

# SQS 1–2/2023: Sisälllys / Contents

*Varpu Alasuutari, Merlin Sophie Bootsmann, Barbara Dynda,  
Orlando Meier-Brix & Ivo Zender*  
Introduction:  
Affective Histories of Queer and Trans Activism I–VII

## 1] Pervoskooppi: artikkelit / Queer Scope: Articles



*Merlin Sophie Bootsmann, Andrea Rottmann & Greta Hülsmann*  
The Fears of Gay Teachers and the Collectivizing Effects of  
Emotion Work: Affects, Emotions, and Emotion Work  
in the History of the Working Group of Homosexual  
Teachers and Educators in the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung  
und Wissenschaft* Berlin 1978–1991 1–15

*Henrique Cintra Santos*  
“Acting out of Fear”: Queer Resistance During  
the Military Dictatorship in Brazil 16–32

*Orlando Meier-Brix*  
Reading Transition with Suspicion: An Affective  
Critique of *Umwandlung* in N. O. Body’s *Aus eines  
Mannes Mädchenjahren* and Its Reception 33–49

*Ivo Zender*  
Desire for Trans Ancestors: An Affective Reading of  
Jordy Rosenberg’s *Confessions of the Fox* 50–68

## 2] Pervopeili: esseet ja keskustelut / Queer Mirror: Essays and Discussions

*Kate Sotejeff-Wilson*  
Erikoissuomalaiset: Queer New Finns, Oral History,  
Affective Activism 69–81

*Pyry Aarnio*  
Tunteiden kuvaus vaikuttamisen keinona trans-  
maskuliinisuutta käsittelevässä nuortenkirjallisuudessa 82–91

*YVE. Nay*  
The Affective Life of Trans Studies as a Political  
Field in Academia and Activism 92–100

## 3] Pervo/peruutus/peili: raportit ja kommentaarit / Queer View Mirror: Reports and Commentaries

*Liekki Valaskivi*  
Transgender Affect: Rage and Joy or Something Else? 101–105

*Sari Laurila*  
Missä mennään, transtutkimus, vuonna 2023? 106–107

## 4] Pervolinssi: taidegalleria / Queer Lens: Art Gallery

*Vili von Nissinen* (käsikirjoitus) & *Nina Mutik* (kuvitukset)  
Katujen yössä 108–114

## 5] Pervosilmäys: arvostelut / Queer Eye: Reviews

*Jean Lukkarinen*  
Queer Interviews: New Directions and Various  
Challenges 115–118

*Leo Ryczko*  
You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like Voodoo:  
A Biography of “Exotic Snake Dancer” Willy Pape 119–122

*Tuula Juvonen*  
Kaikki mitä miehet ovat halunneet tietää seksistä 123–127

*Jay Szpilka*  
How Many Times the Same Story? 128–130

6] Kirjoittajat / Contributors 131–133



SQS-lehden numeron 1–2/2023 kansikuvan on tehnyt tekstiilitaiteilija ja kuvittaja Sirpa Varis.

Cover image of the issue 1–2/2023 of SQS – *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* by textile artist and illustrator Sirpa Varis.

SQS  
1–2/2023

Sisälllys  
Innehåll  
Contents

ISSN  
1796-5551

# Introduction: Affective Histories of Queer and Trans Activism

*Varpu Alasuutari, Merlin Sophie Bootsman, Barbara Dynda, Orlando Meier-Brix & Ivo Zender*

This special issue, titled *Affective Histories of Queer and Trans Activism*, builds on an international workshop with the same title, organized in May 2022 at Tampere University, Finland. The workshop was part of the activities of the research project *Affective Activism: Sites of Queer and Trans World-Making* (funded by the Research Council of Finland) and it aimed at exploring the role of affects and emotions both in the study of queer and trans history and queer and trans activism. Following the workshop, one of the workshop organizers, Varpu Alasuutari, and four of the workshop participants, Merlin Sophie Bootsman, Barbara Dynda, Orlando Meier-Brix, and Ivo Zender, teamed up to edit a special issue on these important and timely topics.<sup>1</sup>

Our aim was to leave a record of (and to develop further) the work discussed in the workshop, but also to open the call for others working on similar research themes. Moreover, we ended up recording also another related event taking place at Tampere University in February 2023: the 8th Nordic Trans Studies Conference, bearing the title *From Transgender Rage to Trans Joy: Trans Studies through Affective Lens* (likewise organized by

<sup>1</sup> Because of its origin in a shared workshop, some of the editors are also authors in this special issue. In such cases, the authors have been recused from the editorial and decision-making processes of their own articles, to ensure ethical editorial practice.

the *Affective Activism* research project). The result is an impressive double issue consisting of articles, essays, book reviews, conference reports, and a keynote lecture discussing affects, emotions, history, and activism in queer and trans studies in multiple ways.

## The affective and emotional turn

In recent decades, affects and emotions have become more and more popular research topics across many fields in humanities and social sciences. This development has been described as the “affective turn” by Patricia Ticineto Clough (2007), whereas social movement studies and historiography have focused more on emotions and the “emotional turn” (Nagy 2018; Gould 2009). In queer and trans studies, both affect and emotion have been essential concepts in theorizing and exploring the histories of queer and trans lives (e.g. Gammerl 2016; Love 2007; Malatino 2022; Nunn 2023; Stryker 1994) and the causes and effects of queer and trans activism (e.g. Alasuutari 2023; Gould 2009; Juvonen et al. 2022; Vähäpassi 2021).

As argued by Deborah Gould (2010, 32), who has studied the history of AIDS activism in ACT UP, affect is “the key force in social change”. Adding

SQS  
1–2/2023

|

Introduction

Varpu  
Alasuutari,  
Merlin Sophie  
Bootsman,  
Barbara  
Dynda,  
Orlando  
Meier-Brix  
and  
Ivo  
Zender

an “affective curve into the emotional turn” of social movement studies, Gould makes a strong argument for focusing on the affective/emotional states to understand activism and its political horizons (Gould 2009, 23). As argued by Tuula Juvonen and colleagues (2022), affects indeed matter in queer and trans activism: they may inspire activism, produce a change in the social world, and affect the activists themselves in a variety of ways. As editors of this special issue, we thus argue that analyzing the histories of queer and trans activism through an affective lens not only makes sense but is also an essential perspective in exploring such histories.

In the SQS journal, affects and affectivity have previously been discussed in a special issue on *Queer Affects* (1–2/2016) and queer history in a special issue on *Queer History Month* (1–2/2020). Our special issue builds on the same fields of research, focusing on and combining them with the study of activism. In our collection of texts, activism is approached as a wide category consisting of actions that aim at changing the world for the better.

### **Affect and emotion – theoretical differences?**

Research on affects, emotions, and feelings has been conducted with a variety of differing and sometimes overlapping methodologies. Especially the controversial question of whether to differentiate between affect, emotion, and feeling – and if so, how – has already been addressed elsewhere (e.g. Ahmed and Schmitz 2014; Gorton 2007). For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the most frequently made distinction is one between affect as an embodied and relational intensity and emotion as its socially mediated expression. Gould, for example, separates affect as a “bodily, sensory, inarticulate, nonconscious experience” (Gould 2009, 19–20) from emotion as a “personal expression of what one is feeling in a given moment, an expression that is structured by social convention, by culture” (ibid., 20–21). Gould also uses feeling as “an overarching term that

encapsulates the entire phenomenon of affect and emotions”, and notes that in practice, all these phenomena coexist and can thus be difficult to separate from one another (ibid., 22).

Notwithstanding the terminological variety within affect studies, there exists a broad agreement that affects, emotions, and/or feelings are part of relational, social, cultural, and political practices. For Sara Ahmed, emotions “produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside” (Ahmed 2004, 10). Ann Cvetkovich highlights that specifically queer and trans communities emerge around shared experiences and feelings (Cvetkovich 2003, 7, 11). Gould notes that feelings are fundamental to political life insofar as movements “authorize selected feelings and actions while downplaying and even invalidating others” (Gould 2009, 28). As Heather Love emphasizes, especially negatively perceived affects and “the intransigent difficulties of making feeling the basis for politics” (Love 2007, 14) still need to be considered further.

The texts exploring affective histories of queer and trans activism in this special issue approach these issues and terminologies differently. Each author has chosen their theoretical vocabulary based on the theories and concepts most suitable to their topics and theoretical and methodological approaches. As a result, many authors of this special issue make not only empirical arguments in their articles and essays but also theoretical and methodological ones.

### **Researching queer and trans activism**

Similarly to the different conceptualizations of affects, emotions, and feelings, each of the articles published in the special issue theorizes activism in a different way which, at the same time, reflects the comprehensiveness

SQS  
1–2/2023

||

Introduction

Varpu  
Alasuutari,  
Merlin Sophie  
Bootsmann,  
Barbara  
Dynda,  
Orlando  
Meier-Brix  
and  
Ivo  
Zender

of activism research. Apart from the aforementioned role of the affective dimension of politics, an important context here is the resistance of feminist, queer, and trans bodies in public space. Whether in the form of a strike, protest, literature, or visual art, the authors consider these affective and bodily expressions as acts of collective and/or individual activist action, allowing readers to get a glimpse of activist politics that are diverse in terms of time and space. Interspersed emotions, art, bodies, and desires, thus, become the lens through which we can look at activism in both the public and intimate spheres.

This understanding of activism has a long tradition and history in feminist, queer, and trans studies. For example, the examination of public protests such as general strikes and direct actions is an important aspect of 20th-century feminism, particularly in the context of anarchist politics (Luxemburg 1906 [2021]; Goldman 1917 [2019]). During the last decades, queer and trans studies have continued discussions on affective gathering and artistic expression in public spaces in order to manifest political opposition and build communities (e.g. Berlant & Warner 1998). While Judith Butler pays attention to social movements, public assemblies, and the vulnerabilities of bodies within theories on politics and power (e.g. Butler 2011; Butler 2015; Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016), other academics explore the potential of bodily resistance to institutionalized cis- and heteronormative oppression within art, literature, film, and other cultural productions (e.g. Ahmed 2017; Cvetkovich 2003; Cvetkovich 2012; Halberstam 2011; Preciado 2013; among many others).

In recent years, scholars have also started to study research practices themselves as forms of activism. The tradition of activist archiving developed by Elspeth Brown and Myrl Beam is of particular relevance to the topic of our issue (Brown 2020; Brown & Beam 2022). Using the method of oral history to explore and produce a history of queer and

trans-specific experiences can be seen as a type of activism. As Brown and Beam suggest, through engaging in radical archiving, which entails emotional labor and a caring approach, as queer and trans researchers, we can contribute to community-based solidarity (Brown & Beam 2022).

Affect-oriented literary studies, in turn, center the affective relationship between the text and its readers and, depending on their orientation, highlight the importance of narrative and literary activism as practices of queer and trans worldmaking for marginalized groups of people. “Narratives”, Schiltermandl and colleagues (2022, 18) point out, “can do a variety of cultural and political work, all centered around different affective responses: empathy, disgust, guilt, hope, and many more”. By foregrounding queer and trans people as readers, these narratives have the potential to challenge hegemonic narratives and “invite readers into alternative worlds in which their own identities are affirmed, accepted, and appreciated” (ibid., 21).

### Introducing the contributions

The authors contributing to this special issue draw on the various theoretical approaches described above, highlighting specific affects and emotions in their study of the history of queer and trans activism or developing their own original affective methodology.

In their article *The Fears of Gay Teachers and the Collectivizing Effects of Emotion Work*, Merlin Sophie Bootsmann, Greta Hülsmann, and Andrea Rottmann analyze how fear influenced the formation of the Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators in West Berlin in the 1970s. The authors argue that the group instrumentalized gay teachers’ fears (to be outed, to be fired etc.) to mobilize their members, hence developing affects and narratives of fear into a conscious strategy of collective emotion work.

SQS  
1–2/2023

III

Introduction

Varpu Alasuutari,  
Merlin Sophie Bootsmann,  
Barbara Dynda,  
Orlando Meier-Brix  
and Ivo Zender

Here, Bootsmann, Hülsmann, and Rottmann differentiate between affects as reactive and emotions as conscious states of feeling while emphasizing the analytical nature of this separation. As they show, affects and emotions are inseparably linked in the teachers' efforts to pursue historical change through emotion work.

Fear is also the central point of analysis in Henrique Cintra Santos's article "Acting out of Fear": *Queer Resistance During the Military Dictatorship in Brazil* which explores the possibility of writing Queer History of the Brazilian dictatorship by analyzing the first organized queer demonstration in Brazilian history. On June 13th, 1980, one thousand people of the newly formed LGBTQIA+ movement protested in the city of São Paulo against police violence and Operation Cleansing, which especially targeted homosexuals, sex workers, and *travestis*. The study examines fear's role, showcasing how it was used by the regime to control, but also how it fueled collective resistance within the queer community.

Orlando Meier-Brix's article *Reading Transition with Suspicion: An Affective Critique of Umwandlung in N. O. Body's Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren and its Reception* analyzes the sexological and autobiographical narrative of *Umwandlung* (gender/sex transition) in Karl M. Baer's memoir, one of the earliest self-authored accounts by an intersex individual. Meier-Brix challenges the prevailing medical interpretation of Baer's transition and reintroduces suspicion as an affective methodology for critically engaging with trans and intersex narratives. The article argues for de-medicalizing *Umwandlung* as an early 20th-century concept of transition and proposes a more nuanced perspective that also offers alternatives to contemporary medicalizing concepts.

In *Desire for Trans Ancestors: An Affective Reading of Jordy Rosenberg's Confessions of the Fox*, Ivo Zender explores the potential for affective activism within the reading, writing, and editing of contemporary fictional

trans literature. In his novel *Confessions of the Fox* (2018), Rosenberg proposes both a (self-)critical and playful approach towards the desire for trans history by letting his trans protagonist Dr. Voth discover a mysterious manuscript about the 18th-century infamous thief and jailbreaker Jack Sheppard while reimagining Sheppard as trans. Zender uses the theoretical framework of textual desire to analyze the tension between a desire to categorize and possess and a desire for community and connection.

Kate Sotejeff-Wilson's essay *Erikoissuomalaiset: Queer New Finns, Oral History, Affective Activism* employs a qualitative approach to the affective histories of queer New Finns in Finland. Accounting for the intersections of gender/sexuality with race and class, the author coins the term *erikoissuomalaiset* ('extraordinary Finns') as an intervention against the anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQIA+ party *Perussuomalaiset* (meaning basic, ordinary, or sometimes 'true' Finns). Engaging these queer New Finns in writing their stories, the research aims to challenge and rewrite the national history of Finland by "integrating minority perspectives into the majority cultural heritage story".

In his essay *Tunteiden kuvaus vaikuttamisen keinona transmaskuliinisuutta käsittelevässä nuortenkirjallisuudessa* [The Description of Emotions as a Means of Influence in Youth Literature on Transmasculinity], Pyry Aarnio explores the emotion of shame in three Finnish young adult novels: Siri Kolu's *Kesän jälkeen kaikki on toisin* [After the Summer Everything Will Be Different] (2016), Riina Mattila's *Järistyksiä* [Trembles] (2018), and Marja Björk's *Poika* [Boy] (2013). The transmasculine protagonists and narrators experience shame as a result of challenging societal norms because of their transness, leading them to withdraw socially. Aarnio weaves together shame, anger, and grief, revealing the intricate tapestry of emotions that emerge in the act of negotiating the constricting boundaries of heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Ultimately, the novels depict

SQS  
1-2/2023

IV

Introduction

Varpu  
Alasuutari,  
Merlin Sophie  
Bootsmann,  
Barbara  
Dynda,  
Orlando  
Meier-Brix  
and  
Ivo  
Zender

empowerment through the exploration of identity, the discovery of supportive communities, and the transformative experiences of desire, touch, and self-acceptance.

YV E. Nay's *The Affective Life of Trans Studies as a Political Field in Academia and Activism* intervenes in the field of trans studies starting with its formation rooted in sexology. In the text, which is a shortened version of their keynote speech presented at the 8th Nordic Trans Studies Conference at Tampere University in February 2023, Nay proposes the approach of critical trans studies. Scholars who critically approach trans studies recognize and dismantle the colonial, white, and US-centered entanglements of their field. Nay does not only call for a disciplinary turn regarding the theoretical and historical foundations of trans studies. In the end, they call for critical intervention in trans studies for the sake of transformative justice for trans people at large.

In *Transgender Affect: Rage and Joy or Something Else?*, Liekki Valaskivi provides a detailed report of the 8th Nordic Trans Studies Conference as a doctoral researcher attending the conference. Approximately 120 participants gathered at Tampere University to discuss affect in the field of trans studies. Valaskivi allows us to relive various academic and artistic contributions of the conference through their eyes and ends with contemplating the complex personal and emotional entanglements of trans scholars with their research.

In the second report of the same event, titled *Missä mennään, transtutkimus, vuonna 2023?* [Where Are We, Trans Studies, in 2023?], Sari Laurila reflects on the conference from the perspective of a trans activist. Laurila calls for more focus from trans studies scholars on very pressing real-life issues such as minority stress and the violent and sometimes deadly effects of cisnormativity. Moreover, Laurila points out that many trans

people end up involuntarily acting as 'micro activists' simply by living in a cisnormative world.

Our art gallery section features a queer historical comic, titled *Katujen yössä* [In the Night of the Streets], written by Vili von Nissinen and illustrated by Nina Mutik. The comic explores the life and meeting places of a group of feminine gay men, called Siskot [sisters], in the 1960s in Helsinki, Finland. Back then, homosexual acts were still criminalized in Finnish society, which posed challenges for finding like-minded company. The comic draws from queer historical sources, including the book *Puistohomot* [Park Gays] by Valdemar Melanko (2012), the magazine *96* published by the early Finnish gay and lesbian association *Psyke*, and the blog post series *Homohistoriallinen Helsinki* [Gay Historical Helsinki] by blogger Hulivilipoika (2014). The comic also features lyrics of Finnish schlagers from the same era.<sup>2</sup> With this comic, SQS starts collaboration with a queer history comic collective, which will hopefully lead to many new comic strips in our future issues.

The review section includes four book reviews. In their review of Claire Summerskill's *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption* (2022), an anthology publishing the work of 19 queer oral historians, Jean Lukkarinen summarizes the articles and manages to show why each contribution is valuable and different from the others. Finally, they argue that the work is an important, unprecedented tool for anyone interested in queer oral history because it provides insight into so many different approaches and methodologies, yet at the same time does not obscure their potential challenges.

2 The songs featured in the comic include *Hyväile, hyväile vaan*, lyrics by Arvo Aallas, *Laulu rakastamisen vaikeudesta*, lyrics by Marja-Leena Mikkola, and *Niin aikaisin*, lyrics by Jukka Kuoppamäki.

Leo Ryczko reviews *You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like VooDoo* (2022) by historian Jens Dobler. The book offers a detailed biography of Willy Pape, a white Berliner who took on the persona of the exotic snake dancer VooDoo during the vibrant 1920s variety show scene. Meticulously covering VooDoo's tours, influences, and later years as a gay bar owner, the book is praised for illuminating forgotten aspects of queer culture. However, Ryczko critiques the book for not fully addressing the colonial, orientalist, and racist undertones of VooDoo's performances and persona, missing an opportunity to connect them to the wider German queer history and colonial past.

Tuula Juvonen, in turn, provides a review of the book *Suomalaisen seksin historia* [The History of Finnish Sex] by Ari Haasio and Markku Mattila. As Juvonen puts it in the title of the review, the book seems to focus on "everything men have always wanted to know about sex" (*Kaikki mitä miehet ovat aina halunneet tietää seksistä*). What is missing from the book, according to Juvonen, is the work that gender studies, queer studies, and cultural studies scholars have done to explore the history of sexuality and its diversity. Juvonen, thus, calls for future historians to focus on the neglected topic of the history of sexuality, and while doing so, to acknowledge the work already done in other fields of study.

*How Many Times the Same Story?* asks Jay Szpilka while reading Sara Ahmed's *Complaint!* (2021). Written as a complaint about the university system – or rather, as a complaint about the system's ignorance towards her complaints and criticism of sexism, racism, and ableism – the book features Ahmed's as well as students' and established scholars' experiences. As Szpilka shows, *Complaint!* resonates with Ahmed's earlier works, leaving the reader both captivated by the fervent criticism and at the same time insecure about how to deal with the similarity and repetitiveness of the complaints themselves.

Finally, we would like to thank our illustrator Sirpa Varis for the amazing cover image reflecting different forms of activism, many of which are represented on the pages of this special issue.

For all of the readers of SQS, we wish an inspirational and stimulating reading with our various contributions. In light of the current and ongoing struggles of queer and trans individuals as well as communities – recently most prominently affected by the growing anti-gender movement in Europe (e.g. Saresma 2020) and the wave of anti-trans legislation in the US, the latter of which has been appropriately deemed genocidal by the Lemkin Institute for Genocide prevention (2022) – we would like to express our sincerest hope that the histories documented in this special issue can serve as an inspiration to keep fighting for and living queer and trans lives unapologetically. We deserve not only to have our stories told, but most importantly, we deserve to live our lives unharmed and fulfilled.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara, and Sigrid Schmitz. 2014. "Affect/Emotion: Orientation Matters. A Conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Geschlechter Studien* 2 (2): 97–108.
- Alasuutari, Varpu. 2023. "Again the Same Hopeless Feeling": Christian Queer Activism as a Personal Experience in Finland, 1960s–2000s. *Gender & History*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12734>
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. 1998. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2): 547–566.
- Brown, Elspeth H. 2020. "Archival Activism, Symbolic Annihilation, and the LGBTQ2+ Community Archive." *Archivaria* 89 (1): 6–32.

- Brown, Elspeth H., and Myrl Beam. 2022. "Toward an Ethos of Trans Care in Trans Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 49 (1): 29–55.
- Butler, Judith. 2011. "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street." *Transversal Texts*. Published September 2011. <https://transversal.at/transversal/1011/butler/en>.
- Butler, Judith. 2015. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Butler, Judith, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds. 2016. *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2012. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto. 2007. "Introduction". In *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, 1–33. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gammerl, Benno. 2016. "Curtains Up! Styles in Gay Men's Venues Since the 1950s". *SQS: Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* 10(1–2): 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.23980/sqs.63667>.
- Goldman, Emma. 1917 [2019]. *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing Association [Digireads.com Publishing].
- Gorton, Kristyn. 2007. "Theorizing Emotion and Affect". *Feminist Theory* 8 (3): 333–348.
- Gould, Deborah. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gould, Deborah. 2010. "On Affect and Protest". In *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication*, edited by Janet Steiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds, pp. 18–44. New York: Routledge.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hulivilipoika. 2014. "Homohistoriallinen Helsinki 1: Kaupungin illassa yksin". *Hulivilipoika: Homokulttuurista löysin rantein*. Published May 15, 2014. <http://hulivilipoika.blogspot.com/2014/05/homohistoriallinen-helsinki-1-kaupungin.html>.
- Juvonen, Tuula, Varpu Alasuutari, Lotta Kähkönen, and Luca Tainio. 2022. "Syrjäytettyjen tunteet aktivismissä." *Politiikasta.fi*. Published February 8, 2022. <https://politiikasta.fi/syrjayettyjen-tunteet-aktivismissa/>.
- Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. 2022. Statement on the Genocidal Nature of the Gender Critical Movement's Ideology and Practice. *Lemkinstitute.com*. Published November 29, 2022. <https://www.lemkinstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-genocidal-nature-of-the-gender-critical-movement%E2%80%99s-ideology-and-practice/>.
- Love, Heather. 2007. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. 1906 [2021]. *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. Paris: Foreign Languages Press.
- Malatino, Hil. 2022. *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Melanko, Valdemar. 2012. *Puistohomot: Raportti Helsingin 1960-luvun homokulttuurista*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Nagy, Piroška. 2018. "History of Emotions." In *Debating New Approaches to History*, edited by Marek Tamm, and Peter Burke, 189–216. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Nunn, Zavier. 2023. "Against Anticipation, or, Camp Reading as Reparative to the Trans Feminine Past: A Microhistory in Nazi-Era Vienna." *Gender & History*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12721>.
- Preciado, Paul B. 2013. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY.
- Saresma, Tuija. 2020. "Antigender-liike, kristillisuus ja oikeistopopulismi: sukupuolen politiikkaa." *Politiikasta.fi*. Published October 19, 2020. <https://politiikasta.fi/antigender-liike-kristillisuus-ja-oikeistopopulismi-sukupuolen-politiikkaa/>.
- Schultermandl, Silvia, Jana Aresin, Dijana Simić, and Si Sophie Pages Whybrew. 2022. "Introduction: Affective Worldmaking: Narrative Counterpublics of Gender and Sexuality." In *Affective Worldmaking: Narrative Counterpublics of Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Silvia Schultermandl, Jana Aresin, Dijana Simić, and Si Sophie Pages Whybrew, 13–44. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Stryker, Susan. 1994. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *GLQ* 1 (3): 237–254.
- Vähäpassi, Valo. 2021. "Finnish Right to Be -Citizens Initiative Campaign and the 'Feeling of Being Counted'". *aoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2021i0.12063>.



# THE FEARS OF GAY TEACHERS AND THE COLLECTIVIZING EFFECTS OF EMOTION WORK

Affects, Emotions, and Emotion Work in the History of the Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators in the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* Berlin 1978–1991

Merlin Sophie Bootsman, Andrea Rottmann & Greta Hülsmann

## ABSTRACT

This article examines how the formation of the Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators in the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (German Education Union, GEW) in 1978 was influenced by the affect of fear, and how emotion work emerged as a key aspect of the formation and collectivisation of the group in its first decade until 1991. To this end, we review the state of affect and emotion research in German queer history, analyse the role of fear in the formation of the group in the late 1970s, and explore the group's continued emotion work in the 1980s. We deliberately highlight the aspects of fear and emotion work. While queer and trans studies have paid much attention to anger (Stryker 1994; Landridge 2008; Milani 2021; Malatino 2022), the same cannot be said for fearful emotional states. Although there is a growing body of work on affect and emotion in German queer history, emotion work has only been implicitly addressed. We therefore highlight the role of both fear and emotion work in the history of the GEW's Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators between 1978 and 1991. In discussing the history of the group, we show how not only affect and emotion but also emotion work can be key to historical change, and we touch on the question of how productive the historiographical distinction between affect and emotion is.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, History of Education, History of Emotions, History of West Germany, Emotion Work

## Introduction

“Every heterosexual teacher recounts his private life with a naturalness. Be it reports from vacation, of the last weekend, about the family and the kids. The gay teacher keeps secret this realm of his life, even if he invents “his fiancée”. It is unimaginable for him, to talk about living together with his boyfriend or the problems of his relationship. He [the gay teacher] is afraid to reveal himself because he fears the general social discrimination and because the male colleagues could maybe experience him as a threat. It is possible that we find a male colleague attractive. This fear often leads to neurotic fears of contact towards colleagues” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19).<sup>1</sup>

1 „Jeder heterosexuelle lehrer erzählt mit einer selbstverständlichkeit von seinem privatleben. Seien es berichte vom urlaub, vom letzten wochenende, von der familie und von den kindern. Der schwule lehrer verschweigt diesen bereich seines lebens, auch wenn er “seine verlobte”. erfindet. Es ist für ihn unvorstellbar, über das zusammenleben mit seinem freund oder die probleme seiner beziehungen zu reden. Er hat angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben,

As the quote above illustrates, the decriminalisation of male-male sexuality between adults in West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany or FRG) in 1969/73<sup>2</sup> and the emergence of lesbian and gay liberation movements from the beginning of the 1970s onwards did not put an end to the experiences of discrimination and marginalisation of LGBTIQ\* (lesbians, gay, bisexual, trans\*, inter\*, and queer\*) people<sup>3</sup> (Griffiths 2021; Huneke 2022). As the quote further shows, homosexuality remained a taboo, especially in schools. When sex education was introduced in public schools in 1969, the official guidelines drafted by the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (conference of ministers of education of the German states) listed homosexuality under “socio-ethical problems of human sexuality as well as penal provisions for the protection of youth and sexual offences” along with contraception, promiscuity, prostitution, rape, abortion, and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (Bundestag 1969, 3–6).

It does not come as a surprise, then, that education politics and policy were an important issue for the lesbian and gay movements from the

---

weil er die allgemeine gesellschaftliche diskriminierung fürchtet und weil die männlichen kollegen ihn möglicherweise als bedrohung erleben. Es könnte ja sein, daß wir einen kollegen attraktiv finden. Diese angst führt häufig zu neurotischen kontakt- und berührungängsten kollegen gegenüber.“

- 2 Male-male sexuality had been criminalised by §175 since the very beginnings of the German National state. In contrast to East Germany which had returned to the milder pre-Nazi version of §175 in 1950, the FRG had retained the version of §175 that had been tightened under National Socialism post 1945 (Huneke 2022, 64). Male-male sexuality was decriminalised in the FRG by the 1969 reform with a higher age of consent of 21 compared to 18 for heterosexuals. A further reform in 1973 lowered the age of consent to 18, but §175 was not abolished until 1994, after German reunification (Griffiths 2021, 32–33).
- 3 While the contemporary movements referred to themselves as gay and lesbian movements, this article opts to use the acronym of LGBTIQ\* to honour the activists of varied gender and sexuality experience as well as expression who were part of these groups.

beginning of the 1970s. The *Homosexuelle Aktion West Berlin* (“Homosexual Action Group West Berlin, HAW”), for example, had a working group on pedagogy and successfully organised protests against the dismissal of a gay teacher, Reinhard Koepp, on the grounds of being homosexual in 1973 (Mücke 1985).<sup>4</sup> The teacher was reinstated with the help of legal assistance provided by the *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (“Education and Science Workers’ Union, GEW”), but as the group’s further work proved unsuccessful, it disbanded in 1975. Instead, several homosexual teachers decided to organise within the GEW in 1978. Our article traces this process of organisation and highlights the importance of affects, especially fear, and of emotion work for their collectivization. Most of the group’s surviving archival material consists of public-facing documents such as brochures, articles, flyers or meeting programmes, while no internal material such as minutes of meetings have been preserved. In fact, internal discussions have only been preserved through contemporary publications by the gay teachers in an attempt to document their work. We will therefore base our analysis on the public materials<sup>5</sup> and focus on the public display and socio-political interdependence of affect and emotion.

The gay teachers within the GEW Berlin<sup>6</sup> initially formed out of fear of

- 4 We use ‘gay’ as a re-appropriated identity category of gay men (equivalent to the German ‘schwul’) and ‘homosexual’ in a more descriptive manner that can encompass both male-male and female-female homosexuality.
- 5 The source material stems almost entirely from the contemporary witness and co-founder of the gay teachers’ group, Detlef Mücke, whose archival material is currently being processed into the archive of the *Schwules Museum* Berlin. Mücke co-founded the group and collected nearly all of its printed materials.
- 6 While the working group was founded under the name of ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft Homosexuelle Lehrer und Erzieher’ [working group of homosexual teachers and educators], it was predominantly a group of male teachers from the outset and only used the moniker of homosexuality in official proceedings, preferring to refer to themselves as gay. Due to this history and an official name change to being the “working group of gay teachers” (AG Schwule Lehrer) in 2016, we refer to the group as ‘gay teachers’ for short throughout the article to use

continued discrimination and marginalization, as the 1978 article *Die angst des schwulen lehrers im dienst*<sup>7</sup> (“the fear of the gay teacher in service”), quoted above and further elaborated on below, vividly illustrates. Fear also played an important role in their initial public messaging and was the focus of their emotion work. How did fear influence the formation of the group and their ongoing collectivization? In which ways was the group’s history in later years, including their activities and aims, shaped by fear?

In addressing these questions, we explore ways of integrating theoretical and methodological perspectives from the history of emotions and affect studies into our empirical research. In terms of our empirical research, we analyse the way in which not only affects but also emotion work can be key to historical change. In terms of theory, we consider how productive the historiographical distinction between affect and emotion really is for historiographical research.

It should be noted that it was no coincidence that both the HAW pedagogical group and the gay teachers were based in West Berlin. Craig Griffiths has recently relativised the role which large cities generally, and West Berlin specifically, played for the gay movement (Griffiths 2021, 2, 58), yet Berlin has been a hub of LGBTIQ\* subculture and politics since at least the Weimar Republic (Huneke 2022, 24). The socio-political conditions of West Berlin undoubtedly facilitated the emergence and continuation of gay action groups working on education politics.

In the first part of the article, we introduce the history of emotions as an approach to queer history that has been popular in Germany. In the second

---

their self-designation. The abstracted collective of and individual male-male desiring teachers are referred to as ‘homosexual teachers’ for differentiation purposes.

7 Between 1978 and 1996, the journal of the GEW Berlin used lower case writing with the exception of capital letters at the start of sentences (Will 2007: 24).

part, we use these approaches to analyse the role of affects and emotion work in the formation of the working group of homosexual teachers and educators within the GEW Berlin in 1978. In the third part, we give an outlook on the group’s continued emotion work throughout the 1980s, when group members increasingly sought to replace feelings of fear with feelings of joy. In the fourth and final part, we draw our conclusions and highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between affects and social structures.

### Affects and emotions in German queer history

German queer history has been slow to adopt perspectives from affect studies and the history of emotions. However, some of the most theoretically ambitious recent work is distinguished by its interest in the historical effects of affects, emotions, and feelings. For instance, in her work on East German lesbian history, Maria Bühner has made productive use of Ann Cvetkovich’s *Archives of Feeling* and Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* (Bühner 2019; Cvetkovich 2003; Love 2009). In her discussion of two documentary projects on lesbians in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a collection of memoir essays and a television documentary, she interprets them as “archives of feelings” that both question well-rehearsed historical chronologies – such as the 1970s as the decade that brought fundamental change to LGBTIQ\* lives – and bring emotions to the centre of historical inquiry, “not only for politics and community building, but also for individuals and their personal journeys” (Bühner 2019, 243).

Bühner (2019, 255) does not explicitly define “emotion” or “affect” but suggests the following distinction between affects and feelings:

It might be a productive way to think about these sexual experiences that are rooted in a bodily experience and certain vague sensations

as affects. Affects that still needed to undergo a process of understanding to find words for them, make sense of them, and transform them into feelings that could be grasped and articulated.

This appears to be a good working definition for our purposes, too, as long as we bear in mind feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's reminder that "—you can separate affect and emotion, you even can have a rationale for doing that, but it needs to be understood as a method allowing you to do certain things and not as corresponding to a natural distinction that exists in the world". (Ahmed and Schmitz 2014, 98.)

In what follows, we will make such a methodological distinction by referring to affects as a reactive and emotions as a conscious state of feeling. For the sake of clarity, we use "feeling" only in the narrow sense of lived experiences of affects and/or emotions. We suggest that an affect can be transformed into emotion by performing emotion work. We define emotion work, in turn, as the conscious work that is performed to manage individual or collective emotions.<sup>8</sup> Emotion work can be part of political work – as we will discuss in the case of the gay teachers – but also, part of intimate relationships or occupational relations (as in emotional labour).

A useful model to consider/analyse how emotions shape social structures is Ahmed's conceptualisation of affects and emotions as "sticky". With her, we argue that emotions have collectivising effects and "work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)". Importantly, she argues that specific emotions are tied to

<sup>8</sup> Hereby, we do not follow Gould's definition of emotion work that encompasses "efforts, conscious and not" to alter one's own and others' emotions (Gould 2009, 28) but focus on conscious efforts alone following our methodological distinction between affect and emotion. We consciously do not use the term emotional labour as it refers to labour which is explicitly required as part of a job or an occupation (Hochschild 1983). Emotion work, as we define it, is not limited to wage labour relations but has a more expansive meaning.

specific groups of people "through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects". (Ahmed 2004, 119–121.) We will turn to this model in analysing the group's continued emotion work throughout the 1980s.

In his research on the history of emotions of gay men and lesbian women in West Germany, Benno Gammerl (2009, 315) has argued that because of the legal reform, "the social frame of same-sex emotionality changed significantly around 1970" in Germany. We will trace how and when this change manifested in terms of fear, which was the central affect for the formation of the group of gay teachers. To conceptualise fear, historian Joanna Bourke's work points us to the mediatory role of emotions. She notes:

[E]motions such as fear do not only belong to individuals or social groups: they mediate between the individual and the social. They are about power relations. Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between self and other or one community and another. (Bourke 2003, 124).

These mediations and negations oftentimes operate by (de-)legitimising the expression of emotions by particular individuals or social groups. Bourke explains this via the example of anxiety and fear: while fear refers to an "immediate, objective threat" as opposed to anxiety's "anticipated, subjective threat", the distinction between them usually "rests on a distinction between the rational and the irrational" (Bourke 2003, 126). Practically speaking, the fearful emotional states of a dominant social group or individual would be expected to be framed as rational fear, and conversely the fearful emotional states of an oppressed social group or individual would be expected to be framed as irrational anxiety.

While affects and emotions are influenced by social structures in the ways which we have outlined, it is important to remember that emotional states

themselves remain fluid and defy simplistic categorisation. The example of fear and anxiety is an excellent one, since the German *Angst* can be translated as both, and the assessment of its expression is therefore not immediately obvious. Just as the perception and framing of affective and emotional states is connected to specific social structures, they are always dependent on their geographical, cultural, and historical contexts. In what follows, the case of the group of gay teachers will serve as an example of this mediatory role of emotions. As we will show, affects were structured by society. Through the teachers' processing of these affects into emotions, they then played an important role in changing these very conditions.

### The fearful formation of the gay teachers 1979/80

As mentioned in the introduction, §175 of the criminal code criminalised homosexual acts between adult men until 1969. For teachers, a conviction under §175 of the criminal code in the FRG did not only result in the loss of their status as civil servants but possibly even a prison sentence. While the 1969 reform abolished threat of incarceration, homosexual teachers could still lose their status as civil servants. In 1973, Reinhard Koepp, a gay teacher in West Berlin, was fired after his superiors had become aware of his homosexuality. While Koepp was reinstated after protests and legal action, the question of whether a teacher would have to face disciplinary action if his homosexuality became known remained unresolved.

After two short-lived pedagogy working groups within the HAW, some of their former members set out to address the ongoing discrimination by forming a working group of gay teachers within the GEW West Berlin (Mücke 1985, 158–161). Informal meetings began in March of 1979 and sparked conversations about the experiences of gay teachers. These led to three members writing an article that was published in the *Berliner*

*Lehrerzeitung* (“teacher’s journal of Berlin”) in July of 1979. This article can be regarded as a founding document of the gay teachers’ group, not only because it called for official recognition of the group, but also because it already presented a public statement.

The article’s title – *Die angst des schwulen lehrers im dienst. oder das tabu homosexualität im erziehungswesen* (“The fear of the gay teacher in service. or the taboo of homosexuality in the education sector”) – highlighted the significance of fear, while the subtitle introduced the main subject of the text, the taboo of homosexuality in West German schools in the 1970s. The authors identified two reasons for the nexus of fear and taboo. First, the responsible administrations refused to take a clear and public stand against the discrimination of homosexual teachers. Second, few same-sex desiring teachers had attempted to make their same-sex desire public. The majority of them, fearing discrimination and disciplinary measures, acted as discreetly and conformingly as possible (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19).

In the article, this fear was illustrated through interactions with colleagues, pupils, and parents. In contrast to their heterosexual colleagues, the gay teachers remained silent about their private lives in an effort not to reveal themselves as homosexuals. This was because they feared both “general societal discrimination” and being perceived as a potential “threat” because of “finding a colleague attractive” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)<sup>9</sup>. In interacting with pupils, the article portrays homosexual teachers as both being perceived as threatening as well as being in fact threatened: out of fear of being associated with the “societal prejudice that he is a seducer

9 „[Der schwule Lehrer] hat angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben, weil er die allgemeine gesellschaftliche diskriminierung fürchtet und weil die männlichen kollegen ihn möglicherweise als bedrohung erleben. Es könnte ja sein, daß wir einen kollegen attraktiv finden“.

of boys up to a sexual perpetrator of violence”, a gay teacher would try to conceal his homosexuality (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)<sup>10</sup>.

This prejudice stemmed from the long-standing and entirely unfounded “seduction thesis”, which posits that homosexuality emerges because young people are corrupted through exposure to same-sex orientation or literal seduction by an adult homosexual of their gender (Samper Vendrell, 16-17). If their homosexuality were to become known, however, the gay teacher would indeed be threatened by homophobic behaviour from the pupils who would make him “run the gauntlet” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18)<sup>11</sup>. Finally, parents, would perceive same-sex desiring teachers as a double threat. Firstly, homosexual teachers would fear being perceived as seducing children into homosexuality. Secondly, they would also be perceived by the parents “as an attack on their own relationship, i.e. on the institution of civil marriage” (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19).<sup>12</sup>

In different constellations, the authors ultimately described the same situation – in all three interactions, a gay teacher would be “afraid to reveal himself” which would ultimately lead to the “complete shutting out of his private domain” (Ibid). The backdrop to these emotional states was an emotional regime which corresponded to the contemporary discrimination against homosexuals: the fears of the heterosexual social group – being threatened by being considered attractive by a person of

---

10 „Trotz der bekannten Tatsache, daß kein Mensch zu einem bestimmten Sexualverhalten verführt werden kann, wirkt auch im schwulen Lehrer das gesellschaftliche Vorurteil, daß er als Verführer von Jungen bis hin zum Sexualgewalttäter gesehen wird. Um ja keinem Verdacht ausgesetzt zu sein, wird er sein Verhalten gegenüber Schülern übergenau beobachten“.

11 „ein spießbrutenlaufen veranstalten würden“.

12 „Das Vorleben einer anderen als der heterosexuellen Beziehung wird aber nicht nur als Bedrohung für ihre Kinder angesehen, sondern wird von ihnen als Angriff auf ihre eigene Beziehung, d. h. auf die Institution der bürgerlichen Ehe empfunden“.

the same gender, young people being “seduced” to be homosexual, the heteronormative institution of marriage being challenged – were socially accepted and commonplace. By contrast, the fears of homosexual teachers to face a variety of discriminatory experiences were considered invalid or not even considered. As the introductory quote to our article notes, this would often lead “to neurotic fears of contact towards colleagues”. (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18–19.)<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, the psychoanalytical framing of this conclusion can be contextualised by the popularisation of therapy and self-therapeutic practices since the 1970s in the FRG (Tändler 2016). On the other hand, by describing the fears of homosexual teachers of contact with heterosexual colleagues as neurotic, these fears were considered irrational. This assessment builds towards the conclusion we draw at the end of this article.

Taken together, the article describes the isolation of same-sex desiring teachers and the invisibility of homosexuality as mutually dependent phenomena: the isolation of homosexuals led to individual as well as collective marginalisation and discrimination. As long as isolated homosexual teachers existed solely as an abstract collective joined through sexual orientation and a shared profession, the situation was deemed hopeless. The fear that gay teachers felt on the job was identified as both the consequence of discrimination and the main obstacle to overcoming it. As the crucial first step to address and overcome the problem, the article designated the confession of a collective gay identity: “Make your gayness public!”<sup>14</sup> (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19). Notably, the article not only called on its readers to be gay in public but also fulfilled a performative act by publicly naming its three authors – Karl Dornhöfer, Jakob Hempel and

---

13 „angst davor, sich erkennen zu geben“; „völlige[n] verschließen seines Privatbereiches“; „Diese angst führt häufig zu neurotischen kontakt- und berührungsängsten kollegen gegenüber“.

14 “Mach dein schwulsein öffentlich!“.

Detlef Mücke – and even providing phone numbers of two of them. The authors claimed that they had taken the step of making their gayness public among colleagues some years ago and reported that “fears towards gays among colleagues were removed” and that they themselves were now encountering “colleagues, the school administration and the pupils with less inhibition, less fear and more confidently” (Dornhöfer, Hempel, and Mücke, 19)<sup>15</sup>.

Five conclusions about the role of fear for the group of gay teachers can be drawn from the article, other contemporary documents, and an oral history interview with founding member Detlef Mücke.<sup>16</sup> First, its founding members shared a fear of discrimination and a corresponding experience of marginalisation. The fear of such continued experiences and the aim to combat them was the impulse for the formation of the group (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 18; Mücke 2021, 00:21:17). Hence, fear mediated between individuals and the social (Bourke 2003, 124). In the case of the gay teachers, this applied doubly. The continued structural discrimination and marginalisation of homosexuals after the decriminalisation of homosexuality caused homosexual teachers to be afraid of making their gayness public. This, in turn, led to further individualisation and invisibility. But the fear of continued discrimination also led to the formation of the group in an attempt to address and overcome it: the gay teachers organised to address their fear and its causes.

Second, the gay teachers utilised fear to make an appeal to empathy in hopes of achieving equality for themselves. In their initial public relations

work, they used rousing descriptions of the experience and conditions of homosexual teachers. At the same time, in self-organised events or negotiations with the educational administration, they presented themselves as confident and entitled to their rights. Although they did not use the framework of human rights, this mobilisation of emotions shows striking similarities to the role that Lynn Hunt has ascribed to empathy in the history of human rights. Hunt argued that “imagined empathy” served as the foundation of human rights. Similarly, the gay teachers strategically deployed pitiable descriptions of their situation to make an appeal to empathy and achieve protection against discrimination (Hunt 2008, 32; Dose et al. 1979, 22-24; Streit et al. 1980, 13; Mücke 1980, 18). Interestingly, this appeal to empathy was a contested way of messaging: some group members disagreed about the pitiful depiction of homosexual teachers, criticising “that the article conveys nothing of the self-confidence of a gay movement that is growing in strength, does not really affect the heterosexual reader, but rather urges him to pity the *poor gay*” (Schreiner 1980, 1)<sup>17</sup>.

The disagreement of the gay teachers over their public portrayal corresponds to the persistence of ambivalence as a “structural feature of gay liberation” in the 1970s (Griffiths 2021, 216). While the authors of the article depicted homosexual teachers as a fear-ridden, persecuted group in need of protection, other members of the working group would have preferred to present themselves as part of an increasingly strong and confident gay movement. Likely, this disagreement concerned both differing experiences among the groups’ members and differing opinions on how to strategically frame the public perception of the group.

15 „bei den kolleginnen und kollegen ängste schwulen gegenüber abgebaut wurden“; „anderen kollegen, der schulleitung und de[n] schülern[n] unbefangener, angstfreier und sicherer [begegnen]“.

16 The oral history interview was kindly provided to us by Stefan Zeppenfeld, who originally conducted it as part of a larger interview project by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on contemporary witnesses of union work in the FRG.

17 „daß der Artikel nichts vom Selbstbewußtsein einer erstarkenden Schwulenzbewegung vermittelt, den heterosexuellen Leser nicht wirklich betroffen macht, sondern ihn geradezu dazu drängt, den »armen Schwulen« zu bemitleiden“.

Third, from the outset, internal exchanges about individual and collective experiences of fear played an important role for the work of the gay teachers. As they recount in the introduction of a self-published documentation of their group's work:

In the initial consolidation phase of the group, the focus was on the personal exchange of experiences; first of all, it was about finding out what constraints a gay teacher/educator is or can be exposed to, what reactions he has to expect from parents and colleagues, how he controls his behaviour, how pupils deal with the word "gay" and what awareness they have of homosexuality, etc. (Schreiner 1980, 1)<sup>18</sup>.

Fourth, these exchanges contributed to the consolidation of individual as well as collective identity. As the article about "the fear of the gay teacher in service" emphasized, this collectivisation was necessary to address and overcome the discrimination of homosexual teachers. The avowal of this identity can therefore be understood as both individuals overcoming fear through collective emotional work and as a mobilisation strategy of the collective of gay teachers. What Pretzel and Weiß described for the West German gay movement of the 1970s applies to the gay teachers in particular: "Becoming gay became the potential of the movement's ongoing mobilization" (Pretzel & Weiß 2017, 19–20). This practice is part of a larger tradition of consciousness-raising groups within the gay movement specifically and emancipatory movements generally in the 1970s (Haunss 2004, 203). Sharing experiences of marginalisation or discrimination allowed for a reflection and processing of these experiences and affects.

---

18 „In der anfänglichen Konsolidierungsphase der Gruppe stand der persönliche Erfahrungsaustausch im Vordergrund; da ging es erst einmal darum, herauszufinden, welchen Zwängen ein schwuler Lehrer/Erzieher ausgesetzt ist oder sein kann, welche Reaktionen er von Seiten der Eltern und Kollegen zu erwarten hat, wie er sein Verhalten kontrolliert, wie Schüler mit dem Wort „schwul“ umgehen und welches Bewußtsein sie von Homosexualität haben usw“.

Together, the gay teachers looked for and often found ways to deal with situations that were individually specific but collectively similar. These exchanges and discussions about problems of daily life "animated the individual often, helped him on, maybe freed him from his fears a little" (Schreiner 1980, 8)<sup>19</sup>.

Fifth, this emotional work was connected to the group's theory of change: discrimination could be overcome by gay identity politics and creating visibility. As a leaflet handed out by the group on Labour Day 1979 put it: "Gay teachers and educators! Put down your camouflage role, fight against your everyday oppression!" (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1979).<sup>20</sup>

Identifying the invisibility of homosexual teachers as central to their discrimination brought both an interpretation of the experience of individual teachers and a collective solution: the group's emotion work was supposed to aid the individual's identification as gay teacher and, in turn, increase collective public visibility. Coming out as a gay teacher was meant to endow individuals with the ability to address and overcome their fears as part of a collective. The group's emotion work therefore offered not only a way to process difficult emotions, but also created meaning and empowerment for those who were willing to identify publicly as gay teachers.

---

19 „Auch und gerade der hautnahe Bereich des persönlichen Erfahrungsaustausches und der Diskussion von Alltagsproblemen hat in dieser Dokumentation keinen Niederschlag gefunden, obwohl er uns doch stets wichtig war und den einzelnen oft angeregt, weitergebracht, vielleicht auch etwas von seinen Ängsten befreit hat“.

20 "Schwule Lehrer und Erzieher! Legt eure Tarnrolle ab, kämpft gegen eure alltägliche Unterdrückung!"



## Beyond fear? The gay teachers' emotion work in the 1980s

The gay teachers continued to centre emotion work in their activism long after their formation. In fact, it remained one of four key areas of their work together with education policy, public relations work, and networking. While sharing and processing fear remained an important part of this work, fear was not the only emotion. On the contrary, throughout the 1980s, the gay teachers actively engaged with overcoming fear and with attaching more positive experiences to the identity of being a gay teacher.

In regard to education policy, the gay teachers had two main demands from the start: a protection against discrimination and the equal treatment of homosexuality with heterosexuality in regard to curricula, educational material, the training of teachers, etc. (Dornhöfer et al. 1978, 19). In negotiations with West Berlin's senator for schools, at the time the liberal democrat Walter Rasch, the gay teachers achieved a partial success in 1979. Rasch stated publicly that the homosexuality of a teacher becoming public – including themselves coming out and not being outed by a third party – was no cause for disciplinary action by the administration (Dose et al. 1979, 22–23).

For the first time in the history of the FRG, homosexual teachers had the legal security that they would not suffer legal consequences if their sexuality became public or they outed themselves. Legislative protections against discrimination were not passed, however, nor was the need for them acknowledged. Instead, Rasch reiterated that homosexuality should not be treated equally with heterosexuality in West Berlin schools (Dose et al. 1979, 23–24). After this initial, though partial, success, the gay teachers tried to influence education politics, lobbying both in West Berlin and the FRG at large throughout the following years and decade. Yet, they remained largely unsuccessful – letters to and conversations with Rasch's successors were as fruitless as addressing the Kultusministerkonferenz, the

assembly of ministers of education of the German states (Laurien 1985; Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister 1985). In fact, both the demand for the equal treatment of homosexuality in school curricula and education materials and legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation were only fulfilled in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and without direct involvement of the gay teachers.<sup>21</sup> The gay teachers were more successful in gaining recognition and support from their union. After their work was initially dismissed as a purely private matter, the gay teachers successfully put forward a motion for the GEW to support the demands for an end to discrimination and the unequal treatment of homosexuality in curricula and education materials (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 15).

The public relations work of the gay teachers was focused on highlighting these two aims. They called attention to the discrimination of homosexual teachers and their own demands to redress the situation (cf. e.g. Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1979). Furthermore, whenever the gay teachers were in conflict – be it with politicians, the administration, or their own union – they publicised the disagreement and scandalised the other side's position as unjust in an effort to make it untenable. For example, when the chief executive of the GEW Hesse made dismissive comments about the formation of the working group of gay teachers, they wrote an open letter to criticise her position, asked her to engage with their work critically yet in solidarity, and demanded that she clarify whether she was stating her private opinion or representing the whole GEW Hesse (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 19–20).

---

21 The equal treatment of homosexuality in school curricula and education materials was ensured by a revision of the implementation regulation on sex education in Berlin school 2001, legal protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation were granted on the federal level by the Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (AGG) in 2006.

Meanwhile, the networking activities of the gay teachers sought to encourage teachers across West Germany to organise themselves just like the Berlin working group had. At the week-long gay festival Homolulu happening in Frankfurt/Main in July 1979, they gave a workshop about homosexuality in schools (N.N. 1979). From 1980, they organised yearly meetings of homosexual teachers from all over West Germany over Pentecost with the explicit goal “to create the conditions for solidarity action and ultimately organising” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 6).<sup>22</sup> The first Pentecost meeting in Hannover in 1980 closed with a final agenda point on the possibilities of forming groups of gay teachers and educators, “e.g. in emancipation groups, in the GEW”<sup>23</sup> (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980, 17). After a second meeting in West Berlin in 1981, the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers became an annual tradition at the Waldschlösschen Academy, a gay education centre with origins in the gay movement of the 1970s (Waldschlösschen Team 2022). During the meetings, different groups engaged with topics such as teaching materials or union politics (cf. e.g. Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980; Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986; Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).

Emotion work, to which we turn next, was just as important during the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers, as Detlef Mücke, founding member of the gay teachers in (West-)Berlin, recounted in an oral history interview:

- 
- 22 „Unsere nächste größere Aktion – zu der ja auch diese Dokumentation erscheinen soll – wird das Pfingsttreffen für Lehrer und Erzieher in Hannover sein. Wir haben es mit Unterstützung von hannoveraner Freunden von langer Hand vorbereitet, um gerade den oft vereinzelt schwulen Kollegen in der Bundesrepublik ein Forum zu geben, auf dem sie mit uns und unter sich Erfahrungen austauschen, spezifische Probleme diskutieren, *die Voraussetzungen für solidarisches Handeln und letztlich eine Organisation schaffen können.*“
- 23 „z.B. in Emanzipationsgruppen, in der GEW”.

Besides the content-related programme, it is important to have a strengthening of the identity as a gay teacher. And everyone has to decide for himself, if he is coming out (...) but the exchange of experiences how others go their way is very, very important for empowerment. For the emancipation groups it is very important, on the one hand you need to have contents (...) on the other hand, however, the strengthening of the personality, dismantling the fears that one has (Mücke 2021).<sup>24</sup>

The quote illustrates that the gay teachers’ entire theory of change – the collective enabling individuals to come out and individual coming-outs improving both individual as well as collective conditions – was based on collective emotion work. In fact, the collective of the gay teachers arguably formed through the sharing as well as processing of experiences (see Ahmed 2004, 119–21). Emotion work was tied to working on an individual and collective identity and vice versa. Consequently, both featured heavily in the Pentecost meetings of gay teachers from the very beginning: the very first agenda point of the first meeting in Hannover in 1980 addressed “experiences and behavioural possibilities to overcome our fears” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1980).<sup>25</sup> Over and above that, every subsequent meeting made space in the agenda for an exchange of experiences. In the beginning of the 1980s, the focus of the emotion work was put on processing fear by coping with it and literally

- 
- 24 „Neben dem inhaltlichen Programm ist es wichtig eine Stärkung zu haben, der Identität als schwuler Lehrer und jeder muss selbst entscheiden, ob er sich outet (...) aber der Erfahrungsaustausch wie andere ihren Weg gehen ist sehr, sehr wichtig zur Stärkung. Für die Emanzipationsgruppen ist es ganz wichtig, einer-seits muss man Inhalte haben (...), auf der anderen Seite aber die Stärkung der Persönlichkeit, die Ängste, die man hat abzubauen“.
- 25 „Unsere Ängste als schwule Lehrer gegenüber Schülern, Eltern, Kollegen und der Dienstbehörde – Erfahrungsaustausch und Verhaltensmöglichkeiten, unsere Ängste zu überwinden.“.

aiming to “overcome” it (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1981, Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1982).<sup>26</sup>

Fear also played an important role in relation to HIV/AIDS. At the Pentecost meetings, working groups were formed to discuss “personal, pedagogical, [and] legal aspects” of AIDS (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, no minutes of these groups’ meetings survived, but it is safe to assume that fear-centered emotional work played an important role. At the same time, the gay teachers tried to mitigate fears about AIDS publicly: in 1986, for example, they organised an information evening for teachers, educators, and pedagogues under the motto of “education instead of panic” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986).<sup>28</sup>

At times, the gay teachers also expressed anger. This was most often the case when the city’s education administration opposed their demand for the equal treatment of homosexuality in curricula and education materials. Having been met with refusal throughout the 1980s, the gay teachers wrote an angry response to an equally dismissive letter from school senator Jürgen Klemann, a Christian Democrat, in 1991. “Today, in 1991, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher (“Working Group of Homosexual Teachers and Educators”) is no longer willing to accept this discriminatory attitude,” they wrote. His letter was a “prime example (...) of prejudice and ignorance”. The senator’s refusal to allow the formation of lesbian and gay student groups could “only be

seen as ignorance or malice”. (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1991, 1f.).<sup>29</sup>

Besides fear and anger, there was also joy. By the mid-1980s, the gay teachers’ collective practice of emotion work put an increasing emphasis on collective experiences of joy. Though sharing and processing experiences of discrimination remained a priority, this represented a shift away from their earlier focus on fear. As the invitation to the Pentecost meeting of gay teachers in 1986 put it:

THERE SHOULD BE A POSSIBILITY to address all the issues that are related to our existence as gay teachers (...).

THERE SHOULD BE A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING that troubles us as a “small (?), but (no longer?) radical minority” or makes us strong ...

BUT WE ALSO WANT TO EXPERIENCE TOGETHER that we are stronger together than each one alone. We want to be happy together, laugh and play together, celebrate a party, make an excursion, in short: enjoy the Waldschlößchen [sic] and its beautiful surroundings... (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1986)<sup>30</sup>

26 „Verhaltensmöglichkeiten, unsere Ängste zu überwinden“; „Strategien zur Überwindung unserer Ängste“.

27 „AIDS: persönliche, pädagogische, juristische Aspekte“.

28 „AIDS. Aufklärung statt Panik. Informationsabend für Lehrer/innen, Erzieher/innen und Sozialarbeiter/innen“.

29 „Heute, im Jahre 1991, ist die »Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher« nicht mehr dazu bereit, diese diskriminierende Haltung zu akzeptieren.“; „Musterbeispiel (...) für Vorurteilsbeladenheit und Unkenntnis“ ; [die Ablehnung von lesbischen und schwulen Schüler\*innengruppen kann] „nur als Ignoranz oder als Böswilligkeit angesehen werden“.

30 „ES SOLL GELEGENHEIT SEIN, alle Problemkreise anzusprechen, die mit unserem Dasein als schwule Lehrer zusammenhängen (...) ES SOLL OBERHAUPT FÜR ALLES PLATZ SEIN, was uns als „kleine (?), aber (nicht mehr?) radikale Minderheit“ bedrückt oder auch stark macht ... WIR WOLLEN ABER AUCH MITEINANDER ERLEBEN, daß [sic] wir zusammen stärker sind als jeder für sich allein. Wir wollen uns miteinander freuen, miteinander lachen und spielen, ein Fest feiern, einen Ausflug machen, kurzum: das Waldschlößchen [sic] und seine schöne Umgebung genießen...“ (emphasis in original).

Hence, there was now a new emphasis on joyful communal experiences to be “stronger together (...) happy together (...) and play together” (Ibid.). Following Ahmed’s (2004, 120) conceptualisation of emotions “sticking” to figures and objects, we suggest that the gay teachers attempted to associate their identity with not just fear, but also joy. The 1987 Pentecost programme noted that the meeting should not be “strictly work-related” and highlighted that “There will also be time for walking in the green surroundings and creative communal preparation of a party on Saturday” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1987).<sup>31</sup> On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pentecost meetings, the programme contained an “optimistic retrospection” which evidently centred a positive outlook on the past decade (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1989).<sup>32</sup>

The emotion work of the gay teachers throughout the 1980s can be characterised by its optimistic outlook. Collective emotion work allowed them to move beyond fear and toward communal experiences of joy by 1986. The Pentecost meetings of gay teachers were an important space for networking and political work – but most of all the Waldschlösschen was a space in which gay identity, community, culture, and joy could be lived. This space was all the more important since the environments of work and politics remained challenging for homosexual teachers in West Germany throughout the 1980s. Even if after 1979 teachers in West Berlin no longer needed to fear disciplinary measures on the grounds of their sexuality, being out certainly did not put a stop to all kinds of discrimination. We would also like to stress that the situation of homosexual teachers in West Berlin was a relatively privileged one in comparison to other parts of the country and especially rural areas – arguably the joyful experiences and

31 „Allzu streng arbeitsmäßig sollte das Treffen aber nicht ablaufen (...) Zeit wird auch sein für das Wandern in der grünen Umgebung und die kreative gemeinsame Vorbereitung eines Festes am Samstag“.

32 „10 Jahre Pfingsttreffen – ein optimistischer Rückblick“.

affects accessible via the Pentecost meetings were all the more important to those most affected by discrimination.

Since affects such as fear and anger remained present in the lives of homosexual teachers, there also was continuous emotion work regarding the experience and processing of negative affects. The 1987 Pentecost programme still highlighted the need to “reduce professional and social discrimination against homosexuals” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer 1987).<sup>33</sup> The Pentecost meetings’ most important role, then, was to create a space in which positive experiences could be made and the individual as well as collective experiences of being a gay teacher could be joyful ones.

### Concluding remarks

In summary, fear greatly influenced the formation of the gay teachers as the group both worked *on fear* by processing it through emotion work and worked *with fear* by consciously expressing it between 1978 and 1991. Their collective emotion work helped the individuals to negotiate and process experiences of discrimination and marginalisation as well as the corresponding affects to these experiences, primarily fear. The group pursued two strategies. In the short term, they tried to instrumentalise fear by using emotive descriptions of their experiences in their publicity work and thus creating empathy and support for their demands. In the long-term, they sought to overcome fear by processing fearful experiences and connected affects as well as identifying and coming out as gay teachers. They hence created a virtuous cycle of identity politics: increased individual and collective visibility of gay teachers was supposed to limit

33 „Abbau beruflicher und gesellschaftlicher Diskriminierung von Homosexuellen“.

and decrease experiences of discrimination, which would then enable more homosexual teachers to make their gayness public, and so on.

The gay teachers tried to empower themselves rather than focus on an appeal for protection. It is worth noting, however, that despite their focus on self-empowerment, a paradox remained within their identity politics. They called for the rights of the individual and the abstract collective of homosexual teachers in opposition to the contemporary governmental policies. In doing so, they addressed the state to provide and protect the demanded rights, therefore acknowledging its legitimacy.

Most importantly, fear had a collectivizing effect in the case of the gay teachers. From a larger abstracted collective of homosexual teachers, some of them formed a stabilised collective (Jungmann 2019, 226–227) – the working group within the GEW. The impulse for this collectivisation was the fear of continued marginalisation and discrimination; the collective stabilised itself through common emotion work. Hence, as much as emotional regimes are influenced by social structures, affects and emotions can play an important part in changing those same structures.

To conclude, we turn to the three major issues surfacing in our discussion. Regarding the productivity of the distinction between affect and emotion, we have shown that analytical distinctions – such as the one between affect as a reactive and emotion as a consciously processed state of feeling – are helpful in thinking about certain subjects. But we caution with Ahmed against confusing this methodological distinction with a binary framework of affect and emotion per se. This is especially true for historiographical research: with the possible exceptions of oral history interviews and videographic sources, the experience as well as expression of affect/emotion usually can only be accessed through written accounts and therefore in an intermediate way. This makes it difficult to differentiate between affect and emotion in historiographical research since it is

oftentimes impossible to assess whether and in how far an “affect” has been processed by emotion work into an “emotion”.

Second, as for the relation between affects, emotion work, emotions, and historical change, the example of the gay teachers demonstrates their connectedness, with social structures being an additional important factor. To weave them together in the simplest narrative: the decriminalisation of homosexuality enabled the gay teachers to openly identify as such, organise and do collective emotion work. Specifically, collective emotion work processed fear stemming from earlier and ongoing discrimination. It also empowered the members of the group to consciously adjust their emotional associations with the identity of gay teachers by increasingly centring joyful experiences instead of only processing fearful ones. Emotion work was hence inseparable from the continuous political work of the gay teachers. It enabled them to keep fighting and to successfully contribute over time to changing social and especially legal structures for the better. The processing of individual affective experience and the reframing of its meaning as part of a collective of gay teachers was key to the continuous existence and work of the group. Moreover, their collective engagement with emotions remained an important aspect of their political work, from the expression of fear in their formation, to the increasing attachment of joy to their individual and collective identities, the attempted calming of public fears about AIDS, and the expression of anger when their demands faced continued rejection of the education administration in the 1990s.

Third, while the group claimed to represent the interests of all homosexual teachers, no more than one or two dozen people organised within the group at a time. Total membership figures are undeterminable. Indisputably, however, the majority of the abstract collective of all the homosexual teachers in West Berlin did not join the stabilised collective of the group of gay teachers. For at least some if not most homosexual teachers, fear

continued to be a strong motivator to not publicise or even accept their same-sex desires until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The fact that fear worked – and continues to work – both to keep some teachers’ homosexuality secret and to form a political group (based on its members’ openly lived gayness), demonstrates that there are no such things as positive or negative emotions but that every emotion can be productive in contingent ways. While some affects/emotions – such as fear in the case of the gay teachers – may be considered as negative, all of them and especially emotion work are productive in shaping collective, individual, and societal histories. Queer histories therefore need to continue to interrogate the workings of affects/emotions and their mutually constitutive relationship with social structures to paint a more complete picture of the histories of LGBTIQ\* activism. What stories can be (re-)told, and in which ways, by paying close attention to the interplay of affects, emotions, emotion work, social structures, and historical change?

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara, and Sigrid Schmitz. 2014. “Affect/Emotion: Orientation Matters. A Conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed.” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Geschlechter Studien* 2 (2): 97–108.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. “Affective Economies.” *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–39.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin. 1979. *Schwule Lehrer und Erzieher haben das Versteckspiel satt! Flugblatt*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin. 1980. *Dokumentation*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher in der GEW Berlin. 1980. *Pfingsttreffen schwuler Lehrer 1980, Programm*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher in der GEW Berlin. 1986. *Pfingsttreffen schwuler Lehrer 1986, Programm*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher in der GEW Berlin. 1986. *Informationsabend AIDS, 06.02.1986*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher in der GEW Berlin. 1987. *Pfingsttreffen schwuler Lehrer 1987, Programm*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher in der GEW Berlin. 1989. *Pfingsttreffen schwuler Lehrer 1989, Programm*. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin. 1991. *Letter to Jürgen Klemann*. May 14, 1991, 1–4.
- Bourke, Joanna. 2003. “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History.” *History Workshop Journal* 55 (1): 111–133.
- Brown, Elspeth H. 2020. “Archival Activism, Symbolic Annihilation, and the LGBTQ2+ Community Archive” *Archivaria* 89 (1): 6–32.
- Bühner, Maria. 2019. “How to Remember Invisibility: Documentary Projects on Lesbians in the German Democratic Republic as Archives of Feelings.” In *Sexual Culture in Germany in the 1970s: A Golden Age for Queers?*, edited by Janin Afken and Benedikt Wolf, 241–265. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bühner, Maria. 2021. “The Ambivalence of Feeling Backward: Lesbian Activists in the German Democratic Republic and Their Politics of Memory.” *History | Sexuality | Law*. Published March 31, 2021. <https://hsl.hypotheses.org/1632>.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Dornhöfer, Karl, Jakob Hempel, and Detlef Mücke. 1978. “Die angst des schwulen lehrers im dienst. oder das tabu homosexualität im erziehungswesen.” *Berliner Lehrerzeitung blz* 7/8: 18–19.
- Dose, Ralf, Karl Dornhöfer, and Detlef Mücke. 1979. “auseinandersetzung mit dem senator für schulwesen.” *Berliner Lehrerzeitung blz* 12: 22–24.
- Gammerl, Benno. 2009. “Erinnerte Liebe: Was kann eine Oral History zur Geschichte der Gefühle und der Homosexualitäten beitragen?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2): 314–345.
- Gammerl, Benno. 2021. *Anders fühlen: Schwules und lesbisches Leben in der Bundesrepublik. Eine Emotionsgeschichte*. München: Hanser.

- Griffiths, Craig. 2021. *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation: Male Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haunss, Sebastian. 2004. *Identität in Bewegung: Prozesse kollektiver Identität bei den Autonomen und in der Schwulenbewegung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Hitzer, Bettina. 2022. *The History of Cancer and Emotions in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huneke, Samuel Clowes. 2022. *States of Liberation: Gay Men Between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hunt, Lynn. 2008. *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Hunt, Lynn. 2016. "The Long and the Short of the History of Human Rights." *Past & Present* 233 (1): 323–331. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtw044>.
- Jungmann, Robert. 2019. *Die Praxis kollektiven Handelns*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Langdridge, Darren. 2008. "Are You Angry or Are You Heterosexual? A Queer Critique of Lesbian and Gay Models of Identity Development." In *Feeling Queer or Queer Feelings? Radical Approaches to Counselling Sex, Sexualities and Genders*, edited by Lyndsey Moon, 23–35. New York: Routledge.
- Laurien, Hanna-Renate. 1985. *Letter to the Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin*. March 18, 1985.
- Love, Heather. 2009. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Malatino, Hill. 2022. *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Milani, Tommaso M. 2021. "Fuck Off! Recasting Queer Anger for a Politics of (Self-)Discomfort." *Gender and Language* 15 (3): 439–446. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.20885>.
- Mücke, Detlef. 2021. "Oral History Interview with Detlef Mücke." Interviewed by Stefan Zeppenfeld. Berlin, August 5, 2021.
- Mücke, Detlef. 1985. "Schwule und Schule. 11 Jahre Initiativen von schwulen Lehrergruppen." In *Schwule Regungen – Schwule Bewegungen*, edited by Willie Frieling, 151–170. Berlin: Rosa Winkel.
- Mücke, Detlef. 1980. "Veröffentlichung einer Anzeige von homosexuellen Lehrern und Erziehern." In *Dokumentation*, edited by Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin, 18. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Secretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. 1985. *Letter to the Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin*, March 5, 1985.
- N.N. 1879. Workshop "Schule." *Homolulu: schwule tageszeitung* 2: 2. Published July 25, 1979.
- Plamper, Jan. 2015. *The History of Emotions. An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schreiner, Klaus. 1980. "Einleitung." In *Dokumentation*, edited by Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin, 1–7. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Seibt, Gustav. 2021. "'Anders fühlen' von Benno Gammerl: Frau Schmidt und Herr Meyer." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Published March 31, 2021. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/benno-gammerl-bundesrepublik-schwul-lesbisches-leben-1.5235999?reduced=true>.
- Samper Vendrell, Javier. 2020. *The Seduction of Youth: Print Culture and Homosexual Rights in the Weimar Republic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Streit, Thias, and Wilfried Laule. 1980. "zur situation von schwulen schülern und lesbischen schülerinnen." In *Dokumentation*, edited by Arbeitsgemeinschaft homosexueller Lehrer und Erzieher der GEW Berlin, 13. Berlin: Self-Publishing.
- Stryker, Susan. 1994. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *GLQ* 1 (3): 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>.
- Tändler, Maik. 2016. *Das therapeutische Jahrzehnt: Der Psychoboom in den siebziger Jahren*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Waldschlösschen Team. 2022. "Welcome to Waldschlösschen." Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://www.waldschloesschen.org/en/>.
- Will, Klaus. 2007. "Jubiläum: blz im 75. Jahrgang. 1920 ist die erste Ausgabe der 'Berliner Lehrerzeitung' erschienen." *Berliner Lehrerzeitung blz* 10: 23–24.
- Witzeck, Elena. 2021. "Politik mit emotionalen Mitteln." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Published April 20, 2021. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/sachbuch/geschichte-der-homosexualitaet-anders-fuehlen-von-benno-gammerl-17291700.html>.

# “ACTING OUT OF FEAR”

## Queer Resistance During the Military Dictatorship in Brazil

*Henrique Cintra Santos*

### ABSTRACT

Amid the Brazilian military dictatorship, at a time when moral repression authorized police persecution, the queer community marched the streets demanding an end to such violence. On June 13th, 1980, one thousand people came out in downtown São Paulo for the first organized queer demonstration in Brazilian history. This demonstration intended to denounce the police violence perpetuated in the center of São Paulo by the so-called Operation Cleansing, which had as its main promoter the police's precinct chief Richetti and queer bodies as one of its main targets. The event is analyzed with a focus on the study of emotions, mainly the concept of fear. Fear is conceptualized both as a tool of institutional control by the military regime and as a propeller of collective queer resistance against violence perpetuated by the State.

**Keywords:** queer history, Brazilian history, emotion.

That Friday, June 13, 1980, [...] almost a thousand people gathered in front of the Municipal Theater in the early evening. [...] Even under a certain climate of tension, some banners were opened that asked for Richetti's exoneration, protested against the precautionary prison experienced, and demanded an end to police violence, racial discrimination, and the release of prostitutes and *travestis*. Several letters signed by the various groups organizing the event were read (Trevisan 1980, 18; my translation).

The excerpt above was taken from a report by the homosexual newspaper, *Lampião da Esquina*<sup>1</sup>, a publication that erupted along with the formation of organized homosexual groups in the large Brazilian urban centers amid the military dictatorship established from a coup in 1964. The event reported by the newspaper<sup>2</sup> refers to a demonstration carried out by several groups of the LGBTQIA+ movement<sup>3</sup> at that time against the persecution and

1 *Lampião da Esquina* appeared in 1978 in a period when the dictatorship was beginning to enter its period of political opening (Pinto 2011, 35) and remained active until 1981. It can itself be considered one of the initial milestones of the Brazilian LGBTQIA+ movement.

2 It is relevant to observe that the cited article was written by one of the participants involved in the protest, highlighting his perceptions about the event.

3 The terms *homosexual*, *LGBTQIA+*, and *queer* will be used in the article to highlight the various ways that dissidents of gender and/or sexuality identify



violent arrests made by the police in the city of São Paulo, which had queer subjects as their primary target, especially *travestis*<sup>4</sup> and homosexuals.

The protest, which took place on June 13th, 1980, is considered the first public demonstration of the queer movement in Brazil (Simões and Facchini 2009, 112), being relevant not only for its purpose but for its courage in the face of a regime in which queer bodies were unwanted and persecuted. In this sense, I intend to analyze this event based on the potentiality of observing social movements by studying emotions. To do so, I will focus here on the discussion of *fear*. Thus, *fear* will, on the one hand, be seen as an outcome of an anti-communist discourse projected by the military dictatorship on queer bodies: not only as a way of controlling them but also of justifying the continuity of the regime for society. On the other hand, *fear* will be analyzed as a producer of a counter-reaction:

---

and name themselves. At the time analyzed here, the term *homosexual* was used in Brazilian society for men or women with homosexual desires and even for trans people. Currently, the term *LGBTQIA+* emerges as an alternative to represent a more marked diversity of bodies and identities and to deal with the political and visibility demands of different sectors. Despite being popularized recently, the term *queer* is more used in academic circles and by researchers focused on gender and sexuality studies (Pelúcio 2014, 7). Despite the *LGBTQIA+* movement not being named that way in the time focused here, this term will be used to highlight how the movement identifies itself today and to account for a diversity that, although not named, was already present at that time.

4 The term *travesti* will not be translated in order to mark its historicity and Brazilian specificity. Although it can be understood within what researchers call trans identities (Oliveira 2017), *travesti* is an identity that is mainly observable in the Brazilian context. In addition, *travesti* must be seen as one of the identities that most destabilizes the fixity of heteronormativity since the *travesti* may or may not identify as a woman, making it possible to be interpreted as a new gender category. The historicity of the *travesti* must always be reiterated since its destabilizing potential has always been received in a violent and exclusionary way by society, stripping these subjects of their citizenship (Pedra 2020).

these queer bodies channeled the *fear* they felt towards the state and police violence to carry out a joint action of protest and resistance to repression.

In addition to the bibliography that will be used for this analysis, I highlight four main sources that were consulted for this work: the past issues of the newspapers *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*<sup>5</sup>; the collection of the homosexual newspaper *Lampião da Esquina*<sup>6</sup>; and the documents from the homosexual group *Outra Coisa*, which emerged in São Paulo in 1980 and whose collection is available at the *Edgard Leuenroth Archive*<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Fear, queer bodies, and the Brazilian military dictatorship***

Just like Women's History, Queer History, and Social and Cultural History (Lewis 2020, 122), among many other subfields of history, the effervescence of historiography on emotions occurred only after overcoming a series of institutional obstructions that attempted to relegate to the studies of emotions a suspicious character and a supposed incompatibility to the Western notion of knowledge. However, in the last two decades, the opening of History to greater interdisciplinarity also benefited those who aimed at the historical study of emotions (ibid, 123), thus appearing not only institutionalized projects for this subfield but also academic journals and funding opportunities.

---

5 Both newspapers digitized their collections and made them available for free. Past issues of *O Estado de São Paulo* can be consulted at: <https://acervo.estadao.com.br>; while those from *Folha de São Paulo* are available at: <https://acervo.folha.com.br>.

6 All editions of *Lampião da Esquina* are available at: <https://www.grupodignidade.org.br/projetos/lampiao-da-esquina/>.

7 *The Edgard Leuenroth Archive* is located at the State University of Campinas (Brazil). The collection of the group *Outra Coisa* was consulted between June and August 2022. More information about the archive is available at: <https://ael.ifch.unicamp.br/>.

At the beginning of this century, attention was already being drawn to the need for research on social movements to also focus on studies on emotions, being emotional work an essential apparatus for developing and maintaining social movements (Gould 2002, 178). That is, the study of social movements from an angle that considers emotions is not about taking them as products of an irrational process of bodies that experience – and suffer from – the world similarly. Bringing emotions to the study of social movements means considering that “our thoughts, ideologies, and commitments are also influenced by aspects that can be seen as affective and emotional” (Wolff 2021, 237; my translation). Deborah Gould analyzes how looking at an emotion such as anger, for example, helps us to better understand how the queer group ACT UP in Chicago was constituted and maintained a successful and lasting history of political activism during the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic crisis. Gould emphasizes that mourning and sadness were re-signified by the group and transformed into anger, propelling the group’s political combative action (Gould 2002, 184). In this way, paying attention to the functioning of emotions can help us to better comprehend how groups within social movements are constructed and interact with their opponents and supporters. (Machado 2018, 88). For those reasons, my intention is to examine the possibility of writing Queer History of the Brazilian dictatorship, especially about Operation Cleansing and the demonstration of June 13th, 1980, perceiving how *fear* is pivotal in this narrative.

Theoretical definitions of a given emotion that can be replicated in different contexts are one of the demands placed on studies on emotions, especially by skeptics about the field. However, instead of focusing in the article on limited definitions that irremediably do not consider the historicity of emotions, my aim is to observe them in a contextual approach, that is, inspecting ways they affect bodies and transit between them (Ahmed 2004, 4). Thus, *fear* must be seen as a product of an association of past

histories (ibid, 63) that erupts in a specific conjuncture. A common aspect among such fear-producing associations is the notion that this emotion is produced and actualized within exercises of power (Aldana 2008, 2).

*Fear* during the Brazilian military dictatorship was an essential tool for the consolidation and maintenance of the regime. This emotion followed all bodies that, either by their armed resistance, in the case of oppositional guerrillas, or by their mere existence, in the case of queer groups, somehow represented a potential destabilizer of the regime (Borges 2021, 94). In other words: not all queer subjects were part of resistance groups or movements, but even their existence and public display could be read as a threat to the regime. Therefore, to understand the relationship between dictatorship and the LGBTQIA+ community, *fear* must be focused on since it was engendered as a desire for “preservation not simply of ‘me’, but also ‘us’, or ‘what is’, or ‘life as we know it’, or even ‘life itself’” (Ahmed 2004, 64). Fear is, in this way, a paradoxical device. It represents the anxiety experienced by the queer body in the face of repression. But it is simultaneously one of the preconditions for maintaining the regime: the fear caused by the public manifestation of the queer body as a justification for police violence and, ultimately, the continuity of the military in power.

Hence, the two decades of military rule in Brazil were possible, among many reasons, by the maintenance of *fear*. On the one hand, this *fear* was indeed generated by the government’s authoritarianism and its practice of censorship (Bezerra 2005, 214), being, therefore, an outcome of the regime. However, there was another *fear* also orchestrated by the regime, but which managed to present itself in a way that placed the dictatorship not as the source of fear but as the guarantee of protection concerning a threat.

## Brazilian queer history and the military dictatorship

In a context of domestic crisis, ideological disputes within the Cold War, and with political and financial support from the United States (Fico 2014, 30), the military staged a coup in Brazil in 1964, initiating a dictatorship that would rule the country for two decades. This period has seen in recent years a growing interest among researchers who focus not only on the various aspects of the regime<sup>8</sup> but also on the exaltation of the past of the Brazilian dictatorship in recent years, especially by right-wing extremists (Camargo, Moraes, and Rosa 2020, 83).

When it comes to a queer history of the military dictatorship, such attention within Brazilian historiography was largely unaddressed. This began to change with the realization of the National Truth Commission between 2012 and 2014. Such efforts in Brazil to deal with the atrocities committed by the dictatorship took longer than in other Latin American countries that also have suffered from their respective dictatorships, such as Argentina and Chile (Torelly 2018, 3). However, the National Truth Commission contributed to shedding attention on the issue, conducting public hearings on the dictatorship's persecution of queer subjects and producing final reports with recommendations for the guarantee of protection and rights

---

8 Among the many works that could be referenced, I'd like to indicate some recent discussion trends. Professor Carlos Fico, from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, has continued his pioneering work in studies on the military dictatorship, having in recent years focused on various topics, such as the end of the regime being controlled by the military themselves (Fico 2017) or the legal apparatus that helped to institutionalize the military regime (Fico 2021). In this same direction, researchers from the Federal University of Paraná have also focused on legal and juridic aspects during the dictatorship (Chueiri and Câmara, 2015). The Laboratory of Gender and History Studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina is another highlight, which has been developing research on feminist resistance against the military regime (Wolff, Zandoná and Melo, 2019).

for this population (Green and Quinalha 2015). For instance, the second volume of the National Truth Commission's final report devotes about 14 pages solely to the discussion of the repression of queer communities during the military dictatorship (Brasil 2014, 299). This commitment seems to have influenced researchers within universities, as articles and dissertations on queer life during the military dictatorship have frequently been appearing since<sup>9</sup>. Thus, not only is Brazilian queer historiography expanded, but the dictatorial military regime can be understood more diversely and thoroughly.

## Dictatorship, anti-communism, and moral panic

At the time of the Brazilian military dictatorship, the authorities' discourse for the preservation of public morality and traditional customs was essential to legitimize and gather supporters (Quinalha 2021, 22)<sup>10</sup>. This public morality rejected all expressions that escaped heteronormativity. Thus, bodies that were not "intelligible", that is, those who challenged a mandatory "coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (Butler 1999, 23), were excluded from the realm of what the military leadership envisioned for the country. In this context, the regime engendered what Benjamin Cowan calls a moral panic, a series of

---

9 For instance, less than a year after the second volume of the final report of the National Truth Commission, a collection containing various articles on the relationship between the dictatorship and homosexuality was released (Green and Quinalha 2015). Likewise, in 2016 a research paper on violence against *travestis* and trans people during the regime was published (Lopes 2016).

10 The Public Entertainment Censorship Division, the dictatorship's body responsible for controlling television, theater, and cinemas, among other sectors, received letters from concerned citizens (Fico 2002, 269) about what they believed to be an affront to morals and good customs in the country. These letters show that the moral issue had a potent appeal among supporters of the regime.

conceptions and anxieties regarding issues of sex, sexuality, gender, and entertainment that helped to legitimize military authority and its attacks on those who were seen as subversives (Cowan 2016, 10).

The analysis of anti-communism helps us to understand the propagation of this moral panic during the dictatorship. While a supposed communist threat within the Cold War was one of the core arguments of the military for carrying out the coup in 1964, the anti-communist sentiment was present in the Armed Forces since at least the 1930s (Fico 2014, 24). Such discourse, however, is not only linked to military, political, or economic issues but is also concerned with discussions about sexuality. The connection between anti-communism and sexuality did not emerge during the dictatorship but was a development underway in Brazilian society and intertwined with transnational connections and influences throughout the first half of the turbulent 20th century.

Therefore, in the 1930s and 1940s, the reaction of conservatives to the intense modernization that Brazilian society was experiencing was to demand the return of customs considered traditional and familiar (Cowan 2016, 22). Similarly, in the months preceding the dictatorship, thousands of people took to the streets calling for military intervention, which became known as *March of the Family, with God, for Freedom*, denouncing the danger of communist immorality in the country (ibid, 76). As they marched through the streets in 1964, these demonstrators clamored for the conservation of a Brazilian morality based on Christian values, which were allegedly being undermined by the communist infiltration in the country – public display of homosexuality being interpreted as one sign of such communist attack against Brazilian traditional beliefs. Part of the population evidently subscribed to the anti-communist discourse that the military rhetoric disseminated over the years preceding the coup. Thus, military anti-communism, the cry of conservatives for the resumption

of traditional values and customs, and the conception of the communist threat in the context of the Cold War were all combined during the regime after 1964.

One of the several examples of moral panic – which helped to build up anti-communist sentiment – can be found in the *Revista Militar Brasileira*, a journal aimed at a military audience and, evidently, a supporter of the regime. In one of its publications after the military successfully gained control of the State, one of the magazine’s editors denounces the alleged communist attack in the country, which could be confirmed by the cultural, religious, and sexual chaos that the youth were supposedly involved in. To exemplify this assumed decadence – and promote moral panic – the author mentioned the growing acceptance of homosexuality (Brasil 2014, 302).

### The manifold meanings of fear

Queer existences, then, were more than unwanted. They were a political and ideological concern. If perceived, whether receiving attention in the media or just showing affection in public, these bodies were interpreted as a subversive manifestation (Cowan 2015, 28). National Security was seen as being under attack from homosexual representation since the anti-communist rhetoric saw the dissolution of traditional family values as a subversive communist tactic during the Cold War (ibid, 29). In this way, publications aimed at the queer public, such as *Lampião da Esquina*, or the representation of homosexuality in television programs or plays, could be perceived as a strategy “to promote an anti-capitalist revolution through the weakening of the pillars of Brazilian society: the Christian religion and the family” (Quinalha 2021, 180; my translation).

In this sense, the regime’s anti-communist discourse was disseminated and reiterated among the population, promoting the dictatorship as the

nation's guarantee of protection against supposed attacks by communist forces presumably infiltrating the country. Guimarães (2007) analyzes, for instance, the many *fears* developed by inhabitants of Serra do Caparaó in the countryside of the Southeast coast in the 1960s due to the proximity of leftist oppositional groups to the dictatorship in the region. Based on the anti-communist rhetoric internalized by this population, such political opposition represented a "threat to the ideal society" (ibid, 294). Similarly, a survey of a small city in the Northeast of the country revealed the discourses that legitimized and raised the population's support for the regime used *fear* of the communist threat as a productive political tool (Cavalcanti 2015, 207). That is, by spreading fear of the communist threat among the population, the military not only justified the 1964 coup but also reinforced the need to maintain the regime to guarantee protection against imminent danger. Returning to the reflection of Ahmed (2004), for whom fear is intrinsic to the maintenance of oneself and what we know, dictatorship, for this population, represented the continuity of life as they knew and desired in opposition to the perceived threat of communism.

It is crucial, however, to notice that it was not the entire population that found the hope of preserving their way of life and themselves in the regime. After all, although all bodies *fear*, *fears* are not experienced in the same way and are not the same (ibid, 68). Borges (2021) notes how in the dictatorships in South America, the dissidents of gender and sexuality dealt with the fear they felt about the genocidal power of the military regimes aiming at eliminating queer subjects, experiences and existences, or at least removing or silencing them from the public space. The recollections of a lesbian activist who operated in São Paulo in the 1980s show, for example, that *fear* acted restrictively on her body in the most basic day-to-day tasks, frightening her for maintaining simple contact or conversations with colleagues on the street (Borges 2021, 99). Such dismay experienced when simply walking through the city confirms the spatial character of fear, as

it adjusts the social and physical space specifically to each body (Ahmed 2004, 69). Therefore, for the queer body, *fear* operates as an attempt to guarantee its survival not in relation to a supposed communist threat but to the State.

In the 1970s, despite the onset of what became known as a political opening, the moral control of society was intensified. Over the decade, after an intense period of political persecution and torture in the first half of the regime<sup>11</sup>, the dictatorship entered a phase in which, even though dismayed, it opened space for the developing of political opposition, consented to the return of exiles to the country and pledged to eradicate practices of torture.<sup>12</sup> Concomitantly, the nation experienced what Fico calls a revolution of morals (2015, 34), in which, mainly, the youth questioned imposed traditions, whether in fashion, music, or manners related to family and sexuality. Some influential singers of *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB) – or Brazilian Popular Music –, some returning from their exile and again producing songs that challenged the regime, are probably the most significant symbol of this revolution of morals (Napolitano 2010, 390). Artists such as Chico Buarque, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, and

---

11 In December 1968, the regime enacted Institutional Act 5, which suspended the guarantee of the remaining individual rights protected by the Constitution (Sales and Filho 2018, 206). Thus began the most arduous period of the dictatorship, in which the main cases of censorship, torture, the disappearance of people and the exile of opponents and critics of the regime happened. For an overview of this period, I suggest the publication by Gaspari (2014). The work by Sattamini (2010) debates one particular case of prison and torture during this period and observes how the regime repressed and persecuted its opponents. In addition, the research by Villaméa (2023) examines the specific challenges that women prisoners faced in the jails of the dictatorship.

12 This period is known as the "political opening" and is characterized by the repeal of Institutional Act 5 in 1978 and the approval of the Amnesty Law in 1979 (Resende 2014, 42). Concomitant with the flexibilization of the legislation by the military, the LGBTQIA+ movement developed in the country.

Milton Nascimento, among many others, used their lyricism to translate the aspirations of youth and represent the reality and dilemmas of Brazilian society (ibid., 392). In addition, the effervescence of groups organized within a LGBTQIA+ movement in the country also enters this context of political opening and contestation of moral precepts.

Paradoxically, it is precisely this moment of a political opening that the regime's control and moral persecution are most intensified, which has implications notably for queer bodies. Despite the regime having introduced a political opening, promising greater freedom for the press and authorization for the formation of opposition parties amid other rights, the military soon excluded moral liberalization from its project of political opening. In other words: although society was truly experiencing a period of loosening of the military's control, the regime intensified its crusade against what it considered to be a violation of Brazilian morality. In this sense, questions about gender and sexuality remained taboo for the regime, impacting notably the LGBTQIA+ community. Therefore, political flexibility was not necessarily accompanied by a liberalization of morals. Namely, the political opening arguably had to be compensated by the intensification of moral control (Quinalha 2021, 29).

In its anti-communist paranoia, the Brazilian military dictatorship saw gender and sexuality dissidence as a threat to national security and a communist tactic of national demoralization. It should not be understood, however, as if moral concerns about gender and sexuality were the main reason people were persecuted, tortured, disappeared, or killed throughout two decades of dictatorship. Despite the moral panic spread by the regime, it was mainly the political opposition and armed resistance that led many to the torture chambers of the regime. What should be noted is that among several possibilities of being denounced as subversive, the moral issue of sexuality was one among several others (Cowan 2016, 14). However, when

the repressive lens of the dictatorship turned to moral issues, queer bodies were the main ones that were persecuted and impacted. In this moment of political opening and intensification of moral control, queer subjects in downtown São Paulo faced one of the moments of most tremendous police violence, and that *fear* sown by the regime gave rise to the first public protest of the Brazilian LGBTQIA+ movement.

### Queering public space: greater visibility and moral panic

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the political opening provided a creative resumption in the arts and new possibilities for debate, although always under the imminence of possible censorship. The press observed more autonomy and freedom in its work, and new oppositional political alliances were formed. In this context, people whose claims had been largely ignored by both the regime and leftist oppositional groups began to organize and establish groups with specific demands, especially feminist and black activists (Macrae 2018, 98). In this sense, not only opposition to the dictatorship resurged but also a diversification of the manners in which leftist groups had operated until then, with the refusal of hierarchical assembling and the questioning of race and gender relations in these fields. Within this political and social background, the LGBTQIA+ movement was established in the country. Its participants sought to promote representations of homosexuals and/or queer subjects within society that challenged the hegemonic society's moral judgment on such bodies (ibid, 108).

It is important to note that queer groups and publications had already existed during the 1960s. This is the case, for example, of *Snob*, a homemade publication by homosexual groups in Rio de Janeiro from 1963 onwards (Costa 2010, 31). However, as well as other newspapers and queer groups,

*Snob* ended its activities in 1969, when the military regime radicalized repression. These first initiatives were terminated due to the panic installed during a period marked by arrests, disappearances, and torture. At the time, there was a *fear* of being observed on the street with a publication like *Snob* in hand and being mistaken as a member of some subversive or communist association (Green 2019, 324). New groups and publications emerged only after 1978 with the political opening, especially in the city of São Paulo.

In 1980, São Paulo, with more than 8 million inhabitants (Souza 2020, 372) and already the most populous municipality in the country, was at the epicenter of these political and social transformations. With the so-called revolution of morals (Fico 2015) and a growing LGBTQIA+ movement, new commercial enterprises of queer sociability were opened, such as bars, cinemas, and discotheques. Thereby, specific regions of the city began to demonstrate an intense circulation and socialization of queer subjects. The city center was the preeminent venue of this dynamic, conferring the confluence of bodies that contradicted the traditional values of Brazilian society and, consequently, of the dictatorial regime. Thus, homosexuals, *travestis* and sex workers, among others, gathered in the region. This imbrication in a specific area is what Néstor Perlongher defines as a “moral region”, that is, the constant transit of specific population strata in search of contacts and pleasures in common areas of an urban conglomeration (Perlongher 2008, 69).

Within a conservative society and a dictatorial regime with a strong defense of preserving traditional Christian moral values, it is self-evident that this region with a growing public display of queer sociability would receive the attention of the authorities. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to underline that LGBTQIA+ community did not start to be persecuted by the authorities and police forces only from that moment on. The arbitrariness

and violence with which public security agents dealt with this portion of the population has a long history and is supported not only by Brazilian morality and conservatism but by the legal intolerance of the period. In this sense, a 1941 decree inspired by Mussolini’s Italian fascist legislation, better known as the Vagrancy Law, demanded that every citizen prove their means of subsistence. However, the decree did not specify how such verification should occur, which relegated the guidelines for verification to the arbitrariness of the police forces (Ocanha 2014, 56). This legal device survived the 1964 coup and was widely used by authorities to arrest and persecute various sections of the population, including homosexuals. Therefore, even though homosexuality as such had not been criminalized in Brazil since 1830, a queer subject circulating in the city center could be easily arrested by the police based on such legal instrument. In the 1980s, the abuse of this legislation developed into an even greater injustice when the country was experiencing an untamed economic crisis with very high unemployment rates (Ocanha 2018, 80). This situation led many, including sex workers and *travestis*, to seek their livelihood informally and with no official proof of income. It is precisely this confluence of greater visibility of these subjects, an intensification of the regime’s moral discourse, the arbitrariness of the police forces, and an economic crisis that police attacks against the queer population intensified. Queer subjects and their spaces of sociability suffered recurrent police raids, which arrested this community without any accusation or evident crime, forcing such individuals into situations of humiliation and public exposure of their queer dissidence (Quinalha 2021, 43).

When studying segregation and citizenship in the city of São Paulo, one observes the frequent circulation of the “speech of crime”, which interprets certain places as dangerous and informs our reaction to that space (Caldeira 2000, 27). Thus, the *fear* arising from this discourse becomes something persistent (Ocanha 2014, 19). As spaces of LGBTQIA+ sociability became

more evident in the urban space, police and popular discourses that saw this visibility as a danger and, consequently, something to be fought, also intensified. Hence, authorities' efforts towards the degradation of queer bodies and their expulsion from the public space also escalated (Quinalha 2021, 33), a dynamic that reached its peak with the outbreak of Operation Cleansing in 1980.

The case of *travesti* is one of the main examples of moral panic arising from the greater presence of queer people in the public landscape. The *travesti* identity during the 1970s reached visibility in Brazilian urban centers, especially in cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, places where they found in the growing commercialization and commodification of sex (Green 2019, 413) ways to overcome their economic and social exclusion. Furthermore, this identity also emerged as a public mediatized subject (Veras 2015, 54). The media noted the *travesti* and exploited their image to attract the attention of readers and audiences. The *travesti* confused and heightened curiosity, as it was the body that, at that moment, most destabilized the impositions of heteronormativity and questioned the hegemonic morality of society and the military regime. This focus received by *travestis* drew the attention of the police authorities, who even promoted in 1976 a large commissioned study on the relationships between these people and the infractions against the Vagrancy Law (Ocanha 2015, 156). Therefore, we have a scenario of police concern and media attention on such bodies, which also emanated onto other queer individuals. In this context, in March 1980, the newspaper with the most significant circulation at the time, *O Estado de São Paulo*, published a series of articles reporting the supposed danger posed by *travestis* and calling out for an intervention by the authorities in the city of São Paulo.

## Operation Cleansing

The newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* maintained an editorial line consistent with the military regime and representative of the middle and upper class of the largest city in the country, thus presenting an evident conservatism. In addition to being an ally of the 1964 coup (Motta 2017, 369), the publication was also a continuous supporter of the dictatorial repression of left-wing groups (ibid., 371). Thus, combining its conservatism with sensationalism, the newspaper announced in the March 25, 1980 edition a series of reports with the following headline: "Danger! The invasion of travestis" (*O Estado de São Paulo* 1980, my translation). Three days later, the newspaper began its series, dedicating an entire page to denouncing the presumed danger posed by *travestis*. The *fear* – something which the population should have around such bodies, but also what the *travesti* should feel towards the hegemonic society – was propagated by the newspaper with statements such as: "The danger of travestis is already known by the police" or "Justice should be more rigorous, punish travestis and not facilitate their actions" (Barreto and Lombardi 1980, my translation). There is, in these passages, an evident "speech of crime", in which *fear* is produced and requires vigilance from society, the press, and, mainly, the police.

With uncommon promptitude among police agencies at the time, a few days after the publication of this series of articles, the authorities already presented the plan to confine *travestis* in a specific region of downtown São Paulo (Quinalha 2021, 67) to prevent them from transiting through regions considered nobler in the city. For such an assignment, it was expected to detain a large contingent through several police raids. To deal with such a large number of possible arrests, the authorities arranged to designate the *Hipódromo* penitentiary, where several detained *travestis* were already being held, as the exclusive destination for this operation



(ibid, 69). Hence, such a community was already a constant target of the police and, with the assistance of a media panic, moral repression was intensified, aiming to expel these queer bodies from the public eye. The development and execution of the plan came under the management of police chief José Wilson Richetti, who was already known for his violent actions and for bragging that he had supposedly expelled sex workers from São Paulo in the past (Facchini 2010, 91). In addition, the imminent visit of Pope John Paul II to São Paulo, scheduled for July 1980, fortified the authorities' justification (Quinalha 2021, 70) and attested to the need to deal with the alleged criminality in the city.

On May 22nd, 1980, Operation Cleansing was launched with full thrust in the city center. The newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, which began to report on the operation constantly, informed that the police aimed to arrest robbers and drug dealers in the region (Flosi 1980, 9). However, in an article on May 27th, 1980, updating recent developments in the Operation, Chief Richetti declared to the newspaper that 700 people had been arrested in one night, including homosexuals, *travestis*, and sex workers (Kotscho 1980, 11). In other words, it is evident that “the act of arresting criminals, in practice, had become the arrest of LGBTs and sex workers who frequented the city center” (Ocanha 2015, 162; my translation). Not even the chief of police, responsible for conducting Operation Cleansing, camouflaged the explicit moral intent of the police raids. Queer bodies, when perceptible in the region, were arrested and publicly humiliated, regardless of their professional status or activities in the target area.

Right at the beginning of the operation, the groups of the newly formed LGBTQIA+ movement in the city realized that the police forces were intensifying persecution against them. For instance, the homosexual newspaper *Lampião da Esquina* dedicated an extensive opinion article in its May 1980 edition, refuting the accusations made by the newspaper

*O Estado de São Paulo* two months earlier. *Lampião* highlighted how the series of articles about the *travestis* only called for police intervention and how this could become a violent repression against all queer subjects (Penteado 1980, 2)<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, during a party at a disco held by the group SOMOS, the biggest and most active homosexual group at that time, news arrived that two of its members who were heading to the disco in the city center were arrested and detained for a few hours (Macrae 2018, 287), even though they had presented the required documents that absolved them of any denunciation under the Vagrancy Law. Therefore, it was explicit that how the police acted in this moral region did justice to the name of the operation, aiming at the expulsion from the public space of bodies that challenged traditional – and dictatorial – Brazilian morality.

Allegations of abuse and torture by the police soon began to surface due to Operation Cleansing. The first was in the weekly magazine *IstoÉ*: a picture of a *travesti* being trampled and pressed to the ground in one of Richetti's police raids (Trevisan 2018, 607). In yet another update on the development of Operation Cleansing, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* reported on June 9th a series of complaints made by detainees, primarily sex workers, about how they were captured and the treatment they received during detention. Complainants reported cases of physical abuse, loss of teeth, and even miscarriages because of physical violence inflicted by the police. Idália, just 22 years old, explained how she had been detained twice in less than 48 hours, which made Richetti promise to arrest her for at least 15 days, intending to restrain her from circulating downtown.

---

13 Darcy Penteado, author of the cited article and one of *Lampião*'s editors, was already a renowned artist in São Paulo at that time. His indignation over the accusations made against the *travestis* remained persistent that year. He would end up being one of the best-known participants in the demonstration against Operation Cleansing in 1980.

Idália's desperation led her to jump from the police station where she was being held, resulting in a series of fractures and hospitalization (Folha de São Paulo 1980a).

The *fear* of long-term detention and the desperation symbolized by using bodily harm to evade arrest did not begin with Operation Cleansing. In 1979, in interviews for the homosexual periodical *Lampião da Esquina*, *travestis* reported how they were always arbitrarily arrested, even if they presented the required documents. According to the recollections of one of the interviewees, the practice of cutting themselves with razor blades inside the cells had become common since the action forced the police to transfer them to health centers (Trevisan 1979). Operation Cleansing and the worsening of arbitrary arrests intensified the enactment of extreme measures, whether cutting with razor blades or Idália jumping out of the cell, for queer subjects to dodge the agents of repression and violence. Analyzing these desperate acts of bodily harm, it is evident how the *fear* of the violence experienced inside the police buildings determined a specific physical reaction. Self-inflicted injuries became a radical measure through which queer bodies responded to the *fear*.

The imprisonment of Vinícius Caldeira Brant during Operation Cleansing was the critical impetus for mobilizing authorities, personalities, and some parliamentarians against police violence. While the allegations of *travestis* and sex workers did not arouse a reaction from the authorities and indignation from society, the arrest of Brant, a cisgender white man and university researcher, spurred a much more significant public impact (Quinalha 2021, 77). But Brant's report to the press was important to legitimize the accusations against Richetti, having reported the unsanitary conditions of the prisons, the violence to which the *travestis* were subjected, and the fact that Richetti's detainees were being treated "as if they were in a concentration camp" (Luppi 1980, my translation).

While members of the artistic realm, such as actress Ruth Escobar, and a few parliamentarians, such as left-wing deputy Eduardo Suplicy, began to denounce Operation Cleansing in their circles and plea for the ceasing of the police raids, it was the new social movements at that time, especially the LGBTQIA+ movement, which engendered the greatest resistance to Operation Cleansing: the protest on June 13th, 1980. There was, therefore, a classic instigator for joint action between social movements: "The violence, unleashed by a state organism, served as a powerful unifier of social movements" (Macrae 2018, 289; my translation).

### Reaction against Operation Cleansing: the first Brazilian LGBTQIA+ protest

In the days leading up to the protest, members of the LGBTQIA+ movement at that time, especially the SOMOS group, circulated pamphlets around queer venues in downtown São Paulo disclosing the abuses committed by Operation Cleansing. Highlighting homosexuals, *travestis* and sex workers as the police's main targets, the pamphlets summoned the community for the protest on the steps of the Municipal Theater. The report published later by *Lampião da Esquina* attests to the presence of at least 1000 people at the protest who adopted a combative demeanor, shocking the aghast spectators with queer bodies embracing and kissing (Trevisan 1980, 18). Before the demonstration began to move through the streets, a manifesto was read to those present, denouncing abuses and violence committed by Richetti and the police force under his control. The 12 groups that signed the letter represented an alliance between the various sectors of the social movements that generated the protest (Ocanha 2018, 84). The event, mainly organized and attended by queer groups and subjects, also received support from feminist associations and the

black movement, highlighting the connections, even if limited<sup>14</sup>, of social movements fighting against specific collective violence.

After reading the manifesto, the demonstrators headed to the busy streets of the city center of São Paulo, chanting protest cries that demanded the arrest of a police chief, Richetti, the freedom of the *travestis* still imprisoned, the end of repression and the introduction of transversal themes, such as the demand for more jobs and the fight against racism. According to the participants' reports, chanting in support of sex workers led several of them – who did not participate in the protest for fear of repression but who lived in the surrounding buildings – to go out onto their balconies and join the chorus of the protesters (Trevisan 1980). Furthermore, according to an article published in *Lampião* a few days later, middle and upper-class homosexuals, also regulars of bars and specific venues in the city center, observed the ongoing protest in astonishment and a mockery manner. This confirms the intersections of race and class that must be observed in the unfolding of Operation Cleansing. Although any queer body was subject to violence and police arrest, it was the most marginalized, poor, and black that repression was most focused on. Consequently, these bodies already exposed and publicly humiliated were the most engaged ones in public resistance to the actions of Operation Cleansing.

---

14 It is important to emphasize that, despite these alliances being recognizable, the intersections between the homosexual movement and other sectors occurred in a localized way and with specific objectives. Regarding the black movement, for example, although the intersection between both movements was observed at different times, this did not translate into a robust discussion about race in many sectors of the homosexual movement, as well as homophobia in sectors of the black movement often continued unquestioned. See Pinto and Pedro (2022).

Despite the demonstration being successful, amounting to limited but supportive press coverage<sup>15</sup>, Richetti did not feel dismayed by the demonstrators and mocked the participants in his statements, going so far as to say that he would head to the city cathedral to pray and have the certainty of not inhabiting Sodom and Gomorrah (Quinalha 2021, 81). Nevertheless, the June 13th event and the denunciations made by politicians and artists to the press partially undermined Richetti's power and led him to gather further support for his actions. On June 17th, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* reported on the support Operation Cleansing received from business owners in the city center. These supporters believed that the “cleansing” promoted by Richetti would also mean the end of violence in the region (*Folha de São Paulo* 1980b). Merchants and middle-class inhabitants of downtown São Paulo, overwhelmed by the public presence of queer bodies on the streets of São Paulo, came out in support of Richetti's actions (ibid, 85), evidencing that Operation Cleansing translated a moral panic that was not only institutional but also social during the military dictatorship.

A formal demand for clarifications about the allegations of police abuse and violence occurred only one month later after the beginning of Operation Cleansing. Despite a rate of only 0.8% of those detained being proven criminals (Trevisan 1980) and the numerous reports of abuse and violence, Richetti and his police force were able to terrorize the queer community for over a month, assembling a scenario of fear and anguish among the LGBTQIA+ community. Regardless of being summoned to testify in

---

15 Unlike *O Estado de São Paulo*, which had been responsible for the reports denouncing *travestis* and demanding police intervention, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* became the main large publication to denounce the abuses of the Operation Cleansing. For this reason, the day after the protests, the newspaper highlighted the demonstration, specifying the allegations of abuse and violence against the police operation (*Folha de São Paulo* 1980b).

front of the Municipal Assembly, an event that included the presence of segments that participated in the protest on June 13th, Richetti received the support of several parliamentarians, and the denunciations achieved few practical results.

Police raids persisted in terrorizing homosexuals, *travestis*, and sex workers, among others, at different times and places, whether in a more organized manner, such as under Richetti's command or occasionally. In a letter to *Folha de São Paulo* at the end of June 1980, one of the members of the *Outra Coisa* – a new homosexual group that emerged in São Paulo that year – thanked the newspaper for publishing the accusations against Richetti. In the letter, it is attested that those who had witnessed the actions of Operation Cleansing would have thought “that Brazil was reliving the horrors of Nazi-fascism in the 1940s, in Germany and Italy” (*Outra Coisa* 1980a, my translation). By recovering the memory of the Nazi and fascist persecution of homosexuals in Europe, the sender of the letter intended to make explicit the violence carried out by Operation Cleansing, the widespread *fear* felt by those who witnessed such acts, and to ask the newspaper to continue to be an ally in further accusations.

This concern about the need to pursue the allegations against Richetti was well-founded. Even with the mobilization of queer groups and the denunciations published in the press, Richetti's operations again specifically attacked places of homosexual sociability in November 1980. In an open letter to the press, the main homosexual groups in the metropolitan area of São Paulo denounced the police brutality across several bars in the city, especially Ferro's Bar, frequented mainly by women. The document also reports that these women were being arrested meanwhile the police shouted: “You are lesbians!” (*Outra Coisa* 1980b). Thus, being queer continued to be seen as a justification to be arrested.

In addition, Richetti's operation inspired similar actions in other regions of the city and other municipalities. In November 1980, a joint document signed by several groups of the LGBTQIA+ movement denounced efforts like those of Richetti in other cities in the state of São Paulo and reported the majority arrest of homosexuals (*Outra Coisa* 1980c). Therefore, Operation Cleansing intensified moral repression not only in the area where it actually operated but ultimately translated the regime's ideology and the moral panic it intended to reinforce. Operation Cleansing was the outcome of a policy of *fear*, supported by the anti-communist discourse and justified by a moral crusade for the maintenance of norms and customs.

### Fear as propellant

Operation Cleansing, therefore, was spawned by the confluence of an anti-communist discourse – which encompassed the queer body as a threat – and *fear* as artifice that justified the regime but also an emotion that was felt by the queer body towards the state. Such confluence was translated into police violence as a response to the growing visibility of LGBTQIA+ sociability in the urban area at a time of political opening and escalation of moral repression. I would also like to add two more aspects that engendered Operation Cleansing: the first concerns the threat that the queer body represented to the maintenance of the compulsory heteronormativity; the second refers to the moral dread of the potential of all bodies being queer.

As mentioned, with the introduction of political opening and signs of exhaustion of the military's censorship and political power, the regime turned to an intensification of society's moral control. In this scenario, it is evident that ongoing national political turmoil was instrumentalized in a discourse that called for the resumption of “values and traditions that are perceived to be under threat” (Ahmed 2004, 76). Thus,

homosexuals and *travestis*, among others, were seen not only as a sign of communist infiltration in the country but, ultimately, the destabilization of heteronormativity itself. For this reason, from the moment that queer subjects achieved greater visibility and possibilities of living and playing a leading role in the urban space, actions such as Operation Cleansing were put into practice. That is, the public presence of these queer personas represented “the failure of the norm to take form; it is the proximity of such other bodies that ‘causes’ the fear that forms of civilization (the family, the community, the nation, international civil society) have degenerated” (ibid, 78). In other words, the greater visibility of the queer body in the urban center – concomitant with the uncertainty of the continuity of the military regime – was interpreted as a sign of the failure of the nation ideal that the hegemonic society, mainly the middle and upper classes, aimed for the country. Therefore, queer bodies represented not only an alleged communist attack but the failure of a heteronormative society that valued Christian morals and, preferably, had in the military the guardians of its safety and existence.

The second aspect, intrinsic to the fear of destabilizing the norm, is the potential that everybody has to be queer. For instance, the concomitant fascination and hatred towards the *travesti*'s body at that period happened because they destabilized the fixity of gender and sexuality norms to their fullest extent. The police forces, under Chief Richetti, when passing through the city center, arrested all bodies that had a queer potential – any destabilizing performance of heteronormativity – or that were passing through the place. This was due to the fear of one of the bodies from which the destabilizing potential emanates escaping, which justified detention and widespread violence. Thus, “fear works to expand the mobility of some bodies and contain others precisely insofar as it does not reside positively in any one body” (Ahmed 2004, 79). As much as these authorities tried to establish parameters that identified queer subjects –

such as the centrality given to the “effeminate homosexual” by the police (Green 2019, 140) – many of these bodies escaped the expectations of the authorities, which further increased the *fear* about the impossibility of controlling and apprehend the totality of these people. In this way, the arbitrary apprehension of anyone in that moral region resides precisely in this *fear* about the possibility of some bodies escaping. Hence, the mobility of these subjects was severely reduced.

Operation Cleansing must be interpreted as a violent outcome of the discourse of *fear* operated by the military dictatorship in Brazil. Fear of the alleged communist threat led a large part of the population to bet on the regime to guarantee their security. Similarly, the queer body, now in evidence in the public space, represented the *fear* of the communist attack on society. This was the case mainly for the middle and upper classes and supporters of the dictatorship, to whom the destabilization of the norm meant the end of traditional values. As a result, the queer community was seen by the police forces as a threat, and it was necessary to intensify the persecution of such subjects, restricting their mobility and visibility in the public space. Thus, Operation Cleansing translated into physical and institutional violence, an ongoing moral panic of a society in effervescent transformation, trembling between dictatorship and eminent re-democratization, between religious and secular values, between traditional beliefs and a moral revolution.

Homosexuals and *travestis*, for the sheer fact of transiting in a specific region of the city – a large concentration of spaces for queer socialization – lived with the constant *fear* of imminent arrest and the possibility of being humiliated, extorted, and violated, psychologically and physically. However, it was exactly this *fear* that also promoted an alliance between these bodies and an organized resistance, which culminated in the protest on June 13th. It is imperative to remark that concomitantly with

Operation Cleansing, the incipient Brazilian LGBTQIA+ movement was experiencing a major internal crisis due to incompatibilities and political disputes between groups and members. However, in this moment of crisis, the various participants in the movement overcame their incongruities and allied against the *fear* imposed by the police raids (Simões 2009, 236).

As Collins (2001) observes, one of the central dynamics within the organization of social movements is the transformation of shared emotions, such as fear, into “the feelings of solidarity, enthusiasm, and morality which arise in group members’ mutual awareness of their shared focus of attention” (ibid, 29). In the case of the Brazilian queer movement in the 1980s, the *fear* shared by individuals and imposed by the authorities and Operation Cleansing was translated into the internal reconciliation of the groups, even if momentarily, and the promotion of public protest against the violation of their rights. This further supports the thesis that one of the most effective drivers for alliance and action in social movements is the confrontation of groups with common enemies (ibid, 31). In the analyzed case, Operation Cleansing materialized an enemy, the delegate Richetti, and actions, the specific and coordinated raids, granting the queer community an evident and close enemy in common.

The cries of protest during the demonstration and the confrontation of the spectators with the exhibition and reiteration of queer identity – through performative gestures, physical contacts, and kisses, among others – denoted agency to these bodies, transforming their impotence into potency (Guzzo and Wolff 2020, 4). What can be seen in progress in these processes of instrumentalization of *fear* for collective action are the resistance possibilities that the collective public demonstration inaugurates (ibid, 6) and, clearly, the manipulation of emotions within such dynamics. Therefore, examining social movements from a scope that considers the dynamics of emotions in these processes is a valid and fruitful endeavor

to understand the history of these individuals, their struggle, and their strategies. Operation Cleansing can be observed as a merely local and municipal procedure in São Paulo in the 1980s. However, when we trace the *fear* and moral panic posed by the communist threat discourse, Operation Cleansing becomes more than just an authoritarian police venture under the support of the elite and the press. It comes to be understood as a local symptom of a national authoritarian political project. Likewise, the focus on emotions helps us recognize how an incipient social movement in crisis overcame its adversities and produced one of the landmarks of Brazilian queer history.

## References

- Aldana, Óscar Useche. 2008. “Miedo, seguridad y resistencias: el miedo como articulación política de la negatividade.” *Polis* 19.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Barreto, Efigênia, and Renato Lombardi. 1980. “O perigo aumenta nas ruas de São Paulo.” *O Estado de São Paulo*. March 28.
- Bezerra, Kátia. 2005. “Inventário do medo: uma viagem de retorno às celas da ditadura militar brasileira.” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 42, no. 1 (June): 213–229.
- Borges, Luiz Augusto Possamai. 2021. “Cartografias do medo e das sexualidades dissidentes nas ditaduras do Cone Sul.” In *Políticas da Emoção e do Gênero no Cone Sul*, edited by Cristina Wolff, 92–110. Curitiba: Brazil Publishing.
- Brasil. 2014. *Comissão Nacional da Verdade. Relatório: textos temáticos*. Brasília: CNV.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Caldeira, Teresa. 2000. *Cidade dos Muros: crime, segregação e cidadania em São Paulo*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

- Camargo, Giovani, Pedro Moraes, and Pablo Rosa. 2020. "A (des)construção da memória sobre a ditadura pós-1964 pelo governo de Jair Bolsonaro." *Revista Cantareira* 33, 79–96.
- Cavalcanti, Erinaldo Vicente. 2015. "O medo em cena: a ameaça comunista da ditadura militar." PhD diss., Federal University of Pernambuco.
- Chueiri, Vera, and Heloísa Câmara. 2015. Constitutional (Dis)Order: Tools of the Dictatorial Machine in Brazil after 1964. *Lua Nova*, no. 95 (May): 259–288.
- Collins, Randall. 2001. "Social Movements and the Focus of Emotional Attention" In *Passionate Politics*, edited by Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, 27–44. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Costa, Rogério da Silva Martins. 2010. "Sociabilidade Homoerótica Masculina no Rio de Janeiro na Década de 1960: Relatos do Jornal O Snob." Master diss., Fundação Getúlio Vargas.
- Cowan, Benjamin. 2015. "Homossexualidade, ideologia e 'subversão' no regime militar. In *Ditadura e homossexualidades: repressão, resistência e a busca da verdade*, edited by James Green and Renan Quinalha, 27–52. São Carlos: EdUFSCAR.
- Cowan, Benjamin. 2016. *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Facchini, Regina. 2010. "Movimento Homossexual No Brasil: Reconstituo Um histórico". *Cadernos AEL* 10, no. 18/19: 81–125.
- Fico, Carlos. 2002. "Prezada Censura: cartas ao regime militar." *Topoi* 3, no. 5 (Dez):251–86.
- Fico, Carlos. 2014. *O golpe de 1964: momentos decisivos*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- Fico, Carlos. 2017. "Ditadura militar brasileira: aproximações teóricas e historiográficas." *Tempo e Arguemento* 9, no. 20: 5–74.
- Fico, Carlos. 2021. Institutional Framework and Institutionalization Projects of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship. *História, histórias* 9, no. 17 (Jan): 8–57.
- Flosi, Edson. 1980. "Aumenta policiamento no centro da cidade." *Folha de São Paulo*, May 23.
- Gaspari, Elio. 2014. *A ditadura escancarada: as ilusões armadas*. São Paulo: Intrínseca.
- Gould, Deborah. 2022. "Life During Wartime: Emotions and The Development of Act Up." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (June): 177–200.
- Green, James, and Renan Quinalha. 2015. "Contribuição sobre o tema ditadura e homossexualidades para o relatório final da Comissão Nacional da Verdade e parceiras." In *Ditadura e homossexualidades: repressão, resistência e a busca da verdade*, edited by James Green and Renan Quinalha, 301–20. São Carlos: EdUFSCAR.
- Green, James. 2019. *Além do Carnaval. A Homossexualidade Masculina do Brasil do Século XX*. São Paulo: Editora Unesp.
- Guimarães, Plínio Ferreira. 2007. "Quando o Comunismo bate à porta: a Guerrilha de Caparaó e o medo desenvolvido pela população local em relação aos guerrilheiros." *Revista De História* 156 (June): 261–94.
- Guzzo, Morgani, and Cristina Wolff. 2020. "Affects in the Political Engagement in the Brazilian Marchas das Vadias (2011-2017)." *Revista Estudos Feministas* 28, no. 2: 1–11.
- Kotscho, Ricardo. 1980. "Delegado quer 'botar para quebrar'." *Folha de São Paulo*, May 27.
- Lewis, Joanna. 2020. "Emotional Rescue: The Emotional Turn in the Study of History." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 51, no.1: 121–129.
- Lopes, Fábio. 2016. "Travestilidades e ditadura civil-militar brasileira. Apontamentos de uma pesquisa." *Esboços* 23, no. 35: 145–167.
- Luppi, Carlos. 1980. "Detidos confirmam violência." *Folha de São Paulo*, June 13.
- Machado, Bernardo Fonseca. 2018. "Emotions in Contest: 'Love' in Demonstrations". *Revista De Antropologia* 61, no. 3:86–108. <https://doi.org/10.11606/2179-0892.ra.2018.152039>.
- Macrae, Edward. 2018. *A Construção da Igualdade: Política e Identidade Homossexual no Brasil da "abertura"*. Salvador: EDUFBA.
- Motta, Rodrigo Patto Sá. 2017. "Entre a liberdade e a ordem: o jornal O Estado de São Paulo e a ditadura (1969-1973)." *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 43, no. 2 (May): 367–379.
- Napolitano, Marcos. 2010. "Brazilian Popular Music: The Soundtrack of the Political Opening (1975/1982)." *Estudos Avançados* 24, no. 69:389–402.
- O Estado de São Paulo. 1980. "Perigo! A invasão dos travestis." *O Estado de São Paulo*. March 25.
- Ocanha, Rafael Freitas. 2014. "'Amor, Feijão, Abaixo Camburão' – Imprensa, Violência e Trottoir em São Paulo (1979-1983)." Master diss., Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo.

- Ocanha, Rafael Freitas. 2015. "As rondas policiais de combate à homossexualidade na cidade de São Paulo (1976-1982)." In *Ditadura e homossexualidades: repressão, resistência e a busca da verdade*, edited by James Green and Renan Quinalha, 149–76. São Carlos: EdUFSCAR.
- Ocanha, Rafael Freitas. 2018. "Repressão policial aos LGBTs em São Paulo na ditadura civil-militar e a resistência dos movimentos articulados." In *História do Movimento LGBT brasileiro*, edited by James Green, Renan Quinalha and Marisa Fernandes, 79–90. São Paulo: Alameda Editorial.
- Oliveira, Francine. 2017. "Gênero, cultura e o dispositivo da transexualidade: a formação da identidade travesti no Brasil." *Revista Darandina* 10, no. 1 (June): 1–20.
- Outra Coisa. 1980a. Letter to Folha de São Paulo. June 30. Edgard Leuenroth Archive, State University of Campinas, Brazil.
- Outra Coisa. 1980b. Open Letter to the Press. November 15. Edgard Leuenroth Archive, State University of Campinas, Brazil.
- Outra Coisa. 1980c. Open Letter - Signed. November. Edgard Leuenroth Archive, State University of Campinas, Brazil.
- Pedra, Caio Benevides. 2020. *Cidadania Trans: o acesso à cidadania por travestis e transexuais no Brasil*. Curitiba: Appris.
- Pelúcio, Larissa. 2014. "Traduções e torções ou o que se quer dizer quando dizemos queer no Brasil?" *Revista Periódicus* 1, no.1: 1–24.
- Penteado, Darcy. 1980. "Um apelo da tradicional família Mesquita: prendam, matem e comam os travestis." *Lampião da Esquina* 24, May.
- Perlongher, Néstor. 2009. *O Negócio do Michê – Prostituição Viril em São Paulo*. São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo.
- Pinto, Rhanielly. 2022. *Estourando a bolha: violências e resistências nas páginas do Lampião da Esquina*. Rio de Janeiro: Autografia.
- Pinto, Rhanielly, and Joana Maria Pedro. 2022. "Alliance Policies: The Homosexual Movement and the Black Movement in Brazil (1981)." *Projeto História* 74, 95–121.
- Quinalha, Renan. 2021. *Contra a moral e os bons costumes*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Resende, Pâmela. "Da Abertura Lenta, Gradual e Segura à Anistia Ampla, Geral e Irrestrita: A Lógica do Dissenso na Transição Para a Democracia." *Revista Sul-Americana de Ciência Política* 2, no. 2 (April): 36–46.
- Sales, Camila, and João Filho. "The Economist and Human Rights Violations in Brazil During the Military Dictatorship." *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 2 (May): 203–227.
- Folha de São Paulo. 1980a. "Denúncias contra Richetti." *Folha de São Paulo*, June 9.
- Folha de São Paulo. 1980b. "Comerciantes apóiam rondas de Richetti." *Folha de São Paulo*, June 17.
- Sattamini, Lina. 2010. *A Mother's Cry: A Memoir of Politics, Prison, and Torture under the Brazilian Military Dictatorship*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Simões, Júlio. 2009. "Antes das Letrinhas: homossexualidade, identidades sexuais e políticas" In *Leituras de Resistência: corpo, violência e poder*, edited by Carmen Tornquist, Clair Coelho, Mara Lago and Teresa Lisboa, 215–242. Florianópolis: Ed. Mulheres.
- Simões, Júlio and Regina Facchini. 2009. *Na Trilha do Arco-Íris. Do Movimento Homossexual ao LGBT*. São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo.
- Souza, Guilherme. 2020. "A história da cidade de São Paulo contada por números." *Cadernos XI Congresso de História Econômica*, 359–381.
- Torelly, Marcelo. 2018. "Assessing a Late Truth Commission: Challenges and Achievements of the Brazilian National Truth Commission." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 12, no. 2 (July): 194–215.
- Trevisan, João. 1979. "Dois travestis, uma advogada: três depoimentos vivos sobre o sufoco." *Lampião da Esquina* 16, September.
- Trevisan, João. 1980. "São Paulo: a guerra santa do Dr. Richetti." *Lampião da Esquina*, June.
- Trevisan, João. 2018. *Devassos no Paraíso*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva.
- Veras, Elias Ferreira. 2015. "Carne, tinta e papel: a emergência do sujeito travesti público-midiatizado em Fortaleza (CE), no tempo dos hormônios/farmacopornográfico." PhD diss., Federal Univeristy of Santa Catarina.
- Villaméa, Luiza. 2023. *A Torre: o cotidiano de mulheres encarceradas pela ditadura*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Wolff, Cristina, Zandoná, Jair, and Soraia Mello. 2019. *Mulheres de Luta: feminismo e esquerdas no Brasil (1964-1985)*. Curitiba: Appris.
- Wolff, Cristina Scheibe. 2021. "Gênero, emoções e afetos na política" In *Políticas da Emoção e do Gênero no Cone Sul*, edited by Cristina Wolff, 229–42. Curitiba: Brazil Publishing.



# READING TRANSITION WITH SUSPICION

## An Affective Critique of *Umwandlung* in N. O. Body's *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren* and its Reception

Orlando Meier-Brix

SQS  
1–2/2023

33

QueerScope  
Articles

### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes *Umwandlung* (gendersex transition) as a sexological and autobiographic narrative in “N. O. Body’s” (Karl M. Baer’s) memoir *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren* (1907), one of the first self-authored accounts of an intersex person in modern times. Scholars as well as authors of popular queer and trans genealogies frame Baer’s transition through medical intervention, although the historical evidence suggests otherwise. This discrepancy generates the author’s suspicion, which functions as a reading strategy and an affective methodology. The article pursues two central arguments: Empirically, it argues to de-medicalize *Umwandlung* as an early 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of transition via the example of Karl M. Baer’s memoir. Methodologically, it reintroduces suspicion to affect theory and proposes “reading with suspicion” as affective strategy to critically engage with trans and intersex narratives. Ultimately, the article argues that a more nuanced, complex and contradictory perspective on *Umwandlung* not only gives new insight into early 20<sup>th</sup> century intersex and trans history but also offers potential alternatives to contemporary medicalizing concepts of transition. In order to do so, the article proposes an interdisciplinary framework comprised of literary analysis as well as historiographic source study and conceptual history within the fields of trans studies and intersex studies.

**Keywords:** Intersex history; autobiography; early 20th century sexology; German; transition narratives; Karl M. Baer; Magnus Hirschfeld; critique; post-critique; suspicion

### Introduction

Worries and doubts tortured me again and again. What was I really? A man? Oh God, no. That would have been indescribable joy. But miracles no longer happen nowadays (MY 93).<sup>1</sup>

In *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren* (*Memoirs of a Man’s Maiden Years*, 1907), author “N. O. Body” – later identified as Karl M. Baer – narrates a fictionalized version of his childhood and coming of age. After the midwife is unsure which gendersex to ascribe to the protagonist, at birth, he is raised a girl.<sup>2</sup> From early on, his body is marked as “other” through

1 “Sorge und Zweifel quälten mich immer und immer wieder von neuem. Was war ich nun eigentlich? Ein Mann? Ach Gott, nein. Das wäre ein unsagbares Glück gewesen. Aber heute geschehen keine Wunder mehr” (MJ 110). I will quote both the 2022 edition of the memoir in the original German as well as Deborah Simon’s English translation (2009). Going forward, I will reference both editions every time to make it as easy as possible for readers to find each quote in either language. I reference the German edition as MJ (*Mädchenjahren*) and the English one as MY (*Maiden Years*). All translations of other German primary and secondary sources are my own.

2 I use ‘gendersex’ as a literal, conceptual translation of the German *Geschlecht* to question the dichotomous concepts of (biological) sex and (social) gender. Especially for the historical context of this research, a clear-cut separation of

the various reactions from the people around him, ranging from curiosity and amazement to disgust, and he experiences bodily changes throughout puberty unlike any of the girls around him. Throughout his childhood and teenage years, he struggles with the lack of knowledge and communication about his gendersex. Only in his early twenties does a sympathetic doctor present him with the possibility to live as the man he felt to have been all along – the gendersex assigned to him at birth is deemed a mistake (*irrtümliche Geschlechtsbestimmung*). He is now able to go through his transition (*Umwandlung*) and starts to live as a man.<sup>3</sup> As it turns out, miracles do happen.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century writers produced a number of autobiographic or pseudo-autobiographic literature which followed a narrative of confessing (“sich bekennen”) non-normative gendersex or sexual identities, such as homosexuality or transvestitism (Sutton 2015, 90). Sutton characterizes these works as “performative technologies of the transvestite self” which are centered around a specific narrative of admitting one’s own non-normative sexual or gendersex identity to oneself or to others (Sutton 2015, 92). By telling personal stories, these works aimed to educate: Karl M. Baer frequently steps out of chronological narration to ask mothers to speak openly to their children about gendersex and sexuality (MY 19, 21, 56; MJ 32, 35, 71) and, at the very end of the memoir, states that he wants to contribute to “modern psychology” and is writing “in the interest of science and truth” (MY 108; MJ 126). In his foreword, editor Rudolf

---

biological and social aspects would be inadequate and linguistically imprecise. I follow Marie-Louise Holm, who uses gendersex as a more adequate translation of the Danish *køn*. See: Holm 2017, 75.

3 I chose to continually refer to the author and the protagonist with he/him pronouns. In the memoir, Baer employs the trope that the protagonist was, even though raised a girl, always a man. No later sources indicate that Baer ever thought otherwise of himself.

Presber claims that he implored Baer to publish the book in order to assist many people with hidden sorrows and help solve many a disastrous riddle among the misunderstood tragedies of everyday life” (Presber in MY, 3; Presber in MJ, 14). It’s quite interesting that Baer’s primary audience are those raising children like him (“mothers”), not the children themselves. Similarly, the author does not seem to be interested in community organizing or legal and political fight for self-determination. He only demands “honest knowledge” (“ehrliches Wissen”) (MY 107; MJ 125), hoping to break the taboo of sexuality and gendersex through a sort of literary, educational activism.

In this article, I will analyze the narrative of *Umwandlung* in Karl M. Baer’s memoir as well as its reception and selected sexological material. Since historian Hermann Simon identified the anonymous author as Karl M. Baer, a writer, social worker and functionary in Berlin’s Jewish institutions, in the 1980s, historians and literature scholars were able to examine the anonymous memoir vis-à-vis other sources documenting his life. His *Umwandlung* and the medical, legal and social practices it might have entailed has received particular attention. So far, scholars of the history of medicine have argued that it is very unlikely that Karl M. Baer underwent surgical procedures (Spörri 2003, 249; Hilger 2016, 244; Hulverscheidt 2022, 180-81). Nonetheless, Baer is sometimes pictured as having received “the first sex change operation in history” (Aderet 2015). As I will later elaborate, this particular perspective on Baer’s work and biography aroused my suspicion. In this paper, I will develop this affective impulse into a methodological framework.

My central argument serves a double aim. Empirically, I propose to de-medicalize early 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of transition (*Umwandlung*) via the example of *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren*, disentangling gendersex transition from surgical intervention. Methodologically, I seek

to reincorporate suspicion into affect theory and propose “reading with suspicion” as an affective strategy to critically engage with trans and intersex narratives. Ultimately, I will explore how a more historically nuanced and affectively complex perspective on *Umwandlung* not only gives new insight into early 20<sup>th</sup> century intersex and trans history but also offers potential alternatives to contemporary medicalizing concepts of transition. As I was confronted with the narrow frameworks of transition as defined by gender-affirming surgeries, I wondered if *Umwandlung* allows for readings beyond medical intervention. In Jay Prosser’s words, I’m interested in exploring transition as “an intermediate nonzone”, an unstable process of movement rather than a single-minded trajectory which is read through the lens of its supposedly final destination, surgical sex-change (Prosser 1998, 3). How, in turn, might a historiographic and literary study of *Umwandlung* and its narrative in Baer’s memoir complexify not only its conceptual history but also contemporary, Western concepts of transition?

This question leads me to analyze *Umwandlung* as narrative across the memoir, its historical-medical context and its reception. I combine historiographic source study, conceptual history and literary analysis in the wider context of trans studies and intersex studies. In order to analyze the narrative of transition in Baer’s memoir and its reception, I develop my suspicion into affective methodology. First, I will situate my methodological approach within critique and post-critique as well as affect theory. Then, I will analyze *Umwandlung* in four steps: first, I will deconstruct *Umwandlung* in connection to medical intervention in the memoir’s reception in reference to the medical history of gender reassignment surgeries in general and Baer’s case studies in particular. While this first step builds on the existing historiography on Baer and the work of medical historians, the second step will tread new ground by tracing *Umwandlung* as concept and narrative in early 20<sup>th</sup> century German sexology, most notably the work of Magnus Hirschfeld. Third, I will

perform a close-reading of the memoir. Ultimately, I will use my suspicion towards prevailing narratives of *Umwandlung* and the memoir’s reception history as a tool to find alternative, empowering readings.

### Reading (transition) with suspicion – theoretical and methodological approach

My initial moment of suspicion in relation to *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren* and its reception was twofold: first, I immediately cringed when I read the term *Geschlechtsumwandlung*, which carries a stereotypical and essentialist meaning that many trans and intersex people today reject. It is inextricably linked to medical intervention, as sex reassignment surgery marks the “magical moment of ‘sex change’” (Prosser 1998, 63). *Geschlechtsumwandlung* shapes a narrative of being trans and intersex that has very little to do with the complexity of trans and intersex experience in terms of identity formation and embodiment and is often used to stigmatize or vilify trans and intersex people, regardless of how they as individuals envision their transition.

Second, I became suspicious when I discovered how Baer is discussed in recent queer and trans genealogies. Here, he is often framed as the first person to undergo gender affirmation surgery. For example, Ofri Aderet refers to Baer in connection to “the first sex change operation in history” in *Haaretz* (Aderet 2015). An online article features Baer and Lili Elbe under the subheading “The World’s First Gender Affirmation Surgeries” (Berlin Guide 2021). Emphasizing this fact in the headline makes it appear as if this detail about Baer’s life is what makes him memorable for queer and trans history.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In her monograph on Lili Elvenes (Lili Elbe), Sabine Meyer notices a similar tendency. She observes that historiography often aims to establish Elvenes

Trans and intersex histories frequently overlap and certain aspects about Baer's memoir and his life – his transition, his navigation of binary gender roles – can provide insight into trans histories as well. However, I'm suspicious when these overlapping histories are subsumed under a trans umbrella and ignore intersex history. Then, trans writers “not only erase intersex history: we appropriate it” (Heyam 2022, 179).<sup>5</sup> To our knowledge, Baer never labelled himself a hermaphrodite – which was the most familiar term at the time – in his memoir or elsewhere, he also did not refer to himself as a transvestite.<sup>6</sup> The point of my research, however, is not to investigate if Karl M. Baer should be reclaimed as intersex, but rather to explore what an analysis of *Umwandlung* can contribute to trans and intersex historiographies and epistemologies of transition.

### Theorizing suspicion

Suspicion is hardly a new reading strategy. Ever since Paul Ricoeur's “hermeneutics of suspicion”, suspicious reading has been considered the standard critical method to approach a text. Suspicious readings have also left their mark on queer and feminist literary criticism. Even though suspicious readings might be well-suited to deconstruct gendered narratives and trace queerness across a text and its readings, Rita Felski and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have also formulated important criticism. Following

---

as the first person undergoing “documented complete surgical genital transformation”. See: Meyer 2015, 39. It seems like Baer's story fulfills a similar function in transmasculine history.

5 Few genealogies explicitly list Baer as intersex, for example: Lopez 2017; Sienna 2019, 194–202.

6 Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term in 1910, four years after Baer wrote the memoir. Here, it feels important to note that transvestite was a common term in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, also used by crossdressers, drag performers, and people who lived in a gendersex different than the one ascribed to them at birth in some or every part of their lives. The term carried a much wider meaning than today. See: Hirschfeld 1917, 140.

Felski, critique is both a “mood” and a “method” and is characterized by modes of questioning, denouncing hegemonic social structures and radical intellectual and political inquiry (Felski 2015, 2). As she states in *The Limits of Critique* (2015), suspicious readings are “negative act[s]”, determined to expose gaps and cracks in the narrative (Felski 2015, 127). Similarly, in her essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You” (2003), Sedgwick argues that suspicion centralizes the concept of paranoia (Sedgwick 2003, 125). Both writers also emphasize the role that affect plays in critical reading. Sedgwick conceptualizes paranoia as “a theory of negative affects” (Sedgwick 2003, 136). Felski, in turn, criticizes that suspicious readings don't hold up to their own standards because the analysis is informed by affect – a “mash-up of conflicting parts” (Felski 2015, 118). Critique claims to operate from an “austere, even ascetic, intellectual” position, but – characterized by the satisfaction to reveal and read against the grain – hides its affective nature (Felski 2015, 118).

To summarize, Felski and Sedgwick have criticized suspicious reading as being profoundly negative and affective. For both authors, suspicious readings are not the enemy per se. Both mainly criticize the fact that suspicious readings have become synonymous with critical reading in general (Sedgwick 2003, 126; Felski 2015, 4–5). Therefore, Felski calls to increase the variety of moods and methods. She writes: “Why – even as we extol multiplicity, difference, hybridity – is the affective range of criticism so limited?” (Felski 2015, 13). The critique of critique, therefore, doesn't necessarily dismiss suspicion as a reading strategy – it seeks to establish alternative modes of critical reading.

To dissolve the flaws of critical and suspicious readings, Sedgwick proposes “reparative reading”, while Felski develops a “post-critical” approach. The post-critical reading posits itself not behind, but in front of the text – instead

of destabilizing the text, it is more focused on locating possibilities within it (Felski 2015, 12). In a similar vein, Sedgwick describes her reparative reading as “additive and accretive” (Sedgwick 2003, 149). I will propose to think of critique and post-critique not as dichotomous or exclusionary but rather to fashion a queer methodology by employing different, sometimes contradictory reading strategies together. In their work, Selina Foltinek and Marie-Louise Holm have each opted for a combined approach of critical and post-critical reading strategies. This allows, as Holm explains, for a multiplicity of readings (Holm 2017, 92–93). Employing a variety of reading strategies might also result in a multifaceted, contradictory perspective on the text (Foltinek 2020, 32). Foltinek locates queer potential in this multimodal method because it destabilizes the binary of critical and post-critical readings (Foltinek 2020, 26–27).

As Felski and Sedgwick call to diversify the approaches to critical readings by proposing their reparative and post-critical models, they opt for alternative affective and methodological frameworks rather than developing new angles at suspicion. In her essay, Sedgwick discusses suspicious readings through the framework of paranoia and theorizes the latter through affect (Sedgwick 2003, 136–138). On the one hand, this move to negative affect is meant to illustrate the one-dimensional nature of suspicious readings – paranoia/suspicion is not introduced as an alternative affective framework. On the other hand, Sedgwick theorizes paranoia as affect rather than suspicion. Similarly, Felski’s affective conceptualization of suspicion is limited to the assumption of suspicion as a negative affect (Felski 2015, 118). As Felski criticizes, suspicious readings are instable and ineffective because the affects which inform the reading and the methods are ignored – she describes suspicion as a “non-emotional emotion” (Felski 2011, 220).<sup>7</sup> But when intentionally conceptualized and taken into

<sup>7</sup> In her essay “Suspicious Minds”, Felski uses emotion and affect interchangeably.

methodological consideration, can the “mash-up” of the analytical and the affective be a strength rather than a weakness?

### Reading with suspicion as an affective methodology

Suspicion does not necessarily disguise subjectivity and affectivity, but can rather help to fashion them into theoretical and methodological tools. In order to create such an intentionally twofold approach, I will reconsider suspicion as affect. While its link to analysis has never been contested by proponents of critique and post-critique alike; its affective qualities, however, have not yet been explored for their theoretical and methodological potential.

What are the affective qualities of suspicion? And how does it relate to intersex and trans histories? Cambridge Dictionary explains “suspicion” as a “feeling or belief that something is likely or true” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The Oxford English Dictionary defines suspicion as “imagination or conjecture of the existence of something evil or wrong without proof; apprehension of guilt or fault on slight grounds or without clear evidence” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In one sense, suspicion might serve as a strategy to debunk cissexist and heteronormative readings and historiographies. Intersex studies as well as trans studies both respond to these structures by deconstructing and questioning normative concepts of sex and gender as well as the legal, social and medical structures which produce them (Horlacher 2016, 10). As Ashley Barnwell remarks: “Suspicion drives knowledge; it is the knitting together of seemingly disparate events and utterances into a pattern that can be read and responded to” (Barnwell 2020, 115). The suspicion that intersex and trans experiences are distorted through cissexist, binary and heteronormative historiographies might drive us to look at the sources with a fresh perspective in order to find more nuanced, complex readings and collect

our own knowledges of intersex and trans histories. This dimension of suspicion stands in the tradition of critical readings.

In another way, however, suspicion may also relate to the affective state of the reader, the historian. For me, suspicion is quite often the affective point of departure of my analysis. As an endosex (=non-intersex) genderqueer trans person writing trans and intersex histories, suspicion accompanies me frequently when I wade through swamps of cissexist, heteronormative historiographies on gendersex and sexuality.<sup>8</sup> It informs the way I read the newspaper or the way I watch the latest TV show featuring a trans character. It guides the questions I ask of historical sources touching on trans and intersex narratives, but, more importantly, it guides my distrust in the reception of these sources. For me, suspicion is an underlying sense of dread, a feeling bordering on knowledge that intersex and trans stories probably will be distorted. I am suspicious of mainstream trans and intersex narratives because I am used to being disappointed, hurt, and infuriated by them. Why wouldn't I approach historical trans and intersex narratives and their discussion in hegemonic historiography in the same way?

Finally, is to read with suspicion the same as performing a suspicious reading? Not necessarily. Although building on the theoretical discourse on critique and post-critique, reading with suspicion is also related to other affective reading strategies: reading with anger, reading with grief and reading with hope. Like all affects, they might spontaneously emerge through our reading and color our first impressions of a text. What if I cannot shake this feeling? In order to avoid replicating the flaws of

---

<sup>8</sup> Scholars of trans studies, such as G. M. Bychowski, Alexander Eastwood, and Sam Holmqvist, have explored the affective and intimate connections of trans researchers to their literary, historical projects: Bychowski 2021; Eastwood 2014; Holmqvist 2018. In order to analyze the (re)production of historical narratives of transition, I'm more drawn to epistemological frameworks rather than identity politics, although I of course cannot operate without them entirely.

critical readings, I aim to consciously integrate the affective as well as the critical dimensions of suspicion into my methodology. Such a reciprocal framework transforms suspicion into an affective methodology. The difference between “suspicious readings” and “reading with suspicion” lies precisely in the shift of rethinking suspicion as affect. When suspicion is understood as affect rather than a synonym of (literary) critique, its pedestal is removed. In a way, refocusing on the affective dimensions of suspicion might solve some of the very problems associated with hermeneutics of suspicion: affectivity is consciously introduced into the theoretical and methodological framework rather than hiddenly tainting a seemingly neutral analytical stance. To read with suspicion is a theoretical, methodological and affective impulse among a range of others, not a resort to *the* hegemonic analytical framework. As shown in the last part of my analysis, other affects such as joy or hope become entangled with suspicion. A reading informed by suspicion is therefore not only one of many affective analytical frameworks but in itself contains traces and links to the various affects informing trans and intersex readings.

### Selection of sources and analytical methods

The analysis of *Umwandlung* as sexological concept and literary narrative influences the selection of the sources. For this reason, I situate my analysis between history and literary criticism, similar to Eastwood's approach of trans literary history. Eastwood proposes that reading trans history through literary representation “provides accounts of history that are affective, imaginative, and closely linked to questions of self-authorship” (Eastwood 2014, 591). Additionally, literary texts are produced for readers. Studying the memoir from an interdisciplinary angle allows me to consider it both as a historical source which is shaping and shaped by sexological discourses on gendersex in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as a narrative of transition which seeks to educate and build affective connections to readers. My approach seeks to destabilize the hierarchy of sources that most scholarship

on trans and intersex narratives explicitly or implicitly engages in. Usually, medical documents are attributed higher credibility and impartiality than self-authored accounts such as memoirs or diaries (Meyer 2015, 42). This power dynamic extends until today, when, due to the lack of information available, medical professionals still possess power to decide over an intersex person's medical treatment, including performing non-consensual surgeries in infancy (Creighton et al. 2009, 254). For these reasons, I aim to deeply engage with the memoir and simultaneously study the academic and medical discourses it is embedded in.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the scope of this article, I will study sexological texts closely related to the memoir, such as case studies and research publications by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, who wrote a medical report for Karl M. Baer to change his gendersex marker and name and also connected him to editor Rudolf Presber. Additionally, I study reviews written around the time of the memoir's publication, both in medical and non-medical periodicals, to analyze how its readers perceived and wrote about the narrative of transition. I then also analyze the memoir's more recent reception in – mostly academic – historiographies, to investigate how authors (re) produce the interpretation of *Umwandlung* as surgical intervention. While this selection of sources cannot make claims about concepts of gendersex transition in early 20<sup>th</sup> century sexology at large, I hope to indicate that further investigation of the medical and autobiographic narrative of *Umwandlung* is needed in order to trace its conceptual history and think through similarities and differences in comparison to 21<sup>st</sup> century narratives of transition.

---

9 As I will show, turning to the history of medicine is quite useful to shed light on *Umwandlung* as an early 20<sup>th</sup> century concept. My effort to de-medicalize the narrative does not result in a rejection of any medical narrative or medical theory, but rather questions our supposedly ahistorical and universal 21<sup>st</sup> century medicalizing frameworks of trans and intersex.

The first step of my initial analysis – and the last in this article – was a close-reading of the memoir. I looked for the term *Umwandlung* as well as motifs of physical and social changes. I then analyzed what purpose these changes serve for the narrative of transition, how different moments might contradict each other and sought to point out gaps or continuity in the narrative as well. Then, I turned to secondary sources. Initially, I analyzed the sources by looking for keywords connected to gendersex transition, for example the article's key term, *Umwandlung*. When this term was absent – as it also is in some passages from Baer's memoir which speak of changes of gendered behavior or gendersex expression – I looked for similar expressions, such as “official change of gendersex” in the review by Georg Merzbach (Merzbach 1908, 101). I also looked for expressions indicating medical intervention or surgery. My initial approach was therefore to reread *Umwandlung* and its medicalized reception into the early sources and point out the gaps and clashes. I then applied a similar method to the more recent reception of the memoir, looking for key terms such as “Geschlechtswandel” (“sex change”) (Simon 1993, 177) or “transgenderation” (Brenner 1998, 32) used to describe, or rather interpret, the protagonist's transition. I then investigated whether the authors make direct or indirect references to medical intervention or surgeries. The analysis of the memoir's reception history is complemented by a selective conceptual history of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of *Umwandlung*, mostly drawn from Hirschfeld's sexological work. Again, I looked for the term *Umwandlung* in his writings and analyzed which kinds of changes – legal, social, medical etc. – he discussed and how he tied them to gendersex identity. Following the initial moment of suspicion, I'm wondering: how is the narrative of *Umwandlung* connected to medical intervention in the memoir's reception and the historiography on Karl M. Baer?

## Umwandlung in Karl M. Baer's memoir and its reception

### Reception history and the (re)construction of *Umwandlung*

Apart from queer, trans and – rarely – intersex historiographies, the reception of N.O. Body's/Karl M. Baer's *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren* is comprised of four genres: reviews of the memoir, published after its publication in 1907, the medical and legal documents that allowed Baer to change his name and gendersex marker, the academic scholarship which emerged in the 1990s as well as popular queer and trans genealogies. First, I will address the memoir's more recent, academic reception before I analyze *Umwandlung* as narrative in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The academic works produced after the memoir's reprint in 1993 are located in three disciplines: history, literature, and history of medicine/sexology. Especially literature scholars like Jana Funke, Ina Linge and Stephanie Hilger take the memoir as a starting point for larger observations about the genre of the memoir or the autobiography, sometimes also in connection to the case study (Funke 2011; Linge 2015; Hilger 2016). Katie Sutton and Marion Hulverscheidt situate the memoir in the history of medicine, specifically German sexology (Sutton 2015; Hulverscheidt 2017, 2022). Michaela Koch contributes to both literary and medical-historical discussions on Baer (Koch 2017a, 2017b). Koch's work is so far unique in that it discusses Baer in the context of intersex theory and activism.

What role does medical intervention play in the academic research on Karl M. Baer? In 1996, Annette Runte discusses the memoir in her study of autobiographical accounts by transsexuals between 1930 and 1990. She deems it "possibly the first autobiography of a hermaphrodite [Zwitter] who underwent surgery" (Runte 1996, 23). Runte consults both the memoir and Hirschfeld's case study published in 1917, which identifies the patient as the memoir's author. Soon after, David Brenner claims that

Baer consulted with Hirschfeld, "who operated on her [sic] to correct her anatomical 'deficiency'", therefore openly narrating his transition through medical intervention (Brenner 1998, 33). In his afterword to the memoir's reprint in 1993, Hermann Simon briefly refers to a *Geschlechtsberichtigung* (correction of gendersex) (Simon 1993, 223). It is unclear whether he refers to the legal process that Baer underwent to change his name and gendersex marker or to medical procedures. In an article published twenty years after the reprint, Simon describes Baer's story as tragic – "especially when we consider that his name change was preceded by medical intervention, however large or small it might have been" (Simon 2013, 79). This description might serve as a hint that Simon associated medical procedures with the terms *Umwandlung* and *Geschlechtsberichtigung* also in his earlier writings. Citing Simon's article from 2013, Dieter Oelschlägel also narrates Baer's *Umwandlung* in the context of corrective surgery (Oelschlägel 2018, 138). More recent examples of Baer's supposed medical procedures also include Marion Hulverscheidt's online article from 2017, "Nobody's Body. Medizinhistorische Reflexion über 'Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren'". Similar to Simon, she mentions that an unspecified operation has taken place (Hulverscheidt 2017). Hulverscheidt has since adjusted her position, as I will discuss below. Savran's and Rachamimov's article "In the Folds of the Skirt. The Different Lives of Karl M. Baer" (published in Hebrew) is the only academic example following of the narrative of Baer as "the *first* person to undergo gender reassignment surgery" (Savran and Rachamimov 2015, 22).<sup>10</sup>

Are there any indications that Baer himself might have undergone medical procedures in the course of his *Umwandlung*? Both literature scholars and scholars studying the memoir in the context of medical history have shown interest in the sexological intertextuality within the memoir, frequently referring to Hirschfeld's published case report. Hirschfeld

<sup>10</sup> My emphasis.



served as Baer's consultant when he appealed to change his gendersex marker and name. The same case report was published in 1906 and in 1917. In 1906, the journal *Medizinische Reform* printed a lecture of Hirschfeld which contained the case of "Anna Laabs" – a pseudonym for Baer – among two others, in 1917, Hirschfeld listed this case in a chapter on hermaphroditism (Hirschfeld 1906, 614; 1917, 44–46). In this anonymized case study, Hirschfeld includes a detailed description of the patient's bodily characteristics, including the genitals. He suggests a surgical analysis of the gonads – but does not mention if such a procedure was performed (Hirschfeld 1917, 46). In her article "N. O. Body, Magnus Hirschfeld und die Diagnose des Geschlechts", historian Myriam Spörri argues that a diagnostic procedure of the gonads would have been unlikely in 1906 – these rudimentary procedures often resulted in castration and were therefore not widely performed (Spörri 2003, 249).

Besides, what part does surgery play in the medical history of transition? Even though the early stages of what would be later classified as gender affirmation surgeries were already being developed in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the procedures were rudimentary and, more importantly, not widely practiced. According to historian Rainer Herrn, the first female-to-male gendersex reassignment procedure that is verifiable by sources was performed in 1912 (Herrn 2005, 104). Herrn shows that even in the 1920s, sexologists and surgeons started to consider gender affirmation surgeries as possible treatment of transvestites; these surgeries were the exception rather than the norm (Herrn 2005, 167). Baer started his social and legal transition in 1906. At this time, Hirschfeld's *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*, which became the most important address for trans and intersex healthcare in Berlin, was not yet established – it opened in 1919. Surgeons such as Ludwig Levy-Lenz were responsible for the implementation of gendersex affirming procedures, not Hirschfeld (Bauer 2017, 85). Baer therefore wouldn't have been referred to him for medical procedures. Hirschfeld

or his colleagues could have referred Baer to someone else, but there is no clue in the memoir or other sources in connection to Baer. Recently, Hulverscheidt has also readdressed the question of surgical procedures in more detail. In the 2022 reprint of the memoir, she stresses that aesthetic surgeries were not common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – and since the case studies report no functional problems, it is unlikely that any procedure was ever performed on Baer (Hulverscheidt 2022, 180–181).

As we have seen, a few authors have addressed the physical dimensions of Baer's transition in some capacity. Spörri (2003, 249), Hulverscheidt (2022, 180–181), and Hilger (2016, 244) have convincingly argued that neither the case studies on Baer nor the medical state of the art suggest that he underwent surgeries. What aspects of early 20<sup>th</sup> century transition and intersex and trans narratives do we miss out on if we don't extend our analysis beyond a determinative, medical-historical approach? Rather than focusing on the question if Baer himself had surgical procedures, I will now contextualize *Umwandlung* as a sexological concept.

### The conceptual history of *Umwandlung*

In order to understand *Umwandlung* as a sexological concept in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I am first turning to a sexologist who is closely connected to Karl M. Baer and the publication of the memoir. Although he does not use the term in the case study, Hirschfeld mentions it in connection to a case of another hermaphrodite in *Sexualpathologie*, where he also publishes Baer's anonymized case report. Here, he includes the following description:

her [sic] wish for a masculine occupation and, hence, a change [Umwandlung] concerning name declaration, dress, and lifestyle, is *extraordinarily* pronounced and advocated with strong, purposeful conviction (Hirschfeld 2017, 58).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Emphasis in the original.

Hirschfeld uses the term only once in *Die Transvestiten* (Hirschfeld 1925, 423). In his publication *Geschlechts-Umwandlungen* (1912), he equally applies the term to those he classifies as hermaphrodites as well as transvestites who show no signs of bodily ambiguity. Here, *Umwandlung* concerns social and legal changes – similar to the description in the quote above – and also physical transformation. These physical changes, however, are not the consequence of medical intervention but rather signs of the “true sexgender” coming to the body’s surface – for example, changes during puberty that seem to contradict the gendersex that was assigned at birth, such as growth of facial hair in a child assigned female at birth (Hirschfeld 1912, 15-16). In general, Hirschfeld rarely uses the term, and when he does, it has only legal and social implications or describes physical transformation with no connection to medical intervention.

Reviews of the memoir circulated around its publication in 1907 also provide insight into the time’s understanding of *Umwandlung*. Some reviews were also published in medical periodicals (Merzbach 1908; “Rezension” 1910). Wouldn’t these reviewers be especially interested in the medical dimensions of the protagonist’s story? Merzbach addresses the “official change of gendersex” (Merzbach 1908, 101). U. discusses the protagonist’s external transition – without any reference to surgical procedures (U. 1907, 320). Kempendorff reads the memoir as the success story of a young woman with “masculine spirit” and a “masculine body”, now beginning a life as a heterosexual man (Kempendorff 1907, 496). Praetorius focusses on the medical diagnosis of “sexual intermediaries” – such as hermaphrodites – rather than the protagonists’ social transformation (Praetorius 1910, 74–76). These reviewers most likely could not connect the anonymized memoir to Karl M. Baer and to his medical case studies – as I mentioned before, Hirschfeld’s publication which connected the medical case to the memoir only appeared in 1917. The first publication in 1906 contained no such hint. Therefore, the memoir was the reviewers’ only source of

information, which they read informed by gendersex concepts of their time. In their readings of the memoir, referring to its narration of and the practices with *Umwandlung*, the absence of medical intervention is telling.<sup>12</sup>

Although a larger comparative study of the sexological discourse is needed, a glimpse into Hirschfeld’s writings and reviews of the memoir already reveals the various aspects of *Umwandlung* in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: changes of social practices (dress, hair style etc.) and, sometimes, the according legal corrections (name, gendersex marker) as well as spontaneous bodily development which called the gendersex assigned at birth into question. Medical intervention, however, is not one of them.

### A close-reading of the memoir

The first mention of the term *Umwandlung* appears in Presber’s foreword to the memoir. Here, Presber reminisces about his first two encounters with Baer. First, he is introduced to Baer when he was still presenting as a woman, and then, two weeks later, encounters “the same visitor, and yet *not* the same” (MY 4; MJ 15).<sup>13</sup> Presber describes Baer’s outer appearance, his dress, his body language, and assesses his performance of masculinity and femininity. He calls Baer “the changed one” (“der Umgewandelte”, *ibid.*),

---

12 The lack of surgical procedures does not only shape concepts of transition but also of trans and intersex embodiment itself. As Herrn points out, signs of a dissociative relation towards the body in terms of gendersex – what is classified today through the medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria – were only rarely described by sexologists around 1910: Herrn 2005, 103. Some transvestites were reported to opt for self-imposed medical interventions, for example self-inflicted castration. These cases seem to be rare, although further research in this area is needed: Herrn 2005, 103–105. This shows that sexologists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not generally perceive trans and intersex people through the prism of self-hatred and body dysphoria.

13 Emphasis in the original.

presumably alluding to the change in presentation and gender expression that occurred in the two weeks between their meetings. In their article, Savran and Rachamimov interpret the period of two weeks between Baer's encounters with Presber as the point in time when Baer's surgical gendersex reassignment occurred (Savran and Rachamimov 2015, 31). Here, Savran and Rachamimov seem to base their interpretation on their associations with the word *Umwandlung* (both "change" and "transformation" in Deborah Simon's English translation) – after all, Presber does not mention any surgical procedures that have been performed in the meantime.

Later, the protagonist narrates this time period from his point of view. He cuts his hair, dons a frock coat and pants for the first time, and makes his first appearances in public (MY 103–104; MJ 121–122). At first glance, it seems like *Umwandlung* only refers to social practices and acts of embodiment beyond medical intervention.

Another passage has often been interpreted as indirectly referring to *Geschlechtssumwandlung* in the surgical sense: shortly after the protagonist is first diagnosed as male while recovering from a leg injury, we read: "For three days, I was down with fever" – "Drei Tage lang lag ich im Fieber" (MY 100; MJ 117). Savran and Rachamimov argue that this state is the result of a medical procedure (Savran and Rachamimov 2015, 31). However, the often-quoted passage remains vague. The life-changing conversation with the doctor happens at home while he is lying in bed. After the conversation, the protagonist expresses his emotions about the revelation and reflects on his past and future. I will now closely examine the subsequent passage:

I lay still for many hours. The new state of affairs was so overwhelming that I could not yet seriously grasp it. Now a bright light lay on our dark path.

*For three days, I lay in a fever.* The doctor came every day, and he had

retained the services of a discreet and reliable nurse. I know nothing of my feverish dreams. I only remember that I lived in regions of boundless bliss.

*I regained consciousness only on the third day.* The severe fever had weakened me so much that I was able to recover my strength only slowly. The delight of the reawakening of my strength was mixed with joyful thoughts of a happy future. I had not actually wanted to write Hanna of the happy turn in our destiny, partly because I feared the letter might be lost and partly because I did not know how she would bear the joyous missive. In the end, however, I hinted at the content of my discussion with the doctor. Joyfully, she wrote back to me. Yes, at last, this was the path to happiness. *I should have the change done, and then she would free herself for me.* First, though, we must see one another once more (MY 100).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis. "Viele Stunden lag ich ganz unbeweglich. Das Neue war so gewaltig auf mich eingestürmt, daß ich das Ereignis ernstlich noch gar nicht zu fassen vermochte. Nun lag auf unseren trüben Wegen ein helles Licht. Drei Tage lang lag ich im Fieber. Der Arzt kam täglich und hatte auch eine zuverlässige, diskrete Wärterin besorgt. Von meinen Fieberträumen weiß ich nichts mehr; ich erinnere mich nur noch, daß ich in Regionen schrankenloser Seligkeit lebte. Erst am dritten Tag kam ich wieder zum Bewußtsein. Das heftige Fieber hatte mich so geschwächt, daß ich mich nur langsam wieder erholen konnte. In das Wonnegefühl des Wiedererwachens aller Kräfte mischten sich die freudigen Gedanken an eine glückliche Zukunft. Eigentlich hatte ich Hanna von der glücklichen Wendung unseres Geschicks nichts schreiben wollen, teils, weil ich fürchtete, daß der Brief verloren gehen könnte, und andererseits, weil ich nicht wußte, wie sie die Freudenbotschaft ertragen würde. Ich deutete ihr aber doch schließlich den Inhalt meiner Unterredung mit dem Arzte an. Jubelnd schrieb sie mir zurück. Ja, das endlich sei der Weg zum Glück. Ich sollte die Umwandlung vornehmen, dann wolle sie sich für mich freimachen. Aber vorher müßten wir uns noch einmal sehen" (MJ 117–18).

The states of recovery, unconsciousness and joy the protagonist experiences open up the passage for interpretations of physical transition. I, on the other hand, would not read this passage as an indirect reference to surgical procedures. First, there is no point in the text that expresses a change of location or passing of time. The whole passage is written in the course of a longer paragraph. The line-break before the aforementioned sentence (“For three days”) is the only hint to an interruption in the consecutive events. Second, the protagonist refers to “the doctor” without further specification. Since he last spoke to the doctor treating his leg injury, no other medical professional has been mentioned. Only later, when he seeks to change his official documents, does he consult other doctors for their medical opinion (MY 103; MJ 121). “The doctor” is most likely the one who treated him for his leg injury and continues to see through his aftercare. It is very unlikely that he was also a specialist in gendersex related surgical procedures. Third, the protagonist concludes the paragraph with his girlfriend’s request to wait with the *Umwandlung* until her divorce is finalized. This, again, indicates that the aforementioned passage is very close in time to the initial revelation and his *Umwandlung*, whatever it might entail, still lies ahead.<sup>15</sup>

According to my reading, nowhere in the memoir does the term *Umwandlung* clearly allude to medical interventions with the goal to masculinize the protagonist’s body. In fact, *Umwandlung* seems to consist of social and embodied practices only – which are pushed to the sidelines by readings focusing on medical intervention. In their article, Savran and

---

15 Hulverscheidt suggests that the “minor operation” recommended by the doctor might refer to a circumcision – a religious obligation for Jewish men. See: Hulverscheidt 2022, 179-84. This interpretation is an interesting entry point for an analysis at the intersection of Jewishness and gendersex, more of which I have explored in my Master’s thesis. Considering the scope of this article, I’m not able to explore *Umwandlung* in terms of both gendersex as well as Jewishness.

Rachamimov understand the narrative of *Umwandlung* in the memoir as a focal point of possibility and agency. They write: “Few in Israel know that he is one of the first people in the world who underwent gender reassignment surgery” (Savran and Rachamimov 2015, 22). Baer’s supposed medical transition is not only one of the details they want to make known about his life but also one of the reasons why they tell his story in the first place. Queer, trans and intersex people might find hope, relatedness, and empowerment in (re)constructing Baer as the first person to undergo gender affirmation surgery, as Rachamimov and Savran’s article and the introduction of Baer into queer genealogies suggest.<sup>16</sup> When Baer is remembered through and for his transition, these particular (re)constructions of the memoir and his life shape the historiographic image of him. Reading medical procedures into the narrative of *Umwandlung* can be a way to reclaim trans and intersex histories as sites of potential and agency. By deconstructing this persistent, potentially empowering narrative, have I not provided yet another negative, suspicious reading, one that might undermine this potentially life-giving interpretation? Is there a way to connect the conceptual history of *Umwandlung* with the memoir’s narrative and can such a reading be fruitful for trans and intersex histories as well?

### Reading beyond surgical intervention – the potentials of suspicion

Transition is thousands of little gestures of protest and presence, adding up and getting some momentum behind them so that you finally achieve escape velocity from the category you were stuck in all those years ago (Carter 2014, 236).

---

16 I borrow the term relatedness in the context of queer, trans and intersex historiography from Carolyn Dinshaw, who describes that, despite their “relatedness in isolation”, the researcher and the researched touch through the practice of queer historiography. See: Dinshaw 1999, 170.

In the memoir, these transitional gestures mostly refer to embodied and social practices, such as masculine-coded clothing or behavior. As part of changing his “outward appearance” (“äußerliche Umwandlung”), the protagonist cuts his hair and wears a frock coat for the first time (MY 103–104; MJ 121–122). He admits that he started this process already before he received permission from the authorities (MY 104; MJ 121). By undermining the official timeline of transition, he has agency over his *Umwandlung*. This agency, however, only becomes apparent when the transitional gestures he performs are perceived as part of his *Umwandlung*. Then, the memoir’s understanding is in line with Carter’s definition of transition: *Umwandlung*, just as transition, is made up of various little practices and experiences and cannot be reduced to legal decisions and medical procedures. Here, the memoir expands the sexological concept of *Umwandlung*. In Hirschfeld’s case study, the description of *Umwandlung* is short and practical. The narrative in the memoir is more elaborate and, more importantly, addresses the affectivity of the social, legal and embodied gestures.

By reading the narrative of *Umwandlung* through “little gestures” of transition or the interplay of different affects, suspicion enables me to read *Umwandlung* through various dimensions beyond medical intervention. Within this multidimensional perspective lies potential for intersex and trans readings. The affective nature of these practices of transition is not exclusively positive: when wearing pants for the first few times, the protagonist describes feeling “uneasy” and “insecure” (MY 103–104; MJ 121–122). Even though he and his girlfriend ultimately agree that his appearance changed for the better, transition remains ambivalent. Not only does masculine-coded behavior and social expectations directed at him feel strange, he also expresses discomfort over sharing a train compartment with other men (MY 104; MJ 122). Negative and ambivalent feelings are not erased in the memoir’s narrative of *Umwandlung*.

The protagonist’s *Umwandlung*, however, is not limited to changes in dress and behavior. In the memoir, *Umwandlung* does entail physical changes in the protagonist’s flesh, skin, muscle tissue, hair follicles and hormonal make-up. His body is narrated through a reoccurring theme of otherness. His genitals, for example, are only described in comparison to other children in his childhood. The girls remark: “Look here, Nora is very different from us” (MY 18; MJ 31). At the same time, the boys don’t seem to notice any difference or particularity: “Soaking wet, we came ashore. We undressed and laid out our clothing to dry in the sun. None of the boys found anything untoward about me, and I was glad of that” (MY 34; MJ 48). During puberty, he notices how his body develops differently from his female classmates. His voice drops: “Others found this amusing, but I was very disconcerted” (MY 41; MJ 57). He doesn’t start to menstruate and eventually decides to fake it. He keeps up this “lie”, as he claims, for ten years (MY 49–50; MJ 64–65). At the same time, he grows facial hair which, for a short time, increases his popularity (MY 50; MJ 65). Due to his “unusual lack of physical development”, he is misdiagnosed with consumption (MY 56; MJ 71). His colleagues think of him as “thin and as lacking in breasts as a ten-year-old” (MY 63; MJ 79).

First, the protagonist’s body changes through puberty and develops in unexpected ways – unexpected in the framework of his assigned gendersex. Second, his body is also affected by his social transition – without medical intervention, through his gendersex performance:

My body, which was no longer constricted by bodices and other tight articles of clothing, developed freely and became stronger. I now do gymnastics and other kinds of exercise to compensate for the forced prevention of a healthy development. [...] I have become stronger and broader, my posture is freer, and physically nothing is

likely to remain of my girlhood years other than a slight furrow left behind from tight lacing (MY 105).<sup>17</sup>

The protagonist's acts of gender performance have an immediate impact on his body. Both are intimately intertwined in his transition and subject to change, but differently than expected. His transition is not limited to the intentional actions he takes after he decides to live as male. From birth to puberty, his body pulls him off the linear path of gendersex development. Then, the author refashions his transition into a linear narrative. However, frameworks of surgical sex-change, regardless of their historical justification, fail to grasp the complexity and longevity of the protagonist's process of *Umwandlung*. The protagonist's physical transformation plays out on various body parts apart from the genitals, and not necessarily results from a new awareness of masculinity, a change in self-perception and outward presentation, but occasionally even precedes these conscious moments of transition. In fact, the memoir doesn't suggest change but continuity in the body itself during *Umwandlung*. After all, what is there to change? His body had already transitioned without medical intervention, through puberty. The only thing left to do was changing its gendersexed frame of reference from female to male. The very factor that especially today defines gendersex reassignment, surgical intervention, is missing because it is obsolete. The protagonist/Baer transitions to live in the body he was born in.

---

17 "Mein Körper, von keinem Mieder und keinem anderen einengenden Kleidungsstück mehr eingeschnürt, entfaltete sich freier und kräftiger. Ich turne und treibe jede Art Gymnastik, um die gewaltsame Behinderung der gesunden Entwicklung wieder auszugleichen. [...] Ich bin kräftiger und breiter geworden, meine Haltung freier, und körperlich dürfte aus meinen Mädchenjahren wohl nichts zurückbleiben als eine leichte Schnürfurche..." (MJ 122–23).

## Conclusion

While the question if Karl M. Baer himself underwent surgery has been answered, a closer look at the early 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of *Umwandlung* enables us to read his story in a wider framework of German sexology as well as intersex and trans histories. A historical-contextual analysis of the term *Geschlechtsumwandlung* shows that it did not entail medical intervention in the German sexological discourse of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. More so, aesthetic surgeries designed to turn genitals into ideal penises or vulvas were not performed on intersex people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hulverscheidt 2022, 180). Refashioning Baer's transition as a product of gendersex reassignment surgeries is not only historically inaccurate, but, as I hoped to show on a textual level, also misses out on the chance to take stories like his as a starting point to drastically rethink medicalizing notions of transition. In the age of gender affirming care, surgical intervention and hormone therapy, these practices have become representative of physical transition; transition, then, is almost exclusively thought through these interventions, especially when it comes to accessing medical or legal transition. Unlike intersex people diagnosed after the 1950s, Baer was not subjected to involuntary surgical procedures. Neither were such cosmetic or sterilizing procedures his only gateway to legal and social transition, as was long practiced in Germany through the implementation of the *Transsexuellengesetz* ("Transsexual law") in 1980.<sup>18</sup> Baer's *Umwandlung* calls into question the quasi-ontological link between transition and medical intervention altogether.

---

18 At its implementation, the *Transsexuellengesetz* required trans people to show proof of sterilization and genital surgery in order to legally change their gender marker. This passage was declared unconstitutional in 2011 and, even though the law was not reformed, is ineffective today.

At first, it might seem negative and pessimistic to disprove the idea that Karl M. Baer received gender affirming surgeries, yet the result of this reading is not negative at all. As Carolyn Dinshaw formulated in the early days of queer historiography, “queer histories are made of affective relations” (Dinshaw 1999, 12). Through the little gestures, affects and embodied and social experiences he explores in his memoir, intersex and trans people who cannot or choose not to transition medically might find moments of recognition and affirmation. Intersex people especially might find positive empowerment in a past that predates forced sterilization and genital mutilation and look for transition narratives such as Baer’s to de-pathologize and de-surgicalize intersex in the future.

Earlier, I described my suspicion as an underlying sense of dread, which, echoing Barnwell, has driven my knowledge (Barnwell 2020, 115). My suspicion is still there but I am also left with curiosity. I’m curious which narratives of transition might come to light in the future and how frameworks indebted to the complexity of trans and intersex narratives will continue to impact their historiographic and literary analysis. This article’s conceptual history of *Umwandlung* is limited to the writings of one particular sexologist, Hirschfeld, and its analysis centers on the memoir of Karl M. Baer. However, the sheer absence of gendersex reassignment procedures in the 1900s suggests that early 20<sup>th</sup> century frameworks of transition – and, by extension, the very taxonomies of transvestites and hermaphrodites themselves – were not linked to medical intervention in a similarly formative, almost ontological way that developed since the 1950s. Historiographic and literary projects therefore need to further de-medicalize and de-surgicalize historical trans and intersex narratives as well as notions of transition. At the same time, they might – like this article hoped to show – make space for more complex, contradictory and multi-dimensional frameworks of transition, reframing intersex and

trans bodies, their transformation and narration as sites of potential and possibility as well as literary agency.

Here lies the transformative power of suspicion as a reading strategy: besides acknowledging my affective relation to cisnormative and heteronormative historiographies and readings, reading with suspicion has provided me with the necessary critical force, analytical scrutiny and methodological as well as affective openness to engage in critique and propose alternative narratives and readings of transition at the same time. By conceptualizing suspicion as affect, it is possible to address the flaws of critical readings while making use of their critical and affective force simultaneously. In this sense, reading with suspicion continues the tradition of queer approaches to hermeneutics, dismantling the binary of critique and post-critique, and joins the ranks of affective approaches to queer historiography and trans and intersex readings.

## Works Cited

- Aderet, Ofer. 2015. “Recalling the First Sex Change Operation in History: A German-Israeli Insurance Salesman.” *Haaretz*, December 5, 2015. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-first-sex-change-surgery-in-history-1.5431147>.
- Barnwell, Ashley. 2020. *Critical Affect: The Politics of Method*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bauer, Heike. 2017. *The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Berlin Guide. 2021. “The Origins of Sexology, Queer, & Trans\* Liberation.” Accessed November 02, 2022. <https://berlinguide.de/en/2021/10/how-the-origins-of-sexual-science-are-connected-to-queer-trans-liberation/>.
- Body, N. O., ed. 2009. *Memoirs of a Man’s Maiden Years*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Body, N. O. 2022. *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren*. Edited by Hermann Simon. Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich Verlag Berlin.
- Brenner, David A. 1998. "Re-Dressing the "German-Jewish": A Jewish Hermaphrodite and Cross-Dresser in Wilhelmine Germany." In *Borders, Exiles, Diasporas*, edited by Elazar Barkan, 32–45. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bychowski, G. M. 2021. "4. The Transgender Turn: Eleanor." In *Trans Historical*, edited by Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Klosowska, 95–113. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Cambridge Dictionary. "Suspicion." Accessed November 02, 2022. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/suspicion>.
- Carter, Julian. 2014. "Transition." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (1–2): 235–37. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400145>.
- Creighton, Sarah M., Julie A. Greenberg, Katrina Roen, and LaGrace Del Volcano. 2009. "Intersex practice, theory and activism." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2): 249–60. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2008-136>.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. 1999. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Eastwood, Alexander. 2014. "How, Then, Might the Transsexual Read?" *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (4): 590–604. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815111>.
- Felski, Rita. 2011. "Suspicious Minds." *Poetics Today* 32 (2): 215–34. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-1261208>.
- Felski, Rita. 2015. *The LIMITS of Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foltinek, Selina. 2020. "Creative Openings and World-Making: Postcritique, Reparative Readings, and Anzaldúa's Borderlands." *COPAS - Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* 21 (1).
- Funke, Jana. 2011. "The Case of Karl M.[Artha] Baer: Narrating 'Uncertain' Sex." In *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*, edited by Ben Davies, 132–53. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herrn, Rainer. 2005. *Schnittmuster Des Geschlechts: Transvestitismus Und Transsexualität in Der Frühen Sexualwissenschaft*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Heyam, Kit. 2022. *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender*. London: Basic Books.
- Hilger, Stephanie M. 2016. "No Body? Radical Gender in Memoirs of a Man's Maiden Years (1907)." In *The Early History of Embodied Cognition 1740-1920: The Lebenskraft-Debate and Radical Reality in German Science, Music, and Literature*, edited by John A. McCarthy, 225–47. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft volume 189. Leiden: Brill.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. 1906. "Drei Fälle Von Irrtümlicher Geschlechtsbestimmung." *Medizinische Reform. Wochenschrift für soziale Medizin, Hygiene und Medizinalstatistik* XV (51): 614.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. 1912. *Geschlechts-Umwandlungen: Irrtümer in Der Geschlechtsbestimmung. Sechs Fälle Aus Der Forensischen Praxis*. Berlin: Adler-Verlag G.m.b.H.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. 1917. *Sexualpathologie. Ein Lehrbuch Für Ärzte Und Studierende: 2. Teil. Sexuelle Zwischenstufen. Das Männliche Weib Und Der Weibliche Mann*. Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. 1925. *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung Über Den Erotischen Verkleidungstrieb Mit Umfangreichem Casuistischen Und Historischen Material*. Leipzig: Verlag „Wahrheit“ Ferdinand Spohr.
- Holm, Marie-Louise. 2017. "Fleshing Out the Self: Reimagining Intersexed and Trans Embodied Lives Through (Auto)Biographical Accounts of the Past." PhD diss., Linköping University.
- Holmqvist, Sam. 2018. "Trans Readings: A Legacy from Myself to Myself." *lambda nordica* 1–2: 185–97.
- Horlacher, Stefan. 2016. *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Hulverscheidt, Marion. 2017. "N. O. Body – Aus Eines Mannes Mädchenjahren – Von Einer Medizinhistorikerin Neu Gelesen I: Hinführung Und Fragestellung." Accessed October 31, 2022. <https://intersex.hypotheses.org/4931>.
- Hulverscheidt, Marion. 2022. "Zu den medizinhistorischen Aspekten der Lebensgeschichte von Karl Martha Baer oder What a doctor could tell about Nobody." In *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren*, edited by Hermann Simon, 167–99. Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich Verlag Berlin.
- Kempendorff, P. Stuttgart 1907. "Rezension." *Der Türmer, Monatsschrift für Gemüt und Geist* 9: 495–99.



- Koch, Michael\_a. 2017a. "Niemand will's gewesen sein: Strategien autobiographischen Schreibens und literaturwissenschaftlicher Forschung zu Intergeschlechtlichkeit am Beispiel von N. O. Bodys Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren." In *Transfer und Interaktion: Wissenschaft und Aktivismus an den Grenzen heteronormativer Zweigeschlechtlichkeit*, edited by Josch Hoenes and Michaela Koch. Oldenburger Beiträge zur Geschlechterforschung, vol. 15. Oldenburg: BIS-Verlag der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg.
- Koch, Michaela. 2017b. *Discursive Intersexions: Daring Bodies Between Myth, Medicine, and Memoir*. Practices of subjectivation, vol. 9. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Linge, Ina. 2015. "Gender and Agency Between 'Sexualwissenschaft' and Autobiography: The Case of N.O. Body's Aus Eines Mannes Mädchenjahren." *German Life and Letters* 68 (3): 387–405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glal.12085>.
- Lopez, Anastasia. 2017. "6 Intersex-Menschen, Die Du Kennen Solltest." Accessed November 22, 2022. <https://www.playbuzz.com/anastasia-lopez/6-intersex-menschen-die-du-kennen-solltest>.
- Merzbach, Georg. Leipzig 1908. "Rezension." *Monatsschrift für Harnkrankheiten*, 101–3.
- Meyer, Sabine. 2015. "Wie Lili zu einem richtigen Mädchen wurde": *Lili Elbe: Zur Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Identität zwischen Medialisierung, Regulierung und Subjektivierung*. Queer studies, vol. 9. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Oelschlägel, Dieter. 2018. "Martha / Karl Baer." *SoZA* 67 (4): 135–39. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0490-1606-2018-4-135>.
- Oxford English Dictionary. "Suspicion." Accessed June 06, 2023. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/195179?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=qa8jPb&>.
- Praetorius, Numa. 1910. "Die Bibliographie Der Homosexualität Aus Den Jahren 1908 Und 1909." *Vierteljahresberichte des Wissenschaftlich-Humanitären Komitees. Fortsetzung der Monatsberichte und des Jahrbuchs für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* II (1): 67–111.
- Presber, Rudolf. 2009. "Foreword." In *Memoirs of a Man's Maiden Years*, edited by N. O. Body, 3–6. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Presber, Rudolf. 2022. "Vorwort." In *Aus eines Mannes Mädchenjahren*, edited by Hermann Simon. 1. Auflage, 14–17. Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich Verlag Berlin.
- Prosser, Jay. 1998. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. Gender and culture series. New York: Columbia University Press.
- "Rezension." Leipzig 1910. *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* Bd. 2, H. 1: 74–76.
- Runte, Annette. 1996. *Biographische Operationen: Diskurse der Transsexualität*. Munich: Brill Fink.
- Savran, Adi, and Iris Rachamimov. 2015. "In the Folds of a Skirt: The Different Lives of Karl M. Baer." *Zmanim: A Historical Quarterly* (131): 22–33.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. London: Duke University Press.
- Sienna, Noam, ed. 2019. *A Rainbow Thread: An Anthology of Queer Jewish Texts from the First Century to 1969*. Philadelphia: Print-O-Craft.
- Simon, Hermann. 1993. "Wer War N. O. Body?" In *Aus Eines Mannes Mädchenjahren*, edited by Hermann Simon. Reprint., 1. Aufl., 167–246. Berlin: Hentrich Verlag.
- Simon, Hermann. 2013. "Hirschfelds Testament Und N.O. Bodys Lebensgeschichte." *Sexuologie* 20 (1–2): 77–82.
- Spörri, Myriam. 2003. "N. O. Body, Magnus Hirschfeld Und Die Diagnose Des Geschlechts: Hermaphroditismus Um 1900." *L'Homme Z.F.G.* 14: 244–261.
- Sutton, Katie. 2015. "Sexological Cases and the Prehistory of Transgender Identity Politics in Interwar Germany." In *Case Studies and the Dissemination of Knowledge*, edited by Joy Damousi, Birgit Lang, and Katie Sutton, 85–103. Routledge Studies in Cultural History vol. 36. Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- U. Langensalza 1907. "Rezension." *Der Kinderfehler, Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*, 320.

# DESIRE FOR TRANS ANCESTORS

## An Affective Reading of Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of the Fox*

Ivo Zender

### ABSTRACT

In this article, the relationship between the affective histories of queer and trans activism and the reading and writing of contemporary fictional trans literature is explored. The focus lies on the analysis of Jordy Rosenberg's (2018) *Confessions of the Fox*, which allows for an investigation into how trans histories can be written and read. The article emphasizes the intricate interplay between literature and history, specifically examining the tensions and pleasures that arise from balancing authenticity and fictionality. Additionally, the role of literature as a medium for expressing emotions and inspiring activism is considered. *Confessions of the Fox* tells the story of a fictional transmasculine literary scholar who discovers a mysterious manuscript that reveals the trans identity of 18<sup>th</sup>-century London's infamous thief and jailbreaker Jack Sheppard. The narrative of *Confessions of the Fox* establishes an analogy between human bodies and written texts, specifically referring to the trans body. I argue that the narrative itself approaches the body and the manuscript through the affect of desire. Drawing on the concept of textual desire, as found in Roland Barthes' (1975) *The Pleasure of the Text* and in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), the article analyzes the relationship between text and readership to trace pleasurable and ethical encounters with otherness. Overall, the article puts forward the idea to consider reading practices as a tool through which we can investigate the significance and ramifications of queer and trans histories and activism.

**Keywords:** trans literature, historiographic metafiction, *Confessions of the Fox*, textual desire, queer reading, trans reading, authenticity, trans literacy

### Introduction

Transgender plays with time, history, and temporality in a multitude of ways that demand intentional and multiple ways of telling trans histories and narratives.

M. W. Bychowski (Devun & Tortorici 2018, 668)

As a literary scholar working on a project about contemporary fictional trans literature, I am of course intrigued by the question of what the writing and also the reading of fictional trans literature could mean for the context of affective histories of queer and trans activism. When do histories of queer and trans activism become affective? Affectivity is central to literature, since art as a form of aesthetic experience aims to affect its readers and evoke emotions. "Literary language [...]", Jane Bennett (2015, 141) points out, "engages our imaginations at a visceral level, to help us feel what cannot be seen". Writers employ language to express, communicate, and depict emotions, and literature provides a distinctive way to grasp the multiplicity and intricacy of human emotional experiences.

In this article, my focus is on examining the interplay between affectivity, story, history, historiography, and queer and trans activism. To accomplish

this, I will analyze Jordy Rosenberg's (2018) *Confessions of the Fox*, a work of historiographic metafiction<sup>1</sup>. Through its narrative, *Confessions of the Fox* offers insights into the questions of how queer and trans histories can be written as well as on how they can be read. At a university's library yard sale, the fictional transmasculine literary scholar and narrator Dr. R. Voth finds a mysterious manuscript and suspects it to be the authentic memoir of London's 18<sup>th</sup>-century infamous thief and jailbreaker Jack Sheppard. The historical Sheppard was known for escaping from prison several times and later served as a model for numerous fictionalizations such as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) or Bertold Brecht's character Mackie Messer in *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). In *Confessions of the Fox*, however, the story of Jack Sheppard is told from a new perspective that reinterprets Sheppard as trans and explicitly focuses on the experiences of marginalized people in 18<sup>th</sup>-century London, such as sex workers and rogues as well as queer, trans, and racialized individuals.

Starting with the epigraph "Love's mysteries in souls do grow, but yet, the body is his book" (vii), two lines from John Donne's poem *The Ecstasy* (1633), the text establishes an analogy between body and book, suggesting that the body is a text which can be written and read, closely linking the bodily and the textual. However, as I will demonstrate, *Confessions of the Fox* is not just referring to any body, but to the trans body in particular. The encounter with the mysterious manuscript found by Dr. R. Voth subsequently serves as a metaphor of an encounter with a trans body, so that everything said about the manuscript or the textual body can be read as referring to the trans body and vice versa. By this, the trans body appears

---

1 The concept of *historiographic metafiction* was coined by literary theorist Linda Hutcheon (1988, 5) in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. She refers to historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages".

in its textuality, making it accessible as something which is written and read. Further, the theme of encountering something mysterious, something not readily comprehensible because its identity, genre, and authorship are not clear (yet), points towards broader questions of recognition (what is this?), authenticity (is this real?), intelligibility (how do I culturally understand and classify this?) and the ethics of encounter (how do I approach this?).

With regard to these questions, I argue that *Confessions of the Fox* approaches both the manuscript as well as the trans body through the affect of desire. In general, I understand 'affective' as referring to emotional or subjectively felt aspects of behavior, experience or expression. Without engaging in an extensive debate on the theorization and differentiation of the terms 'emotions' and 'affects', my approach to analyzing *Confessions of the Fox* draws inspiration from Sara Ahmed. Ahmed (2014, 97) perceives affects "as part of what emotions do" yet maintains a critical stance towards rigid demarcations between affects and emotions. Ahmed (2004, 4) characterizes emotions as cultural and therefore dynamic forces that direct our orientation either away from or towards specific objects or individuals. In her work, she is interested in tracking "how emotions circulate between bodies" and how they "shape the very surfaces of bodies" (ibid.). Like this, Ahmed places significant emphasis on the role emotions play in defining the constitutive boundaries between individuals and their surrounding world. "[I]t is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others", Ahmed explains, "that surfaces and boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (ibid., 10).

Employing this approach, which aims to explore emotions and affects as forces moving bodies towards and away from others, in the context of literature allows me to illuminate the relational and embodied aspects of emotions and affects. Furthermore, Ahmed's (ibid., 12) perspective

acknowledges the affective impact of textual encounters due to their evocative qualities when positing that “figures of speech’ are crucial to the emotionality of texts”.

While Ahmed’s perspective is certainly valuable in emphasizing the relationality of emotions and affects, when it comes to tracing the movement of desire in the text, I remain inclined to favor the term ‘affect’. This preference stems from its ability to offer a more encompassing understanding of desire, acknowledging the complex interactions of emotions, visceral sensations, and bodily affects. Moreover, ‘affect’ underscores the intensity and immediacy of desire, capturing its preverbal, somatic, and not necessarily conscious dimensions (cf. Gould 2009, 19–20).

Despite its significance as a form of intense longing or wanting for something or someone and despite it having been a prominent subject of psychoanalysis and feminist theory, Kristyn Gorton (2007, 345) criticizes that desire is frequently neglected within discussions of affect studies. Gorton (2008, 8) points out that there have been numerous theorizations of desire where it “has been understood as both an emotion and an affect, as a drive, and as the essence of human subjectivity”. But when analyzing cultural products, Gorton (2007, 346) suggests shifting the focus from offering additional interpretations and definitions to considering “what desire does rather than what it is”.

In my analysis of *Confessions of the Fox*, I argue that the pervasive influence of the affective experience of desire is actively shaping the narrative throughout its pages. In line with Ahmed and Gorton, I aim to explore the effect of desire by understanding desire as a movement capable of both uniting and dividing, fostering intimacy, or creating distance. With this in mind, the circulation of affect between the text and its readers can be viewed as a possible form of intersubjective activism, as it has the potential

to shape bodies, forge connections, and thereby challenge hegemonic affective arrangements.

When delving into the realm of the affective within the literary field, it is essential to recognize that this article prioritizes the exploration of story over history. Specifically, when analyzing literary works, particularly those of fiction, the emphasis lies on the narrative and the art of storytelling, rather than on factual accuracy or historical authenticity. However, history and story are also intricately intertwined in multiple ways. All forms of history and historiography rely to some extent on storytelling techniques to convey their truths,<sup>2</sup> just as many historical novels use historical events and characters as the basis for their fictional narratives. Stories, however, are not bound by strict adherence to factual accuracy and may playfully blur the lines between fact and fiction. In the end, a literary text is an artistic creation that establishes a connection with its readers and engages them on an experiential and affective level.

While the focus of literary creation and analysis may differ from that of traditional historiography, the historiographic and literary narratives have more crucial points of contact when it comes to the excavation and articulation of the histories of marginalized subjects. For them to even emerge, they are faced with considerably greater challenges due to the structural gaps and epistemic invisibilities. The use of literary storytelling can help to balance these limitations of historiography. In her essay *Venus in Two Acts*, Saidiya Hartman (2008) for instance proposes the method of *critical fabulation* to serve the cause of historiography of marginalized subjects whose archives are marked by the violence of absences and

---

2 However, the question of the significance of narrative and narrativity in historiography encompasses a vast and contentious field which has seen much discussion and controversy. To explore the topic further, see, for example, Lorenz, Berger, and Brauch (2021).

omissions (cf. Hartman 2008; 2019). Therefore, this article also discusses whether the act of reading and writing fictional trans (hi)stories can be a form of activism, too, and if yes, how?

In the following, I will begin by employing the theoretical framework of textual desire to establish the basis for my analysis. From there, I will delve into the exploration of how the reciprocal desires between the text and the reader influence and shape the meaning, interpretation, and overall reading experience. Since *Confessions of the Fox* establishes an analogy between the text and the body, the theoretical concept of textual desire becomes a lens that not only provides insights into the literary text but also sheds light on trans corporeality. In this article, I intend to explore the circulation of desire within the literary text, examine the significance of textual desire in the realm of contemporary trans fiction, and analyze Jordy Rosenberg's approach to reading and writing trans histories, focusing specifically on his novel *Confessions of the Fox*.

### Textual desires and queer and trans readings

The concept of textual desire is largely associated with poststructuralist literary theory, for example Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) as well as with the concept of *Queer Reading*, as linked to the work of US literary scholar and pioneer of queer studies Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Both currents emphasize the idea that texts are not simply passive carriers of meaning, but rather active participants in shaping the desires and identities of their readers and vice versa. In this view, reading is understood as a dynamic interaction between the text, the reader, and the cultural and historical contexts in which they are situated. It is important to note that there is no unified theorizing regarding both the concept of textual desire and the method of queer reading. By drawing on Barthes' and Sedgwick's approaches, among others, I develop an understanding of textual desire

as an intimate relationship between the text and the reader, which both accounts for the reader's desire to read and also for the text's desire to be read.

Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* explores the various ways in which the reader experiences pleasure and meaning in reading and how this experience is shaped by the text itself as well as by the reader's own desires and expectations. He argues that there are two different modes of pleasure in reading: *plaisir* (pleasure) and *jouissance* (bliss). *Plaisir* refers to a pleasure that comes from reading a well-written text or the re-reading of a familiar story which Barthes characterizes as a "comfortable practice of reading" (Barthes 1975, 14; emphasis in original). *Jouissance*, on the other hand, "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language". While the reader is affirmed "in the consistency of his selfhood" by reading a *text of pleasure*, reading a *text of bliss* is a more intense, disruptive pleasure that arises from encountering something new, unknown, other and potentially unsettling which results in a certain loss of self (ibid.). In other words, one may assert that whereas a *text of pleasure* provides satisfaction to its readers, a *text of bliss* is deeply affective in a transformative sense. At the same time, however, Barthes does not assume a text to exclusively be a *text of pleasure* or a *text of bliss*; rather, a text can contain both pleasure and bliss, both the known and the unknown, with one element usually prevailing over the other. When reading, the reader encounters both pleasure and bliss which makes them a "subject split twice over, doubly perverse" because "he [sic] enjoys the consistency of his selfhood [ ... ] and seeks its loss" (ibid.; emphasis in original).

Besides this, Barthes also discusses the corresponding idea of a *writerly* text, which is one that – in contrast to a *readerly* text<sup>3</sup> – invites the

3 Barthes already introduces the terms *writerly* and *readerly texts* in *S/Z* (1970).

reader to participate in its creation and interpretation as its meaning is not immediately evident. Such a text allows for multiple readings and interpretations and it is the reader's engagement with the text that brings it to life. Barthes moreover assumes that texts carry erotic stimuli which captivate and seduce the reader. As a result, the reader becomes absorbed by the text and is fascinated by its mysteries, desiring to make sense of its enigmatic qualities. This "avidity for knowledge" or for "whatever furthers the solution of the riddle" is what Barthes calls *Oedipal pleasure*: "to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end" (ibid., 10–11).

Since the meaning of a text is often neither obvious nor permanently fixable, the textual desire in this case expresses itself as a desire for meaning which demands an active effort on the part of the reader. Benedikt Wolf starts from the premise of a "fundamental mysteriousness of literary texts" (Wolf 2019, 13; my translation). By drawing on French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche's (1987) *General Theory of Seduction*, Wolf understands this fundamental mysteriousness, similar to Barthes' erotic stimuli, as a situation of seduction in which the text seems to want something from the reader, while it is remaining unclear what exactly. The way, however, in which texts handle their own mysteriousness and their seductive qualities can vary significantly: some texts emphasize their own mysteriousness, while others refrain from overtly displaying it (Wolf 2019, 13). In the context of mysteriousness, the textual desire appears as a quality of the text itself which is able to draw the reader in and make them follow its path of desire. On the other hand, the reader enjoys the thrill of not (yet) knowing, compelling them to continue reading and form a relationship with the text. The reader's pleasure lies in allowing themselves to be captivated by the text while simultaneously attempting to comprehend its meaning.

However, as Wolf annotates, "the pleasure of the text is not neutral", but the themes of desire, pleasure and seduction subsequently raise questions of

gender relations (ibid., 14; my translation). Especially the literary-oriented queer studies have been concerned with the relationship between language, desire, and gender. In this context, Sedgwick's work laid the cornerstones for a method of reading known today as *Queer Reading*. In her book *Between Men*, Sedgwick emphasizes the importance of the text as a site where desire can be expressed and negotiated beyond the intention of the author or even the characters involved in the plot. Sedgwick (1985, 21) argues that desire between men in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century English literature is often expressed through a variety of linguistic, stylistic, and narrative techniques within a structure of erotic triangles. She argues that these techniques constitute a kind of coded language that allows desire between men to be identified without naming it directly. Queer reading can thus be seen as a method for decoding the "erotic subtexts and shadow histories" (Kraß 2003, 22). By reading between the lines, the reader can excavate the latent queer desires embedded in the subtext.<sup>4</sup> Meridith Kruse (2019, 134–136) points out that Sedgwick is "situat[ing] her reading practice in the context of hostile culture", where projecting one's own queer desires onto a text becomes essential for countering heterosexist suppression and serves as "a tool for survival and resistance".

Ján Demčišák (2012, 91), however, criticizes this approach of differentiating between a heteronormative surface and a hidden queer subtext, arguing that the failure to recognize the queer subtext reveals itself as an exclusive

---

4 Nevertheless, Andreas Kraß consistently emphasizes that a queer reading should not be misunderstood as a biographical method aiming to identify the author's personal (homosexual) desire in the text (Kraß 2009, 97). Instead, queer reading is a "critical reading method which deconstructs heteronormative oppositions and takes a look at the explicit and implicit spaces of desire through close reading" (Kraß 2015, 329; my translation). Thus, the practice of decoding has to be understood as *one* possible form of conducting a queer reading, whereas others would focus on how the textual structure itself challenges or 'queers' (hetero)normativity and binarily structured arrangements.

(in)ability to decode queerness. Demčišák emphasizes that the desire to read for queerness is not indicative of a quality inherent in the text itself. Rather than a textual desire (*Textbegehren*), Demčišák argues that decoding queerness reflects a reading desire (*Lesebegehren*). Disregarding the intersubjective circulation of emotions and affects and their mutually constitutive effects, Demčišák's interpretation considers desire as a trait that can be attributed either to the text or to the reader (ibid.). However, he raises the important question of "how we should actually deal with the desire to read for queerness" (ibid., 93; my translation). As a response, he suggests "being aware of one's own desire, intentionally displaying it or at least accepting it" (ibid.). Although I agree with Demčišák's perspective on the importance of acknowledging one's own desires instead of denying them, it appears that Demčišák may not fully consider the structural imbalances in (historical) texts that contribute to the need of reading for queerness, specifically in terms of who is represented and who is marginalized or absent. Based on my exploration of trans literature, I thus argue that instead of merely accepting one's desire to read for queerness, approaching literature with a sense of desire and submitting to its effects on the relationship between text and reader can prove to be a highly productive starting point for literary creation and the pleasure of reading.

With regard to the context of trans literature, however, Alexander Eastwood (2014) and Sam Holmqvist (2018) have made notable contributions to the discourse on reading practices by introducing the concept of trans reading. Their research explores the ways in which historical literary works can be read to trace a history of trans literature and grapple with the complexities of the desire for recognition. Encountering representations of trans ancestors in historical literature or documents often prompts questions about how these characters and their experiences can be interpreted (Eastwood 2014, 591; Holmqvist 2018, 187). Holmqvist (2018, 188) observes that there are many depictions in historical literature

of "experiences, expressions, and lives [...] that we would today refer to as 'trans'". Reading about these characters today, it is not uncommon for them to be claimed as either lesbian/gay or trans, depending on the desire of the reader. Holmqvist (ibid., 190) argues that claiming a character as lesbian/gay does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of also claiming them as trans. Ultimately, the terminological discussions about how to correctly identify a character point towards the inherent desire to establish a literary canon of either gay/lesbian or trans literature.

Although Eastwood (2014, 591) acknowledges that "marginalized readers crave historical representations of themselves", and affectively relate to literature in this way, he critically calls this approach a "revisionist reading strateg[y]" (ibid., 595) since it "appropriate[s] the past for present agendas" (ibid., 601–602). Due to limited findings of trans individuals in historical texts as well as to concerns about ineptly applying contemporary gender identity categories and concepts to the past, Eastwood modifies his approach to trans literature towards a practice of "resonant reading". Instead of aiming for recognition through identification, this approach directs its attention to the portrayal of relatable experiences and topics by emphasizing the importance of "similarities and affinities" (ibid., 595). Eastwood's proposition implies that it is possible to acknowledge the desire of marginalized readers to affectively connect with (metaphorical) expressions of transness without explicitly having to designate historical and literary characters as trans.

In addition to the distinction between queer and trans as identities, however, it becomes evident that queer and trans readings also diverge in terms of their analytical focus. Beyond their critique of heteronormativity, queer readings are suitable to challenge the very notion of norms and binaries and offer a subversive approach to interpreting texts. This usually involves reading texts against the grain, 'queering' them, so to speak, in

order to highlight their subversive potential. On the other hand, trans readings are not inherently queer in the sense of contesting norms. As Eastwood and Holmqvist critically discuss, trans readings rather reflect the desire to read about transness. The effort to identify and recover 'lost' trans ancestors is frequently part of this, but requires careful scrutiny. Trans readings of historical texts, however, allow to highlight the importance of both reclaiming archives and establishing subcultural canons as strategies to counteract erasure.

In the context of approaching archives from a marginalized perspective, Saidiya Hartman's works about the archive of slavery propose a method of transparently expressing personal reading desires *and* engaging them creatively. Hartman's (2008, 10–11) concept of *critical fabulation* involves a fusion of historical research and speculative fiction and addresses the gaps and systematic silences within archival records, where the lives of the enslaved merely appear as dehumanized objects or corpses. By imaginatively reconstructing the experiences of these individuals without aiming to provide closure, Hartman creates counter-histories that challenge hegemonic historical narratives and epistemologies and offers a broader comprehension of the past, including its continuities into the present. "Loss gives rise to longing", Hartman writes, "and in these circumstances, it would not be far-fetched to consider stories as a form of compensation or even as reparations" (ibid., 4). Hartman's textual desire can thus be understood as a desire for text itself, emerging from the lacuna of such texts due to power relations within historiography. Hartman's perspective makes it possible to acknowledge the desire of marginalized individuals to encounter their own reflections in history and literature and to reconceptualize this desire as a valid and imperative response to their absences. By situating her textual desire within the context of slavery, the act of reading with desire emerges as an essential form of resistance against systematic violence.

As observed, both the text and the readers bring their desires to the reading process, forming a relationship whereby they mutually affect and shape but also potentially contradict each other. Building upon Ahmed, I interpret textual desire as a dynamic force that circulates between the text and the reader. In the upcoming analysis of *Confessions of the Fox*, I will examine the various textual desires that emerge both from the text and its readership. I will specifically analyze how the desires for representation, recognition, and touch, as well as the desires for community, subversion, and resistance, are manifested in the reading of the novel. At the same time, I will explore how these desires interact and contrast with the desire to authenticate, know, and categorize. By examining these dynamics, I aim to uncover how *Confessions of the Fox* incorporates and subverts these various desires in order to challenge dominant trans narratives and contribute to a more diverse literary landscape.

### Encountering a mysterious body of text

As mentioned earlier, *Confessions of the Fox* is a metafictional work that involves the reimagination and retelling of the life of Jack Sheppard, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century thief and jailbreaker from London, as a trans individual. The narrative situation of the novel is intricate and multilayered: the author Jordy Rosenberg presents his first-person narrator, Dr. R. Voth, a literary scholar in the contemporary, slightly dystopian New England, as being confronted with a mysterious manuscript: "A mashed and mildewed pile of papers, easily overlooked. And yet, a rare and perplexing find. The lost Sheppard memoir?" (x). This narrative situation of finding intriguing archival material, in turn, mirrors a situation that Rosenberg himself experienced during research. In a conversation with the writer Andrea Lawlor, Rosenberg relates that



*Confessions* is based in research I did on primary source documents about the 18th century's most notorious prison-break artist: a real person named **Jack Sheppard**. What I'd noticed about that archival material was that it repeatedly presented Jack as very genderqueer—he was generally described as very lithe and effeminate and impossibly sexy. [...] I wanted to run with this connection I found in the archives between gender queerness and hatred of/escape from capitalism, and sort of literalize it as an explicitly fictional—actually almost science fictional—trans origin story. (Rosenberg & Lawlor 2018; emphasis in original)

Rosenberg's desire to write about Jack Sheppard (and thus re-write the Sheppard archive) originates from his encounter with descriptions of the thief in the archive which he perceives as genderqueer. As he reads, he experiences a resonance and affinity towards Sheppard, much like the method of resonant reading suggested by Eastwood. In contrast to Eastwood, however, Rosenberg deliberately and joyfully appropriates history for his endeavor, motivated less by the need for queer survival, as expressed by Hartman and Sedgwick, than by the pleasure of engaging in queer and trans readings, resulting in the re-writing of trans history.

Like a thriller, the narrative of *Confessions of the Fox* unfolds around the mystery about the nature of the manuscript which seems not to have been read in years (xi). In a fictional preface, Dr. R. Voth introduces himself as trans ("guy by design") (xii) and as the editor of the manuscript which, according to Voth, contains the supposedly real story about the transmasculine thief and jailbreaker Jack Sheppard. Voth also confesses that he took the manuscript and went into hiding with it, where he now wants to publish it "'independently' of the Publisher's desires and control [...] with all my original footnotes" (xiii). The text presents the reader with a situation they curiously want to make sense of, and in this way, the text itself becomes the object of desire because the mystery can only be solved

by reading. The figuration of the text as the desired other is underlined when Voth tenderly caresses "the soft, eroded pages of the manuscript" (xi) while transcribing its words for publication and developing a more and more protective relationship towards it. The manuscript longs to be touched by Voth just like *Confessions of the Fox* wants to be read by the reader. In their article about the limited accessibility of transgender archival materials, K. J. Rawson (2009, 138) speaks about the importance of the "tactile experience of touching the past".<sup>5</sup> Briefly touching a folio by Shakespeare made them experience a powerful emotional reaction of excitement leaving them with a feeling of satisfaction. When explicitly being invited to touch S&M toys during a "museum-like display in the Historical Society's suite commemorating the Folsom Street Fair", the author even started to imagine "being touched back" (ibid., 139). Rawson sums up that "touching artifacts is a desirable and pleasurable experience" which "is a deeply affective moment" and creates a "particular kind of relationship" (ibid., 139–140). Heather Love's work informs Rawson's understanding of the queer touch going beyond being just "laced with desire" (ibid., 140). With Love, Rawson suggests that such touch can also trigger feelings of shame through an "identification with history" of social marginality. Overall, Rawson emphasizes the importance of historical archives as places where a "meeting of desires, of touches" can take place (ibid., 139–140).

As we have seen, when Voth runs his hands over the ailing pages of the manuscript, touching the past plays a vital role in shaping the affective experience within the narrative of *Confessions of the Fox*. The physical act of discovering, reading and touching the pages is essential for the novel, as it emphasizes the significance of an immediate and sensual interaction

5 The aspect of the tactile with regard to queer histories has also been discussed by Elizabeth Freeman (2007; 2010), Heather Love (2009) and Carolyn Dinshaw (1999).

with the past. Moreover, it is the allure of the manuscript's mystery which is particularly captivating. Similar to Voth, the reader is driven to uncover the manuscript's contents, authorship, and historical validity. As proposed by Barthes and Wolf, the textual desire expresses itself as an enticing enigma, drawing the reader into a compelling journey of discovery. The reader joins Voth, who himself is unsure of how to assess the manuscript because its origin, authorship and narratee are uncertain: "The manuscript was confounding, its authenticity indeterminate" (ix). Reading immerses them in what Barthes (1975, 10) refers to as the Oedipal pleasure of "learn[ing] the origin and the end" and as Barthes and Wolf suggest, engaging with mysteries and the unknown can be a pleasurable experience.

The novel presents the reader with multiple layers of text. Besides the extradiegetic level of the fictional preface, there is the first intradiegetic narrative consisting of the mysterious manuscript's story about Jack Sheppard. Additionally, the readers also receive Voth's footnotes at another intradiegetic level, which, quite boldly, go beyond the usual brevity and content of footnotes. These footnotes, in a metafictional twist, become a narrative of their own.<sup>6</sup> The act of commenting upon the manuscript via footnotes conveys the impression that Voth is reading the manuscript at the same time as the readers which creates complicity between them as a reading community. This complicity is further strengthened by addressing the readers directly and intimately ("You may not know this, but") (xii), invoking them as readers ("READER! I have some urgent news to convey") (258) and, in a digressive manner, sharing more (personal details) with them than is commonly permissible in footnotes. Like this, Voth creates a strong and emotionally intimate bond with the readers. Similarly, the manuscript and the footnotes enter a relationship between two intertwining bodies of text.

6 A similar example of excessively commenting on a fictional text, in this case a poem, can be found in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962).

Footnotes are usually meant to explain, comment, or translate noteworthy aspects of a main text. Indeed, the manuscript is not easy to read as it is full of words of real or imagined 18<sup>th</sup>-century rogue slang like "quim" (5), "Muff", "Tuzzy-Muzzy" (10) or "customs-house" (30) – which ultimately all mean 'pussy'. On first impression, the footnotes, even if they consistently interrupt a linear reading flow of the manuscript, do their job by annotating unintelligible 18<sup>th</sup>-century rogue jargon and offering translation into today's language. In this sense, making the manuscript intelligible to today's readership means transferring concepts and words of the past to present understandings. Relatively quickly, however, it becomes clear that Voth does not perform this job reliably. Jess Arndt (2018) points out that his translation is a very subjective selection, since terms that are less in need of translation, such as 'sugar stick' are translated, while other terms that are much more in need of an explanation have none.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Arndt suspects "some kind of disruption/refusal at the formal level". In addition to textually appropriating the margins and exercising control over the interpretation of the text through selective translation and commentary, Voth's deliberate emphasis on explicit language for genitals and his 'unprofessional' storytelling in the footnotes can be interpreted as an intentional rejection of the act of translation itself, or, put otherwise, as a defiance of intelligibility. In this way, refusing to give any translation of a possibly unintelligible body expresses a refusal to objectify and commodify the (trans) body by willfully making it inaccessible and thereby inconsumable for the ones who are not able to read it.

7 These terms include, for example, 'mutt' (5), 'Yeoman' (6), 'Polhem Lock' (18), 'Smicket' (41), 'smish' (44) or 'snabblers' (208). Also, when Bess and Jack meet for the first time, Bess initiates a conversation in cant in order to find out if the two of them speak the same language, asking Jack "'D'you jaw the bear garden?'†", to which he replies "'I do flash‡.'" (42). In the corresponding footnotes († and ‡), Voth only points out that the two "Speak in underworld tongues/speak cant", but does not 'translate' what they say, allowing them to keep the intimacy of the moment for themselves.

This refusal of intelligibility becomes very clear, for example, when Rosenberg's parodistic depiction of the molesting publisher Sullivan wants Voth to submit a painted illustration of Jack's genitalia (272). Sullivan is convinced that "READERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO VISUALIZE" (132; capitalization in original) and insistently requests a picture from Voth ("WHERE IS THE 'PICTURE' OF THE 'HUMAN CHIMERA' GENITALIA AS INDICATED ABOVE?") (134). His request arises from the fact that, within the manuscript narrative, Jack is examining an illustration that depicts "a *certain area* of a human Chimera" (134; italics in original). But rather than containing the expected image, the manuscript instead displays an abstract, literally unreadable page (133). Voth speculates that this page was inserted by "the original author" (134) of the manuscript, but interestingly, it bears a striking resemblance to the famous marbled page from Laurence Sterne's (1759–1767) *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.<sup>8</sup> In order to be left in peace by Sullivan, Voth eventually responds to his request, but gives him a googled picture of a 'waterlogged slug' from a garden book which he photoshopped onto a "pitted and moth-eaten page" (272) to make it look 'authentic'. The picture indeed works to satisfy the publisher's voyeuristic desire to visualize non-cis genitalia: "He motherfucking loved it" (272). This joke, in turn, provides additional joy for the readers through the joint conspiracy with

8 Monika Schmitz-Emans, for example, highlights the significance of the marbled page's constitutive presence in Sterne's novel, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between the terms text and book: "a novel like *Tristram Shandy* forcefully emphasizes that there is no abstract, 'naked' text of a printed book, as there is always an element of typographic and page design staging involved" (Schmitz-Emans 2020, 96; my translation). By this, Schmitz-Emans understands the book as a body, not just a text. The same "sense for the *aesthetic-reflexive*, the *poetological* potentials of these [typographic] effects" (ibid., 99; my translation; italics in original) is thus true for Rosenberg's novel. To underline the self-reflexivity of *Confessions of the Fox*, Sterne is also referenced (107) and can be understood as an important influence on Rosenberg's work.

Voth against the 'evil' publisher. The joke, however, can simultaneously be interpreted as a sincere effort to protect trans bodies from voyeuristically being exposed, sensationalized, and objectified, thereby addressing the question of how to ethically engage with trans histories.

However, Sullivan's intentions go beyond merely visualizing non-cis genitalia and presenting them as a shocking or fascinating spectacle for a cisgender audience. As an editor working for a profit-driven company, he also seeks to authenticate the manuscript in order to make it commercially available and utilize it as a promotional tool for a new testosterone product. He needs Voth to authenticate the manuscript in order to "*take exclusive ownership of that manuscript, copyright and sell it*" as "*the earliest authentic confessional transgender memoirs in Western history*" (122; italics in original). The character Sullivan thus embodies the capitalist and cisheteronormative desire for possession, identification, classification, and essentialization. At the same time, the novel links capitalism and cisheteronormative epistemologies in a way that they cannot be understood independently of each other and portrays how they are acted out on the trans body.

### Desire for community

Voth takes the relationship between himself as the narrator and the readers one step further by not only cultivating an attentive readership, but also by involving the readers in his enigmatic and potentially illicit undertakings as confidants. He shares his intimate secrets and creates a distinct division between a "*we*" (Voth and the readers) and a "*they*" (others outside of the intimate circle):

I took the manuscript because I could not help but take it once I realized it was trying to communicate something. Something just for us. And if you are reading this, then you know who I mean.

And you're like: *Don't say too much! What if this publication has fallen into the wrong hands?*

Don't worry.

Even if I were saying – *hypothetically speaking* – that this is a code, they will never be able to read it.

There are some things you can see only through tears. (xiv; italics in original; underlining mine)

Who is this *us* and who are *they*? The *us* is established as knowing and cautious and seems to be an exclusive community of insiders because the *us* is able to read the code whereas the *they* is not. Even if the text is in plain sight, there are different ways of seeing, reading, perceiving and making sense of it. Voht points out that there is a way to “see only through tears” (xiv), but with water in one's eyes, one is usually not able to see clearly. Through a filter of water, instead, one only sees a slightly distorted, estranged version of reality. Estrangement, in turn, and drawing on the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky, can be considered as “the most vital capacity of art” (Dickson 2021, 206). Estranging the perception of the everyday makes it possible to gain another perspective and see it anew (ibid.). In a similar vein, Sonny Nordmarken (2014, 41) emphasizes the significance of a perspective informed by the expression of vulnerability when stating that “perhaps speaking through my wounds can create a new way of seeing”. The estrangement here is caused by tears which come from sadness and pain. The community of insiders shares this experience. Although sadness and pain are requisite for seeing, seeing itself is experienced as pleasurable and joyful because its exclusive nature, in knowing something others don't, makes it a pleasure. This epistemic difference, as Sabine Fuchs points out, results in an erotic relationship between the knowledgeable and the text:

Exercising subcultural competencies in reading, viewing, decoding is eroticized by establishing a relationship of power and knowledge: Being able to decode something that others do not know is experienced as pleasurable. (Fuchs 2009, 154; my translation)

So, the *us* knows more than the *they*. The *us* is equipped with a queer literacy through the shared experience of marginalization, that allows it to decode the text and thereby enjoy it. *Confessions of the Fox* does refuse its legibility. But only towards the *they*. The *they*, however, only exists within the fictional world because every person who actually reads the text, every reader of the text, automatically becomes part of the exclusive community, granted this special status by reading the text. The reader is invoked as such and drawn in through affection. In this process, the reader is not only addressed and affected, but even appropriated. One cannot and maybe does not want to resist the appellation because being part of the *us* feels good and thrilling. It is a lustful submission to the text, an erotic subjectivation. By engaging in reading the text, the reader emerges not only as a reader but is made a subversive and queer subject.<sup>9</sup>

Creating a queer community of readers, in turn, is crucial for trans literacy, which refers to the ability to recognize and understand someone's trans identity within a shared subculture. Since “it's not only interactions with strangers that form the core of self-realisation”, there is, says Jules Joanne Gleeson (2021, 77), also another perspective which focuses instead “on trans communities, which perform the central work of reciprocal

<sup>9</sup> A limitation of these remarks, however, is the fact that the readability and especially the enjoyability of the text also depends to a not inconsiderable extent on an existing knowledge of academic discourses on the part of the reader, since the footnotes are packed with references to other works, which, if not already known, also want to be read (someday). At the same time, however, the numerous references highlight the significance of intertextuality for the novel, showing that a text always exists as part of a broader context.

recognition” (ibid., 71). Trans people are encouraged, inspired, and empowered to transition by meeting other peers. Affinity-based trans communities “provide a context or ‘space’ for the articulation of new language, lifestyle developments, and culture” (ibid.). Within these spaces, it is less about passing as a man or woman through an intelligible binary performance of gender than about a space for mutual recognition as trans. The encounter within this space circulates around the perception of certain codes and signs and the conception of the other as self, as part of the same subculture. While trans individuals can be recognized, acknowledged and supported by other trans individuals, as Gleeson describes, *Confessions of the Fox*, however, mainly depicts intimate relationships between a trans individual and a person who can be understood as femme (Jack and Bess; Voth and his ex). Like this, the narrative transcends a t4t support framework and directs attention to a rich tradition of trans/butch-femme dynamics within a queer subculture. It underscores the essential role of allies and lovers in supporting and validating trans individuals, even if they may not personally identify as trans. In addition to the decoding skills of queer literacy, *Confessions of the Fox* portrays the existence and importance of trans literacy which involves recognizing, appreciating, and desiring trans individuals, while also emphasizing the indispensable role of community.

The encounter between Jack and his lover Bess serves as a poignant example to underscore this profound significance of trans literacy. When Bess, a radical PoC femme intellectual and sex worker, and Jack meet at a pub for the first time, Bess perceives him as “her boy” (41), whereupon Jack introduces himself to her for the first time with the name Jack, “*saying himself into being*” (43; italics in original). Uttering this name, however, triggers in him a sense of shame, dissociation, and alienation, yet these sensations transform into a feeling of embodiment as soon as he hears Bess say his name in turn. The recognition, the acknowledgment as well as the invocation of the other take on the meaning of an act of creation, of

a coming into the world. It is the encounter with the desired and desiring other which is mutually constituting.

However, Jack continues to experience deep insecurities when it comes to being seen by Bess, particularly when contemplating the vulnerability of a more intimate encounter that would expose his body: “But Jack didn’t know how to do this – to *stay*. More properly, to *stay Seen* [...] Show himself to her – as what?” (68; italics and capitalization in original). Despite Jack’s heightened self-consciousness regarding his genderqueer appearance which defies conventional gender categories, he discovers profound acceptance and understanding when he opens up to Bess about his insecurities, admittedly engaging in playful flirtation along the way:

Jack look’d down at himself. ‘Do you think I’m a Monster?’ He said this half-shamed but half – something Else.

If she said *no* it would be the wrong answer.

Same with *yes*.

‘Well, you’re *Something*.’

How did she know his word – his secret Word for what was behind the door in himself that he could not open? (109; italics and capitalization in original)

Jack does not have to conform to societal expectations of being either male or female because Bess is able to perceive him for who he is, acknowledging his wish to be seen in a way that aligns with his understanding of self. Coming up with an answer beyond yes or no, Bess reassuringly recognizes Jack’s difference without perceiving him as other, which ultimately allows him to feel seen. Unlike Jack, however, the other protagonist Voth confidently embraces the name of the monster when discussing it within the narrative of the footnotes. Nevertheless, Voth remains mindful of the

intention and the identity of the person who uses that term: “Relax: I’m reclaiming the term. I *like* it. I mean, when uttered in certain contexts out of certain mouths” (76; italics in original). Overall, Voth emphasizes the significance of considering who speaks, names, and discloses information when he states that “there’s a difference between a confession one wants to give, and one that is taken” (109). According to Voth, it is precisely the thoughtful approach to storytelling within the manuscript which he understands as evidence of the document’s authenticity, because it refrains from voyeuristic descriptions of Jack’s genitals and avoids revealing his deadname, among other things.

The encounter and subsequently unfolding romance between Bess and Jack is even more significant when we consider the difficulty of being desired and desirable as a trans body within a cisheteronormative society. Even in the playful context of their flirtatious exchange, Jack’s underlying fear of rejection due to his gender nonconforming appearance is expressed when he asks Bess if she considers him a monster (109). Trans activist and journalist Riki Anne Wilchins (1997, 120) points to the fact that within a cisheteronormative matrix, the trans body is not desirable because it is a body which – seen from a cis perspective – might be confusing. This confusion often leads to rejection, abjection, revulsion and potentially also physical violence. Alternatively, Sandy Stone (2006, 231) suggests that the trans body is desirable precisely because its gendered dissonances create sexual tensions which open up “entire spectra of desire”. In this sense, Jack is not only desired by Bess because he was just ‘lucky’ to meet someone with a trans fetish, but because Bess is capable to affectively comprehend how desirable he is *and* recognize his humanity.

Furthermore, in the novel, Jack’s breaking out of prison where he is thrown into as a result of his thievery is portrayed as an event that garners cheers and admiration from the crowds in London. In this context, it is not difficult

to interpret the prison cell as a metaphor for the restrictive confines of the gender binary, which Jack seeks to challenge and break free from. And it’s exactly his skillful act of escaping from confinement that makes the crowds adore him.

### Paradigm shift, metalepsis and redefining authenticity

I must once again return to the enigmatic nature of the manuscript because the manuscript, too, as a textual body escapes generic classification. Initially, Voth is not sure about how to understand the manuscript and approaches it against the backdrop of common notions of textuality. He assumes that there must be one author and that the manuscript could be the authentic memoir of the real Jack Sheppard. Later on, Voth finds out that it is a collectively written text which is co-created by a multitude of unidentified authors and has been written throughout the centuries without having been claimed as one author’s intellectual property. While reading the manuscript, Voth becomes more and more suspicious of his understanding of it because he encounters omissions regarding Jack’s name of birth as well as anachronistic references. The collective authorship is considered by Voth as “the only explanation for the many generic irregularities and impossible references that populate this text” (260). After understanding that the manuscript is an unfinished textual body to which changes can be made and which is in fact deeply enriched by these additions he too adds a new, final sentence to the manuscript, turning from being a reader into a writer. As he himself becomes another co-author of the manuscript, he transgresses the boundaries between the diegeses, resulting in metalepsis.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the manuscript turns out to be

<sup>10</sup> Diegesis is a term used to refer to the fictional universe created by a narrative. Metalepsis, in turn, is a rhetorical figure or narrative device in which a narrative makes a self-referential intrusion by transgressing the boundaries between the

the embodiment of a *writerly* text which not only wants to be read and touched but also written and transformed.

It is also shown that Voth had to go through a paradigmatic shift in perspective first in order to approach the text. This paradigmatic shift primarily consists in affectively opening up to an understanding of the manuscript within its own terms:

I must confess that I believe my own attachment to the text clouded my ability to recognize the glaring obviousness of this collective authorship earlier. I was looking for the reflection of a single subject when I should have been looking for something else. (259)

Like this, textual desire can also take on a form of intimacy and closeness that moves the reader to identify with the text and ultimately approach it in an affective way. Voth is fascinated by the text, although, or perhaps because, he cannot make sense of it while at the same time developing an affinity toward it. However, Voth's shift in perception highlights the inherent epistemological constraints of his desire to find reflection and affirmation of his existing knowledge within the text. On the other hand, the shift in perspective has to be understood as a learning process which entails the potential for (self-)transformation, for broadening one's own horizon, if otherness and difference are respectfully encountered.

The metalepsis, the transgression of the diegetic levels, ultimately serves as a means to express the yearning for two bodies to touch and connect across disparate temporalities. Voth's captivation with the manuscript arises primarily from the revelation that the purportedly 'authentic' Jack Sheppard is actually trans. The two narratives of Sheppard and Voth,

---

otherwise separated narrative levels. In simpler terms, metalepsis occurs when elements from one level of a narrative enter or influence another level.

past and present, progress side by side, and the relationship between the two bodies of text develops along shared experiences, or affinities. Voth's present-day narrative is intricately linked to the manuscript from the past through the use of footnotes. These footnotes hook into the text of the manuscript, sprinkling it with small symbols, while the act of reading one body of text stimulates the writing of the other, establishing a dynamic relationship which "with the help of what is written and what is said nurtures the other's desire to write and speak for themselves" (Duval 2023, 28; my translation).

Furthermore, by interacting and touching each other, emotionally and literally, the two bodies subvert their conventional hierarchization as main and secondary text. At the same time and as a result of sharing the same pages, their mutual engagement challenges the conventional understanding of temporality, which portrays the present and the past as separate entities progressing in a linear succession. Here, instead, the present hooks into the past to convey its narrative, simultaneously highlighting the parallels and differences between the two protagonists Jack and Voth.

Through its intricate narrative structure, the novel conveys the desire for a trans ancestor. As the memoir unfolds, Voth's initial fascination with the enigmatic manuscript transforms into a desire that encompasses more than just historical recognition. It encompasses the pleasure of recognizing oneself in another and a desire to build a community across time without claiming a continuity of trans history. Simultaneously, *Confessions of the Fox* reveals a self-critical reflection of Rosenberg's and also Voth's yearning to read about trans ancestors in history. The device of self-irony is crucial for Rosenberg to make his own desire for Jack Sheppard's trans identity clear, as well as to distinguish it as his own reading desire for trans histories. This is done to challenge a potential cis-heteronormative perspective that might view Sheppard solely as a cisgender man. Thereby, the re-articulation of

authenticity and the possibility to playfully subvert authenticity within the historiographic metafictional realm is of paramount importance.

The redefinition of authenticity is initially conveyed through the ethical approach to writing trans histories (“*I consider this elegant declining-to-describe to be strong evidence of the document’s authenticity*”) (109; italics in original) and is then predominantly exemplified through the paradigm shift experienced by Voth. Regarding textuality, a normative understanding of authenticity attributes a text to one author exclusively who performs a particular role in legitimizing the purpose of that text (cf. Foucault 1979). But here, the manuscript has been written by so many authors that it is impossible to attribute singular paragraphs or sentences to one person. At the same time, it becomes evident that the unambiguous attribution of authors to texts is a crucial aspect of a capitalist paradigm which is driven by the need for commodification. Through the multiplication of authorship, the traditional notion of the author as the sole originator and creator is thoroughly deconstructed. Instead, the manuscript evolves into an object of utility rather than a mere commodity, fostering an interactive relationship based on affinity between the text and the reader. The reader potentially even becomes part of the textual body by turning from a reader into a co-writer. Authenticity is thereby redefined in the sense that the alteration of the manuscript by subsequent readers does not cause it to lose its value, but instead makes it truly salient and even “the most valuable Sheppard document ever discovered” (260). The manuscript is thus truly authentic because it is formed by and for a community and has the power to affect its readership.

Nevertheless, the topic of authorship holds further significance insofar as discussing the textuality of the manuscript can also be extended to addressing gender. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004) notes that gender is created through a process of interaction and collaboration with

others, making it impossible to attribute one single author:

Moreover, one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my ‘own’ gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself). (Butler 2004, 1)

Exploring the concept of authorship in the manuscript as well as considering Butler’s insights on authorship regarding gender, *Confessions of the Fox* draws a parallel between the authorship of a text and the authorship of one’s own gender. Thereby, the conventional understanding of authorship as an individual, autonomous act is not only challenged but also critiqued as a capitalist practice. Expanding the conversation on authorship to encompass discussions on gender offers an opportunity to reveal the complex interplay of power structures and communal agency in shaping (textual) bodies. However, it is crucial to acknowledge a limitation to the deconstruction of authorship in the case of *Confessions of the Fox*. While the manuscript showcases collective authorship, Jordy Rosenberg still remains the only author of his novel published by the major publishing houses *Random House* (US/Canada) and *Atlantic* (UK). Although the extensive references to other authors and works in the footnotes could be seen as an attempt to emphasize the constitutive influence of existing literature on the creation of *Confessions of the Fox*, it is important to acknowledge that the novel’s publication is ultimately limited by the structural demands of the book market. Thus, deconstruction can be carried out within the realm of the narrated world, but outside of it, its application is limited.



## Conclusions

Rosenberg's historiographic metafiction provides the space for transformative encounters between the readers and the text by affectively engaging with the unknown. Both the trans body and the mysterious manuscript do not make themselves off-handedly legible to others and the legibility of the text and the intelligibility of the body are even refused to a certain extent, especially regarding a cis readership. However, those who are willing to engage in reading are initiated and this submission can be experienced as pleasurable as it entails joining a community of queer readers. *Confessions of the Fox* emphasizes the understanding of writing and reading as collective activities which are in themselves able to form subversive communities. In addition, the willingness of readers to engage with seemingly illegible texts demonstrates that they can tolerate a significant degree of uncertainty and illegibility and still persist in reading. Possibly, this very aspect creates opportunities for new and affective modes of connection in the face of encounters of otherness. By understanding the text and the body as analogies, exploring partly illegible expressions of textuality can also be applied to exploring non-intelligible forms of gender and sexuality. This may lead to the disruption (paradigmatic shift) and recreation (metalepsis) of established norms and existing affective arrangements.

As previously explored, the inquiry regarding authenticity (is this real?) is addressed through a redefinition achieved by examining the concept of authorship. The manuscript attains its authenticity by virtue of being a collective creation and involving its readers as active participants in the process of writing. When it comes to the question of recognition (what is this?), both Voth and Jack bring in the term 'something'. The vagueness conveyed by the abstract term 'something' suggests that both Voth and Jack refuse to draw on an existing term to encapsulate their experiences. Instead,

'something' implies a transcendence of conventional epistemologies, exceeding the binaries of yes and no, fact and fiction, man or woman etc. At the same time, the term also refuses to restrict itself to newly fixed or fixable meanings. After all, the question of what 'something' truly is can only be answered by 'it' itself, provided one engages oneself in a relationship with 'it' on its own terms.

The question of intelligibility, however, is intrinsically tied to the ethics of encounter, as both grapple with how to approach and establish connections with otherness. *Confessions of the Fox's* ethical approach to reading and writing trans (his)stories can be understood as a form of activism, emphasizing the importance of engaging with literature as a means to promote social change. Mainly through the creation of the fictional manuscript and its editor Voth, *Confessions of the Fox* substantially comments on the ethics of reading, writing, editing, and publishing by proposing a considerate approach to transness.<sup>11</sup> The character Voth, despite all his flaws and talkativeness, is created by Rosenberg as an example of how to ethically engage with a text. In the course of reading, Voth examines his own approach towards the manuscript and is willing to modify it and immerse himself in a learning process when he recognizes that the lens with which he is perceiving the text is not suited. Moreover, he shields the manuscript from the prying curiosity of the publisher as well as from the capitalistic demand for authentication. Voth's ethical approach towards storytelling and publishing thus mainly consists in

---

<sup>11</sup> Other than that, the narrative of *Confession of the Fox* encompasses various additional aspects where ethical values and social change are addressed. This is achieved, for example, by visibilizing racism, colonial struggles, Bess' support for the decolonization of the fens, or the historicity of the police and prison industry, to name but a few. Furthermore, an underlying Marxist analysis of capitalism is expressed through a critique of commodification and exclusive ownership as well as extended by giving commodities a voice.

taking a resolute stand against voyeurism and the possible exposure of trans bodies as well as against capitalistic modes of commodification. Since the narrative implies that Voth eventually becomes a member of an activist group whose goal it is to decolonize the archive through the act of editing (261), Voth's actions can be seen as a form of literary activism, aimed at promoting a more conscientious and respectful approach to working with texts that contain marginalized perspectives and experiences.

Through the lens of textual desire, the analysis of *Confessions of the Fox* has illuminated the inherent tensions between a desire for ownership, control, and commodification on the one hand, and a desire for connection and community on the other. Due to *Confessions of the Fox's* explicit metafictional discourse on topics such as authenticity, intelligibility, the interplay between text and body and the concept of authorship, the distinction between surface and subtext, as it has been both suggested and contested by queer reading approaches, as well as the need for queer decoding appeared less pressing. However, the presence of a queer code remained important in order to avoid exposure and, at the same time, create pleasure. The narrator, Voth, claims to employ coding to communicate with his readers and to protect the text from being appropriated. Additionally, Rosenberg (& Lawlor, 2018) reinterprets and rewrites the historical figure Jack Sheppard as a trans individual based on 'decoding' descriptions of Sheppard as "lithe and effeminate and impossibly sexy". By doing this, however, Rosenberg's decoding is not another attempt to recover a historical trans character lost or erased in the archives, but a playful engagement with resonances.

Irrespective of the historical accuracy of Sheppard being trans or not, Rosenberg is able to make history accessible and tangible through the literary. This enables readers to intimately connect with the narrative on a personal and emotional level. Furthermore, the act of re-telling history makes it possible to confront and challenge dominant narratives that have

historically marginalized or erased the experiences of queer and trans communities. This re-shaping of archives serves as a powerful means to amplify queer and trans voices and reclaim a rightful place within a broader historical discourse. Although Rosenberg is writing a story, not history, his writing results in re-shaping the archive by imaginative reinterpretation.

Additionally, by captivating a diverse array of readers, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, through a compelling narrative that establishes a close and intimate connection, *Confessions of the Fox* fosters a sense of community among its readers. Another form of activism depicted in *Confessions of the Fox* therefore resides in its affective retelling of trans history which places a profound emphasis on the practice of community-building, embodying the belief that community is vital for fostering solidarity and cultivating a shared sense of belonging. The emphasis on touch which runs through the narrative, expresses the importance of the encounter. By the recognition of similarity, the experience of affinity and resonance, and the possibility of active participation in the writing process, communities across time and space can be formed.

In this sense, desire exerts a powerful influence on subject formation, shaping not only the individual sense of self ('I') and the relational dynamics between individuals ('You'), but also collective identities ('We') and distinctions from others ('They'). Desire possesses the capacity to forge connections, foster closeness and intimacy and to create or dissolve boundaries. However, the desire of others (to possess) can also engender resistance and induce an urge to evade or oppose it. In essence, *Confessions of the Fox* advocates for a profound re-articulation of desire, shifting its focus from a yearning for possession to a genuine desire for connection.

*Confessions of the Fox*, in short, is a text which playfully engages with the tensions between factuality and fictionality. The novel prompts us to contemplate our approach to queer and trans history and the absence of

queer evidence in archives by speculatively re-imagining the past. It also highlights the significance of trans ancestors for those living today. Why do we seek their presence? What purpose do they serve? *Confessions of the Fox* critically emphasizes that the actual existence of these individuals is not as crucial as the imagination of their existence to stimulate engagement, form connections, and build communities. As Voth's paradigm shift points out, it is not a prerequisite to confirm the historical authenticity of trans ancestors in order to envision a past, present, and future.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2014. "Affect/Emotion: Orientation Matters. A Conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für GeschlechterStudien* 20 (2): 97–108.
- Arndt, Jess. 2018. "Jordy Rosenberg on Writing a Queer 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Love Story." *Electric Lit*, July 18, 2018. <https://electricliterature.com/jordy-rosenberg-on-writing-a-queer-18th-century-love-story/>.
- Barthes, Roland. 1975. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bennett, Jane. 2015. "Systems and Things. On Vital Materialism and Object-Oriented Philosophy." In *The Non-human Turn*, edited by Richard Grusin, 223–240. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Demčíšák, Jan. 2012. "Wenn das Begehren liest..." In *Slowakische Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 4 (1): 90–96.
- Devun, Leah, and Zeb Tortorici. 2018. "Trans\*historicités. A Roundtable Discussion". *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5 (4): 658–685.
- Duval, Elizabeth. 2023. *Nach Trans. Sex, Gender und die Linke*. Berlin: Wagenbach.
- Dickson, Nathaniel. 2021. "Seizing the Means: Towards a Trans Epistemology." In *Transgender Marxism*, edited by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke, 204–218. London: Pluto Press.
- Eastwood, Alexander. 2014. "How, Then, Might the Transsexual Read? Notes towards a Trans Literary History." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (4): 590–604.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. "What is an Author?" *Screen* 20 (1): 13–34.
- Fuchs, Sabine. 2009. "Das Paradox der sichtbaren Unsichtbarkeit. ‚Femme‘ im Feld des Visuellen." In *Femme! radikal – queer – feminin*, edited by Sabine Fuchs, 141–158. Berlin: Querverlag.
- Gleeson, Jules Joanne. 2020. "How Do Gender Transitions Happen?" In *Transgender Marxism*, edited by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke, 70–84. London: Pluto Press.
- Gorton, Kristyn. 2007. "Theorizing Emotion and Affect. Feminist Engagements." *Feminist Theory* 8 (3): 333–348.
- Gorton, Kristyn. 2008. *Theorizing Desire. From Freud to Feminism to Film*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gould, Deborah. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12 (2): 1–14.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2019. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Holmqvist, Sam. 2018. "Trans Readings. A Legacy from Myself to Myself." *lambda nordica* 23 (1–2): 185–197.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Kraß, Andreas. 2003. "Queer Studies. Eine Einführung." In *Queer denken. Gegen die Ordnung der Sexualität (Queer Studies)*, edited by Andreas Kraß, 7–30. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Kraß, Andreas. 2009. "Kritische Heteronormativitätsforschung. Der queer turn in der germanistischen Mediävistik." *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 28 (1): 95–106.
- Kraß, Andreas. 2015. "Kritische Heteronormativitätsforschung (Queer Studies)." In *Literatur- und Kulturtheorien in der Germanistischen Mediävistik: Ein Handbuch*, edited by Christiane Ackermann and Michael Egerding, 317–348. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Kruse, Meridith. 2019. "Sedgwick's Perverse Close Reading and the Question of an Erotic Ethics." In *Reading Sedgwick*, edited by Lauren Berlant, 132–140. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Lorenz, Chris, Stefan Berger, and Nicola Brauch. 2021. "Narrativity and Historical Writing. Introductory Remarks." In *Analysing Historical Narratives: On Academic, Popular and Educational Framings of the Past*, edited by Chris Lorenz, Stefan Berger, and Nicola Brauch, 1–26. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Nordmarken, Sonny. 2014. "Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness." *Qualitative Inquiry* 20 (1): 37–50.
- Rawson, J.K. 2009. "Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics." *Archivaria* 68 (2): 123–140.
- Rosenberg, Jordy. 2018. *Confessions of the Fox*. London: Atlantic.
- Rosenberg, Jordy, and Andrea Lawlor. 2018. "Jordy Rosenberg and Andrea Lawlor on Exploding Narrative Structure and Theory Posturing." *The Millions*, August 10, 2018. <https://themillions.com/2018/08/jordy-rosenberg-and-andrea-lawlor-on-exploding-narrative-structure-and-theory-posturing.html>.
- Schmitz-Emans, Monika. 2020. "Harlekine und Grabsteine – oder: Wie ediert man den Zufall? Zu den marmorierten und schwarzen Seiten in Laurence Sternes *Tristram Shandy* und ihrer Wiedergabe in neuen Roman Ausgaben." *editio* 34 (1): 96–122.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1985. *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stone, Sandy. 2006 [1991]. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 221–235. New York: Routledge.
- Wilchins, Riki Anne. 1997. *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion & the End of Gender*. Ithaca: Firebrand Books.
- Wolf, Benedikt. 2019. "Kritische Lektüren zu Sexualität und Literatur. Einleitung." In *SexLit. Neue Kritische Lektüren zu Sexualität und Literatur*, edited by Benedikt Wolf, 10–35. Berlin: Querverlag.

# ERIKOISSUOMALAISET

## Queer New Finns, Oral History, Affective Activism

*Kate Sotejeff-Wilson*

In a relatively homogeneous Nordic context like Finland, ethnic heterogeneity is more visible than it would be in a more diverse society. This intersects with sexuality and gender. How do new Finns (citizens or residents here, born elsewhere) who identify as queer (LGBTQIA+) narrate their place in Finnish history? How do they feel about the change they have (not) experienced? Where do they see the need for activism? The essay is based on personal histories of queer new Finns – *erikoissuomalaiset* – that I collected in 2021. The aim was to bring new Finns into a queer history of Finland’s last half-century, ever since 1971 when homosexuality was decriminalized.

What if you are not the only rainbow duck (*regnbågsankan*) in the pond, but the only one with a “foreign” accent, who “looks like you were not born here”? What if you have rights (e.g. to marry) where you were born, but not where you live (or vice versa)? How do sexuality and gender intersect with location and ethnicity? How do these intersections change, and who tells that story?

The narrators who responded to my qualitative questionnaire raised two issues. First, they felt they were shapers of Finnish history, but under-recognized. Second, they described being out as queer new Finns as

activism, which I hope to show was also affective. Building on an emerging concept of affective activism (Juvonen et al. 2022) and the 50-year-old feminist slogan “the personal is political” (Kelly 2022), I see affect (feelings, emotions, what moves us) as fuel for activism (working for, moving to change). By telling their stories, the narrators effectively and affectively enabled community with other queer new Finns.

### **Erikoissuomalaiset: extraordinary Finns**

Some Finns are extraordinary.

The *Perussuomalaiset* (“basic, ordinary,” sometimes called “true” Finns) is an anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQIA+ party in Finland. At the time of writing (April 2023) they are the party with the second-largest number of MPs, voted in on a platform of “make Finland great again.” You can translate *erikois-* as extraordinary or rare. So *erikoissuomalaiset* are extraordinary Finns. I invented this term as a form of resistance to being classified as not “basic, ordinary, or true” enough to be Finnish.

SQS  
1–2/2023

69

Queer Mirror  
Essay

Kate  
Sotejeff-  
Wilson



Image 1: Erikoissuomalaiset.

At Jyväskylä Pride in August 2019, at a radical stitching workshop in Vakiopaine bar (Radikaalit pistot 2019), I made this cross-stitch design for *erikoissuomalaiset* (Image 1). The lettering is in all the colours of the expanded Pride flag designed in 2018 by Daniel Quasar, including trans, nonbinary, and many skin colours. Along the bottom is a Finnish lake. Top left are two bats: *lepakko*, bat in Finnish, is slang for lesbian. On the right is a lupin, an invasive – or inventive? – species here (*vieraslaji tai vierailuva tähti?*). This was a direct response to the anti-immigration rhetoric of the Basic Finns party: MP Juha Mäenpää had just called immigrants “invasive species” (Niemi 2019). But pink and purple lupins are beautiful – especially on roadsides at midsummer – even if they are not “indigenous.”

We can turn the story around. Change the rhetoric. To do that, we have to tell our stories and weave them into the big story. Engage with how it feels to live with “Finnish first”; stitching is resisting. It can be a cross (angry) stitch! Knowledge production can be “paranoid,” looking for and starting with injustice, or “reparative,” beginning by imagining a possible future (Sedgwick 2003). In the radical stitching workshop, I was trying to do the latter, to acknowledge the injustice but to make a future imaginable. This can be an activist-historian’s task. To paraphrase N. K. Jemisin (2018), how long ‘til queer future month?

Extraordinary Finns are part of the story of queer Finland. We are born outside Finland; we are new Finns. We are LGBTQIA+, the term I used in my call for narrators. Aware it could be reduced to mean “not straight” (not unlike “non-white” for race) and create a new binary (Somerville 2020, 5), I use “queer” here for ease of reading.

What about the Finnish word *sateenkaari* (rainbow)? Queer old Finns (*kantasuomalaiset*) told their stories in a “rainbow-coloured” celebration of 100 years of Finnish independence: a collection of their blog posts was published online as *Suomi 100 – Sateenkaaren väreissä* or “Finland 100 – In Rainbow Colours” (Suomi100 2016). The rainbow on its cover is sanitized, which shows a problem with how the term *sateenkaari* may be



Image 2: Suomi100 cover.

used to gloss over, homogenize, and desexualize diverse queer experience (Mizielińska 2006). Looking at it, we might wonder: is this a children's bible story about Noah and the Ark, with heterosexual pairs of animals going in two by two, the unicorns missing the boat? Where are the pinks and purples, blacks and browns? Is half of the "rainbow" missing?

In her introduction (Suomi100 2016, 5–6), Katriina Rosavaara presents more nuanced picture than the cover: "Arts and culture institutions have to actively rewrite history, to create space for silenced voices and challenge racist and stereotyped perspectives... as part of the shared story [of a] diverse Finland."<sup>1</sup> For a conference paper (Sotejeff-Wilson 2021), I contrasted the narrations of these old Finns with those of the new Finns. Here, I focus on the new. My motivation remains to share untold stories.

The potential for "revision of memory" (Boyd and Ramírez 2012, 273) to straighten, or to queer, the story is great. We can reformulate heteronormative histories, as Tuula Juvonen (2002, 291; 2022) has done for museums. But who does the work of integrating minority perspectives into the majority cultural heritage story: is it always the minorities themselves, or the same few museum staff (Museovirasto 2021)? When multiple minority identities intersect, it gets harder to join the conversation. As queer immigrants with overlapping minority identities, the narrators could be described as "hard-to-reach."

## Storytelling as affective activism

My approach is intersectional because diversities are inseparable: it is not possible to talk about gender and sexuality without mentioning race and class. As Imogen Tyler (2021, 239–40, 252) has shown, we ignore class

<sup>1</sup> All English translations are mine.

at our peril, not least as it intersects with race and sexuality in the "violent practice of exploitation and social control" that is stigma.

As Ghassan Moussawi and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2020, 13–16) state, "Race and racialization, empire, and the transnational intersect... [in a queer rethinking of] our categories of analysis, particularly around what constitutes the 'national.'" Yet this has not always been taken into account in history:

You have gender studies, like postcolonial studies, separated from History, so that historians do not have to deal with these questions. This is how power operates. This process of excluding the thing from the institution that does not really want to deal with it (Hanna Järvinen in Gaudreau 2021, 170).

Silo thinking has affected queer history, too. For example, AIDS may be narrated separately as a gay or POC pandemic, though some work on this very intersection (Abdur-Rahman 2018). Yet race is just as constructed and unstable as sexuality (Barnard 2021). "We want to find ourselves, but also to be freed from categories, it is an interesting tension" (Fisher 2021).

Queer stories are hard to find. So much queer history is oral history. "To discover and to write the history of sexuality has long seemed to many a sufficiently radical undertaking in itself" (Halperin 1989, 273). Creating a queer migrant history can be a testimony (Boyd and Ramírez 2012, 9) or, as I suggest here, affective activism.

Storytelling is effective. Telling queer migrant stories means resisting a neoliberal narrative of "multicultural" diversity as choice: "We must do more than diversify happy object choices" (Ahmed 2010, 120, 159). The queer new Finns challenged how history is written, who writes it, and why. They described being out (being seen and heard as both queer and as new

Finns) as activism that was both affective and effective. They felt that their presence fuelled change. Becoming visible and audible, taking up public space, made a community including queer new Finns possible. By writing their stories, rather than having a place made *for* them as minorities by the majority, they were co-creating a future on an equal footing *with* all Finns.

Storytelling is affective. Halberstam (1998) calls weaving scraps of evidence into a story a scavenger methodology typical of queer studies; but stories we tell about our lives do not form a seamless linear narrative (Alasuutari 2020, 49, 52, 61). This is because we know things not only in our minds, but also in our souls and bodies (Salami 2020). Even if affect is more embodied, and emotion more social (Greyser 2012, 86), both impact on our storytelling. How the narrator and listener interact shapes how the story is told (Boyd and Ramírez 2012, 3–5, 113, 141), and the worlds we make. By writing their own stories, documenting their own “archive of me,” queer people can state: I exist, I happened (Riseman 2022, 69). As a text worker on the fringes of the academy, I resonate with Anne Balay’s idea that queer oral history is outside academy structures, and can be, as Shirleene Robinson calls it, a “debriefing space” for activists (Balay 2022; Robinson 2022). In calling for narrators, I tried to provide this debriefing space for affect. But rather than offering an oral interview, face to face, I sent a written invitation.

In a pandemic, as was the case when this material was gathered, bodies are more wary of interacting. It might be easier to tell stories at a safe distance, in writing. Finland has a long, strong tradition of written oral history (Pöysä 2018); The Finnish Literature Society regularly calls for Finns to write about their experiences for posterity (including of Covid-19, SKS 2020). Rather than focusing on the oral alone, Finnish researchers use the term *muistitieto* (memory studies) and engaged with these written oral histories, also from a queer perspective (Savolainen and Taavetti 2022, 11; Taavetti

and Juvonen 2022). In writing, respondents reflect on what is important to them at their own pace. I invited my narrators to record their experiences, to join this very Finnish memory studies tradition.

### Queer new Finnish narrators

To reach my narrators, I created an anonymous bilingual questionnaire in English and Finnish, tested it with queer friends and colleagues, both old and new Finns, and shared it using the snowball method. I shared the questionnaire in conjunction with Jyväskylä Pride in 2021. I emailed personal contacts, posted on the SQS email list, and in Facebook groups including SateenkaariSuomi (“rainbow Finland”), International Working Women of Finland and Foreigners in Jyväskylä. I emailed Finnish queer and immigrant NGOs, but if I received any response, it was “try SateenkaariSuomi.” That group is large, but largely Finnish-speaking; new Finns are present, not prominent (I only joined it to share the questionnaire). The most responsive were networks where I was active. This meant that respondents knew (of) me or knew someone who knew me. They were more likely to open up to me as a fellow queer new Finn, as I was more likely to understand them (on the pros and cons of researching “people like me” see Tooth Murphy 2020 and Traies 2020).

I received 15 respondents: 13 wrote in English and 2 in Finnish (translated here to preserve anonymity).<sup>2</sup> I have not tied quotes to people. In such a small community, this would compromise the anonymity I assured my narrators. Age-wise, 5 respondents were younger adults (aged 19–30),

<sup>2</sup> A few new Finns cannot claim to speak for all new Finns. Larger studies can; the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare concludes that “members of the queer community with a foreign background... experience both overt and covert forms of discrimination and experience exclusion from both queer and diaspora communities” (Czimbalmos and Rask 2022).



7 in midlife (31–50), and 3 older (51–70). By gender, four men, eight women, and three others responded. Sexualities were not asked about, but were written about.

My narrators are like me. I’m a white middle-aged middle-class migrant queer cis woman with a PhD: born in Wales to English and Polish parents, I moved from London to Mikkeli when I married a Karelian<sup>3</sup> in 2012, and live in Jyväskylä, Finland.

The narrators were *new* Finns – but not so new. Some had lived here for over two decades. One was born in Finland, the rest in Bangladesh, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Israel, the Netherlands, Scotland (2),<sup>4</sup> Switzerland, UK (2), US (2), and New Zealand. Most lived beyond the pale, or *susiraja* (Kehä 3, like London’s M25, outside which the “wolves” run): Jyväskylä 6; Helsinki 4; Espoo 2; Turku 1; Mikkeli 1; Not stated 1.

Narrators identified differently as *Finns* (see image 3).

Some cited other feelings of Finnishness:

I think I feel the Finnish soul.

I am cosmopolitan. From in between.

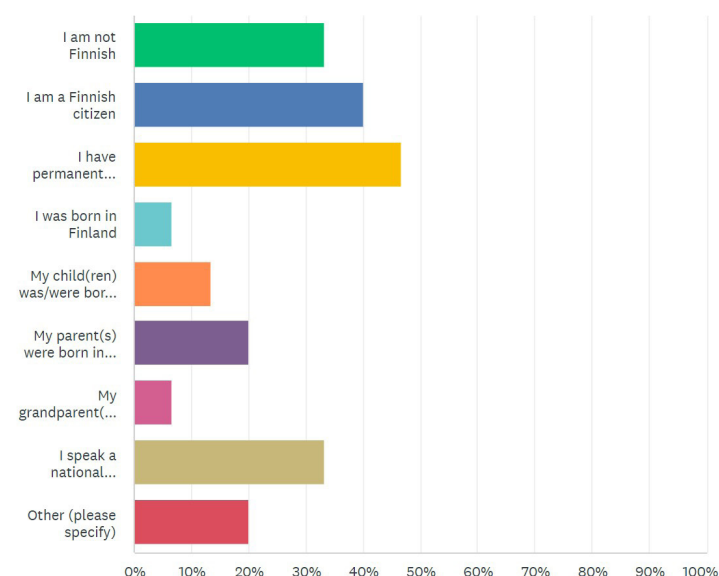
By now, I’m much more culturally Finnish than American, but I still don’t speak very fluently.

My key question was what change the narrators saw in their queer lives: How is the LGBTQIA+ community where you were born different from the one in Finland? How has [this community, in Finland] changed over the years?

3 Karelia has a strong identity on the borderland between Finland and Russia. On its oral history see Fingerroos 2008.  
4 Though Scotland is still in the UK, 2 narrators wrote it separately.

## Are you “Finnish”? What does that mean to you?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES

- ▼ I am not Finnish
- ▼ I am a Finnish citizen
- ▼ I have permanent residency in Finland
- ▼ I was born in Finland
- ▼ My child(ren) was/were born in Finland
- ▼ My parent(s) were born in Finland
- ▼ My grandparent(s) were born in Finland
- ▼ I speak a national language of Finland (Finnish, Swedish, Sami, Roma)
- ▼ Other (please specify) [Responses](#)

Image 3: Are you Finnish? Responses in English.

I suggested themes as prompts: Pride, rights, education, religion, politics, work, role of groups (trans, nonbinary, older people, children, men, women), their place in the queer/local/Finnish/global community. Not everybody resonated with every theme – but some wrote a lot about some, and I try to reflect this “gravitational pull” in the citations.

I gave the narrators a basic timeline of legal changes affecting queer people in Finland since 1971 and asked them to add personally important dates, to organize their stories.

- 1971 Homosexual acts stop being illegal in Finland
- 1981 Homosexuality stops being classified as an illness in Finland
- 2002 Parliament approves trans law in Finland
- 2017 Equal marriage is recognized in Finland

By close reading (Lentricchia and DuBois 2003), I first read each whole narrative, then the responses by question, several times, to pick out recurring themes. Aware of my insider–outsider status (Dwyer and Buckle 2009) – stepping out or back from inside the group of queer new Finns to research – I took a qualitative approach to how my narrators made meanings as queer new Finns.

## We write history from both ends

The narrators write history in their own “trans time” (Tuomenvirta 2022) or “queer time,” resisting the chrononormativity of a linear life story (e.g. birth-naming-marriage-children-death, see Tooth Murphy 2022, 163, 164). The queer new Finns experienced change in their lifetime – positive or not, fast or slow – but also “composed continuity” (Golding 2022, 84). Many narrators had lived in more states than their birth country and Finland. They freely compared, but also conflated places and times. They

prioritized what to narrate and how to link it chronologically. They chose their history.

The narrators saw history is an intergenerational enterprise, not written from before to after, or from old to young, but from both ends:

Older LGBTQIA+ people can also provide a more personal history of their experiences to younger kids, and I think programmes that fostered activities with queer youth and elderly people would be a really great way to break down some of the barriers and bring more understanding.

Unsurprisingly for the (mostly middle-aged) narrators, intergenerational “queer kinship” through oral history (Dahl et al. 2022) or “telling your story to your family” (Summerskill 2020) did not mean blood relations. Parents and children did not figure in the narratives. This generation may not have expected or wanted children, at least less so than younger queer folk. Their sense of companionship was as co-travellers, comrades, co-combatants, or growing together (Somerville 2020, 11–12) of friends as “chosen” family.

In what follows, I focus on four aspects that evoked strong emotional responses in the queer new Finns in their narrations: gender diversity, public space, religion, and racism. (Lack of) change in these fields had fuelled in them an urge to act.

## Amplify trans and nonbinary voices

The narrators felt that in Finland “here, now” it is easier than “there, then” for nonbinary and trans people to speak out, but their voices are not loud enough. This could be because Finnish has no gendered personal pronouns (unlike Swedish or English), making nonbinary people linguistically less visible. To say that nonbinary people “did not exist in America in the 90s!”

(as one narrator did) would be going too far, though new Finns saw them here and now:

I think, both at home and in Finland, NB [narrator's term for nonbinary] people are more invisible in a way. Our society is so gender-coded. I've had some acquaintances tell me if I've gotten their pronouns wrong and that they're NB, I appreciate that there's a level of comfort here that NB folks (and anyone else who's been misgendered) can speak up and say and know that they'll be respected and that the proper forms of address will be used.

New Finns expressed that trans people's voices need to be heard louder, especially when they talk about the pain of medicalization (unsurprisingly, given the care and control in Nordic welfare states) and violence from other queers:

From what I've heard, it's especially difficult to transition in some cases, you need special permission and therapy visits for the state to help which feels incredibly archaic.

I'm not sure if this has always been the case but it feels like TERFs now have a loud and mainstream presence. Lesbians have always been the vanguard for fighting for LGBTQI+ rights but to see a section of that community now working against Trans people is just so disheartening.

As I write this, the outgoing Finnish parliament has finally confirmed the new trans law (which remains inadequate as it excludes minors), meaning that trans adults no longer need a psychiatric diagnosis or sterilization [!] to obtain legal gender recognition (Amnesty 2023). So, trans and nonbinary voices are being heard, but not loudly enough.

## Expand queer public space

Queer events, venues, and ceremonies had affective importance for the narrators' lives. They narrated the contraction of this public space. Being safely out in public – as queer and as a new Finn – may have become more of a challenge over time. Activism – Pride as a protest – had also been diluted. Some narrators missed the larger and more flamboyant events in their larger (and more flamboyant?) birth countries:

I always joke that Helsinki Pride is the most straight Pride I've ever been to haha. I miss the strong and powerful scene. Big gay clubs and being comfortable with being out in public.

But in the Covid-19 pandemic, they had to mark Pride at home, online, or not at all:

I haven't taken part in Turku Pride as I wasn't in the country for 2019 and then obviously 2020 and this year were cancelled.

The sense of change – “Pride has grown a lot in Finland in the past 10 years. Jyväskylä had its first not so long ago” – was not always positive. 2021 saw a homophobic attack at Jyväskylä Pride beach party (Jyväskylän Seta ry 2021). Bigger events felt less of a protest, more commercial, and less inclusive, than they had been in the past:

Finnish Pride started from being a place where you acknowledged that you are part of the community, kind of like coming out publicly, instead of a protest. It has evolved over the years to be more like the American event, though.

commercial [Pride events] often feel like they're aimed at the white, cis-male gay community and that can drown out a lot of other identities. As a bisexual woman I only [feel] accepted if I am ...

with someone that isn't male-identifying or presenting. The times I've been with a cis-het man I have felt uncomfortable for both of us... I have lost a community I once felt safe in.

This contraction of queer space was felt all year round. Though virtual spaces are more accessible (Mustola in *Suomi100* 2016, 42), queer venues had often closed long before – and after – lockdowns (Sateenkaariyhteisöt ry 2023). Some narrators felt that “Finland does better than most” – others found queer spaces here too regimented. The culture of associations could play a role:

In Finland the most LGBT events are centralized and organized by some official authority like Seta. In Czechia there are plenty smaller independent groups.

While the narrators mourned the contraction of queer space, they could be affirmed in public as couples. Risking reading this within a neoliberal story arc, equal civil marriage (in Finland from 2017) felt like progress. Many new Finns had their relationship recognized earlier elsewhere:

I married my ex-wife in Holland because then it was not possible in Finland, but having children was not a problem (2008)

Some used (then straight) marriage to immigrate:

I got to Finland because I married my best friend, a gay man, to do so. We thought that marriage would never happen for same sex partners ever, so we might as well use our right to get married for good. Well, that changed!

This change is recent and rapid. But marriage in a church or another place of worship is still near impossible (Kallatsa 2022).

## Make religion queerer here

Although they have two “national” and thus public churches (Lutheran and Orthodox, state-funded through tax), Finns are reluctant to discuss religion publicly (Kimanen 2019). Affective queer activism exists in both the Lutheran (Alasuutari 2021) and Orthodox (Sateenkaariseura 2008) churches, but queer-friendly religious communities were not easy for the narrators to find. “Religion (e.g. LGBTQIA+ people in churches or mosques)” was one prompt I gave them. As a queer Catholic convinced that “religion is a queer thing” (Stuart 1997) and interested in its affects, not least how queer theology is “rethinking the Western body” (Loughlin 2007), I wanted to give fellow new Finns space to express how they feel queerness and religion intersect. They found this harder to do in Finland than elsewhere:

Judaism recognizes at least 6 gender identities in our religious texts and gender fluidity is recognized and accepted... decolonization in Judaism now ... is redefining our religion by our terms... it's literally written in our texts. The youth clubs I went to had openly gay youth workers... as inclusive as 1980's Britain could be... there I started to explore my own identity. I am not part of the Jewish congregation [in Finland], the language barrier makes it too difficult [and the less accepting] community is Orthodox.

It took new Finns longer to find accepting religious communities here – the ones that evangelize are likely less queer-friendly:

I've had a hard time being LGBTQ and also going to church. I've been thrown out of the “Free Church” (Vapaakirkko). For being gay. Seems they're not so free after all. Luckily there are now English-speaking Lutheran services in a church here where the people are welcoming.

None of my queer friends here are part of the church or religious at all.

Thus, new Finns may struggle to find affective spaces to act in as both religious and queer. Yet, they found it even harder to reach spaces free of racism.

## Call out rampant racism

The heterogenous narrators (born on at least five continents) had different experiences of racism (e.g., anti-Black, anti-Semitic, anti-Slavic). Did these queer new Finns “provincialize that Western sexual epistemology” (Baer 2020, 18) and act against it with a “queer of color critique” (Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz 2020, 16)? How did narrators express the impact of racism on their queer lives? Most narrators felt that homophobic discrimination had not changed over their years in Finland:

I’ve had a hard time in my work (as an orchestra musician) from a couple of religious people. The majority of people are OK with it. This hasn’t changed since I moved here 14 years ago. I’ve always been “out.”

In Finland I’ve had people shout slurs at me in the street... it came as a shock to experience it in Tampere by young people. I would not be ... as open about having a same sex relationship as in the UK but Finland has a very nice polyamory scene and people are mostly accepting of polyam relationships.

Crucially, narrators had moved into being an ethnic minority here which may make them more likely to notice racism. They raised issues of accent bias (Agarwal 2020, 78–82), exoticism in which European imperialism and sexual exploitation collide (Schaper et al. 2020), and the Finnish whiteness

that fails to acknowledge its own colonial history and present racism shaped “day-to-day” by “embodied and affective practices” (Hoegaerts et al. 2022, 10).

There is a toxic environment in white cis gay men that is very racist, I don’t see that in the other sections of our community. As a white-functioning woman I haven’t experienced racism but I have experienced orientalism and been exoticized and othered, both in the UK and Finland. More in cis-het men but has definitely from all gender identities.

There is a huge huge problem with bigoted beliefs in Finland and rampant public racism. I’m a co-founder of a community for international people, there isn’t a single meet up where discrimination isn’t mentioned.

The new Finns saw racism in the queer community, too:

LGBTQIA+ folks aren’t immune from racism, no one is. And because Finland is so homogenous, racism definitely abounds, more than I think many Finns realize or care to admit. I’ve certainly seen it and experienced discrimination, and I look like I could have been born here. Especially on Finnish social media, people openly comment and use slurs against darker-skinned people, even those trying to speak Finnish and integrate. There needs to be more efforts at diversity and inclusion and more strict consequences at school and work, even for micro-aggressions. Of course, the US is also riddled with racism, but in Finland, just on a smaller scale (and without guns).

This narrator drew a direct line between their experience of racism and the need to act. I had expected some queer new Finns to feel they were

not seen as “Finnish enough.” This was not true for all. As one respondent born in the US said:

Most of my LGBTQIA+ friends are Finnish.

The community is not small compared to e.g. Estonia. There are lots of people with foreign roots in Finland.

But for others, it was:

I think they are part of the fabric that makes Finland the strongly self-identifying and proud country it is... Finnish first, then LGBTQI.

Queer new Finns who felt they came second to “Finnish first” sought “more efforts” towards inclusion. Articulating their histories was a step in that direction.

## Chosen history and being out

Writing our own queer migrant histories can be self-documentation as liberation (see Rivers 2012, 64–65). The narrators chose what to document. Writing their histories, they expressed the liberation of being out, which they saw as fuelling change, or activism.

Chosen history aligns our place in time. Just as “chosen family” can be a positive alternative to biological family for many queer folks, I see (consciously or not) choosing the ancestry and heirs one aligns oneself, resisting chrononormativity, as writing a “chosen history.” The narrators chose places and times to align themselves with, and combined them in new ways to write their own chosen histories.

The narrators said little about how their birth culture(s) were present in Finnish queer culture. As a Scot responded: “In the local Finnish scene?

People love kilts.” Some did align with queerness in their own traditions, like the Jewish writer above, or this one:

Perhaps you’ve come across, in your research, *takatāpui*, homosexuals in traditional Māori culture. Interesting that that term has been around since before the colonization.

This writer may not be Māori, but was seeking roots in the same land (Sedivy 2021, 273ff.).

The narrators were aware of writing history, of taking a place in time. They parcelled up their pasts into the places in which they happened (“America in the 90s”; “youth club in the UK”). Thus, the narrators expressed an old idea that may resonate for migrants: “the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there” (L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 1953).

Narrators also emphasized their place in the history of Finnish queer culture. They saw themselves as not needing activism or advocacy from others, but as activists themselves (compare Krivonos, forthcoming 2024 on Ukrainian aid, activism, and migration). They did not want to be siloed as minorities needing majority help, but recognized as leaders:

Many very influential people in the community in Helsinki have been born abroad. The leader of HESETA, the head of the drag family Crackhouse, the leader of EGOW Helsinki for lesbians.

In this sense, being out as “born abroad” within the queer community was important, just as being out as queer was important in general.

Like I did with my cross-stitch introduced at the start of this essay, several narrators wrote to repair, to “spread positivity” for others by being out:

I want to combat the discrimination by gay men and straight women I face. But neither compare to the stigma and attacks ... gay men

used to face, that society slowly moved away from. I use 'bisexual' as a man, to destigmatize it... to spread sex positivity and throw away toxic programming influencing masculinity and relationships.

As in any society, [we bring] a different perspective, an addition to the culture, and just by being visible and out, change the conversation towards one of inclusion.

The queer new Finns challenged how history is written, who writes it, and why. They wrote themselves back into Finland's queer history, present, and future. In this sense, their being out can be seen as affective activism. Becoming visible and audible made a community including queer new Finns possible. This is history and future with all Finns. What other voices could "change the conversation towards one of inclusion"? Who else can weave into the big story?

### Acknowledgements

*Thank you above all to the narrators. Amy Tooth Murphy, Claire Summerskill, and Jane Traies, thanks for sending me your articles from OHJ 48(1). Thank you to the editors for their exceptionally constructive feedback. Thank you to the researchers I edit and translate for, whose ideas shape mine.*

### Bibliography

- Abdur-Rahman, Aliyyah I. 2018. "The Black Ecstatic." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24 (2–3): 343–65.
- Agarwal, Pragma. 2020. *Sway: Unravelling Unconscious Bias*. Bloomsbury Sigma Series. London: Bloomsbury Sigma.

- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Alasuutari, Varpu. 2020. *Death at the End of the Rainbow: Rethinking Queer Kinship, Rituals of Remembrance*. Turku: University of Turku.
- Alasuutari, Varpu. 2021. "Navigating the Affective Landscapes of Christian Queer Activism in Finland." Histories of Sexualities, Gender Diversity and Queer in the Nordic and Baltic Region Conference, October 26, 2021, University of Helsinki.
- Amnesty. 2023. "Finland: New Gender Recognition Law 'a Major Step towards Protecting Trans Rights'." *Amnesty International*. Published February 1, 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/finland-new-gender-recognition-law-a-major-step-towards-protecting-trans-rights/>.
- Baer, Brian James. 2020. *Queer Theory and Translation Studies: Language, Politics, Desire. New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Balay, Anne. 2022. "'I Gotta Go': Mobility as a Queer Methodology." In *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, edited by Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers, 143–150. London: Routledge.
- Barnard, Ian. 2021. *Queer Race*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Boyd, Nan Alamilla, and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, eds. 2012. *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Czibalmos, Mercédesz, and Shadia Rask. 2022. "Sexual and Gender Minorities Among the Foreign-Origin Populations in Finland: An Intersectional Analysis." Report, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-343-912-2>.
- Dahl, Ulrika, Joanna Mizielińska, Raili Uibo, and Antu Sorainen. 2022. "Introduction." In *Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Area*, edited by Ulrika Dahl, Joanna Mizielińska, Raili Uibo, and Antu Sorainen, 11–46. Huddinge: Södertörns Högskola.
- Dwyer, Sonya Corbin, and Jennifer L. Buckle. 2009. "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8 (1): 54–63.
- Fingerroos, Outi. 2008. "Karelia: A Place of Memories and Utopias." *Oral Tradition* 23 (2): 235–254.
- Fisher, Kate. 2021. "'I Couldn't Find Myself in History. No One like Me Seemed to Have Ever Existed.' Who Needs the History of Sexuality?" Histories of Sexualities, Gender Diversity and Queer in the Nordic and Baltic Region Conference, October 25, 2021, University of Helsinki.

- Gaudreau, Lynda. 2021. *The Almost Manual: On Asynchrony, Time Lapse, Choreography, and Extravagant Details in Life and Creative Process*. Helsinki: University of the Arts.
- Golding, Victoria. 2022. "Beyond Composure and Discomposure in a Shifting Queer Identity Narrative." In *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, edited by Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers, 83–91. London: Routledge.
- Greysen, Naomi. 2012. "Beyond the 'Feeling Woman': Feminist Implications of Affect Studies." *Feminist Studies* 38 (1): 84–112.
- Halberstam, Jack. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halperin, David M. 1989. "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory* 28 (3): 257–74.
- Hoegaerts, Josephine, Tuire Liimatainen, Laura Hekanaho, and Elizabeth Peterson. 2022. *Finnishness, Whiteness and Coloniality*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Jemisin, N. K. 2018. *How Long 'til Black Future Month?* First edition. New York: Orbit.
- Juvonen, Tuula. 2002. *Varjoelämää ja julkisia salaisuuksia*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Juvonen, Tuula. 2022. "Temporal Tentacles? Feeling the Queer Past." Queer Tentacles Seminar, September 23, 2022, University of Jyväskylä.
- Juvonen, Tuula, Varpu Alasuutari, Lotta Kähkönen, and Luca Tainio. 2022. "Syrjäytettyjen tunteet aktivismissa." *Politiikasta*. February 8, 2022. <https://politiikasta.fi/syrjayettyjen-tunteet-aktivismissa/>.
- Jyväskylän Seta ry. 2021. "Jyväskylän Setan Rantajuhlissa Tapahtui Viime Yönä Väkivaltainen Hyökkäys." July 4, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/297930240267718/posts/4260332454027457/?d=n>.
- Kallatsa, Laura. 2022. "Same-Sex Marriage, Toleration, and the Clergy of the Finnish Lutheran Church." *Religions* 13 (8): 734.
- Kelly, Christopher J. 2022. "The Personal Is Political." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed June 21, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/the-personal-is-political>.
- Kimanen, Anuleena. (2019). "Encountering religion in a secular context: How do Finnish students perceive and encounter religions and worldviews in the classroom?" In *Contextualising Dialogue, Secularisation and Pluralism: Religion in Finnish Public Education*, edited by Martin Ubani, Inkeri Rissanen, and Saila Poulter, 165–182. Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH.
- Krivosos, Daria. Forthcoming 2024. "All Roads Lead to the Railway Station: How Young Ukrainian Refugee Volunteer Women Challenge Sexism, Racism, and Homophobia in Volunteer Refugee Support Networks." In *Feminist Perspectives on Russia's War in Ukraine*. Lexington Press.
- Lentricchia, Frank, and Andrew DuBois, eds. 2003. *Close Reading: The Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Loughlin, Gerard, ed. 2007. *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. Malden: Blackwell Pub.
- Mizelińska, Joanna. 2006. "Queering Moominland: The Problems of Translating Queer Theory Into a Non-American Context." *SQS – Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen Seuran lehti* 1 (1), 87–104. <https://journal.fi/sqs/article/view/53722>.
- Moussawi, Ghassan, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz. 2020. "A Queer Sociology: On Power, Race, and Decentering Whiteness." *Sociological Forum* 35 (4): 1272–1289.
- Museovirasto. 2021. Whose Heritage? Meanings, Experiences, and Dialogue, Seminar, November 24–25, 2021, National Museum of Finland.
- Niemistö, Elina (2019). "Mäenpää ei kadu syyteharkintaan edennyttä vieraslajipuhettaan." Yle.fi, August 13, 2019. <https://yle.fi/a/3-10920885>.
- Pöysä, Jyrki. 2018. "19th Century Field Documents in the Archives – Oral History before Oral History?". IOHA Conference, June 18–20, 2018, University of Jyväskylä.
- Radikaalit pistot. 2019. Radikaalit pistot & Sijainnit-runoilta, JKL Pride 2019, August 21, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/events/s/radikaalit-pistot-sijainnit-ru/2376860869303342/>.
- Riseman, Noah. 2022. "Finding the 'Evidence of Me' through 'Evidence of Us': Transgender Oral Histories and Personal Archives Speak." In *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, edited by Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers, 59–70. London: Routledge.
- Rivers, Daniel. 2012. "Queer Family Stories: Learning from Oral Histories with Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers from the Pre-Stonewall Era." In *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd, and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, 57–72. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, Shirleene. 2022. "LGBTIQ Activism and 'Insider' Interviewing: Reflecting on Oral Histories from the Campaign for Australian Marriage Equality." In *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, edited by Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers, 151–161. London: Routledge.



- Salami, Minna. 2020. *Sensuous Knowledge: A Black Feminist Approach for Everyone*. London: Zed.
- Sateenkaariseura. 2008. "Ortodoksinen Sateenkaariseura." Accessed June 22, 2023. <https://sateenkaariseura.wordpress.com/>.
- Sateenkaariyhteisöt ry. 2023. "Kvääristö kertoo lopettavansa." February 6, 2023. <https://ranneliike.net/uutiset/16324/kvaaristo-kertoo-lopettavansa>.
- Savolainen, Ulla, and Riikka Taavetti, eds. 2022. *Muistitietotutkimuksen paikka: Teoriat, käytännöt ja muutos*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran toimituksia, nro 1478. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura.
- Schaper, Ulrike, Magdalena Beljan, Pascal Eitler, Christopher Ewing, and Benno Gammerl. 2020. "Sexotic: The Interplay between Sexualization and Exoticization." *Sexualities* 23 (1–2): 114–126.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sedivy, Julie. 2021. *Memory Speaks: On Losing and Reclaiming Language and Self*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- SKS. 2020. "Koronavirus sekoittaa maailmaa – SKS kerää kokemuksia." Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. March 12, 2020. <https://www.finlit.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/uutiset/koronavirus-sekoittaa-maailmaa-sks-keraa-kokemuksia>.
- Somerville, Siobhan B. 2020. "Introduction." In *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, edited by Siobhan B. Somerville, 1–14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sotejeff-Wilson, Kate. 2021. "Erikoissuomalaiset\*: Narrating Queer History with New Finns." Histories of Sexualities, Gender Diversity and Queer in the Nordic and Baltic Region Conference, October 26, 2021, University of Helsinki.
- Stuart, Elizabeth. 1997. *Religion Is a Queer Thing: A Guide to the Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People*. London: Cassell.
- Summerskill, Clare. 2020. "'It's Telling Your Story to Your Family': Reflections by an Older Lesbian on Being Interviewed for a Verbatim Theatre Production." *Oral History* 48 (1): 66–74.
- Summerskill, Clare, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers, eds. 2022. *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*. London: Routledge.
- Suomi100. 2016. "Suomi100 – Sateenkaaren väreissä." April 26, 2016. [http://cultureforall.fi/doc/Suomi\\_100\\_-\\_Sateenkaaren\\_vreiss/Suomi100-sateenkaariblogit-2016-2018\\_KOOSTE.pdf](http://cultureforall.fi/doc/Suomi_100_-_Sateenkaaren_vreiss/Suomi100-sateenkaariblogit-2016-2018_KOOSTE.pdf)
- Taavetti, Riikka, and Tuula Juvonen. 2022. "Queernäkökulmia muistitietotutkimukseen." In *Muistitietotutkimuksen paikka: Teoriat, käytännöt ja muutos*, edited by Ulla Savolainen, and Riikka Taavetti, 392–412. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura.
- Tooth Murphy, Amy. 2020. "Listening in, Listening out: Intersubjectivity and the Impact of Insider and Outsider Status in Oral History Interviews." *Oral History* 48 (1): 35–44.
- Traies, Jane. 2020. "The Perils of the Recording: Ethical Issues in Oral History with Vulnerable Populations." *Oral History* 48 (1): 75–85.
- Tuomenvirta, Kaarna. 2022. "Trans Temporalities and Camille Auer's 'Monument for the Excluded'." Queer Tentacles Seminar, September 23, 2022, University of Jyväskylä.
- Tyler, Imogen. 2021. *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality*. London: Zed.

# Tunteiden kuvaus vaikuttamisen keinona transmaskuliinisuutta käsittelevässä nuortenkirjallisuudessa

Pyry Aarnio

Tässä esseessä tarkastelen sitä, miten kaunokirjallisuudessa esiintyvissä transmaskuliinisuuden representaatioissa kuvatut tunteet<sup>1</sup> vaikuttavat yhteiskuntaan. Tarkastelen teosten vaikuttavuutta kirjallisuudentutkimuksen näkökulmasta eli keskityn teosten tekstuaalisiin keinoihin vaikuttamisen muotona.<sup>2</sup> Tapausesimerkkeinäni on kolme kotimaista nuortenromania, joissa on transmaskuliininen päähenkilö: Siri Kolun *Kesän jälkeen kaikki on toisin* (2016, jatkossa *Kesän jälkeen*), Riina Mattilan *Järistyksiä* (2018) ja Marja Björkin *Poika* (2013).<sup>3</sup> Kaikissa kolmessa teoksessa päähenkilö on myös romaanin kertoja. Se, että transhahmo saa kertojan äänen, on merkittävä vaikuttamisen keino. Minä-muotoinen kerronta nostaa transhahmon keskiöön ja asettaa transsukupuolisen hahmon kokemuksen ja tunteet

lukijan keskeiseksi samastumiskohteeksi. Näin transsukupuolisuuteen liittyvät tunteet tulevat lukijan lähelle.

Kirjallisuus ja tekstit ovat kytköksissä niitä ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan. Ne vakiinnuttavat ja toisaalta haastavat asenteita, arvojärjestelmiä ja hierarkioita. Tekstien rakenne ja sanavalinnat tuottavat niihin ideologioita, joiden avulla yhteisön normeja voidaan purkaa tai vahvistaa. Kaunokirjallisuuden vaikuttavuus kytkeytyy siis teosten narratiiveihin ja siihen, miten niitä hyödynnetään ja millaisia asenteita niihin liitetään. Tunteiden kuvauksella on kaunokirjallisuuden vaikuttavuudessa erityinen merkitys, sillä kuvattujen tunteiden kanssatunteminen ja toisaalta niiden torjuminen vaikuttaa lukijan käsityksiin maailmasta ja itsestään (Helle & Hollsten 2016; Rossi 2021).

Kirjallisuuden representaatiot vaikuttavat yhteiskunnan ja kulttuurin muutokseen. Lisäksi representaatiot tuovat esiin ja tuottavat uusia identiteettejä. (Hall, 1997.) Erityisesti nuortenkirjallisuuden representaatioilla on huomattava merkitys, sillä nuoren lukijan identiteetti on muutoksessa. Representaatioiden uudelleen tuotetut muodot puolestaan vakiinnuttavat ja muokkaavat aiempien representaatioiden näkemyksiä ja asenteita (Hall 1997). Analysoimissani romaaneissa transsukupuolisuuden representaatioita uudelleenkirjoitetaan tunteiden kuvauksen keinoin. Esiin nousevat

- 1 Käytän käsitettä tunne, sillä se voidaan mieltää affektin käsitettä laajemmin (Helle & Hollsten 2016).
- 2 Rajaan kirjailijan position tarkastelun esseeni ulkopuolelle. Katson sen, mitä teos transsukupuolisuudesta sanoo, olevan kirjallisuudentutkimuksen näkökulmasta keskeisempää teoksen vaikuttavuudelle kuin esimerkiksi sen, onko teoksen kirjoittaja itse sukupuolivähemmistön edustaja.
- 3 Esseeni pohjautuu maisterintutkielmaani (2022), jossa tarkastelin neljää suomalaista 2010-luvun nuorten romania – edellä mainittujen lisäksi käsittelin myös Johanna Hulkon romania *Suojaava kerros ilmaa* (2019) – transmaskuliinisen henkilöhahmon identiteetin kuvauksen näkökulmasta. Rajaan Hulkon romaanin esseeni ulkopuolelle, sillä transsukupuolisuuteen kytkeytyvät tunteet ovat teoksessa sivuosassa.

SQS  
1–2/2023

82

Pervopeili  
Essee

Pyry  
Aarnio

muun muassa häpeän, vihan, halun ja rakkauden tunteet. Näistä häpeän tunne korostuu ja kietoutuu muihin tunteisiin.

Queer-teoreetikko Sara Ahmed (2014) kutsuu häpeää ”tahmeaksi tunteeksi”, johon muut tunteet sekoittuvat. Aineistossani erityisesti ulkopuolisuus, suru ja viha saavat merkityksensä juuri häpeän kautta. Häpeä kuitenkin tarrautuu myös positiivisiksi miellettyihin tunteisiin: rakkauden, hyvän olon, onnellisuuden ja vapauden tunteisiin. Häpeään tarrautuneet tunteet ovat teoksissa vaikuttamisen keino. Esimerkiksi viha suuntautuu ulospäin ja pyrkii vaikuttamaan ympäristöönsä. Toisaalta rakkaus, vapaus ja onnellisuus vaikuttavat purkamalla häpeää. Seuraavaksi tarkastelen, kuinka häpeää ja muita siihen kietoutuvia tunteita aineistossani kuvataan, ja millaista kuvaa transsukupuolisuudesta nämä kuvaukset rakentavat.

## Häpeän sosiaalisuus

Häpeä on ideologisesti latautunut ja sosiaalinen tunne. Aineistossani se kytketään transsukupuolisen henkilöhaamon ja cisnormatiivisen yhteisön välisiin ristiriitoihin, yleisiin asennemalleihin ja sosiaalisiin normeihin. Häpeä näkyy romaanissa silloin, kun transshahmo ei pysty vastaamaan yhteisön odotuksiin. Affektiteoriaa kehittäneen psykologi Silvan Tomkinsin (2008, 389) mukaan häpeä syntyy, kun yhteisön normatiiviset ohjeet estävät yksilöä toimimasta positiivisia tunteita tuottavalla tavalla. Tomkins (2008, 359) puhuu häpeästä yksilöön itseensä kohdistuvana tunteena: kun yksilö ei pysty vastaamaan yhteisön normatiivisiin odotuksiin, hän tuntee häpeää omasta itsestään. Kirjallisuudentutkija Silje Linhart (2015) puolestaan ehdottaa, että kun normirikkomus, väärin tekeminen, on oman identiteetin ilmaisemista, lähestytään ajatusta, että oma identiteetti on väärin. Esimerkiksi Kolun teoksessa perheriidan puiminen saa transsukupuolisen päähenkilön Peetun ajattelemaan juuri näin: ”En keksinyt mitään muuta syytä. Minä olin tämän riidan syy. Se mikä olen.” (*Kesän jälkeen*, 66.)

Häpeässä kyse onkin myös häpäisemisestä. Esimerkiksi Mattilan romaanin transsukupuolinen päähenkilö Eelia pohtii häpäisemistä: ”Kotikaupungissa pidettiin visusti huoli, että minulle oikealta tuntuviin asioihin läimäistiin häpeäleima. Se kirveli hehkuvana otsassa ja naulasi sanat vatsan pohjalle.” (*Järistyksiä*, 17.) Häpäiseminen on vallankäyttöä. Oikeilta tuntuvat asiat tuomitaan vääriksi ja niistä rangaistaan. Näin häpäisemisellä on tarkoitus: tavoite on ohjata pois sosiaalisesti ei-toivottavasta käytöksestä kohti sosiaalisesti toivottavaa käytöstä.

Eelian häpeä saa romaanissa kehollisen muodon. Häpeä tuntuu siltä, miltä kuraisissa vaatteissa ja hiuksissa yksin kotiin käveleminen on tuntunut. Häpeä on märkää, sotkuista ja kylmää. Se saa pehmeät kankaat ja hiukset muuttumaan painaviksi ja valuviksi ja liimautumaan ihoa vasten. Tunteet sotkeutuvat ja tarrautuvat ihoon, ja silti ne pitäisi pystyä työntämään syrjään. Pahaa mieltä ja itkua pitää nieleskellä isoina kulauksina. Tunteille ei saa antaa periksi, koska silloin pitäisi selittää, mikä kaikessa tuntuu niin pahalta. Omista tunteista ja kokemuksista pitäisi tehdä julkisia, jolloin menettäisi niiden hallinnan. (*Järistyksiä*, 37–38.)

Eelian tultua kiusatuksi muiden katseet kohdistuvat häneen, mikä saa kädet ”vapisemaan” ja veren kohisemaan suonissa ”kuin luotijuna” (*Järistyksiä*, 37). Fyysisen reaktion syynä on altistuminen niin sanotulle ei-toivotulle katseelle, mikä tuottaa häpeää ja ulkopuolisuuden kokemuksen. Tunteiden tutkimuksessa onkin korostettu katseen vieraannuttavaa vaikutusta. Näin katsomiseen liittyy arvottava aspekti. (Linhart 2015; Tomkins 2008.) Muiden vilkuilu osoittaa Eelian muuttuneen heille vieraaksi. Vieraus kiehtoo ja siten kerää katseita puoleensa. Toisaalta vieraus on luotaantyöntävää, sillä se leimaa sosiaalisesti ulkopuoliseksi. Se siis eristää Eelian ja saa hänet vetäytymään. (*Järistyksiä*, 37–38.) Vetäytyminen näyttäytyy tekstissä alistumisena. Koska Eelia vetäytyy ja kiusaaja, ”sänkitukkainen”, saa jäädä muiden seuraan, tarttuu voitonriemuinen halveksunta myös muuhun seurueeseen.

Kyse on tyypillisen traagisen narratiivin uudelleentuottamisesta: koska transsukupuolisuus poikkeaa normatiivisesta sukupuolisesta järjestelmästä, sille ei ole tilaa yhteisössä. Vetäytyminen, joka supistaa transsukupuolisen henkilöhahmon ihmissuhteiden piiriä, näkyikin monissa tarkastelemissani teoksissa keskeisenä teemana. Vetäytyneisyys on yksi häpeän ilmenemismuodoista, sillä häpeä pyrkii piiloutumaan (Oinas 2011, 153). Toiseuden ja ulkopuolisuuden tunteet, joihin häpeä kietoutuu, saavat jättäytymään pois sosiaalisista suhteista. ”Joskus yksin oli vain helpompi” (*Järistyksiä*, 39).

## Häpeän välttäminen sulautumalla

Välttääkseen syrjinnälle ja ei-toivotulle katseelle altistumisen romaanien transhahmot pyrkivät sulautumaan pikemminkin kuin tulemaan esiin transsukupuolisina. Esimerkiksi Kolun romaanin Peetu haluaa olla kiinnittämättä muiden huomiota: ”Elämäni ensimmäisenä päivänä mä haluaisin olla kukatahansa” (*Kesän jälkeen*, 70–71). Halu olla kuin kuka tahansa on reaktio transsukupuolisuuteen liittyviin vierauden ja häpeän tunteisiin sekä pelkoon. Kyse on niin kutsutun stealth-elämän tavoittelusta: termiä stealth käytetään transsukupuolisuuden kontekstissa ilmaisemaan transtaustan piilottamista, eikä sille ole vakiintunutta suomennosta. Kyse on tietoisesta valinnasta jättää kertomatta transsukupuolisuudestaan ja toisaalta niin sanotusta ”läpi menemisestä”, jolloin transsukupuolisen yksilön transsukupuolisuus jää ulkopuolisilta tunnistamatta, kun hänet sukupuolitetaan kehon ulkoisten piirteiden perusteella oikein. (Edelmann 2009; Zimman 2009.) Stealth-narratiivi on myös vallankäytön keino, sillä se legitimoii näkymättömän transsukupuolisuuden ainoaksi hyväksyttäväksi transsukupuolisuuden muodoksi. Stealth-narratiivi toistuu Kolun romaanin lisäksi myös Björkin romaanissa, jossa Makke elää stealth-elämää, vaikka itse sanaa stealth käytäkään.

Kolun romaanissa Peetun on tultava jatkuvasti ulos kaapista transsukupuolisena. Jos Peetu ei itse tee sitä, julkisessa tilassa ”vastaan pulpahtaa joku yläasteajan kusipää”, joka käyttää tilaisuuden Peetun ”outtaamiseen” (*Kesän jälkeen*, 22–23). Peetun ajatus noudattelee Lal Zimmanin (2009) huomiota, että transsukupuolinen tulee kaapista toistuvasti myös transition jälkeen. Stealth-elämä puolestaan näyttäytyy tavoiteltavana ideaalina: ”Mutta pelkkä ajatus stealth-elämästä – voida olla se kone, jota tutka ei näe – se on mulle pyhä” (*Kesän jälkeen*, 24). Häpäisyä ja häpeää tuottava transsukupuolisuus halutaan piilottaa, jotta häpeää tuottavia tilanteita kuten muiden arvostelua ja negatiivisia katseita ei tarvitsisi kokea. Sara Davidmann (2010, 198) katsookin, että transsukupuolinen ”on ohjelmoitu” piilottamaan itsensä ja sulautumaan ”normaaliin” väestöön. Sosiaalistuttuaan cisnormiin transyksiö siis tuntee voimakasta tarvetta toteuttaa sitä ja pyrkii peittämään transsukupuolisuutensa. Stealth on siis transsukupuoliselle yksilölle normatiivinen odotus.

Tarkastelemieni teosten transsukupuoliset henkilöhahmot vastustavatkin ajatusta, että heidän täytyisi astua julkisuuteen esimerkkeinä transsukupuolisuudesta. Esimerkiksi Björkin romaanin transsukupuolinen päähenkilö Makke ja Kolun romaanin Peetu pyrkivät päinvastoin erottautumaan sateenkaariyhteisöstä ja -aktivismista. He eivät halua osallistua yhteiskunnalliseen diskurssiin tai poliittiseen toimintaan. Romaaniensa maailmoissa Makke ja Peetu jättäytyvät julkisesta keskustelusta ja vetäytyvät yksityisyyden suojiin. Transsukupuolisuus kohdentuu siis teoksissa elämän yksityiselle alueelle. Toisaalta on syytä muistaa, että kaunokirjallisina teoksina romaanit myös ottavat osaa julkiseen keskusteluun transsukupuolisuudesta. Näin kirjailijan teoksellaan välittämä viesti tulee osaksi julkista keskustelua ja vaikuttaa siihen, miten transsukupuolisuus yhteiskunnassa ja kulttuurissa ymmärretään.

Kolon romaanissa Peetu kommentoi julkiseen keskusteluun osallistumista. Vaikka Peetu ei halua olla transsukupuolisten ääni, hän myös tietää, että ”hiljaisuuden murtumiseksi”, jonkun täytyy ”lyödä rumpuja” ja ”kantaa banderolleja”. Jotta saisi oikeuksia, niitä täytyy vaatia. Silti Peetu mieluummin on ”postoperatiivisesti vaan ihan vitun hiljaa”. Vastoinkäymiset ja koettu syrjintä, ehkä jopa väkivalta, saavat hänet kaipaamaan yksityisyyttä. (*Kesän jälkeen*, 24–25.) Linhart (2015, 242) kiinnittää tutkimuksessaan huomiota samaan kuvioon: sukupuoleltaan varioivat henkilöhahmot harvoin haluavat olla huomion keskipisteenä ja osallistua politiikkaan. Ilmiössä on kyse tunteista. Häpeä, aiemmat negatiiviset kokemukset ja pelko ajavat trahshahmon vetäytymään poliittisesta toiminnasta.

Myös Björkin romaanin transsukupuolinen päähenkilö Makke kommentoi Pride-kulkuetta, joka symboloi sukupuoli- ja seksuaalivähemmistöjen hyväksi tehtävää tasa-arvotyötä. Makkelle [sic] Pride näyttyy ”pellekulkueena”, jossa outoihin asuihin pukeutuneet kirjavat ihmiset käyttäytyvät sopimattomasti, jopa seksuaalisesti julkisessa tilassa. Makken näkemys Pride-kulkueesta on heteronormatiivinen ja ennakkoluuloinen. Vastapuolelle asettuvat Priden ”vastamielenosoitukset” ja niihin liittyvä aggressiivisuus. Makke viittaa vuoden 2010 Pride-kulkueeseen kohdistettuun pippurisumutteella tehtyyn hyökkäykseen, jonka Makke tuomitsee. Makke siis tunnistaa ja tuomitsee sukupuoli- ja seksuaalivähemmistöihin kohdistuvan väkivallan, mutta ylläpitää itse heteronormatiivisia rakenteita, joiden verukkeella väkivaltaa tehdään. (*Poika*, 182.)

Makke rajaa itsensä ulos pervojen queer-ihmisten joukosta ja asettaa oman ”vakavan” ja ”asiallisen” identiteettinsä vastakkain seksuaalivähemmistöjen ”pelleilyn” kanssa. Heteronormista poikkeava seksuaalinen identiteetti näyttyy näin tuomittavana, epäsovinnaisena ja naurunalaisena. Voimakas tarve assimiloitua ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan purkautuu teoksessa ennakkoluuloisuutena homoseksuaalisuutta ja muita vähemmistöjä kohtaan. Vakiinnuttaakseen oman paikkansa miehenä Makke kääntyy muita

sateenkaarivähemmistöjä vastaan. (*Poika*, 182.) Sama ilmiö on nähtävissä myös todellisuuden LHBTQ-yhteisöä koskevissa keskusteluissa. Vahvistaakseen omaa asemaansa vähemmistöt ja niiden edustajat kääntyvät helposti toisiaan vastaan.

Romaanissa sopeutumisen tarve purkautuu myös cisnormatiivisuutena. Makke ei pyri irrottautumaan ainoastaan seksuaalivähemmistöistä vaan myös sukupuolivähemmistöstä. Hänelle sukupuolenkorjaus ei kyseenalaista normeja vaan vahvistaa niitä. Makke on mies. Hän irrottautuu jopa termeistä transsukupuolinen ja transmies, sillä ne erottavat hänet (cis) miehistä. ”Minä en ole transu vaan transsukupuolinen. Paitsi että en ole. Minä olen mies.” Makke lainaa netissä kohtaamaansa haukkumasanaa. Aiemmin transvihamieliset kommentit ja haukkumasanan käyttö ovat saaneet hänet suuttumaan. Normatiivisen maskuliinisuuden toteuttaminen kuitenkin vapauttaa Makken vihastaan transvihamielisyyttä kohtaan. Se ei enää tunnu kohdistuvan häneen itseensä. Makke on siis kääntänyt selkensä myös transsukupuolisille. (*Poika*, 182.)

Käsitän Makken pyrkimyksen irrottautua vähemmistöistä ja suunnata identiteettinsä kohti asfalttityöntekijä-perheenisä-tyyppistä ”perusmiestä” pyrkimyksenä toteuttaa normatiivista maskuliinisuutta erehtymättömästi. Kyse on tiedostamattomasta pyrkimyksestä, ja tarkoitus on välttää normien rikkomisesta aiheutuvaa häpeää. Makke myös onnistuu pyrkimyksessään, sillä heteroseksistinen maskuliinisuus toimii teoksessa yhteisöön integroitumisen avaimena. Esimerkiksi Makken veljen Aaronin on helpompi hyväksyä Makken maskuliinisuus, kun hän sopii fyysisesti ja sosiaalisesti heteroseksistiseen mieskäsitykseen (*Poika*, 200). Heteroseksistisen maskuliinisuuskäsityksen kriittinen tarkastelu puolestaan jää lukijan vastuulle.

Sen sijaan todellisten transmiesten on havaittu jakavan niin sanotun joustavan käsityksen maskuliinisuudesta (Hines 2010). Myöhemmissä kotimaisissa nuortenromaneissa maskuliinisuuskäsitys vaikuttaa jousta-

vammalta kuin Björkin romaanissa. Näin myöhemmät teokset korjaavat Björkin teoksen luomaa kuvaa transmaskuliinisuudesta. Transshahmon maskuliinisuuden ei tarvitse nojata heteroseksistiseen maskuliinisuuteen. Joustavan maskuliinisuuskäsityksen korostuminen liittyyneen nuortenkirjallisuudelle tyypilliseen humanismiin. Koska nuortenkirjallisuudella on taipumus kasvattavaan ja opettavaan otteeseen, syrjivät toimintatavat selittyvät teoksissa usein ei-toivottaviksi (ks. esim. Hilton & Nikolajeva 2012). Joustavaa maskuliinisuutta edustava mieskäsitys sopii siis heteroseksististä maskuliinisuutta paremmin nuortenkirjallisuuden didaktisiin tendensseihin.

## Häpeä kietoutuu vihaan ja suruun

Transsukupuolisen häpeän ja vihan tunteet ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa: muiden vihamielisyys tuottaa häpeää, joka puolestaan tuottaa vihaa häpeän kokijassa. Ulkopuolisuus, kiusaaminen ja yhteisön cismormatiivisuus sattuttaa, häpäisee ja suututtaa. Jatkuva muiden katseen kohteena oleminen ja nöyryytyksen ja hyljeksinnän kohtaaminen saavat vihan patoutumaan. Transtutkija Susan Stryker käyttää termiä transraivo (*transgender rage*). Vähemmistön, kuten transsukupuolisten, kokema raivo on yhteiskuntajärjestelmää ja muita ihmisiä kohtaan patoutunutta vihaa ja häpeää, jota muiden kohtelu tuottaa. Raivon tunteeseen liittyy myös sen purkautuminen. Toisin kuin ulkopuolisuus, joka on sisäänpäin vetäytyvä tunne, raivo ja suuttumus suuntautuvat ulospäin. Kyse on siis äänestä, vastaansanomisesta ja oikeuksiensa puolustamisesta, ei äänettömästä vetäytymisestä. Toisaalta raivo on läsnä silloinkin, kun ääntä ei kuulu. Transyksilön arki on nimittäin ”jatkuvaa kamppailua sosiaalisia normeja vastaan”. (Stryker 2006, 253.)

Selkeimmin suuttumusta ja vihaa ilmaisee Kolun romaanin Peetu. Tyypillisesti oman identiteetin kyseenalaistamiset saavat Peetun kiivastumaan. ”Mitä se kellekään kuuluu, mistä olen tullut läpi ollakseni se mikä olen”

(*Kesän jälkeen*, 25). Erityisesti suututtaa, kun ne, joilta ymmärrystä eniten kaipaa, eivät ymmärrä. Peetua suututtaa, kun oma äiti, jonka pitäisi aina olla lapsensa tukena, ei siihen pysty (mt. 54). Tunne myös purkautuu. Kielikuvia hyödyntävässä kohtauksessa Peetu on myrsky, joka huuhtoo pois transvastaiset ajatusmallit:

Minä olen ukkosmyrsky joka sadan taivaalta, minä iskeydyn jokaiseen korkealla keikaroivaan torniin, olen salaman jyrä joka osuu maanpintaan ja kaataa rannikon männyt, olen iso myrsky, peetunpäivän myrsky, minä syöksyn taivaalta vailla pelkoa, mutta minä en sada maailmaan tuhoa tai kuolemaa, minun salamoideni sanoma on tämä: Anna ihmisten nähdä toiset sellaisena kuin he itse haluavat. (*Kesän jälkeen*, 103.)

Kohtauksessa irrottaudutaan maasta ja samalla symbolisesti yhteisön normeista. Näin normien vastustaminen mahdollistuu. Tunteiden purkaukseen liittyy tummuus ja ukkosen uhkaava jyrinä, jotka kuvastavat vihan tunnetta, sen voimakkuutta ja ”syöksyvää” vauhtia. Mielen synketyksessä maisemakin synkkenee ukkospilveksi. Viha on siis hallitsematonta. Kuitenkin sillä on tavoite: sen tarkoitus on suunnata ihmisten katseet ja odotukset toisin. Peetun viha ei siis vain tuhoa vaan myös puhdistaa ja korjaa. Näin teos osoittaa, että viha voi myös voimaannuttaa. Viha ei siis näyttäyty ainoastaan negatiivisena tunteena. Sen avulla voidaan tuottaa myös positiivisia vaikutuksia ympäristöön. (*Kesän jälkeen*, 103.)

Vihan lisäksi häpeä tuottaa surua. Eniten suru on läsnä Mattilan romaanissa. Eelian kotikaupungissa, ”pesäpallokaupungissa”, Eelian yksinäisyys ja erilaisuus korostuvat, mikä ilmenee teoksessa Eelian vaikenemisena ja vetäytymisenä. Surua tuottavat vanhempien hetero- ja cismormatiiviset odotukset, joihin Eelia ei pysty vastaamaan. Koska surun käsittelyyn ei ole ollut tilaa, se on päässyt kasautumaan seiniksi minuuden ympärille

(*Järityksiä*, 61). Ahmed (2014) ehdottaa, että suru tai melankolia on luonteeltaan sateenkaarevaa (*queer*), kun se liittyy kyvyttömyyteen vastata hetero- ja cisnormatiivisiin odotuksiin. Juuri tästä Eelian surussa on mielestäni kyse. Eelian suruun liittyy useita queer-yksilön suruun liittyviä traumoja: kodin ahdasmielisyyttä, hetero- ja cisnormin toteuttamisessa epäonnistumista, ulkopuolisuutta ja fyysistä väkivaltaa.

Surua tuottaa myös valehtelu ja syyllisyys siitä. Vanhempien heteronormatiivisuus on niin vaativaa, että se estää ensirakkaudesta puhumisen. Kysyttäessäkin Eelia vastaa ”ei mulla ole ketään” (*Järityksiä*, 63), vaikka on jo alkanut tapailua kumppaniaan Islaa. Eelia pyyhkii Islan pois, ei keneksikään, koska parisuhde ei sovi vanhempien odotuksiin. Valehdellessa surussa on monta kerrosta. Se on häpeää siitä, ettei sovi heteronormatiivisiin odotuksiin, syyllisyyttä kumppanin piilottamisesta, pelkoa hylätyksi tulemisesta ja surua siitä, ettei uskalla eikä voi olla valehtelematta vanhemmilleen. Valhe painaa möykkynä mahassa. Se itkettää ja saa hengityksen salpautumaan ja ”kaikesta tulee mustaa”. (*Järityksiä*, 64.)

Yleisimmin romaaneissa surun tuntemukset liittyvätkin ihmissuhteisiin ja niiden riitoihin. Esimerkiksi Kolun romaanissa, jossa Peetu käsittelee transsukupuolisuuden liittyviä tunteitaan lentämällä purjelentokoneella isänsä kanssa, surulla on vaikutusta siihen, millaisen vaikutuksen lentäminen Peetussa tuottaa. Surun vuoksi lento on ”aivan toisenlainen”. Koneen nousu ei tuota tavallista kehon rajoitteista ja dysforiasta vapautumisen tunnetta. Päinvastoin mieltä painavat ajatukset tuntuvat niin raskailta, että kehon massa kasvaa: surunsa takia Peetu ”painaa liian paljon”. Alakulo on niin raskasta, että kone voi pudota sen voimasta maahan. Pilvien takaa pilkistävä aurinkokaan ei pysty valaisemaan mieltä ja Peetu kyllä tietää miksi: riidat täytyy sopia, jotta niiden painolasti purkautuu. (*Kesän jälkeen*, 26.)

Kun mieli on alhaalla, on vaikea saada lentämisestä vapauttavaa kokemusta. Vastakkain asettuvat positiivisesti latautuneet aurinko, taivas, horisontti ja

onnellisuus sekä negatiivisesti latautuneet maa, suru ja paino. Negatiivisista tunteista voidaan kuitenkin suunnata pois. Kun isä ohjaa koneen pois jalaspilvien suunnalta, myös Peetu ohjaa ajatuksensa pois surua aiheuttaneista asioista (mt. 46–47).

## Häpeästä voimaantumiseen

Teoksissa käsitellään myös positiivisia tunteita kuten voimaantumista. Mattilan teoksessa taidelukio Vally on luova paikka. Eelialle se on myös positiivista minäkuvaa luova paikka. Taidelukiossa Eelia saa olla oma itsensä ja tuntee hyväksynnän kokemuksia. Lukiosta löytyvät ensimmäiset hyvät ystävät ja ensirakkaus. Muutkin lukiolaiset ovat kotipaikkakunnallaan tunteneet olevansa erilaisia. Muiden erilaisten keskellä on turvallista päästää oma erilaisuus esiin.

Sosiologi Elina Oinas korostaa, ettei häpeä itsessään ole ongelma. Se luo yhteisöön sääntöjä ja näin myös asettaa yhteisöön kuulumisen ehdot. (Oinas 2011.) Häpeä voi siis myös toimia yhteisöä rakentavasti. Aiemmin koetut häpeän kokemukset herkistävät toisten kokemalle häpeälle ja siten lujittavat ja muovaavat yhteisöä (Kekki 2004; Oinas 2011). Lukiossa Eelia saa elää omalla tavallaan. Kukaan ei huomauta sukupuolen ilmaisusta tai seurustelukumppanin sukupuolesta. Vallyn turvallisessa ilmapiirissä kaapin oven uskaltaa avata, ja se aukeaakin niin voimalla, että mitään piilotettavaa ei jää. Avoin ilmapiiri saa Eelian myös sanallistamaan omaa identiteettiään ensimmäisen kerran.

Neljäsadan kilometrin päässä kotoa kaappini ovi uskalsi tipahtaa saranoiltaan. Vallyssä löysin oman sanani, tai oikeastaan sana löysi minut, se loikkasi varoittamatta keskelle tyhjää vihkon sivua. Olisi pitänyt synnyttää äidinkielen aine, mutta vahingossa synnytinkin oman sanani, josta sain raamit ja siihen oikeanlaisen kuvan. En-

simmäistä kertaa uskalsin katsoa peiliin ja tuijottaa silmiin ihmistä, joka näytti minulta, ei tytöltä pojan vaatteissa, ei hämmentävän neitimäiseltä pojalta, ainoastaan Eelialta vaan. (*Järityksiä*, 28.)

Oman sanan ”synnyttäminen” näyttää identiteetin sanallistamisen aktiivisena ja kehollisena toimintana. Toisaalta sana synnytetään hallitsemattomasti ja arvaamattomasti. Se ilmestyy kuin tyhjästä. Oman sanan synnyttämisessä arvaamatonta onkin juuri se, että Eelia synnyttää itse itsensä. (*Järityksiä*, 27–28.) Sanallistaminen tekee ilmiön todelliseksi, näkyväksi ja ymmärrettäväksi osaksi maailmaa. Oman identiteetin ymmärtäminen muokkaa käsityksiä omasta ulkomuodosta ja kehosta. Kun omalle identiteetille löytyy sana, myös itsensä katsominen peilistä tuntuu voimaannuttavalta kokemukselta. Sanallistaminen auttaa löytämään myös muita itsensä kaltaisia: ”jossain siellä tietolähteiden takana oli olemassa lauma tyttölokeroon väkisin viskattuja neutraaleja värejä”. (mt. 28–29.) Oman identiteetin sanallistaminen toimii avaimena itsensä ymmärtämiseen, hyväksymiseen ja oman yhteisön löytämiseen (ks. Juvonen 2019).

Voimaantumista on nähtävissä myös Kolun teoksen purjelentokohtauksissa. Purjelentäminen on mekaniikaltaan lähellä aitoa lentämisen kokemusta. Koneessa ei ole moottoria, joten lentäessä hyödynnetään ilmapirtauksia. Niinpä ilmapirtoja, ilmanpainetta ja pilvisyyttä kuvaavat sanat saavat teoksessa metaforisia merkityksiä. Termiikit, aurinko, tuuli ja nousut yhdistyvät oivallukseen, onnellisuuteen, vapauteen ja seksiin (*Kesän jälkeen*, 55, 67, 68). Lentäminen ja taivas symboloivat avarakatsisuutta ja tarjoavat Peetulle mahdollisuuden laajempaan näkökulmaan. Peetu haluaakin ympärilleen ihmisiä, ”joiden katse kohdistuu ylös” ja ”katseen, joka ei luokittele, leimaa tai laatikoi” (mt. 19). Kuvalliset ilmaisut osoittavat Peetun luovaa kielenkäytön tapaa. Lentäminen, oma identiteetti ja sen sanallistaminen rinnastuvat. Lentäminen, ”taivaalle kirjoittaminen” symboloi siis Peetun koko elämää: hän elää, hänen muotonsa muuttuu ja hän osoittaa, että ihmisyyden on muutosta (mt. 106). Lentämällä Peetu voi

irrottautua painavista tunteista ja kokemuksista sekä suunnata katseen maan ja menneisyyden sijaan taivaalle ja tulevaisuuteen.

## Traaginen kertomus murtuu

Kotimaisen nuortenkirjallisuuden transsukupuolisuutta käsitteleviä romaaneja voidaan pitää positiivisina vastakertomuksina esimerkiksi angloamerikkalaiselle transsukupuolisuutta kuvaavalle nuortenkirjallisuudelle, jossa korostuu ongelmakeskeisyys, traagisuus ja transhahmon ulkopuolisuus (ks. esim. Aarnio 2022; Linhart 2015; Reynolds 2007). Oman identiteetin sanallistamisen ja lentämisen kuvaston avulla transsukupuolisuus saa Mattilan ja Kolun romaaneissa positiivisia merkityksiä. Myös romaanien rakkauskertomukset purkavat traagista narratiivia näyttämällä transsukupuolisuuden arvostettavana, haluttavana ja hyväksyttävänä. Transsukupuolinen ei ole sosiaalisesti ulkopuolinen, vaan hänellä on oma rakastava lähipiirinsä. Transhahmon seksuaalisuuden kuvaaminen tuo myös uudenlaisen näkökulman kotimaiseen nuortenkirjallisuuteen, jossa on perinteisesti kuvattu heteronormatiivista seksiä (Grünn 2003).

Suostumuksellinen seksi, seksuaalisuus ja parisuhteet, jotka perustuvat rakkauteen ja molemminpuoliseen haluun, ovat läsnä kaikissa analysoimissani teoksissa. Björkin, Kolun ja Mattilan teoksissa transsukupuolisia hahmoja kuvaillaan seksuaalisina, romanttisina ja monin tavoin kykenevinä, ja transsukupuolisen kumppanin kanssa harrastettua seksiä tyydyttävänä. Näin transsukupuolinen hahmo näyttäytyy seksuaalisesti haluttavana ja haluavana. Transhahmot myös näyttäytyvät teoksissa romanttisen rakkauden kohteina. Rakkauden ja seksin kuvauksissa korostuvat tunteet, jolloin myös lukijan omasta seksuaalisuudesta tai sukupuoli-identiteetistä poikkeavat kuvaukset voivat avata ovia empatiaan ja lukijan seksikäsityksen laajenemiseen.



Paidan repsottaessa napittomana häpesin omaa kehoani [– –] Halusin kuiskata älä katso, älä koske, mutta Isla ei antanut siihen tilaisuutta. Hän peitti suuni kädellään ja upotti minut silmiinsä, syvään viidakonvihreään jossa suuntaavaistoni sotkeentui.

Upoksissa ne ensimmäiset oikeat sormet koskivat rintojani niin, että ensimmäistä kertaa koskaan halusin niiden olevan siinä, pysyvän siinä ja muuttavan muotoaan laihojen sormien sivelyn alla. Suudelmat kiehuivat polttavina huulilta kaulalle ja pikkulintu sisälläni lauloi taas pahaa pois. (*Järistyksiä*, 88–89.)

Mattilan romaanissa kumppanin kosketus saa rinnat ”muuttamaan muotoaan”, mikä symboloi Eelian muuttuvaa käsitystä omasta kehostaan. Rinnat, jotka muiden katseelta ja kosketukselta pitää piilottaa, löytävät paikkansa. Oinas ehdottaa, että Judith Butlerin (1990) performatiivisuuden käsitettä voidaan hyödyntää ruumiillisuuteen liittyvää häpeää purkavien tekojen analyysissä. Koska kyse on tilanteisesta häpeän purkamisesta teoin, Oinas katsoo performatiivisuuden käsitteen valaisevan häpeän purkamisen tapaa. (Oinas 2011.) Kohtauksessa seksi saa butlerilaisen performatiivisen merkityksen. Seksi on teko, jonka avulla omaan kehoon kohdistuvaa häpeää puretaan. Iho, joka ensin tuntuu epäsovivalta, kuin toisen ihmisen vaatteelta, muuttuu omaksi. Häpeä muuttuu haluiksi, joka kohdentuu myös omaan kehoon. Seksi muuttaa jopa dysforian lauluksi. (*Järistyksiä*, 88–89.)

Romaanien tulkitsemista positiivisina vastakertomuksina traagiselle narratiiville tukee myös teosten loppuminen toiveikkaaseen sävyyn. Toiveikkaat loput ovatkin nuortenkirjallisuudelle tyypillisiä, sillä ne sopivat nuortenkirjallisuuden lajin tendensseihin: itsensä hyväksyminen ja kasvaminen saavat sijaa ja katse suunnataan tulevaisuuteen (ks. esim. Reynolds 2007, 72; Linhart 2015, 284). Kolun ja Mattilan teosten lopetuksissa itsensä ja toisten hyväksyminen nousevat keskiöön, jolloin lopun toiveikkaus liittyy päähenkilön henkiseen kasvuun. Björkin teoksessa toiveikkaus kytkeytyy

mahdollisuuteen täyttää yhteisön normatiiviset odotukset. Mattilan ja Kolun romaanien henkilöhahmot ovat lopussa vahvempia ja valmiimpia vastaanottamaan tulevaisuuden hankaluuksia. Oman yhteisön löytäminen nousee keskiöön. Tämä murtaa tyypillistä alistetun ja yhteiskunnan ulkopuolelle putoavan transsukupuolisen hahmon kertomusta (ks. Linhart 2015; Reynolds 2007).

Esimerkiksi Kolun romaanin lopussa veli Pyry ja kumppani Aamu ottavat purjelennolta palaavan Peetun vastaan. Isä, joka on muuten paljon läsnä romaanissa, jää loppukohtauksessa taka-alalle, jolloin itsenäistyminen ja oman yhteisön löytäminen korostuvat. Suunta on eteenpäin, kohti rakkaita ihmisiä, kirkasta taivasta ja tulevaisuutta. (*Kesän jälkeen*, 104–110.) Toiveikkaus ja terapeuttisuus näkyvät Peetun kehittyneessä kyvyssä käsitellä asioita: häpeästä, pelosta ja vihasta päästään yli, jolloin tulevaisuus haasteineenkin vaikuttaa seesteisemmältä. Peetu korostaa oman identiteetin löytämisen merkitystä. ”Mutta ei ole syvempää onnea kuin olla se joka on.” Itselleen on oltava rehellinen. Häpeän purkaminen on siis itsensä hyväksymistä. (mt. 92.)

Myös Mattilan teos loppuu positiiviseen sävyyn. Tultuaan vanhemmilleen ulos kaapista Eelia toteaa, että kokemus hylätyksi tulemisesta on ”kallis hinta”, joka itsensä hyväksymisestä kuitenkin ”on pakko maksaa”. Itsensä piilottaminen puolestaan on ”kuin luovuttaisi kokonaan”. Myös Mattilan teos siis kuuluttaa, että itselleen on oltava rehellinen, vaikka se romuttaisi kodin ja perheen muodostaman korttitalon. Kuten viittaus kaatuileviin pelikortteihin osoittaa, on valheisiin perustettu koti hauras rakennelma. Itsensä paljastaminen ja hyväksyminen on yhteisön hyväksyntää tärkeämpää. (*Järistyksiä*, 140.) Ulostulon jälkeen kuvataankin itsensä hyväksymisen tunteuksia:

Isän mentyä astuin pakkasta pelästyneelle nurmikolle ja levitin käteni. Mitä sitten, jos en sopinut pesäpallokaupunkiin tai muiden määräämiin muotteihin? [– –]

Minulla oli minun kokemukseni, minun tarinani, menneisyyteni ja tulevaisuuteni, jossa sain hypätä sukupuoliruuhtujen yli jos niin tahdoin. [– –]

Annoin samean tihkusateen leijata kasvoilleni. Tunsin kuinka rintaani kasvoi uusi sydän, ja kaikki minussa alkoi matkustaa kohti kokonaan jotain uutta. (*Järityksiä*, 146.)

Käsiensä levittämisen ele kuvaa itsensä hyväksymistä, itsensä ja maailmansa syleilemistä. Syleilevä ele tuottaa tekstiin hellän ja anteeksiantavan sävyn. Jopa piiskaavana näyttäytynyt sade muuttuu sen myötä kevyeksi sen sankkuudesta huolimatta. Oman olon keveneminen keventää myös sitä, miltä ympäristö tuntuu. Lapsuuden koti ja ”pesäpallokaupunki” saavat jäädä taakse. Ne hyväksytään osaksi menneisyyttä, mutta katse on jo suunnattu tulevaisuuteen. Perhe vaihtuu: lapsuuden perheen paikan ottaa kumppani, jolloin edellinen kylmä sydän surkastuu ja tilalle ”kasvaa” uusi sykkivä rakkaus. (*Järityksiä*, 146.) Ajatukset ovat jo matkalla kohti uutta. Konkreettinen lähteminen kohti omaa paikkaa, Välyä, ja symbolinen siirtyminen kohti omaa tulevaisuutta linkittyvät vanhempien odottamasta identiteetistä vapautumiseen ja omana itsenään elämiseen. Samalla siirtyään aikuisuuteen: vanhempien vaikutuspiiristä omaan elämään, jossa omilla valinnoilla, ystävillä ja kumppanilla on yhä enemmän merkitystä.

Transsukupuolisuutta käsittelevä kotimainen nuortenkirjallisuus on selvästi tendenssikirjallisuutta: tarkoitus on voimaannuttaa nuoria lukijoita ja ottaa kantaa sukupuolen politiikkaan, transsukupuolisuutta käsittelevään diskurssiin ja transsukupuolisten asemaan yhteiskunnassa. Pidän häpeän kuvausta oleellisena teosten vaikuttavuuden kannalta. Sen avulla aktivoidaan tyyppillinen traaginen narratiivi, jonka mukaan transsukupuolisuus sulkeutuu yhteisön ulkopuolelle. Häpeä johtaa teoksissa transsukupuolisen hahmon vetäytymiseen ja näkyy pyrkimyksenä irrottautua politiikasta. Vaikka hahmot kaipaavat stealth-elämää, romaanien lopussa korostuu

voimaantuminen. Näin häpeä valjastetaan identiteetin kehityksen hyväksi. Lopetusten toiveikkuus mahdollistaa teosten tulkitsemisen positiivisina vastakertomuksina. Näin tuotetaan uudenlaisia transsukupuolisuuden representaatioita ja kyseenalaistetaan vallitsevia narratiiveja.

Positiiviset vastakertomukset muokkaavat transsukupuolisuuden esittämisen kaanonin. Lisäksi uudet positiiviset representaatiot ja narratiivit nuortenkirjallisuudessa auttavat voimaannuttamaan transnuoria ja toisaalta avartamaan myös muiden lukijoiden käsitystä sukupuolesta. Positiiviset narratiivit ja representaatiot purkavat väärinkäsityksiä ja stigmoja ja liittävät transsukupuolisuuteen positiivisia mielikuvia, joten ne voivat myös muuttaa yleistä suhtautumista ja asenteita transsukupuolisuutta kohtaan. Näin positiivisilla representaatioilla on myös yhteiskunnallista vaikutusta.

## Lähteet

- Aarnio, Pyry. 2022. *Transmaskuliinisuus ja sukupuoli-identiteetti kotimaisissa 2010-luvun realistisissa nuortenromaaneissa*. Maisterintutkielma. Helsingin yliopisto. Humanistinen tiedekunta. Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen maisteriohjelma. Kotimainen kirjallisuus.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2014/2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Björk, Marja. 2013. *Poika*. Helsinki: Like.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Davidmann, Sara. 2010. Beyond Borders: Lived Experiences of Atypically Gendered Transsexual People. Teoksessa *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, toim. Sally Hines & Tam Sanger. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 186–203.
- Edelmann, Elijah Avid. 2009. The Power of Stealth: (In)Visible Sites of Female-to-Male Transsexual Resistance. Teoksessa *Out in Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World*, toim. Ellen Lewin & William L. Leap. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 164–179.

- Grünn, Karl. 2003. Uusin nuortenkirjallisuus. Teoksessa *Pieni suuri maailma. Suomalaisen lasten- ja nuortenkirjallisuuden historia*, toim. Liisi Huhtala, Karl Grünn, Ismo Loivamaa & Maria Laukka. Helsinki: Tammi, 285–294.
- Hall, Stuart. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Helle, Anna & Anna Hollsten. 2016. *Tunteita ja tuntemuksia suomalaisessa kirjallisuudessa*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Hilton, Mary & Maria Nikolajeva. 2012. *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Hines, Sally. 2010. Introduction. Teoksessa *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, toim. Sally Hines & Tom Sanger. New York: Routledge, 1–22.
- Hulkko, Johanna. 2019. *Suojaava kerros ilmaa*. Hämeenlinna: Karisto.
- Juvonen, Tuula. 2019. Nimeämisen mahti. Sukupuolta ja seksuaalisuutta kuvaavien termien suhteisuudesta. *SQS – Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen Seuran lehti* 13(1–2): 1–22. DOI 10.23980/sqs.89126.
- Kekki, Lasse. 2004. Pervot pidot. Johdanto homo-, lesbo- ja queer-kirjallisuudentutkimukseen. Teoksessa *Pervot pidot. Homo-, lesbo- ja queer-näkökulmia kirjallisuudentutkimukseen*, toim. Lasse Kekki & Kaisa Ilmonen. Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 13–45.
- Kolu, Siri. 2016. *Kesän jälkeen kaikki on toisin*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Linhart, Silje Hernæs. 2015. 'A Wild Stream of Eyes': *Affect and Identity in Male-to-Female Transgender Narratives for Children and Young Adults*. Väitöskirja. University of Oslo. Faculty of Humanities. Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies. Käsikirjoitus.
- Mattila, Riina. 2018. *Järityksiä*. Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö.
- McCallum, Robyn. 1999. *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Oinas, Elina. 2011. Häpeä, arki ja ruumiillisuus. Teoksessa *Häpeä vähän! Kriittisiä tutkimuksia häpeästä*, toim. Siru Kainulainen & Viola Parente-Čapcová. Turku: Uniprint, 151–182.
- Reynolds, Kimberly. 2007. *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rossi, Riikka. 2021. Empaattinen ahdistus romaanin tunnevaikutuksena. Tapaustutkimuksena Marjo Niemen Kaikkien menetysten äiti. *Avain* 18(1): 38–55. DOI 10.30665/av.100383.
- Stryker, Susan. 2006. My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage. Teoksessa *The Transgender Studies Reader: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, toim. Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 244–256.
- Tomkins, Silvan. 2008. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Zimman, Lal. 2009. 'The Other Kind of Coming Out'. *Transgender People and the Coming Out Narrative Genre*. *Gender and Language* 3(1): 53–80. DOI 10.1558/genl.v3i1.53.

# The Affective Life of Trans Studies as a Political Field in Academia and Activism

YV E. Nay

Trans Studies have become an epistemological project that challenges who has the power to intervene in violent knowledge production that shape trans lives. The field promises to form a radical critical intervention in pathologizing, criminalizing, marginalizing, and dehumanizing discourses. In doing so, it strongly builds on trans activism initiated by trans people and their allies regarding the challenges facing trans persons particularly regarding historical and current medico-psycho pathologizing regimes. This text departs from this specific moment in Trans Studies and trans politics by asking how Trans Studies is rooted in the counter-knowledge production against the pathologizing taxonomies of Sexology.<sup>1</sup>

I will start this text with some reflections on the formation of the field of Trans Studies which leads me to question of what the attachment of trans scholars, activists, and artists to the formation of this field is. I will point out that Trans Studies are rooted in the counter-knowledge production against the pathologizing taxonomies of Sexology in forming its promise to form its critical intervention. In doing so, I will show how Trans Studies strongly builds on trans activism initiated by trans people and their allies

<sup>1</sup> This text is a shortened version of a keynote I was invited to give at the 8<sup>th</sup> Nordic Trans Studies Conference in Tampere, Finland.

regarding the challenges facing trans persons particularly regarding historical and current medico-psycho pathologizing regimes. I refer here to trans activism and the claim for human rights in discussing the question how the figure of the 'Human' is not only linked to the gender binary but inextricably to colonial regimes. In my conclusion, I will ask what Trans Studies might become. How can we imagine the field's future considering its myriad legacies of colonialism? I suggest thinking through a version of *Critical Trans Studies* (Nay and Steinbock 2021) that continues to resist and transform oppressive power systems while building generous and generative worlds in developing knowledge, political and artistic practices.

## The Formation of a Field Trans Studies and the Attachment to the Promise of a Radical Critical Intervention in Knowledge Production

As numerous introductory and overview publications on the question of the emergence and development of Trans Studies have shown so far (Stryker 2006; Stryker and Whittle 2006; Stryker and Aizura 2013; Baumgartinger 2017), Trans Studies does not build – as often assumed by a broad public and hegemonic academic disciplines – solely on the

SQS  
1–2/2023

92

Queer Mirror  
Keynote

YV E.  
Nay

trans emancipatory movements that emerged in the 1960s. “Transgender phenomena” (Stryker 2006, 3), in Stryker’s words, were already studied with the emergence of modern sexual sciences in Europe in the late 19th century. The critical examination of these historical manifestations of “transgender phenomena” and its pathologizing taxonomies in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Sexology figures as the background for the later formation of the field of Trans Studies. Trans Studies are concerned with these taxonomies and make them the subject of a critical scholarship on trans. In doing so, Trans Studies address the ontological and epistemological question of the invention of new categories of gender non-conformity. The emergence of the modern subject category *trans* is examined and contextualized with the violent pathologizing, criminalizing, marginalizing, and dehumanizing discourses of so-called *transsexualism* or *cross-sex and -gender identification*. Trans Studies dwells on the question of what *trans* means in its emergence, dissemination and ongoing development. In doing so, Trans Studies become an epistemological project that challenges who has the power to define what “trans” means.

As Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah write in the inaugural issue of the field-forming journal *Transgender Studies Quarterly* *TSQ*, Trans Studies makes it possible for trans people to be both “subjects of knowledge as well as objects of knowledge” (Stryker and Currah 2014, 9). Trans people represent a critical intervention in the production of knowledge that objectifies and pathologizes trans people: “[T]hey [trans people] can articulate critical knowledge from embodied positions that would otherwise be rendered pathological, marginal, invisible, or unintelligible within dominant and normative organizations of power/knowledge” (Stryker and Currah 2014, 9). Susan Stryker’s (2006, 12) understanding of Trans Studies as “(de)subjugated knowledges” is considered a canonical reference for the formation of the academic field Trans Studies, which sees itself as counter knowledge to the pathologizing Sexology. Trans

Studies accordingly examine the normative social, cultural, and political regimes that present certain bodies and identities as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ and reject others as pathological. In this sense, Trans Studies promise a “radical critical intervention” (Stryker 2006, 13) “through desubjugating previously marginalized forms of knowledge about gendered subjectivity and sexed embodiment” (Ibid.).

This promise, I argue, forms the attachment of scholars, activists, and artists to Trans Studies. The “radical critical intervention” – which is filled with hope for transformative justice for trans people – is understood as a response to knowledge production grounded in Sexology’s violent and destructive legacy of dehumanization, shame, and stigma with idealizing alternatives from deviant ascription. Trans Studies in this redemptive understanding offers the possibility of mobilizing political potential and life-forming forces to produce ways and worlds of living that were previously considered as deviant, pathological and criminal. The attachment to this promise is linked to the hope of expanding potentials for the imagination and practical realization of trans lives for all in the here and now.

However, this important and laudable project not only idealizes trans lives and politics but also places high expectations on trans knowledge production, politics, and art. But what happens when these expectations are not met? In what follows, I discuss this question based on trans politics, which are an important critical intervention in the pathologizing medical and legal knowledge production on trans lives. I examine trans activists’ demands for self-determination, who argue that trans rights are human rights.

## Trans Human Rights as a Critical Intervention in Pathologizing Knowledge on Trans

Social and Political Science scholars have observed a significant change in the perception and articulation of the concerns of trans people on a global scale since the new millennium. Political activism initiated by trans people, and their allies has raised the awareness of politicians, legislators, and the general public regarding the challenges facing trans persons (LaGata/Balzer 2014; LaGata/Balzer and Hutta 2012; Vidal-Ortiz 2020). As the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (2016) and the Council of Europe (2020), among others, note, access to the labor and housing market as well as education is limited for trans persons; their lived realities are hardly considered in migration and asylum issues; their health care is inadequate; and trans persons are particularly exposed to physical and psychological violence as well as hate crimes.

One of the main focuses of trans activist struggles against gender discrimination is the demand for medical and legal self-determination of gender. Political struggles by and for trans people have intervened in the field of medical regulation of transgender identification and embodiment. This has resulted in a continuous change in the conception of gender within medicine. This is particularly evident in the shifting meanings and new taxonomies for non-norm-conforming gender and sexual modes of life in the context of their medicalization in the *International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD) of the *World Health Organization* (WHO) and in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the *American Psychological Association* (APA). This cataloging has pathologized – in a continuum with sexological discourses – numerous deviations from the normative gender binary as a psychological disorder with the effect to maintain and reinforce a naturalized notion of a binary gender order (Güldenring 2015; de Silva 2018; Fütty 2019). This

psychopathologization has been effectively countered by internationally and locally organizing trans activists and their allies with decades of political pressure.

Recently, in the ICD-11 of 2018, which is currently to be ratified in the individual member states of the WHO, transgender identification and its expressions are no longer catalogued as a mental illness in the chapter “Mental and Behavioral Disorders” but are defined under the chapter “Sexual Health” in the category “conditions related to sexual health” as “gender incongruence of adolescence and adulthood” (WHO 2018). The latter is considered an outstanding achievement of trans activists in their efforts towards a depathologization of non-norm-conforming gender identification and embodiment (WHO 2018; Sues Schwend 2020).<sup>2</sup>

These successful claims for the medical and legal recognition of gender identity and embodiment represent a “critical intervention” against the de-humanizing conditions of trans lives as proclaimed by Trans Studies as an academic and political field. Trans activists particularly aim at de-pathologizing the medical discourses and protocols on gender-variance via the claim for the right to self-determine one’s gender as a human right (GATE, ILGA-Europe, TGEU 2021). Carla LaGata / Carsten Balzer (2014, 100) describes this politics of trans rights as human rights as paradigm shift that would challenge the “dominant and globalized

---

2 Despite this important change, a wide range of healthcare providers, researchers and trans community organisations have voiced misgivings about the diagnosis “gender incongruence of childhood” (WHO 2018), the ICD-11 diagnosis currently uses for gender-diverse children who have not yet reached puberty (Winter et al. 2019; Cabral Grinspan et al. 2016). Clinical researchers and trans activists argue that the diagnosis pathologises the experiences of children who are merely exploring, embracing, and expressing gender diversity (Ehrensaft et al. 2018).

western medical-psychiatric perspective, which defines gender-variant people as a deviation of an apparently natural binary gender order and thus pathologizes and stigmatizes them”.

Trans activists intervene in the definition of gender as gender self-determination by inscribing themselves into the category of the ‘human.’ This is linked to a notion of a self-determined trans subject that is an extension of what is understood by the term ‘human’ itself. This notion of the human, however, is grounded in two problematic aspects. First, it evokes an understanding of an autonomous and coherent subject that is only attainable for certain trans persons. This subject, the self-determined trans person who can attain state-legitimized rights and medically institutionalized health care, is a normatively charged figure. As Adrian de Silva (2018) as well as Tamás Jules Joshua Fütty (2019) have elaborated for the German context and Persson Perry Baumgartinger (2019) for Austria, inclusion in state recognition is shaped by particular norms and concepts of citizenship.

The notion of the self-determined state-recognized trans subject is significantly characterized by its social conformity and neoliberal production as a rights-conforming, dignified, and vital citizen. Trans rights as human rights are part of a logic of state rights that Dan Irving aptly describes as follows: “Rights are not understood as the responsibility of the benevolent state; rather, rights are earned through individual’s actively demonstrating their worth. Those who have attained material ‘success’ measured by one’s participation in labor and consumer economies and demonstrate financial, physical, and spiritual fitness prove themselves deserving rights” (Irving 2012, 157). Hence, the demand for human rights extends the social inclusion of certain trans persons, while producing exclusions of trans persons who cannot or do not want to comply with these normative notions of a self-determined subject. This illustrates that trans

political struggles for human rights have paradoxical effects. The partial inclusion simultaneously entails trans normative exclusions of unequally positioned trans persons. Second, this understanding invokes a universal figure of ‘the human’ that has been produced by colonial violence which continues to this day. To understand this present moment of trans activism in the Global North/West and its impact on the knowledge production in Trans Studies, I suggest to critically assess the history of the Western cisheteropatriarchal white empire, that involved colonial conquest and transatlantic slavery to build up the figure of the universal human.

### **The Coloniality of Gender, the Figure of the Universal Human and its Historical Present in Trans Politics**

Black feminists, feminists of Color and trans scholars have outlined the nexus of an apparently clearly demarcated gender binary and a seemingly civilized white race as the foundations for the construction of the universal figure of the human. María Lugones (2007) for instance draws on the colonial matrix of power from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which established a new global order built on the genocide of indigenous peoples and the African slave trade, to highlight the racialized and gendered human versus non-human distinction. In the colonial narrative, only the so-called civilized are human, whereas the colonized are deemed animalistic and “non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful” (Lugones 2010: 743). In a similar vein, Hortense Spillers (1987) provides an analytic for thinking gender that exceeds the terms of human biology or social construction. Spillers shows how Blackness is disqualified from the privilege of traditional gendered categories in order that Black existence becomes something other, or in Spillers words “a symbiotic blend” (2007, 304) of categories that is unrecognizable as gender.

Consequently, we need to challenge the established interpretations that see human rights located in the Global North/West, and particularly in Western Europe, as the bastion of democracy and liberty to dissemble and de-centralize the imaginary of human rights as universal rights (Dhawan 2014). In Sylvia Wynter's analysis on how the Caribbean and Americas came to be an arena to test out and brutally invent the Human for various Western colonial powers, she identifies the geopolitical shifts in Europe from the medieval period, in which hierarchical ordering of people was sanctified by God, to the Enlightenment mode of secularization, in which the idea of race and its hierarchies defines humans in a chain of "colonial difference" (Wynter 2003, 263). This legitimating logic for white supremacy that shapes the wholly constructed notion of a world civilization, Wynter argues, is accompanied by the empirical effect of "African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation" (Wynter 2003, 263). In other words, Western colonial projects have established the universal human, "the white Man" (Wynter 2003, 260), as a mythical identity in opposition to the gendered, racial, religious, and cultural "Other."

It is this blend produced by the *longue durée* of the coloniality of power, racial capitalism, the afterlife of slavery, and white supremacy that builds the ground for thinking about the construction of the white, Western, and bourgeois gender binary. This analysis of the coloniality of gender has significant impact on the "critical intervention" Trans Studies aim at the ontological and epistemological question of what gender beyond the gender binary might signify. Black Trans Studies play a crucial role here in a new formation of the field of Trans Studies. In his work, Black Trans Studies scholar C. Riley Snorton examines "how captives were rendered as raw materials" (Snorton 2017, 53) "for mediating and remaking sex and gender as matters of human categorization" (Snorton 2017, 20). In his attempt to find Black and trans life in the de-humanizing conditions of slavery and beyond, Snorton traces Black figures who made use of the

"fungible ungendered flesh" they were ascribed to for fugitive movements. Snorton shows how Black slaves attained personal sovereignty in the Antebellum North via the recurrence of "cross-dressing" and cross-gender modes of escape. In addition, Snorton provides what he calls a "shadow history" of trans embodiment in the aftermath of World War II and in the early Cold War period against the backdrop of Christine Jorgensen as an exceptional figuration of trans embodiment.

Snorton refers to media reports of Jorgensen's "sex change" that cast her embodiment as a testament of the magnitude of modern science consolidating a notion of trans (sexuality) as the result of medicalized treatments aimed to inscribe gender as an anatomical and biological premise. Jorgensen's spectacularized trans embodiment worked not only as a promise of freedom to live as a trans (sexual) woman, but as a national narrative of somatechnical advancement, and thus as a figure of national freedom. Snorton argues that "if Jorgensen's media figuration came to represent a form of freedom, it also signified upon the various kinds of unfreedom that marked and continue to animate black and trans temporalities" (Snorton 2017, 142). By focusing on the mediated narratives of Black trans figures during this period, Snorton illustrates the role Jorgensen played within the structure of America's national racial identity for a global audience. The shifting notion of human valuation herein becomes clear with the Black trans figures Hicks Anderson, Black, The Browns, and McHarris and Grant Snorton illuminates from the shadow of history as "they lay the groundwork for understanding trans/gender embodiment in relation to the kinds of violence that inflect black and trans life, only one of which is the violence of erasure, and for which that erasure is about not an absence but a persistent and animating presence" (Snorton 2017, 144). Snorton aims to re-figure trans historiography while focusing on both un-becoming and becoming, on presence and disappearance as well as on haunting.



Against this backdrop, I argue that the critical intervention in the production of knowledge Snorton provides us with as its shadow history shows the colonial legacies of sexological and medical regimes that regulate the access to medical care and access to legal gender recognition (see Gill-Peterson 2018). This critical intervention is crucial for the contestation of transnormativity in trans politics as human rights activism today. With the above-mentioned paradigmatic turn to human rights, trans politics builds on the figure of the universal trans person. This does lead to a certain visibility and recognition for some and simultaneously fortifies the dominant white gender normativity while masking the various lives of trans people beyond this privileged position (see Valentine 2007; Aizura et al. 2014; Ellison et al. 2017). Therewith, it reiterates the coloniality of the universal human as the ground for accessing medical treatment and towards legal representation. In line with trans historiography's accentuation of the first widely noticed and visible trans figure Jorgensen, the normative figure of the white middleclass, able-bodied, and mentally abled trans person persists as the legitimate subject of trans human rights activism.

### Critical Trans Studies – Or, What is Critical about Trans Studies Now?

As I have shown so far, the early formation of the field of Trans Studies as a “critical intervention” in pathologizing knowledge production in medicine and psychology, which emerged in the Sexology in Europe in the late 19th century, is built – according to Susan Stryker – on a concept of “desubjugated knowledge.” The aim in critical knowledge production as well as in activism to counter the ascription to trans as ‘unnatural’ and ‘monstrous’ has proven to be oriented in a reifying way towards a colonial universal figure of the Human. The Human as a universal figure becomes the focus of the “critical intervention” in Trans Studies as counter-oppressive

knowledge production. This desubjugating stance becomes evident in the version of trans politics as human rights politics. Such politics reaffirm the dehumanizing colonial regime, as their dominant subject remains the white trans person as the recipient of human rights. The promise of Trans Studies as a project of “desubjugated knowledge” providing a “radical critical intervention” in the production of epistemological knowledge on “trans phenomena” and of trans politics as a transformative justice project for all trans people is thus not fulfilled.

In this version of Trans Studies, “desubjugation” alludes to a subject position that can free itself from subjugation. As I have exemplarily shown with the work of C. Riley Snorton (2017), Black Trans Studies show that ways of “desubjugation” during slavery as well as in its afterlife are to be understood more broadly. Thus, to de-center Trans Studies from its focus on the white subject, multiple formations of power must be considered in an understanding of what a “critical intervention” might mean. I suggest thinking of this attempt as the desire for a revised “radical critical intervention” Susan Stryker set out Trans Studies do be, and thus an altered attachment to what Trans Studies might encompass by asking how we could imagine the field's future considering its myriad legacies of colonialism in knowledge production on gender.

I propose thinking through a version of what Eliza Steinbock and I termed *Critical Trans Studies* (Nay and Steinbock 2021). Building on earlier work that interrogate the presumptive whiteness, settler-colonial context, and US-based orientation of the field (Aizura et al 2014; Ellison et al. 2017; Chiang et al. 2018; Garriga-López et al. 2019), Eliza and I “have sought to continue to do the necessary work of tracing histories of colonialism and white supremacy that underwrite dominant concepts of gender and sexuality which have accompanied the formation of our field” (Nay and Steinbock 2021: 149-150). In doing so –and this exceeds Eliza and my

thoughts so far – I will examine what the term *trans* might mean here as well as what the “critical” in *Critical Trans Studies* might signify.

The widely discussed question what the term *trans* might encompass starts with *trans* as a historical category, and asks how the term has circulated globally, and how race, class, ability and location have complicated the desire to do justice to the complex ways in which people inhabit gender variance (Stryker 2006; Stryker et al. 2008; Stryker and Aizura 2013; Stryker and McCarthy Blackston 2023). Here, an attachment to a radical critical intervention in providing conditions for transformative justice for all trans people remains important while deferring from an understanding of *trans* as a subject position. However, it is important to focus on the previously outlined problematic of the universal human without simply deconstruct the human by – in Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson, and C. Riley Snorton’s (2017, 163) words – “(...) instrumentalizing those not-quite humans and sometimes humans whose violability forms the abstracted imaginative surface (to borrow from Saidiya Hartman [1997]) upon which the human and its metrics are conjured.” The question what *trans* might mean must therefore encompass the racialized production of gender. Black Trans Studies scholars work on such repressed genealogies of the role of Blackness for social political subjectification. C. Riley Snorton for example elaborates on the “transversality” of theorizing Blackness and transness while pointing out that *trans* is more about a movement with no clear origin and no point of arrival, and *blackness* signifies upon an enveloping environment and condition of possibility. “Here, *trans* – in each of its permutations – finds expression and continuous circulation within blackness, and blackness is transected by embodied procedures that fall under the sign of gender” (Snorton 2017, 2).

Against this backdrop, we might think of *trans* as an asterisk – a sign often used in trans activism and theory to hold a place for various meanings of

*trans*. The asterisk would stand for the past not yet past, or the past in the present. Black Feminist theorist and historian Christina Sharpe uses the term “the asterisked human” (Sharpe 2016, 30) in her analysis of Black lives in the afterlives of slavery. Sharpe refers to “Trans\*” as “a variety of ways that try to get at something *about* or *toward* the range of trans\*formations enacted on and by Black bodies” (Ibid., original emphasis). “Trans\*” refers furthermore “to a range of embodied experiences called gender and to Euro-Western gender’s dismantling, its inability to hold in/on Black flesh” (Ibid.). Following Sharpe, the asterisk might hold space for ways of being in the history of the ascribed monstrosity of gender and sexuality to Black bodies. *Critical Trans Studies*, as I want to argue here, might then be an asterisk itself which moves critical knowledge production across different temporal sequences each of which move but back to the past and forward to its afterlife.

I will close with a few thoughts on the term *critical* in *Critical Trans Studies*. It alludes towards a seemingly more elaborated version of Trans Studies. Here again, an attachment to radical critical intervention in providing conditions for transformative justice for all trans people remains important. I understand *critical* as a perspective that scrutinizes knowledge production in a power-critical way. Here, the critique of existing knowledge becomes a precondition to produce new knowledge. Ideally, this knowledge is more comprehensive, more complex, and more power sensitive.

However, this term invokes a logic of progress. It refers to the figure of the critical intellectual, who is genuinely part of an academic industrial complex. This complex is based on the production of so-called innovative knowledge – often measured with various impact factors. This logic of the academic industrial complex is grounded in capitalist extractive productivity. It not only jettisons previous knowledge in a revolving door of prestige and attention but also contributes to the exhausting conditions

of mostly institutional precarious trans scholars in academia as well as in activism and art. The question here is: How can we move beyond these extractive conditions in the (future) formation of the field of Trans Studies?

I suggest sticking to the attachment to a knowledge production that follows the desire for transformative justice for all marginalized people. This desire encompasses the relational aspects of the ambivalent power dynamics at work in contemporary imperial and colonial logics of disciplinarity in academia. *Critical Trans Studies* might in this sense strive to dismantle these logics. This needs a different way of care (see Malatino 2020) within academia, activism, and art as the extractive racial capitalist logic of the academic industry complex demands. The latter demands a competitive logic within conditions of scarcity of resources that translates in an understanding of the term “critical” as delimiting from the many scholars who work within, despite, and beyond this academic industrial complex. I suggest continuing to follow the desire for a radical critical intervention in providing conditions for a transformative justice for all trans people in a version of Trans Studies as *Critical Trans Studies* that continues to resist and transform oppressive power systems while building generous and generative worlds in developing knowledge, political and artistic practices.

## References

- Aizura, Aren Z., Trystan Cotton, Carla LaGata/ Carsten Balzer, Marcia Ochoa, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz. 2014. “Introduction. Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (3): 308–319.
- Baumgartinger, Persson Perry. 2017. *Trans Studies. Historische, begriffliche und aktivistische Aspekte*. Wien: Zaglossus.
- Cabral Grinspan, Mauro, Amets Suess Schwend, Julia Ehrt, Tshegofatso J. Seehole, and Joe Wong. 2016. “Removal of a gender incongruence of childhood diagnostic category: a human rights perspective.” *The Lancet Psychiatry* 3 (5): 405–406.
- Chiang, Howard, Todd A. Henry, and Helen Hok-Sze Leung. 2018. “Trans-in-Asia, Asia-in-Trans.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5 (3): 298–310.
- Council of Europe. 2020. *Combating Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Council of Europe Member States*. [https://rm.coe.int/combating-discrimination-on-grounds-of-sexual-orientation-and-gender-i/16809fb2b8?fbclid=IwAR0dUq\\_b821v\\_-Vn51kDzPeGdIx2OsRS1I1zkmKf5FVVjms\\_dsCu9gE78g](https://rm.coe.int/combating-discrimination-on-grounds-of-sexual-orientation-and-gender-i/16809fb2b8?fbclid=IwAR0dUq_b821v_-Vn51kDzPeGdIx2OsRS1I1zkmKf5FVVjms_dsCu9gE78g).
- de Silva, Adrian. 2018. *Negotiating the Borders of the Gender Regime. Developments and Debates on Trans(sexuality) in the Federal Republic of Germany*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Dhawan, Nikita. 2014. *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial World*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Verlag.
- Ehrensaft, Diane, Shawn Giammattei, Kelly Storck, Amy Tishelman, and Colton Keo-Meier. 2018. “Prepubertal Social Gender Transitions: What We Know; What We Can Learn – A View from a Gender Affirmative Lens.” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 19 (2): 251–268.
- Ellison, Treva, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson, and Riley Snorton. 2017. “We Got Issues. Toward a Black Trans\*/Studies.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4 (2): 162–169.
- European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights FRA. 2016. *Professionally Speaking: Challenges to Achieving Equality for LGBT People*. Luxembourg: European Union.
- Füty, Tamás Jules Joshua. 2019. *Gender und Biopolitik. Normative und intersektionale Gewalt gegen Trans\*Menschen*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Garriga-López, Claudia Sofia, Denilson Lopes, Cole Rizki, and Juana María Rodríguez. 2019. “Trans Studies en las Américas.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6 (2).
- GATE Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex Advocacy in Action, ILGA-Europe International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association Europe, TGEU Transgender Europe. 2021. *Trans Rights are Human Rights: Dismantling Misconceptions about Gender, Gender Identity, and the Human Rights of Trans People*. [https://gate.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TransRightsAreHumanRights\\_July2021.pdf](https://gate.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TransRightsAreHumanRights_July2021.pdf).
- Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2018. “Trans of Color Critique before Transsexuality.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5 (4): 606–620.

- Güldenring, Annette. 2015. Zur Rolle der Medizin und aktuellen Trans-Gesundheitsversorgung in Deutschland. In *Gutachten: Begrifflichkeiten, Definitionen und disziplinäre Zugänge zu Trans- und Intergeschlechtlichkeiten. Begleitforschung zur Interministeriellen Arbeitsgruppe Inter- & Transsexualität - Band 1*, edited by Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 31–40. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.
- LaGata, Carla / Balzer, Carsten. 2014. “Human Rights.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (1–2): 99–103.
- LaGata, Carla / Balzer, Carsten, and Jan S. Hutta. 2012. *Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide – A Comparative Review of the Human-Rights Situation of Gender-Variant/Trans People*. Berlin: Flyeralarm.
- LaGata, Carla / Balzer, Carsten, and Jan S. Hutta. 2014. ”Trans Networking in the European Vortex: Between Advocacy and Grassroots Politics.” In *LGBT Activism and the Making of Europe*, edited by Philip M. Ayoub and David Paternotte, 171–192. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lugones, María. 2007. “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.” *Hypatia* 22 (1): 186–219.
- Malatino, Hil. 2020. *Trans Care*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nay, Yv E., and Eliza Steinbock. 2021. “Critical Trans Studies in and beyond Europe: Histories, Methods and Institutions.” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8 (2): 145–157.
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Snorton, Riley. 2017. *Black on Both Sides. A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Somerville, Siobhan B. 2000. *Queering the Color Line. Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Spillers, Hortense J. 1987. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe. An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics* 17 (2): 64–81.
- Stryker, Susan. 2006. “(De)Subjugated Knowledges. An Introduction to Transgender Studies.” In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 1–17. New York: Routledge.
- Stryker, Susan, and Stephen Whittle, eds. 2006. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Stryker, Susan, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore. 2008. “Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36 (3–4): 11–22.
- Stryker, Susan, and Aren Aizura, eds. 2013. *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*. New York: Routledge.
- Stryker, Susan, and Paisley Currah. 2014. “Introduction.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (1–2): 1–18.
- Stryker, Susan, and Dylan McCarthy Blackston, eds. 2023. *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Suess Schwend, Amets. 2020. “Trans Health Care from a Depathologization and Human Rights Perspective.” *Public Health Reviews* 41 (3): 1–17.
- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Vidal-Ortiz, Salvador. 2020. “Transgender Movements.” In *Companion to Women’s and Gender Studies*, edited by Nancy A. Naples, 463–479. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- WHO World Health Organization. 2018. International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems ICD-11. <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2f%2fid.who.int%2f%2fid.who.int%2f344733949>.
- Winter, Sam, Diane Ehrensaft, Michelle Telfer, Guy T’Sjoen, Jun Koh, Simone Pickstone-Taylor, Alicia Kruger, Lisa Griffin, Maya Foigel, Griet De Cuypere, and Dan Karasic. 2019. “ICD-11 and Gender Incongruence of Childhood: A Rethink Needed.” *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health* 3 (10): 671–673.
- Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (3): 257–337.

# TRANSGENDER AFFECT

## Rage and Joy or Something Else?

Liekki Valaskivi

On a snowy Thursday morning in Tampere, a group of researchers, students, and activists donned their hot pink name tags, with preferred pronouns included, and gathered for the 8<sup>th</sup> Nordic Trans Studies Conference, titled *From Transgender Rage to Trans Joy: Trans Studies through Affective Lens*.<sup>1</sup> The conference was held at Tampere University, Finland, and it ran from February 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 2023. As implied by “8<sup>th</sup>”, it was a part of a series of conferences and symposiums organised by the Nordic Trans Studies Network, which was formed in 2009 at the *Transgender Studies and Theories: Building up the Field in a Nordic Context* conference at Linköping University, Sweden. Since then, there have been six Nordic Trans Studies conferences or symposiums at irregular intervals, organised by whomever had the time and funding to do so. The previous two were both in 2019, in Trondheim, Norway, and Lund, Sweden, respectively. This time, the conference was organised by the research project *Affective Activism: Sites of Queer and Trans World-Making*, led by university lecturer Tuula Juvonen and funded by the Academy of Finland. With approximately 120 participants, this iteration of the Nordic Trans Studies Conference was the largest thus far, as well as the largest trans studies conference ever organised in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> <https://events.tuni.fi/nordictransstudies23/>

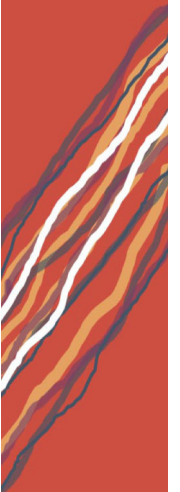
The theme of the conference, as the title implies, was affect. As I am not particularly familiar with affect theory, I was a bit concerned that I would be out of my depth, but fortunately, that was not the case. While many presentations touched on affect and the titular subjects of trans rage and trans joy were discussed at length, the conference themes allowed for a wide variety of topics and perspectives, not all of them directly related to affect. A presenter I spoke to mentioned that the topic of their presentation had veered quite far from affect after submitting their abstract, but this was a non-issue at the conference, and their presentation fit in just as well as the others in that session.

The two keynote speakers at the conference approached the subject of affect in very different ways. Dr. YV Nay from the Zürich University of Applied Sciences discussed *The Affective Life of Trans Studies as a Political Field in Academia and Activism*. In an information-packed keynote, they recounted the dehumanising and pathologizing history of transgender in academia and posited that the promise of trans studies to desubjugate trans people was not met, because the paradigm shift to human rights builds on a universal image of transgender. This benefits some, but further masks the existence of others in racialised and normative ways. Nay proposed critical trans studies, rooted in Black trans studies, as a solution, and suggested that

SQS  
1-2/2023

101

Queer  
ViewMirror  
Report



Liekki  
Valaskivi

in order to de-centre trans studies, multiple formations of power should be considered. This very academic and factual presentation was contrasted by the second keynote from Hil Malatino from Penn State University, titled *Weathering: Slow Arts of Trans Endurance*. Malatino's keynote occupied a space somewhere between academic writing and prose, and it was mesmerising to listen to. He spoke of holding environments, psychological spaces in which one is comfortable and safe from the hostilities of the world, where the broader antagonistic world is digested, and how these environments can become oppressive when the world is so antagonistic that the holding environment becomes saturated with it. Malatino also brought up the competing trans discourses alluded to in the title of the conference – the joy and the suffering – and attempted to complicate their relationship and to understand them as simultaneous. Negative affect saturates trans lives, and the only way out of it is through, but not in a way that makes experiencing joy impossible. I found this evocative and engaging essay very compelling, and I wish there was more space in Finnish academia for this kind of semi-creative writing.

This conference was the first in the series of Nordic Trans Studies Network conferences large enough to warrant parallel sessions. These 12 sessions allowed the participants to break off into smaller groups based on what most interested us, which was a great way to encourage discussion and facilitate networking between participants with similar interests, academic or otherwise. The drawback of simultaneous sessions, of course, is that there were many interesting presentations and discussions that I was not able to be present for, and therefore cannot report on beyond listing what they were: Institutions and Ethnographies, Community Care, Larp and Gaming, TransNatures, Affective Residues of the Trans History of Sexology, Art/Culture/Research, Transing and the Politized Body, and Politics and Belongings. I heard great things about many of these sessions from my fellow conference attendees, and more information about individual

presentations in each session is available on the conference website. The four parallel sessions I did attend were Nonbinary Expressions, Trans Childhood/Youth, Performing Rage, and Trans Pleasure and Joy. In what follows, I will describe them in detail, amidst my thoughts on the non-academic events of the conference.

Nonbinary Expressions was chaired by Varpu Alasuutari and it clearly drew a very nonbinary crowd: almost everyone in the room had 'they/them' on their nametag. First, doctoral researcher Vilja Jaaksi from the University of Turku gave an excellent presentation on nonbinary androgyny on social media. At least in certain settings, nonbinary gender is becoming intelligible, meaning that there are certain gender expressions that can be recognised not as male or female but as nonbinary. However, this image of the nonbinary is based on a very specific standard of (white, thin, abled) androgyny, and nonbinary people report feeling increasingly pressured to present in a specific way in order to be perceived as they wish to be perceived. Next, we heard from another doctoral researcher from Turku, Sade Kondelin, who with the help of visual aids introduced us to Karelian folk clothing, *ruutat*, and discussed several different options for how traditionally gendered folk clothing can be adapted for the nonbinary wearer, so that one does not have to choose between presenting as Karelian and presenting as nonbinary.

Last in the session, Swedish filmmaker Ester Martin Bergsmark's presentation in its meandering and poetic style was interesting but a little bit difficult for me to follow. Bergsmark discussed representing transfeminine and nonbinary experiences through filmmaking, and the purpose of the queer sex film as finding joy in your body by focusing on the tactile rather than normative ideas of what specific genitalia are or do. The presentation was illustrated by stills from the film *Instinct*, which was screened at the conference later that afternoon but which I was,



unfortunately, unable to attend. When I asked around the next day, the film was described to me as erotic but not pornographic and interesting but a little strange to watch in an academic setting. One person mentioned that having seen the film, they understood what the presenter meant by the closeups creating the nonbinary body: zoom in close enough and the body becomes unidentifiable and thus un-genderable.

Alongside academic discussion and discovery, the conference provided artistic explorations of transness. On Thursday, in addition to the film screening, we were able to view some visual art by Marie Andersen, Aimé Dabbadie and Frej Haar in the Linna lobby in between sessions. We also experienced a thought-provoking performance by Mar Fjell and Malin Arnell, titled *Whatever (you need)*, which consisted of the performers moving furniture and various object around the performance space while interacting with each other and the audience. One of the purposes of art is to evoke an emotional response, and this performance certainly achieved that, aptly for a conference centring affect. Based on the reactions of the people around me, the predominant affect of the audience was fascination and amusement. I, unfortunately, primarily experienced discomfort, and frankly would have left after five minutes had I not committed to reporting on all parts of the conference to the best of my ability. I found myself wondering whether it might be appropriate to include some kind of content warning in the conference programme about this type of performance. As the conference was quite vocal about following policies for a safer space, it felt somewhat contradictory to invite participants to a performance that included a deeply unpleasant soundscape and interactions with random members of the audience with no forewarning. It is often the intention of art, particularly performance art, to shock and disrupt, and there is perhaps a conversation to be had about finding a balance between that and the safety and comfort of participants.

The second session I attended, titled Trans Childhood/Youth, was the one I was personally most looking forward to, as it pertained to the topics of my own research, and it did not disappoint. Chaired by Tobias Raun, this Friday morning session included many fascinating presentations with different perspectives to research into trans children and youth. In their talk about the medical treatment of trans youth in Danish media, Tobias Raun and Mons Bissenbakker presented their upcoming article, which describes a pseudo-feminist criticism of the increasing number of trans boys wanting to transition. Instead of opposing medical transition based on concerns for trans individuals, the discourse in Denmark has now turned to a concern that trans boys' desire to transition is a direct result of the way society devalues women and femininity, and that by transitioning they are attempting to take some kind of shortcut out of patriarchy. The presenters were interested in this shift in discourse and the way in which medical professionals now act as gatekeepers to the "authentic" desire to transition.

Next, Kristiina Tyni, Anna Bratt and Matt (Matilda) Wurm presented their research, in which they interviewed Swedish gender-creative children (ages 4-12) about their gender identities and experiences. Based on these interviews, it is clear that even small children can have a strong internal sense of gender – "I felt it inside", as the title of the presentation quoted a participant – and they are surprisingly adept at articulating these experiences when given the space to do so. Isak Auran's PhD plan for the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences explored movement, meaning all bodily motion and active bodily involvement, as a perspective into the experiences of trans youth, particularly in the context of school.

Finally, Irina Schmitt's presentation discussed how Swedish trans and nonbinary young people navigate gender norms at school. Cisnormativity at school puts a lot of pressure and stress on trans students and is inherently linked to other categories of oppression, like race and body-shaming. It

isn't always clear whose responsibility it is to address these issues, but the presenter encouraged teachers to become activists. My only complaint about this session as a whole was that I wish that there had been more time for discussion. I look forward to citing the research presented in my own work.

In the third session on Friday afternoon, chaired by Luca Tainio, we heard perspectives on the subject of Performing Rage. Eli Ståhl, who is originally from Denmark but placed in London, spoke to us about affective solidarity and transgender rage. They introduced us to a UK protest and a US sculpture, both protesting policies that would limit trans people's access to public bathrooms, and both expressing rage via the medium of urine – hence the title of the presentation: Pissed Off. The second presentation of the session was from Kaarna Tuomenvirta, who first introduced us to their PhD research at the University of Helsinki, where they explore healing from the experiences of Finnish trans clinics and the compulsory psychiatric evaluation process through poetry, and then read some of their poetry for us. We were warned that the poems described the traumatic and dehumanising process of medical transition in Finland, and I somewhat wished I had heeded that warning, as they were difficult to hear, but they were also beautiful and powerful and unquestionably a tool for healing and recovery. As there were only two presentations in this session, we had plenty of time for a discussion about who gets to access and express rage in the trans community, and how rage is received and interpreted depending on things like gender presentation and race.

The evening event on Friday, QUEER RAGE, was certainly the most memorable part of the conference for me. We gathered at the local restaurant and event space Laterna for an evening of conversation, dancing, drinks and performances. I had many interesting conversations with fellow conference attendees, learned about what was discussed in some of the

parallel sessions I missed, and built some much-needed networks as a new doctoral researcher. As for the performances, I saw my first ever live drag performances and they were excellent, but I particularly enjoyed the stand-up performances from Josephine Baird and Jamie McDonald, which were genuinely hilarious and well-tailored for the crowd of trans and queer academics. As the former mentioned in the following morning's session, finding humour in difficult or traumatic trans experiences and sharing them with a community works as a release for pain.

The fourth and final session I attended took place on Saturday morning. Despite the somewhat subdued and weary atmosphere after two long days, this session titled Trans Pleasure and Joy, chaired by Tuula Juvonen, included four interesting and engaging presentations. First, we heard from Tais B. Terletskaja from the University of Copenhagen, who discussed pleasure as a political issue in trans and queer cultural production. The presentation brought up many interesting points about a necessary turn from damage and suffering to pleasure in trans and queer theory, as well as the need to work through difficult affect without letting it destroy us. The presentation ended with a slideshow of queer artworks in various media that explored in some way the relationship between pleasure and suffering as a part of queer existence.

Dannie Milve from Södertörn University gave us a fascinating presentation about sextech, its claims of disruption and innovation, and its potential to actually inspire meaningful change in a queer context, should they move from platitudes about diversity and inclusivity to an actual radical reimagining of human sexuality. Representing the Queer Psychology in Sweden research group, Theodor Mejias Nihlén and Matt (Matilda) Wurm introduced us to their research regarding minority joy and the positive aspects of the trans experience. They presented a model of minority stress and proposed a counterpart describing minority joy and its effects



on health and well-being, and identified several different categories of minority joy expressed by their interviewees, such as an increased sense of authenticity and the unique insights provided by having lived in two genders.

The final presentation of the session was pre-recorded, as the presenter shawndeez lives in California and could not attend remotely due to the 10-hour time difference. Shawndeez presented their PhD research into the spiritual explorations of queer/trans Iranian Americans. They had discovered that many interviewees felt good in their expressions of queer love which, I felt, was a beautiful note to end the session and the academic portion of the conference on.

The conference finished off with a tour of Del LaGrace Volcano's photography exhibition *Bodies of Resistance* in Tampere Art Museum, organised in collaboration with the Trans\*Creative project (led by senior researcher Lotta Kähkönen and funded by KONE Foundation) and co-curated by doctoral researcher Luca Tainio. Volcano's portraits of queer people display bodies and gender expressions that are not traditionally or often seen in art. I was particularly struck by the Transgenital Landscape series, which depicts transmasculine genitalia. The artist mentioned in their description of this series that non-trans people are often curious about what genitalia trans people have, but I believe that curiosity extends to trans people as well – we want to know what people like us look like, or what we might look like ourselves at a future point in transition. While Volcano's portraits ostensibly explore bodies and gender expressions that are considered taboo or perverse, and while the artist made several compelling points about diversity throughout the conference, it was interesting to realise that the subjects of the photographs were predominantly white, and more importantly, inhabited bodies that were thin, attractive and at least seemingly abled. Specifically, the people who

were pictured undressed, or in photos evoking the sexual or erotic, were thin and attractive and white – displaying precisely the kind of socially and culturally recognisable androgyny that Vilja Jaaksi discussed in their talk in the Nonbinary Expressions session.

I walked back from the museum with a colleague from Estonia and, in the cold wintery sunshine, we discussed our experiences of the conference. I expressed how exhausted I felt both after and during the conference. Attending a trans studies conference as a trans academic is cognitively, emotionally and physically exhausting because you cannot play the role of the detached observer even for a moment. As my new friend eloquently put it, when we are doing trans studies, we are both the subject and the object. Your body, your fears, your hope, your pain – they are all part of every discussion and the topic of every presentation. Everything is personal just as much as it is academic or political, and it becomes impossible to separate yourself from the work. It was difficult for me to analyse or fully appreciate the poetry of Kaarna Tuomenvirta in the Performing Rage session, for example, because it was terrifying to hear the kind of experiences I have to look forward to at Finnish trans clinics – the kind of trauma that I, too, will someday have to heal from. Processing these kinds of emotions while maintaining the outward appearance of academic professionalism is enormously taxing for all of us. In the negotiations between trans rage and trans joy, I found myself drawn, both as an academic and as a trans person, to a secret third option: trans exhaustion. Perhaps that is something to explore further next time, whenever that may be. None of this is to say that I did not enjoy the conference or that the work that we do as trans academics is not worth it, only that we should acknowledge just how difficult it is to do what we do – and to give credit to ourselves and each other for doing it regardless.

# Missä mennään, transtutkimus, vuonna 2023?

Sari Laurila

Astuessani ensimmäistä kertaa yliopiston ovista elettiin 1990-luvun jälkimmäistä puoliskoa. Pois pääsin vielä ennen opintoviikkojen ja piirtoheittinkalvojen jäämistä historiaan. Tästä päivästä käsin moni muukin asia on muuttunut. Tämän huomasin osallistuessani helmikuussa 2023 Tampereen yliopistolla järjestettyyn Nordic Trans Studies Network -konferenssiin.

Tutkijat ympäri Eurooppaa ja kauempaakin pitivät konferenssissa esityksiä aiheista, jotka ovat tematisoituneet tiedeyhteisön luupin alle vasta melko äskettäin. Transtutkimus pääsee harvemmin itsenäisesti esille; usein se on jäänyt sukupuolentutkimuksen tai queer-tutkimuksen sivujuonteeksi. Siksikin ilahduin konferenssin laajuudesta, ja ilmeisesti myös järjestäjät yllättyivät runsaasta osallistujajoukosta. Kahdeksatta kertaa järjestetty tapahtuma oli lyhyen historiansa toistaiseksi suurin.

Eräänlainen paradigman muutos leijui ilmassa. Tänä päivänä transihmisten olemassaolo aletaan viimein tunnustaa. Silti moni kärsii cisheteronormatiivisuuden väkivallasta ja vähemmistöstressistä. Omana itsenä eläminen kysyy yhä valtavasti voimia. Transtutkimuskin painii metatason kysymysten parissa: kuka voi olla subjekti, kenellä on valta määritellä trans? Kuten edellä totesin, transtutkimus on usein sisällytetty muuhun tutkimukseen. Tarve itsenäisemmälle transtutkimukselle on ilmeinen, ja varmaankin myös sukupuolentutkimuksen piirissä tätä tavoitetta edistetään.

”From transgender rage to trans joy” kuului konferenssin otsikko lyhennettynä. Tätä voi tulkita moninkin tavoin. Cisnormista käsin transtaustainen

herättää usein ihmetystä ja ennakkoluuloja. Moni transtaustainen joutuu tällöin tahtomattaankin ikään kuin mikroaktivistiksi. Aktivismi on siis muutakin kuin järjestön äänitorvena vaikuttamista. Jokainen transioituvaa on pakotettu aktivismiin ainakin oman elämänsä puitteissa. Siinä olisi tutkijoillakin työsarkaa todellisuuden kanssa kohtaavan aiheen parissa. Tässä viitekehityksessä ”joy” voi asettua toisenlaiseen valoon. Korjausprosessia leimaava kärsimyksen eetos saattaa seurata elämässä pitkään transition jälkeenkin.

Niin kauan kuin tarvitaan erillisiä turvallisemman tilan malleja, ollaan vasta matkalla kohti hyväksyntää. ”From rage to contentment” soisi silti siintävän jo lähestyvässä horisontissa. On ennen aikaista tuulettaa, että oltaisiin perillä. Cisnormi kaikessa väkivaltaisuuudessaan pahimmillaan tappaa ihmisen. Tästäkin kuultiin puheenvuoro workshopissa.<sup>1</sup> Olisi silti väärin syyttää vain valtarakenteita. Kaiken takana on ihminen, tavalla tai toisella.

On toki triviaalia opponoida, sillä ”from rage to joy” on kaikin tavoin kannatettava päämäärä. Kuulin silti hyvin vähän esimerkiksi vähemmistöstressiä pohdiskelevaa puhetta. Esillä ollut runous, kirjallisuus ja muukin taide

<sup>1</sup> Sanna Mustasaari esitelmöi konferenssissa aiheesta ”Post Mortem: Affective Battles over Gender, Sexuality and the Dead Body” käsitellen transtaustaisiin ihmisiin kohdistuvaa rakenteellista väkivaltaa, itsemurhaa ja politisoitunutta kuolemaa.

varmasti pyrki voimauttamaan, mutta käsien likaaminen niihin rakenteisiin, joista esille nostamani epäkohdat kumpuavat, kysynee myös tutkijalta attityydiä. Kärsimys jyrää ilon alleen, raivoamisesta ei ole yhtä loikkaa toiseen äärilaitaan, siirtymä on hitaampi ja asteittäisempi joka tasolla.

Mistä lie myös tutkijoiden, ei pelkästään tiedotusvälineiden, omaksuma ilmaus transyhteisö, jolla kaikki transtaustaiset tullaan niputtaneeksi yhteen. Tätä mietin konferenssissa mielessäni ja välillä ääneenkin. Kaikki transtaustaiset eivät ole verkostoituneet toistensa kanssa. Kaikki eivät löydä omaa viiteryhmäänsä, yhteisöänsä tai onnistu pääsemään sellaisen jäseneksi. Inklusiosta tuleekin eksklusiota. Ainakaan tutkija ei saisi vetää mutkia suoriksi.

Kaiketä feministiset teoriat sukupuolen performatiivisuudesta ovat nykyisenkin transtutkimuksen taustalla. Teoriat kuuluvat tutkijan työhön, ja ilahduttavasti transtutkimusta tekevät myös transtaustaiset. Kentällä on tilaa, tutkijoita on yksi siellä, toinen täällä ja kolmas oman työn ohessa. Ollaan lupaavassa alussa.

Kierrepallot seurasivat toisiaan kuunnellessani keskustelua konferenssin puheenvuoroista. ”I might not follow you”, toistui usein vastauksissa. Moni tutkimushanke vaikutti palvelevan vain tutkimusta itseään. Kaikki puhuivat sujuvaa englantia, mutta yhteistä kieltä ei aina tuntunut löytyvän. Oltiin edes samalla pallokentällä, aprikoin. Kaikki tietävät jostain jotain mutta yhteisesti ei tiedetä mistään mitään, summasin vaiti nihilistisiä ajatuksiani.

Cisnormin purkaminen tapahtunee kaukana tutkijan kirjoituspöydästä. Jos se on tapahtuakseen, se hiipii julkiseen retoriikkaan vähitellen. Boomerkin voi omaksua uusia asioita halutessaan. Tämä on tärkeää, jotta jokainen voisi kokea, ettei omasta olemisesta koituisi jaksamista nakertavaa stressiä. Jos taskussa pitää aina olla paksu tukku rautalankaa, alkaa elämä kuluttaa kohtuullisen nopeasti. Tarvitaan niiden puheenvuoroja, joilla

asiantuntemus on parhaiten hyppysissä: transtutkijoiden, kokemusasiantuntijoiden, kynnelle kykenevien siinä määrin kuin kukin jaksaa toivottaa. Eikä sen pitäisi olla toivottamista, ei edes maailmassa, jossa eniten tilaa saa kovimmin huutava.

# KATUJEN YÖSSÄ

Käsikirjoitus Vili von Nissinen  
Kuvitus Nina Mutik

♪  
Kun lähelläsi oon, kun mä sun  
lähelläsi, lähelläsi valvon, niin sanat  
vaietkoon, kun mä sun hyväilyjäsi palvon,  
ei sanat voi korvata mitkään, hetkiä hämyisen maan,  
Kun kanssas olla saan pitkään, hyväile, hyväile vaan ♪

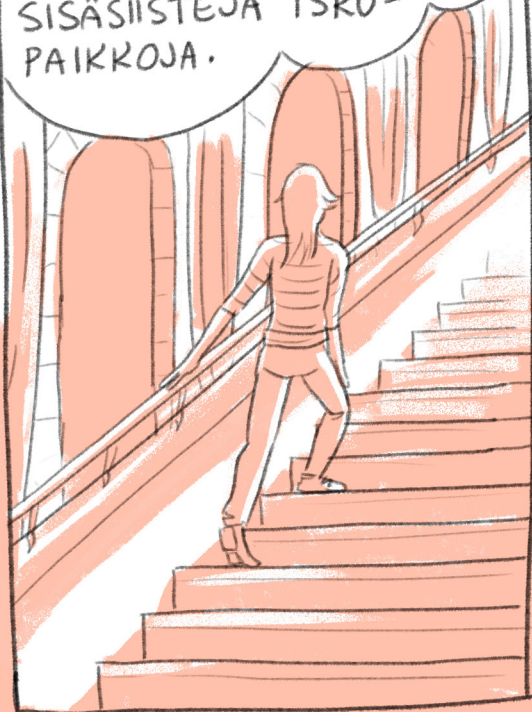




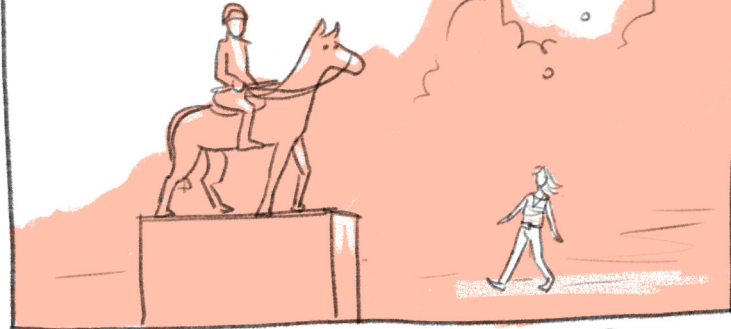
KILPAILU ONKIN TAVAT-  
TOMAN KOVAA JA  
VERISTÄ.



JOS TÄNÄÄN HALUAA  
MIESTÄ, ON JATKETTAVA  
ULOS. WANHAN KELLARIN  
LISÄKSI EI OLE MUITA  
SISÄSIISTEJÄ ISKU-  
PAIKKOJA.

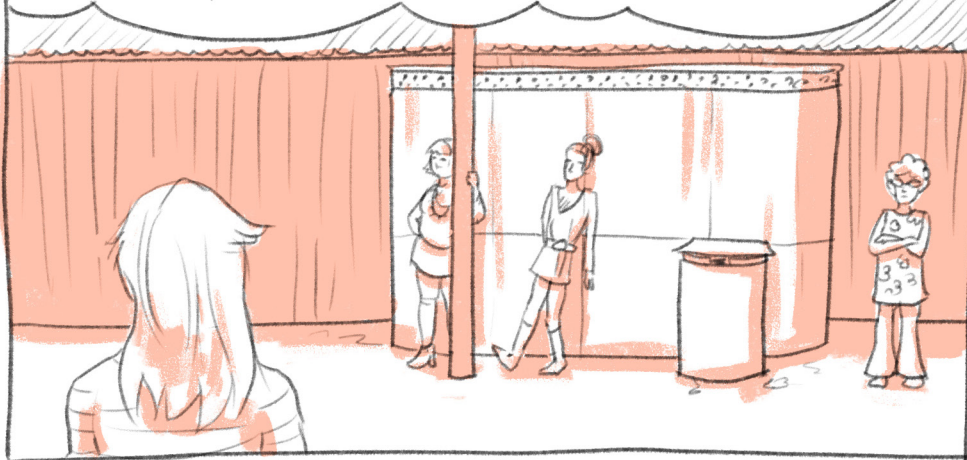


ONKO EDES HIENOSTO- JA SATAMA-  
LUTKAN VÄLILLÄ LOPULTA  
MITÄÄN EROA?



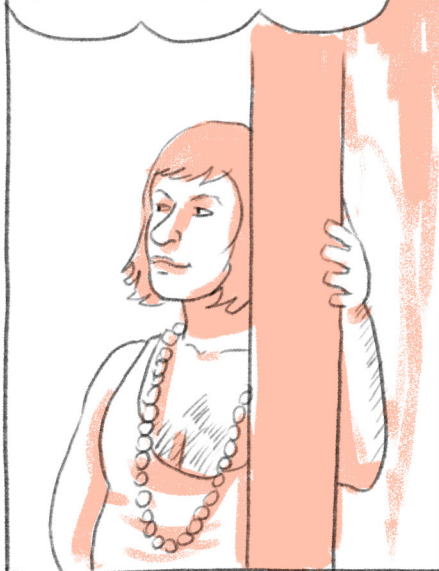
Ei käynyt tiemme suureen hotelliin, ei salattuihin makuuhuoneisiin... vain  
rintani vasten sun rintaasi, ja sydän sydämmees, suu suuhusi, vain katu  
helli, puisto suojasi, ja silta kaartui, meri kohautti, ja linnut nauroivat, lensi  
pareittain, se oli puolen tunnin onni vain...

KISSALANKUVA ON HELSINGIN AINOA TODELLINEN HUORAKATU, EIKÄ TÄÄLLÄ OLE YHTÄÄN NAISTA.



ME SISKOT YLLÄPIDÄMME HOMOFIILIEN PYHÄÄ MYSTEERIOTA LEMPINIMIEN KÄYTÖSTÄ. JO VUOSISATOJEN AJAN KALTAISEMME OVAT NAAMIOITUNEET LEMPINIMIEN TAAKSE. NYT YHTEISKUNNAN OLLESSA SALLIVAMPI NIMIPERINNE ALKAA JÄÄDÄ UNHOLAAN.

"HEKLAN" SIEMENLAAVAAN VOISI HUKKUA KOKONAINEN KYLÄ.



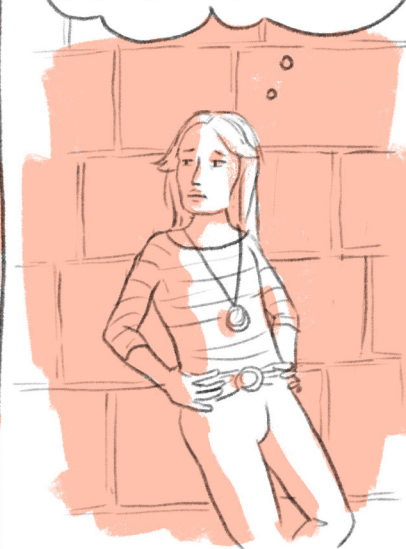
"BRIGITTE" KOKETEERAA KUIN RANSKATAR, MUTTA RANSKALAISEN KOROSTUKSEN UNOHTUESSA PALJASTUU RUOTSALAINEN BIRGER.

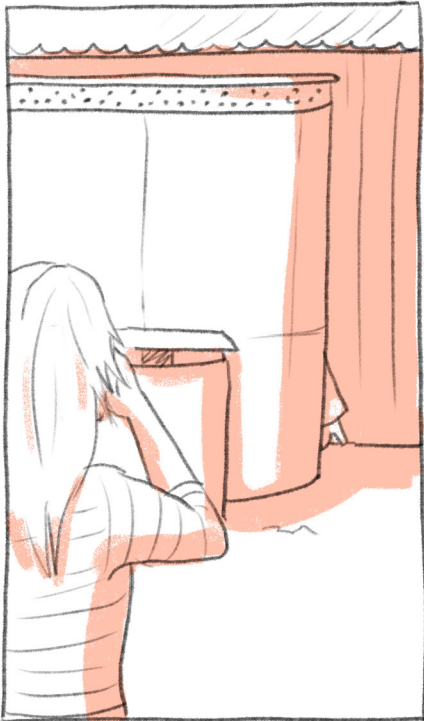


"KIKKARAPÄÄN" OIDIPAALISUUS TULEE ESIIN PYRKIMYKSENÄ OLLA ÄITINSÄ.



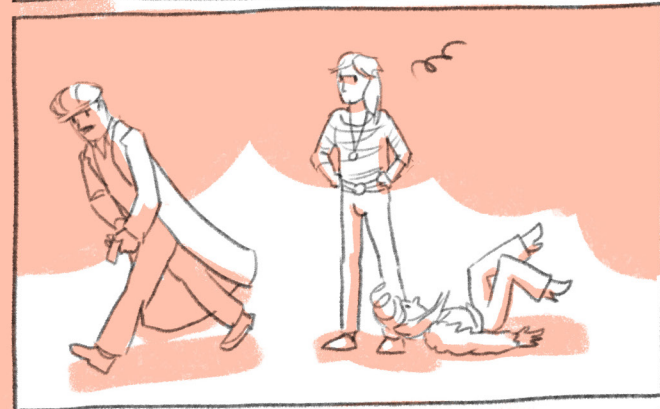
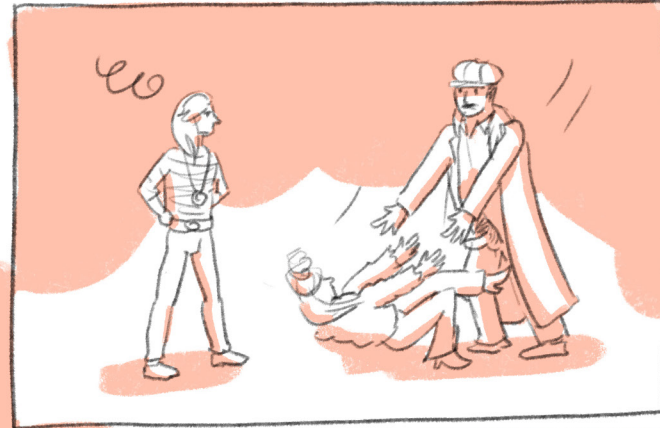
TÄMÄ ITKUMUURI ON KUULLUT MONET HUOKAUKSET.







PAINU PASKALAKKI VITTUUN! YRITITÄ TOISSA-  
ILTANA KATSASTAA TARJONNAN TYÖN VARJOLLA  
JA TULIT TÄNÄÄN POKAILEMAAN PÖMPELIIN?  
PAINU PIHTAAVAN PIKKUVAIMON JA HUUTAVAN  
LAPSES LVO KOTIAS TÄÄLTÄ!



SQS

1-2/2023

113

Pervolinsi  
Taidegalleria

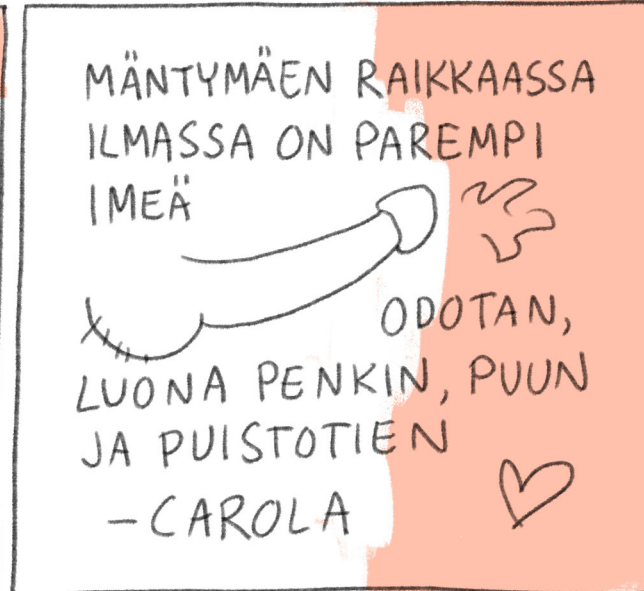
Vili  
von Nissinen  
ja  
Nina  
Mutik

AH VIOLETTA! "ELIITTI"-SISKOJEN KUNINGATTEREKSI  
ITSENSÄ KRUUNANNUT OOPPERADIIVA ON OMINUT  
ELEENSÄ JA NIMENSÄ IHAILEMANSA ITALIALAIS-  
OOPPERAN TRAAGISELTA KURTISAANIHAHMOLTA.



♪ Aurinko pois Kastehelmet niinkuin  
Kygneletkin taas Kuivattaa. Häntä niin  
silloin Kaipasin, yksin näin hiljaa laulelin  
Kesäamusta lohdutusta Kerran etsin

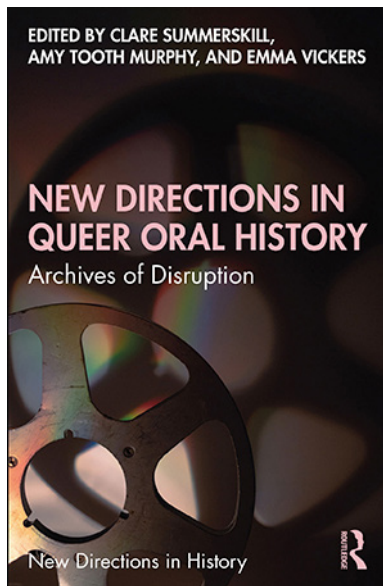
Niin aikaisin  
Niin aikaisin  
Niin aikaisin



# QUEER INTERVIEWS

## New Directions and Various Challenges

Jean Lukkarinen



Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers (eds). 2022. *New Directions in Queer Oral History. Archives of Disruption*. London and New York: Routledge. 219 pages.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003092032

*New Directions in Queer Oral History* is an incredibly detailed collection of 19 articles from queer oral historians with various backgrounds. In their articles,

the writers revisit their queer history interviews and discuss the difficulties and possibilities that queer oral history has as a practice. The book also gives tools for its readers to prepare for different kinds of obstacles they might discover while interviewing sexual and gender minorities. In this book review, I discuss themes of the book and reflect on them in relation to my own oral history interviews in my MA project on Finnish trans history.

### Generational Gaps and Personal Archives

*New Directions in Queer Oral History* is divided into four parts. The first part of the book focuses on narrating LGBTQ histories and the visibilities and invisibilities that may be caused by different oral history practices. In his article “Queer Intergenerational Reticence: A Religious Case Study”, George J. Severs examines his interview with “Jeremy”, an older HIV/AIDS activist of the Church of England, pointing out that the age of the interviewer and the interviewee play an important role in oral history interviews. Severs has studied the relationship between the Church of England and HIV/AIDS activism in the 1970s and the 1980s by interviewing the Church members. Severs argues that in his case, the generational gap between him and the interviewee caused him to be reluctant to ask certain questions and not to question further the answers given to him. He also notes that due to his admiration of Jeremy, he failed to take into account that Jeremy’s activism might have affected his career harmfully as a priest (p. 40–48). Importantly, Severs’ article reminds us that younger researchers, who admire the queer elders they interview, may be easily blinded by positive images of history produced by the interviewees. The article also points out that the admiration may prevent them from asking difficult questions that could result in different narratives about

SQS  
1–2/2023

115

Queer Eye  
Reviews

Jean  
Lukkarinen

the history of LGBTQ activism. In order to produce critical analysis, younger and older researchers must evaluate their attitudes and ties with the researched movements and the research participants so that their own idealized images of them do not guide the interview process.

Severs' article skillfully shows that different backgrounds, like age differences, may have an influence on the interviewing process. According to Severs, the generational gap between young queer researchers and queer elders can create a wall between the groups since the younger generations haven't lived during, for instance, the criminalization of homosexuality. These differences might also create distrust between the interviewer and the interviewee (p. 44–45).

However, this isn't always the case, as El Chenier's article "An Army of Listeners" wonderfully proves. Chenier's article is located in the fourth part of the book, which discusses the authority in queer oral history processes. Chenier writes about a queer history seminar, during which their students interviewed a group of older lesbians, who had been involved in the women's movement in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Chenier, their students found common ground and shared mutual interests with the older lesbians even though students were not of the same generation as the interviewees (p. 195–200). This demonstrates that in order to be successful, a queer oral history interview does not necessarily require the participants to share a common generational background. According to Chenier, during their course, one of the key elements to a successful interview was, instead, cross-generational respect for each other's experiences. This seemed to break the generational wall between the participants (p. 195–201).

Cross-generational respect played an important role also in the queer oral history interviews I conducted for my MA thesis in Cultural History. While interviewing older cross-dressers and transfeminine people about

their life experiences in Finland in the 1990s and 2000s, I made sure that the interviewees were allowed to describe their identity in their own terms and words, even though I otherwise used modern language to describe gender diversity in my own work. Meeting and interviewing older people from the trans community was also important to me personally because it gave me role models from the past. According to Chenier, it is important for younger queer students to meet queer elders. After Chenier's course, one student commented that meeting older queer people made their own future easier to imagine (p. 195–200). This is an important observation since trans and queer histories are often fractional, and historical role models can be difficult to find.

Noah Riseman's article "Finding 'Evidence of Me' through 'Evidence of Us': Transgender Oral Histories and Personal Archives Speak" highlights this fractionality of trans histories. Riseman has researched transgender history in Australia from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During his study, he noted that it was common for the research participants to have a personal collection of different trans-related articles and newspaper clippings. These personal archives, as Riseman explains in his article, can help the researcher discover hidden or forgotten aspects of history. Riseman also notes that these personal collections of trans people often serve as collections of "evidence of me" and "evidence of us". By this, he refers to the collector's urgent need for collecting every little piece of information about trans people and the trans community they can find, regardless of the quality of the source. As Riseman writes, these collections can offer exceptional opportunities for the researcher to discover new information about, e.g., smaller organizations that don't have the resources to organize their own archives (p. 59–68).

Working together with Dreamwear Club, a support organization of cross-dressers and transfeminine people in Finland, has taught me that personal

archives often offer vital clues about the organizations and people within them. Therefore, I found Riseman's descriptions of trans people's personal archival practices very relatable, as the members of Dreamwear Club had also collected old newspaper clippings from other magazines and printed them out on their own club magazines.

## Bodies Matter?

The second and third parts of the book discuss important themes of bodies and intersubjective meaning-making and how they affect queer oral history. Articles in these sections underline that bodies are physical constructions that have both affected the experiences of the interviewee and the interviewer in the past and affect the oral history processes in the present because they offer visual clues of sameness or difference to the participants of the interview. Several writers refer to the book *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, in which Boyd and Ramírez argue that bodies have an effect on the interview process and that similar bodies present in the interview situation contribute to the authenticity of the interview (Boyd & Ramírez 2012, 2).

One notable example of how bodies have affected the experiences in the past is given in Margaret Robinson's article "Bisexual Women's Storytelling and Community-Building in Toronto", in which she discusses her interviews with 40 bisexual women about bisexuality and polyamorous relationships. In her study, Robinson analysed her interview data using Voice-Centred Relational Analysis (VCRA), in which the researcher examines the research participant and the cultural and physical frameworks they are speaking from. One aim of the analysis is to pinpoint what kind of body the interviewee is talking from (p. 111–114). Robinson found out that the discussion about bodies was often related to the interviewees'

gender identity and their attitudes towards gender norms in the past. For instance, one participant reported that they didn't conform to society's norms of being a woman at the time of the interview because of their big size (p. 115). Robinson's article demonstrates that, regardless of the same background, people with bodies that do not conform to societal norms may experience history differently.

Bodies can also create trust and queer intimacy in the present. Martha Robinson Rhodes's article "Filling the Boxes in Ourselves" distinctively points out that interviewees often attempt to search for clues of "sexual sameness" from the interviewer's appearance. In her study, she interviewed self-identified bisexuals and people attracted to multiple genders about their life experiences in Great Britain from the 1970s to the 1990s. As reported by Robinson Rhodes, clothing choices and hairstyles can be markers of the queerness of the researcher. According to her, these signals help to build mutual trust between the interviewer and interviewee (p. 121–123). Amy Tooth Murphy notes the same in her article "In Search of Queer Composure: Queer Temporality, Intimacy, and Affect", in which she examines her interviews with butch lesbians. In her article, Tooth Murphy suggests that similar bodily markers, such as butch haircuts, combined with similar queer backgrounds can result in mutual bonding and create queer joy and intimacy during the oral history interviewing process. She argues that it is important to create a queer space and queer time for the interview that allows the participants to be comfortable and to connect with each other. Tooth Murphy also suggests that granting space for queer joy and solidarity in the interviews contributes to creating more diverse interpretations of history (p. 163–169).

What sets these articles apart is that in Robinson Rhodes's study, her participants asked whether she was bisexual or not, whereas Tooth Murphy seems to have either passed as a butch lesbian to her interviewees or talked

about her orientation beforehand (p. 122–123; 163–169). As Robinson Rhodes argues, it is not easy to pass as a bisexual in the interviews because of the generational differences and the lack of universal visual signs of bisexuality (p. 123). This proves that even though the bodies of the interviewer and the interviewee would visually seem to be similar, they do not necessarily create mutual bonding if the meanings we give to our bodies are not the same. For instance, when I interviewed trans women for my MA thesis, I was sometimes confused to be a trans woman myself. As a masculine-leaning nonbinary person, this took me by surprise during the interviews, but the misunderstanding was cleared up quickly. Tooth Murphy's article brings up an important point about mutual bonding and queer joy, but when read alongside Robinson Rhodes's text, it seems to lack reflection on the fact that every identity group does not have clear visual signs indicating what their sexual orientation or gender identity is. However, this does not mean that the groups who have these markers should not feel queer joy over them – on the contrary, it is important to cherish the diversity of the LGBTQ community and remember that all queer oral history theories do not work with every group in the same way.

## In Conclusion

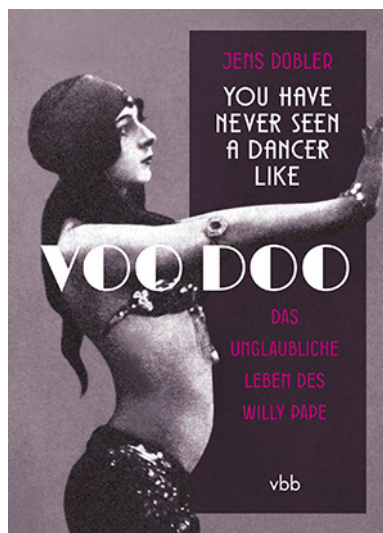
*New Directions in Queer Oral History* is a great book for anyone conducting research on queer oral history. It gives wonderful advice on how to plan and carry out successful oral history interviews. It also helps you to prepare for the interviews and the obstacles you might encounter while interviewing LGBTQ people. Reading about the difficulties and possibilities in queer oral history also gives the reader insight into how to analyze the interviews and how to find a new level of nuance in them. *New Directions in Queer Oral History* is also a book that I would have needed when I started planning my MA thesis on Finnish trans history. I'm delighted to have this book as a guide now, as I am starting to work on my PhD thesis.

## References

- Boyd, Nan Alamilla & Ramírez, Horacio N. Roque (eds.). 2012. *Bodies of Evidence. The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like VooDoo A BIOGRAPHY OF “EXOTIC SNAKE DANCER” WILLY PAPE

Leo Ryczko



Dobler, Jens. 2022. *You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like VooDoo: Das unglaubliche Leben des Willy Pape*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg. 160 pages.

In his book *You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like VooDoo: Das unglaubliche Leben des Willy Pape*, historian Jens Dobler presents the reader with an

extensive biography of the artist Willy Pape (1891–1940), a white Berliner, and his stage persona VooDoo.<sup>1</sup> As a so-called female impersonator, VooDoo was a staple of German and European variety show theatre of the 1920s. During her active career from 1911 to 1927, she did not only

tour through Germany and Europe but was also present in many queer<sup>2</sup> magazines, like *Die Freundin* or *Das 3. Geschlecht* for example, as well as several scientific publications of Magnus Hirschfeld, a famous sexologist of the time.

Dobler recounts Pape’s life in a lot of detail, beginning with the tin can factory of his father and ending with his death in 1940. About two-thirds of the book is occupied with the stage life of VooDoo, which entailed many tours, events, and contacts. Starting in Munich with her first show in June of 1911, dancing through all of Europe, her last known show took place in Berlin in December of 1929. As Dobler describes her stage life he spotlights venues, i.e. the Flora-Theater in Hamburg (pp. 70–73), to give a short overview of their histories, locations, and other visiting artists. Similarly, Dobler analyses other stars of variety theatre, who could have

<sup>1</sup> As it is no longer deductible which pronouns Willy Pape/VooDoo would prefer on and off stage, I will use he/him for Willy Pape and she/her for VooDoo as it is common today for Drag Queens.

<sup>2</sup> I use queer as a description for non-normative (in the sense of deviation from a supposed norm) gender and sexual identities. I am referring to the history of the origin of the term “queer”, which is explicitly meant to show and break the construct Butler named the heterosexual matrix: a supposedly natural connection between body, desire, and gender (Butler 1999, 41-42; 194). Nevertheless, I would like to stress the ahistorical use of the term, which might suggest the existence of an identity shared by a group. This might have not been the case for Weimar Republic.

been inspirations for VooDoo, like Mata Hari or Maud Allan. He also details possible contacts she had or might have had with other artists, for example the group Ba-Ta-Clan-Girls from the Bataclan-Theatre in Paris. In doing so, Dobler focuses on the part of VooDoo which is tied to the variety show scene of the time. He paints her as a variety show star in Europe asking why she remains unknown today. He states that variety theatre has been ignored by historians of theatre and performing arts for far too long as it is regarded as proletarian amusement in contrast to other art forms like classical theatre or opera (p. 101), hence explaining his focus on it. The book on VooDoo is a fine contribution against the forgetting of this art form.

While the stops and venues of her tours are still traceable today, the full content of VooDoo's shows remains a mystery as there are neither tapes nor many pictures of them. Only a handful of photographs, and descriptions by reviewers or of the advertisements can be used for deductions. Dobler paints a picture of erotic dances full of exoticism, similar to the aforementioned inspirations like Maud Allan. Her shows seemed to have been filled with orientalist and colonial references in clothing, requisites, the show titles, and the distinct performance as a "Schlangentänzerin" ("exotic snake dancer") with a living boa on stage. The snake, which supposedly was big and heavy, stayed with Pape well after his last show. Whereas VooDoo's active career ended in 1927, Willy Pape's life in the queer nightlife scene of Germany continued.<sup>3</sup>

The latter part of the book is concerned with the last 13 years of Pape's life during which he and his partner Emil Schmidt ran a successful and

---

3 Dobler sets 1927 as the end of VooDoo's career as it is the year Pape moved back into his parents' house to nurse his father (p. 124). But in the list of shows the last show is dated to 1929 (p. 152–154). Therefore, it is plausible to say the active career of VooDoo ended in 1927 whereas the last show was in 1929.

famous gay bar named Zum kleinen Löwen (The Little Lion) located in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Dobler presents us with several accounts of people who visited the bar and wrote about it, i.e. Klaus Mann who noted in his diary that he visited "VooDoo" (p. 124). The bar remained open until mid 1933 when the national socialist government used varied methods to close all of Berlin's gay bars within a couple of months. Dobler only writes a handful of pages about Pape after the closing of his bar during the Nazi regime until his death in 1940 as there is little known. Pape and Schmidt kept living together but moved into the far outskirts of Berlin. After opening another bar in Berlin in 1939 with Schmidt, Willy Pape died in 1940.

Dobler's book can only be described as a labor of love. It is a very detailed account of an almost forgotten prominent figure of variety shows and the queer Berlin of the Weimar Republic. Dobler unearthed possibly every trace there still is of VooDoo and Willy Pape to tell the story he published now. He even found a newspaper clipping about VooDoo from the Estonian magazine *Esmaspäew*, where she is pictured in male and female garments and described as a "hermaphrodite, whose female organs are more pronounced and who performs in variety and cabaret" (p. 109). The book is an important work on a distinctive person and his stage persona; a great example of an individual history to explore a wider historic context. Further research could be the reasoning behind and the ways of expression of colonial tendencies and racist motives in popular culture of the German queer scene, examining queer magazines like *Die Freundschaft*, *Die Freundin* etc.

Dobler's focus on VooDoo's involvement in the variety theatre scene is understandable but neglects the compelling entanglement of orientalism, colonialism, racism, gender, and sexuality VooDoo represented. Not only her name evokes European ideas of magical African religious practices, but orientalist and colonial references were blatantly present in her whole stage



persona. Even when Pape retired from VooDoo and became a bar owner, the fascination with the oriental and colonial didn't stop: like many other queer bars and clubs, he held events somewhat themed oriental, or as Dobler puts it, "exotic". He doesn't specify how these events are regarded as "exotic" - apart from their names, like "Eine Nacht in Singapore" (A night in Singapore). Dobler also quotes an account from the journalist Marion Sakulin published in 1931, who describes Pape's bar as having a Black man as an employed server working there, who Pape "picked off the street of Paris and brought to Berlin as a special attraction" (p. 132). Dobler doesn't question this account and later speculates that he must have spoken French, as the bar was advertised as multilingual (p. 135). It could very much be a fabrication of the author Sakulin – a further exoticization of an openly gay bar with an owner who used orientalist exoticization himself in his stage life.

Although Dobler addresses the fact that VooDoo, a white German, invokes orientalist stereotypes he does not problematize it further. In the sub-chapter "Ein Junge aus Wittstock wird Syrierin" ("A boy from Wittstock becomes a Syrian woman"; pp. 33–45), Dobler acknowledges "the exotic and connected with it the erotic" (p. 33) motives VooDoo uses and ties them to the German climate of racist violence and exoticization regarding the products of European colonies. However, he examines this not in a critical way, but by engaging in stereotypes himself. For instance, he describes human zoos in Berlin at the time as an example of the "exotic-erotic" times VooDoo was coming up in: "Young and old spinsters were in unstoppable awe of half-naked sons of chiefs at the human zoos in Zoologischer Garten [...]"; p. 33, transl. LR). This may have been the spirit of the time but without a deeper explanation for the colonial, racist, orientalist ideologies of Weimar Republic it not only trivializes the kidnapping and internment of people in human zoos but also the connection between VooDoo and human zoos falls flat.

VooDoo's use of orientalist-racist imagery comes as no surprise and can be seen as emblematic of the interwovenness of white German queerness and racism. As Laurie Marhoefer states, the invention of a white queer identity was interlinked with ideas about the sexual and gendered otherness of non-white people – specifically in the colonies (Marhoefer 2022, 86). Ideas of homosexuality were constructed by sexologists, ethnologists, and medical scientists who looked in the colonies for sexual deviancies and gender bending.

One of the most prominent scientific figures in this field, Magnus Hirschfeld, who was also involved with VooDoo, as she appeared in scientific publications of his, very much used colonial/ethnological ideas to further his theory on human sexuality. While at the same time excluding "oriental men" to be "real" homosexuals, Hirschfeld writes that Italy had an orientalist character for there being a lot of homosexual activity, but a disdain for being the receiving part of penetrative sex (Hirschfeld 1914, 571 via Çetin and Voß 2016, 10–13). Evidently, there were many colonial and racist entanglements in the German queer scene, which comes as no surprise; in the words of Stuart Hall: "colonization was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis. It was always inscribed deeply within them" (Hall 2021 [1996], 298). Not connecting VooDoo and her whole performance and persona to this background hinders the historical connection of the German queer history with the German colonial past.

With that all said, Jens Dobler's *You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like VooDoo* constitutes an important work against the forgetting of the history of queer culture with an expansive biography of a formerly unknown figure. Starting in 2003, Dobler (2003, 158) invested several years of research, even interviewing an old friend of Willy Pape still alive then. The groundwork he lays with this publication can now be used to broaden our understanding

of VooDoo's time by integrating the broader culture of racist orientalism and colonial references in the queer culture of the German Empire and Weimar Republic and by extension today.

## Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge.
- Çetin, Zülfükar, and Heinz-Jürgen Voß. 2016. *Schwule Sichtbarkeit - schwule Identität: Kritische Perspektiven*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Dobler, Jens. 2003. *Von anderen Ufern : Geschichte der Berliner Lesben und Schwulen in Kreuzberg und Friedrichshain*. Berlin: Gmünder.
- Dobler, Jens. 2022. *You Have Never Seen a Dancer Like Voo Doo: Das unglaubliche Leben des Willy Pape*. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg.
- Hall, Stuart. 2021 [1996]. "When Was "the Post-colonial"? Thinking at the Limit." In *Selected Writings on Marxism*, edited by Gregor McLennan, 293-315. New York: Duke University Press.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. 2001 [1914]. *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Marhoefer, Laurie. 2022. *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

# Kaikki mitä miehet ovat halunneet tietää seksistä

Tuula Juvonen



Ari Haasio ja Markku Mattila. 2022. *Suomalaisen seksin historia*. Helsinki: Avain. 320 s.

Kun kirjan nimi on *Suomalaisen seksin historia*, kiinnostuneen lukijan sormet syyhyävät oitis. Koska teos on aihepiirinsä ensimmäinen yleisesitys,

odotukset ovat väistämättä korkealla. Kuinka kirjoittajat ovat rajanneet aiheensa, mitä on otettu mukaan, millaisia ovat painotukset? Ehkä siksi on myös väistämätöntä, että itse lukukokemus onkin sitten melkoinen pettymys.

Jo lukijalle suunnatussa esipuheessa kirjan kirjoittajat huomauttavat, että teos ei ole tieteellinen tutkimus vaan tietokirja, jota historioitsijat ovat tehneet muiden töidensä lomassa. Kirjalta ei siis sinänsä tule edes odottaa uutta tietoa, ja se osoittautuukin koosteeksi aiemmista tutkimuksista. Aiempia tutkimuksia läpi kahlatessaan kirjoittajat ovatkin tehneet

huomattavan urakan, sillä teoksessa on 33 sivuinen lähdeluettelo, josta löytyy laajasti tutkimuskirjallisuutta, mutta myös runsaasti muuta kirjallista aineistoa moneen lähtöön. Toisaalta lähteiden tarkastelu herättää runsaasti kysymyksiä siitä, millä kriteereillä tutkimuskirjallisuutta on poisvalittu – erityisesti, kun poissaolollaan loistavat monet sukupuolentutkimuksen ja kulttuurintutkimuksen saralla ansiokasta työtä tehneet seksuaalisuuden tutkijat.

Vaikka kirja ei olisikaan itsessään tutkimus, lähden lukijana kuitenkin siitä toiveikkaasta oletuksesta, että väitelleiden tutkijoiden ja historioitsijan koulutuksen omaavilta kirjoittajilta voi odottaa näkemyksellistä pohdintaa kirjan aihepiiristä, suomalaisen seksin historiasta, ja vastauksia niihin lukuisiin miksi-kysymyksiin, joihin se antaa aihetta. Ensimmäisiä kysymyksiä herättää kuitenkin jo kirjan sisällysluettelon tarkastelu: miksi juuri nämä teemat on valittu käsittelyn kohteeksi ja miksi niitä on painotettu kuten nyt on tehty? Sinänsä perusteellisen ja hyödyllisen lainsäädäntöosuuden (s. 47–91) lisäksi kolmisenkymmentä sivua käytetään myös sekä prostituution että pornografian käsittelyyn, kun taas esimerkiksi ”seksi osana heteroseksuaalista parisuhdetta ja avioliittoa” joutuu tyytymään vain noin 15 sivuun. Kiinnostava – ja ehkä myös queer – valinta on sekin, että otsikotasolla nautintoa koskevat luvut on rajattu erilleen heteroparisuhdetta käsittelevistä luvuista.

SQS  
1–2/2023

123

Pervosilmäys  
Arvostelut

Tuula  
Juvonen

Valitun rajauksen hämmentävyys tulee esiin myös historiaa käsittelevän teoksen aikarajauksessa, joka seilaa levottomasti antiikista nykypäivään ja edelleen tulevaisuuden spekulointeihin. Vaikka teoksessa on julkilautustusti ja aiheellisesti nostettu seksuaalisuuden käsittelyn rinnalle sukupuoli, laajakaariset väitteet länsimaisesta sukupuolikäsityksestä, joka ”on perustunut biologiseen kahtiajakoon” ja joka on ”näihin päiviin saakka läpäissyt yhteiskunnan kokonaan” (s. 39), eivät kestä kriittistä tarkastelua. Esimerkiksi Thomas Laqueur (1990) esittää tutkimuksessaan, että länsimainen sukupuolikäsitys on sekin muuttunut yhden sukupuolen mallista kahden sukupuolen malliin. Lisäksi – kuten kirjoittajat uumoilevat (s. 35) – se saattaa olla jälleen muutoksessa kohti sukupuolen entistä laajemmin ymmärrettyä moninaisuutta.

Kaiken kaikkiaan olisin toivonut kirjoittajilta huolellisempaa pohdintaa historiallisten muutosten ajallisesta jaksottamisesta: onko sellaista mahdollista tai mielekäästä tehdä suomalaisen seksuaalisuuden historiasta, ja jos kyllä, millä perusteilla? Miten seksuaalisuuden muutokset ja yhteiskunnan muutokset liittyvät ja lomittuvat toisiinsa? Tässä suhteessa Sandra Haggmanin (2014; 2016) tutkimus homoseksuaalisuuden ymmärtämisessä tapahtuneesta muutoksesta olisi voinut näyttää kirjoittajille mallia, kuten myös Jens Rydströmin ja David Tjederin jo vuonna 2009 ilmestynyt ja vuonna 2021 uusintapainoksensa saanut teos ruotsalaisesta sukupuolihistoriasta. Vaikka murros agraariyhteiskunnasta kaupungistumiseen otetaan *Suomalaisen seksin historiassa* huomioon, historiallisia muutoksia käydään systemaattisesti läpi ja käsitellään lähinnä lainsäädännön muutoksina. Valitettavasti tällöin muutos kiinnitetään aina vain yksittäisiin lainkohtiin, ja yhtenäisen kokonaiskuvan hahmottaminen muutoksen ajallisuudesta jää lukijan itsensä tehtäväksi. Tämä herättää lukijassa kysymyksen siitä, eikö seksuaalisuuden historiassa ole siis tunnistettavissa suuria yhteiskunnallisia linjoja, vai jäivätkö ne vain kirjoittajilta huomaamatta?

Toinen historiankirjoitusta koskeva kysymys herää jo esipuheessa esitetystä huomiosta, että ”[s]eksiä ja seksuaalisuutta ei ole kovinkaan runsaasti käsitelty historiallisesta perspektiivistä” (s. 10). Miksi historiantutkijat eivät ole tarttuneet aihepiiriin, kun yhteiskuntatieteilijät ja nais- ja queer-tutkijat ovat näin kuitenkin tehneet? Kirjan ilmestymisen jälkeen julkaistu artikkeli ”Sopimatonta” (Mäkelä ja Tarkka 2022, 12) antaa eväitä tämän kysymyksen vastaamiseen viittaamalla 1800-luvun aikana vallinneen porvarillisen eetoksen sävyttämän siveellisyys- ja tukahduttamisajattelun pitkäikäisyyteen, joka on johtanut seksiä koskevan tiedontuotannon välttelyyn vähintäänkin 1960-luvulle asti. Tämä seksuaalisuudelle nuiva asenneilmapiiri on voinut lyödä leimansa erityisesti kansakuntaa keskeisesti rakentaneeseen historiantutkimukseenkin.

Tässä mielessä kirjoittajat ryhtyvät äärimmäisen epäkiitollisen tehtävän ääreen käydessään kirjoittamaan historiaa aiheesta, josta on olemassa vain heikosti aiempaa historiankirjoitusta. Puuttuvaa perustutkimusta he ovat päätyneet kompensoimaan muun muassa viittaamalla (verkosta ketterästi löytyviin) pro gradu -tutkielmiin.

Seksiä koskevan historiantutkimuksen puutteita on agraarisen Suomen osalta teoksessa paikkaamassa myös folkloristinen tutkimus. Tosin, kuten Mäkelä ja Tarkka (2022) muistuttavat, sekin on usein keskittynyt seksuaalisuutta koskevan tiedon rajoittamiseen ja peittelyyn. Folkloristista tutkimusta rahvaan seksitavoista *Suomalaisen seksin historian* kirjoittajat kuitenkin käyttävät perusteellisesti hyväkseen luodessaan kuvaa maaseutuyhteisössä vallinneista seksikäytännöistä.

Ohuemmaksi kirjoittajien lähdekirjallisuus kuitenkin muuttuu silloin, kun siirrytään maalta kaupunkiin. Millaista oli työläisten seksi, tai kaupunkiporvariston, tai säätyläisten? Tästä tiedämme edelleen kiusallisen vähän, ja sekin vähä tuntuu välittyvän tähän teokseen juuri prostituutiota koske-

van tutkimuksen kautta. Ehkä tilanne olisi ollut toinen, jos mukaan olisi kelpuutettu myös sukupuolentutkijoiden ja kulttuurintutkijoiden tekemää tutkimusta (vrt. s. 27–32)? Prostituutiota käsittelevä luku on myös yksi harvoja kohtia kirjassa, jossa naiset ja heidän oma toimijuutensa seksuaalikeskusteluissa vilahtaa eksplisiittisesti esiin. Naisten omasta aktiivisuudesta suhteessa seksuaalisuuteen olisin lukenut mielelläni enemmänkin.

Vaikka kirjoittajat kertovat olevansa tietoisia seksuaalisuuteen kietoutuvasta vallankäytöstä, sitä ei teoksessa käsitellä eksplisiittisesti sukupuolituneena ja historiallisesti nykypäivään jatkuvana kysymyksenä. Alaluku naisenryöstöstä (s. 77–78) ei jatkunut teoksessa nykykeskustelulla pakkoavioliitoista. Vain parissa kohdassa (s. 51, 171) mainitaan naisliikkeen tehneen työtä ainakin vuodesta 1888 vuoteen 1908 ohjesääntöisen prostituution lakkauttamiseksi. Miten tämä naisten vähintään 20 vuotta jatkama herkeämätön kamppailu näkyi aikansa sukupuolten välisten suhteiden ja seksuaalikäsitteiden muuttumisessa? Myös Sukupuolitautilien vastustamisyhdistyksen toiminnasta olisi ollut kiinnostava kuulla enemmänkin (s. 233) – jatkoiko se tätä aiempaa naisliikkeen toimintaa, vai ketkä nyt ottivat asiassa vetovastuuta? Tätä teosta antoisamman kuvan naisasianainten siveellisyyspyrkimyksistä ja niihin suhtautumisesta tarjoaakin esimerkiksi taidehistorioitsija Harri Kalhan (2008) tutkimus *Havis Amanda* -patsaan ympärillä kuohuneesta kiistasta.

Kirjassa käytetään jonkin verran sivuja kristillisen seksuaalisuuskäsityksen käsittelyyn, samoin kuin siihen liittyvään ajatukseen binäärisistä sukupuolista. Jos perinteisen kristillisen etiikan ja sitä myötäilevän lainsäädännön mukaan ”[s]eksin perimmäinen tarkoitus oli laillisten jälkeläisten tuottaminen” (s. 95), kiinnostavaa olisi ollut sen historiallisen kaaren auki kirjoittaminen, jonka kuluessa seksin tarkoitus on muuttunut muuksi. Kuitenkaan esimerkiksi avoliittojen yleistymisen syiden pohdintaan ei teoksessa hukattu aikaa (s. 102). Kirjaa lukiessa mieleen hiipii myös mahdollisuus

siitä, että seksin perimmäinen tarkoitus on sittenkin aina ollut vaihtelevan mielihyvän tuottaminen heteromiehelle – eikä tämä seksin tehtävä näytä kirjan painotusten mukaan juuri muuksi muuttuneen, eritoten kun kirjoittajat puhuvat seksistä ihmisen perustarpeena (s. 9, 261–262) ohittaen aseksuaalisten ihmisten olemassaolon, tai ilakoivat siitä, kuinka lääketiede voi antaa pontta yhdyntöihin (s. 221), mikä toiseuttaa vähintäänkin osan lesbolukijoista. Oireellista on sekin, että ehkäisyä koskeva keskustelu on kirjassa sijoitettu lukuun ”Seksi ja yhteiskunta”, eikä esimerkiksi lukuun ”Seksi nautintona”, vaikka voisi hyvin ajatella, että monelle naiselle vasta toimiva seksitaitien ja raskauden ehkäisy on mahdollistanut nautinnollisen seksin.

Moraalikäsitteiden muuttumista olisi ollut kiinnostava päästä seuraamaan myös ajallisina jatkumoina – vai sittenkin katkoksina tai paikallisina eriaikaisuuksina? Yhtäältä kirjassa puhuttiin nimittäin entisaikojen varsinaisista joustavista yöstelykäytännöistä (s. 96–99), mutta viitattiin myös suomalaisten viime vuosikymmeninä tiukentuneeseen suhtautumiseen aviolliseen uskottomuuteen (s. 107). Miten tätä muutosta voisi nykytiedon valossa tulkita, ottaen huomioon sen, kuinka myönteisesti avoimista suhteista ja polyamoriasta nykyisin keskustellaan?

Entä onko suomalainen seksi sitten jotain aivan erityistä verrattuna vaikkapa ruotsalaiseen tai eurooppalaiseen seksiin? Kirjan nimen huomioon ottaen kirjoittajat käyvät yllättävänkin usein kertomaan seksin harjoittamisen tavoista antiikin Kreikassa ja Roomassa. He eivät kuitenkaan perustele lukijalleen sitä, miksi näin täytyy tehdä suomalaisen seksin historiasta kertovassa teoksessa. Ovatko suomalaiset siis helleenien jälkeläisiä suoraan alenevassa polvessa, vai ovatko antiikin vaikutteet siirtyneet jollain tavoin osaksi agraarikulttuuriamme, tai tulleet esikuvallisiksi säätyläisten seksielämälle? Vai onko kyseessä kuitenkin vain ”hauska on tietää” -tyyppinen päivittely siitä, kuinka seksuaalisuus voikin ottaa monenlaisia kulttuurisia

muotoja? Tämän sijaan olisikin ollut kiinnostavampaa kuulla enemmän todennetuista ylijaraisista vaikutteista seksuaalikäsitteistämme, joista eksplisiittisesti teoksessa nousi esiin vain Ruotsi (s. 25).

Teoksesta löytyvät homoseksuaalisuuden historiaa koskevat löyhät heitot harmittavat tätä lesbo- ja homohistoriasta kiinnostunutta lukijaa tietysti eniten. Kirjoittajat puhuvat useampaan kertaan homoseksuaalisuuden kriminalisoimisesta, vaikka Suomessa rikollisia olivat vain homoseksuaaliset teot – tekijän seksuaalisesta suuntautumisesta riippumatta. Vaikka teknisesti voikin väittää, että homoseksuaalisten seksisuhteiden vuonna 1889 tapahtuneen kriminalisoinnin seurauksena ”yhä useampi samansukupuolisen seksin harrastaja joutui oikeuteen” (s. 50), rikostilastojen varassa on ilmeistä, että tuon lain säätäminen itsessään loi tuomioille vasta edellytykset, ja varsinainen tuomioiikki tapahtui vasta yli 60 vuotta myöhemmin. Lainsäädäntöä käsiteltäessä oli harmillista ja hämmentävää sekin, että ilmoitetut vuosiluvut viittasivat satunnaisen vaihtelevasti joko siihen vuoteen, jolloin lait hyväksyttiin, tai siihen, kun ne astuivat voimaan. Löperöä on sekin, kun transsukupuolisuudesta sinänsä myönteisesti puhuttaessa tullaan ohimennen sanoneeksi, että ”erilaiset hoidot voivat jopa vaarantaa henkilön terveyden” (s. 115). Tässä olisi ollut syytä tarkentaa, että viittaus hoitojen vaarallisuuteen koskee nimenomaan eheytyshoitoja, kun puolestaan sukupuolen vahvistamista tukevien hoitojen heikko saataavuus voi vaarantaa transihmisen terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin.

Suomalaisen lesbouden historia kartoittamattomana alueena kuitataan teoksessa lyhyesti sillä, että ”lähdemateriaali on vähäistä ja satunnaista” ja lisäämällä väitteeseen alaviite yhdysvaltalaisen Judith Bennetin (2000) artikkeliin. Historiankirjoitusta on silti ennenkin kyetty tekemään vähäisistä ja satunnaisista lähteistä, joten suomalaisen lesbouden historian tutkimattomuuden ongelmat sijainnevat pääsääntöisesti muualla kuin lähdemateriaalin heikossa saatavuudessa.

Ehdottoman myönteistä kirjassa on se, että siinä lähes ohjelmallisesti nostetaan esiin sukupuolten ja seksuaalisuuksien moninaisuus, kuten vaikkapa luvussa ”Seksi osana muunlaisia suhteita” (s. 110–118). Lukijana olisin toki kaivannut sen avaamista, miten käsite queer, sukupuolten moninaisuus tai englanninkielinen kirjainyhdistelmä LGBTQIA+ sijoittuu nimenomaisesti suomalaisen seksin historiaan. Myös oma alalukunsa ”LGBTQIA+ kulttuurisena ilmiönä” herättää suuria toiveita, mutta minkäänlaiseen historiallisuuteen alle sivun mittaisessa tekstinpätkässä ei valitettavasti päästä. Sateenkaarihistorian ystävien toiminnassa mukana olleena tiedän, että tutkimusta tältä saralta on tehty vielä niukasti, mutta jotain kuitenkin (ks. Sateenkaarihistorian ystävät n.d.), ja kirjoittajien olisi suonut ottavan sen huomioon siinä missä jo paremmin tunnettua tutkimusta heteroseksuaalisuudestakin.

Mitä taas kirjoittajien queer-teoreettiseen ymmärrykseen tulee, se vaikuttaa varsin satunnaisista lähteistä ammennetulta. He päätyvät esittämään muun muassa, että ”[q]ueer-tutkimus painottaa seksuaalisuuden eri muotojen normaaliutta” (s. 111). Itse muotoilisin väitteen paremminkin niin, että queer-tutkimus kyseenalaistaa ja haastaa tiettyjen seksuaalisuuden muotojen oletettua normaaliutta.

On tietysti mahdollista, että en tee kirja-arvioissani oikeutta teoksen kaikille nyansseille. Todennäköisyyttä siihen kasvattaa eritoten kirjan hankala rakenne, jossa samat asiat kertautuvat eri luvuissa hiukan eri painotuksin. Samalla kirjasta kuitenkin puuttuu hakemisto, jonka avulla lukija olisi voinut harsia kasaan yhtenäisempää kertomusta monista esiin nostetuista teemoista. Todennäköisesti hakemiston laatiminen, yhdessä kunnianhimoisemman ja ammattitaitoisemman toimitustyön kanssa, olisi auttanut ryhdistämään teosta ja tehnyt siitä siten lukijaystävällisemmän ja mielenkiintoisemman. Tällaisena en menisi suosittelemaan sitä oppikirjaksi, niin kipeästi kuin sellaista yliopisto-opetuksessa kaivattaisiinkin.

Mutta ehkä *Suomalaisen seksin historia* teoksen suurin ansio kaiken kaikkiaan onkin näissä moittimissani puutteissa. Kerätessään yksien kansien väliin kaiken sen tietämyksen mitä se nyt tekee, se mahdollistaa yllä mainittujen – ja varmasti myös monien muiden – kriittisten kysymysten esittämisen. Näin tehdessään sen lukeminen toivottavasti inspiroi ja sisuunnuttaa uuden sukupolven suomalaisia historiantutkijoita tarttumaan liian pitkään laiminlyötyyn aiheeseen. Jos näin olisi, saisimme kuin saisimmekin vihdoinkin lukeaksemme uutta ja kiinnostavaa tietoa suomalaisen seksin historiasta.

## Lähteet

- Bennett, Judith. 2000. 'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9:1–2, 1–22.
- Hagman, Sandra. 2014. *Seven Queer Brothers: Narratives of Forbidden Male Same-Sex Desires from Modernizing Finland 1894–1971*. Florence: European University Institute, PhD thesis, Department of History and Civilization. <https://doi.org/10.2870/798193>.
- Hagman, Sandra. 2016. *Seitsemän kummaa veljestä: Kertomuksia suomalaisen homoseksuaalisuuden historiasta*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Kalha, Harri. 2008. *Tapaus Havis Amanda. Siveellisyys ja sukupuoli vuoden 1908 suihkulähdekiistassa*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Laqueur, Thomas. 1990. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mäkelä, Heidi Henriikka & Tarkka, Lotte. 2022. Sopimatonta: Seksuaalisuuteen liittyvien kalevalamittaisten runojen perinnöllistäminen Suomessa 1818–1997. *Elore* 29:2, 34–58. <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.121473>.
- Rydström, Jens & Tjeder, David. 2021. *Kvinnor, män och alla andra. En svensk genushistoria*. Toinen painos. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Sateenkaarihistorian ystävät. n.d. Julkaisuja. <https://sateenkaarihistoria.fi/julkaisuja/>. Haettu 3.5.2023.

# How Many Times the Same Story?

Jay Szpilka



Sara Ahmed. 2021. *Complaint!*. Durham: Duke University Press. 376 pages.

There is something deeply thankless about the task of having to review Sara Ahmed's latest book, *Complaint!*, in multiple meanings of that word. It requires me to criticize – possibly even harshly – a work with ambition and scope I find admirable, and whose political commitments and hopes I

aspire to share. More troubling even, this sentiment emerges alongside the creeping suspicion that most criticism I am about to present against *Complaint!* ultimately serves to confirm Ahmed's intuitions and conclusions.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Coming in at the heels of her two previous works, the excellent *The Use of Use* (2019) and the widely popular *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), *Complaint!* takes for its subject matter the

titular complaint – or, to be more precise, the fate of complaints made against sexist, racist, and ableist working conditions lodged by scholars within the (Western: chiefly UK, but also US) university system. The starting point here is Ahmed's own disillusionment with the university and her decision to – in the face of the ignorance following her complaints – leave her post at Goldsmiths College and become an independent scholar. As she writes, this prompted her to reach out to other people, both established scholars as well as students who shared similar experiences with having their complaints stymied, ignored, and filed away by the administration invested not in fostering diversity and equity, but rather in preserving work-place hierarchies and reputation at the cost of minority workers.

Much of *Complaint!* is, therefore, built upon collected stories extracted from a number of interviews; however, despite the superficial similarity of methods, it would be difficult to classify the work as one belonging to a field of institutional anthropology. Social sciences are hardly a point of reference for Ahmed, who instead shapes her material into something immediately familiar to the readers of her previous works: a phenomenology of a minority experience.

The task that Ahmed sets herself up against is to provide a rich and viscerally-felt account of how it feels to complain against injustice and go

SQS  
1–2/2023

128

Queer Eye  
Reviews

Jay  
Szpilka



mostly unheard. Although she does not shy from analyzing institutional logics driving the processes of ignoring and setting aside complaints, her interest lies less in the institution itself and more in the life of those who suffer as the consequence of its inertia and tendency to reinforce existing hierarchies of social and cultural privilege.

In writing about it, she is also unmistakable Ahmed in style. Consider the following opening sentence of the book: “To be heard as complaining is not to be heard. To hear someone as complaining is an effective way of dismissing someone. You do not have to listen to the content of what she is saying if she is just complaining or always complaining” (p. 1). To the readers of her previous work, this is not just familiar – it is cosy. The entire text, then, moves alongside similar paths; we follow Ahmed’s phenomenology of complaint guided by her free-flowing prose, gentle wordplay, and attention to the intricacies of the everyday experience. As in *The Use of Use*, photographs of walls, doors, and filing cabinets illustrate the text, not to provide concrete examples or the visual archive of some specific time and place, but rather to serve as anchor points for some of Ahmed’s recurring metaphors: that of a wall to claw on, of a door closing, of a cabinet as a graveyard of complaints. In fact, some of those photographs return from her previous work, as at places Ahmed retreads significant portions of her argument from *The Use of Use*, returning to the out-of-use post-box turned into a bird’s nest that was so crucial for her in that book.

The sense of familiarity does not limit itself to matters of style. The arguments themselves likewise feel immediately known. Ahmed’s phenomenology of a complaint is, in fact, a detailed account of experiences she has already devoted much of her work to: of being an (institutional) feminist killjoy whose complaints disturb the peace and hierarchy; of being set against systems designed to suppress minority voices; of butting one’s head against the world’s sexism and racism over and over again, and feeling

like it is going nowhere. In this respect, *Complaint!* reads like a collection of case studies meant to illustrate *Living a Feminist Life*, or less abstract presentation of her points from *The Use of Use*. This is to say: the biggest issue of *Complaint!* is that while reading this book, I could not escape the nagging sense I have already read it before, and multiple times, too. It is, for the lack of a better word, overly repetitive.

And yet, this is also where the thanklessness of criticism comes back in full force. When I say that *Complaint!* is repetitive, that is, it revisits arguments made before, and reaches conclusions already well-established in the author’s prior work, what do I do? Following Ahmed, one could point out how the demand to present “fresh” or “new” material in the face of the persistence of sexism and racism is, in fact, a demand to look away from those sorry structures, to pay them no mind. Insistence on moving on in thinking, instead of going in circles, can, therefore, in itself be an insistence on ignoring the structures that will not budge easily. An important theme in *Complaint!* is how such complaints are often met with a soft sort of dissuasion: *don’t say those things, they won’t accomplish anything, everyone already knows that this or that professor is a pest, but nothing can be done about it*. An accusation of repetition, then, is also an accusation of being boring, unexciting, of obsessively dwelling in the same – and if the same is a deep critique of institutional and structural violence, this dwelling becomes a domain of the killjoy that refuses to shut up about the wrong, even as her voice is deemed nagging and frustrating.

This, incidentally, makes the very criticism I am raising here – that *Complaint!* is a book that does not really move Ahmed’s thought beyond the bounds of what she had set in *Living a Feminist Life* and *The Use of Use*, not to mention her earlier work – by itself a demonstration of her argument. Of course, *Complaint!* is repetitive because the work of complaining is one of endless repetition of the same point. Of course, *Complaint!* refuses to

move towards new theoretical grounds because complaining refuses to stop addressing the same old problem. Of course, *Complaint!* is mildly frustrating to read to someone who has already consumed Ahmed's previous work because complaining is not meant to be easy on the ear of the listener. And as a result, I am not sure what to write next.

"We can hear something because of its intensity," writes Ahmed, adding that "the exclamation point in the title of *Complaint!* is a way of showing what I am hearing, how a complaint is heard as intensity, an emphasis, a sharp point, a sore point, a raising of the voice, a shrieking, a shattering" (p. 47). Perhaps, then, the repetitiveness in this text is precisely this exclamation point, meant to drive up the intensity of the killjoy statement and point at the urgency of complaint that does not stop even when it is (over)heard – especially since, as Ahmed notes time after time, hearing a complaint without acting on it is one way to *file it away*, which is to file down at the very will to resist the injustice that the complaint marks. So, does that negate the criticism? Does it mean that repetition is merely a part of the method that ought not to be pointed out as a shortcoming of the work?

Unfortunately, the issue is not so easy to resolve. One could ask, for example, what it is that allows Ahmed the ability to air those same complaints – and points – over and over again, making her very work a kind of performance of feminist killjoy practices. Would a scholar without her reputation, without her fame and status, be allowed such dwelling in complaint? But then again, is it valid to criticize a writer for making good use of their own privileged status? The paradox is that thinking about *Complaint!*, whether to criticize or praise, invariably seems to point towards problems that are not directly related to the work of complaining itself. This is a challenge – and an interesting one at that. But what does it say about the book, about the work? Does it have to say anything?

This question is also a conclusion. *Complaint!* is a book about problems that lead to complaints, and how complaints themselves become problems, and brand people who complain as problematic. It is only fitting, then, that as a work, it is also a problem – one that does not yield itself to easy, effusive praise, one that seems to demand criticism, which then turns out to have been its strength all along, and that is what is so thankless about trying to review it. There is no definitive point I feel secure in making about *Complaint!*, not even whether this uncertainty speaks to the work's shortcoming or its power. Not even a glib "perhaps it's both" seems fitting here. This is also why I do not know how else to conclude this review without lapsing into an endless string of repetitions.

### Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.  
Ahmed, Sara. 2019. *The Use of Use*. Durham: Duke University Press.

# Kirjoittajat / Contributors

## **PYRY AARNIO**

pyry.aarnio@gmail.com

Pyry Aarnio is a transgender man and a Master of Arts graduate from the University of Helsinki, specializing in literary studies. In his master's thesis (2022), he researched the descriptions of a trans masculine identity in Finnish realist young adult fiction published between the years 2010 and 2019.

## **VARPU ALASUUTARI**

varpu.alasuutari@tuni.fi

ORCID: 0000-0001-7333-1781

Varpu Alasuutari is a postdoctoral research fellow in Gender Studies at Tampere University, Finland. Currently, Alasuutari is working on the project "Affective Activism: Sites of Queer and Trans World-Making", funded by the Research Council of Finland. Alasuutari's research interests include e.g. queer history, affect theory, and negative affects in queer and trans lives.

## **MERLIN SOPHIE BOOTSMANN**

m.bootsmann@fu-berlin.de

Merlin Sophie Bootsmann is a research fellow at Freie Universität Berlin. In their Ph.D. dissertation titled *Queering West German Education: LGBTIQ\* education as a history of conflicts*, she is researching the intersections of the history of education and social movements in the mobilization of (human)

rights in relation to educational politics and policy by LGBTIQ\* collectives since the 1970s.

## **HENRIQUE CINTRA SANTOS**

henriuecintra@outlook.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-1989-8992

Henrique Cintra Santos is a doctoral researcher in Global History at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil. He is currently writing his dissertation on queer activism, with particular emphasis on the Brazilian and German contexts.

## **BARBARA DYNDA**

barbara.dynda@uw.edu.pl

Barbara Dynda is a doctoral researcher at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. She holds an interdisciplinary MA in humanities and social sciences. Her current work explores the history of feminist zines and the anarchist feminist-queer movement in post-1989 Poland. She is a member of the EU-funded CCINDLE project on feminist politics across Europe and the "Queer It" project on queer theory in Poland and Germany.

## **GRETA HÜLSMANN**

greta.huelsmann@fu-berlin.de

Greta Marlene Hülsmann studies European History at the Humboldt University of Berlin. They work on Queer and Trans as well as Colonial History. She is a

student assistant in a sub-project on "Human rights, queer genders and sexualities since the 1970s" of the DFG Research Unit "Law - Gender - Collectivity."

## **TUULA JUVONEN**

tuula.juvonen@tuni.fi

ORCID: 0000-0003-2313-2826

PI, DSocSci Tuula Juvonen, has published awarded and ground-breaking monographs about Finnish LGBT history. Currently she is interested in queering national history writing and conducting collaborative queer activism in memory institutions. While working as a senior lecturer in Gender Studies at Tampere University, she leads a Research Council of Finland funded research project "Affective Activism: Sites of Queer and Trans World-Making" (AQT, 2021–2025).

## **SARI LAURILA**

sari.lau@protonmail.com.

Sari Laurila is a trans activist and an alumni of Tampere University.

## **JEAN LUKKARINEN**

jean.lukkarinen@gmail.com

Jean Lukkarinen, MA, is a doctoral researcher at the University of Turku. They are currently researching the activism of gender minorities in the Finnish media from the 1960s to the 2000s.

SQS  
1–2/2023

131

Kirjoittajat  
Contributors

ISSN  
1796-5551

**ORLANDO MEIER-BRIX**

orlando.brix@gmail.com

Orlando Meier-Brix is a researcher, educator, content creator and writer. He studied Jewish Studies at the University of Vienna and the University of Potsdam as well as Religion and Culture at Humboldt University of Berlin. He is most interested in researching the intersections of gender, sexuality, queerness and Judaism, particularly in the fields of intellectual history and religious texts. He currently works as an educator at the Schwules Museum Berlin as well as a content creator and researcher in the cultural field.

**NINA MUTIK**

nina.mutik@gmail.com

Instagram: ninamutik

Nina Mutik is a fearless queer professional artist and activism is a part of most of their work. Their main medium is comics, but they also do immersive participatory art games, different visual arts and installations. Their ongoing online comics often discuss the contact between different minorities and the majority, discrimination and prejudice through comedy.

**YVE. NAY**

yv.nay@zhaw.ch

ORCID: 0000-0002-0755-3711

YV Nay is Senior Lecturer at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland. YV Nay's postdoctoral project Affective Activism – The Feeling of Belonging in Transgender Communities is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Nay is the author of *Feeling Family. Affektive Paradoxien der Normalisierung von 'Regenbogenfamilien'* (*Feeling Family. The Affective Paradoxes of the Normalization of 'Rainbow Families'*) (2017) and co-editor of "The Europa Issue" of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* TSQ (2021, 8.2.).

**VILI VON NISSINEN**

vilinnessinen@gmail.com

Instagram: von\_nissinen\_artpage

Vili von Nissinen, MA in Theatre and Contemporary Art, is an unapologetic queer artist, performer, writer, and director working in the fields of theatre, live and visual art, and immersive participatory art games. Their latest show, *Hyeena*, explored conflicts between binary and non-binary worlds based on autobiographical material and long research about the cultural history of hyenas.

**ANDREA ROTTMANN**

andrea.rottmann@fu-berlin.de

ORCID: 0000-0003-4616-1427

Andrea Rottmann is a postdoctoral research fellow in History at Freie Universität Berlin. She has worked on queer spaces and subjectivities in postwar Berlin. Her current research focuses on the intersection of human rights and gay and lesbian activism from the 1970s to the 1990s.

**LEO RYCZKO**

leo@ryczko.de

Leo Ryczko is a doctoral researcher at the Freie Universität Berlin. In his dissertation, he examines the colonial and orientalist motives of queer magazines of late German Empire and the Weimar Republic. His interests lie in the different manifestations of queer colonialism and orientalism in those magazines with a special focus on media specificity, e.g. the difference of orientalism in personals and in scientific articles. He is a scholarship holder of Hans-Böckler-Stiftung and teaching at Gender and Technology Centre (GuTZ) of Berliner Technische Hochschule.

**KATE SOTEJEFF-WILSON**

kate.sotejeff-wilson@cantab.net

ORCID: 0000-0002-5751-9618

Kate Sotejeff-Wilson has been interested in the politics of toleration since her PhD (UCL 2005). She translates and edits at KSW Translations and is chair of Nordic Editors and Translators.

**JAY SZPILKA**

jasszpilka@gmail.com.

Jay Szpilka is currently teaching at the SWPS University in Warsaw. They completed their doctorate on BDSM practices in contemporary Poland at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Polish Culture. Their current work focuses on the intersection between transness and sexual desire, especially in the context of fringe kinky practices. They publish in English and in Polish, in journals such as the *Feminist Review*, *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, or *Excursions*. Aside from their academic work, they are also a prolific culture writer for Polish opinion press.

**LIEKKI VALASKIVI**

liekki.valaskivi@tuni.fi

ORCID: 0000-0003-1350-0963

Liekki Valaskivi, MA, is a doctoral researcher in Gender Studies at Tampere University. Their research is focused on gender diversity in Finnish comprehensive education through the methodology of action research, and their primary goal as a researcher is to incorporate Transgender Studies theory into Finnish education.

**SIRPA VARIS**

sirpajohannasatu@gmail.com

www.sirpavaris.blogspot.com

Sirpa Varis, BA in Textile Design, MA in Cultural Environment Research is based in Turku. They

SQS  
1–2/2023

132

Kirjoittajat  
Contributors

ISSN  
1796-5551

work between illustration, textile art, visual arts and graphic design.

**IVO ZENDER**

ivo.zender@uni-bielefeld.de

Ivo Zender, MA, is a doctoral researcher at the Research Training Programme “Experiencing Gender” at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. His work is situated at the intersection of Gender and Literary Studies and he is writing his doctoral dissertation on contemporary fictional trans literature.

**SQS**  
1–2/2023

133

Kirjoittajat  
Contributors

ISSN  
1796-5551