

9. Queer Altercations

There are several queer themes that are resistant to classical attempts at scholarly classification, ignorant of the suffering they're frequently inflicting on the inquiring scholar. These are phenomena familiar to everyone in this field, but which remain unspecific, both in their origins and in their impact. Into this grouping can fall modes of behavior, norms and rules can all fall into this grouping, when they cause irritation, and when the riddles behind them can't be "solved" in any way meaningful either to heteronormative social majorities, or to the queer community. These realities are exacerbations of discourses and/or performances, generated by individuals or groups, which come about either purposefully to irritate, or as a social byproduct. These moments appear to enjoy the tensions they're grounded in, which result from the contradictions inside a queer framework, and which must be fought over—and, if necessary, tolerated—in an act of communal willpower. It's essential to recognize these conflicts—in theory and in social practice—and the opaque circumstances that they may precipitate, which can, in turn, trigger a further series of related developments:

Gays are smarter than anyone else . . . They're overrepresented as artists and inventors, and there's a reason for that. On average they have higher IQs, but also we have license to experiment and push boundaries where others don't. . . On the one hand, you have the trans lobby that's all about control and oppression and misery and victimhood and grievance culture. And then drag queens, which is about taking the same kind of pain and expressing it through gender-defying comedy and transgression and subversion. I'm very much in

the second camp. ... I see things happening first, because I'm on the edge of culture, I'm the canary in the coal mine.¹

The queer artist Milos Yiannopoulos knows how to provoke people, above all people from his own community. The interview with Yiannopoulos presented here prompted the editor of the queer magazine *Out* to publish an editorial note at the head of the interview—this disclaimer wanted to make absolutely clear that the views expressed by Yiannopoulos were *not* the magazine's official standpoint.²

Emanations originating in queer recognition crystallize in battle lines, which seem to want to swap moderate compromises for extreme and polarizing positions. Alternatively, such emanations harden along deep-reaching conflict lines pertaining to a heteronormative ordering system, whereby alternative solutions, offered up by subcultures, must often cede ground to the outward extensions of societal norms. All these exacerbations are strategic, shape the queer community in their discursiveness, and influence the general public. They polarize and demand confrontations with old structures, all too comfortable traditions, and unreflective patterns. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a queer theoretician who's held up as the "founder of queer theory," described the concept of queerness in 1993 thus:

- 1 Chadwick Moore, "Send In the Clown: Internet Supervillain Milo Doesn't Care That You Hate Him" in: *Out Magazine* on September 21, 2016, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2016/9/21/send-clown-internet-supervillain-milo-doesnt-care-you-hate-him>.
- 2 "Editor's Note: It should not need saying that the views expressed by the subject of this piece in no way represent the opinions of this magazine, but in this era of social media tribalism, the mere act of covering a contentious person can be misinterpreted as an endorsement. If LGBTQ media takes its responsibilities seriously we can't shy away from covering queer people who are at the center of this highly polarized election year, and we ask you to assess Milos Yiannopoulos, the focus of this profile, on his own words without mistaking them for ours." Chadwick Moore, "Send In the Clown: Internet Supervillain Milo Doesn't Care That You Hate Him" in: *Out Magazine* on September 21, 2016, <https://www.out.com/out-exclusives/2016/9/21/send-clown-internet-supervillain-milo-doesnt-care-you-hate-him>.

A word so fraught as “queer” is – fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement – never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself. Anyone’s use of “queer” about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else. This is true (as it might also be true of “lesbian” or “gay”) because of the violently different connotative evaluations that seem to cluster around the category. But “gay” and “lesbian” still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested). “Queer” seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation.³

Radicalism is inherent to what is queer, a radicalism that always knows how—at least in part—to escape the clutches of scholarly, descriptive categorizations, and creative processings. Many see the acronym LGBTI as providing a necessary counter-construct to a definition—even though others experience this same, acronymic definition as polarizing in itself. If only through the gradual extensions of the LGBTI term, it documents the social, and sometimes political needs that are met by naming processes. Many people appear to think that with the definitions L for lesbian, G for G/ay, B for bisexual, T for transgender, and I for intersexual, clear attributions have been made, which, depending on awareness levels, aim to fix, in a statistical or in a flexible manner, sexual desire or a gender-based ambiguity. Whether one agrees with this definition process or not, the discursive clarity in the terminology appellation is not contested, either in acknowledging one’s own identity and desires, or in the allocation via external instances. The radicalism of the LGBTI concept lies in the social essences that are subsumed within this acronym. The letters are in no way secretive reductions, but rather, when deciphered knowledgeably, descriptions, which are backed up by a standardized narrative matrix: gay as sexual act between two men, lesbian as sexual intimacy between two women. This formula reduces things down

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 8.

to essentials, indeed, to what is perceptible, and leaves little room for maneuver for ominous interpretations. The collective clarity in decoding the LGBTI formula also becomes evident when components of the acronym are used as insults. It's only because there's an initial consensus exists, that the power of the term can establish prominence as an insult, and becomes viable in a social context:

While there are legally registered partnerships on the one hand, and conversations are proceeding about access to marriage for lesbians and gays, and about rainbow families and rights to adopt, and while ever more Austrians speak out, in opinion polls, for further equal opportunity measures, substantial homophobic prejudices are still hovering underneath the politically correct surface.

This cannot be a surprise to anybody: centuries of cultivated resentments do not disappear within just a few years. It is problematic, however, that in Austria hardly anyone's speaking about this dark side, about that which continues to exist, despite legal equality of opportunity. People prefer to avoid confronting homophobia, just as many people continue to avoid intervening in the case of unqualified attacks against foreigners.⁴

This phenomenon can be observed in many other postmodern, virtually interconnected societies, and not merely in Austria. This allows us to draw again on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument again: queerness's radicalism lies in its refusal to conform, which is why space must be given to exacerbations and altercations in the gay community's own discourses on the subject. And these discourses are far-reaching and polarizing, they endure for ages and are, nonetheless, continually laden with fresh emotions. They are, incontestably, present and necessary, even if they refuse categorizations—as the following, highly contentious examples are intended to demonstrate. More significant still is the function of such discourses in providing a territory that is

4 Irene Brickner, "Warum 'schwul' ein Schimpfwort ist" (11.01.2014), in: *Der Standard* on January 11, 2014, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1388650739347/warum-schwul-ein-schimpfwort-ist>.

dangerous, in terms of the arguments that happen on it. But the danger of interpretations, falsely relayed by third parties, cannot obstruct a discourse and the arguments laid out in it—and nor can these real dangers inhibit recognition of such necessary discourses.

Trans-Formations

As a concept, transformation is founded on a plan, or at least an idea, which change ought to be achieved through which parameters. As such, transformation is determined by a point of departure and a point of arrival. One of the great, contentious debates of our times rages around gender and/or sex, transition and passing as a process with the goal of arriving, in terms of gender. From this perspective, the trans identity moment is interpreted as the metamorphosis between one gender and the other. In this, biological worlds are highly relevant, and function as maps of gender and sex, on which participants set sail and leave the one world, and are meant to steer themselves toward the other. But what in all this should be allowed to count as queer, and what matches better to a heteronormative establishment?

At a time when many queers have signaled their desire for mainstream acceptability, it has been trans people who have carried forth the mantle of radical queerness, both personally and politically. We queer those formerly “straight” people who desire us, something I am proud to say I’ve done to varying degrees with every straight, cis man I’ve dated. We queer them when we transition, too, as when a friend dating a trans man at the start of his transition recently looked at me with a quizzical expression and said “I guess I’m queer now.” It was the moment he realized that soon others would assume he had a queer history he hasn’t actually lived, or began living at the moment his partner came out.⁵

5 Meredith Talusan, “Queer Culture in the Age of Transgender Disruption,” in: *Vice*, December 12, 2016. Accessed on November 27, 2023: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/aevjze/queer-culture-in-theage-of-transgender-disruptio>.

Does this make a transgender biography unquestionably and permanently queer? The argument here is that the trans identity biography can be lived as a queer position, but it's also possible actors choose not to make that choice—so that in this way it's similar to a same-gender sexual orientation. Having gone through the process of gender transition does not release anybody, automatically, from a queer understanding, but a queer sense of belonging certainly is something an individual can decide to take on—or reject.

This particularly contentious part of the debate impacts above all on the question of *how long* people belong for, so it's like a debate about membership. Is queer belonging permanent and unlimited? Or should there be options of being queer once, or at times, and not at another point or other points in time? Does queerness always depend on self-definitions, or heteronomous attributions, or does it require both?

Living in solidarity in the queer milieu positively valuing—as elucidated in the above based on various arguments—subcultural and peripheral groups in all their diversity, including the alternative needs and performances pertaining to these groups. Exaggerating queer ideals based on majority-backed mechanisms of recognition might seem an attractive and comfortable strategy. But such an amplification should be understood as only one of the concepts currently available for gender-based and sexual variety. In such heteronomous determinative processes, it remains accentuated explanatory concepts, which don't have to fulfill any kind of holistic mission, but which correlate to the desire for a normative order. There's nothing reprehensible about taking on a particular concept, but excluding alternatives should be reprimanded. As such, queer belonging does not have to reflect itself in its form of appearance, but rather in everyday understandings relating to relationship forms, interpretations of gender, and sexual freedoms. This means that no one needs any kind of autonomous or heteronomous attribute, similar to a seal of approval, that confirms they're sufficiently queer. A competition to see who's the queerest of them all is also equally unnecessary, or a hierarchization regarding what is allowed to count as queer, and what's already too conformist. Because in a queer subculture, and in external perceptions of the same, all these processes lead

to accentuated confrontations, which can only shrink the space needed for diverse forms of structuring—a space that's too small to begin with. This strenuous act of conscious openness becomes all the queerer, but also more polarized, the more controversial the themes addressed become: what, we ask, will trans-formation really mean for social-cultural and for political fields, including homelessness, top-flight sport, and leadership?

A Question of Age

Queer Theory has failed to fully take account of, and incorporate, the interlocking and overlapping underpinnings of the normative frameworks by which female sexual and gender identities are constituted. There is, therefore, no “queerness” about the debate surrounding the lowering of the age of consent, and the effects on teenage boys have been over emphasized at the expense of the impact on teenage girls. In order to have a truly genuine queer debate about the age of consent, sufficient attention must be paid to all of those affected and involved, particularly girls and that the attention should be extended to schools, medical staff, social workers etc. Lowering the age of consent is likely to lead to an even greater pressure on girls to be sexually active before they are ready, exposing them to experiences and consequences before they are sufficiently emotionally and physically mature.⁶

Well into the twenty-first century's third decade, many subjects relating to sexuality remain highly emotionalized, and tabooed. Decision-makers, whether elected politicians or otherwise, like thus to delegate discourses about the same to professions and research areas that they envisage as apparently suited to handle the same, including psychiatry, law and the judiciary, and, more specifically, criminology. If any public conversations about the same take place at all, they're often conducted

6 Sarah Beresford, “The Age of Consent and the Ending of Queer Theory,” *Laws* 3, no. 4 (2014): 773, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws3040759>.

purely on a tedious, fact-based level. But this factual grind disguises that significant social and political aspects are at play:

If the adolescent is our figure for the child, a figure intrinsically marked by a combination of protection and propulsion, qualified autonomy and peremption, we might more richly attend to axes of social difference and inequality This rendition of the child by-passes the somewhat overstated conclusions that white kids have futures where kids of color do not, or that innocence is only the preserve of white childhood. The conflicted, relatively recent fabrication of adolescence – as liminal, social but also biological, imitative but also inventive, vulnerable but agentive – itself invites reading difference (race, gender, class, ability, sexuality) back into rather than washed out of the theoretical framework. More avowedly than the child, the adolescent is a pluralized, resolutely historicized, and eroticized construct. While the adolescent is no less ideologically saturated than the child, the former's avowed differences – within the very category itself – engender an engagement with social inequalities more promising than add x and stir.⁷

In the book this passage is taken from, sexual theoretician Joseph Fischel argues that key categories in the debate, including childhood and youth, are loaded to the point of over spilling with norms, valuations, limitations, and much more. If these constructs seem to be clear and unitary, approaching them in the context of social reality exposes blatant differences. And it's precisely because of this fact that a queer and diverse debate is necessary. Neither demonizing nor playing down the issues involved will provide a responsible space for the discussion about sexuality and age, particularly with a view to the global gray zones, which provide possibilities for abuse, rape, coercion, and exploitation:

It's evident that services provided by the tourism industry are also used by travelers interested in accessing child prostitutes. So there's

7 Joseph J. Fischel, *Sex and Harm in the Age of Consent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 219.

now a demand on the tourism sector, also based on international agreements, to cooperate, and to prevent the possible use of its amenities for child prostitution.⁸

Not only the tourist industry, but also many other areas of organizational and intellectual activity are now under pressure to bring in lasting improvements to the current situation. There has been an accentuated focus on perpetrators in this context—and I focus consciously on male perpetrators here, as it's primarily men who carry out the deeds in question. But focusing exclusively on these men as sick individuals falls short and is not productive in terms of illuminating the subject in the queer breadth that it requires: international politics, social work, psychotherapy, police and many further professions need a queer-theoretical consciousness regarding sexualities and genders. Only then can they draw the necessary lines between the unacceptable and the acceptable in such a way that these deeds can be prevented fundamentally—and not just deferred to different geographical localities. The queer confrontation with such sexual felonies, and with the terrible impacts that these have, must be carried out in multidimensional ways. It's necessary, for example, to recognize the fact of such modes of behavior as a reality, and not to keep silent about them out of a sense of shame, ignorance, or disinterest, and not merely to hint at them. What is required, therefore, that this subject is indeed a subject, and a clarity that abuse can never be reduced to individual perpetrators, but rather must always be viewed as part of larger systems. However unpleasant the question of age relating to sexual acts and gender-based notions may appear to some affected parties and participants, an inability to confront the issue will itself lead to more victims. This is why a mindfulness and consciousness about sexual and gender-based gray zones in the global community is necessary: in order to conduct a discourse about the same, which provides space

8 Astrid Winkler, "Maßnahmen gegen Kindersextourismus," in: *SWS-Rundschau (Die Zeitschrift des Vereins für interdisziplinäre sozialwissenschaftliche Studien und Analysen)* 46, no. 3 (2006), https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-164472_313.

for prevention, intervention, and societal critique. It's crucial we create such spaces, whether people find the debate pleasant or not.

Bottom Shaming

Bottom-shaming is nothing new and has always been partly about power. ... Some of the stigma associated with bottom-shaming is indicative of gender roles. How many times have you heard a straight person ask, "Which of you is the girl in the relationship?" The guy on the bottom is the one being penetrated, which they associate with femininity. In this society, which is more of a handicap – being a woman or being a man who exhibits a trait associated with being a woman?⁹

The division of rolls in sexual interactions between two men has been locus and content of powerful interpretations and confrontations. The defrauding of hegemonic masculinity—or so one interpretation has it—is enacted by that man who doesn't make exclusive use of his penis in satisfying his desire.¹⁰ The division between top and bottom, active and passive, pushes inter-male sexuality in the exclusive direction of dichotomous positions, in which there's only one giver, and one receiver. This way of perceiving wants to reduce being gay, to accentuate matters so that the term only applies to a single sexual position:

Even most rappers just used it as a neutral insult at the start, without thinking about gays. But the more massively it's used in the scene, the more its meaning is shifted. In doing so, protagonists have assumed the aggressive, American form of homophobia. This then mixed, in some districts of Berlin, with the hatred against gays emanating from the Arabic-Turkish milieu. So that one now has to admit: the term

⁹ Jorge Rodriguez-Jimenez, "Op-ed: It Is Time to End Bottom-Shaming," in: The Out Magazine on October 31, 2014, <https://www.advocate.com/31-days-prep/2014/10/31/op-ed-it-time-end-bottom-shaming>.

¹⁰ See: R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2006).

definitely has a sexual referent. But the people [that use it] often don't know anybody that's openly gay. It's a bit similar to xenophobia—it's worst in areas where there are no foreigners. And as it happens, a weird rule applies [when using this term as an insult]: "you're only gay if you get fucked."¹¹

It's fascinating how similar the approaches of some heteronormative and queer representatives are, in unanimously attributing true masculinity only to the active man, the one on top, or in their interpretation of the active sexual act as male performance. Indeed, it certainly is the case that understandings of roles, which stem from a heterosexual constellation of bodies—and here, too, the possible spectrum should be seen much more widely than it typically is—are applied, from without, to queer relationships, and also then internalized. A reportage on the subject for *GQ Magazine* brought a number of relevant highlights in the debate to the fore:

David, a 35-year-old gay man from London who doesn't identify as top or bottom, says he worries that "some guys can start to define their lives" by their sexual role. "I fully understand the need to give yourself an identity, and when the only thing we all have in common (as gay men) is sex, it's the easiest one to lean on", he says. "But I also think it leans too heavily into heteronormativity, because I think it can be seen in terms of the bottom being 'the woman' and the top being 'the man'. Is there no rule book for relationships that hasn't been written by straight people?" In recent years, in some gay circles, 'bottom' has become a sneering synonym for 'camp' or 'femme-presenting'. Court, a 37-year-old gay guy from Denver, tells me that 'bottom-shaming' is definitely a thing. People feel like bottoming makes you the submissive or 'the woman, which is ridiculous', he says. But some gay guys out

¹¹ Johannes Gernert, "Interview mit Marcus Staiger 'Nur wer gefickt wird, ist schwul,'" in: *Stern*, August 29, 2008. Accessed on November 27, 2023: <https://www.stern.de/kultur/musik/interview-mit-marcus-staiger--nur-wer-gefickt-wir-d--ist-schwul--3757762.html>.

there feel so threatened in their masculinity that they don't want anyone to perceive them as even being capable of taking it.¹²

This is a further case in which labeling and stigmatization is a social process, which strongly curtails the multifarious sketches that exist for representing sexuality inside a queer community. Even if self-defining one's role as either top or bottoms seems omnipresent, there's no obligation forcing you to choose between one club or the other. And there's just as little reason to give in to the pressure to sort everyone else you know or have heard of into one of the two positions. Here too, a dilemma unfolds: on the one hand, queer sexuality's true freedom is forced, by social deformations, into a heteronormative corset. On the other hand, bottom shaming's structural entrenchment in gender-based duality is testament to the fact that people only feel the need to problematize particular positions:

Altogether, traditional masculine ideals may to some degree amplify the adverse effect that some gay men experience when compared to heterosexual men. In other words, gay men may feel pressured to live by the same expectations and restrictions that heterosexual men – whether it be as a defensive reaction or because it genuinely reflects their personality – while simultaneously experiencing some of the adverse effects of misogyny and sexual objectification that heterosexual women feel. ... Consequently, gay men who value traditional masculinity ideology may experience stress, shame, or guilt because being truly ›masculine‹ is unattainable due to their same-sex romantic attractions.¹³

12 Nick Levine, "It's Time to Stop Pigeonholing Gay Men as Tops and Bottoms," (23.05.2019), in: *GQ Magazine*, May 23, 2019. <https://www.gq.com/story/its-time-to-stop-pigeonholing-ourselves-as-tops-and-bottoms>.

13 Francisco J. Sánchez, Stefanie T. Greenberg, William Ming Liu, and Eric Vilain, "Reported Effects of Masculine Ideals on Gay Men," in *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 10, no. 1 (2010), 10, <https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fa0013513>.

Concepts of a *right* kind of masculinity, as a parameter of socialization unquestionably influence the later experience of one's own gender/sex, and one's sexual preferences. To draw from the language the feminist movement, we can consider the sexual act as a mirror of our society, both in the interactions completed and the narratives that are then attached to the same. Or to articulate it more provocatively: bottom shaming is the logical consequence of heteronormative, everyday culture—and the real evidence behind the demand that the queer and the feminist movements should be drawn more tightly together in the future.

Sexual Perfectionism

If you don't have sex, you don't have a life. Whoever practices ordinary sex isn't creative. And whoever politicizes sex has no sense of fun. Popular accentuations of debates about sex in the twenty-first century uses this language, or similar, when the issue is experiencing the *right kind of* sexuality. But:

It is not obvious whether better relations imply more sex, or more sex help build better relations. It seems likely, however, that having a positive attitude to sex, improves both how one relates to loved ones, and the amount of pleasure obtained from intimate behavior. The previous discussion suggests that sexual behavior is not functioning optimally in industrialized societies. The two most troublesome aspects are probably: (1) an elevated level of negative emotions such as guilt and shame, and (2) a malfunctioning sex life that restricts the harvesting of positive feelings. ... Whether or not present sexual behavior qualifies as a >disease of modernity<, there seems to be room for improvements, particularly in the form of altering the bioecological systems that drive infant development.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bjorn Grinde, "The Contribution of Sex to Quality of Life in Modern Societies," in: *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 17, 449–465 (2022). <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11482-021-09926-6>.

Sexuality's importance for a relationship has become a commonplace. But when it comes to the question of how sexuality should be experienced, new ideals appear to stretch back, and hook up with old traditions. As is the case in the sex toy industry, which is increasingly visible, and which, with its desire-inducing innovations knows how to entertain virtually interconnected, postmodern societies:

Many varying sex toy industries appear to be rising. With many individuals stay at home either with someone else or by themselves, sales of sex toys have increased. Items and media designed arouse sexually have often circulated in society. ... Besides, technology trends and various consumers prevalent in the area are also enhancing the market framework. Moreover, countries like Germany, Denmark, and Holland are certainly the main growing states pushing the demand for sexual toy products in Europe. ... Another different factor being followed by the vendors is the enduring uncovered opportunity of more comprehensively serving women through gender-neutral tones, which likely contributes to the growth of the market. ... The high demand for sex toys by NGOs, government, and foundations for supplying amidst many countries is a significant factor that will contribute to the increasing requirement for condoms. As final consumers are now becoming clear to experiment and adventurous, the need for future fashion and provoking sensual undies is multiplying in the market report. The need for sexual emollients has mainly been concentrated in European countries. The need for other goods which majorly includes sexual improvement supplements is also growing at a stable pace. The European sexual health market is witnessing a high need for herbal goods as they are without side effects, which is contrary to allopathic products. ... In Europe, the sexual wellbeing market is experiencing a shift because of the further introduction of female sexual products for example, vibrators, female condoms, and dildos. ... New innovations and technology arrivals in manufacturing

sex toys like 3D printing and production of organic emollients are running the business in Germany ...¹⁵

This is not simply commercial interests discovering new forms of desire, including the female body, previously *terra incognita*, alongside the commercial idealization of male penetration. Moreover, new ways of producing a desirous finale have moved to the center of companies' economic interests. This has made the products not only more various, but also technologically more complex, of higher quality, and more attractive in the forms they assume. Utensils for male sexuality have risen up above the smelly 1970s nylon air, and are now color-coordinated, packed in enticing forms, advertised in entertaining video clips, and discreetly sold. Their message is thereby clear: sex takes place between maximum two people, is good, clean fun, and is part and parcel of modern life—or at least of *normal* modern life. And sex may now be undertaken alone—so this message continues—and particularly for these purposes there are a number of expensive supporting aids you can buy, which all promise you an absolute profit in terms of desire. Whether alone or in company, sexuality is regarded as a healthy activity within modern existence, which intrinsically contains a feeling of wellbeing within it. Or, as Alexandra Fine, a sex toy producer puts it, a “mix of at-home entertainment and at-home wellness.”¹⁶ And the description really does fit to a tee, in order to successfully sell one’s products to the women and me, both queer and nonqueer, who are being targeted. Sports socks for youngsters have had their time, and the cucumber stays in the fridge: quite consciously, people are saying goodbye to old images (and some genuinely useful tools among them), in order to buy stimulating high-tech and sexy design instead. Customers are sold the promise and the ideology that good sex

15 Yeshwant Naik, “Regulations on Sex Toy Industry in Europe,” in: *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 16 (2021), 171n., https://techniumscience.com/index.php/social_sciences/issue/view/32.

16 Rosemary Donahue, “Even the Worst Year Ever Was No Match for the Sexual Wellness Industry,” in: *allure* on January 24, 2021. <https://www.allure.com/gallery/sexual-wellness-sex-toy-sales-skyrocketed-during-pandemic>.

lies in one's own hands, and ought to be permanently reinvented, in order not to count as prudish, and also not to miss out on your ultimate reward for all that work. On this view, sex is above all your path to climaxing.

For long, ideas and feelings about sexual perfectionism were co-shaped by actual possibilities of sexual performance, i.e. from actual, anatomical possibilities of uniting together with another person, either anally or vaginally. This subject continues to dominate, which explains the current but simultaneously archaic cult that surrounds the erection. Bodies, however, and the sexuality connected to them, have changed, both in economic terms and in social perceptions. Well-being, health, relaxation, creativity, and self-determination are only some of the rallying cries that are linked intentionally with the purchasing of sex toys. Without such supports, sex is portrayed as reduced to a dull, obligatory act: lethargic rather than agile, gray instead of colorful, strenuous, but not energetic:

Our contemporary daily lives are flooded with sexual stimuli, but also emptied of the same. ... Clearly eroticism and desire are driven away much more effectively by their own hyperbolic, cultural staging, their almost ceaseless commercialization and electronic dissemination, than they ever were by old forms of repression through bans. ... Everything has become commonplace, everything seems to be slotted in and frozen, but then something unpredictable, shocking, and mad happens. Suddenly, fantasies of omnipotence and perfection are back. Things no longer proceed smugly, but rather in a highly risky way; boredom no longer prevails, but rather a state of emergency.¹⁷

This analysis does indeed seem relevant, to name and describe the accentuation toward sexual perfection, and the hidden paradox within that. Many seem to feel they can't live up to such perfectionistic ideas about sex, or don't want to become slaves to sexual pressure. The feeling, that

17 Volkmar Sigusch, "Kultureller Wandel der Sexualität," in *Sexuelle Störungen und ihre Behandlungen*, ed. Volkmar Sigusch, (Stuttgart: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 24.

one's own sex life is lacking something grows alongside the demands involved in paying for dispensers of desire—sex toys and the like—to plug this gap. To the image of idealized vitality has now been added the facet of *healthy* sexuality, which, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, washes around everyday life. In response, the accentuated development in relation to queer recognition can mean that not experiencing sexuality at all, or even a justified rejection of sex toys and sex entertainment, is actually queerer than it looks—considering the unknowns pertaining to production, unresolved issues of resource sustainability, and questionable labor conditions.

