

## Preface: In a Queer Time and Place

Jenny Kangasvuo & Sanna Karkulehto

The year 2006 has been an unsettling time for the Finnish queer community, not least within academia. A string of upsetting events has caused us to feel awkward and ill-at-ease, precisely as a “community”. We have been experiencing a time that might best be described as ‘queer’, in a place no less ‘queer’ – a notion sensible enough if it was not for the fact that we happen to be queers ourselves (to employ a paradox inspired by Judith Halberstam). Many of us feel as though we have been suddenly thrust into the world of Kafka. The losses and tragedies we have been forced to confront are simply too absurd and too hard to understand. While some people might think the sorrow and upset caused by the losses a “private” matter best kept in the closet, we have chosen to bring the issue out and face up with it.

One of the authors writing in this issue of *SQS*, Harri Kalha, dedicates his essay (“Millä ihmeen silmällä?”), a critical account of Pink TV and the “cuddly gays” of contemporary media, to the memory of a Finnish professor who was killed in May 2006. The professor was a prominent figure in the gay community in Helsinki, and the news of his death raised feelings of grief, but also horror and anger: he was murdered in his home by two men invited there for drinks after a night out at a local gay club. Kalha cites the

obituary published in Finland’s biggest daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, which states in a rather blasé manner that it was the professor’s open-minded “curiosity” and “pleasure-loving, hedonistic” attitude that brought about his death. “The image of the [otherwise] cuddly gay who stumbles fatally upon his own desire may mean well, but feels bad”, Kalha reflects, employing a Finnish pun that does not quite translate into English (*tarkoittaa hyvää, mutta tekee paha*, suggesting the hurtful dangers of such reasoning). Only in a society blinded by heteronormativity can a homicide be written about without mentioning the subjects behind the crime. Thus we are presented with the paradox, a queer one indeed, that a person gets murdered *on account of himself* rather than *by someone*.

Unfortunately, more sad news was to follow in November. The death of a young, talented post-graduate student in Turku sent shudders through the academic community of Cultural and Literary Studies. Finally, for the end of the year, we hear that one of our colleagues, a pioneering figure in Finnish queer studies, has been missing in person since he flew off to an international conference some three months ago. His whereabouts still a mystery, we are faced with the prospect of yet another tragedy. As touched and perplexed as we, like so many others, are by these incidents, we feel

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compelled to ward off despair with a touch of optimism. Mikko Tuhkanen, at the beginning of his article (“Aika matkalla: Elizabeth Grosz, queer-teoria ja ontologia”) longs: “[F]or the return” of our colleague. Like Tuhkanen, we are all still waiting, though perhaps in vain. The first bad news from Turku left us feeling empty and helpless for not being able to express our gratitude to a deceased contributor of *SQS*. We hope this will not happen again.

Thus we would like to dedicate this issue of *SQS* to the memories of those who have passed away far too early and far too violently. A dedication such as this one usually calls for some kind of “elevating” closure. The promise of a better future, perhaps. Unfortunately we do not have one to offer. Lee Edelman, who visited Finland in the spring of 2006, describes queerness as a force antagonistic to the notion of future: the queer is always already positioned outside and against the normalizing, productive ideals of society and culture. Thus, the very notion of “a better future” may well be a mere fantasy that offers little more than a temporary illusion of consolation.

After the gloomy incidents mentioned above, many of us have been pondering on the value of academic work, particularly if it entails working on the brink of an abyss. Who is able to go on any more – does anybody even want to? On the other hand, all this could help us realize the urgent need to queer the “productivity demands” of today’s academic world, a system in which the importance of ranking lists, cunningly devised reports, inhuman bureaucracy, and the Brave New Salary System seem to overrule the importance of critical reflection, creativity – and pleasure.

*The Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is produced (*sic*), however, by individuals who we like to think of as embracing the ideals of an “open-minded curiosity” and a “pleasure-loving, hedonistic” attitude, who enjoy both their life and their work in even that queerest of queer times and places we call ‘today’s academia’. While the current university system, lacking as it is in creative time and resources (and supporting research fields that can be measured in terms of a certain economic value), seems to suck the very life blood out of us, it has become all the more important for us to provide an academic free access journal made by people who are willing to think and write for (critical) pleasure rather than for a price. If it wasn’t for the heartfelt urgency of our agendas, we would not have the heart to expect such devotion from our authors. But as things are, we are happy and proud to present texts written by people who we know are working under tremendous stress yet still manage to be witty, inventive, interactive, challenging and insightful.

In the discussion forum, Harri Kalha takes up some crucial theoretical and methodological questions concerning the disciplinary nature of queer theory itself, particularly the “temporal-local” challenges presented to queer inquiry in a non-Anglo-American context. Indeed, it seems that now, precisely at a time when we have been reminded of the cruel and contingent character of the real world outside our Academic ivory closet, that comfortable space we inhabit is starting feel rather cramped and in need of thorough airing out. It is perhaps high time we lose our innocence in this respect: good riddance to the illusion of

a “united family of queer theorists”. Why not instead face up with the fact that we, while having much in common, also differ in near-paradigmatic ways, beginning with our usage of the very term ‘queer’ (for the notion of which we are indebted to the perennially keen-eyed Pia Livia Hekanaho). We should become more aware of our particular takes on queer terminology, and be prepared to explain them both to the people outside our intellectual community and within it. How do *you* understand and contextualize your queer theory, how and to what ends do you theorize it, how and to what ends do you apply it – methodologically, pedagogically and politically? We welcome all kinds of commentaries, elaborations, discussions and debates relating to this topic to be published in the following issues of *SQS*.

In this issue of *SQS* we offer three peer reviewed articles (Pia Livia Hekanaho, Michael O’Rourke, Mikko Tuhkanen), two essays (Harri Kalha, Tiina Tuppurainen), two discussions (Harri Kalha, Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka), a

presentation of a recent doctoral dissertation (Annamari Vänskä) and a book review (Tuula Juvonen). We are especially glad to note that the *SQS Journal* has found a readership among graduate students, and continue to encourage them to contribute their work to the journal. We hope, in particular, that Tiina Tuppurainen’s essay on female masculinity in the television series *L-word* inspires other students to submit manuscripts for eventual publication in the journal.

This issue’s Queer Lens Art Gallery is dedicated to Tom of Finland who is one of the most well-known Finnish artists internationally. Pia Livia Hekanaho writes about the retrospective ToF exhibition held in Helsinki in summer 2006 and the exhibition catalogue written by Bernt Arell and Kati Mustola. One of Tom’s works is also featured on this issue’s cover page. *SQS Journal* wishes to express its gratitude to the Tom of Finland Foundation (<http://tomoffinlandfoundation.org/>) for their kind permission to reproduce the images.

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