', *Invertito: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten*, 9 (2007), pp. 136–55.

³⁴Christiane Wilke has shown how the construction of discreet memorials makes impossible consideration of the kinds of 'complex identities' that made up everyday life. See 'Remembering Complexity? Memorials for Nazi Victims in Berlin', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 7 (2013), pp. 155.

organizations as in society; what mattered more than suspicion of homosexuality was acting on one's desire or transgressing well-established sexual or gender norms.³⁵ Here too, much work remains to be done.

Beyond the historical facticity of the monument's representational strategy, there was another way in which identity politics served to undermine its potential reach, raising the spectre of what Jasbir Puar has referred to in her work as 'homonationalism'. On the steel panels that accompany the single stele, a text underscores the importance of the memorial for human rights in general:

Because of its history, Germany has a special responsibility to oppose the violation of gay men's and lesbians' human rights. In many parts of the world, homosexual love remains illegal and a kiss can be dangerous.

Not only is the omission of transsexuals—those we sometimes, wrongly, collapse into the term transgender today—surprising, but the suggestion that homophobia is something lurking solely beyond Germany's borders is troubling to say the least. To suggest that Germans have learnt and applied the lessons of Nazi persecution fails to appreciate the long and hard-fought battle for a monument and also reproduces a Western-specific form of liberalism that takes sexual morality as its fulcrum.³⁶ This kind of thinking is not altogether uncommon even among queer activist groups, who, like many well-intentioned Germans, see Muslim migrants as particularly homophobic and in need of sensitivity education.³⁷ In other words, while the memorialization of gay and lesbian persecution was designed to reflect contemporary human rights concerns and promote the work of inclusivity across diversity, in actuality, by constructing commemoration around discreet identities, it perpetuates a false teleology. Where once the narrative arc went from shame to pride, from criminalization to acceptance, here it is used by the queer community itself to denote properly progressive citizenship as though there is no homophobia in today's Germany and Muslims may not themselves be gay or gay friendly.

Yet as Peter Rehberg argues in his essay in this issue, queer identity in today's Germany cannot be so easily bounded by national points of reference. In his analysis of *Butt* magazine, something as visceral and immediate as the pornographic depiction of the male body is laden with codes and referents that at once build on and transcend German cultural and visual imaginaries. *Butt's* artfully transgressive portrayal of hipster masculinity presents an alternative to American cultural hegemony in the porn print industry with its emphasis on strong muscular bodies. And yet, at the same time that *Butt* takes up certain trends emanating out of the German and European subcultural

³⁵Geoffrey J. Giles, 'The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11, 1/2 (2002), pp. 256–90. Giles's position takes a very different stance from that found in Richard Plant's famous book on the subject, which contends that after the Röhm putsch, gay men refrained from joining the ranks of the SS. Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (Edinburgh, 1987). On the situation in the SA, see Andrew Wackerfuss, *Stormtrooper Families: Homosexuality and Community in the Early Nazi Movement* (New York, 2015).

³⁶The essays in Michael Schwartz's edited collection attempt to map out new directions for this kind of research. See *Homosexuelle im Nationalsozialismus: Neue Forschungsperspektiven zu Lebenssituationen von lesbischen, schwulen, bi, trans und intersexuellen Menschen* (Oldenburg, 2014).

³⁷Fatima El-Tayeb has analysed the erasure of the 'queer Muslim' in "'Gays who cannot properly be gay": Queer Muslims in the neoliberal European city', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 19 (2012), pp. 79–95; Jin Haritaworn, 'Queer Injuries: The Racial Politics of "Homophobic Hate Crime" in Germany', *Social Justice*, 37 (2011), pp. 79.

circles, it also shows that what counts as queer in the digital age, as this magazine moved to an online presence, is more fraught than stable. Rehberg asks how useful it is to use the frame of the nation when thinking about aesthetics and the visualization of desire. What is queer about *Butt* is not the depiction of male-male desire, but its hybridity of meaning that goes beyond the national frame. It is suffused with influences at the level of artistic production and consumption that make it essential to analyse on no fewer than three levels: for its place in the German visual canon, for its role in European sexual subcultures, and as part of ongoing transnational aesthetic conversations about art and desire. Like the Homo-Monument, Rehberg's discussion of *Butt* magazine suggests that there has indeed been a significant shift in late twentieth and twenty-first century history as far as the history of sexuality is concerned. We might have just reached a place where it might not be enough to ask 'how German is this?'

VI: Ways Forward

It may seem that queering German history is more trouble than it is worth. I would argue that by placing emphasis on contingency and complexity, we might ask new questions of our existing archives, see different historical pivots, and imagine alternative ways of thinking about how people have experienced community, animus, identity and the passing of time regardless of whether they have identified or were identifiable as gay, straight, trans or bi. As difficult as it may be to de-naturalize the past from contemporary assumptions, especially when so much is at stake in terms of how it may be better used to understand and critique today's inequalities, a queered approach to our own analytical certitude might pose real possibilities for critical engagement with past and present alike. Of course, there is still much work to be done. Trans history, while really taking off in the North American academy, has very little traction in German history beyond a focus on sexology.³⁸ Critical disability studies has proposed another new set of tools for how to think about what constitutes normality both historically and contemporaneously, while the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed and Fatima El-Tayeb's anti-racist analysis of Europeaness has provided new lenses with which to view the intersection of sexual, national and racial inequalities, especially in matters of epistemology and citizenship.³⁹ Even within this special issue, we are not yet at a place where these conceptual frameworks—at the core of queer studies internationally—are animating the discussion, which is a telling comment on the state of the field. The reasons for this are many, and I have outlined some of them here already. Indeed, if we wish truly to queer German history, we need to listen to the conversations that are taking place outside our discipline, and bring them to bear on our own historical questions. For as this special issue shows, there is much to be gained from interdisciplinary approaches, even those that seek to destabilize historical concepts in the service of recasting them anew.

³⁸Rainer Herr, *Schnittmuster des Geschlechts: Transvestismus und Transsexualität in der frühen Sexualwissenschaft* (Giessen, 2005). One interesting exception is the work of Jin Haritaworn. See Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London, 2015).

³⁹Robert McCruer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York and London, 2006); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC, 2006); Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis, 2011).

Abstract

This essay examines ways in which historians might learn from queer approaches to the past. Drawing inspiration from queer theory and ideas long circulating in cultural, literary and medieval studies, it argues that there is much to be gained when we adopt a more self-reflexive, genealogical, context-specific analysis of lives lived. A queered history interrogates whether our guiding questions and assumptions might actually foreclose possible lines of analysis, especially around matters of identity. Emphasizing overlap, contingency, ambiguity and complexity, it asks us to linger over our own assumptions—individual as well as societal—to interrogate the role they play in the past we seek out, discover and recreate in our writing. Not just the preserve of scholars of LGBT history, it questions universal experience, suggests new historical pivots and periodizations, while pointing out the unconscious ways in which progressive narrative arcs often seep into our analyses.

Keywords: queer, methodology, genealogy, self-reflexivity

Carleton University
JenniferEvans@cunet.carleton.ca