

Grand Narratives and Other Narratives in Queer Studies of Today

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The problems following the translation of queer theory and of the term queer into a non-American context obviously still have an impact on the debates in the field of queer theory. If not before, this was clear to me during three days in the beginning of May, when I took part in the PhD-course *What's up in Queer Theory? Recent Developments in Queer Studies* organized by the Nordic Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, at the Centre for Gender Studies in Lund, Sweden. To be honest, I had this grand narrative of queer theory hanging over my shoulders during the whole course. Nevertheless in this text, I really had not planned to once again repeat this narrative if it had not been for my surprise over the number of times we during the course returned to this notion about queer theory as an occupation mainly for white, middle class, individuals from the U.S.

When referring to this episode here, I see how static and determinative the words become, as building stones reconstructing the grand narrative. They certainly block the story that I want to tell. This make me aware over the fact that it is the story itself the story of queer as a whitened, middle classed, U.S word that is the grand narrative of queer theory.

Seen from this angle it was interesting to notice while reading the participator's papers and joining the group discussions, that several persons presented queer projects in a quite wide spread of European national contexts. Some problemised queer theorizations, others sought to establish a queer method and methodology, and, not least, many were driven by the explicit wish to investigate certain forms of queer practices based in a specific European context. With a few exceptions - one of them was definitely the U.S queer scholar and professor Judith Halberstam who was a teacher at the course - the course was in itself an example of queer activities from other positions than the white, middle-class, U.S-position.

Although the request of a re-contextualization of queer was one frequent topic at the course, I would like to call this into question here. To me, such a request does not only simplify the debate - it also brings non-U.S scholars into the comfortable position of never being forced to take the responsibility of the work that is produced, because the real stuff is always produced by someone else somewhere else, than by me or you here and now. Moreover, it continuously reproduces the story of how U.S culture has imperialized queer. Every time it is rearticulated, it simultaneously

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overshadows other articulations of queer produced outside of the idea of the grand narrative.

Academics as activists: Queering the archives

One example of the establishment of queer outside of the U.S hegemony at the course was Tuula Juvonen's queer archival activism. In her lecture at the course, she problematized the establishment of archives and of archival research. Through emphasizing the importance of a personal archive, she gave the idea of transformative research another perspective presenting archives as stories for the future, instead of traces of the past.

The key word for the course as a whole came to be archives in a variety of perspectives - from Judith Halberstam's critical notion of the archives, over Tuula Juvonen's queer archival activism to Tiina Rosenbergs genealogical track of queer theory in Sweden. This emphasis brought along a critical perspective on practices of canonization on the course as a whole, and a quite strong disagreement over how to conceptualize the future in queer studies. As connected to change and transformation, the future is often given a key role in feminist and queer research which was visible for instance when Tuula Juvonen encouraged us to be queer archival activists: to think over our personal archives in order to queer the future, to lay the ground for a change in the future. With the conviction that heteronormativity can be disrupted in the archives, Tuula Juvonen transformed the academic into an activist whilst queering the archives, emphasizing the fact that it is possible to queer the archives

of existing knowledge through asking new questions and offering new perspectives. The scholarly mission, then, is to trace the hidden story in the archive, visible through gaps and silences. And as a practice of the fact that archives do matter, we were asked to think through strategies for our own archives, for queering existing archives, and for a redefining of archives and activists.

Queering the Future/No Future

The future can nevertheless also be understood through the angle of normativity politics, as the thing politics are structured and invested in. Understood as such, futurity could be criticized, with several wide-ranging consequences, of course. Proceeding from the book *No Future* by Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam emphasised the fact that homosexuality is not invested in futurity, and as such the emblem for a no-future project. Edelman's discussions of the symbolic Child as the figure of futurity was the core idea, around which Halberstam developed her line of argument. Heterosexuality, to Halberstam/Edelman, was perceived as reproductive and thus futuristic, while queerness was described as "the side of those not fighting for the children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (Edelman 2004, 3).

Through presenting Edelman's text, Halberstam wanted to reject the normality-strive in queer studies, and embrace the anti-social movement. Turning against all these fabulous histories of liberated gay couples, aiming to

break up with the construction of homosexuality as the same project as heterosexuality, she presented Edelman's argumentation as the justification of an anti-redemptive model of sexuality. In the line of this argumentation, we were given two options: 1) To do the same political project as heterosexuals, i.e. the future-project or 2) To inhabit the chain of insult, i.e. the no future-project.

Although clearly expressing her interest in Edelman's argumentation against the project of futurity, Halberstam also pointed out some of its problems. Here is where the archives re-enter the stage. The anti-social turn, according to Halberstam, had been expired by a political sexual hedonism, and the archive of the anti-social project was all the same: heroic, gay men, canonized western literature. Halberstam pointed out that the archive does matter, seeing that the canonical chain only can reproduce the same story - i.e. the heroic narrative. Thus, she emphasized the need for a different archive. What was needed, she meant, were multiple genealogies that overlap other genealogies, in order to present the history of the present as a product of, for instance, the radical sexual movement in the 1960s *and* of the masculinist groups in the 1930s. To Halberstam this is the anti-heroic narrative, built from an anti-individualist, anti-capitalist archive containing lesbian women, rage, desire, unregulated speech.

The idea of the anti-heroic narrative is definitely important for queer scholars, although here I would like to put focus on that the duality in Halberstam's archives may run the risk of giving a simplistic picture of canonization and

story-telling, overshadowing the fact that story-telling and power intersect in a complex way. It is crucial be aware of the fact that the reason to why a certain story is narrated as the dominant one always is a question about power and authority. This is also the reason to why we should focus on complexities, themes and questions instead of the production of a linear story, which Halberstam also emphasizes. But I would rather question the dichotomy as such, rather than as Halberstam try to build up yet another narrative, developing further the idealization of certain characteristics. Besides, the fact that Halberstam continuously returned to the point of queer as a word imperialized by the U.S queer culture, is yet another example of how power and story-telling co-operates, in this specific case repeating the grand narrative of queer theory.

The Queer Moment and Intellectual Quiriosity

The wish to break off with the idea of queer as a linear story was nevertheless also the topic of the last lecture at the course, where Tiina Rosenberg gave us a piece of a queer moment in her genealogy over the development of queer in the Swedish context. White hegemonic feminism, Rosenberg emphasized, is most comfortable acknowledging its institutionally powerful white, heterosexual, middleclass roots. As academics, nevertheless, we must take the consequences of the political struggle. Which means, in this context, at first to acknowledge the heterogeneity and the non-linear narrative of the history of queer theory and secondly, to apprehend the mutual interdependence



between theory and social movements a relation all too often ignored. This habitual historiography of queer was also the topic of an SQS-article from last year, where Joanna Mizielska reflects over the history of queer as an evolutionary story. She writes:

"Why do 'we' often 'buy' the teleological developmental history of the LGBT movement, expecting that it will follow the same path everywhere, having its starting point in Stonewall or some other symbolic space and time? Notice that even the Gay Pride Parade is celebrated in Europe because of what happened in the U.S. and this event is referred to as the moment of the awaking of the LGBT people in general" (Mizielska 2006, 94).

Luckily, we were not provided with any conclusion at the end of the course. The final moment of the course was instead kept for a discussion focusing following challenges for queer studies of today:

- Canon formation: What does it mean to select a canon?
- National contexts: Other ways of telling narratives
- The relation between queer theory and feminism

During the three days of the course we consequently took part in an ongoing critical conversation over the meaning of queer in different national contexts, of queer in our academic work and in our personal lives. As a scientific tool, however, queer was performed and described as a word operating on different levels from queer as an analytical tool, to queer as an empirical term. In this respect, the word queer was positioned at a multiplicity of levels, but

always through a critique towards mainstream scientific practises. This is also how queer studies become a politically provocative practice, characterized by an intellectual and curious look for the unexpected.

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