

Queer Archive: an Imagined Curriculum

Queer Archive: an Imagined Curriculum – The Queer x Design Edition

Queer Archive: an Imagined
Curriculum – The Queer
Theory Edition

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[1] Foreword

“As with the notion of ‘legal nonconforming’ discussed earlier, the category of nuisance has rich potential for advancing queer urban analysis.

Historically, queer persons have often been targeted for ‘nuisance abatement’ - seen not so much as an existential threat to the city, but endangering others’ ‘enjoyment’ of the urban context. Furthermore, as Valverde notes, the notion of nuisance is powerfully intersubjective and embodied. Tracking, for instance, how a gay pride march is sometimes construed as a nuisance and in other cases as an asset might thus have much to offer future investigations into queer urbanity. (...) While there is, of course, no singular way that queer cities ‘see’, in this discussion I have sought to track key intersections of queer sexualities and urbanisms. Worldwide, the trend towards greater urbanization continues apace, particularly in non-Western contexts.

Our cities of the future could be dystopian slums of despair, utopian metropolises of progress, or both at once, zoned into uneasy coexistence. Given that queer communities have been central to the development of the modern city in Europe and beyond, attention to the place of sexuality in urban life could provide pathways towards a better understanding of how urban life might contribute more powerfully to human flourishing.

If we try seeing like a queer city, just for a little while, what new vistas might emerge?” [1]

[1] Cook, Matt & Evans, Jennifer V. (2014) *Queer cities, queer cultures: Europe since 1945— Seeing like a queer city*, Tom Boellstorff.



QUEER CITY



A. Harmless Kisses; Infinite Loops:

Making Space for Queer Place
in Twenty-first Century Berlin;
by Jennifer Evans



As historical geographers have taught us, abstract spaces transform into concrete places of memory, community, even identity through a range of overlapping and highly emotional interactions 'from the global to the intimately tiny'.

(...) What purpose is served by thinking about the quest to build a monument to the Queer victims of Nazism politics of place making?

Focusing in on the way disparate groups claim and make sense of certain city spaces and the emotions and memories they help call into being sheds light on the role of competing and sometimes overlapping practices and interactions that makes up (even as it troubles) any stable sense of collective memory.

Not only does this foreground the messiness of commemorative practices, but it also points to the high degree of emotionality involved in the politics of placemaking itself.

There were several other factors that left indelible marks on the commemorative landscape of twenty-first-century Berlin, which would influence the shape and face of debate over the LGBT memorial. Chief among which was the different memorial tradition in the former German Democratic Republic or GDR, which ceased to exist in 1990. There victimization itself was a thorny issue, as suffering under the Nazis was explicitly linked to ideology, with communists often at the centre of memorial campaigns. This did not stop East German citizens from trying to expand the narrow definition of victim. After two successful wreath-laying exercises, one in Buchenwald in 1983 and another at Ravensbrück a year later, several gay and lesbian groups planned a coordinated effort to coincide with Christopher Street Day (or German Pride) on 30 June 1984.

State response was swift. Activists had their photos taken by the East German secret police or Stasi as they at-

tempted to board trains for the two sites. In Sachsenhausen, they were allowed to lay their wreath, but no mention could be made of homosexual victims.

Efforts to delimit who could claim victim status may have been undertaken by the Stasi, but they had garnered the support of veterans' organizations and the management of the two camps. Although the GDR no longer stood by the 1990s, queer activists could not help but wonder what remained of these attitudes and how they might mix with the quiet homophobia that still percolated in the West that marginalized the memory of gay persecution in its own way, as a subject still very much under-represented in academic discourse and official commemoration.

From the 1990s onwards, once it was announced that the city would adopt New York architect Peter Eisenman's design for the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe, each design competition for a new memorial resulted in countless hours of moral and ethical soul-searching. After close to a decade of lobbying for national recognition of Nazi crimes and emboldened by the state's commitment to the construction of Peter Eisenman's memorial, queer activists in Germany felt a glimmer of hope with the 1999 announcement that the Federal Republic was morally obligated 'to commemorate the other victims of National Socialism in appropriate ways'.

Buoyed by this decision, the largest national gay rights organization, the Association of Lesbians and Gays (Schwulenund Lesbenverband or LSVD) built on the actions of earlier initiatives and submitted a formal petition for a queer monument. The red-green majority in the federal parliament (Bundestag) ensured that in 2003 the request would be honoured and within 2 years, the Berlin Senate Administration for Science, Research, and Culture, Urban and Architectural Art (Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur Kunst im Stadtraum und am Bau) tendered

an open call for design submissions to be vetted first by the LSVD, together with the 'Initiative for the Commemoration of Homosexual Victims' (Initiative 'Der homosexuellen Opfer gedenken').

Of the 127 submissions received from as far away as Tel Aviv, New York and London, they narrowed the field to 26, to be adjudicated by a 11-member prize committee consisting of the Berlin senator for city development, a prominent art historian, several curators and museum directors, two artists, and Günter Dworek, representing the LSVD.

Despite a few misgivings about the harsh modernism of the cuboid, which differed quite significantly from other monuments in Cologne, Frankfurt and Amsterdam, the committee seemed to have weathered the storm of public opinion, that is, until that May when noted feminist and editor of EMMA magazine, Alice Schwarzer mounted a full-scaled media attack and opened the floodgates of identity politics.

Her argument was that women were not just rendered invisible in the current design but were being written out of a shared history of persecution – as the title of the magazine article made plain: 'again, women are forgotten'.

In a coordinated article in the leftist taz newspaper, caberettist Maren Kroymann reiterated many of the points raised by Schwarzer, most notably that lesbians continue to represent an invisible minority, whose experiences failed then and now to resonate within majority culture.

Using legal persecution as the benchmark of victimization, the whole of women's agency and experience during the Third Reich falls away.

Furthermore she claimed, in framing the memorial, aesthetically, around men's sexuality, Elmgreen and Dragset simply perpetuate the

social isolation of lesbians. They did so both in the name of honouring the victims and critiquing the here and now. Appealing to them as fellow artists, Kroymann argued that ‘work with images and symbols’ has the potential to make a statement on present injustice as well.

The masculine bias was draughted into the very plans themselves. Not only would the proposed memorial fail in its intended purpose of commemorating the dead, if built without alteration, it also threatened to undercut any meaningful effort to confront present-day homophobia. This action on the part of Schwarzer and Kroymann, and all those signatories who by November 2006 had added their names to the petition ‘for women in the Homo-Monument’, fundamentally changed the terms of engagement.

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

In the years that followed the EMMA action, three things happened: the history of persecution itself was debated, the question of collective memory and artistic endeavour was interrogated and finally, a compromise was reached and aspects of the memorial’s design were altered.

The debate turned on a few core issues. Alongside claims of the historic (and ongoing) occlusion of women from history and history-making (two separate but related things in the minds of these activists) was the issue of whose task it should be to undertake commemoration generally, whether the LSVD truly spoke for all queer groups or whether the historic enmity towards gays and lesbians was better left to small-scaled actions such as those from the decade before, many of which witnessed significant participation of women both separate from and in solidarity with men. Amidst all this, the story of discord and rising emotions travelled out of Germany and into the pages of gay and lesbian news media in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada.

So as not to see the project totally derailed and perhaps ensure their relevance as the premier gay and lesbian organization, the LSVD orchestrated a series of podium discussions to address the issues swiftly, judiciously and in public.

These, too, were covered extensively by the local Berlin newspapers, by the national media, and increasingly, by the international lesbian and gay press.

In two of the sessions, the artists were even on hand to defend their design decisions. In a pointed statement later published on the LSVD website entitled ‘A Portrait is Not Representative’, they systematically addressed the arguments advanced in the EMMA article. They began their commen-

tary by carefully articulating their sympathy for the claim of marginalization, be it in the art world or on the job site.

Barely a paragraph in, they dropped this conciliatory tone and turned their sights on what they termed the 'populist attack unleashed by EMMA'.

'Why on earth would we want to exclude women? Or transsexuals' they exclaimed, exasperated by the campaign. Then something interesting happened. Drawing on aspects of their own aesthetic practice, they put forward a sophisticated discussion of the gender of oppression. 'Who has the right to define "the feminine" and "the masculine?"'

They suggested that, according to the EMMA line, 'this could be interpreted as a return to traditional and strongly divided depictions of men and women's lives'. The decision to fill the memorial's window with a film about two youths kissing was an attempt to portray 'a vision of intimacy and tenderness' in the face of rampant homophobia. This image of an 'eternal kiss' was to serve as a corrective to the sense of alienation and trauma victims suffer, a sentiment so personal and yet all-encompassing that it 'surpasses representation'. The pain caused by homophobia exceeds words and images, they argued, and so, the artist is left with only gestures towards lived experience.

Countering the notion that the film loop made male sexuality the standard for a generalized gay and lesbian experience, rendering men and men's experience the touchstone for all oppression, they returned to this issue of the strengths and limitations of metaphor in renderings of this sort. In a final exasperated outpouring, they further complicated the picture: We ask ourselves, what kind of depiction of men and masculinity do the editors of EMMA expect from us? What if we had two feminine boys that might be easily perceived as girls?

What about two masculine girls? Would that be allowed? ... What counts as sexuality and identity should not be controlled by outmoded markers of what is feminine and masculine.

(...) Collective memory is so often 'used, misused, and exploited' by governments and the heritage industry and taken up by average people to give themselves 'a coherent identity, a national narrative, (and) a place in the world'.

In view of this tendency, it is doubly important to find ways of keeping it messy, if only to capture the contentiousness of claims making to undermine the power of localist, identitarian and nationalist assertions of neutrality in suggestions that certain spaces bear essential or universal meaning.

Instead of reproducing neat yet myopic histories, perhaps a more responsible approach might tackle what Massey refers to as 'the inevitable hybridities at work in the constitution of anywhere'. Instead of lingering over this battle over definitions of persecution (which pitted gays against feminists and lesbians over whose history should be encapsulated in the monument) as an example of the corrosiveness of identity politics, I have argued it might be more useful to see it as an exercise in place making – the process by which memory and history gel and become fixed in actual material space.

Efforts to make the memorial speak to everyday oppressions, those both in Germany and abroad, afforded it a more fixed (though no less problematic) meaning as a site of reflection, pilgrimage and memory.

Contemporary Berlin's importance as a site of twenty-first century rights struggles is

forged in large part due to its location at the intersection of multi-perspectival (often emotionally-charged) narratives of place. And yet, it is well worth pondering in a future project what is lost as well as gained in the quest to concretize such a vision of queer consciousness in public memory, especially one that – however heroically committed to the present – is rooted in identity politics and disconnected from the past.

B. In *Inferno*:

A Visual Narrative About
Queer Space in London.



Inferno is a techno rave come performance art platform that prioritises and champions trans+, non-binary and queer djs and performers with artist and dj lewis g burton at the helm.

Inferno had its first event in february 2015 and has been growing since and now includes an annual seminar entitled the inferno summit as well as an inferno zine.

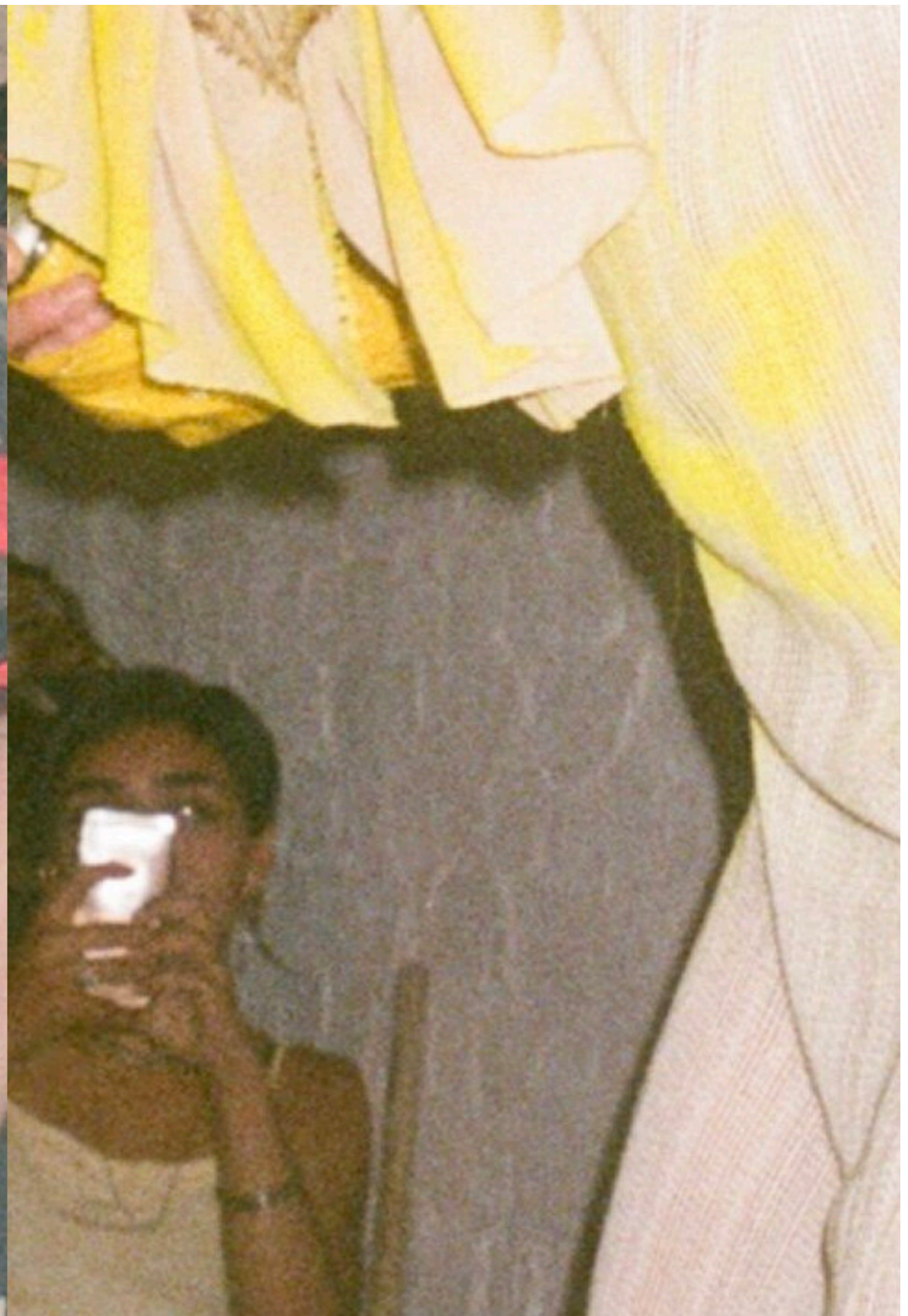
Inferno marries the camp with the underground, pop with techno and the good with the bad, creating an exciting and unique clubbing experience. inferno has grown into a community space curated by burton giving a platform to emerging artists and djs as well as showcasing new works by resident performance artists and special guests alike.





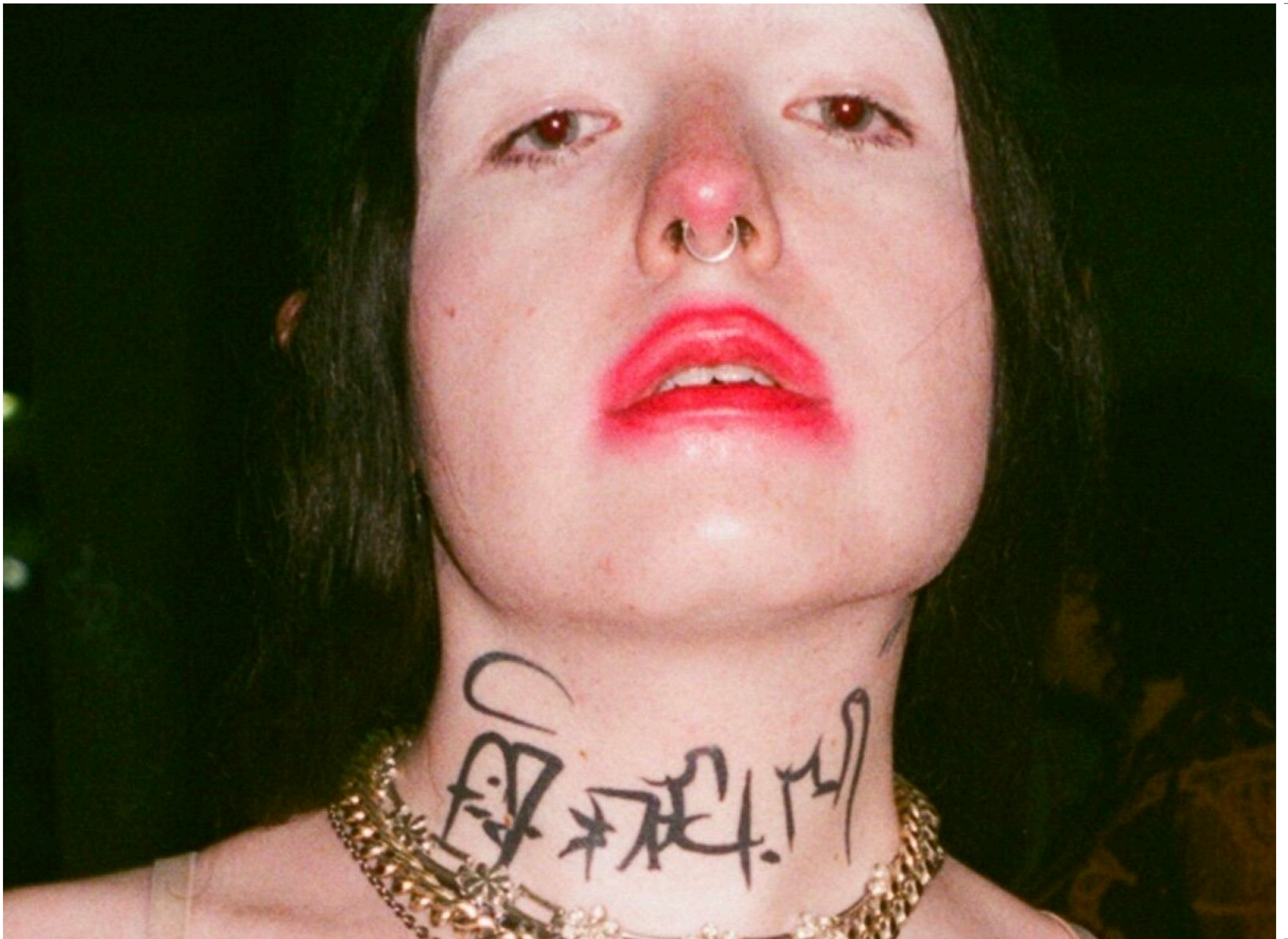
























C. From Pathology
to Pride:
Fighting for Homosexual Rights

The emergence of medical, psychiatric and psychoanalytic research that sought to categorise sexuality in the nineteenth century worked to pathologise those who did not conform to the heterosexual norms of the era.

However, while this was the basis for social control of “perversity”, it also made possible new discursive formations. As Foucault highlights, around the same time “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (1978, 101).

Despite the problematic and pathologised construction of sexuality offered by sexologists like Ellis, the language used in these accounts would come to be recuperated and utilised in activism around sexuality in the decades that followed. As homosexuality began to solidify as an identity, so too did homosexual rights organisations emerge in Europe in the late 1800s.

In 1869, writer and human rights campaigner Karl Maria Benkert (later known as Karoly-Maria Kertbeny) wrote an open letter in opposition to anti-sodomy legislation that would criminalise sex between men (Steakley 1975). While this legislation was introduced in 1871, Benkert’s letter sparked the beginnings of a movement defending homosexuality.

German neurologist Magnus Hirschfeld similarly opposed this aspect of the penal code, and in 1897 he founded the first homophile organisation: the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (Lauritsen and Thorstad 1995).

Building upon Karl Ulrich’s models of sexuality (as a mismatch between body and soul), Hirschfeld understood

homosexuality as an abnormality of co-mingled femininity and masculinity. With this understanding of homosexuality as congenital, he established the Scientific Humanitarian Committee to persuade judicial bodies to abolish the anti-sodomy legislation. The Scientific Humanitarian Committee worked towards legislative reform by highlighting the suffering caused by anti-sodomy legislation and emphasising the harmlessness of homosexuals.

In 1903, Benedict Friedlander founded the Community of the Special, an organisation that supported the Scientific Humanitarian Committee but opposed Hirschfeld's conservative position, describing it as "degrading and a beggarly pleading for sympathy" (Lauritsen and Thorstad 1995, 50).

Hirschfeld later founded the Institute for Sexual Science, which housed a significant archive of materials on gay cultural history and which was burnt down by the Nazis in 1933.

Gay Liberation

Gay Liberation movement emerged as part of a "New Left", taking a radical approach to advocate for civil rights and democracy. The Black Power movement, Women's Liberation, and the Anti-War movement informed the context for the emergence of liberationist discourses.

Gay Liberation was indebted to these movements, even borrowing their slogans — the famous "Gay Power" rallying cry came directly from "Black Power". Unlike the homophile movements, which obscured their purpose with coded language, Gay Liberation groups/organisations were named proudly and defiantly. This is because, as Dennis Altman highlights, "gay liberation (...) is concerned with the assertion and creation of a new sense of identity, one based on pride in being gay" (1972, 109).

Popular imaginings of Gay Liberation in the USA often understand the Stonewall riots of June 1969 as a crucial moment, if not turning point (detailed below) (Stein 2019). However, it is worth noting that a shift from conformity to confrontation was perceptible in gay rights activism in the early 1960s. For instance, in 1963, the regional homophile group East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) was formed. Members discussed openly protesting legislation discriminating against homosexuals in the federal workforce; in 1965, a satellite group of the Mattachine Society began an annual fourth of July protest outside Philadelphia's Independence Hall (Stein 2019). Furthermore, in 1966, a small riot followed a police assault of a trans person at a San Francisco eatery, Compton's Cafeteria – the venue had been a haunt for homeless youth and sexually and gender diverse people (Stryker 2008).

(...) The Stonewall Inn was one of only a few gay bars in New York City that permitted dancing; it had a diverse LGBTIQ patronage and was described by activist and author Vito Russo as a space for “people who were too young, too poor or just too much to get in anywhere else” (quoted in Carter 2004, 74).

Police regularly raided the venue, and in the early hours of 28 June 1969 (with a warrant regarding illegal alcohol sales), five to six officers arrested various workers and patrons and demanded that the crowd of 200 leave the venue. On this occasion, the community fought back, and a riot broke out with the local LGBTIQ community battling police in the streets. The details of what happened that night are contested, but as Marc Stein outlines:

According to some accounts, a lesbian was the first to fight back; multiple accounts emphasize the distinctively aggressive defiance of trans people and street youth. Soon the crowd, which included straight allies, was shouting at the police and throwing coins at the building over the next hours, thousands of people rioted in the streets with campy courage and fierce fury (2019, 5)

From Liberation to Pride

Across the liberation movement, gay activists and organisations were united by their focus on pride and liberation. This movement viewed the public declaration of identity (or “coming out”) as a meaningful political act. For activists in the movement, coming out was not just about publicly declaring your identity but rather a battle cry for LGBTIQ people to join the fight for equality, not just by coming “out of the closet”, but out of the bars and onto the streets.

While the act of coming out politicised identity, the movement’s focus on pride and liberation sought to reject associations between homosexuality, shame, repression and persecution. Each of these concerns responded in particular ways to earlier discourses and understandings of sexuality.

Responding to (and ultimately rejecting) earlier movements, Gay Liberation suggested that sexuality was something to be affirmed. At the time, this affirmation was thought to be the best way to break free from traditional understandings of sex, gender and sexuality and, most importantly, to achieve political and sexual freedom. These concerns are reflected in activists’ publications from the early 1970s and later interviews with key figures, along with most popular culture texts that represent their efforts. However, as we have mentioned, the historical accuracy of these representations must always be interrogated, as they have tended to simplify the key events and have consistently failed to represent the diversity of protesters involved in the movement.

Ideas from Gay Liberation are echoed in the modern pride movement, which celebrates LGBTIQ identity in parades, festivals and marches around the world. The first pride marches occurred in the USA in 1970 to com-

memorate the Stonewall riots. While LGBTIQ pride events occur globally, we must stress that participation in the pride movement is not a sign of a nation's "progressive" politics.

In part this relates to the fact that the understandings of sex, gender and sexuality from which the pride movement has emerged are largely Western constructs.

Considering the history of sexuality sketched in this chapter, we can see that knowledge, power and sexuality are inextricably linked. The construction of knowledge around sexuality has worked to legitimise violence and discrimination against the LGBTIQ community, but has also influenced the articulation of identities available and the foundation for organising collectively to fight back.

Foucault referred to this double-edged sword as "reverse discourse": where articulation of and demands on behalf of identities are made possible via the very language used to subjugate those identities (1978, 101).

The key resistance movements traced throughout this book have attempted to shift terms around gender and sexuality with varying degrees of success. While retrospectively considering the knowledge, understanding and political strategies presented by each of the periods we have discussed, it is tempting to attempt to offer a clear narrative of political progress.

However, looking closely at these shifts in discourse about sexuality it becomes clear that any such narratives would not only be false, but insufficiently "global".

Furthermore, the Gay Liberation movement in the West that many saw as a "usurpation by white, middle-class, gay men, and ... their sexist and misogynist agendas" (Sullivan 2003). Here we must note that for marginal groups, the terms of political debate are often set by those with the most power.



[2] References

Image Index
and Bibliography



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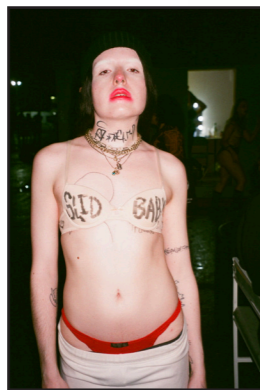
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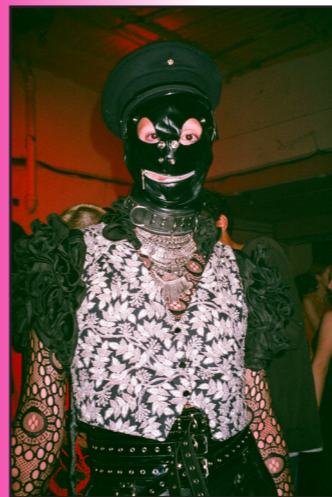
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