



# Queer Traditions: Politics of Remembering

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During the past ten years, two key elements have become established traditions within the Society for Queer Studies in Finland: First, organizing queer research conferences in Turku, and second, publishing the SQS Journal. Both the organizing of conferences and the publishing of a scholarly journal are inevitably forms of an identity political practice that also constructs the identity of queer studies. Consequently, we are also compelled to ask ourselves what kind of queer studies is outlined in our journal and what its limits are.

The theme of this anniversary issue of the SQS Journal is Queer Traditions. The issue outlines the identity of queer scholarship today by considering the possibilities of queer remembering and queering memories. The term “counter-memory” is often used in the postcolonial field of theorizing as a methodological tool for remembering the past in a creative way, clearing space for alternative perspectives of history. As Gayatri Spivak claims, the subaltern consciousness is always subjected to presuppositions, memories,

SQS  
1-2/2014

VI

Introduction

Kaisa  
Ilmonen  
&  
Tuula  
Juvonen

and generalizations of the *élite* (cf. Spivak 1987, 203) which means that the memory of the subaltern depends on the *élite*'s ideas of what is to be remembered. In this issue, we would like to employ "queer memory" to multiply the prevailing forms of remembering.

The contributions of this issue prove that the topics that are understood as queer are themselves in a constant flux. As the sociologist Jukka Lehtonen attests in his review article, based on autoethnography, interviews, and archived personal histories, both those who have been involved in Seta's (Association for sexual equality in Finland) youth organizations and Seta's pursuits have been constantly changing throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The change is particularly apparent in the terms the young members use for themselves: the young gays of the 1980s were followed by gays and lesbians in the 1990s while the young of the 2000s use a totally different vocabulary. Moreover, whereas transgender issues were not at the center of Seta's agenda during the 1980s and 90s, nowadays cis- and transgender terminology occupies a self-evident position in the discourse of the Seta youth.

Instead of autoethnography, the historian Riikka Taavetti's contribution on the politics of remembering focuses on the autobiographical memories of the lesbian activist and writer Siiri, whose writings have been preserved within various archival collections. In the article, Taavetti intricately examines how the choices scholars make when soliciting materials through their calls also influence the content of the archives as soon as the materials get archived – and thus outline the data available for future scholars. She considers the possibilities of remembering a lesbian life in the sections called Absence, Searching, and Finding. In the end, Siiri's remembering appears as a counter-memory with which the hegemonic politics of memory is confronted.

The act of memory is neither a factual nor a one-dimensional reflection of things past. We are socially and culturally surrounded by the political structures of the official memory-system, such as the archive-institution, which organize the processes of remembering, even our personal ones. Remembering is never a completely personal cognition, but structured by the public understanding of what can be remembered and how. Our memory is related to the "memory-politics" of social institutions. Many historians, such as Joan Scott or Michel Foucault, have written about the instances of power shaping our processes of remembering and our conceptions concerning the past. Such a starting point is also prolific in terms of queer studies: It is important to analyze how the normal outlines the other and remembers the other as other. Consequently, the other is forced to constitute thyself in terms of the very memory-politics producing the othering effect. (Cf. Foucault 1980/1977; Scott 1999/1988; Hutton 1993.)

In addition to autobiographers with an archival impulse, such as Siiri, we are also in dire need of queer scholars who appreciate the archival recording of LGBT lives. Only archived records enable the queer-memory of the future: For example, both Taavetti and Lehtonen were able to write their contributions because of the previously collected and archived data. Archived interviews and reminiscences collected for a particular research project, and also made accessible for future scholars, will subsequently create possibilities for grasping and understanding non-heteronormative everyday experiences more widely. In her contribution, Tuula Juvonen reminds those queer scholars who conduct ethnographic research in the current ephemeral digital era that they hold a key position in archiving the authentic experiences of the people they study. According to Juvonen, the ethical collection of research data, including ethnography and interviews, and archiving data for subsequent use, will be vital to queer studies in the long run.

Valdemar Melanko's book *Puistohomot* [*Gays in the Park*], which is reviewed in this issue by Mari Pajala, is an extraordinary example of how material originally collected for research may provide a peep-hole into past times and their queer ways. For his study, Melanko observed the sexually active gay male subculture in Helsinki in the 1960s. The preliminary analyses of these observations constitute a unique and irreplaceable gay-historical archive.

According to Marita Sturken, a scholar of cultural memory and visual culture, even our most subjective memories are entangled with cultural memory which is constituted within the multi-layered network of language, shared experiences, popular culture, fantasy, and collective desires. (See Sturken 1999, 233–234.) Similarly, the normalizing fantasies of official memory shape our own queer memories and the ways in which “queer” becomes inscribed into our cultural memory. In order to widen the records of official memory, we must, like Melanko, share and conserve queer memories, too.

Literature and poetry are particular archives of cultural memory created by authors who inevitably store the collective affects of their own (corpo)-reality – also those related to sexuality. Those affects also influence the narration of queer cultural memory. For example, the Finland-Swedish author Christer Kihlman wrote his autofictional novels during the last decades of the 20th century, unraveling the silence surrounding homosexuality at the time by addressing the issue of male (homo)sexuality directly. In his *Lectio Praecursoria* concerning Kihlman's novels, Mikko Carlson, a scholar of Finnish literature, reminds us of the contingent nature of sexual relationships which escape clear dichotomies. He conceptualizes “the textual queer space” which, Carlson suggests, could provide a useful tool for criticism enabled by the literary inscriptions of the private and the intimate.

Literary scholar Elsi Hyttinen examines, in her article on Elvira Willman's literary works, the ways the queerness of texts, instead of the author's identity, may help us to see and shatter the limits of constructed normalness. Hyttinen explicates how for example the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Finnish working class literature became defined in a tense relationship with references to male homosexuality which itself intertwined with the ways class, Christianity, honor, or health were understood. Willman (re)narrates the working class literary inscriptions of masculinity.

In literature, depictions of memories and remembering highlight the changing nature of the past. Subjective conceptions concerning the past are not static facts but in a constant process of becoming – powered by memory. Thus, like Helen Lock argues, the past “is recalled by memory, not by an objective process whose results are subject to verification, but by creative reconstruction. Creativity, spontaneity, intuitiveness, and subjectivity all help to provide access, through memory, to a past that does not have to be – indeed, cannot be – monolithic.” (Lock 1998, 12). This kind of creative reconstruction enables the author to overcome the stagnated, legitimate narrative of the past and allows her to re/member history anew. Literary rewritings of conventionally narrated histories highlight literature's potential to re-structure the past, while representations of personal remembering bring forth various versions of the past intersubjectively.

Katja Seutu, a scholar of Finnish literature, and particularly poetry, reminisces the late poet Mirkka Rekola, a coeval with Kihlman. In her obituary, Seutu reminds us that Rekola, too, can be interpreted as writing within the tradition of silence – but also against it. By close-reading the focal themes of Rekola's poetics, Seutu indicates how Rekola's poetry becomes a dialogue of expressing and covering the subject matter forbidden in her time. Moreover, the worldview framing Rekola's poetry

– which relates to binaries such as man-woman and day-night that always coexist in pairs instead of as oppositional – also powerfully challenges the unfruitful opposition between homo- and heterosexuality.

Within the postcolonial field of studies, the act of re/membering has been considered a reconstructive fictional force that separates personally and collectively meaningful instances from the legitimated narrative version of the past and organizes the past in a way that fruitfully supports the process of personal identity. In the context of queer studies, remembering queerly, in a way that creates space for historical queer experiences, turns out to be a reconstructive force. Linda Anderson, a scholar who has published widely on autobiographies, notes that the act of remembering enables a subject to process his/her identity. Thus, Anderson considers the acts of remembering as space where a person is not compelled to repeat the past mechanically. Each author, Kihlman, Willman, Rekola, Siiri, Melanko and Lehtonen, designs a past that enables the voice of a queer subject.

Jenny Kangasvuo, a cultural anthropologist and a scholar of bisexuality, published her debut novel *Sudenveri [Wolf's Blood]* in 2012. The novel, which is reviewed in this issue by Sari Miettinen, could be placed in the much discussed new literary genre, Finnish fantasy. Kangasvuo's novel resonates queerly: Drawing from the new turn within humanities, posthumanism, the novel is not restricted to unbalancing the boundaries of sexuality, but also of species. The protagonists of the novel live in changing bodies, shifting shapes between the forms of a human and a wolf. For them, too, remembering becomes an act of re/membering with their collective identities.

One of the Sturken's main arguments is that memory desires to take a narrative form (Sturken 1999, 234–235). As we live in a collectively experienced reality and share a language which structures our reality and our collective past, we also learn to remember and to narrate our memories

in a culturally specific way. In a heteronormative society, these culturally specific modes of remembering might push queer memories to the margins. Sturken argues, from a feminist perspective, that to “acknowledge the function of memory as an inventive social practice is also to reckon with the traffic between personal and cultural memories” and that “all memories are part of a complex and ever-changing script” that can be separated neither from discourses of women and sexuality, nor from debates over family (Sturken 1999, 238). This special issue of SQS is thus devoted to queer memories debating anew the narrated scripts of embodied reality.

The debates concerning scripts over gender and sexuality are addressed by the gender studies scholar Sade Kondelin in their article on the experiences of Finnish transmen living with changing bodies. Kondelin, like Jukka Lehtonen, draws from personal experiences to their study of the subject matter. However, first and foremost, Kondelin revises queer perspectives by applying the contemporary materialist field of theory to their analysis on the interviews of transmen. While examining transmen's experiences of their corporeality, Kondelin also documents the narrative modes these transmen use in order to tell their personal, embodied histories. By conceptualizing the mutual dynamics of gender identification and sexual orientation, Kondelin highlights the experienced and embodied multiplicity present in queer life.

Jenny Kangasvuo examines the multiplicity of images, politics and experiences of sexuality in her *Lectio Praecursoria* on Finnish bisexuality. Her research question focuses on the changing place of bisexuality in Finnish sexual culture from the 1970s to present-day discussions. According to Kangasvuo, the cultural place of bisexuality has both multiplied and gone through several transformations during the examined period: bisexuality occupies not one but several spaces in Finnish sexual culture and each space signifies bisexuality differently. Consequently,

SQS  
1–2/2014

IX

Introduction

Kaisa  
Ilmonen  
&  
Tuula  
Juvonen

all contributions of this issue highlight the multiplicity of lived sexual experiences.

We would also like to emphasize the multiplicity of lived gender and sexual experiences with the images included in this issue. The pictures, taken by private people, have been archived in the LGBT-collection at the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas. The collection continues to grow through donated pictures and other items by private donors.

Judging from the contributions of this SQS issue, Finnish queer studies is alive and kicking. It does not narrate itself in a single voice but reaches out thematically, methodologically and theoretically in new directions while also reconsidering the past. It queers both the politics of remembering and the preconditions of traditions. The SQS Journal has, since 2006, provided a unique forum for queer research perspectives. If you want to support the 10-year-old Society for Queer Studies in Finland and its efforts to keep publishing the SQS Journal, please sign up for membership. Additional information can be found on the Society's web page, <http://sqshome.wordpress.com/>.

We are grateful to Elina Siltanen for her help in the finalizing our Introduction, and to Päivi Valotie, whose role in publishing SQS is more than essential!

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SQS would like to thank *Timelines of Academic Feminism* -project lead By Professor Marianne Liljeström and funded by the Academy of Finland for the support to our current issue.

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SQS  
1–2/2014

X

Introduction

Kaisa  
Ilmonen  
&  
Tuula  
Juvonen