6. Queer Sexuality

Shifts in scientific treatises about sexuality, and lived, expressed forms of sexuality themselves, have not simply been slow and continuous during the last two centuries, but are also impacted by radical transformations in society and its politics—the culture of sex, and its history, can't be understood as a continuum. Both first and second-wave feminism, same-gender desire becoming visible in the nineteenth century, the Social Revolution of 1968, and the Stonewall Revolution in 1969, are only the most vivid examples of this historical process. The human body, and the sexuality that resides therein, were gauged anew, and incorporated into a medical, legal, social, cultural, and political discourse, each time with the aim of adding more knowledge and clarity, about historical, spiritual, and moral interpretations, to the bodily, gender-based, and sexual ensemble. Now that many actors have arrived in the twenty-first century, many aims appear to have been achieved, and clarity to prevail, about what defines heteronormativity, and who, based on which genders and which sexualities, may be categorized as "queer." Yet this categorical definiteness is now increasingly dissolving again, as individuals flee regularly from the segments laid down in the past, or claim lifestyles for themselves that could be interpreted as both conservative *and* queer. The stage of queer sexuality is like a street party that grows ceaselessly, with countless new forms displaying new wares. This is a festival where new possibilities, forming at the margins and complementing each other, can always be discovered:

> "No matter what label you end up sticking with," Watson explains, "It's also important to know that your attractions and identities can be fluid and change." It's why Alfred Kinsey, a famous sexologist, invented the Kinsey scale – a numbered spectrum between completely homosexual and completely heterosexual – to help queer people express how they felt. Because even in 1948, people were realizing that no two bisexuals loved and desired people in the same exact way, and that sexuality evolves.[1]

Indeed, measuring queer sexuality as a defined territory is genuinely difficult, even when many seem to know what could be meant by it. The fluid and inconstant character trait of queer sexuality is what makes it impossible to fence it in—or to fence other people out. It's in debt to this reality that obligatory terms like LGBTI*[2] or specific descriptions like lesbian/gay do their work, in order to hit the spot for communication purposes. This makes sense because cultural and political discourses, but above all scholarly and scientific studies and knowledge production requires an unerring terminology, so conclusions can be reached, or value added in comparison to the starting points of such investigations. "Queer" functions as a catchall term, a theoretical model, which allows the theme as a whole to remain in view, but within which specifics are threatened with loss. Queer sexuality can be named as a holistic, social-cultural construct, and worked through in this way, but what is special about it is, unerringly, individual desire and personal expression:

> Americans are becoming more accepting in their views of LGBT people and homosexuality in general, and the number of people identifying as LGBT has grown in recent years. For example, 63 % of Americans said in 2016 that homosexuality should be accepted by society,

1 Caroline Colvin, "Am I Queer? Here's How To Tell, According To Sexuality Experts," in: *elite daily (Bustle Digital Group)*, August 19, 2019, https://www.elitedaily.com/p/am-i-queer-heres-how-to-tell-according-to-sexuality-experts-18649786. For more on Courtney Watson, the female psychotherapist in Oakland, USA, referred to by Colvin, see: http://www.doorwaytherapeutics.com/about/.

2 LGBTI* and LGBTI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Inter and more.

> compared with 51 % in 2006. LGBT adults recognize the change in attitudes: About nine-in-ten (92 %) said in a 2013 Pew Research Center survey of adults identifying as LGBT that society had become more accepting of them in the previous decade.[3]

A study conducted by the Pew Research Center, 2017, concluded that there had been an increase in persons identifying as LGBT, from 8.3 million adults in the USA in 2012, to 10.1 million in 2017.[4]

Such statistics make evident one of the many reasons why categorizations are a necessity: without descriptive definitions, transparent conclusions are difficult, become a matter of conjecture, or a simply impossible. If these clear links to the subcultures cannot be established, insightful images pertaining to a queer community, and norms of majority-based structures, would remain opaque. That's why queerness as a descriptor requires structures, which can make visible gender-based and sexual identity as a minority, as smaller groups within larger ones, as a cultural and social concept, as particular historical content, and much more. Parallel to this, queerness can also mirror the individual level—one's own queer desire and queer sexuality—especially when established self-descriptive terms seem to fit badly, or aren't even on offer in the first place.

Alongside the diversity of desire and expression of gender-based relations pertaining to it, queer sexuality is also the conceptual home for questions of putting into practice, or applying theories. Because this other form of sexuality and gender can indeed, parallel to a conventional norm, be lived out in practice through a spectrum of facets, and at equally diverse locations. That said, not all modes of experiencing are equally popular, or have the same amount of prestige accorded to them. The appraisal of queer sexuality from without—by a majority united through norms—and from within—by a queer, sub-community, the

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3 Anna Brown, "5 key findings about LGBT Americans," *Pew Research Center*, June 13, 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/13/5-key-findingsabout-lgbt-americans/.

4 Brown, "5 key findings."

components of which are constantly differentiating themselves from each other—cause hierarchies of recognition. As early as 1993, the American cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin labeled this phenomenon the "hierarchy of sex," in an anthology article.[5]

This hierarchization impacts on the perception and experience of sexuality in general, the representation of gender, the kind of desire, and the creativity with which the satisfaction of a particular desire is put into practice. Irrespective of whether the desire in question is queer or nonqueer, the pattern of traditions is extremely familiar, and has been abundantly interpreted. In media and in schools, in countless magazines, in public life, and in the community: all these communicate finely made excerpts of sexual acceptance, while never, or hardly ever, finding concrete words to name the sex itself:

> In this sense, taboos can be understood as a system of norms, as the morals and morality of a society, and thus as the expression of societal power that's joined to the same. This societal power is divine, or, we could say, taboo, so that it cannot, in itself, be called into question, or changed. As a sacred power for cultural concepts about the "rightness" of specific, societal notions, this power inscribes itself on and into the individual body, by means of societal notions about gender and sexuality, which can be rewritten as taboos. The individual body then internalizes these societal ideas in the form of its conscience. Thus, notions about taboos are culturally specific symbols of societal power, which cling to the bodily.[6]

This "bad" conscience induces a sense of shame, and the shame results in a taboo. This powerful form of self-control exerts strong pressure on sex-

5 Gayles S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3ff.

6 Lidia Guzy, "Tabu–Die kulturelle Grenze im Körper," in: *Geschlecht als Tabu: Orte, Dynamiken und Funktionen der De/Thematisierung von Geschlecht,* ed. Ute Frietsch, Konstanze Hanitzsch, Jennifer John, and Beatrice Michaelis (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 19n.

ual modes of behavior and gender-based identities to find forms of tolerance and acceptance that are worthy of being applied. With these givens, queer sexuality must routinely sit down at the societal negotiating table. By turn, it is defined by those who are currently doing the negotiating, and by the details of how desires should and could be satisfied. One can't help but think of a certain social and dynamic capriciousness, which cannot simply be denied. In practice, general societal tolerance and acceptance means that an identical form of sexual autonomy is classified as acceptable by one group and as inappropriate by another: such positioning diverges strong between different persons, nationalities, regions, and religions. Heteronormativity does not adhere to any clear concept, which reifies or devalues queer sexuality in any standardized way. Rather, political and cultural influencing factors call the tune—and milieu-specific components, and personal social skills are also important—in order to achieve a matching recognition for some forms of queer sexuality and genderness. Regarding particular, queer-sexual expressive forms there appears to be no alternative whatsoever apart from societal scorn. Thus, queer sexuality emerges out of desire and as a discursive construct, to which a categorical appraisal can be applied. Parallel to this, and as a concept relevant to social politics, queer sexuality becomes ever more burdened with interpretations. This development is neither surprising nor particularly recent:

> Although queer was not a popular term of self-identification at the time …, its recent deployment is often informed by those issues of identity, community and politics that she raises here. A similar scrutinising of lesbian and gay identities can be seen in the queer engagement with post-structural critiques of subjectivity and individual or collective identities, its pragmatic crystallization and deployment of recently reworked subject positions, and in its attention to the discursive formations of the various terms by which homosexuality in particular and sexuality more generally are categorised.[7]

7 Anna-Marie Jagose, *Queer Theory, An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 93.

It's only through discourse that these categorizations can gain clarity, and can only then become efficacious, when it's possible to form a common image through social interaction. Regardless of whether articulated or not, this crystallization of evaluation categories is being carried out across the board. This explains different layers of recognition for queer life in large-scale political unions, including the EU and the USA. The reality and concept of "gay territory,"[8] first identified and named decades ago, elucidates and informs us about the contemporary proximity of discrepancies in social politics. In a single region, both queer freedom, and a queer failure of understanding, can take place in the same blinking of an eye, and can unfold from these two contrasting points. Continuing to think along this vein will inevitably build a bridge to the debate on gender equality and equality of opportunity. Because although those evaluation categories and layers of recognition become particularly apparent in the case of queer genderedness and sexualities, they can in no way be reduced to the same:

> Partnerships for life, as a relationship model, distinguish themselves precisely by being different from marriage, and through an updating of the gender and sexuality hierarchies connected with the marriage model. I want again to emphasize the interwovenness of sexuality and gender, and the benefits of working with the critical concepts of heteronormativity, in not simply reducing these contexts to an isolated "discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation": it's precisely the interplay of normative heterosexuality and homophobia, which structure hierarchical gender-based relations.[9]

8 Robert W. Bailey, "Sexual Identity and Urban Space, Economic Structure and Political Action," in: *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 231.

9 Anna Böcker, *Weder gleich- noch que(e)rstellen. Heteronormativität, Reproduktion und Citizenship in den Debatten zur Lebenspartnerschaft,* (Berlin: Gender Politik Online, 2011), 17, https://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/gpo/pol_sys/politikfelder/Weder_gleich_noch_queerstellen/annaboeckerglecihnochqueerstellen.pdf.

Although evaluation structures encircle the readability of gender and sexuality, a *queering* becomes possible, as soon as recognized yet unarticulated criteria are not fulfilled. In so doing, sexual and gender-based disturbances flow every which way, and far beyond the areas defined by Gayle Rubin, as a range of scholarly studies have affirmed for decades. The role of women, images of ideal manliness, collective notions of beauty, and thoughts about an optimized corporeality: all these are subject to trends and transformations:

> It is beyond dispute that, broadly speaking, developments of the sort charted by Rubin[10] are happening throughout most Western societies–and to some extent in other parts of the world as well. Of course, there are significant divergences between different countries, subcultures and socio-economic strata. Certain groups, for example, stand apart from the sort of changes described, or actively attempt to resist them. Some societies have a longer history of sexual tolerance than others and the changes which they are experiencing are perhaps not quite as radical as in the US. In many, however, such transitions are happening against the backdrop of more constraining sexual values than were characteristic of American society several decades ago. For people living in these contexts, particularly women, the transformations now occurring are dramatic and shattering.[11]

This constant development of an enhancement and devaluation of sexual and bodily performances, and the becoming visible that is linked to this, is grounded in both a social-cultural tradition and in innovation. This is a game of achieving balance between a striving toward emancipation and a heteronomous tolerance/a hoped-for acceptance:

> Sexual emancipation, I think, can be the medium of a wide-ranging emotional reorganisation of social life. The concrete meaning of

10 Lilian Rubin is an American sociologist and psychotherapist. For more information: https://lilli anrubin.com/.

11 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy, Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 12n.

> emancipation in this context is not, however, as the sexual radicals proposed, a substantive set of psychic qualities or forms of behaviour. It is more effectively understood in a procedural way, as the possibility of the radical democratisation of the personal. Who says sexual emancipation, in my view, says sexual democracy. It is not only sexuality at stake here. The democratisation of personal life, as a potential, extends in a fundamental way to friend ship relations and, crucially, to the relations of parents, children and other kin.[12]

This sexual democratization, which was described as such in the 1990s through the work of the British sociologist Anthony Giddens already, is formed, and made tangible for the individual, out of broad-based societal influences—including media or politics—alongside the impacts effected by family and friends. This is why a sexual emancipation of people is required, which, on Giddens' view, must be conceived of in terms of processes:

> It would be a daredevil act of understatement to say that not all gays and lesbians share this view of the new queer politics. It will continue to be debated for some time. I have made my own sympathies clear because the shape of any engagement between queer theory and other social-theoretical traditions will be determined largely by the political practice in which it comes about. In fact, however, no term–even "queer"–works equally well in all the contexts that have to be considered by what I am nevertheless calling queer theory. Queer activists are also lesbians and gays in other contexts – as for example where leverage can be gained through bourgeois propriety, or through minority-rights discourse, or through more gender-marked language (it probably won't replace lesbian feminism). Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear. Queer theory, in short, has much work to do just in keeping up with queer political culture. If it contributes to the self-

12 Giddens, *The Transformation*, 182.

> clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age, it may make the world queerer than ever.[13]

The contextualization of a queer sexuality turns up again in multidimensional settings—the natures of these are family-based, sociocultural, subcultural, media-based, political, and many others besides. In so doing, it influences one's own shame, and the kind of conscience that's been formed up until this point. Sex that's perceived as "worse," more dirty, more deficient, more banal, more chaotic, less protected, or indeed more unconventional, remains a risky decision in practice, but much more so in public avowals of the same—or in public attributions applied to it. Whoever completes a performance worthy of any of these adjectives is guilty, should experience shame, even when, or rather precisely when, such performances take place in secret, in the dark, or in private.

While queer sexuality may possess clear forms within theoretical and political frameworks, in quotidian coexistence, the boundaries have become at least partially fluid. If the new sexual and gender-based normality admits same-gender desire, and adequately assimilated forms of trans identity, this principally signifies an assumption of heteronormative game rules by those who have sufficient will power and possibilities to apply such rules. These may include two men in a relationship, with an adequate ratio of proximity to distance, who concurrently fulfill clichés arising from the particular situation; the single but self-sacrificing lesbian activist; or the trans woman who has arrived authentically in the social target gender. These are only three examples of the many opportunities, packed with chances, for a milieu-specific kind of recognition.

But, from this perspective, whoever doesn't fit into such schemes should hide, and who doesn't "function" on these terms would be well advised to persevere in silence. A visible breaking out of any particular niche of queer sexuality is sanctioned by tabooing, stigmatization, and

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13 Michael Warner, "Introduction," in *Fear of a Queer Planet, Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004), xxviii.

anti-solidarity, if the form of queerness assumed cannot be processed by society. In these terms, it's not a queer "Being-Different" a priori that's the transgression, but rather being different in a specific expressive form, which turns out too contrary to a dominant, normed image in public performance. The repeatedly applied categorization, fluid in how it represents itself—a categorization that must perforce be understood as capricious, and milieu-specific—carries historical traditions into the future, which primarily consider conservative understandings of compulsive stability. Parallel to this, there's an apprehension of new and partially queer forms of representing sociocultural expansion politics—when assimilating makes this possible—in order to generate new waves of recognition, which can affirm or match with the foundations of the systemic canon of values:

> Thus, it seems that the crucial issue is a permanent altercation with human intimacies and their visibility, a spectacle playing out in the antechamber of recognized sexualities. In this process, publicly visible same-gender inclination threatens to injure the fragile construct of order surrounding interpersonal proximity. Visible love between two women or two men turns invisible but evident sexuality into a parade and leads to an acute lack of explanation. The compulsion grows to articulate unstated principles and more: to have to legitimate a heteronormative order that's already a given. Which encompasses not merely a sexual order, but also the norm of gender-based behavioral means. Fitting into a role as a man or a woman, and betrayal—through intimacy with one's own gender—leads unavoidably to a crisis of definition, what the norm actually is, and to a disordering of the visible. Only distance from public life, even when clarity concerning the relationship between two people is already established, supports and calms the norm and order of sexuality and gender.[14]

In terms of conforming to normative notions, this "antechamber of power"[15] provides the recognition of sexual or gender-based compo-

14 Martin J. Gössl, *Schöne, queere Zeiten?*, 22.

15 Gössl, 22.

nents of queerness, a recognition that achieves itself step by step, or continues itself silently. This is not about a general amnesty, but rather a dynamic of negotiation between: political demands and counter-demands; traditions; economic, media-based, and cultural influencing factors; and an international, ethical discourse. This form of debate is abstract and yet omnipresent, which is why theoretical appropriations can only represent one side of the coin. It's particularly sexuality—queer sexuality—which likes to come to the fore in practical everyday life, with all its difficulties:

> In queer theory, the cultural production of norms and normality, the exposition of the "other," and the inclusions and exclusions connected with that, have, until now, only rarely been placed in relation with the structurally constructing influence of capital valorization, exploitation, and economic compulsion no how lives are led … . We thus risk losing sight of the reason behind the reproduction of the hierarchical differences that are imposed on one another, in which the "increase" in freedom for some comes accompanied by a "decrease" in freedom for others. But self-evidently, this social (re)-differentiation is heteronormatively structured. The answer to whether this must necessarily be the case, and the consequences of this answer for critiquing heteronormativity, will determine whether [participants in] sexual politics wish to be no more than affirmative coworkers, laboring away at modernizing what already exists. Or whether sexual politics can form the bedrock of a societal project to rock the boat of societal relations.[16]

An important component of the boat of societal relations mentioned above are indeed the sanctioning mechanisms of power that push what is unacceptably queer to the peripheries of society, perception, and solidarity. Attractive collaborations, which reach into a queer subculture,

16 Peter Wagenknecht, "Was ist Heteronormativität? Zu Geschichte und Gehalt des Begriffs," in: *Heteronormativität, Empirische Studien zu Geschlecht, Sexualität und Macht*, ed. Jutta Hartmann, Christian Klesse, Peter Wagenknecht, Bettina Fritzsche, and Kristina Hackmann (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2007), 30.

make those logical alliances brittle that disfigure thematic connectedness and fuel segregation within queer scenes and subcultures, despite what actors know about heteronormative fickleness:

> This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals. As defined by ancient civil or canon law, sodomy was one category [among several] forbidden acts; its perpetrator was the juridical subject of this act, but not more than this. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and a possibly mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him everywhere: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. … The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[17]

Judith Butler, a scholar of gender and queerness, also elaborates on this thought, in concluding that:

> Note as well that the category of sex and the naturalized institution of heterosexuality are constructs, socially instituted and socially regulated fantasies or "fetishes," not natural categories, but political ones (categories that prove that recourse to the "natural" in such contexts is always political). Hence, the body which is torn apart, the wars waged among women, are textual violences, the deconstruction of constructs

17 Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 42–43. Note by translator of this volume, Henry Holland: I have adapted Hurley's translation. Despite all its merits, Hurley's translation muddies Foucault's intentions at certain points, rather than clarifying them.

> that are always already a kind of violence against the body's possibilities.[18]

In a subsequent step, this theoretical singularity is applied by Michael Warner in an exemplary analysis of different large cities in the USA, including New York:

> The current conditions in New York vividly illustrate what happens when national and international forces push the expansion of a market at the expense of public space and public autonomy, while at the same time lesbian and gay organizations decide that privacy and normalization are their goals. Gay men and lesbians collectively are exceedingly ill equipped now to recognize or resist the shifts in public culture. The media that organize the lesbian and gay public have changed, along with the rest of the culture; they are increasingly dominated by highly capitalized lifestyle magazines, which themselves have been drawn into close partnership with the mass entertainment industry through the increased visibility of some gay celebrities and the increased use of gay-themed plots in mass culture.[19]

Does this mean some protagonists in a queer subculture are corrupt collaborators? And do a few queer segments of recognition suffice to break apart the solidarity of a community of queer sexualities and genders?

In the twenty-first century, many queer challenges remain tangible and visible, but also negotiable. The institutions and communities, which have been participating in a broad-based discourse on sexual and gender-based, have extended themselves, and in some cases positioned themselves anew. Increasingly, international perspectives are being added to political perceptions. This is why national discrepancies pertaining to queer living conditions can irritate concerned parties, thus benefiting participants' ability to participate in discourse and in action.

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18 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 172.

19 Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 162n.

This can be seen, for example, in a queer refugees' movement—i.e. the explicit emigration away from the land of one's birth, because of how life is there, experienced in individual, sexual, and gender-based terms. But it can also be seen in the political noticing of discriminatory or even life-threatening threats to queer persons in other parts of the world—for example in a media focus on parliamentary bills that threaten queer people's inviolability.

In similar fashion, the provocative question concerning collaboration must be juxtaposed with a further question: isn't accessing the "antechamber of power"[20] generally beneficial for a lasting, social politics based transformation of foundational norms pertaining to genders and forms of sexual expression? Can taking on norms and standards from societal majorities have subversive effects nonetheless, and thus create space for new forms of queer love and life? Fundamental questions arising here are based on the assumption that the recognition of some queer performances can create corresponding spaces of tolerances in queer subcultural niches. This is especially relevant to those individuals who, in the long term, are likely be denied the acceptance of majorities.

It's a similar feeling to holding out in a bus shelter in rainy weather: Some manage to get on and ride in a full bus, even when there's no seat free. If that's the case, then there will definitely be at least one place free in the shelter for that person who had been standing in the rain until now, and who was ignored toughly by those who had been staying in the dry. It remains unclear, however, who now gets to move into the dry. Or rather: the haphazard crowd in the shelter means that this process is determined subtly. Similar to the power of recognition, forms of influence—government cabinet membership, for example, corporate leadership, or many other decision-making locations—have been commandeered by a single group or majority. It's all too easy to see the responsibility that others have, the person sitting next to you in the canteen, for example, or to fix one's view on the fact that one's earned one place in historical terms. This can easily lead to a postponement of every form of

20 See: Martin J. Gössl, *Schöne, queere Zeiten?*, 22.

solidarity with others, and to finding a "good" justification for one's own deeds. But what encroaches particularly on the responsibility for one's own actions is the possibility of successful aspiration, the chance of getting on in life, oneself, and thus the far too understandable concentration on the true tasks in life: finally getting either into the bus shelter, or even onto the approaching bus. Even when thinking in this way, clarity often prevails concerning grievances in the power system, and about the aforementioned strategies of tabooing, stigmatization, and anti-solidarity. Yet all too willingly, people often see unfair present-day conditions as the price that must be paid for one's own well-being, and in order not to endanger one's own chances, by mentioning uncomfortable facts pertaining to specific cases. The buses continue to pass by the crossroads of one's own life, and a typical kind of character always manages to get onto one bus or another.

Thus, queer sexuality remains essentially one thing above all: queer. Or put differently: the potential of this sexuality lies not merely in the chance of recognition by heteronormative power structures, but also in the articulation and performance of alternative counter-proposals and counter-publics. That's why we should enjoy existing sympathy for partial recognition forms of queer sexuality and gender, and why solidarity with queer peripheral forms should be a lived, embodied solidarity.