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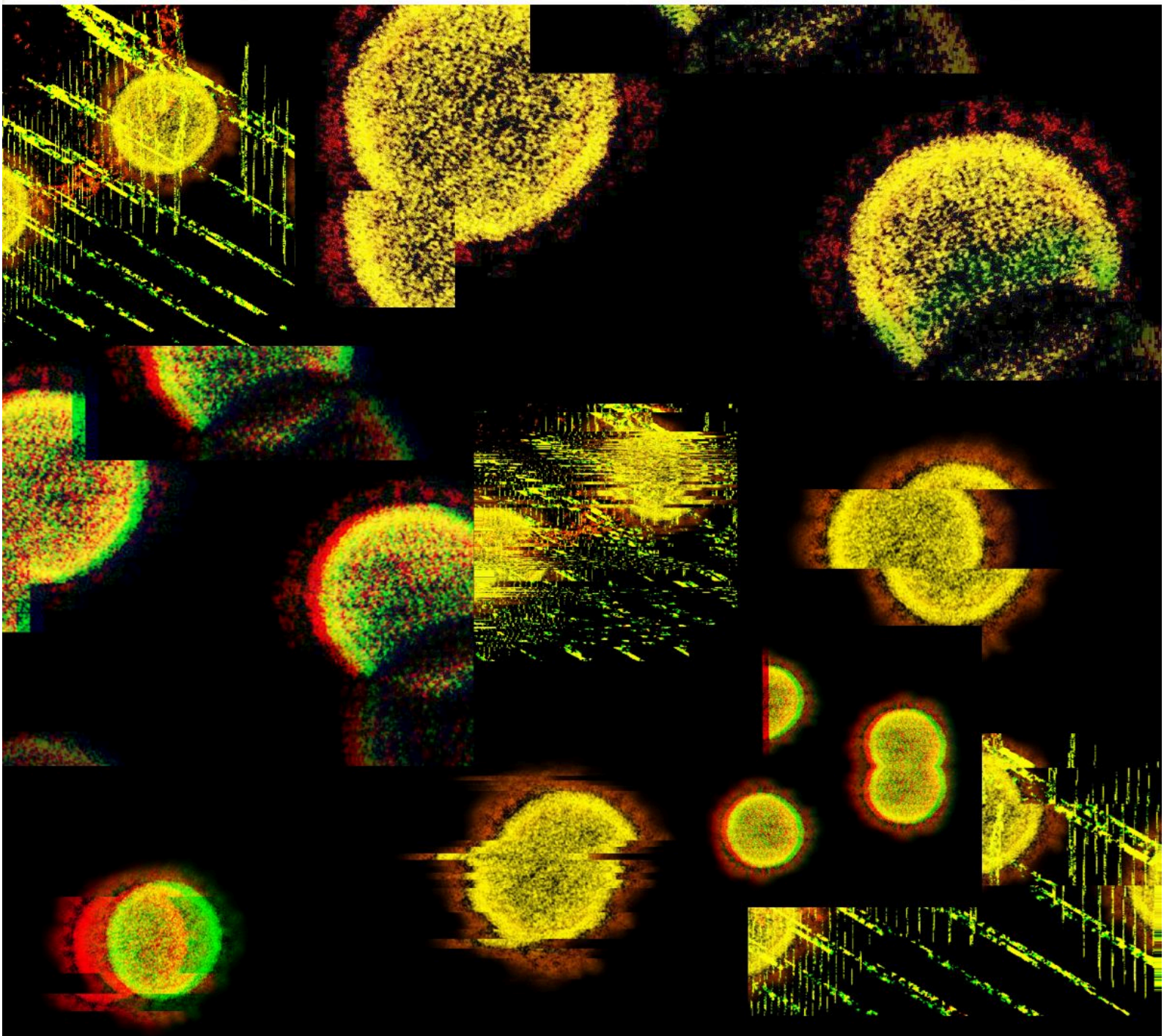

FLASHBACKS AND FLASHFORWARDS: EPIDEMICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

interalia
a journal of queer studies
pismo poświęcone studiom queer
interalia.queerstudies.pl
ISSN 1689-6637
16 / 2021
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ISSN 1689-6637
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Editorial

The first part of the current issue, "Flashbacks and Flashforwards: Epidemics and Social Change," includes materials collected and edited by Rafał Majka and Justyna Struzik. A detailed introduction to this thematic part may be found on pages 4-11. In the non-thematic part which follows we have been able to showcase the outstanding work of three individual authors – Tyna Fritschy from Switzerland, İlkan Can İpekçi from Turkey, and Nils Clausson from Canada. We also want to draw readers' attention to two ground-breaking group projects: a Spanish online museum of queer art and a series of highly creative educational films directed by the German queer theorist Antke Antek Engel.

Tyna Fritschy's article "Undisciplined Zones of Knowledge" engages in a critical way with the disciplining and domesticating effects of academic knowledge production – effects that do not spare queer theory. Exploring historical examples and epistemic fields or modes of undisciplined knowledge, the author fosters feminist, anticapitalist, and decolonizing perspectives in and on queer theory. Concluding with a vote for radical care, Fritschy enacts the undisciplining move in her own text through experimental, essayistic writing as well as caringly and carefully intertwining voices that inspire her thinking.

In his theoretically-informed interview-based study "The Lived Experiences of Queer* Teachers in İstanbul, Turkey, within the Scope of Institutionalized Heteronormativity and Neoliberal School Policies" anthropologist İlkan Can İpekçi looks at the ways in which queer teachers respond to the Turkish state's and school authorities' enforcement of normative masculinity and heterosexuality. He discusses many forms of state-sanctioned homophobia as well as the emotional labor performed by the queer teachers, who need to either constantly monitor their own behavior, conforming to employers' expectations, or leave the teaching profession. While all the interviewees live in the capital, their experience is shown to be strongly inflected by class: even though material and social capital does not protect the men from homophobia, it does mitigate their sense of isolation by giving them access to more liberal neighborhoods and safe spaces.

In "'Dynamite Scrupously Packed': A Revaluation of Henry Blake Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year*," Nils Clausson revisits the 1919 novel to argue that it has been unfairly overlooked by critics harbouring anachronistic expectations about what a gay novel should be. Clausson argues that while Fuller's perspective was not informed by the post-Stonewall concept of coming out, he portrayed a relationship between two men in an affirmative manner and celebrated the subversive potential of homoerotic desire by relying on the tradition of dramatic comedy.

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The (non-peer-reviewed) article by Ricard Huerta, showcases the Museari project, an online museum seeking to promote LGBTQ art and to overcome stereotypes and taboos. The paper is a case study showing the possibilities that virtual exhibitions offer to teachers interested in preparing online lessons on tolerance, inclusion, and diversity – especially in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his review of three educational shorts created by Antke Antek Engel *et al.*, Tomasz Basiuk comments on how the project's playful character helps achieve its ambitious goal of presenting key concepts in queer theory without resorting to oversimplification. Engel (who is member of the *InterAlia* editorial board) does not shy away from exploring tensions and contradictions within the field of queer theory to suggest that queer is a matter of "pleasure in complexity, confusion and contact in conflict."

Finally, Mateusz Marecki reviews a one-actor play, *Wyznania* (Confessions), which premiered in Słupsk in 2020. (Słupsk is a northern Polish city which once elected the openly gay politician Robert Biedroń as its mayor; he served from 2014 until 2018). Directed by Stanisław Otto Miedziewski, Grzegorz Piekarski plays the part of a homosexual Roman Catholic priest who reassesses his faith in a would-be sermon indicting bishops for homophobia and hypocrisy. The stage set suggests both a house of worship and a gay sauna, and the actor's body is simultaneously sexualized and presented as a sacrificial offering, or perhaps a body that has been resurrected. Marecki discusses this performance in the context of other theatrical and cinematic work on related themes coming from Poland, as well as some well-publicized instances of coming out by former Roman Catholic Polish priests.

Flashbacks and Flashforwards

Epidemics and Social Change

Flashbacks and Flashforwards: Epidemics and Social Change (intro)

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/PYYJ9700

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The idea of this special issue emerged in the context of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which became a social and medical fact at the beginning of 2020. Although epidemics and pandemics differ profoundly – not only in terms of the strictly epidemiological or medical dimension of the disease outbreak but also with regards to social and political responses – they produce similar effects by intersecting with existing inequities, thus affecting various vulnerable populations and communities. In consequence, the disruptions they cause mobilise groups and individuals to seek recognition of their rights, fight for equal access to healthcare and stand up against discrimination and social exclusion. The last point became for us a point of departure to think about and conceptualize this special issue.

Andrew T. Price-Smith claims that "contagion also contains the seeds of catalytic socio-economic and political transformation" (2009: 2); and in their introduction to the book *The Anthropology of Epidemics*, Ann H. Kelly, Frédéric Keck and Christos Lynteris argue that "the inevitable and yet unpredictable emergence of new epidemics and pandemics" (2019: 2) provokes us to pose a question about possible futures for humanity. Epidemics and pandemics that have roamed humankind so far have been turning points in many different ways. For example, the Black Death is thought to have paved the way for capitalism, while the Western manifestation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic decimated a whole generation of queer people, tainting the gay identity experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has already shown the drawbacks of slimmed-down, underfinanced and understaffed, or privatised institutions of social care. Yet, by redefining the moral economy of life and death, each of these outbreaks of diseases changed the dominant ways of thinking about social relations and provoked individuals and collectivities to invent new forms of solidarities and care.

Epidemics work in contradictory ways, on the one hand – causing established social patterns to fade away, on the other – inspiring people to forge strong connections of solidarity and communal care. It is in the times when new or recurring pathogens appear that the social lines of privilege and abandonment, or stigma and discrimination, are most vividly laid bare. Those who are deemed worthy by

the system or who actually are worthy, economically speaking, receive as much care and as little supervision as the conditions allow, whereas social groups that do not sit comfortably with the normative narratives of the nation-state (be it migrants, gays, sex workers, trans* people, people who use drugs, or working-class people in general), are cordoned off, violently monitored, or left out of the system.

If we look at the recent events taking place in Poland and beyond, we observe a certain shift towards the introduction of penal measures in governing the pandemic. In Poland, this move towards criminalisation bound the HIV and coronavirus epidemics together. In March 2020, the Polish government introduced the so-called "anti-crisis shield" to manage some of the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. In cases where someone, "knowing that they are infected with HIV, directly exposes another person to such infection," the government increased penalties from three years to up to eight years of imprisonment. This change was introduced with no justification or public debate. At the same time, the regulations were modified to include coronavirus transmission in the penal code. However, real regulatory practice regarding the coronavirus epidemic runs counter to the force of the written legal provisions. With the spread of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 and the sharp rise in infection rates, the government chaotically maneuvers among makeshift restrictions, treading carefully among its present and prospective constituencies. Anti-mask and anti-vaccine advocates roam the public space undisturbed while people who live with HIV and who are on TasP are traumatized into social and sexual hiding with the said Art. 161 § 1 of the Polish Penal Code regarding the exposure of another person to HIV infection. Even if, in the light of present-day medical knowledge, their HIV status is undetectable so they cannot "directly expose another person to HIV infection," they bear the brunt of this symbolic muscling up of the right-wing state. They appear easy victims, with all the ideological burden of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has again brought to the front the realization that it is socially and economically vulnerable groups who are most affected during an epidemic, and that the demonization or monsterization (Dziuban *et al.*, 2021) of particular communities in a folk way identified as the agents or "carriers" of the virus/disease (for HIV/AIDS – gay men, sex workers or people who use drugs, and for COVID-19 – people who "look Asian," paramedics or animals), runs along a violent, survivalist logic unhinged from scientific or medical findings. In his "Queer Epidemics" contribution to this issue, Tomasz Sikora elaborates on the logics of social exclusion and immunization, cultural dynamics of epidemics, and fear of contagion.

In the coronavirus pandemic, working-class bodies have been disproportionately affected in comparison with (upper) middle-class ones. During lockdowns, or with harsh restrictions regarding public and working spaces, workers who do manual work or provide services which need direct interaction between people, still had to leave their homes and risk exposure to the coronavirus. White-collar workers could and, to a large extent, still can work from home. In some countries class divisions overlapped with the dynamics of (the remnants of) structural racism, for instance in the US non-white

Americans were hospitalized much more often than their (upper) middle-class white compatriots because of socioeconomic status which translates into access to health care, household nutrition and lifestyle habits, thus health conditions[1].

In this special issue, we are interested in how epidemics intersect with social inequalities, how they affect different populations, and also to what extent and in what ways they shape the cultural imaginaries of such categories as health, life, death, and rights and political subjectivities. Of course, we tend to think about all these global questions through a local lens in which our experiences and observations are embedded. Our local Polish context seems to be significant, too. Following other scholars and activists in rediscovering non-hegemonic stories of HIV/AIDS epidemics (e.g. Rosengarten *et al.*, 2021; Chantraine, Molle and Musso, 2019), we sought contributions that would question or problematize the dominant narrative(s) about HIV epidemics, activism and policies in the local context. However, the current pandemic has thwarted our plans to some extent. Academia and activism, often characterized by precarity, have become even more unstable and unpredictable in the coronavirus era, making the everyday work of many of us more difficult. In consequence, not all of the commissioned articles were ultimately submitted.

While thinking about this special issue, we kept asking ourselves about the local histories of epidemics. Of particular interest to us were HIV/AIDS policies and activism that have emerged in Poland. We were also considering to what extent social imaginaries of HIV have been shaped by the temporal coincidence of the epidemic developments and policy responses with the post-1989 political and economic transition from state socialism to capitalism. We were looking at the stories told by activists about transnational cooperation in the 1990s, exploring the very first measures introduced to respond to the virus, and reflecting upon various social figures produced in the HIV/AIDS context by medicalised and community discourses. This period has been described in literature through the notion of "thick" times which "is meant to reflect a certain congestion of actors, events, emotions, actions and ideas, which are in progress and remain fluid" (Struzik, 2021: 571). The "thickness" of the 1990s manifested itself, for example, in an extensive transfer of knowledge and practices taking place between (mostly Western) non-governmental organisations (such as AIDES in France[2], Noah's Ark in Sweden or Deutsche Aidshilfe in Germany) during workshops, study visits and conferences. This wave of transnational collaboration not only brought certain vocabularies and categories to grasp complexities and contradictions of the epidemic, but it also allowed activists and policy-makers to bond and transgress institutional boundaries. One of the policy-makers active in the 1990s recalls this moment in the following way:

[1] Though inner cities and reservations, which are inhabited mostly by non-white working-class Americans, lack proper medical care infrastructure.

[2] See the interview with Bruno Spire in this issue.

> And actually, at this moment, I think, this boundary between civil society representatives and us – so-called bureaucrats – vanished. We had a lot of meetings, actions together, we were learning together, and together we participated in workshops[3].

Activism rooted in friendship and care in the context of epidemiological crisis is also explored in Robert Kulpa and Katherine Ludwin's article "The Potential of Friendship: A Case for Social Resilience." The authors show how shifting our focus in thinking about sociality to friendship might help us to escape heteronormative social orders constantly reproducing the (nuclear) family as a crucial building block of the society. Despite this perpetual reproduction, marginalized communities and groups create friendships and nonheteronormative intimate relations which make them more resilient in the realm of the pandemic. The meaning of community care during the early HIV epidemics is also discussed in the article "A Litany of Saints: Remembering the Early Years of AIDS Coalitional Activism in the First Year of a New Pandemic" by Mary Foltz, Adrian Shanker, Liz Bradbury, and Kristen Leipert. The stories of the HIV/AIDS activists quoted in the article expand commonplace definitions and practices of care by embracing not only concerns for health and well-being, but also housing, social and emotional needs. Solidarity was also at the heart of the formation of the French organization AIDES, as Bruno Spire recalls, pointing to the role of self-help groups, volunteers, and patients themselves in shaping the response to the HIV epidemic. All those aforementioned affects and feelings certainly constituted an important social context for many artistic works which were produced in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In "All the Rage: A Partial Memoir in Two Acts and a Prologue" Nils Clausson reviews the memoir of famous Canadian playwright Brad Fraser who has written, in quite a touching way, on loss, despair but also solidarity and affection in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Taking the affects and practices of solidarity and care beyond anthropocentrism, Laura Murray in her article "In the Margins of One Health: Interspecies Solidarity, Care, and Inequality" shows vernacular challenges to normative Western assumptions regarding the contexts of (re)emerging zoonotic diseases, painting in her ethnographic narrative pictures of interspecies bonding and care.

While community responses remain essential to understanding social inequalities but also to changing them, epidemics provoke punitive actions against vulnerable populations. Drawing on our fieldwork, we may observe how the HIV/AIDS epidemic intersected with criminalisation of drug use and moralised public debates about nonheteronormative sexualities.

Poland, being a low prevalence country with a relatively stable epidemiological situation, fits the epidemiological picture of Central and Eastern Europe. One of the figures produced with HIV/AIDS policy worlds in the 1990s is the "drug user" (in Polish – "narkoman"). For years people who inject drugs were the population most exposed to HIV infections. With the dominant abstinence-based

[3] The interview was conducted by Justyna Struzik as part of the Disentangling European HIV/AIDS Policies. Activism, Citizenship and Health (EUROPACH) project, financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme 3 Uses of the Past.

treatment model and criminalisation of drug possession, gradually progressing since 1997, a person who uses drugs became inextricably associated in social imaginaries with criminality (see Struzik, "Narcophobia Meets Queerphobia" in this issue). As Kasia Malinowska (2017: 158) puts it, "drug use, previously considered a social and medical issue, was re-framed as a problem of law and order in which drug users were viewed as criminals, social outcasts, threats to public safety, associates of the Russian Mafia and perpetrators ready to attack law-abiding citizens with HIV infected needles."

Furthermore, the involvement of the Catholic Church in shaping HIV prevention (Owczarzak, 2010) reinforced a moralized approach towards the virus and drug use, and reconfigured understanding and practising citizenship in regard to health:

> As politics in Poland shifted to the right and aligned more closely with the church, the discussion over who does and does not deserve state-funded care became more dominant, as did the rhetoric of blaming the individual for their health outcomes. Having Polish citizenship was no longer sufficient qualification for state-funded public health measures or access to healthcare; in the new paradigm, one had to be morally deserving as well. (Malinowska, 2017: 158)

Throughout the last four decades the picture of HIV, both in terms of epidemiology and political discourses, has changed radically. Today gay men and other men who have sex with men are the key population in Poland with a visible increase in new HIV diagnoses. As in the case of drug use being criminalised and stigmatised, nonheteronormative sexualities face growing homophobia and transphobia (for example, so-called LGBT-free zones established by local authorities, smear campaigns run by some right-wing politicians, denigration of queer and feminist collectives and NGOs, banning of sex education in schools, and trans-exclusionary voices among activists). Yet, these experiences and processes should be placed in a broader framework and explored through ways in which sexualities and sexual practices are governed and managed.

Queerphobic discourses, legal regulations and everyday practices taking place in education, medical and political settings, point to disciplining, controlling and silencing as the dominant tools of governing. This can be observed, for example, in the context of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). While PrEP is one of the most effective HIV prevention methods and a number of countries have started to reimburse it, it remains to some extent "unrecognized" and "silenced" by public institutions responsible for HIV prevention in Poland. PrEP has been pushed into the private healthcare sector, accessible for some (usually wealthier) persons. When PrEP was introduced in the Western context, discussions emerging around this form of chemoprophylaxis, usually in social media and (sex) dating apps, tended to present highly moralised vision of sexuality, in which being on PrEP was framed as having "reckless," "irresponsible" sex, as if this was supposed to be linked with a certain punishment or at least a serious consequence. The conservative moral panic (especially among nonheterosexual communities), which produces such statements as: "Promoting medicine which persuades people to

stop using condoms is sick,"[4] should be interpreted in the context of the long dominant discourse of HIV/AIDS prevention, that is, condom prophylaxis. For many gay men, and especially for a number of HIV/AIDS activists, condom safer sex has become, as Kane Race notices, "a habitual and ongoing practice" (2018: 104), a socialized pattern of sexual behaviour. Thus, "PrEP forces us to contend with what scares us, not only about risk but also about sex: how the condom has operated in the citizenship area, for example, not only as a piece of latex but also a symbolic prophylaxis against the apparently terrifying prospect of unbridled homosexuality" (*ibidem*, 101-102). And that "terrifying prospect of unbridled homosexuality" is what the post-HIV/AIDS epidemic gay activism was for many decades trying to keep as far at a distance as possible when activists managed to build a respectable, "virtually normal" image of a gay man in society and struggled to remove the HIV/AIDS stigma from gay identity. Condoms are not being discarded in HIV/AIDS prevention activism that focuses on GBMSM[5] communities, but it has been acknowledged that there are men who do not use condoms, who do not like using condoms, or who fail to use condoms (for example, during chemsex parties). Given the availability of other effective HIV/AIDS prevention methods, Bruno Spire claims in this issue, activist and community-based organizations should think of themselves as "trade unions of people," representing also those "who have problems with condoms" instead of fighting them.

Nowadays, the rhetoric of (the lack of) responsibility in the context of PrEP is used in various state and sociocultural discourses in different ways. In spaces where PrEP can be accessed free of charge, where sexual health testing and counselling infrastructure is co-financed or reimbursed by the state, and where public institutions embrace and support PrEP and U=U activism, "being responsible" has drifted towards "being on PrEP" and/or "being undetectable." In 2017, the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officially confirmed the 2008 Swiss Statement regarding the health prevention effectiveness of antiretroviral therapy (ART), which is known as Treatment as Prevention (TasP), stating that when one becomes undetectable, there is no possibility and no risk of HIV transmission. Tim Dean notes that "the category of 'undetectable' disrupts the positive/negative binary (Lee, 2013). The drugs perform a kind of deconstruction on the binary opposition that has organized gay erotic life for decades" (2015: 241), moving us into, as Dean puts it with a kind of amusement, a "pharmaceutically mediated utopia," where the virus seems no longer to weigh heavily on sexual intercourse dynamics, because "'undetectable' poz guyz cannot pass on the virus and neg guys on PrEP cannot get it" (*ibidem*). This, however, is only the case in some developed Western economies that deliver TasP free of charge, co-finance or reimburse PrEP and PEP, and provide accessible sexual health infrastructure. Outside as well as inside "the West," there are many different spatial and temporal realities. On the one hand, this "pharmaceutically mediated utopia" seems to have brought the long-awaited end of HIV transmissions and AIDS deaths, at least in some Western states, yet, on the other hand, this utopia is a form of biopolitical government, as "it relies on surveillance at the biomolecular level by an entire apparatus of medical power" (*ibidem*) and, because it is provided by the state, it is contingent upon the ideological whims of the political state and pharmaco-capitalism. PrEP

[4] A PrEP-skeptical comment on a LGBT Facebook group. Trans. by RM.

[5] Gays, bisexual men and other men who have sex with men.

and TasP have certainly been bridging the social and sexual worlds of HIV-positive and HIV-negative persons separated in the past by conservative ideologies and HIV-phobic discourses. For example, in gay communities one can find such accounts:

> … it kind of made me feel good I don't have to ask guys what their status is and so poz guys don't have to worry about disclosure or rejection and you know all that stigma stuff, and I like the idea that they have a different experience now that there are so many guys on PrEP because some guys would just – like I don't ask. (Focus Group; Grace *et al.*, 2018: 27)

However, with the growing awareness and accessibility of PrEP, (sex) dating apps for gays, bisexuals and other men who have sex with men have seen the emergence of users who, despite being undetectable on TasP, will identify themselves as "on PrEP." Both PrEP and TasP use similar combinations of drugs, and this "confusion" might be a deliberate move, that is, a strategic, sexual identity shielding from the HIV stigma (e.g. where sex between serodiscordant partners might get legally risky for the HIV-positive person); or it might also be the result of a lack of knowledge about the difference between these two biomedical technologies. Zoran Milosavljević writes about the (mis)use and social dynamics of PrEP in his article "The Paradoxes of PrEP: Rejection, Reluctancy, and Novel Gay Identities in Biomedical HIV Prevention in Serbia."

In 2018, the Polish right-wing government, trying to find money to fund its populist policies, sought to radically reorganize the ART financing policy. The aim was to lower the costs of ART per person, and one of the solutions considered by the Ministry of Health was to take ART out of the central state tender system and put it into the healthcare reimbursement system. This would mean, among other things, that people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) would have to get their medicine from local pharmacies instead of their HIV outpatient hospital clinics. This change would likely exacerbate HIV/AIDS stigma-related fear and anxiety in a country whose state-run National AIDS Centre, in a video spot released in December 2021, debunks myths about HIV/AIDS in an anonymous silhouette interview with an HIV-positive woman and man, using voice pitch-shifting technology. In the end, ART was not introduced into the reimbursement system, yet the amount of money to be spent per patient was lowered. As a result, some combination antiretroviral therapies were disrupted because certain drugs ceased to be economically available; a number of PLWHA had to then switch to different medicines that come at cheaper prices.

New biomedical technologies in HIV/AIDS prevention are not usually promoted or embraced by state institutions with enthusiasm. Instead, as has been true in the past, communities and social movements are driving the implementation by the state of novel healthcare programs. In his contribution to the issue, Karsten Schubert uses the term "democratic biopolitics" to name "the agency of citizens and activists, and their active participation in biopolitics." "Democratic biopolitics" is thus social

change enacted at the grassroots level, in community-based settings. Vibrant, positive PrEP and U=U discourses in social and public spheres and policy implementations in these areas are manifestations of the "democratic biopolitics" Schubert advocates.

By bringing together the voices of academics and activists from different countries and regions, this issue offers a look at epidemics and pandemics through a dynamic, sometimes contradictory and unstable, lens. Narratives about the past, present and future enable us to see health, life, and death in their relational, affective, yet material forms, intersecting with inequalities and power dynamics. At the same time, they demonstrate the unprecedented importance of community and grassroots mobilization in the struggle for health and treatment rights, sexual expressions and pleasures.

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Queer Epidemics

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/WEOJ1945

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This chapter of my book Bodies Out of Rule *(2014) considers John Greyson's* Zero Patience *– a 1993 musical satire on the early days of the AIDS epidemic – in the context of the epidemiological and immunity discourses inherent in neoliberal biopolitics. Greyson's film can be read as a queer critique of the broadly understood epidemiological operations of biopower, especially its authoritarian systematizations and taxonomizations that establish a certain "regime of truth" and are a necessary condition for the effective regulation of social practices and subjects. Through my reading of Greyson's film, I argue for a queer reclamation of the feared figure of the virus as a thoroughly transversal figure that transcends existing boundaries, identities, and cognitive categories.*

Keywords*: biopolitics, immunization, John Greyson,* Zero Patience*, virus*

In the previous chapter I discussed briefly some of the differences between the cultural figures of the virological and epidemiological imaginary that, as I want to argue, has become central to late modernity. Both vampirism and zombie-ism are like a contagious disease: they are unpredictable, their causes and sources are difficult, if not impossible, to detect, they get transmitted through direct bodily contact (blood and/or flesh), they spread exponentially and are difficult to contain, they spell chaos, if not an apocalypse. Indeed, the internet is replete with information on the alleged vampire virus (V5 or K-17, or other) or else the zombie virus (LQP-79 or the C-virus, or other), and comparisons to HIV are often explicit[1]. A growing number of cultural theorists (leading among whom are Tony D. Sampson and Jussi Parikka)[2] assert that in a globalized culture of networks and ever increasing connectivity, "contagion" becomes, for better or worse, the underlying logic of major social phenomena. "The age of globalization is the age of universal contagion," Hardt and Negri state bluntly (2001: 136). In the realm of the internet and the media the idea of "going viral" has itself gone viral, not to mention the very vampire and the zombie. What they have in common, besides the quality of "undeadness," is a familiar idea of the computer virus, itself, as Buiani points out, traceable to the discovery of the HIV virus (2009: 87) and the more general virological rhetorics that developed, over the 1980s and onward, in science, politics and other social spheres. (Incidentally, if HIV inspired IT specialists to think of malicious information codes in virological terms, a later hypothesis, proposed in 2003, concerning HIV infection – the Trojan Exosome Hypothesis – has probably borrowed its name from information technology; see Gould *et al.* 2003.)

[1] See, for example, South African Vampyre Culture Center; Rannals 2013.

[2] See Jussi Parikka, Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses (2007) and Tony D. Sampson, Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks (2012).

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The last two decades or so have seen a (viral) proliferation of movies featuring epidemics or contagions, often with a (post-)apocalyptic twist. Some evocative titles include, among many others: *Epidemic* (1987, Denmark, dir. Lars von Trier), *Outbreak* (1995, USA, dir. Wolfgang Petersen), *12 Monkeys* (1995, USA, dir. Terry Gilliam), *Contagious* (1997, USA, dir. Joe Napolitano), *Virus* (1999, USA, UK, Germany, Japan and France, dir. John Bruno), *Contaminated Man* (2000, USA, UK and Germany, dir. Anthony Hickox), *Infection* (2004, Japan, dir. Masayuki Ochiai), Mulberry Street (2006, USA, dir. Jim Mickle), *28 Weeks Later* (2007, UK, dir. Danny Boyle), *Pandemic* (2007, USA, dir. Armand Mastroianni), *Carriers* (2009, USA, dir. David Pastor and Àlex Pastor), and *Contagion* (2011, USA and United Arab Emirates, dir. Steven Soderbergh). Among the less mainstream classics of the plague/ epidemic genre critics list two early (pre-AIDS) movies directed by David Cronenberg: *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977). These and other movies, diverse as they are, evidence a voracious demand for an apocalyptic thrill, to be sure, combined with the postmodern inclination for morbid "teratology," akin to an aesthetics that Mark Dery has called the "New Grotesque" (1999: 145–166). But they also point to an epidemiological frame of mind which, arguably, underlies much of current (bio)political practice. Expanding zones of access and contact, the reasoning goes, call for enhanced preventive measures, based primarily on surveillance and identification. Public health is increasingly becoming a high security issue; or, rather, state security and population control are increasingly framed in terms of (global) epidemiological prevention. As Ronnie Lippens puts it, in reference to anti-terrorism, the present international relations conceives of the global Empire "as a complete, organic body of free-but-organic-and-therefore-orderly flows that however needs to be kept intact by means of epidemiological interventions aimed at excluding or neutralizing viral entities" (2004: 125, emphasis original)[3].

Giorgio Agamben's influential idea that modern Western regimes operate increasingly on the principle of the "state of exception," where the executive power is justified to use any security measures beyond its legal prerogatives in a state of "higher necessity,"[4] corresponds to the epidemiological paradigm that I am sketching out here. "Normally" the state of exception would apply to war conditions: either a war between states, or a civil war within a state. In Hobbesian terms, the very existence of the state is justified through its primary function to ward off both kinds of war, or, indeed, the war of all against all. In late modernity, however, the "state of exception" – when not related to an open war as such – has come to be understood largely in epidemiological terms. An infection that might prove lethal to a body politic, or to humanity at large, is an ever-present possibility, and because of that all resources – scientific, technological, political, and social – must be mobilized for the sake of "survival" (however selective the idea of survival turns out to be, on closer scrutiny). As Bashford and Hooker aptly note,

[3] The category of epidemic/contagion movies frequently overlaps with that of zombie/vampire movies; one notable recent example is the 2013 blockbuster *World War Z* (USA), directed by Marc Forster.

[4] "One of the theses of the present inquiry is that in our age, the state of exception comes more and more to the foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule" (Agamben, 1998: 20).

> The uncontrollability and unknowability of contagion, its surprise appearance in other bodies, in other places, in other creatures, invites systems of control and knowledge: hence the huge scientific and bureaucratic machine of public health, touching on so many levels of conduct and social organization, from the personal and local to the national and international. (2001: 2)

Thus, modern sanitary regimes, instituted for the sake of *salus populi*, have a deeply political justification: the prevention of an apocalyptic pandemic of social disorder and the protection of the community's security. The imagined epidemic refers to a variety of possible threats: a "real" contagious disease, a deadly computer virus, an extremist idea that leads to acts of terrorism or rebellion, a market crisis, a weakening of the "moral fiber" of a society (through, for instance, pornography), etc. Since any of these (and more) is a constant possibility, the state of exception becomes permanent, which legitimizes modern governments' ever expanding control, surveillance and "necessary" preventive actions. In short, modern regimes can be said to be mostly panic-driven.

Within the epidemiological paradigm, the two major strategies employed by modern biopolitics are, arguably, containment and immunization. Simply speaking, containment refers to any policy that seeks to prevent a dangerous phenomenon (a "real" or "figurative" epidemic) from spreading. The US "containment doctrine" during the Cold War was supposed to prevent "communism" from spreading; today, it is "islamism" and terrorism (notoriously conflated) that have become the usual suspects. A variety of sanitary measures are undertaken to prevent an uncontrolled spread: identifying outbreaks (and particularly the "patient zero" of an epidemic and the pathogen's routes), physical elimination of possible animal pathogen carriers (e.g. burning poultry), quarantines, etc. Equally, if not more, important are immunological discourses and policies, which have gradually come to occupy a central place in contemporary socio-political and cultural imaginaries. In Donna Haraway's classic statement,

> the immune system is an elaborate icon for principal systems of symbolic and material "difference" in late capitalism. Pre-eminently a twentieth-century object, the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of Western biopolitics. That is, the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological. (1991: 204)

According to Haraway, the importance of the immunity discourse in late capitalism stems from its intersection with the discourses of self and other that regulate epistemological categorizations and, consequently, the current parameters of socio-political life. As understood in current medical usage, the immune system must constantly differentiate self from non-self, it "must recognize self in some manner in order to react to something foreign," in Edward S. Golub's formulation (quoted in Haraway,

1991: 203). The question arises, "When is a self enough of a self that its boundaries become central to entire institutionalized discourses in medicine, war, and business?" (Haraway, 1991: 224). Invoked in order to justify particular forms of social organization and political action, immunology and its scientific vocabulary are themselves thoroughly imbued with cultural assumptions about selves and others, and particularly the desired or undesired interactions between them. However, Haraway contends, immunity can also be conceived in terms of shared specificities; of the semi-permeable self able to engage with others [...]; of situated possibilities and impossibilities of individuation and identification; and of partial fusions and dangers" (1991: 225).

The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito's take on the biopolitical immunity paradigm differs in several respects from Haraway's, although not in contradictory ways. It is worth pointing out that in Esposito's view a conceptualization of (legal or medical) immunity must necessarily be understood in conjunction with a conceptualization of community within the modern biopolitical paradigm that he traces back to the beginnings of modern political philosophy, especially Hobbes's foundational *Leviathan* (1651). Esposito defines immunization as the (communal) organism's internal mechanism which protects it not by "frontal opposition" but through the strategy of "exclusionary inclusion or exclusion by inclusion" (2011: 8). My contention in this context is that if present-day multiculturally-oriented liberalism seems to be ready to recognize certain kinds of difference and fold them into its posited body politic, this is happening largely in terms of the Espositian logic of immunization, i.e. a body politic internalizes a certain amount of what seems to constitute a danger in order to immunize itself against that very danger. "To survive," Esposito asserts, "the community – every community – is forced to introject the negative modality of its opposite, even if the opposite remains precisely a lacking and contrastive mode of being of the community itself" (2008: 52). He compares the immunization of a political body to vaccination, which consists in introducing into it a "fragment of the same pathogen that it wants to protect itself from" (2008: 46). In effect, immunization "saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective" by subjecting it "to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand" (2008: 46). Shifting the view to the modern liberal bodies politic that have become relatively favourable to certain notions of "multiculturalism," I would claim that under these current regimes carefully selected forms of difference must be administered in tolerable doses, they must be closely regulated and made functional by and for the system, so that a more radical (and contagious) difference is prevented from jeopardizing the system's *status quo*.

Contagion and epidemic can thus be argued to constitute the nodal point that brings together major issues of late modernity: questions of defining self versus other, the importance of recognizability and identifiability, the vulnerability of bodies and bodies politic (and hence questions of state security), the medico-political imperative to control and contain, and the viral nature of the media and communication; the list is not exhaustive, to be sure. For example, if the major issue in current international politics is, as many believe, the phenomenon called "terrorism," it is certainly framed to a large degree in epidemiological terms. Terrorism itself aims at spreading an uncontrollable panic in

a given population, which means it considers fear to be contagious; the use of the media (e.g. the videos of bloody executions of captured "enemies") is another dramatization of this attempt to trigger an epidemic of fear. The terrorists' message is also perceived as a contagious "pathogen" whose dissemination must be brought under control, however difficult this seems to be due to the decentralized communication networks that have proliferated thanks to technological developments and an ever increasing access to those technologies. The fear of terrorism is, in turn, used by governments to terrorize their citizens into complicity and obedience; in other words, an official (controlled) panic – in the form of a declared "state of exception" – is employed to ward off the fatal panic that might be caused by terrorists. Terrorism is posited as a high security risk that threatens to weaken and possibly kill the body politic "from within," which might be imagined either as "one of us" (one of the body's cells) turning cancerous and deadly, or as a pathogen that enters the body from the outside to wreak havoc inside it. The state's monopoly on violence is thus inseparable from its monopoly on fear: an administration protects the population from other "illegitimate" forms of fear, just as the official use of violence is justified in terms of protecting the body politic from other (and allegedly deadly) forms of violence.

*

Considering the paramount importance of immunological categories in late modernity, the proliferation of "contagion" movies is hardly surprising. The two epidemiological strategies of biopolitical control I singled out above – containment and immunization – find ample illustration in such movies. In Soderbergh's *Contagion* (USA/United Arab Emirates, 2011), for instance, it is crucial to both find the "patient zero" and trace the paths of the virus's spread, and to devise a vaccine before it is too late, i.e. before the whole population (if not the whole humanity) gets killed by the disease. The movie's plot is rather predictable and the "message" conventionally moralizing, but there is one aspect that merits mention here, namely the fatal discrepancy between the need for urgent action (finding and administering a vaccine) and the legal procedures that, if duly observed, would take much too much time[5]. In other words, the movie offers a justification of the breach of legal procedures in the "state of exception" caused by the pandemic. The protection of life – Hobbes's *conservatio vitae* that Esposito declares the originary gesture of modern biopolitics – is posited as the highest law that justifies any necessary sacrifices. Similarly, in the more recent *World War Z* (dir. Marc Forster, USA/Malta, 2013) devising a vaccine is literally a matter of humanity's life or death. We also find an element of individual sacrifice here, but the epidemiological "lesson" that the movie teaches is that in a globalized world the politics of containment is no longer tenable in the long run (the walls around Israel, though temporarily effective, eventually prove insufficient) and so the only salvation is in immunization through vaccination. In the late modern world some "classic" dichotomies must be redefined. One of them is the distinction between the inside (self) and the outside (other): the inside (self) must recognize its vulnerability to and dependence on the outside, or its ultimate permeability. Another is the distinction between poison and cure (or enemy and friend): the only way to protect

[5] It must be noted, however, that in *Contagion* it is not the government that sidesteps the law, but a brave scientist who is ready to risk her own life for the common good (and, perhaps, for her professional career).

human beings from the deadly zombie virus is, paradoxically, internalizing a different pathogen that makes humans "invisible" to the more deadly virus. In Espositian terms, it is life's "negative modality" (an illness that, however deadly, can be kept under control) that is used in order to protect life from an apocalyptic destruction.

Although epidemic/contagion movies have many models on which to base their more or less fantastic and apocalyptic plots (bird flu, swine flu, SARS, the Spanish flu, not to mention the Black Death or smallpox), it is, arguably, the AIDS epidemic that for several reasons has become a primary instance of the epidemiological paradigm of late modernity. Its importance as a reference point has to do with its sheer scale, of course, as well as the fact that it has been the first disease of such scale since the Spanish flu of 1918–1919 that has killed millions of people in the developed Western world, especially in North America. Moreover, it has engendered complex political and cultural responses (including the queer activism of the 1980s and the queer theory that followed in its wake). Indeed, the epidemic itself as well as its medical, cultural, social and political contexts may be seen as a vivid dramatization of the mechanisms of modern biopolitical regimes, driven as they are by the fear of dysfunction and disorder, concomitant with the fear of some sort of socially transmitted contagion. Modern sanitary and medical regimes, instituted for the sake of salus populi, have proved to have a deeply political justification, i.e. the prevention of an apocalyptic pandemic of social disorder and the protection of the community's security and futurity. Indeed, through the logic of catharsis, the genre of apocalyptic contagion movies may itself be seen as a functional element in the socio-psychological immunization of the public against "more real threats" present in social life, or more precisely against the governments' and other powerful institutions' claims as to what constitutes such threats and what counteractions they necessitate.

In her classic essay "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification" Paula A. Treichler famously asserted that AIDS was not only an epidemic of an infectious illness, but an epidemic of meanings as well (1987: 268). As she explains,

> "AIDS" is not merely an invented label, provided to us by science and scientific naming practices, for a clear-cut disease entity caused by a virus. Rather, the very nature of AIDS is constructed through language and in particular through the discourses of medicine and science; this construction is "true" or "real" only in certain specific ways – for example, in so far as it successfully guides research or facilitates clinical control over the illness. The name "AIDS" in part constructs the disease and helps make it intelligible. We cannot therefore look "through" language to determine what AIDS "really" is. Rather we must explore the site where such determinations really occur and intervene at the point where meaning is created: in language. (1987: 262)

The cultural constructedness of "AIDS" does not deny the reality of the lived experience of people living with AIDS (or HIV) or the people around them; rather, it makes those experiences intelligible and communicable. It also makes the disease controllable at least in symbolic terms, even if it remains incurable, because the act of naming and creating stories (whether personal narratives or medical discourses) helps to contain and tame the dangerous, socially and epistemologically disruptive phenomenon. The disease and the devastation it causes, however painful, become more emotionally "acceptable" when inscribed into explanatory, or simply meaningful narratives. At the same time, however, none of the narratives (even the scientific one, despite its authoritative status) can offer a final explanation, and so AIDS remains "a nexus where multiple meanings, stories and discourses intersect and overlap, reinforce and subvert each other" (Treichler, 1987: 269).

Arguably, the AIDS epidemic brought about a new level of critique of the socio-cultural formation of identities, bodies, sexualities, communities, and more; a formation that is always invested and contested politically, even though the scientific discourse more often than not claims a political neutrality that seems to lend it credibility and authority. The scientific community was caught red-handed, as it were: the definitions and interpretations of AIDS kept changing due to the debates among scientists themselves, the attitude shifts in the media and in the general public, politicians' decisions (or, more accurately, their prolonged inaction), and, significantly, the attention grabbing campaigns of the grassroots movement known as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). The AIDS crisis has become a nexus of contested meanings, convictions, affects and practices, where the political, the personal, the medical, the communal, and the cultural proved to be implicated in one another in ways more numerous and more subtle than most people may have suspected. And nobody can tell, as Treichler observes, "whose meanings will become 'the official story'" (1987: 287), at least for the time being. In fact, the more or less established HIV/AIDS narratives continue to be challenged and alternative narratives offered. Most of such alternative narratives, including the controversial 2009 documentary House of Numbers: Anatomy of an Epidemic (directed by Canadian born Brent Leung), are dismissed as conspiracy theories and/or "AIDS denialism," and accused of causing large-scale damage to people's health and lives. And yet, despite an overwhelming scientific consensus on the "official story" of HIV/AIDS, despite the fact that the disease seems mostly explained away and contained, if not yet effectively cured, doubts and uncertainties persist and questions multiply rather than disappear, within and without scientific circles. There is something in the very nature of the disease and epidemic (inasmuch as we understand it as, precisely, a disease and an epidemic) that seems to defy any ultimate explanations and biopolitical regulations. I would even risk the statement that with HIV/AIDS science may have reached the very limits of knowledge as we know it, the limits of any belief that science can faithfully represent, through its classifications and cause-and-effect explanations, the true nature of the real world. It is certainly able to offer provisional definitions,

preventive guidelines and temporary remedies, but unable to get a full grip on the virus and the disease it is believed to cause. As with Heisenberg's principle in quantum physics (to use a somewhat far-fetched analogy), AIDS marks the end of certainty in cultural and scientific definitions of diseases[6].

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John Greyson's 1993 movie *Zero Patience* is, among other things, a playful comment on the multiple narratives that claim to uncover or contain the "truth" about AIDS. The very fact that Greyson, a major representative of the so-called New Queer Cinema, chose to tell the story in the highly unlikely – given the seriousness of the subject matter – genre of a musical comedy draws the viewer's attention to the importance of linguistic and narrative conventions and how they impact our expectations, emotional reactions and understandings of the "truth" behind the story[7]. In this respect alone, as well as in many others, Greyson ridicules the somber tone and the sensationalism of the dominant discursive conventions applied routinely to AIDS. The film's campy humor and, more generally, its multiple breaches of decorum, are more than just subversion for subversion's sake; not unlike Bruce LaBruce's Brechtian distanciation techniques mentioned in the previous chapter, they convey the idea that, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, "the genre is the message."[8] Or, to put it somewhat differently, whatever societies take to be the "truth" depends crucially and inevitably on the alleged truth's discursive framing. This is, obviously, one of the key insights found in the writings of Michel Foucault; in a much quoted passage he ascertains that each society has its "regime of truth" which consists of the types of discourse that determine a society's criteria for distinguishing true and false statements (1984: 73). In modern societies, continues Foucault, this regime of truth is an effect of "scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it"; it is "transmitted under the control [...] of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)," but at the same time it is open to "political debate and social confrontation" (1984: 73). Greyson's *Zero Patience* explores several intersecting or conflicting discourses, their institutional frameworks and the various media in which they materialize, and it weaves a dense multidimensional narrative that sheds any simple notion of "truth."[9] The movie is a complex elaboration on the "epidemic of signification" (Treichler 1987, quoted above), the "crisis of representation itself" (Watney, 1987: 9), and the "epidemic of blame" (a phrase used in the movie by the leading character, Sir Richard Burton) triggered by AIDS. Even the title itself, let me note in passing, is an ingenious and politically charged resigni-

[6] For an overview of AIDS-related theory and activism, see especially Watney (1987), Crimp (1988 and 2004), and Treichler (1999).

[7] To be sure, *Zero Patience* was not the first comedy about AIDS. In 1985 the German filmmaker and activist Rosa von Praunheim made the low budget black comedy *A Virus Knows No Morals*, which may have been one of the sources of inspiration for Greyson. Matthew Sini argues that the New Queer Cinema in general was characterized by a particular predilection for a transgeneric aesthetics whose purpose was "to critique both the ideological implications of the [mainstream Hollywood] genres as well as the notion of genre itself" (2011). Sini concentrates on American cinema and does not mention Greyson.

[8] McLuhan's seminal proposition was, of course, that "the medium is the message" (1994: 7–21).

[9] On how "framing" organizes notions of reality, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Easy on the Organization of Experience* (1986).

fication of the notion of "patient zero" as used in epidemiological discourse: the quest for the cause/ origin is replaced by an urgent call for action.

Appropriately enough, the movie's opening scenes, as well as the first musical number, make a reference to the *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, itself a frame narrative consisting of a large collection of imaginative (as well as "exotic") tales. The aspect of the *Arabian Nights* that has come to be highly valued in the West (other than the literary quality of individual stories, of course) is the way in which storytelling becomes a strategy of deferring death in general, and of abating the ruler's fatal anger in particular. Fiction becomes, literally, a matter of life and death (or, even better, of livability and diability), but also a way of dealing with authoritarian power and the "truths" it decrees or the realities it creates and sustains. Choosing Sir Richard Francis Burton[10] (whose major biography was published three years before the film's release) as the unlikely leading character points in a number of ways at the question of discursively and institutionally produced "truths." Not only the translator of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* and *Kama Sutra*, the Victorian personage is also referred to as an explorer, geographer, cartographer, writer, soldier, spy, diplomat, orientalist, ethnographer, linguist, and so on. Above all, Burton must be seen as an empire-builder, both through his geographic exploits and the "knowledge" he so extensively produced. This dizzying range of occupations reveals Burton as an ambiguous, multidimensional figure – a man of knowledge, a man of action, a man of imagination – and a scandalous one at that, given his eager interest in matters sexual (among other things, he carried out a massive study of penis size). One of Burton's actual theories, expounded in an essay appended to his translation of the *Arabian Nights* and quoted in the movie, is that of the so-called "Sotadic Zone," i.e. a zone where pederasty is a widespread and acceptable social phenomenon. Related to climatic factors, the Sotadic Zone left England (but not North America) safely protected from the danger of pederasty[11].

In *Zero Patience* the "historical" Burton blends with the fictional character who happens to be an immortal taxidermologist and diorama designer working for the Natural History Museum in Toronto. Burton's "truths" are always framed or showcased: through his dioramas, his narrations, or the video documentary he sets about to make for his cherished Hall of Contagion on the alleged Patient Zero of the AIDS epidemic. In Burton's hands, the world as we know it becomes a diorama full of stuffed animals, wax figures, artifacts and "special effects," all placed in a frame narrative that pretends to be a truthful, factual, scientific representation of reality. A scheming, fame-hungry character, Burton proclaims to his boss: "We must be fearless in our pursuit of scientific truth, no matter how con-

[10] The Burton character is probably another witty resignification performed by Greyson: an important person in the early days if the epidemic was Democrat Congressman Philip Burton, one of the first US officials to push for AIDS-related research and legislation.

[11] In his "Terminal Essay" attached to volume 10 of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1886) Burton asserts that "[w]ithin the Sotadic Zone [including France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and Greece, with the coast-regions of Africa from Morocco to Egypt] the Vice is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo, whilst the races to the North and South of the limits here defined practice it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with the liveliest disgust."

troversial or unpopular!" before breaking into a song about his vision of a "culture of certainty" and an "empire of knowledge": "Classify and label, find the answers out,/ A culture of certainty will banish every doubt." Burton wants to persuade his boss to endorse his project to research the still mysterious causes of AIDS:

> Geography has mapped every river, every glade,
> Yet we still have much to learn about the mystery of AIDS.
> Let's explore this foreign body, learn the customs of its cells,
> Classify its nooks & crannies, pull its chains and ring its bells.

In an attempt to find a simple chain of cause and effect, Burton posits the necessity to identify the patient zero of the epidemic:

> We will never find a cure, till we isolate the source ,
> Once we know where it came from, we can kill it off by force.
> What's the origin of this virus? Europe, Zaire, or Haiti?
> The clues are here before us, Patient Zero holds the key.

The colonial echoes in Burton's reasoning are not incidental. Donna Haraway, alongside many other scholars, emphasizes "the residue of the history of colonial tropical medicine and natural history in late twentieth-century immune discourse," including the AIDS discourse (Haraway, 1991: 223). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri state succinctly:

> As AIDS has been recognized first as a disease and then as a global pandemic, there have developed maps of its sources and spread that often focus on central Africa and Haiti, in terms reminiscent of the colonialist imaginary: unrestrained sexuality, moral corruption, and lack of hygiene. (2001: 136)

Burton's original project (before his love affair with Patient Zero) is a neo-imperialist and totalitarian one: it is a project of nothing less than an epistemological colonization of the world, a turning of the world into a museum.

The ghost of Patient Zero is a character based on Gaëtan Dugas, although the name does not appear in Greyson's movie, effaced by the generic term "Patient Zero." Dugas was a Québécois flight attendant who was widely believed in the mid-1980s to have been the Patient Zero of the AIDS epidemic: a superspreader who wilfully infected thousands of men. Suggested by some epidemiologists, the hypothesis gained an enormous currency thanks to Randy Shilts's book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987). Dugas was othered in the US as Canadian; othered in English Canada as Québécois; othered from heterosexual society as queer; othered from the community of "good citizens" as promiscuous and irresponsible; othered from the healthy as the bearer of the "gay cancer." Greyson's *Zero Patience* is, among other things, a reflection on this exoticizing and stigmatizing gesture, an epistemological and social othering, a distancing whose logic, I would argue,

is not far from the logic of quarantine. When MacKenzie, the Natural Museum manager, expresses his doubts about Burton's Patient Zero project ("A promiscuous, irresponsible, homosexual Canadian – hardly a positive role model, Dick"), the latter replies with emphasis: "He was *French*-Canadian" and thus wins his boss over. The other "othered" characters include the Haitian-Canadian George or even the Green Monkey (personified in the movie as a stone butch woman), the mythical transmitter of the virus to *homo sapiens*, now represented in Burton's diorama as a stuffed specimen. Situating Zero/Dugas within the US-Canadian national dynamics, Robert L. Cagle cogently remarks:

> Nationality, sexuality, and HIV status became intermingled in this portrait of a monster whose only concern, other than maintaining his youthful good looks, was getting off – at any cost. [...] Patient Zero became a vampiric spectre of the AIDS generation, a phantom who drained the life out of vital young men while fussing and primping in a futile attempt to maintain his rapidly withering beauty. (1995: 71)

As an alien and shameful disease (doubly alien: allegedly gay-related as well as imported from the "dangerous Outside," i.e. Africa via Canada), AIDS was not mentioned in public by President Ronald Reagan until 1985. As I pointed out in the chapter on Canada's politics of multiculturalism and its relation to the cultural and literary mode referred to as the Canadian Gothic, this more general gesture of othering had one more specific dimension, which involved Reagan's ambition to boost America's self-confidence and propagate its masculinist image as a "superheroic state," to use Neil Renwick's phrase (1999: 154). This narrative rendered Canada – with its declared commitment to peacekeeping, conflict resolution and multiculturalism – an effeminate and vulnerable weakling. One could hardly find a better personification of this idea than "a promiscuous, irresponsible, homosexual [French] Canadian."

Sir Richard Burton and Zero Source. Author's screenshot (DVD).

For lack of any other name, "Zero" in Greyson's movie comes to function as the Dugas character's proper name. In a simple reading, this renaming or, rather denaming, may be read as a critique of the erasure of the "real" person, or more specifically his/her "real" experience and biography, from dominant cultural narratives. While Burton's cynical use of Zero as a demonized, destructive figure is exposed and censured, no "true" Zero is ever directly accessible, either; after all, we only deal with the nameless ghost. It is interesting how, especially in light of queer theory's anti-identitarian stance, this erasure of name/identity effected by dominant, authoritative discourses becomes, in fact, an opportunity for a renarrativization, or, better, a chain of renarrativizations that evade an identity position without at the same time erasing lived experience or memory[12]. Greyson's Zero is a paradoxical and liminal figure, irreducible to a single narrative. As a ghost, he occupies the nonspace between the living and the dead, but even his spectral status becomes "queered" in that he retains an exclusive visibility and materiality for Burton[13], which technically speaking would make him a hybrid between an immaterial ghost and a fleshy zombie; let us keep in mind his promiscuous vampiric inclinations, too[14]. Moreover, as a "zero," he occupies the nonland between the positive and negative[15]; he is a (non)figure, a screen onto which multiple images and narrations get projected. Even though he originally wishes to be made visible (he asks Burton to make him appear), in the end he gives up on that wish, and instead chooses his zero-ness, so to speak, because whatever identity he might be granted through one definitive narrative or another (that of a demonic Typhoid Mary or that of a hero whose cooperation with scientists proved crucial for early AIDS-related research; negative or positive) would seem to fix the "truth" about him. It is not that Zero/Dugas is utterly unnarrativizable – stories are necessary for survival, as both Scheherazade and Greyson know very well; it is rather that all narrations should be aware of their own generic conventions and limitations, their epistemological and political ramifications, the precariousness of their truth claims (always contaminated with "fiction"), etc. The nullification of Zero's name/identity opens up the space for an endless chain of resignifications, which may be playful at one level, but also deeply political and/or "heartfelt" at another. As I have argued elsewhere, queer could indeed be defined through a "productive emptyness," a sort of "negative capability," to borrow a term from Keats, or the Platonian chora, reinterpreted by Julia Kristeva in terms of what she calls the Semiotic (Sikora, 2012: 46, 53). Against the

[12] In the opening song, Zero pleads: "Tell the story, clear my name." The basic meaning of this "clearing" of his is obvious: as Zero's appearance in Burton's video attests, he just wants the world to know he is innocent. But "to clear" may also be read as "to make transparent" or invisible, or simply "to remove."

[13] This narrative ploy must also be read as a dramatization of the all-important question of queer (in)visibility, the question of who is visible to whom, in what ways, and under what circumstances (see, for example, Hennessy 2000, especially chapter 4, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture"). A recent development in theorizing (and politicizing) queer visibilities has been animated by queer theory's turn to Jacques Rancière; see especially the 2009 issue of the *Borderlands* journal, "Rancière and Queer Theory," edited by Samuel A. Chambers and Michael O'Rourke. Rancière's approach also provides one of the key methodological tools for Tomasz Basiuk's main line of argument in Exposures (2013: 11, 34, 373–6).

[14] Cf. Hanson 1991 and my discussion in chapter 6.

[15] It is worth noticing how the opening credits play with plus-, minus-, and zero-like shapes. More generally, the movie revolves around various meanings and usages of "positive" and "negative" e.g. George's song "Positive," where its basic meaning is "certain."

usurpations of the Symbolic order, which aims to fix all true meanings and identities, the Semiotic enables the never-ending movements of significations and resignifications (Sikora, 2012: 53).

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Zero Patience was Greyson's satirical response to the discourses and practices that grew around AIDS, especially the normative accounts that acquired the status of an official story (the truth itself) and started to dominate public space; accounts that followed the parameters of the apocalyptic epidemic imaginaries that I mapped out briefly at the beginning of this chapter[16]. More specifically, Greyson's movie was a response to Randy Shilts's 1987 book *And the Band Played On*, which quickly gained the status of the definitive history of the early days of the AIDS epidemic (not least because of its sheer size). Shilts's credentials were strong: as a well-known gay journalist he could claim (or be claimed) to be an "unbiased representative of the gay community." The book spurred massive opposition from what was later designated a queer movement; significantly, the organization that proved pivotal for a revision of queer sexualities and socialities, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was formed in the very same year, 1987. It is beyond the scope of my discussion here to summarize the critiques, but what they had in common, generally speaking, was the ambition to maintain a non-homophobic and sex-positive perspective that would not yield to dominant (straight) conceptual frameworks and narratives that demonize (gay) promiscuity, promote moral rectitude, and rely on established "truths" about AIDS, sexuality, community bonding, etc[17]. As Douglas Crimp put it in one of the most influential essays of the nascent queer critique, "[t]he fact that Shilts places blame for the spread of AIDS equally on the Reagan Administration, various government agencies, the scientific and medical establishments, and the gay community, is reason enough for many of us to condemn the book" (1987: 239). Actually, Crimp's essay ends with a reference to John Greyson's 1987 music video "The AIDS Epidemic" as an example of "a new phase in gay men's responses to the epidemic," a phase in which, "we are now reclaiming our subjectivities, our communities, our culture [...] and our promiscuous love of sex" (1987: 270). While the reference to an imagined "us-ness" of gay men seems problematic, especially since earlier in his essay Crimp criticized Shilts precisely for assuming that "what all gay men want is identical" (1987: 242), the general critique of the ways in which queer sexualities and socialities are made, through representational techniques, to fit into mainstream scenarios remains valid.

In 1993 Shilts's journalistic novel was made into an HBO movie. Whether by accident or not, Greyson's *Zero Patience* and Ottawa-born director Roger Spottiswoode's *And the Band Played On* premiered on the very same day: ominously enough, September 11[18]. It is not my intention to posit a simple binary opposition between "gay" and "queer" stances, yet I find it most instructive to juxtapose the two movies with a view to highlighting the difference between "gay" and "queer" narrative framing.

[16] On the associations of queerness with apocalypticism see Sedgwick, 1990: 127–130.

[17] For a multifaceted discussion of the postmodern and antiliberal politics of ACT UP, see Aronowitz, 1995.

[18] The year 1993 saw one more important AIDS movie: the tear-jerking Hollywood blockbuster *Philadelphia* (directed by Jonathan Demme). For an insightful discussion of the movie's latent homophobia, see Edelman, 2004: 18-19.

The American movie is, properly, a high drama that capitalizes on sensationalism, sentimentalism, and uncomplicated moralism. With all the parts neatly divided between the "good guys/gays" and the "bad guys/gays," Spottiswoode's docudrama, after Shilts's book, misplaces the question of (sexual) difference onto the question of individual moral qualifications or, at best, the ignorance of "scientific facts." (The gay mob that opposes the ban on bathhouses in San Francisco does not realize it is acting against its own best interest; "they're only human," Dr. Selma Dritz comments condescendingly in the HBO movie.) The difference between Spottiswoode's "gay" stance and Greyson's "queer" one dwells mostly in the gap between the naturalizing authoritativeness of the former ("that's exactly how it was!") and the renarrativizations and resignifications that Greyson's movie performs as it evades any final "truth regime." (Indeed, any organization of the epistemological – and thus ideological – construct of "reality" that poses itself as the "truth" or the "natural order" itself must be seen as a phallic investment.) Like Shilts's book, the HBO production "demonstrates so clearly that cultural conventions rigidly dictate what can and will be said about AIDS" (Crimp, 1987: 245); any sayable truth is always an effect of a particular convention. The convention adopted by Greyson in *Zero Patience*, however, is precisely one that aims to question the limits of every possible convention, or at least to expose each convention's provisional character. Spottiswoode's drama, on the other hand, following Shilts's work, "adopted a no-longer-possible universal point of view – which is, among other things, the heterosexual point of view," to quote Douglas Crimp once more (1987: 245). Spottiswoode's is a heroic, regenerative tale in which the good will of the good people prevails, sooner or later, over the ignorance, excessive ambition and ideological biases of other people. It is about getting things right, so that humanity can survive[19]. As countless apocalyptic or near-apocalyptic movies make clear, saving the world is always saving the world as we know it: the heteronormative, patriarchal, liberal humanist world that either exorcises queerness out of existence or else, more "progressively," normativizes it into its own institutional, conceptual and moral frameworks.

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Greyson's parody – a very serious parody, no doubt – is an exercise in telling the story of a deadly epidemic not in apocalyptic terms. In its antiheroic playfulness it does not posit any clear-cut villains or heroes. Not even the HIV virus itself, personified as a flamboyant drag queen, gets the honor of being the story's hated villain. In response to the "epidemic of blame" that surrounds the actual disease, the drag queen virus exclaims: "Blame? I'm a virus, right? Sickness is my job. If I was really responsible for the worst epidemic of the twentieth century, you can bet I'd be boasting about it! Mary, I'd ask for a promotion!" Indeed, in a humorous yet somewhat didactic tone, it/she/he goes on to warn against "everyone who says they're an authority, who talks with certainty!" Paradoxically, the virus that Zero talks to makes him "appear" (he becomes visible to Burton's camera), if only for a minute or so, which may be read as Greyson's ironic comment on how it took a deadly virus to make queer people temporarily visible to mainstream media and high profile politicians. More generally,

[19] The quest for a point of origin (here: the source of the epidemic's outbreak) is inseparable from thinking a possible end, an apocalypse (here: a pandemic). To identify "patient zero" is deemed essential to containing the epidemic, and thus preventing the end of the world.

the virus stands for the indelible uncertainty and undecidability inscribed into any and all epistemological grids that organize our understanding of the world[20]. The drag queen as such, as a cultural phenomenon, occupies a similarly undecidable position: defined by the "straight mind" (to adapt Wittig's useful term)[21] as a "fake" woman behind which there sits a "true" (i.e. biological) man, in a queer understanding the drag queen points in a very different direction, the direction of the undecidability of "fact" versus "fiction," "identity" versus "masquerade," "male" versus "female," etc. It points, that is, towards an infinite chain of signification, in which this or that "truth" is merely a politically enforced effect.

Miss HIV Source. Author's screenshot (DVD)

[20] Incidentally, the word GRID was an acronym of the first designation of what later came to be known as AIDS (it stood for "gay-related immune deficiency"); see, for example, Shilts 1987: 121. Arguably, the association of "epistemological grids' with GRID, though not connected by any causal relation in the "real world," may reveal the way in which AIDS participates in the categorizations and systematizations that "empires of knowledge" impose on our perception of reality. For a brief moment in 1982, the newly discovered disease came very closely to conclusively proving the existence of a "gay essence" visible to the disease-carrying virus, and, consequently, recognized by the state and other powerful, life-regulating institutions.

[21] According to Wittig, the straight mind "develops a totalizing interpretation of history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the same time" and it produces "general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals" (1992: 27).

While the "straight mind" can only imagine the virus (as well as the queerness that it is sometimes made to stand for) as apocalyptic, Greyson's film, in a sense, shows how the HIV virus is reclaimed by queer culture itself – a culture that developed largely in response to the AIDS crisis. Deadly as it is, HIV not only destroyed "the best minds of a generation" (to paraphrase the opening line of Allen Ginsberg's Howl), but it also triggered new ways of thinking sexuality, social relationality, political action and forms of knowledge building; it must be seen not just as a blind assassin, but a productive force as well[22]. Actually, the reclaiming of HIV has been literalized in the "bug-chasing/gift-giving" subculture, in which gay men proactively seek to get (or transmit) the virus. Not only is the virus eroticized here, but it also enables the creation of new forms of new forms of kinship and new levels of intimacy[23]. Shockingly to many, gay or straight or otherwise, the subculture spurns the dominant culture obsessed with health and hygiene, and the society dedicated to the regulation of bodies, desires, identities and relationships. It thus problematizes the idea of a good or livable life, and it blurs the line between what is "life-giving" and what is "death-dealing." The members of gay men's bareback/bug-chasing subcultures (based on unprotected sexual activities, often with a view to getting the "gift" of the HIV virus) certainly do not live up to the ideal of a responsible, good, value-adding citizen, participating in the (implicitly straight) "common good" and working towards "a better future." Although the positive aspect of the bug-chasing network is emphasized (e.g. extending the limits of intimacy or creating new modes of social connectivity), there also transpires the more negativist message of "no future," as postulated most forcefully (though in a different context) by Lee Edelman (2004)[24].

In the early days of the AIDS crisis, the gay community and its allies demanded urgent action from the government, the healthcare system, pharmaceutical corporations and other social institutions, but simultaneously they defended their autonomy and resisted the institutions' regulatory inclinations. The promotion of safe sex techniques by AIDS activists was often seen as a way of saving gay men's "promiscuous love of sex" (Crimp, 1987: 270). But within a decade, once the idea of safe sex became part of the official gospel and an instrument in the regulatory operations of the state, some gay men started to feel alienated from the confining safe-sex culture, of which the relatively small but visible bareback subculture is a vivid manifestation. While the mainstream LGBT movement pursued further protection – and thus, inevitably, supervision – from the state by demanding, for instance, the right to same-sex marriage, a number of queer activists and theorists have resisted that direction, which came to be known as "homonormativity," a term coined by Lisa Duggan and defined

[22] It is not completely irrelevant to mention that more and more scientific research is done on the use of HIV for the treatment of some diseases, especially cancer; see, for example, Rossolillo et. al. 2012.

[23] See Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009). For an informed critique of Dean's theses in the context of the so-called antisocial and antirelational positions in queer theory, see Basiuk 2013.

[24] In a nutshell, Edelman argues that queers should reject any kind of "reproductive futurism" and instead embrace the figural position they are being ascribed within the current social order, i.e. the position of negativity (or the death drive). Queerness would thus act as a constant reminder that there is, there can be, no future at all, or that all futurity is nothing but fantasmatic: "Our queerness has nothing to offer a Symbolic that lives by denying that nothingness except an insistence on the haunting excess that this nothingness entails, an insistence on the negativity that pierces the fantasy Screen of futurity, shattering narrative temporality with irony's always explosive force" (2004: 31).

as neoliberalism's sexual politics[25]. Just as safe sex was appropriated by the official epistemological regimes that regulate social practices, so – I would argue – the spirit of early queer resistance was skillfully rearticulated, within an increasingly dominant neoliberal milieu, as a personalized "risk management" or, in Antke Engel's apt phrase, "virtuous management of difference" (2013: 183). Once taken up and handled by the immuno-political machine of the modern state, the AIDS crisis was used successfully by neoliberalism to solidify and reinforce its claims and its grip on social relations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. To put it bluntly, if you learn to use a condom and live in a stable monogamous relationship, then the specter of contagion is contained and you prove yourself to be a virtuous citizen, worthy of, say, the right to marry. It is perhaps no accident that recently, at a time of the growing dissatisfaction with the neoliberal order, the AIDS crisis in general, and the history of ACT UP in particular, have come to attract a refreshed attention. The year 2012 alone saw two documentaries devoted to this subject: *How to Survive a Plague* (USA, dir. David France) and *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (USA, dir. Jim Hubbard).

Despite the fact that John Greyson's *Zero Patience* was made two decades ago, it remains more than just a document of its time. It continues to be an important and relevant comment on queer's cultural, social, political, ethical and epistemological resistance to "straight" framings and fixings. I choose to read the movie through the idea of queerness as a sort of viral contagion[26] that refuses to be contained, policed and regulated by the immunological apparatuses of contemporary biopolitics. Queerness is a figure of the impossibility of being appropriated and taxonomized: like a virus, a zero, a ghost, a vampire or a zombie, it dwells between the living and the dead, between presence and absence, between the positive and the negative. Posited, as it often is, as a portent of death, self-annihilation (cf. Bersani, 2010: 29) or the apocalypse itself (cf. Sedgwick, 1990: 127–130), it nevertheless proves to be a creative social force that traverses, connects, transforms, hybridizes, disrupts and reassembles. The "queer virus" is no respecter of identities, persons, races or species. It claims no origin, no telos, no family tree, just a horizontal movement, an epidemic propagation which "has nothing to do with filiation by heredity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 241). The apparently "innocent" and scientific search for origins and certainties is mocked and rejected for the sake of a mutable queer diaspora without an origin (as Gloria Anzaldúa puts it, "I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races"; 1987: 80). Queerness "introduces disorder into communication," to borrow

[25] Duggan defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (2003: 50).

[26] The association between "homosexuality" and contagion is age-old, of course, and continues to be perpetuated, in one of its versions, by the popular myth that homosexuality is "caused" by (early) seduction, and although genetic explanations seem to prevail in recent years, the fear of "gay contagion" still persists. Indeed, Gregory M. Cochran, American physicist and professor of anthropology, has proposed his own theory of male (*not* female) homosexuality's origin, in which he literalizes "gay contagion" as a viral disease: "Now that we know that human male homosexuality looks like a disease caused by some infectious organism, the next question is how that could happen – how could some virus change sexual interest? I don't think that anyone can be sure of the exact mechanism at this point. I think we can be fairly confident that it is caused by an infectious organism, from the information we have and general evolutionary considerations [...]. All this is speculative, of course: but the idea that male homosexuality is caused by a pathogen makes good evolutionary sense, unlike every other explanation ever proposed" (2005).

Jacques Derrida's characterization of the virus (in Brunette and Wills, 1994: 12), it questions every consensual version of reality and tirelessly disrupts the apparently stable (because institutionally stabilized) relationships between signifiers and signifieds, on which the world's intelligibility and classifiability so crucially depends.

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The Paradoxes of PrEP: Rejection, Reluctancy, and Novel Gay Identities in Biomedical HIV Prevention in Serbia

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/ODVI6514

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This article explores the different ways in which gay men in Serbia perceive PrEP as a novel method of HIV prevention. In the article, I draw on data from my research on PrEP use among thirty gay men in Belgrade. The use of PrEP is still very low amongst gay communities in Serbia due to their rejection of PrEP and due to the stigma around PrEP use. In Serbia, the social significance of PrEP relates to HIV status disclosure on gay social/dating media. Paradoxically, on gay dating sites, the signifier "PrEP" blurs the line between HIV positive gay men – who have achieved undetectable HIV status through a potent ARV therapy – and those HIV negative gay men who use PrEP as a preventative tool against HIV transmission. In the article, I will argue that a new form of gay identity has emerged on gay dating apps in Serbia – "undetectable, on PrEP." This new identity emerges from confusion in HIV risk assessment. The use of PrEP has been seen as a marker to denote someone's HIV negative status and to protect them from HIV transmission. However, some gay men with an undetectable HIV status would like to be regarded as HIV negative even though they are not, and thus they use the signifier "on PrEP" to highlight their desire to claim an HIV negative status. PrEP has many symbolic valences: from HIV status disclosure to assumed promiscuity. As I will argue, while the health paradigm is of utmost importance for Serbian gay men, internalized stigma additionally drives the low uptake of PrEP amongst gay communities in Serbia, thus contributing to the confusion regarding PrEP use and the overall approach to HIV prevention. This article finds that those respondents who accept PrEP without stigma or confusion regarding their HIV status are also more willing and ready to recommend using PrEP to other gay men.

Keywords: *gay men, PrEP, Serbia, HIV status, HIV prevention*

Introduction

The use of PrEP in Serbia among gay men for HIV prevention is a complex question, best defined through ambivalence and reluctance. There is a high level of confusion among gay men on the role of PrEP, which leads to a certain paradox. First, this potent preventive tool cannot fulfil its preventive role against HIV transmission because so many in the gay community either reject PrEP outright or are reluctant to use it; and second, in many cases its potency has been "hijacked" by the fear of stigmatization and confusion about for whom PrEP is designed – whether for HIV negative or HIV positive gay men. In this confusion around PrEP and HIV status a new sexual identity – "undetectable, on PrEP" – emerges with further risk assessment implications.

This article contributes to the current debate on the social signification of PrEP (Auerbach and Hoppe, 2015; Calabrese and Underhill, 2015; Dean, 2015; Eaton *et al.*, 2017; Castro, Delabre and Molina, 2019; Nicholls and Rosengarthen, 2019; Gomez *et al.*, 2020). The meaning of PrEP as a preventive method

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against HIV transmission goes beyond simple "pill-popping," and as Auerbach and Hoppe cogently noted, "PrEP embodies a range of interacting physiological, psychological and social realities that together affect not only an individual's risk of avoidance of HIV infection but also relationship dynamics, sexual cultures and social arrangements that have influence beyond HIV" (2015: 30). The gay community's response to PrEP is also being driven by a broader social signification of HIV status; one that puts questions of risk and responsibility at the heart of HIV prevention (Jaspal and Daramilas, 2016; Thomann, 2018; Hildebrandt, Bode et Ng, 2019). The match between objective risk and subjective perception of risk among gay men is frequently a mismatch and it erodes PrEP's preventive potential. Race (2016) sees PrEP as a signifier to the changing paradigm of HIV prevention and a "reluctant object" to be or not to be used in gay sexual practices.

The relation between PrEP and HIV status goes beyond a simple division between HIV negative and HIV positive gay men and their opinions about risk assessment, which has even resulted in the introduction of new categories of identification, such as the "preventionist identity" (Calabrese and Underhill, 2015) or "HIV negative, on PrEP" (Thomann, 2018). Brennan (2017) describes how gay pornography has changed under the influence of PrEP, into expositions of the full condomless or "bareback" sex act, and he underlines the fact that this situation has further implications for gay sexual practices. Golub, Gamarel and Surace (2017) report that PrEP users are sometimes perceived as HIV positive and deemed to be lying about their HIV status. Klein and Washington (2020) report the lack of interest in learning about PrEP and problems in its adoption among a portion of gay men in the US.

PrEP in Serbia

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Serbia is an unstable one. Serbia is a low prevalence country, but the number of cases per year is on the rise, mostly among the MSM population (UNAIDS, 2020). Since 2000 MSM have been the predominant group among newly registered cases, with 80% of all registered cases in 2019 (IOPHOS, 2020). The antiretroviral therapy (ARV) has been available since 1997, and 64% of HIV positive individuals were on ARV in 2019 (IOPHOS, 2020).

PrEP in the form of Truvada was registered in Serbia in 2015 by the Agency of Medicines and Medical Devices of Serbia (ALIMS). Initially, the major impediment to its distribution was the price of 30,000 dinars (approx. 250 euros monthly) as this was simply too expensive for the majority of gay men. The first step toward better access to PrEP was the registration of the generic drug Gilestra Duo T, produced by the pharma company Actavis. It was registered in 2018 and offered the treatment at a much lower price of 50 euros per box/monthly therapy. Given the fact that the average salary in Serbia as of July 2021 is approximately 550 euros (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2021), even the generic form of PrEP remains unaffordable for many.

The semi-official start of PrEP in Serbia was in August 2019. The protocol for prescribing PrEP was drawn up by the Ministry of Health in 2019, in consultation with the People Living With HIV/AIDS

(PLWH) non-governmental organizations. This protocol stated that the use of PrEP should be commenced only after the potential recipient of PrEP has first undegone HIV/STD testing. After this initial testing and start of PrEP, testing for HIV and STDs should be done every three months as a method of screening. STD screening is a form of epidemiological surveillance but also a signifier of successful combination of preventive measures in use – the conventional prevention through condom use, which protects against other STDs, and the biomedical prevention of PrEP, which protects against HIV transmission but not against other STDs.

When one is screened to be HIV negative, they can get the so-called precept (i.e., an informal prescription) from an HIV/AIDS specialist in the Clinic for Infectious Diseases in Belgrade. With this prescription for PrEP, one can then buy the drug in the pharmacy close to the Clinic. Nevertheless, many gay men in Serbia are using "informal" or "wild" PrEP, the source of which is virtually impossible to establish, for it is usually imported and sold on the black market. Brisson (2017) warns that if public health officials interfere with the "informal use" of PrEP among gay men and MSM, they aggravate the problem because such "informal use" contributes to HIV risk-reduction. The medical professionals' counterargument is that "informal use" of PrEP could lead to HIV viral resistance to ARV due to frequent nonadherence. When the adherence to PrEP is not respected, the concentration of ARV in the blood stream is insufficient to stop the replication of the HIV virus and there is a possibility of further spread of HIV after unsafe sexual practices.

The ongoing talks between the Ministry of Health, the Public Health Insurance Fund, medical specialists and gay community members who are organized in gay and PLWH non-governmental organizations, should eventually result in the broader availability of PrEP. Although PrEP is supposed to be subsidized and gradually made available throughout Serbia, by the autumn of 2020, nothing had changed in Serbia regarding PrEP use and PrEP recommendations. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has indisputably contributed to the impediment of PrEP use because access to preventive services and medical specialists has been disrupted for the majority of gay men.

Methodology

This paper is based on qualitative research carried out through interviews. I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews. 24 gay men were randomly sampled when they attended a gay club in Belgrade in the period between 7th October and 29th December 2019. 6 gay men were sampled by the "snowball" technique. All of them identified as gay men during the interview and they gave their verbal informed consent before the start of the interview. The HIV status of the participants was not the dominant factor in the recruitment process, since the aim of the research was to map the overall situated knowledge about PrEP in the gay community, regardless of individual HIV status.

The interviews were coded and, subsequently, the codes were grouped into categories and themes. I employed thematic and discourse analyses for the data set to be analyzed. Specifically, in this article I tend to focus on two emerging themes from my research – first, PrEP use in relation to sexual sociability and a new sex/health identity; and second, the implications of stigma reproduction.

PrEP use in relation to sexual sociability and a new sex/health identity

In discussions of the potential use of PrEP, there are many aspects of HIV discourse on prevention which tend to shape PrEP's acceptance and good preventive results. Some of the most important are: access to PrEP, which depends on the cost and availability; and adherence to PrEP, defined as the discipline to take the daily dosage regularly and to respect suggested protocols of use. All other characteristics of PrEP prevention could be derived from these two main ones. Race draws attention to these interconnected aspects of PrEP:

> The issues of nonadherence, risk compensation, cost, access, unwanted toxicity, and the possible development of resistant viruses in the context of undetected seroconversion and suboptimal treatment (which is what PrEP would be in these circumstances) are real and must be addressed. (2016: 17-18)

Such a complex interconnection of aspects related to PrEP shows that an individual decision to use PrEP depends on many factors. For instance, 14 of my interviewees reported that they would gladly use PrEP; 10 reported that they would not use it under any circumstances; while 6 were not sure whether they would like to be on PrEP or not. This last group justified the ambiguity of their position in relation to PrEP by stating that they did not feel as if they had sufficient information about it.

The tension between PrEP users and non-users with regard to stigmatization, which I discuss in the next part of this paper, also poses the question of risk and responsibility among and between gay men, which lies at the heart of the debate about PrEP. For gay men in Serbia, the overall scarce use of PrEP leads to various ambiguities and interpretations of the role of PrEP in HIV prevention and risk management, thus making it a proper "reluctant object" (Race, 2016: 17). Serbian gay men are also reluctant to reach for PrEP because they do not know whether PrEP is used for HIV prevention (only by HIV negative gay men) or for HIV viral load control (only by HIV positive men). HIV positive gay men use a combination of ARV for HIV treatment that is the same as PrEP, so some HIV positive gay men use the signifier "PrEP" as a proof that they actually are in the same position as HIV negative gay men.

With such confusion regarding PrEP in Serbia, the risk assessment and responsibility in relation to HIV transmission are defined by the biomedical conception of PrEP as a tool of protection, rather than a bestowal of permission for the deregulation of sex. In the discussion presented by Dean, PrEP is seen through the lens of "sexual and morale failure," and he notices as follows:

> For gay men to identify themselves as 'at risk' entails an acknowledgement of their desire for raw sex that goes against community norms. To acknowledge this desire is potentially a risk in itself, because it compromises our image of the responsible gay man who always practices safer sex. To inquire about Truvada for PrEP may be felt as a sign of failure, or a confession that one wishes to behave in a way that the mainstream gay community has coded as immoral (2015: 229-230).

PrEP's proven potential is often eroded by the community's perception of it as an unreliable tool of protection for many gay men and as "a new form of prevention" for others. The negative side effects of the use of PrEP worry some gay men. For instance, a 42-year-old teacher from Čačak/Central Serbia, who is worried that PrEP is a product with "high toxicity," explains:

> I might consider taking PrEP in 5-6 years' time [...] Maybe, I'd do it! I would use it only as the last resort against HIV. It seems to me that it's "pure poison."
> (Anonymous, 42-year-old)

This discursive notion of PrEP as a "poison" has had the effect of eroding trust in PrEP and therefore limiting its success in the at-risk demographic in Serbia that is comprised by the gay community. More positive experiences with PrEP and then the sharing of the testimony of those positive experiences among gay men are certainly needed in order to achieve a significant improvement in PrEP uptake.

Conspiracy theories are another factor negatively influencing PrEP's introduction in Serbia. One of these is that PrEP is a product of a corrupt large profit-driven pharmaceutical company, thus not medically or scientifically reliable for everyday use by gay men. Serbia is not alone in this respect. In the context of the USA, Eaton *et al.* (2017) report on the conspiracy-related theory of PrEP rejection among gay men in the south. What is specific for Serbia is that such an attitude persists among a large number of gay men, and it contributes to the spreading of false claims that there is a bigger conspiracy theory behind PrEP whose origin is in the "pharmaceuticalisation" of gay identity, in other words, a scheme to form the gay experience through medication instead of sexual and homosocial practices. In Serbia, this issue is only an extension of the discourse around the biomedicalization and pharmaceuticalisation of gay health, where there is a cluster of theories related to PrEP, all of which revolve around Big Pharma-related conspiracies, fake news, and the theories about the deliberate concealment of public information.

Yet another attribute of PrEP influencing the level of its uptake is the perception of PrEP as a "novelty": i.e. something newly available with which to experiment on gay men's health. Although this is not a dominant discourse, it nevertheless drives some gay men and MSM to reject PrEP as a "still to be proven" solution for the prevention of HIV infection, and this takes time. With this perception of PrEP as a "novel" drug, additional efforts are and will continue to be necessary to introduce PrEP to a

broader gay audience if the level of its uptake and impact are to be raised. The testimony of Aleksandar2, a 33-year-old artist from Belgrade, is germane here. He has also been alerted about PrEP's side effects, for he states:

> I wouldn't take PrEP because it is still under-researched, especially in terms of its side effects.
> (Aleksandar2, 33-year-old)

For Aleksandar2, PrEP is a novelty – an under-researched medicine and treatment regime – and that is the main reason that he would not consider taking PrEP in this initial phase of its introduction in Serbia. Nikola, a 30-year-old lawyer, has reservations about PrEP mostly related to his fear that it could destabilize his management of the chronic illness he already suffers from, and he explains:

> I would consider taking PrEP if it did not interfere with my chronic disease. I have irritable bowel syndrome, and I've also heard that it fucks you in the head. One of my friends was on PrEP, but he was completely fucked up in his head.
> (Nikola, 30-year-old)

Nikola is not precise about his friend's experience with PrEP, nor is there any proven medical evidence concerning the potential side effects of PrEP on the bowel or chronic bowel conditions, but rumors of side effects in general are sufficient for him not to take PrEP for the time being. Aleksandar1, a 34-year-old chef, is worried, just like Nikola, about potential side effects of PrEP. He discusses this issue as follows:

> PrEP is really bad for your bones. I've heard that PrEP is actually not suitable for people with rheumatoid arthritis.
> (Aleksandar1, 34-year-old)

Aleksandar1 is not an isolated example of gay men's concern with the side effects of PrEP. Indeed, the discourse about negative side effects of PrEP among some gay men is a serious obstacle to PrEP's implementation, and this discursive field erodes the potential for the expansion of PrEP as a preventive method against HIV infection.

A further complication impacting the successful introduction of PrEP in Serbia is the price. It is the most significant factor in the acceptance of PrEP among gay men and a key focus of my interviewees' responses when PrEP use was considered. Their answers powerfully illustrate a deep class divide in the Serbian gay community, which impacts public and community health. The context of their answers is an economically weak public health system in Serbia, that does not provide free of charge PrEP. The class divide that is apparent between sub-groups of gay men in Serbia, and its differing impact on the health of those sub-groups, is a serious topic that needs to be foregrounded in a broader

future research project, focusing on the intersections between sexuality, class and race. We can find a relevant example of precariousness in the testimony of Stefan2, a 23-year-old artist from Belgrade, who thinks that PrEP is expensive. He states as follows:

> You can take daily PrEP. The cost is 50 euros per box. I think that's quite expensive. I've heard some rumours that NGOs are lobbying to make PrEP available on prescription for free, but that still hasn't happened.
> (Stefan2, 23-year-old)

Stefan2's hope – that PrEP will become available on prescription in the Serbian context – is a long-distance goal, and, at the present moment, it is going to remain out of reach for some time to come. Dragan, a 48-year-old unemployed delivery worker from Belgrade, has the same opinion – that PrEP is expensive and that this is the reason why many gay men are not currently on PrEP:

> People say that when they are on PrEP they don't want to use condoms, but when they hear how expensive PrEP is they give up on it.
> (Dragan, 48-year-old)

Adherence to PrEP depends on many factors, but one of the main barriers to PrEP use in Serbia is the cost of the drug. In Serbia, the ratio of economic inequality (the difference between the income of the richest and the poorest) is 9:1 and it is one of the widest gaps in Europe (Eurostat, 2018). As discussed above, the pricing and affordability of PrEP is an additional difficulty, given the average monthly salary. The cost of a month's supply of PrEP, which is 50 euros, puts PrEP potentially out of reach for some gay men. Supporting previous claims of PrEP being too expensive is AleksandarH, a 24-year-old waiter, who also cannot consider PrEP use because of the cost. He claims:

> You know what you have to pay for PrEP here in Belgrade? The price of 50 euros is absolutely insane!
> (AleksandarH, 24-year-old)

Dejan, a 35-year-old hairdresser, also commented on the price of PrEP. He had initially misunderstood and thought that the 50-euro price-tag for PrEP was to purchase enough meds for a three-month period. He discusses it as follows:

> D: The price is ok if it is for protection. When compared with the price of going out, having drinks, shopping, or taxis, that's not too much. None of these are necessities. And with PrEP [...] Is this the price for one-month or for three-month protection?
> Q: 50 euros is the monthly price.
> D: Ahaaa! Ok! You should have told me that detail up front. That's important! Very important! That's too expensive!

Dejan seemed taken aback when he learned that for 50 euros one could only purchase PrEP for one month and not three months. He insists that such information should be broadly and clearly communicated to the public and that might help people make the decision to take PrEP.

In stark opposition to the previous views of PrEP as an expensive drug, Djordjo, a 25-year-old hairdresser, does not consider PrEP expensive. He comments:

> The cost of daily PrEP per month is 50 euros. In my opinion, this is not expensive. (Djordjo, 25-year-old)

Individual economic circumstances – monthly income or lack thereof, level of income, stability/ instability of employment – are markers of class division among gay men, and thus, they are also markers of systemic health inequalities regarding potential HIV prevention. Subsidised PrEP, supported financially by the Public Health Insurance Fund in Serbia, is still hard to imagine and, overall, no prospect of subsidized PrEP in the near future is a contributing factor for the slow introduction of PrEP in Serbia.

Two of my interviewees, Stefan, a 23-year-old artist, and Anonymous2, a 40-year-old physiotherapist, both from Belgrade, discuss the use of PrEP for chemsex purposes. Chemsex is not a novel phenomenon among Serbian gay men (see Milosavljevic, 2017), but the role being played by PrEP in this sexual practice is. This area is clearly under-researched, especially drug-to-drug interactions which could undermine the potential of PrEP. Following this line, an interviewee, Anonymous2, states:

> Anonymous2: My ex-boyfriend is HIV positive. I'm aware that HIV transmission happens when drug use is connected with sex.
> Q: You mean in Chemsex settings?
> Anonymous2: Yes, absolutely.

While Anonymous2 discusses general chemsex practice, Stefan goes further in his testimony. Stefan is not satisfied with the recommendations for PrEP use suggested by the health authorities in Serbia because they deprive chemsex practitioners of PrEP. He elaborates on this topic as follows:

> I know that chemsex parties are risky sex environments. You are excluded from being prescribed PrEP in the policy recommendations if you say that you are practicing chemsex. That's discrimination! I don't understand why! We lack proper research on the topic, so we have to draw on case studies from the Netherlands or Germany [...] So, instead of reducing HIV risk, Serbia forbids doctors from prescribing PrEP use for chemsex. That's such a shame! I've heard that doctors are afraid that if PrEP use is inconsistent, then the virus could mutate and that's why they ban chemsex users from getting PrEP on prescription. I disagree with that!
> (Stefan, 23-year-old)

Here, Stefan discusses important issues regarding the use of PrEP in Serbia. Stefan claims that, in relation to PrEP, health practitioners discriminate against certain sexual practices amongst gay men: some sexual practices are deserving of PrEP and some like chemsex are not. On the part of the medical professionals, fear of PrEP misuse and consequently, of the risk of the growth of viral resistance to ARVs, is driving such decision-making. In order to enable as many PrEP users as possible to access PrEP, the development of national PrEP policy should be much more inclusive. A truthful account of the whole gamut of different sexual practices in the community of gay men and MSM should be the focus of HIV prevention policy and that must include chemsex. Castro, Delabre and Molina (2019) emphasize that "risk compensation remains a frequent argument against the availability and provision of prevention methods for vulnerable populations." Although the question of improper use of PrEP (adherence) and potential viral resistance to ARVs are legitimate issues, those issues should be researched far more thoroughly in the Serbian context. The acquisition and the use of PrEP in Serbia shows the lack of clear public health guidelines as well as an unregulated market. There is a need to update PrEP-use protocols to be in line with ECDC guidelines. Most of PrEP in Serbia is sourced on the black market, which indicates that public health services should take this into account when developing any strategies for HIV prevention.

The use of PrEP in Serbia is not on recommendation from medical professionals to gay men. Rather, gay men amongst themselves recommend and self-regulate the use of PrEP. Their decisions in turn draw on the following factors: stigma in relation to PrEP use, the disclosure of HIV status, and risky sexual behaviour. Such recommendations also create a tension between HIV positive and HIV negative gays in the community.

Recommending PrEP to others is clearly connected to another issue – an HIV health identity and its disclosure. You can recommend PrEP only to those gay men who are HIV negative, and this leads to a paradoxical mismatch of identity. The recommendation of PrEP to others was clearly a very divisive issue among my interviewees and they responded as follows – 16 said they would recommend PrEP to others, 4 would not recommend it, and 10 were not sure whether they would recommend it or not.

Milos2, a 33-year-old unemployed waiter from the outskirts of Belgrade, discusses this issue as follows:

> M2: Yes, I know of PrEP. I saw many men advertise themselves on Grindr or Romeo saying they are on PrEP. The most frequent users of PrEP are foreigners when they come to visit [...] Local boys say they are on PrEP, but at the same time, they are HIV positive.
> Q: What do you mean? How is that possible?
> M2: Well [...] I don't know, but that's what they say. They think that if they are HIV positive and they take ARV then they are on PrEP, too. It's the same thing for them.

Milos2 discusses an interesting phenomenon that he spotted on gay dating websites. For some gay men any treatment regime involving the use of ARVs is equated with PrEP use, and this conflation of the two is then incorporated into gay online identity and (re)presentations. A novel identity emerges online – "undetectable, on PrEP." In online gay communication, some gay men who are HIV positive consider themselves more attractive to others if they say they are on PrEP, instead of saying they are on ARV, because they think it will imply that they are HIV negative, instead of HIV positive. In this context, they believe that an undetectable viral load, as the result of treatment with ARVs of an already existing infection, is the same as PrEP's protective use – i.e. the effect is that the virus is blocked, thus un-transmittable. As Race summed up this situation, it is "how things must appear and be experienced by those of different sero-status" (2016: 18).

Among gay men, the self-designated category "on PrEP" is extended not only to those who are HIV negative and on PrEP, but also to those who are HIV positive and on ARV with an undetectable viral load – "undetectable, on PrEP" category. The result of the traumatic effects of HIV/AIDS epidemic, the health paradigm and the premise "life is easier when you are not HIV positive" is firmly reflected in this gay men's identity in Serbia. It can clearly be seen in this study that the true HIV status of respondents is being disregarded and PrEP is being judged to be used as a pharmaceutical "prosthesis," making viable a significant change in gay subjectivity – a transformation of HIV positive identity on ARV into an HIV negative one on PrEP. As discussed, this shift has a repercussion on risk assessment in sexual practices. In the mind of some HIV positive gay men, if PrEP use equals antiretrovirals use, then this could reverse the position of risk among gay men in a following way:

> By comparison, PrEP asks HIV-negative men to confront the structure of exception head on, as it were: to identify themselves as subjects of risk in the mode of pre-calculation and intentionality. Perhaps, then, PrEP is such a reluctant object partly because it makes explicit something that is difficult to be explicit about from within one of the common orientations to sex and risk among gay men today: the desire to position risk as an *exception* rather than a tendency, a 'straying afield of oneself' rather than something as coherent or culpable as a habit or a pre-calculated decision.
> (Race, 2016: 24-25)

In a metaphorical "equation," HIV positive gay men on ARV achieve immunological equilibrium with HIV negative gay men on PrEP. Preciado (2013) discusses the importance of "immunological equilibrium" as lying at the heart of subjectivity in what he calls the "pharmacopornographic era" – the era when biomedical interventions and pharmaceutical technologies (and PrEP is the one of them) transform someone's identity. Due to this power of transformation PrEP use is seen as a valuable addition to the available potency of antiretroviral medicines (ARV) to prevent HIV transmission and to establish immunological balance in the body. Following the same logic, prevention of HIV transmission is the result of successful ARV therapy based on the principle "U=U" or "unde-

tectable=untransmittable" (Vernazza *et al.*, 2008). In this respect, the Serbian context is not an exception from the rule. In Canada, Grace *et al.* (2018) discuss an interesting phenomenon among some Canadian gay men who believe PrEP use to be a responsible pharmacological method to achieve an undetectable viral load.

The exclusive case for PrEP-induced HIV protection is confirmed by two of my interviewees, both of whom consider PrEP as an extreme measure that enables people to proceed to have sex without concern for the potential infectiousness of a sex partner in the "heat of the moment" situations. For them, HIV status is erased from the identity of potential sex partner(s) and is not considered relevant in risky situations since "PrEP on demand" allows them to proceed freely to the realization of sexual desires. A good example of this is Senad, a 50-year-old salesman, who discusses PrEP use as follows:

> I would take PrEP when the guy is HIV positive and in circumstances where I'm hot for him and I want to have sex with him. I don't like to use condoms. Sex is much easier without them. HIV infection is not a 'bogey man' anymore.
> (Senad, 50-year-old)

This situation of PrEP "on demand" described by Senad reflects the extent to which the perception of HIV prevention is completely transformed somehow in line with Race, as "escaping the pressure of the condom imperative" (2016: 24). Sharing the same thoughts as Senad is Nino, a 50-year-old salesman from Belgrade, who states as follows:

> The use of PrEP is very logical. I would take it if I want to prevent HIV when I like someone irresistibly. Fuck, let's do it! That's it, I would use it when I do not have info on someone's HIV status and I want to have sex with him right now.
> (Nino, 50-year-old)

Nino and Senad both link the "heat of the moment" situations with rejection of condom use and both consider PrEP use as a form of protection against HIV. The PrEP protocol in Serbia is unfortunately insufficient as it lacks the possibility for PrEP "on demand" use. Officially, the only possible way to use PrEP is a continuous use and this is the reason why most gay men turn to the black market to access PrEP. They can get PrEP when it suits them, before sex or before events where they expect to find sexual partner(s). The fear of potential misuse or non-adherence to PrEP by medical professsionals is grounded as it leads to HIV viral resistance to ARV drugs.

Online user profiles with the designation "on PrEP" have a highly affirmative impact in online gay communication in Serbia. The gay community on gay dating sites in Serbia frequently includes PrEP on their profiles. Nikola2, a 23-year-old medical student, discusses an interesting phenomenon which he has spotted online:

> When you communicate with them online, everyone is on PrEP. I simply don't believe it! Look [...] (Nikola2 is showing to me his phone screen and a user profile from Grindr. There is a picture of a man's torso with the caption: "On PrEP") You see? So many men claim to be on PrEP and yet it is still so underused. That's our reality [...] Everyone says they are on PrEP, and they are not (laughs) [...] I do not believe they take PrEP at all!
> (Nikola2, 23-year-old)

The arm's-length nature of virtual communication and online anonymity allows for virtual "playing" with HIV status and health identity among gay men even in the time of the undetectable viral load. What my interviewees said puts into question the truthfulness of those posting the PrEP info on their online profiles. This was most evident when they discussed PrEP use and sex in risky collective environments. The following example is a vivid illustration of such a situation. AleksandarH, a 24 years old waiter, discuses misuse of PrEP:

> I prefer condoms, but when I went to this sex party, no one was talking about PrEP. There was no protection policy at all! I went there and I escaped. I saw 5 or 6 guys fuck with one guy [...] In my opinion, I think that PrEP abuse is very much our reality. I've heard that foreigners bring PrEP to Belgrade and when they organise parties here, they give PrEP to our boys. Just one pill and that's it! The boys believe they are protected because someone says so. Imagine, no risk for them at all!
> (AleksandarH, 24-year-old)

AleksandarH discusses the risk of HIV as inherently based on shared responsibility among potential sex partners, which is mostly absent in collective sex environments. In this context, the loss of control in sex and inadequate PrEP use lead to unsuccessful HIV prevention due to suboptimal dosage and non-adherence to PrEP. For AlexandarH, the abuse of PrEP relates to the casual disregard by potential users of the need for strict adherence to a specific PrEP use regime if it is to be effective as pre-exposure prophylaxis against HIV infection. Changing this situation is going to require far more positive attitudes to sex and intimacy in the gay community. If the use of PrEP is to increase to a level where its potential for protection among gay men is realised, such positive attitudes to sex and intimacy need to be built into promotion campaigns for PrEP (see Keene *et al.*, 2020).

PrEP use and stigma reproduction in Serbia

Different forms of stigmatization relate to the gay identity and PrEP, and they not only intertwine with each other, but they also have a cumulative effect on the dismissal of PrEP as a positive force, sometimes even contributing to the PrEP paradox. All forms of stigmatization undermine the implementation and protective potential of PrEP. In 2012, when PrEP first became available in the the US, PrEP users were named "Truvada whores" because they were regarded as more promiscuous and more risk-taking in sex. This type of stigma is well documented (Duran, 2012; Calabrese and Underhill,

2015; Haire, 2015; Jaspal and Daramilas, 2016; Spieldenner, 2016; Eaton *et al.*, 2017; Hildebrandt, Bode and Ng, 2019). Spieldenner (2016) describes the phenomenon of "slut shaming" directed towards PrEP users. Furthermore, Dubov *et al.* (2018) discuss stereotyping as a form of stigma and they relate this to PrEP-use based on "stereotypes of promiscuity, chemsex, condomless sex, or sex work" (p. 1835).

The stigma related to gay sexuality affects all aspects of gay lives, including HIV treatment and prevention, and Serbia proves to be no exception to the rule (Milosavljevic, 2012; 2017). The interviewees in my research confirmed the influence of stigma on PrEP access, as 6 out of 30 interviewees (20%) would not ask their GP for a prescription for PrEP. 3 out of 6 state the reasons for this decision as follows: first, they do not see themselves as promiscuous (1 interviewee); second, they could not bear the "hassle" of going to see their GP, a fact that is can be attributed to a hidden fear of enforced coming out (1 interviewee), and third, a preference for the use of condoms over PrEP protection (1 interviewee). 3 interviewees out of 6 claimed that they would not go for the PrEP prescription and PrEP regime because they feared being stigmatized in/by the medical institution (which accounts for 50% of those who would not go to see their GP for the PrEP prescription, and 10% of the overall number of interviewees involved in the research). Igor, a 33-year-old economist from Belgrade, explains his decision not to get PrEP on prescription in this extract from his interview:

> I: I wouldn't go to see my GP to get a prescription for PrEP. I would feel embarrassed because doctors are biased – they gossip about who's gay and I find the gossip intolerable. You have to go through that over and over again.
> Q: You think if you accepted a prescription, you would be forced to come out to your GP?
> I: Absolutely! Their reaction to homosexuality is hideous – they don't know anything about sexual diversity. Do you really think that my GP wouldn't ask me – why do you need PrEP? What do you need it for? They are so narrow-minded.
> Q: So, in your opinion, you would feel stigmatised if you approached your GP and asked to be prescribed PrEP?
> I: Of course I would! Medical professionals lack the knowledge about the needs of gay men and disregard the problems which they face because of their sexuality in everyday life. Medical doctors are ignorant about that.

All sexual minorities are persistently stigmatized in Serbia and this also holds true throughout the medical professions and institutions (see Kocić *et al.*, 2008; Vowa *et al.*, 2015). Igor's argument about the stigmatisation of gay men is proof that such a stigma affects the overall body politic of gay men in Serbia. It certainly affects Igor's decision not to get PrEP and it deepens his internalized stigma. Dragan, a 48-year-old delivery man, and AleksandarH, a 24-year-old waiter give similar answers. Dragan states that stigmatization affects his decision to take the PrEP prescription.

> If you want to get a prescription for PrEP from your GP, you have to tell him or her that you are gay and that's the problem (Dragan mimes looking uncomfortable and pulls his face into a grimace).
> (Dragan, 48-year-old)

Stigma becomes internalised in the minds of gay men in Belgrade who are potential PrEP users, and we can see how it operates in the way AleksandarH thinks about medical doctors, PrEP and gay men. He elaborates more fully on the matter, stating that he would not dare to go to see his GP to be prescribed PrEP. He would not like to be forced to come out in a GP's office and he fears the judgement of doctors:

> Medical doctors have a really bad approach. They are simply judgmental! They stigmatise! [...] I wouldn't dare to go to them to sort out a prescription. They don't understand gay men. They only judge.
> (AleksandarH, 24-year-old)

A substantial number of the gay men involved in the study, as many as 7 out of 30 (23.3%), express the fear that they would be stigmatised in medical institutions by medical professionals. This is an obstacle to biomedical HIV prevention and it is not without significance when it comes to how to improve both overall HIV preventive methods and improved adherence to the PrEP regime. The introduction and implementation of PrEP in Serbia reveals a systemic social stigmatisation of gayness which, if not checked, could significantly reduce the access to PrEP provided by the state and consequently undermine HIV preventive programs.

Some other forms of stigma related to PrEP also appear to be highly significant. When we consider the recommendation of PrEP within the gay community, some of my interviewees see PrEP as intended exclusively for those who are "very promiscuous." Thus when respondents were asked to whom they would recommend PrEP, this "very promiscuous" group was the first group that came to their mind. Golub, Gamarel and Surace (2017) discuss "promiscuity" as the most common form of stereotyping of PrEP users among gay men. Anonymous2, a 40-year-old physiotherapist from Belgrade, claims:

> Yes, I would recommend PrEP to highly promiscuous men. For instance, sex tourists, no matter gay or straight, are the ones who are supposed to take it! That's because HIV is still here and those who get it are not monogamous men, but highly promiscuous.
> (Anonymous2, 40-year-old)

The stigma that surrounds PrEP use is present in the discussion among my interviewees and the response of Anonymous2 follows this line of thought when PrEP use is discussed. In the group of

respondents who consider PrEP use as exclusively relevant to "highly promiscuous" men is Aleksandar, a 33-year-old artist, who states:

> I don't know who should take PrEP. I think it's your character that defines those who are supposed to take it. The uptake depends on the number of sex partners you have.
> (Aleksandar, 33-year-old)

There was no consensus among my interviewees as to the definition of "highly promiscuous men." Neither did they agree on how many sex partners – past and/or present – were necessary to qualify as promiscuous. The category "promiscuous" is individually and arbitrarily constructed and does not provide a clear-cut measure of when/at what point/whether you are considered promiscuous or not. Nevertheless, the discourse of promiscuity among gay men in Serbia certainly erodes the potential of PrEP to prevent further HIV transmission, as many gay men do not want to be labeled "promiscuous."

Conclusions

This article explored some paradoxes regarding PrEP use in Serbia that range from the rejection of and reluctance to use PrEP to the novel forms of gay sex/health identity that result from PrEP use. The biomedical HIV prevention in the form of PrEP is a signifier of how the new technological regulation of HIV influences homosociality, gay online communication, sexual practices, and stigmatization. Although PrEP is considered to be designed for HIV prevention by HIV negative gay men, some HIV positive men are willing to express their belief that ARV therapy is the same thing as PrEP. They form and use a new identity position – "undetectable, on PrEP" – and through this process gay men switch from "HIV positive" or "undetectable on ARV" to "on PrEP" position. This novel identity has repercussions in online gay communication and representation, but it also impacts risk assessment and sexual practices.

Since the introduction of PrEP in Serbia in August 2019, the uptake of PrEP has been very low. The current PrEP uptake among gay men in Belgrade and Serbia could be described as still "informal" and "event-based." In 2020, there was no significant improvement in the accessibility and availability of PrEP. Since the protocol for PrEP use in Serbia is restrictive, PrEP "on demand" or "event-driven" PrEP is still not officially incorporated in the policy.

There is a huge gap between the objective risk of HIV and the subjective perception of "risk-while-on-PrEP" among gay men. The relation between PrEP and HIV status has been communicated as a paradox on gay dating apps and websites in tandem with the emergence, in gay online communication, of the new hybrid identity "on PrEP" or "undetectable, on PrEP." New information and knowledge gained from gay men's practices and experiences with PrEP should inform lesson-learning and be widely incorporated into the policy on PrEP in Serbia. Promotional activities regarding PrEP use in

Serbia should focus on the access and availability of PrEP, but also on the necessity to emphasize who qualifies for PrEP use and who is on ARV therapy. What is more, the difference between ARV therapy and PrEP should be clearly communicated by the health authorities. The information that ARV is for HIV-positive persons and PrEP is for HIV-negative persons should be easily accessed and spread in the gay community.

PrEP as a prevention tool has a target group of HIV negative gay men. It is meant to be for HIV prevention and not for the treatment of HIV infection. Sometimes, gay men who are on antiretroviral therapy claim that they are on PrEP. In doing so, they falsely present themselves as HIV negative. Although an undetectable HIV viral load status means no HIV transmission, it is not the same as HIV negative status. Thus, the tension between HIV negative and HIV positive gay men in the gay community in Serbia has entered a new phase of non-trust.

Making recommendations to others that they should consider PrEP use is proof that PrEP is an accepted and trustworthy tool for risk reduction. It shows confidence in someone's HIV status and consistent risk assessment. Nevertheless, the stigma which surrounds PrEP use, reluctancy and rejection of it, as well as HIV status mismatch in relation to PrEP use are all obstacles to successful HIV prevention in Serbia. This article is intended to initiate a debate on the biomedical prevention of HIV through PrEP, and its implications in the context of Serbia.

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In the Margins of One Health: Interspecies Solidarity, Care, and Inequality

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/FXRL1951

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This paper tells the story of two women — a veterinarian and a folk healer—to foster political, environmental, and social conditions in which pastoralists based in the central Indian state of Maharashtra could thrive. For them, this practice of fostering necessarily meant tending to human and nonhuman animals together. The women I followed called this interspeciated practice, One Health. To be sure, they borrowed this term from more economically-dominant and politically-normative international development organizations. When wielded by these institutions, One Health has designated a model for preventing emerging zoonotic diseases, and the pandemics they often cause, through the surveillance of marginal livestock rearing communities, often in the Global South. My interlocutors' projects intersected with One Health—and thus were available for funding from it—insofar as the central conceit of One Health was that human and nonhuman animals can share illness. Yet the politics and ethics of the two were very different. I make this case by ethnographically tracking different modalities of seeing that characterize One Health and its vernaculars. Sight, I argue, operates as a perceptual orientation that initiates a "becoming-with" the world for my interlocutors versus a tool to control it (Dave, 2012). How, I therefore ask, might different ways of apprehending the bonds of human and nonhuman beings reveal how we might yet learn to dwell differently on an exhausted planet?

Keywords: *feminist anthropology, multispecies ethnography, embodiment and the senses*

Introduction

This story is one of seeing anew. It is an account of relations between humans, animals, plants, and places – once obscure to me – becoming sensible as I followed the practice of one veterinarian and one tribal healer with knowledge of traditional medicine, both women, working at a nonprofit organization called Anthra that was located in the central Indian state of Maharashtra, though the scope of their practice was nationwide. These women sought to foster political, environmental, and social conditions in which marginal farmers and pastoralists could thrive. This practice of fostering necessarily meant tending to human and nonhuman animals together. This was in part because the social, geographical, and economic barriers to health that they looked to upend extended across human medical clinics and veterinary offices alike.

The women I followed – Nitya, the veterinarian, and Sangita, the healer – called this "interspeciated" practice One Health (Livingston and Puar, 2011). The concept of One Health initially arose in the early 2000s after a series of zoonotic outbreaks of West Nile Virus, Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever, Mad Cow Disease, SARS, and Avian Influenza. In response, the Wildlife Conservation Society organized a meeting in New York. They invited major stakeholders in global regimes of development and public health. By 2008, the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE),

the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, and others came together to publish the book *Contributing to One World, One Health: A Strategic Framework for Reducing Risks of Infectious Diseases at the Animal-Human-Ecosystems Interface*. In 2018, in the wake of a fresh spate of Ebola and Zika outbreaks across West Africa, the World Bank and its partners published an update to the inaugural framework.

My friends at Anthra had been working in holistic registers of health since the 1990s. However, they more recently adopted the specific term of One Health from these international development organizations. When wielded by more economically-dominant and politically-normative institutions, One Health designated a model for preventing emerging zoonotic diseases, and the pandemics they often cause, through the surveillance of livestock-rearing communities seen as posing the greatest risk to global public health. This produced an emphasis on the Global South that, I argue, recapitulated old colonial tropes of the tropics and filth, which justified intrusive practices of data collection, surveillance, and discipline by institutions of the Global North in the name of the development of the Global South. My interlocutors' projects intersected with One Health – and thus were available for funding from it – insofar as the central conceit of One Health was that human and nonhuman animals can share illness. Yet the politics and ethics of the two were very different. My interlocutors' vernacularization of One Health was a radicalization of it.

Drawing on eighteen months of ethnographic field research in sites of animal husbandry and dairy production in India, six of them specifically in western Maharashtra, in this paper I track the different modalities of seeing that characterize One Health and its vernaculars. Sight, I argue, alternately operates as a perceptual orientation that initiates a "becoming-with" the world for the women I worked with, versus a tool to control it (Dave, 2012). That is, the work of Nitya and Sangita was steeped in a sensory openness unto the world and its vicissitudes. Its tactics assumed that the wellbeing of self and other, human and nonhuman, internal and external were always already mutually made and remade. The two women worked from a place of vulnerability, proximity, and shared stakes rather than mastery, securitization, and hierarchies of developed and developing world; as more dominant paradigms of One Health were prone to do. Sight and technologies of visualization, in short, modulated between being a technology of power and a tactic of counter-hegemonic activism, raising the question: How might different ways of apprehending the bonds of human and nonhuman animality yet teach us something new about what it means to be human? Or to put this differently, how might we cultivate new ways of recognizing ongoing exclusions from the category of "the human," perpetuated by dominant regimes of global public health, development, humanitarian aid, and citizenship?

Human-Animal Porosities

I met Sangita in December of 2015. She was pure charisma and nerve right from the start. It was then that I first participated in one of her medicine-making workshops that she hosted as a *pashu sakhi* (animal friend) and *vaidya* (healer) with Anthra, the NGO I was interning with at the time. Sangita, myself, and a small team of her assistants left early in the morning in a van paid for by Anthra. The

sun rose as we made our way a couple hours northeast of the city of Pune. We were going to meet a group of Maldhari pastoralists, then stationed in the district of Ahmednagar in Western Maharashtra. This particular group was a cattle-keeping community; they reared world-famous Gir cows and bulls from the state of Gujarat.

We approached their encampment on foot from the road. Sangita hollered, "*Ai! Dadi! Kaisi ho*?" (Hey! Big sister! How are you?) A woman smiled wide, adjusting her light cotton *dupatta* as she approached. Sangita and her assistants smiled too, hauling a massive cast-iron *karahi* out of the car for us to make the medicine in. After gathering everyone and finding a suitable spot to build a fire, Sangita got to work. She roasted camphor powder, mixed in sesame oil, and added frankincense while chatting with the group about the properties of different ingredients she was using, herbal remedies they found effective, their daughters' schooling, their crops, and their relationships with settled villagers. She poured the mixture into cold water and began to knead the concoction like dough. There were titters from the young boys watching from afar. The greenish brown goo, indeed, looked a lot like dung. Sangita smiled with them, unfazed. She knew the balm worked and that was all that mattered.

The balm was one of many traditional medicines that the staff of Anthra promoted in their One Health model. It could be used either on cracked hooves or skin, preventing these fissures from causing secondary health problems for bovine and human producers later down the road. Heel and hoof were not so different when the world was being organized into interfaces that could split or not, get infected or not. Under this rubric, the two could be lumped together into a class of cracked bodily parts. The balm that Sangita was making with the Maldhari women was not species-specific because of the practical intimacy of humans and animals in contexts of pastoralism. In the margins, other ways of organizing biological life – including states of normal and abnormal, healthy and sick – opened up. Species distinctions were not steadfast boundaries, but rather, porous interfaces. Indeed, Nitya claimed that folk remedies of many livestock-rearing communities did not make an ontological distinction of human and animal based in biological conceptions of species. As Anthra's website put it,

> There is an artificial separation of livestock care and human medical care; communities do not necessarily view these as two separate streams. Thus, a key component of Anthra's approach is to actively ally resources in human and livestock health.

The website claimed that, from the point of view of a small farmer who might share food, residence, and sickness with their animals, there was no hard and fast distinction between human and nonhuman.

Practical Intimacy in the Margins

As I learned during my time with Anthra, semi-nomadic Maldhari shepherds first traveled to Maharashtra during a drought in Gujarat in 1972 (Krätli, 2015: 48). For years, these groups relied on accessing common grazing grounds while also making seasonal deals with sugarcane farmers. Historically, when these deals have been made, during the winter months of October to February, Maldharis have camped out on harvested fields. Here, their animals have consumed the sugarcane crop residues, and in turn, the herds have fertilized the fields while clearing them of stubble (Krätli, 2015: 49). Customarily, Maldharis have then often returned to their villages during the monsoon when *jangli* (wild) fodder has been more abundant. The flexibility of pastoral production systems, as well as their efficiency in using what is traditionally considered the waste of production systems, has ingeniously enabled shepherding groups of Maharashtra and Gujarat's drylands to manage the unpredictability of rainfall and frequent drought in the region better than many of their settled counterparts. They "stretch the length of the wet season" and "access discontinuous resources" using mobility (Krätli, 2015: 43).

Yet migratory life has nonetheless entailed particularly stark forms social and spatial marginality. Indeed, by the time Sangita was hosting her workshop, the sugarcane factories of the area had closed. Maldhari shepherds had moved onto new lands by making fresh negotiations with different farmers. They remained flexible, maximizing access to resources by being adaptable, but there were limits. Many of the pastoralists that I met, for example, were unable return to their home villages at that time due to fodder and water shortages. Their routes of mobility as a production strategy were uncertain. They were changing and they were precarious. This precarity compounded already existing challenges of mobile life.

Sangita visiting her husband's village (2019). Author's photo.

During my time with Anthra, Nitya helped me understand that mobility and legibility in the eyes of the state were difficult to reconcile. For example, a recent study by India's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment found that 50% of the pastoral families they surveyed did not possess caste certificates, voter identity cards, below the poverty line (BPL) ration cards, or proof of address. As such, they also could not access Aadhar cards, which are increasingly necessary for access to social welfare services, banking, and telecommunications. The question of what kinds of identification pastoralists had access was to was one that Nitya explored during my time as an intern. Nitya and the Anthra team ultimately concluded that Maharashtra's pastoral people were, "Hidden and unaccounted for."

This documented difficulty in accessing a broad swathe of social services shaped Nitya's contention that doctors and veterinary professionals were similarly inaccessible to the region's pastoralists. It was not about human and animal, it was about settled and unsettled. Being mobile, she argued, made it socially, politically, and economically necessary to address human and animal health together with inexpensive medicines that reduced production input costs and saved time otherwise spent walking from an encampment to pharmacies, clinics, and hospitals. Folk medicines, like the one Sangita was making that day, helped overcome material and immaterial barriers that these communities experienced in accessing healthcare for themselves and their animals. The oneness of my Anthra's One Health was thus not of a universalizing or generic kind. They were not interested in "the human" and "the animal" as totalizing categories. They were interested in *these* humans and *these* animals. There was no one size fits all solution, only case-by-case assessments that took into account the unique biographies of distinct illnesses, whether they be human or bovine or both. Difference and similarity only emerged in context.

Human and Animal Reproductive One Health

Indeed, with Anthra's emphasis on pastoral communities in particular, their One Health vernacular described a particular kind of encompassment with ambivalent political implications that required close attention and further study. The boundary between human and animal could be crossed, but not all shared ailments could be singularly addressed. This required knowledge, training, and discernment. In addition to questions of caste, space, and class, for Nitya, this also meant accounting for gender. Pastoral women play a crucial role in animal husbandry as they often care for pregnant ewes, goats, and cows, as well as their young lambs, goats, and calves. At the same time, according to Nitya, they experience extreme difficulty in accessing maternal and reproductive healthcare for themselves. As such, during my research, Nitya's One Health was specifically geared toward illuminating, researching, acting upon the intersections of reproductive health with livestock health.

Following a series of open-ended interviews that Nitya and her small team conducted on the "maternal health seeking behavior" of pastoral women in 2019, she argued that gender norms within pastoral communities meant women had to travel with male relatives to the doctor. Finding a chaperone compounded the already existing practical difficulties of finding the time and means to

travel to a clinic or hospital. In addition to the difficulties of physical access, she further asserted that many women felt that the doctors disapproved of their life's mobilities. She argued that the women "were unable to follow through with the advice of the doctor in terms of filling prescriptions and not exerting themselves during pregnancy and thus felt discriminated against and patronized by many health professionals."

If doctors disapproved of their lives' mobilities, the women Nitya interviewed equally disapproved of hospital birthing norms. She wrote, "The unacceptability of hospital practices, including being forced into a supine position and the way the placenta is disposed of [...] were dissuading factors." Hospital births were, therefore, seen as undesirable; they were a last resort for the women interviewed. A complicated birth or pregnancy required a hospital, whereas a good birth was a field birth, despite the fact that it meant many children continued to be born without birth certificates and thus to be beyond the reach of social services. Encountering stigma instead of care discouraged the women that Nitya worked with from seeking out formal maternal and reproductive health professionals. Instead, she found, their "health seeking behaviors" were forged in relation to the ways in which they looked after and mothered their animals.

For example, in one workshop that Anthra organized, pastoral women were gathered in order to share strategies for managing health and illness beyond the bounds of a clinic or hospital. Women from Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra all attended. When asked about their health, many of the women emphasized their strength and immunity. As one Maldhari woman of the *rabari* caste put it, "We are resilient because we migrate." More than this, many women emphasized that they were resilient because living and caring for animals taught them how to do so for themselves. Women of all three groups, for example, asserted that they had seen animals giving birth their whole lives. This, they declared, gave them confidence for field deliveries. As Nitya later put it, "Their proximity to living animals, and being constant witness to the birth of lambs, chickens, and puppies, made them more familiar with the birthing process. They did not believe it to be a potentially life-threatening situation." Watching animals give birth was a source of knowledge and empowerment for human parturition.

One Health, in this context, named a specific kind of togetherness, one of shared disenfranchisement and neglect on the one hand, and possibility on the other. Anthra's program specified hierarchies of gender, caste, and geography that fractured the category of the citizen body politic – those who are counted and accounted for in the delivery of social services – such that certain humans and animals were drawn closer together through their mutual exclusion. Nitya was not interested in this drawing together as a generic or abstract process, but rather, as one that took place in situated contexts where humans and animals shared what Alfred Schutz defined as a *lifeworld*, which is to say, "An intersubjective world in which people both create social reality and are constrained by preexisting social and cultural structures." In the case at hand, these were social and cultural structures that were mutually immanent with the lives of animals. This more-than-human lifeworld of health and disease

was simultaneously problematic and redemptive insofar as it was characterized by abandonment and ingenuity in the margins (Das and Poole, 2004).

Sangita in the field (2016). Author's photo.

In this way, Nitya vernacularized One Health. By "vernacular" I do not mean to suggest that her use of this term was anything but cosmopolitan and globally-minded. Indeed, her funding for the project had come from a Christian German organization, "Misereor," a name taken from the biblical phrase, *misereor super tubam*, or, "I have compassion on the crowd." Moreover, she presented and workshopped her ideas internationally. Yet the way she explicitly interpreted and reframed the term meant it was a rooted concept. For "One Health" to make any sense in localized realities, it required translation. It refused to scale easily in the sense of moving from local to global without resignification (Tsing, 2004). Rather than meaning Nitya's One Health was a parochial offshoot of a Western concept that gets to pass as an unmarked universal, then, to say she vernacularized One Health is to say that Nitya made dominant renderings of the term appear equally limited.

One Health

To take a step back, a large number of reports and academic studies have been published on the subject of One Health since the early 2000s (Zinsstag *et al.*, 2011). These reports share in Anthra's principle that wellness is not an isolated human state. Yet different from Anthra, this framework sees connections between human and animal health from above. It takes on an abstracted gaze that

produces and naturalizes an emphasis on the Global South. Specifically, the dominant approach to One Health advocates for public health systems that might better anticipate emerging and pandemic threats. The research and writing that I encountered included diagrams, graphs, and case studies all to highlight, as emphatically as possible, the importance of global public health officials working, thinking, and problem-solving at the "animal-human-ecosystem interface" in order to improve the "governance of infectious diseases" through integrated surveillance structures. It is a paradigm of securitization, which more often than not is exclusively interested in investing time and resources in the prevention of diseases that are perceived as most likely to affect the Global North (Bankoff, 2001; Hotez and Kamath, 2009; Nunes, 2016).

In order to build prevention programs, that is, most reports and studies propose targeting "hotspots for transmission," which are almost exclusively constructed as being situated in the tropics (Ruckert *et al.*, 2020). One Health research thus aims to correlate zoonotic disease outbreaks with specific features of a society and its environments. The idea is that, by correlating disease with socio-ecologies, experts will be better able to pinpoint the causes of diseases. In turn, they will be able to predict and prevent them. This work of correlation, however, requires defining quantifiable characteristics of certain environments – for example, population size or extent of mammalian biodiversity – which might then be measured and correlated with disease incidence. A high rate of correlation is taken as an indicator of causal relation and predictive value.

Yet the process of coming up with and measuring "indicators" is far from a straightforward of friction-less process. In "Quantification and the Paradox of Measurement: Translating Children's Rights in Tanzania," Sally Engle Merry and Summer Wood highlight the magnitude of such a challenge. A key point of their analysis is that, to measure something, it must be countable. If cannot be counted or has not been counted, then there is a significant problem of translation (2015: 206). Moreover, the process of generating data is extremely difficult, and thus, researchers and policymakers tend to rely on datasets that already exist. For example, one study I looked at in the realm of One Health took the number of broadleaf trees in an area – an index of tropicality – as a predictive indicator. In a footnote on why these trees were taken as a predictor in this way, the authors noted that, "These reflected the most frequently hypothesized drivers of zoonotic disease emergence" (Allen *et al.*, 2017: 7). In other words, the frequency of taking "tropical" trees as predictive lead them to also assume their causal importance and predictive value.

Such studies are biased in the simple sense of relying upon already measured factors, and in turn, upon already existing hypotheses about what may be significant (Merry, 2016: 28). It was, at least to some extent, a circular logic insofar as measuring "something" requires knowing what that "something" is. This circularity lead to an underexamined tendency for various stakeholders to emphasize the tropics in their conception of landscapes of disease.

Tropicality

Tropicality has quickly become an organizing category for work on One Health. For example, the World Bank deployed the concept of "Neglected Tropical Diseases" and "Neglected Zoonotic Diseases," the latter being a subset of the former, in its report. Emerging in the wake of Millennium Development Goals – announced in 2000 – the terms operationally refer to diseases that "prevail in 'tropical' regions and are under-researched, under-funded, and under-treated compared with their disease burden" (Shahvisi, 2018). Philosopher and medical ethicist Arianne Shahvisi has noted that the term was initially meant to highlight neglect, and in turn, mobilize policymakers to address this class of diseases. However, as she writes,

> Neglect is understood to be a passive failure, tantamount to forgetfulness, carelessness, and omission of duty. For there to be neglect, there must be referents for the neglecter and the neglected. While the health needs of the people of 'tropical' regions are undoubtedly neglected, the identity of the neglecter, and the nature of the neglect, is rarely spelled out.

The ineffectiveness of the notion of neglect has created conditions in which an emphasis on tropicality is justified. When the nature of the neglect that shapes conditions of disease are unnamed – which is to say when the role of poverty, and more importantly, neocolonial relations of structural adjustment and extraction, are unspecified – it becomes easier to imagine that "tropical" regions are diseased because they are environmentally determined to be so (2018: 229-230).

For example, when elaborating on the subject, the World Bank's report succinctly concluded, "Neglected Zoonotic Diseases are endemic to many poor countries" (World Bank, 2018: 1). In this context, "endemic" was being used as an epidemiological term to suggest that certain zoonotic diseases persist at a baseline rate in these regions. Yet the term's crossover with a biological sense of endemism – denoting the extent to which a species or species ecology is unique to a particular place, belonging to it to the extent that it does not exist elsewhere – created a sense that disease belongs to the poor, and poverty belongs to the Global South as a whole (Karesh and Cook, 2005: 38-39). It territorialized disease in a way that recalled colonial discourse on the subject.

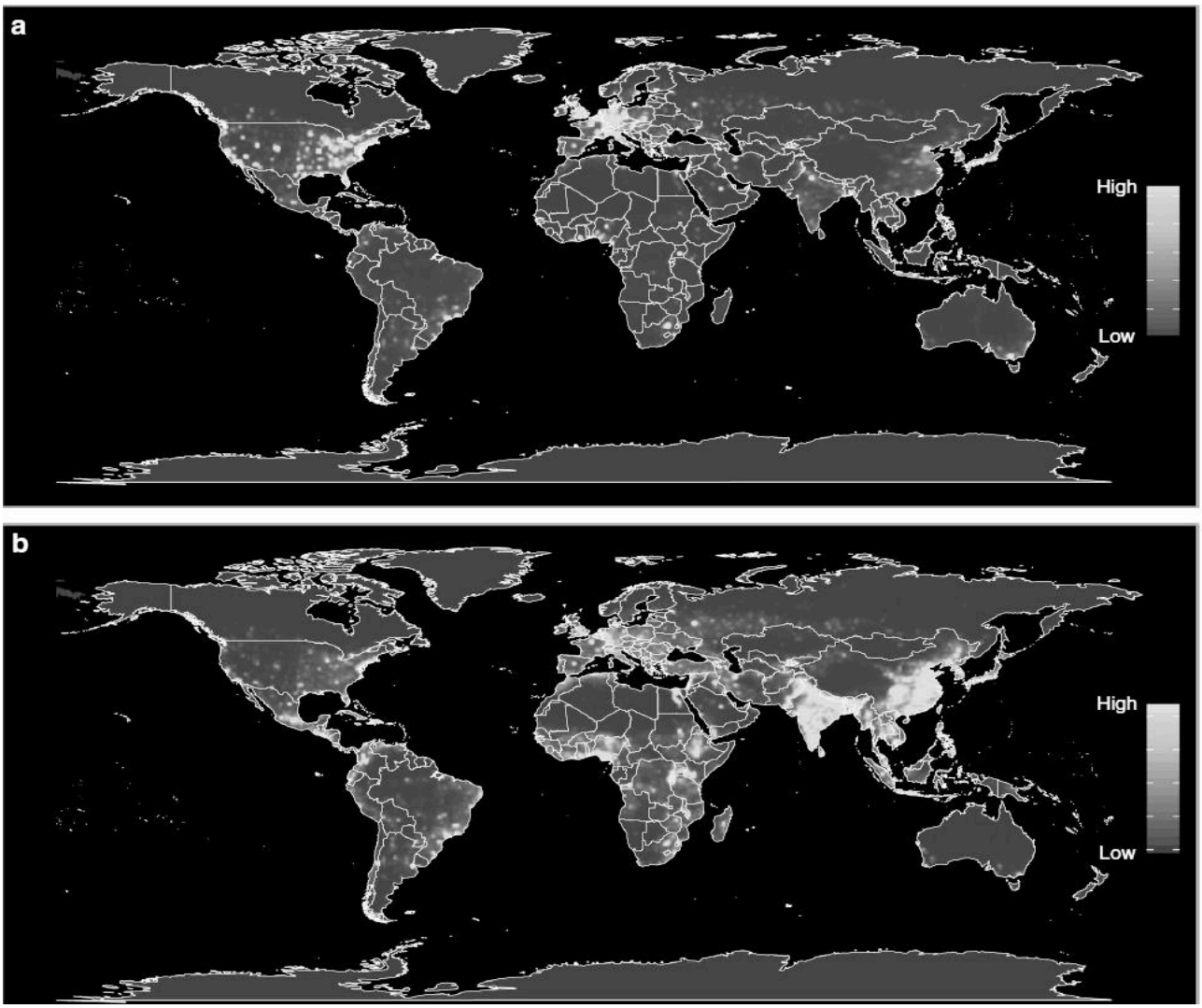
The language of tropicality, as one that encodes assumptions about the relationship between geography, poverty, and diseases that were a prevalent part of colonial public health discourses of tropical medicine and disease. In the article "Illusory Riches: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950," historian of South Asia David Arnold tracked the production of the tropics as a conceptual as material space in academic writings of the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His point of focus was French geographer Pierre Gourou's "magisterial survey" from 1947, *Les Pays Tropicaux* (The Tropical World). Arnold argued that it illuminated how "the tropics" were produced as a homogeneous terrain of pestilence, despite acute awareness on the part of experts of the time regarding climatic diversity within countries like India.

According to Arnold, the generalization of "the tropics" fed into a sense of environmental determinism and civilization difference. The heat and humidity of "the tropics" was posited as basically spoiling the physical and moral character of these regions (Arnold, 2000: 6). Discourses of tropical medicine posited that "Asia was an area of heat and humidity which possessed distinctive vegetation, flora and fauna, a distinctive epidemiology, and produced distinctive (distinctively undesirable) human and social characteristics" (Amrith, 2013: 98). Tropical climates created tropical diseases which were taken as evidence of "the moral and material 'superiority' of northern climates, races, and civilizations," thus justifying imperial projects of development and control (Arnold, 2000: 6, 15). Likewise, One Health interventions often use the concept of "tropicality" in discourses that similarly figured the homogeneity of certain places, people, and their connection to disease on one hand and the rightness of intervention on the other. In this way, "the tropics" are still being viewed and produced from "an external, Euro-American perspective" that justifies continued intervention in these regions in the name of their development (Arnold, 2000: 9).

Mapping Disease

The maps of One Health are often crisscrossed with arrows showing disease trajectories. They are colored in gradients of red, orange, and yellow in order to visually highlight hotspots. They are supported by legends and footnoted commentaries, explaining exactly what they mean, even though they often seem to need no interpretation. One map from 2016, circulated by the American Center for Disease Control (CDC) showed the places where their "Global Disease Detection Centers," or One Health surveillance centers, were located: India, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Kazkhstan, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, and Guatemala were lit up. A different map, created by the Institute Livestock Research Institute – which only includes Africa, India, the Middle East and Asia within its purview – illustrated the number of livestock keepers per square kilometer in shades of yellow to brown. Red dots that indicated areas where "one or more people or animals out of 100 are infected by one or more zoonotic diseases per year" were superimposed on this hued geography. East and West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Bangladesh were flushed with red dots (though these areas were not necessarily the most densely populated by human-animal communities).

The power of maps such as these is that they claim to reflect the world as it is. They would seem to come before and after language as a plain exhibition of objective knowledge. They naturalize an emphasis on "tropical" areas as they two-dimensionally represent what would seem to be an objective fact, an impartial geography. Yet as a technology of visualization and abstraction, these maps, in fact, produced an imagined geography, a conceptual space, of developed and developing, diseased and healthy, us and them. I say "imagined" not because these schemas are imaginary. There are violently material effects of such discourses. Rather, with the term "imagined," I mean to highlight the erasures and simplifications that are enabled by the translational process of mapping, as a technique of seeing from above and afar, which justify top-down, interventionist, developmental regimes of power (Allen *et al.*, 2017: 4).



Heat maps predicting the distribution of sites of zoonotic disease outbreak.

For example, the article "Global Hotspots and Correlates of Emerging Zoonotic Disease" by Toph Allen and his colleagues sought to correlate indicators and outbreaks in a predictive model. The authors included a map illustrating their conclusions. The map they provided is a diptych: the top map represents a predicted future distribution of emerging zoonotic disease based on where events have actually been reported and correlated with indicators. The bottom map, meanwhile, predicted the future distribution of emerging zoonotic diseases "after factoring out reporting bias," which is to say, after statistically adjusting for the underreporting of disease by "poor countries." The first map shows the eastern United States, Europe, and East Asia as future sites of outbreak. The second overwhelming predicts Asia as a prospective hotspot. In correcting for reporting, the maps presume to provide an ever-more-fine-grained portrait of society. Yet the abstracted gaze of the global map – its scale at the level of a god's eye view, removed and withdrawn to see from the heavens above – enables certain simplifications and erasures that work to further naturalize imperial ideologies about the innate relations between poverty, disease, and the tropics and justify the need surveillance as a public health practice.

To start with, despite the map appearing as a diptych in the original publication, it is the second map alone – without context or explanation – that has since been circulated as visual evidence of a global landscape of disease. Indeed, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the singled-out second map, showing Asia – plain and simple – as a terrain of disease, appeared on the homepage of the EcoHealth Alliance, a "global environmental health nonprofit organization" with funding from the United States Department of Defense, and subsequently in the Netflix original documentary series, *Coronavirus Explained*.

On the EcoHealth Alliance's homepage, moreover, bold block lettering had been transposed onto the second map so that it now asked: "Who stands between you and the next pandemic?" The phrasing of this question assumes that future pandemics will take place. Equally, the question syntactically takes it for granted that this threat will come from a person or place that is Other to the addressee of the question. Combined with the exclusive circulation of the "corrected" map, where the fact that it has been altered is obfuscated, the image works to produce a sense that the individualized self of the West stands vulnerable, insecure, and in danger of being overtaken by invisible, foreign elements that travel from afar (Said, 1976). It anxiously asserts that we live in a world where boundaries of self and other, East and West, human and animal have been broken through viral mobilities.

That is, the map makes certain countries, communities, and people more visible and others less visible. It does so according to a medicalizing gaze that normalizes certain kinds of disease by eliminating them from the second image, implying that only diseases associated with bodies that are racialized and classed in particular ways count as posing a threat to society. The justification for this manipulation of the field of the visible is that, by adjusting for underreporting, the map is only making what must "actually" be occurring but in these zones discernible to those outside them. In other words, as a technology of visualization, the map allows for certain amplifications and erasures in its making, such that certain statistical bodies are materialized on the map as bodies to be feared, bodies in need of control, governance, and regulation.

Yet by making this correction in order to make predictions, the map is also invoking a binarized logic of whose actions constitute action in the face of disease. The many strategies of small-scale producers for managing human-animal health, as documented by Nitya, do not count. They are erased. The logic for doing so is that, in "poor countries" diseases are said to go "neglected" because they are underreported. By the same logic, the maps presume that since Euro-American countries report their disease, they can be written off as sites of potential outbreak. Reporting is, in short, taken as a token indicator of whether countries are more broadly undertaking proper measures to prevent disease, where disease prevention and management has therefore been reduced to strategies to surveil and control.

Indeed, steeped in an ethics of suspicion and securitization, the diagrams, reports, and studies undertaken in the name of One Health justify the implementation of targeted programs of "bio-surveillance." This is necessarily to be done by international development organizations in "developing" countries. With the Enlightenment idea in hand that vision is a salubrious tool for self- control and discipline, surveillance is taken to be a legitimate public health practice and policy (Foucault, 1975; Scott, 1998; Ticineto-Clough *et al.*, 2011). In these contexts, projects to surveil collectives of humans, animals, environments, and microbes – that are threatening because they are unknown – do not take the form of material infrastructures for surveillance, such as an airport scanner, CCTV, or facial recognition software. Rather, they rely on the perpetually incomplete project of generating, managing, and circulating data.

Data – in the form of statistics, maps, and reports – constitute the surveillance of One Health. It has been and is being created through scientific studies funded by international development organizations. These studies have, for example, begun to tag, track, and analyze the movement of wildlife that can act disease vectors, such as bats (EcoHealth Alliance, 2020). Information is interpreted, circulated, and managed through increasingly complex databases and interactive maps regarding histories and geographies of outbreak. Again, much of this is funded by international nonprofits in lock step with defense budgets. One Health reports, too, are an important aspect of "data-veillance" insofar as reporting on underreporting depends upon a scrutinizing gaze that justifies the need to police marginal livestock rearing communities while industrial operations – known sites of risk for emerging zoonotic disease – go relatively unchecked.

Ultimately, this growing body of data extends the institutionalized tradition to surveil the bodies of people who are Othered – and to enroll them in projects to surveil themselves and their neighbors – insofar as the information gathered helps materialize certain bodies in certain ways and conceal others (Dubrofsky and Magnet, 2015: 27). It naturalizes particular ways imagining, encountering, and fearing these bodies so as to justify their control and regulation. We might say then that field of the visible, what it is possible to see and ignore, is thus shaped by racist, heteronormative, and ableist epistemological hegemonies (Butler, 1993; Puar, 2011).

Frightening bodies of the Other are made legible and illegible – they are seen, imagined, and felt – through the eyes, as well as the mind's eye, as culturally-molded faculties of interpretation and projection (Ahmed, 2004). The map thus does not just reflect a factual distribution of disease, but rather, creates an imagined geography of fear, Otherness, and risk that justifies surveillance. In this way, the data-veillance of One Health operates according to a visualizing practice that has been central to regimes of power – from capitalism to ethnography – which, as philosopher Laura Marks put it, is "a sort of instrumental vision that uses the thing seen as an object for knowledge and control." Yet as Marks and others have pointed out, vision is not one thing. Indeed, major differences between dominant iterations of One Health and its face at Anthra had to do with differences in seeing as aspects of recognizing and managing disease.

Seeing with the Body

In the book, *Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura Marks sought to recover a fuller sense of what it might mean to look and see. She investigated the way in which many of the films that make up a core canon of intercultural cinema are sensorially counter-hegemonic insofar as they "aim to represent configurations of sense perception different from those of modern Euro-American societies, where optical visuality has been accorded a unique supremacy" (2000: xiii). For Marks, these films embodied a kind of "haptic visuality" that is contrary to the Enlightenment tradition of ocularcentrism. This is a visuality capable of summoning the tactile, one that might represent non-visual registers of experience by being co-constituent with perceptual registers of the body beyond sight, including touch, smell, and taste (2000: 129). Here, seeing does not just enroll the eyes, but rather, the whole corporeal sensorium. Visuality, in Marks's writing, thus emerges as something more than a mere technology of control.

Indeed, what is most radical about a haptic kind of vision, Marks argued, is that it helps reimagine how sight might work as a tender opening unto the world. It evokes a "model of subjectivity [that] posits a mutual permeability and mutual creation of self and other" (2000: 144). That is, when the eye's relations with enfleshed perceptual landscapes of touch, smell, taste, and memory are foregrounded, to see becomes thinkable as an act that makes the body vulnerable in the world. Seeing with the body requires being open, porous, and coextensive with that which would seem to be external to it. Vision begins and ends beyond the eye itself. For Marks, the embodied mutualism of haptic visuality thus brings into focus a process by which self and world are reciprocally made, unmade, and remade in moments of "yielding-knowing," where the concept of yielding-knowing evokes epistemologies of submission rather than domination. "The perceiver relinquishes power over the perceived" (2000: 149).

When I think of Sangita's knowledge of plants, bodies, and their interactions with each other, I think of yielding-knowing. I think of her hands, worn with skill, rubbing a balm into an aching shoulder; knowingly thumbing a *tulsi* plant, telling me about its properties and potential; gently holding a baby chick. Each moment involved sight, but also, touch. Her knowledge was in her hands as much as her head. To know through touch is to also allow oneself to be touched, even if it is your hand that is extended out. In the context of disease, moreover, it is to allow oneself to be at risk of contagion, illness, and disease. Sangita's healing practice required yielding to this fact contagion. She was unafraid. Her and Nitya's practices of activism and care drew a riotous number of animals, plants, and people in close to them. They were subject to the world and subject of it. They were willing to simply be present in sickness and in health, to hear real people in real time talk about their problems even when these problems led them in unexpected directions. It was to allow oneself to be transformed, to become undone.

Conclusions

One time, Sangita, Nitya, and myself wound our way up the Western Ghats in our hired car with the windows down. The air was wet and warm. The mist on the hills was gustatory; a dew to make the mouth water. It hung heavy and thick whipped around the top of mountains and floating lightly off the edges. The muddy streams were overflowing and women were out in the fields transplanting rice. Gods engraved into big red stones watched over them from the spots where they once appeared. Monsoon had just arrived and the world seemed to being saying, *aaah*.

We were on our way to meet Hanumantha, a farmer organizing – or trying to organize – an organic dairy in his village. He had requested Anthra's pamphlets on Ayurvedic and folk remedies for ailments experienced by livestock and their keepers. Hanumantha grew an immense number of organic vegetables for himself and his family. Sangita and I developed a list a page long: ridge gourd, bottle gourd, red gourd, bitter gourd, broad beans, peas, cabbage, fenugreek, turmeric, black beans, cucumber, onion, tomatoes, eggplant, rice, and things with Marathi names that had no counterpart in English. He grew elephant grass and sugar cane for his animals, and made trades with other farmers – usually ones without animals – for other kinds of fodder, such as, sorghum and corn. He also owned land and relatively large herd of eight Jersey-Holstein crossbred cows, two bulls, and seven calves. Hanumantha used the dung of his herd to fertilize his field and the labor of his two oxen to prepare it.

His connection with his animals was close, though not romantically so. It was an intimacy that arose out of the reality of life and its everydayness. The material structure of his home was telling in this regard. His house consisted of three adjoining rooms: A kitchen, living room, and cattle shed. He had taken out a seventeen-lakh rupee loan – approximately $25,000 USD – to add the cattle shed onto his home. The shed was both a marker of modernity and a new necessity made requisite by the fact that Hanumantha had decided to invest in a more intensive method of production. Six years earlier Hanumantha had switched from rearing buffalo (murrah) to purebred Jersey cows because, he explained, while buffaloes produce more milk – worth more per liter because of its fattiness – they also have longer gestation times. This affects not only how quickly one can reproduce a herd but also how frequently buffaloes give milk. Yet his decision to switch to Jerseys was costly. The purebred animals did not fare well in their new hilly, rainy home. All suffered from mastitis so severe – caused, in part, by moisture – that he had to replace his herd again. Replacing his herd for a second time, Hanumantha opted for Jersey-desi mixes. While many experts claim that these hybrid animals contain the best of both desi and exotic worlds as it were, Hanumantha was taking no chances and built them a shelter to better protect them from the elements.

Yet the debt that Hanumantha incurred as a result of his herd's need for a hi-tech shelter put him on the brink of financial and emotional collapse. He explained to the team, "I have tried to do things in different ways, but I have not been able to come up with a profitable solution. I am unable to make ends meet. I don't have any household items for entertainment, or a lifestyle of leisure. I don't even

have a TV. I can't change any of this. People drink Rs 400 worth of alcohol. I have to think twice before having an extra cup of tea. If, after doing all this, there is no satisfaction in my job [...] " he trailed off. Nitya picked up the thread, "Yes, if you don't even have any satisfaction, then it is difficult." Hanumantha, encouraged, responded, "Yes, from 4 or 5 in the morning until the evening we are all working hard, just working [...] We live on the field. We live here due to our cattle." He pointed to his daughter who had flitted around the edges of the room, giving and taking cups of tea, "This is my daughter," he said, "She is unwell. She got wet in the rain and has caught a cold and fever." Sangita, Nitya, and I all smiled with as much warmth as we could summon.

Nitya lit up, "Let us teach her! She can learn how to use local, natural medicines. It will reduce your expenses." "Sure," Hanumantha replied, "Why not?" He stopped abruptly, just then his daughter shook her head. "She says no!" He laughed. Nitya bristled, "These days, everyone wants to go to the city and learn computers. It such a fad." Perhaps lightened by his daughter's insouciance, Hanumantha changed his tack. "Yes, the world is changing so fast," he agreed. "But I am satisfied that in my house, apart from minor seasonal illnesses, there is no blood pressure, diabetes, and other such illnesses. There is so much change," he continued. "Strange illnesses that we never knew of. Nowadays there are no children without a caesarian section. Unlike in our case, my wife was carrying a basket of cow-dung, working in the fields when her water broke and she delivered right there: No hospital expenses. She had a robust constitution. It gives me a sense of satisfaction that, here, our health is still good."

A Jersey-desi mixed breed cow (2019). Author's photo.

Reversing the assumptions of One Health that poverty and human-animal intimacy mean disease must run rampant, Hanumantha asserted the opposite: It was rich people and urban places that were diseased. In fact, animal proximity to humans was key to their wellbeing. After a brief silence in the conversation, Hanumantha continued, "Last night there was a snake, it was a cobra. We got some villagers and killed him. It was the cow who warned us all." He paused as we all gazed into the shed, tails quietly swishing, chomping away on dry fodder. He continued, "It's a balance of nature: we look after the animals, who in turn help us." He then repeated, "It's a balance of nature, an inter-relationship (*sambandh*)." Here *sambandh* articulates a way of knowing that was mutual, a kind of sharing that was not blighted.

Indeed, the longer I followed Nitya and Sangita, the more I began to understand that, rather than zoonotic diseases, the sicknesses they bore witness to and sought to redress with their One Health were of a more social kind. For many producers, the risks and hardships they shared with their animals were not so much about disease per se. Recall, in her interview with shepherding women, pastoral women told Nitya that it was their proximity with their animals that enabled them to take care of themselves, a vital necessity since they were more or less abandoned by the state and its social services for health and veterinary care. More than this, they said, their lives and livelihoods made them strong, made them immune. When Nitya pushed, however, wanting more detail about any health issues whatsoever that they may experience, a few told her, and then more agreed that, "The main health issues they experience are joint pain, back pain, weakness, tired eyes from embroidery, tiredness, malnutrition."

Their fatigued bodies point us to a different class of afflictions, still shared by humans, animals, plants, and environments, but beyond the current scope of One Health. Instead of biological diseases and infections, when we look and see from the perspective of the body – a real body, rooted in time and place, where the eye's connection with touch, memory, and feeling are allowed to remain intact – other kinds of vulnerabilities become perceptible. All around us, human, animal, plant, and ecological bodies, particularly, those that bear the brunt of producing for a global economy of food accumulation and waste, are manifesting signs of this exhaustion and pending collapse. Rather than striving for more mastery, more control, more surveillance, however, we need to find ways to remain bound and open to this tiring planet.

An exhaustion extends across multiple kinds of bodies in the peripheries of productionism. Humans – especially those who are materially marginalized by "urban metabolisms," cycles of consumption and expulsion – do share states of wellness and sickness, living and dying, risk and possibility with their animals, their crops, their lands. For better or worse, they rely on each other in these weary times, thickly bound by the interrelations of living and its vicissitudes. This exhaustion is ignored by dominant One Health frameworks, as well as dairy development more broadly, at this time. Its manifestations are not seen by them; data bears no witness. The complex interrelationships

that makeup this field of "waxing and waning vitalities" remain hidden and unaccounted for (Singh, 2015). To bear witness, as Nitya and Sangita taught me, was to see anew, to see differently, to see with the body and let its course be changed (Naisargi, 2012).

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A Litany of Saints: Remembering the Early Years of HIV/AIDS Activism in the First Year of a New Pandemic

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/UBQQ8712

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With the emergence of COVID-19 in the U.S., many LGBTQ people found ourselves reflecting upon the early years of HIV/AIDS and how our communities responded to the lack of robust federal and state response to this preceding public health crisis. As the leaders of the Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center (BSC) in eastern Pennsylvania became a central resource for our community sharing up-to-date information about COVID-19 and organizing vaccine clinics, they also recognized the historic nature of this moment as many elders in our community consistently tried to make sense of the current crisis by contemplating their past AIDS activism and organizing. In March of 2020, BSC staff and archivists received grant funding to conduct an oral history project called "40 Years of Public Health in the LGBTQ Community: Collecting and Curating Local LGBTQ Health Experiences From HIV/AIDS to COVID-19," which recorded both timely commentary on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQ people and memories of HIV/AIDS organizing that seemed urgent and relevant to our contemporary moment. Offering excerpts from oral histories collected in 2020, this piece explores how COVID-19 spurred LGBTQ people in the Lehigh Valley to share stories about communal grief, health inequity, political responses to pandemics, and organizing to support the health of minoritized communities.

Keywords: *COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, oral histories, LGBTQ community archives*

In March of 2020 during the emergence of COVID-19, LGBTQ elders in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, like LGBTQ people in other communities, were haunted by memories of the 1980s when HIV/AIDS decimated friends, chosen family, and lovers. As President Trump spread false information about the virus and bungled the federal response, elders recalled the era of Ronald Reagan and his murderous silence and inaction as gay men, bisexual men, and trans people died. While the two viruses and activist responses were different, the desire for accurate information from medical professionals about the spread of COVID-19 stirred up memories about early responses to HIV, some blistering with homophobia and others providing necessary information to communities about transmission

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and treatment. For many elders, there were eerie similarities between the 1980s and today as governments in both periods ignored the needs of minoritized communities in response to deadly viruses; as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities faced higher death rates from COVID-19, elders recalled the challenges faced by QTPOC during the early years of HIV and how homophobia and racism inspired widespread disavowal of national and international responsibility to attend to HIV+ people, to invest in research, and to share information about transmission. When *The New York Times* showed that the price of inequality is death in multiple stories about COVID-19's impact on Latinx, Indigenous, and Black Communities[1], QTPOC in the Lehigh Valley concurred as some lost multiple family members to the recent virus. And all of our diverse elders could remember funeral after funeral of beloved friends from decades before when homophobia, transphobia, and racism shaped the lack of quick response to HIV; then, too, the price of inequality was death although news media in the early years tended to ignore the crisis or to allow homophobia to shape coverage[2]. In their isolation, their current grief resonating with histories of loss, our diverse elders ached to speak with each other and with younger generations about what they had survived and those who didn't, how early generations responded to HIV and what strategies we might deploy this time around with a new pandemic. They wanted to share reflections about the import of community responses and organizations to addressing inequity in healthcare and fighting for the lives of each other in the face of callous governmental indifference and spread of misinformation across the national stage. They wanted to speak of the absolute necessity of clinging to each other in hyperlocal responses to those suffering in our communities even as we struggle for competent federal and state response to health crises. And from quarantine, they needed an outlet.

Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center in Allentown, PA recognized this need early in the COVID-19 pandemic[3]. As our region's central LGBTQ organization, they are on the front lines, advocating for LGBTQ health equity in our region. While some of their work focuses on health promotion and advocacy, they also create programs that celebrate regional LGBTQ arts and history. In 2016 they established the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Archives in partnership with Muhlenberg College[4]. The archive collects and preserves materials from local LGBTQ organizations, leaders, and community members to support robust historical accounts of our community's history. While center staff worked

[1] For a discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on Latinx communities, see Fink (2021); and Jordan and Richard A. Oppel, Jr. (2020). For a discussion of the impact on both Latinx and Black communities, see Oppel, Jr. *et al.* (2020) and Santos (2021). For a discussion of the impact on Indigenous communities, see Healy (2021) and Conger *et al.* (2020).

[2] For information on how news media covered HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, see Treichler (1999); Watney (1997); and Kinsella (1992). For recent journalistic reflection on *The New York Times* coverage of HIV/AIDs, see Soller, ed. (2018).

[3] To learn more about Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center, visit https://www.bradburysullivancenter.org/.

[4] The Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Archives were created in partnership with Muhlenberg College; while Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center maintains ownership of the archives, Muhlenberg generously provides space for the collections and archival assistance in processing, digitizing, and managing the collections. This unique partnership ensures that the local LGBTQ community has access to collections to which they have contributed, as well as oversight over their use and development, even as Muhlenberg College offers resources to ensure safe preservation and expert archival processing and organization. To peruse the collections in the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community archive, visit https://trexler.muhlenberg.edu/library/specialcollections/collections/#lgbt.

with speed to share information about COVID-19 prevention for the LGBTQ community, they also recognized the historical import of this significant moment in time and the urgency of collecting life histories of elders in our community as they are especially at risk from this virus. Expanding from a previous oral history grant, center staff quickly applied for and received grant funding to conduct interviews with diverse community members to collect their thoughts about the recent pandemic and recollections of the early years of AIDS activism in the Lehigh Valley. While we are inspired by a number of oral history projects created in metropolises like the groundbreaking ACT UP Oral History Project coordinated by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman[5], we also agree with a number of LGBTQ historians that more work needs to be done in small urban centers and rural communities to collect the unique histories of LGBTQ people outside of New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles[6]. Our archival projects, like those produced in other small urban centers and rural communities, are important contributions to expanding our understanding of LGBTQ history.

In this short piece, we share a few excerpts from oral histories included in the collection titled 40 Years of Public Health in the LGBTQ Community: Collecting and Curating Local LGBTQ Health Experiences From HIV/AIDS to COVID-19[7]. We hope to highlight here how leaders of a community in a small urban center were prompted by COVID-19 to reflect upon communal grief, health inequity, political responses to pandemics, and organizing to support minoritized communities. We believe that oral history collection and curation through public programs are powerful ways both to honor the value of our elders' contributions to social change in our region and to create intergenerational conversation that can fuel on-going political struggle for equity for LGBTQ people. With this particular project, we hoped to instigate conversations in our own community about knowledge produced during healthcare crises and strategies utilized in the early years of AIDS that might be useful today. Even as we certainly focused upon stories about effective regional AIDS organizing that administered to the dying, shared information about transmission and HIV, and advocated for HIV+ people with political campaigns and outreach to healthcare organizations, we also wanted to build a space for our community to grieve, to commemorate, and to name those that we lost to AIDS and those that

[5] To access the ACT UP Oral History Project, visit http://www.actuporalhistory.org/index1.html. For other impactful oral history projects focused on HIV/AIDS, see University of California San Francisco's AIDS Oral History Project (https://www.library.ucsf.edu/archives/aids/); University of California Berkeley Library's AIDS Epidemic in San Francisco oral history project (https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/libraries/bancroft-library/oral-history-center/projects/aids); and the GLBT Historical Society's San Francisco ACT UP Oral History Project (https://www.glbthistory.org/oral-history-projects).

[6] A number of LGBTQ studies scholars expand beyond a limited focus on coastal metropolises as they turn to lesser studied urban centers and rural communities. In Pennsylvania, our archival team has benefitted from the work of the LGBT Center of Central PA History Project (https://centralpalgbtcenter.org/lgbt-history-project) as a model for community-based archival collection and exhibition. For a rich discussion of Central PA LGBT history based on this project, see Burton and Loveland (2020). Other recent monographs also address LGBT archives and archival projects outside of New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. See Kumbier (2014), especially Kumbier's discussion of archival projects focused on Drag King communities in New Orleans (121-152). For a discussion of Sacramento's Lavender Library, Archives and Cultural Exchange (LLACE), see Diana K. Wakimoto *et al.* (2013). For discussion of rural LGBTQ communities, see Gray *et al.* (2016); Johnson (2013); Herring (2010); and Gray (2009).

[7] To see the full interviews from this collection, visit this page.

we lost so recently in the past year. And we wanted to acknowledge the caretakers and organizers in our community, the ones who carry the fire, as they shine a light on inequity then and now, fueled by their grief and rage to fight for social change. For this issue of InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies, we offer community reflections on mourning, politics, and inequity to center non-academic voices in the journal's current focus on LGBTQ communities and pandemics. We hope that these excerpts might inspire academics and non-academics outside of major urban metropolises to build their own LGBTQ oral history archives that share overlapping and divergent stories about your communities' history, including life stories about how LGBTQ people organize locally to address inequity in health-care.

On Mourning

Many of the oral histories in our collection touch on the magnitude of loss from AIDS and the continuation of grief across decades, which rose again with force as the death tolls of COVID-19 emerged in media outlets. General statements that list the numbers of funerals attended in the 80s and 90s are spiked with clear recollections of lovers and friends offered with vivid detail. So, too, some community members reflect upon recent familial and community losses from COVID-19, specifically addressing the high-rates of deaths within Black and Latinx communities and the challenges of being essential workers. The following excerpts offer a few stories about what one community member, T. Scott Allen, calls "a litany of saints."

> [Y]ou were looking at death to be. And [...] you just knew, because back then, you know, there were no cocktail drugs. I mean, you know, you weren't going to slow it down. It was going to take its course. And, you know, it was a one-way ticket – and it was a very short runway. And then you would see them the next week, and then they could barely walk. I remember one dear friend of mine who passed away, probably no older than age 27 maybe at the oldest, you know, walking his mother across 9th Street to go to bingo one night. And this was a party boy. This was a boy who was out every night – party, party, party, party. And now his skinny little legs were walking with his mother, taking her to a bingo game. You know, what a 180 that was. And, sure enough, you know, I was by his bedside, and helping him eat. [...] And it actually was a dark era, quite honestly. I mean, death was a regular part of the conversation. [...] [Y]ou would look in the obits, and, 'Oh, John died. Mark died. Fred's dead.' [...] I mean it was a litany of saints.
> -T. Scott Allen (2020)

> And my first encounter with somebody who was HIV+ was a gentleman by the name of Chuck, who has passed on. [...] And we ran into him in Atlantic City [...] [and] he was coming out of a bar and we were going in, my late husband Will and I. And he looked really – he had all these black and blue marks all over him, which was Kaposi sarcoma and I didn't know that at the time. [...] And I would say maybe

six months later, they were doing a fundraiser for him to help with the medical bills for him. So, we went down to that. [...] Chuck was a wild child when I met him. And I had seen him several years over, you know, over the years. I mean I knew him before I met Will. So, we had gone out several times and were, you know, intimate. But that was the last time that I had seen him, down in Atlantic City.
-David Moyer (2020)

[I]t became an era that was, you know, death and obits, and people we knew were dying off. And you would go to the bar and you would see people one week and [...] next week they wouldn't be there. [...] [A]nd then you read the paper two weeks later – they're dead. And that sort of brings me to my personal story [...] in '86 is when I met my partner, Jim. And he was a specialty nurse – a high-end nurse – in the hospital. And we had a wonderful life together. And then he was working a lot of overtime, a lot of twelve-hour shifts, a lot of back-on-back shifts over weekends and then he was losing his appetite – and he was thin to begin with – but he was losing some weight. [...] And then he got a rash, and he couldn't get rid of this rash. And he went to the dermatologist. And along the road, he gets an HIV test. [...] And I can clearly remember – it was just before Thanksgiving in 1990, I came back and [his] test was positive. Based on his T-cell count, which was very, very low, they surmised that he got infected before he and I met, somewhere in his prior journeys. And Jim was very young. I mean at the time he was probably 27, maybe 28. So that was around Thanksgiving and Christmas time [...] and by July – July 9th, actually [...] he passed away.
-Charles Versaggi (2020)

I personally have lost three people in my family to COVID. The realities for minority communities. [...] Black communities, you know, those numbers that were coming out from the Black community about the spread of COVID, they weren't false statistics. The Black community has been hit really hard by COVID. [...] [My husband and I are] both essential workers. My husband is the hardest working guy I know. [...] And he was working for another company in the Lehigh Valley. [...] And when COVID first hit, the company didn't seem to be taking it seriously. And you know they were starting to get cases in the warehouses but they weren't reporting them. They weren't telling the employees that they were getting cases. [...] So, he moved to another warehouse [...] [and] they're taking everything seriously. [...] [W]e both realize that because we both have to go out to work, him more than me, you know, he realizes he's exposed, even with all the protection that they can give.
-Brian Jones (2020)

On Politics and Pandemics

One theme that community members addressed in their interviews was an eerie feeling of similarities between political responses to AIDS and political response to COVID-19. Even as they noted clear differences between historical periods as homophobia and transphobia shaped political indifference and callousness in the 80s and 90s, they made comparisons between the Reagan and Trump eras, noting federal and state ineptitude that magnified the suffering of the ill and dying. The silence of Reagan era politicians about AIDS and a willful lack of funding and coordinated attention to the disease was analyzed in relation to the brash trumpeting of misinformation and downplaying of the seriousness of COVID-19, especially for minoritized communities, by Trump. For our community, reflections on inept political responses across historical periods bled into thoughts about the role of conservative religious organizations in promoting misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> The problem we have in this culture, and it happened with HIV and AIDS too, is things get politicized right away. It's like you're a red state; you don't wear a mask. It you're a blue state, you wear masks. Well, that's ridiculous. And Ronald Reagan – you know how he was. Ronald and Nancy? They didn't want anything to do with AIDS/HIV.
> -T. Scott Allen (2020)

> It's such a different situation now than the AIDS crisis was. But, at the same time, there are a lot of parallels that we see and one of the things, if we as the gay community hadn't kind of taken hold of it ourselves, it would have been left to just run rampant, you know what I mean? We weren't getting support from the, you know, Reagan/Bush government. We weren't getting support by a lot of people in general because they thought this was a gay disease. It was only affecting gay people and it was only affecting drug users, so better to it. [...] But one of the parallels I see to this and our situation now is actually the way that a lot of people in the government are trying to make it seem as if it's a non-issue, it doesn't exist, you know? We can look the other way, it'll just go away, you know? And that, we saw when we had the AIDS epidemic. It was, like this is a small, isolated thing. It's only affecting, you know, this type of people. It's nothing for us to worry about [...] until it started going into the population as a whole and heterosexual couples had to worry about it, too, and it was like this is something that could spread that way. [...] Had AIDS been only affecting rich, white businessmen, they would have had funding a lot quicker. [...] But I didn't really notice a feeling of support or denial or anything like that coming from the government. It almost felt, to be honest with you, back then, it felt like this was our problem, we had to take care of it. Nobody else cares, nobody else is even looking at it, and so if anything's going to be done, we have to do it as our own community.
> -Mitch Hemphill (2020)

> Well, I think what strikes me about it, going to the politics of it all, is that like HIV/AIDS, there was no recognition of it at the top. So we didn't have like a national focus on, hey, let's take care of this, together as a nation. Took a while, and I think the passage of Ryan White money was key, that there were some people in legislature who got it, and they got it usually because they had a child die, or they knew someone. [...] [And] I think that's been certainly one of the issues with COVID. [...] Now what I think is a little different, or maybe it's not different, I don't know, but we learned everything medically or otherwise from each other and from people who had just had it. And I think now with COVID, [...] I mean if you have half a brain, you could see that this was going to go to other places, you know. Everyone was susceptible. [...] But I think not having the top political support has been a problem.
> -Rose Craig (2020)

> How did this happen and how do we have such ineptitude in our systems and things that should be dealing with this stuff and the anger of the ignorance of people? Of the lack of empathy and compassion. [...] So, the number of people who during this pandemic that have just decided that selfishness is the way to go. That not being concerned about the other person is good. [...] [A]nd I work in the Church community. [...] And, you know, MCC Lehigh Valley is a very progressive, inclusive congregation. But I can tell you that from – in the Church world, [...] Church universal not MCC Lehigh Valley but just Church Universal, you know, you got some wing bats. You got a lot of them who, for some reason, they can't deal with science, they can't deal with just the realities of how the world works because its' contrary to what a book says. [...] I firmly believe that a lot of this insanity that we're dealing with – my grandmother used to tell me that Church folk are the worst folk. (Laughter) And I've worked and been in the Church all my life and I agree with her. So, a lot of what we are dealing with in this country, in this Christian country – if we didn't have so many self-righteous religious folk, we might be in a better situation. [...] And I think [...] things we're lucky about in our community and in our Lehigh Valley and also in the whole state of Pennsylvania is we have a wonderful Secretary of Health in my opinion. [...] I mean, to have Dr. Rachel Levine speaking as a trans woman but also speaking as the incredible voice of science and reason.
> -Brian Jones (2020)

On Inequity and Organizing Communities of Care

Throughout many interviews, narrators returned again and again to the absolute power of community responses to HIV/AIDS. In response to governmental inaction and grief in the face of so much death, local community activists started the AIDS Service Center as a hub for education, fundraising, and direct services for those dying from and living with HIV. So, too, they created an educational organization called Fighting AIDS Continuously Together (FACT) . LGBTQ community

members in larger regional health organizations, like the Allentown Health Bureau, became key players in bridging activist organizations and civic public health initiatives to support HIV+ people. Church leaders, especially in the regional Episcopal Church, also became activated to address phobic religious communities' responses to HIV/AIDS and to create loving community spaces to administer to the spiritual needs of community members. Finally, community members started regional LGBTQ publications with the specific aim of sharing information about HIV and promoting the work of our regional activists. All of the interviews excerpted below show the value of community engagement in public health initiatives. And these people in particular have laid the foundation for our community's current responses to COVID-19 as our LGBTQ organizations have been a source for accurate information and informed education about the virus, and advocacy for LGBTQ people's health in Pennsylvania during the pandemic. Their stories also serve as a challenge to think holistically about how to support the overall health and well-being of our community, including thinking beyond access to healthcare and education about viruses to housing and food insecurity brought on by and preceded by the recent health crisis.

> We were beginning to have so many people that we socialized with all the time getting ill that suddenly there were not so many more parties, frankly, but it was mostly, okay, how do we help our friends? [...] So, I proposed that we, instead of being a [LGBTQ] community center, we change ourselves to being a service center. [...] [W]e dissolved the community center and we began the AIDS Services Center. [...] [W]e had a board of directors; we had everything we needed for the 501(c)3 application, got that approved. Part of my job was to get out there and sell this to the typical regular funders in the community to make them aware of what was going on. Because back then, nobody was really talking about it, especially in Allentown or Bethlehem, or at least in Pennsylvania. And the whole issue about being gay was again something that wasn't a real popular topic. [...] Part of what we provided at that point in time, now there were people in the community, and people associated with us that were really doing the handholding, feeding, taking care of, wiping the behinds of our friends who got ill quickly; there were a lot of angels out there doing that kind of work. And we were associated with that. One of the skills that we could actually bring was the fact that [...] [we] knew how to navigate the system, the human relations system, and the nonprofit system within the Lehigh Valley. And it was important, because part of what we had to do was also educate, to inform the community about what this was, why this was important. [...] At the same time, we went out and hustled money… and wrote grants and did things like that, and also looked for corporate sponsors. [...] [W]e knew that we wanted to add case management, was what we called it at the time, and basically, that was a matter of looking at the person, sort of holistically, and seeing what did they need? Did they need a place to stay? Did they need some nursing care? Did they need food? You know, what was it that each particular

person needed?[...] [I]t was like, hey, Joe is in trouble; he's down the street. You know, it was a very great network of people who knew people. And you know, again, this all evolved out of our friends dying, and us trying to figure out what the hell can we do [...] and that was the basic reason why it all went that way.
-Rose Craig (2020)

And within our community, we knew that the government wasn't really doing much of anything for it. The health departments weren't doing anything. And to raise awareness and do something about it, we kind of had to do it on our own. And that was one of the reasons, you know, with founding FACT, although it was supporting the entire community, not just gay and lesbian [...] people [...] but it opened itself up, knowing it had to do everything for the entire community and have those services for everyone. That was a big step forward, you know, and drove a lot of things, I think with like the Allentown Health Bureau. [...] The money [from FACT fundraisers] at that point, as I understood it, with my involvement with them, in the beginning, was a lot of it, it had to do with helping people that were HIV-positive. It had to do with educating the public. It had to do with getting materials like condoms out in bars and literature out in bars and making people more aware of it within the community. And, like I said, obviously, they, you know, were open to the entire population of our area. However, that was where the focus needed to be because our community was being affected in a higher ratio than the community at large. So, that's really where their focus was, to educate, to – there was money, as they went down the line, that was made available, like, through grants for different other organizations. So, they're almost, like, a parent organization to other organizations. But the main thing was to get the word out, to get the materials out so that people understood better what was going on and how to help prevent it from spreading.
-Mitch Hemphill (2020)

[I]t wasn't until, well, 1985 is when FACT was started. And, again, it was started by a group of bar owners and local merchants, and people who were – wanted to do something because their friends were dying. And nothing was being done, really, at that point, then, because I don't think the AIDS Activities Office had started yet, [...] and doctors, again, didn't really, still, didn't know what was going on. But so, they held an event up at Rainbow Mountain called the FACT Summer Games. [...] So, I went up the first year by myself and it was overwhelming. I mean, we had – there must have been a thousand people there, if not more, back then, in those days.
-David Moyer (2020)

[U]p until that time when I was [...] hired [at the Allentown Health Bureau] [...] at least in the LGBT community, we were perceived as the health police. You know, if you're going to go to the health bureau and you test positive, look out, they're going to do this stuff. [...] But we don't do that stuff. [...] We're not – that's not what we're about. And I think one thing that helped the LGBT community was that I'm a gay man and I'm doing this work. And that's why I think a lot of – you know, the word got out that way. Hey, we have an advocate in the health department. If you want testing, you can go see him. [...] Or, if you don't want to go in, call and he'll come to your house or apartment. [...] And I would do that.
-David Moyer (2020)

Because there was no safety net from Washington at the time or Harrisburg, really. It was a very hopeful time. While it was sad and this was a tragic thing going on, a lot of innovative things were being done, especially the church had a chance to really be a partner with groups that they wouldn't have had partnerships with otherwise, and make friends, and show them the church wasn't – I mean, it was – religious communities weren't all great at the time, as you know. There was a lot of fear in churches. [...] And in our church tradition, communion is so important that we had to do a lot of stuff with the church about communion, about how you couldn't – finally, we got doctors to come out and say, "You cannot get this from the common cough. Period." You can't. Unless you're doing something else at the altar rail besides taking communion, you can't get HIV. (laughs) [...] So one of the big things that we did in the Episcopal diocese that we did ecumenically, actually – it wasn't just us, but it was kind of spearheaded by us – but it was the healing. We had that first healing service at the cathedral. [...] We wanted to let people with HIV and AIDS know that we would touch them, that we would actually touch them, that they can take communion with us, and we're not going to be afraid of you, and we want you not to be afraid of us. And so, that was the big message that we were trying to put forth in that service. And I remember that it was packed. I mean, there was not a seat left in the room, mainly because allies – a lot of allies came.
-T. Scott Allen (2020)

But I started *Above Ground* magazine and launched that in November of 1994. And the reasons for launching the magazine was because LGBTQ – the community in the Lehigh Valley no longer had a periodical [...] and it was something that was needed. It was missing for a period of time. [...] [I]t was an entertainment and information monthly magazine that I put out. And one of the things that I made available through it was access to the HIV/AIDS groups so they could advertise their events, put in articles, you know, different things like that. And I would actually always go to the big events and give them publicity and things like that so people

> kept aware of it. [...] So, that was one way that [information about AIDS and AIDS organizations' events and fundraisers] actually spread throughout the community and into the surrounding areas. [...] So, I hope to think that it did something to help in that way.
> -Mitch Hemphill (2020)

To close, this recent oral history project allowed our community to offer up a litany of saints, both those that we have lost in two pandemics and those who rallied to provide comfort to the dying, to advocate for greater information about HIV/AIDS, and to fight for strong civic, state, and federal responses to public health crises. Overall, each interview returned to the import of vital community responses to inequity in healthcare. As T. Scott Allen states in his interview, "And the enemy was multi-fraught. It was prejudice, and discrimination in the culture. It was the medical community and providing services. It was we can't let our brothers and sisters languish. We've got to do something. We can't just sit by and watch this happen. There was a lot of energy around that. [...] But I think more what it taught me was communities can rise up together and address problems that seem insurmountable and seem bigger than us" (2020). The stories shared by our elders give us the ability to see a variety of ways that our community built transformative organizational responses to healthcare crises that can inform our efforts today.

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The Potential of Friendship: A Case for Social Resilience and New Care Optics

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/RGRQ6813

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In this article, we call for greater recognition of friendship as a basic social relation that should play a pivotal role in re-imagining social resilience if it is to be future-proof in the face of social upheaval, such as the current pandemic. Drawing on existing research and early scoping of emergent information about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we suggest that friendship is an important component of heterogenic social realities. The specific focus of our discussion is twofold. Firstly, attention is paid to the narrow lens of social policy that privileges particular familial set-ups and living arrangements, and in doing so marginalises groups which are already disenfranchised; secondly, we consider the dangers of nationalism and Eurocentrism as they relate to these issues. We suggest that thinking in terms of friendship can open up new avenues of academic and political imagination, offering strategies with greater potential for building socially resilient communities.

Keywords: *Friendship, social policy, wellbeing, pandemic, resilience.*

Introduction

The ongoing socio-cultural, economic and political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly mark a crisis of neoliberal ideologies of entrepreneurial individualism and growing precarity on national and global scales (Standing, 2011), as well as in the micro-social dimensions of personal and community networks, relation(ship)s, and modes of sociability. While countries' responses varied – from Italy's and Poland's tight restrictions, to more "relaxed" measures in the UK – there is at least one commonality across several national contexts and different "waves" of the pandemic. In Poland and the UK – the two countries which we observe for academic interests and personal links – emergent political and media discourses have been heavily skewed towards economic consequences on a macro level. When micro-level economic and general social issues are brought to attention, there is a dominant emphasis on the heteronormatively constructed nuclear family as a hub of resilience. On the one hand, "family" becomes an ersatz of society, and on the other, it is constructed as an individual *locus* of coping and support[1].

[1] https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/dzialania-rzadu and https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus (this and subsequent links accessed on 12.07.2020).

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It is our argument, and a call for further action and reflection from academic communities and policy makers, that such a focus is reactive, and that bold reconfigurations are needed. Our ongoing and future post-pandemic work on strengthening societal resilience will not be effective or pro-active enough without recognition of social relations beyond (heteronormatively understood) family and kinship. To recognise friendship as a fundamental social relation on a par with (and not over-shadowed by) the family is a much-needed step towards more nuanced understandings of resilience and, consequently, more effective strategies for building socially resilient communities.

Writers harnessing a sociologically influenced take on the concept have impacted our thinking about resilience. These include Dagdeviren *et al.* (2016), Pavićević (2016), and Rampp *et al.* (2019). In this article we draw on the flexible and purposefully open definition of Estêvão *et al.* (2017: 21) who propose understanding resilience as a "complex and multilevel process through which societies, institutions and individuals respond to sudden and large-scale environmental, social and economic shocks." Their goal with such open-ended conceptualisation is to move away from "heroic" to more "mundane" and "everyday" understandings, as signalled in the title of their article.

At the same time, Estêvão *et al.*'s definitional work pertains to the characteristics of resilience in relation to poverty, and the potential operationalization of resilience in this context. Their analysis includes a focus on the family as a key unit of consideration in relation to resilience, yet the concept of family is not explored or problematized. We view this is a critical oversight and posit that exploration of what family is taken to *mean* and *do* in this context holds potential for fruitful conversation. Such exploration and discussion may help us to think about the role played by institutions and policy making in relation to friendship and possibilities for resilience and the unsettling of inequitable social systems.

In this article we look at two clusters of pandemic-related issues – policy and global political economy – and suggest friendship as a possible entry point for re-imagining needs and outcomes that might benefit societies. We draw our initial, tentative and often hypothetical reflections (which undoubtedly require further, more systematic study) based on Polish and British contexts. In the following section we present the research context before moving to section three, where we deliberate the need for friendship to be recognised in social policy in general and especially in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The last section of our discussion, prior to the conclusions, presents incipient thoughts on how accounting for friendship can counterbalance resurgent, nationalist biopolitics that looms behind global dimensions of the pandemic, only reinforcing the spectre of Eurocentrism.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic is a geo-political issue and insightful research responding to the crisis needs to be attuned to the epistemic geo-politics of knowledge-production and spatial-temporal dimensions of scholarship to avoid an Anglophone or broader Occidentalist skew (Koobak, Tlostanova, and

Thapar-Björkert, 2021; Kulpa and Silva, 2016; Whitehand, 2005). We draw inspiration for this response article from the ongoing, larger research agenda on friendship in Poland and the UK involving discourse analysis, examination of practices and responses (social justice activism, ground-up commons mobilisations) which has drawn on participatory observations and biographical interviewing.

Both countries' changing social practices, institutional failures, and emerging consequences from the crisis in terms of inequality, offer a useful springboard for thinking about European societies at large. The UK and Poland epitomise different religious (respectively: protestant, catholic) and social attitudes and traditions (individualism vs. communitarianism, more liberal vs. more conservative), and political economies (established vs. "young" capitalism and neoliberal democracy). On the other hand, as recent years have shown, both are susceptible to populist nationalisms (e.g. "Brexit"), rising "heteroactivism" (Browne and Nash, 2020) and "anti-genderism" (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). Indeed, our early analysis of political discourse indicates that both national contexts share a commonality in the way that family is understood and placed at the core of their responses to the pandemic: notably the heteronormative "family" unit (i.e. the life-long married, monogamous, reproductive, "nuclear" and overwhelmingly heterosexual unit) (Ludwin, 2011) at the centre-stage of socio-economic and political imagination. Within these similarities and differences, there is a potential for developing greater understandings and practices of "friendship as social resilience," which may be applicable to other European contexts. "Rapid response" knowledge-building about the effects of the pandemic shows a similar tendency. Whilst UK Research Councils have sought to address social inequalities through funding calls for projects addressing and mitigating the health, social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of COVID-19[2], research awarded thus far does not attend to the importance of social relations outside of the traditionally understood family. In Poland, there are particularly tight constraints in terms of what is researched, since humanities and social science projects are significantly underrepresented among those awarded by the Foundation for Polish Science[3] and National Science Centre[4].

For a moment we were excited about a promise of one project that focuses on the 'household' as a social unit of coping with pandemics[5]. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a short-lived excitement: also here "household" is unreflexively synonymised with nuclear heterosexual family and childrearing. This is unfortunate, as we find "household" – while not without its disciplinary and conceptual burdens and need for further conceptualising work – to be a promising concept-category for social

[2] https://www.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/ukri-open-call-for-research-and-innovation-ideas-to-address-covid-19

[3] https://www.fnp.org.pl/en/nowe-srodki-na-badania-zwiazane-z-covid-19-przyznane

[4] https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/index.php?jednostka=&jednostka_miasto=&jednostka_wojewodztwo=&kierownik=&kierownik_plec=&kierownik_tytul=&status=&projekt=&kwotaprzyznanaod=&kwotaprzyznanado=&typkonkursu=&konkurs=&grupa=&panel=&slowokluczowe=covid&aparatura=

[5] https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/index.php?projekt_id=501446

imagination and social policy; one that may be helpful in escaping family-centrism towards other co-living arrangements, such as friendship, which are not predefined upon heteronormative expectations.

We draw on a substantive body of existing research to support our proposal that friendship should be at the heart of future research and political debate in response to pandemics, and beyond. These works point decisively to the importance of adequately reflecting a range of social relations in social policies, welfare provisions, and the legislature (Roseneil, 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Others highlight the unsustainable nature of social policies presuming marriage and monogamous coupledom as the default social and political unit, discriminating against single people (Lahad, 2017; Wilkinson and Bell, 2012), as well as against those people living together in "alternative" caring and supportive households and arrangements that are not based on a presumption of "typical" sexual, romantic, or kinship ties (Slany, 2008; Sanger and Taylor, 2013; Stoilova *et al.*, 2017). A growing number of scholars approach thinking about intimacies in a more holistic manner, spanning desire, love, friendship, and caring alongside each other (Jamieson, 2005; Budgeon, 2006; Pahl and Spencer, 2010; Nelson, 2011; Musiał, 2015), and there is also an increased interest in the study of friendship itself (among others: Adams and Allan, 1998; Blatterer, 2014; Caine, 2009; Descharmes *et al.*, 2011; Szarota, 2018).

With this context in mind, our suggestion to focus more systematically on friendship has strong potential to push policy-making boundaries, with attention given to overlooked social bonds and how they strengthen social resilience across European societies.

Friendship and Policy: Beyond the Heteronormative Fantasy?

Over the last several decades the nuclear form of family – a product of post-industrialisation – has been exposed as inherently unstable. This is highlighted through: increases in cohabitation, divorce rates, single-parent families, single-person households (Szlendak, 2015; Stasińska, 2018), liberalisation around gay rights in some – mostly Western – countries, and a social recognition and proliferation of research on "queer kinship" and other intimacies, including friendship (Blatterer, 2014; Dahl and Gabb, 2019).

Despite this evidence, the nuclear family remains the much romanticised "ideal type" of aspiration. The power of the "heteronormative" arguably lies here, in the fantasy rather than the actuality, in the persistent normalization of a specific, narrow version of heterosexuality and family arrangement as "organic" (Ludwin, 2011). Based on the privileging of the (largely heterosexual), married, monogamous, reproductive "nuclear" family unit over other, "deviant" sexualities and living arrangements, it manifests itself in a multitude of nuanced ways, and is perpetually reproduced in the fabric of Western cultures, including in social policy, welfare provision and legislation (Roseneil *et al.*, 2020). Oláh *et al.* (2017: 43) published research findings on the changing nature of families and societies in predominantly European Union countries. They found that further scrutiny of diverse, intimate social

relation(ship)s that go beyond kinship ties is, among others, much needed to inform the development of relevant social policy related to individual lived realities. If we (individually, nationally, globally) are to endure this moment in history, we need a social framework, built and sustained through a variety of relationships, including friendship, that holds potential to facilitate and enhance individual and communal resilience at a structural level.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, emerging reports show that ethnic, gender, sexual minorities, migrants, refugees, and other marginalized groups are significantly disadvantaged by national responses (ECDC, 2020; Gayer *et al.*, 2020); social inequalities and their intersections are at once magnified and hidden by these responses. Given our word limitation here, we focus specifically on "queer" individuals and communities, whilst recognising the need for a discussion about the amplification of social inequality to be broadened and developed in future work. We understand "queer" as living practices and experiences (rather than an identity) of people who remain at the thresholds of the normative familial ideals of their given contexts/times/cultures. As such, they destabilise and agitate the central ideologies of heteronormative societies, in particular reproductive heterosexuality as *the* institutionalised face of sexual citizenship as "normal" (Warner, 1999), rather than heterosexuality *per se* as the acceptable face of intimacy. Why? Because it is not heterosexuality itself that is invested with social privilege, but a very specific, narrow version of heterosexual life – married, monogamous, reproductive – to which one should *at least* aspire. Many practices of heterosexuality, self-consciously or otherwise, fall outside this constraining frame of heteronormativity, and thereby are in line with our understanding of queer practices.

Queer individuals are disproportionately ostracised from families of origin in both Poland (Mizieliń-ska, Król, and Struzik, 2017) and the UK (Donovan, Heaphy, and Weeks, 2001). Consequently, friendship serves the intertwined practical and emotional functions required for resilience of the kind necessary to survive in the face of violence, stigma and socio-economic marginalisation. This is only exacerbated by the pandemic's worsening effects on wellbeing and mental health. For instance, McMullan *et al.* (2020) report that in the UK 59% of the general population experienced negative impacts of the lockdown, while in Poland 56% indicated worsened living conditions (Malinowska, Marchlewska, and Górska, 2020: 13). In their study of the pandemic, Gayer *et al.* (2020: 3–4) directly link this deterioration to withdrawal from e.g. friendship structures, and they further suggest that the negative impact is potentially amplified for various marginalised groups. Multiple exclusions, which are significantly exacerbated by the pandemic, are also a concern for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC, 2020: 1).

Furthermore, for some individuals inhabiting the nuclear family space, friendship may offer an important role in maintaining that very family form – a kind of pressure valve necessary to sustain daily relations – or provide escape routes and emotional support when the "family" becomes a site of abuse (e.g. encouraging escape from situations of domestic violence, providing a place to say,

helping with resources to leave) (see, for example, Parker, 2015). The United Nations (Fang, 2020) identify the global increase in domestic violence as a "shadow pandemic" exacerbated by the withdrawal of support outlets and networks (including friendship ties), and similar reports are made in the UK (Townsend, 2020) and Poland (RPO, 2020). The Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH) in Poland warns that measures like "stay at home" expose queer communities to "domestic homophobia" at higher rates (KPH, 2020). While Maciocha (quoted in Haynes, 2020, para. 5) says they are "more scared of their current home/work situation than the virus itself," Mohan (2020) reports that transgender people, already disproportionately represented in suicide statistics (McNeil, Ellis, and Eccles, 2017) are especially vulnerable. This is a global issue: as Wangare, (quoted in Mohan, 2020, para. 4) puts it: "Coronavirus will only expose more of these vulnerabilities. [...] We are hearing from people who say they fear they are detransitioning due to lack of access to medical care. This puts them in an extremely fragile emotional state." Neglecting friendship and its existing pivotal role in supporting and maintaining personal and social relations in times of crisis would be a serious oversight that we cannot afford.

Friendship, Political Economy of Neoliberalism and Eurocentrism

Our second focus is centred on nationalism, Occidentalism, and the political economy of neoliberalism, with the hypothetical premise being that dangers of nationalist self-enclosures and xenophobic politics are likely to increase as discourses and measures of "protectionism" and ill-fitted social Darwinism ("survival of the fittest") espouse socio-economic and political imaginations. This in turn will contribute to the global geopolitics of inequality post-COVID. We suggest that greater attention to friendship in academic research and political imagination about societal resilience and resistance can inspire new pathways for thinking, from a social justice perspective, about the detrimental effects of the pandemic on global, European, and national levels.

Given the ways in which global capitalism organises society, particularly the close relationship between governments and large multi-national organisations, and their (lack of) accountability (Harvey, 2011), a grounded example comes from a case which also ties into politics around marginalised communities. For the current moment, lessons come from development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with its underpinning histories of political ideologies and state (non)actions, geopolitical implications of past and recent global circulation, and varied consequences for different social groups (e.g. homosexual men in the "West" in the early years, or currently heterosexual women in the "Global South")[6]. The existing research on the (global) political economy of HIV/AIDS (Owen, 2014; Nuki and Townsley, 2018) shows clear, negative effects of the neoliberal logic of profit accumulation in "big pharma" industries, severely affecting societal cohesion and globalised inequalities between "Global North" and "Global South." With further insights from Harvey (2011) and Standing (2011) into the neoliberalization of socio-economic relations (i.e. profit accumulation, individualist

[6] https://www.avert.org/global-hiv-and-aids-statistics

approach, individualization of responsibility, "equality of opportunity" rather than redistributive justice), and from Dussel (2000) on Eurocentrism, we would like to suggest (again, hypothetically and tentatively, as a conversation starter rather than conclusive argument) that the Occidentalist and Eurocentric logic of the above case might have impact and implication for the current one.

Eurocentrism and nationalism are two sides of the self-referencing, conjugated local-global dynamics, and Bieber (2020) shows that (negative) consequences of the pandemic already implicate a growth of authoritarian attack on liberties, xenophobic biases, bordering-up, deglobalization, and fear politics. To counterbalance these violent practices, more trans-national, collaborative, communitarian dialogues and initiatives are needed, as Golding (2020) calls for in a recent interview. Friendship thereby seems very relevant here, with foundations for encouraging new potentials with and through friendship already in place; others before us, in international relations and political sciences, have already noticed (not uncritically) the potential of friendship as political concept-practice (Chowdhury and Philipose, 2016; Digeser, 2016; Oelsner and Vion, 2011; Smith, 2019). Importantly enough, friendship and care can also serve as steppingstones between political theories and more praxis-oriented policy decision-making.

The rupture of the COVID-19 pandemic opened up a space for rethinking, practicing anew, and importantly – experimenting – with the *status quo*. What would a more flexible social policy that recognises friendship and support and that seeks to counteract the obscurity of nationalisms and political economies of Eurocentrism and neoliberalism look like? Perhaps an excellent starting point might be engaging with the feminist ethics of care theories (The Care Collective, 2020; Held, 2006; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 1993). These take relationality, solidarity, responsibility and cooperative mutuality as their central tenets of envisaging social and political worlds, and facilitate deliberations on political economies of nation-states and practicalities of social policy-making. Approaches inspired by the feminist ethic of care range from the foundational works of Tronto (1993; 2013) and Held (1995; 2006), who propose feminist philosophical models of "living together" beyond traditional, masculinist frameworks characterising much of the "canonical" political philosophy, to the works of Sevenhuijsen (1998; 2003), who takes these philosophies further in the direction of policymaking, laying foundations for pragmatic solutions.

At the same time we must stay vigilant against the narratives of "friendship of nations" or the "caring (white) saviour," which have often been historically abused for the rationalisation of colonialism, legitimisation of warmongering, or "pan-sovietism" (Koschut and Oelsner, 2014; Narayan, 1995). While these issues may seem (too) broad – for the consequences of pandemics do pose a set of new theoretical and practical challenges for which applicable strategies must be developed. Friendship reminds us of inter-connectedness and various social forms of commons (Brunkhorst, 2005) and commoning (Di Feliciantonio and Aru, 2018), and in considering friendship we may find alternative language to re-imagine current and future solutions to pandemics. By deflating the blood-related

optics of kinship, and thus the popular biopolitical governmentality of nation-states, thinking in terms of friendship is a step towards devaluing the chauvinistic and xenophobic ethnocentrism of "blood and soil" nationalisms, and a move to common living based on a premise of shared dependence and relationality. Or in the powerful words of Rahul Rao (2021: 81):

> We confront the 'same' challenges with very different resource endowments and insurance schemes. Unsurprisingly, much of our contemporary politics takes the form of struggles to redistribute vulnerability. In this regard, the sharing of vulnerability is a worthy aspiration, one that might portend a more egalitarian world in which, as Butler suggests, vulnerability would not be eliminated through its transformation into invulnerability but would furnish the ground on which reciprocal relations of interdependence might be forged.

Conclusions

In this short piece we have speculated an argument about shifting forms of intimacy, and the importance of friendship in understanding contemporary life, particularly in the context of national responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland, the UK, and globally. We contend that in order to build resilient communities and respond adequately to moments of social crises, social policy and government responses must be more attuned to the significance of friendship and the shifting realities of individual lives.

The examples presented here demonstrate that norms, intimacies, living arrangements and forms of care and support in modern Europe are changing significantly and becoming more heterogenous, yet European social policies persistently hold on to the heteronormative "ideal" type of kinship and household. Countries and supra-national institutions like the EU must respond to the lived realities of their citizens, rather than reflect a heteronormative ideology which holds little hope for weathering global crises like those posed by the current pandemic. To do so, there must be a bold and creative re-imagining of the role of various personal, group, national, and trans-national relations beyond the "family." Specifically, we argue for friendship to be more fully acknowledged and engaged with at a policy level.

Robust, fair and just social policy must, in part, focus on addressing social inequalities. Thinking in terms of friendship holds particular potential for combatting social inequalities; it is socially marginalised groups who most often rely on, and resourcefully develop, networks of friendship as a necessity for practical, emotional and psychic survival. We need to learn from this. Given the above, developing policy in the area of friendship will help to strengthen these important and often vital connections and relationships. Understanding "social resilience," in part, through the lens of friendship relations holds fruitful possibility for creating flexible, strong, and enduring post-pandemic communities.

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Biopolitics of COVID-19: Capitalist Continuities and Democratic Openings

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/OAGM9733

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"Biopolitics" has become a popular concept for interpreting the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the term is often used vaguely, as a buzzword, and therefore loses its specificity and relevance. This article systematically explains what the biopolitical lens offers for analyzing and normatively criticizing the politics of the coronavirus. I argue that biopolitics are politics of differentiated vulnerability that are intrinsic to capitalist modernity. The situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is, therefore, less of a state of exception than it might appear; COVID-19 is a continuation and intensification of the capitalist biopolitics of differentiated vulnerability. In order to critically evaluate this situation, the article proposes the concept of "democratic biopolitics" and shows how it can be used, among others, for a queer critique of the differentiated vulnerabilities that are produced by the coronavirus and its capitalist governance. In contrast to widespread interpretations of democratic biopolitics that focus on collective care in communities, this article highlights the role of the state and of the redistribution of political power and economic resources as key for biopolitical democratization.

Keywords*: biopolitics, democratic biopolitics, COVID-19, coronavirus, capitalism, queer politics, redistribution*

We live in very Foucauldian times, as the many articles and essays published on biopolitics and COVID-19 suggest. However, the term biopolitics is often used vaguely or as a buzzword, losing its specificity and relevance. Therefore, in this piece, I first systematically explain what the biopolitical lens offers for analyzing the politics of COVID-19, and then show how the biopolitical vocabulary could be further developed towards normative concepts that would effectively evaluate the biopolitics of the coronavirus. The biopolitical lens elucidates two points: that biopolitics are politics of differentiated vulnerability that are intrinsic to capitalist modernity, and that the coronavirus situation is therefore significantly less of a state of exception than it may seem to be. Rather, COVID-19 is a continuation and intensification of the capitalist biopolitics of differentiated vulnerability. In order to critically evaluate this situation, I propose the concept of "democratic biopolitics" and show how it can be used for a queer critique of the differentiated vulnerabilities that are produced by the coronavirus and its capitalist governance. As opposed to other interpretations of democratic biopolitics, I highlight the role of the state instead of the collective care of the community (Sotiris, 2020; Schaffar, 2020). Populist biopolitics, I argue, blend out such differentiated vulnerabilities by constructing an absolutist biopolitical regime in the name of the people, putting forward either health or individual freedom as unquestionable values that must be protected at all costs.

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1. Biopolitics and Capitalist Modernity

The contemporary conception of "biopolitics" was coined by Michel Foucault. Foucault was concerned with power, that is, with how people are governed, which techniques are used for government, and how these relate to knowledge and science. Biopolitics, he argued, is a certain form of power that emerged in the late 18th and the 19th century, and which still shapes our present. Biopolitics means, according to Foucault, that governments have taken life, or more precisely the population and its health, birth rates, death rates, etc., as their new object. New technologies of power, and new kinds of knowledges, such as medical and statistical knowledge, were developed in order to influence the population. Surveillance and the control of sexuality, as well as the emerging systems of insurance and welfare, are central. Foucault describes this as a historical rupture: Never before has politics been in charge of overseeing biological processes so closely and in such scientific and systematic ways.

Foucault develops the concept of "biopolitics" in *The History of Sexuality I* (1978) and the *Governmentality Lectures* (2007; 2010). In the latter Foucault argues that modern governmentality operates through a specific kind of power over life, which rules both the individual and the collective. On the individual level, biopolitics operates through disciplinary power, which Foucault analyzed in his earlier *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1977). On the collective level, biopolitics consists of the regulation of the population through scientific knowledge, such as demography and statistics. Today, biopolitics is based not only on discipline but also on control as a mode of power, that relies on contemporary digital technologies and neoliberal decentralization, as Deleuze (1992) and contemporary governmentality studies show (Dean, 1999). Moreover, through new medical technology, biopolitical governance and ethics have become significantly more complex and nuanced than in the 19th century, when it centered on the reproduction of the work force and military force. The fact that contemporary biopolitics include possibilities of medical enhancement on a molecular level, such as pre-implementation genetic diagnostics and hormone therapies for trans people, calls for biopolitical ethics and citizenship, especially given their capitalist organization (Preciado, 2013; Rose, 2007). However, these developments merely reinforce the Foucauldian argument that modernity itself is biopolitical.

I would like to emphasize that the concept of biopolitics can provide a more precise analysis of capitalism than Marxism alone may accomplish. This is important because traditionally, Foucault's theory and Marxism are seen as fundamentally contradictory since Foucault often criticized the Marxism of his day. However, Foucault's critique of Marxism should be viewed as an internal critique among fellow critical social theorists rather than as a fundamental critique. *Discipline and Punish* is a refined analysis of the modern disciplinary power that makes capitalist industrialism possible, and biopolitics is Foucault's further development of the analysis of modern governmentality. Capitalist mass production is based on complex biopolitics, as these ensure the reproduction and consumption required for ongoing capitalist production and exploitation. Marxist feminists have shown that the exploitation of reproduction is the foundation for modern sexism and bourgeois patriarchy (Federici,

2014) and Foucault's concept of biopolitics should be read as an additional analysis of such exploitation as rooted in modern power techniques. In sum, we cannot understand capitalism without biopolitics.

Foucault's use of the concept is descriptive, that is, analytical and explanatory, and at the same time normative and critical: he describes the grip biopolitics have on individuals through technologies of power in a way that makes manifest the repression at work in these biopolitical processes. Not only through targeted action to discipline, control, and normalize individuals, but also by "letting die" those who are less relevant in biopolitical considerations. Capitalist accumulation is based on exploitting the workforce and thereby putting workers at risk while ensuring general reproduction. Biopolitics can explain how the "original exploitation" (Marx, 1991: 641–85; Harvey, 2004) of capitalism is not original at all, but an ongoing mode of letting some die while making others live and protecting them. Allowing such violent exploitation by letting some people die, through forcing them to work to death for others, points to the inherent connection between capitalism and racism, as the genesis of capitalism is based on postcolonial exploitation and slavery (Robinson, 2000). According to Foucault (2003: 254ff.), biopolitics is fundamentally intertwined with racism: as soon as the population and its health and hygiene became a policy issue, distinctions were not only made between classes, but also between "races" among national and ethnic lines, and more precisely, between worthy and unworthy lives. Accordingly, Foucault interprets the Third Reich and the Holocaust as radicalizations of this form of power that shapes all of modernity (Foucault, 2003: 259f.).

Thus, biopolitics is fundamentally about unequal treatment, which is inherent to modern capitalism and based on exploitation, sexism, and racism: Biopolitics means making distinctions, exposing some to more risk than others, and offering some more protection than others. Daniele Lorenzini has therefore described biopolitics as a politics of "differential vulnerability" (Lorenzini, 2021)[1]. Biopolitics has always been about protecting some and exposing others to vulnerability that can, in the most extreme cases, result in death. Examples for this differentiated vulnerability in the current COVID-19 situation are plentiful: think of different working conditions between the home office class and low-income workers in the meat and plant picking industries that saw massive coronavirus outbreaks in Germany, for example, or the situation of refugees in camps. Another important example of differentiated vulnerability has been provided by the heteronormative regulations that allow easing the strict contact regulations only for heteronormative lifeforms, and not for queer relations. For example, in Germany, contact restrictions were eased during Christmas in a way that privileged heteronormative families and excluded queer sociality (Schubert, 2020).

[1] I use the term "differentiated" instead of "differential" vulnerability to indicate that differences are actively produced through biopolitics. The term "differential vulnerability" is also used in medical literature, where it risks essentializing social differences by ignoring their biopolitical production.

2. Is COVID-19 a State of Exception?

There has been a lot of talk about the coronavirus situation as exceptional, that is, as a "state of exception." Of course, the situation is exceptional because the state intervenes differently, with restrictions in areas of life that are normally much less regulated. However, I refrain from saying that it intervenes more extensively because I believe we are often caught in a liberal mode of thinking, which does not allow us to see to what degree our routine way of life is thoroughly regulated by politics. For example, a "free" and "unregulated" market is, in fact, the result of a specific regulatory framework that creates the extreme inequality that people often view as a given. In order to deal with the coronavirus, the state intervenes differently, then, but not necessarily to a greater extent.

With Foucault in mind, one would say: What happens is not exceptional but expectable; we see contemporary repetitions and syntheses of old biopolitical forms, such as discipline, individualization of responsibility, security technologies based on statistical and medical knowledge. Philipp Sarasin (2020) reminds us that there is no singular concept of biopolitics in Foucault's work, but rather that Foucault offers a careful differentiation of distinct modes of power employed as responses to an epidemic, all of which are used during the coronavirus crisis. That nothing has changed fundamentally is affirmed by other sociological analysts: Andreas Reckwitz (2020) describes the situation as typical risk politics and Armin Nassehi (2020), following a more system-theoretic idiom, points to the fact that all functional systems, such as law, politics, and economy, play their routine roles. So we are witnessing a state of exception rather in a directly phenomenal sense, as one experiences it as an exception; yet very little has changed fundamentally, in terms of social and political systems, discourses, or power mechanisms.

Arguing that the situation is not fundamentally exceptional entails, furthermore, that our experiences of exceptionality in our concrete lives are highly differentiated according to our social position. That nothing has changed fundamentally means that the lives of many vulnerable people changed dramatically for the worse, while well-off people manage relatively well in the pandemic. The current situation may be understood, then, as the non-exceptional continuation of the exploitation mechanisms of biopolitical capitalism on the one hand, and heteronormativity on the other, as heteronormative lockdown measures hit queer people particularly hard. The contact restrictions were tailored to heteronormative lifestyles in many countries without taking queer forms of sociality into account (Trott, 2020).

Macro-economically, the same combination of phenomenal exception and structural continuity is evident: While the Covid situation seems to lead governments to overcome the anti-Keynesian anti-deficit spending mode of neoliberal austerity by enormous financial aid programs both in Europe and in the U.S., neoliberal financialization continues to grow (Šumonja, 2021). The discrepancy between rich and poor has been further boosted while stock markets skyrocketed (Gebeloff, 2021). However, governments do not make any earnest attempts to finance the corona-deficit by redistributing wealth, for example through significant wealth taxation of the richest 10 percent. If no broader

redistribution scheme is put into place, there will be a fallback to severe austerity measures that will prevent public investments and further dismantle the welfare state. Alongside injustice and further exploitation that such austerity brings, it is also likely to strengthen heteronormative and traditionnalist family politics as a functional alternative to welfare organized reproduction. Furthermore, lockdown procedures often privilege the economy: in the case of Germany, for example, hardly any regulation has been introduced for workplaces, while the private sphere, the cultural sector, and the food service sector are severely regulated and restricted. Not only does this cause psychological burdens, but it may also lead to the destruction of urban infrastructures, such as bars and nightclubs. Together with austerity measures that might force people from these sectors to work in other domains, these developments severely endanger queer cultural and subcultural spaces.

3. Democratic and Populist Biopolitics[2]

The urgent question is, then, what options we have, and what follows from biopolitical theory, except for this dispiriting analysis of the perpetuation of power structures. Along with other scholars, I suggest introducing a normative term, "democratic biopolitics," in order to critically evaluate the politics of COVID-19. Of course, this does not provide concrete steps to be taken, but rather a theoretical contribution to normativity in biopolitical theory, and it offers a reflection of the role of the state and civil society in the pandemic. In contrast to the widespread understanding of the term, I do not view democratic biopolitics as contradictory to the state but show that they are a matter of pluralist deliberation and state power.

Traditional analyses of biopolitics focus on state and medical institutions and how they govern the behavior of individuals and societies. These analyses carve out the (potentially) repressive effects of such biopower on individuals and communities and focus on the long-term development of discourses, technologies of power, and modes of subjectification. Such biopolitical analyses are structured "top-down" and have no conceptual place for agency, freedom, and democratic decision-making. This focus of biopolitical theory on state institutions and repressive power is, however, only a side-effect of Foucault's central contribution to critical social analysis, namely, to show that repressive power works *within* subjects, as they are constituted by power in the process of subjectification. Arguably, this framework of subjectification refrains from clarifying how agency, freedom, resistance, and emancipation can be conceptualized – as a result, this apparent lack of clarity is one of the most widely discussed questions in Foucault scholarship (Lemke, 2019; Schubert, 2020b).

In order to counterbalance the focus on repressive power within biopolitical theory, recent years have seen attempts to conceptualize "democratic biopolitics" (Prozorov, 2019) which accounts for the agency of citizens and activists, and their active participation in biopolitics. This usage of democratic biopolitics is both analytical – following Foucault's insight that since power comes from below, it is necessary to take into account the manifold participants in biopolitical processes – and normative:

[2] Parts of this section have been previously published in Schubert 2020a.

participation, that is political and ethical deliberation of biopolitical developments, is something to be valued and supported. I have developed such a concept of democratic biopolitics in my discussion of HIV-Pre-Exposition-Prophylaxis (PrEP) and I have shown that PrEP is not (only) a strategy of big pharma to make money, but actively desired by and developed with the gay community (Schubert, 2019). PrEP is part of an ethical re-negotiation of sex in the gay community and can help to destigmatize sex and fight homonormativity. The democratic biopolitics of PrEP include activists' work to demand that PrEP is covered by public healthcare systems, which was successfully completed in Western Europe in 2019, with Spain and Germany as the last countries to join (Schubert, 2021). In Central and Eastern Europe, access to PrEP is still a matter of economic privilege as it is not covered by public insurances. Because of the complex involvement of the affected community and the emancipatory effect this biotechnology has on gay lives, PrEP provides an ideal case study for the concept of democratic biopolitics.

Regarding COVID-19, a discussion of the potential of democratic biopolitics quickly emerged, especially in reaction to Agamben's (2020) interpretation of coronavirus politics as complete repression. Along similar lines to my analysis of the ethical deliberations of sexual practices in the gay community, Sotiris (2020) imagines collective care in a non-coercive way in which practices like social distancing are deliberated democratically, thus not only based on "the authority of experts" but on a "democratization of knowledges." Sotiris gives HIV politics and the knowledge production of ACT-UP as an example of such democratization of knowledge.

However, such an analysis of democratic biopolitics fails to grasp what is remarkable about the coronavirus situation. For the first time, biopolitical considerations became a leading issue in political debates. Due to homophobia, HIV was not a concern of mainstream politics for a long time, but othered – and this is fundamentally different in the case of COVID-19 (Schubert, 2021)[3]. That biopolitics entered mainstream political deliberation, rather than community-based coping strategies, should be interpreted as the democratic aspect of coronavirus politics. It goes along with a shift in the temporality under focus in the biopolitical analysis: while it traditionally focuses on tracing the historical genealogy of the development of power and knowledge, in this case, the analysis of biopolitics as differentiated vulnerability in capitalism focuses on the present. While framed by such biopolitical power structures, democratic biopolitics is a matter of deciding between present alternatives. This possibility to politically select between alternatives is a key aspect of the democratic biopolitics of COVID-19. And such democratic biopolitics are a matter of state power. This is a clear difference from Sotiris' use of the term "democratic biopolitics," which positions democratic biopolitics in contrast to state power.

[3] See Schaffar (2020) for a more nuanced comparison of HIV and COVID biopolitics, which nevertheless shares the focus on solidarity in communities rather than on a state level that I deem insufficient for analyzing the democratic biopolitics of COVID-19.

To define the concept of democratic biopolitics more precisely, and to clarify that democratic biopolitics cannot be described through the binary between community ethics and the state, I suggested a contrasting term (Schubert, 2020a): populist biopolitics, a form of decay of democratic biopolitics, which points to the danger that can arise from the unmediated and grassroots-based norm-setting that Sotiris understood by the term democratic biopolitics.

Both concepts – traditional biopolitics focusing on the repressive state, and democratic biopolitics focusing on the emancipatory agency of activists and the community – fail to account for a new form of biopolitical normalization and repression that occurs in the pandemic and that should be termed "populist biopolitics." Just as populism is a degeneration of democracy, populist biopolitics is a degeneration of democratic biopolitics. It is a repressive and paternalistic form of democratic biopolitics, i.e. when members of the community and not the state engage in biopolitics that limits freedom and normalizes others. Populist biopolitics occurs both online and offline when members of the community shame each other for supposedly irrational and non-solidary behavior, such as, for example, leaving the house or meeting with friends, encapsulated in #staythefuckathome. Populist biopolitics also occurs in more formal political discourse, when the state is pressured to enact stricter regulations on the population.

The populist biopolitics of the coronavirus allows us to sharpen the recent concept of democratic biopolitics when put into relation with the notions of populism and democracy as discussed in political theory. Following Müller (2016), populists claim to represent the true interests of the people by monopolizing moral truth and thus rejecting pluralism. Populist biopolitics in times of the coronavirus shares these elements: We are called to do the only morally correct thing in order to protect other people, while alternative political considerations, such as the differentiated vulnerabilities outlined above, are excluded from deliberation. This framing does not allow for pluralist deliberation, but rather assumes the role of speaking the moral and political truth in the name of the people.

Populist biopolitics may also occur in an opposite form: the denial of the pandemic and the rejection of all social distancing and lockdown measures. Such anti-coronavirus movements formed quickly in Germany, bringing together a wide spectrum of conspiracy theorists and right-wing populists, fueled by widespread esoteric beliefs (Oltermann, 2021). Here, the universal morality in the name of the "real people" is not directed towards protection from the coronavirus itself, but from the restrictions against the coronavirus. Such populist biopolitics are framed as a defense of democracy that is, according to this position, threatened by coronavirus regulations.

I call both of these opposite extremes "populist biopolitics" because they both take one biopolitical solution as absolute, negating the differentiated vulnerability that has always been the core of capitalist biopolitics. I want to be very clear that pointing out this formal similarity is not meant as equating these two political extremes. I am well aware that restrictive coronavirus politics with the

aim of protecting vulnerable members of society is a rather leftist agenda, while coronavirus denial is fueled by right-wing conspiracy theories, and relatively lax measures are demanded mostly by people with economic interests.

Calling both extremes "populist biopolitics" helps to further define democratic biopolitics: as biopolitics is politics of differentiated vulnerability, democratic biopolitics entail the democratic negotiation and deliberation of these differentiated vulnerabilities. Differentiated vulnerabilities stem from the multiplicity of different social positions and their respective patterns of vulnerability. Such social multiplicity entails a wide range of interests, identities, and values. Thus, democratic biopolitics relies on a pluralist understanding of the political, in contrast to the absolutist populist biopolitics, which imagines a unified, coherent, and real interest of the people. Now, such negotiation of differentiated vulnerabilities is already taking place in coronavirus politics. For example, COVID-19-related class discrepancies between working-class people who keep the supply chains running, and the home office class, the unequal distribution of care work between men and women, or the different impact of lockdown measures on rich people who own spacious houses and poor people who rent tiny flats were widely debated in mainstream media. That differentiated vulnerability is an explicit part of public debates on coronavirus politics is already remarkable since the differentiated vulnerabilities that form part of biopolitics were rarely debated in mainstream media outlets, but usually take place within the bubbles of critical theoretical debates.

Democracy, in contrast to populism, is essentially pluralist[4]. This pluralism must be ensured by constitutional law and by a lively public debate, that includes a wide plurality of voices – politicians, epidemiologists and other experts; for example, social scientists, and members of civil society, among others. Democratic politics need to weigh different policy aims, such as preventing the collapse of the health care system while reducing the impact on the economy, and it needs to make decisions that lead to differentiated vulnerabilities.

The concept of democratic biopolitics is also normative and critical: While it is true that democratic biopolitics are at play during the coronavirus crisis, these politics, as shown, lead to a continuation and reinforcement of existing structures of inequality. In order to render these biopolitics more democratic, inequality must be criticized and equality demanded. Democratic biopolitics understood normatively, consists of the critical analysis of differentiated vulnerabilities with the aim of easing the inequalities through political measures. The key would be to avoid regulations that reinforce existing structures of discrimination, as often happened during the coronavirus pandemic. For example, making exceptions from otherwise strict limitations of social contacts only for those who live in classical, hetero- and homonormative relationships, as was done during Christmas 2020 in Germany,

[4] I follow such a liberal definition of democracy in contrast to populism because this can capture the difference between absolutist (populist) and pluralist (democratic) biopolitics. This does not rule out the possibility of a leftist populism that is compatible with pluralism and democracy because it does not rely on a given notion of "the good of the people," but constantly and pluralistically re-constitutes this notion through social critique (Kempf, 2020).

reinforces heteronormativity and ignores the differentiated vulnerability of queer persons. Such politics can take a direct populist form, as in the claim that the general interest is to privilege straight lifestyles and that queers need to restrict themselves in the name of the greater good of the people. A critical analysis of the differentiated vulnerabilities is also required regarding the regulations of the economic sphere, which tend to put workers at risk in order to ensure profits, for example through insufficient safety measures (Cauwer and Christiaens, 2020), while systematically destroying social reproduction through very strict regulations of the private sphere. The distribution of the burdens of restrictions among social groups and social systems is a matter of biopolitical power and representation, and it is by no means without alternatives that more severe restrictions are enforced on the private sphere rather than on the economy.

Specific guidelines for what should be done and which regulations should be put in place cannot of course offered in a theoretical text. However, the biopolitical theory demonstrates the extent to which capitalism and biopolitics are intrinsically connected, and that biopolitics is a matter of differentiated vulnerabilities. That the related inequalities and discriminations are reinforced during the coronavirus pandemic is primarily a matter of structural biases in the political representation, that privileges the interests of the rich, straight, upper-class. Democratization means first and foremost better access to and representation of weaker voices that are not taken into account in democratic deliberations. This would lead to the redistribution of wealth and the realignment of the relations between restrictions in the economic and private sphere.

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Narcophobia Meets Queerphobia: Criminalisation, Harm Reduction and Responsibility in Polish Drug Policies

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/SPUM9550

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In 2019, Sebastian Kaleta, a Polish parliamentarian associated with the ruling Law and Justice party, published a report denigrating Warsaw-based organisations working in the field of LGBT rights and harm reduction. The report allegedly shows what these organisations actually spend taxpayers' money on.[1] In Kaleta's view, under the guise of working in the field of drug dependency and combating HIV/AIDS, the NGOs in fact "affirm" the use of psychoactive substances and "promote" non-heteronormative sexual behaviours. The distribution of condoms, education on how to use psychoactive substances in a safer way, de-stigmatisation of non-heteronormative sexual practices (e.g., chemsex), do, according to the author of the report, lead to the dissemination of "harmful ideologies," with so-called LGBT and gender ideologies at the forefront. The data used to create the report was public information published on the websites and social media networks of such organisations as Social Education Foundation (FES), which works in sex education and STIs prevention; Social Drug Policy Initiative (SIN), which organises screening tests of psychoactive substances and advocates for changing the public perception of drugs and drug laws in Poland; Sex Work Poland, which is an informal initiative of sex workers and allies advocating for sex workers' rights; Social Policy Foundation, PREKURSOR, a harm reduction organisation; and Social AIDS Committee (SKA) – HIV/AIDS service provider. Nevertheless, the report was presented by the pro-government press as a document revealing the "hidden truth" and the "real face" of NGOs. What the document did was reinforce a logic already present in the Polish drug policy and the dominant way of thinking about drug use: only abstinence can be considered as the *right* state policy. Even if the state officially implements harm reduction programmes, measures that minimise harm in the field of non-heteronormative sexual practices, psychoactive substance use or sex work cannot be associated with "social deviance." According to this logic, citizens should not engage in risky behaviour, and if they do, all responsibility falls onto them. One of my research participants, who works with people who inject drugs, describes this logic by comparing the dominant narrative on drugs to the popular attitude towards sexuality expressed by policymakers:

> I'm thinking of this kind of negation that people use..., not accepting the fact that people use [drugs – author's note] and have sex. It's such wishful thinking that

[1] It was not the first such voice by a state authority. More on harm reduction debates in Poland: Owczarzak, 2007, Struzik, 2021, Dziuban *et al.* 2021.

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> everyone will stop using [drugs – author's note] and they won't use [drugs – author's note] any longer. They won't have unprotected sex – it can be compared to that. It's nowhere near what most people do. This model is so drug-free and also it often negates pharmacology, or rather pharmacological support for treatment, to recover from addiction. The assumption here is that help and support are provided to those who choose abstinence, and those who choose to use... it doesn't really matter what happens to them, i.e. not only whether they have [drug-induced – author's note] collapse, but also whether they become infected with HIV or HCV.

Following various public discussions about illegal drugs, I have been wondering what the Polish drug wars bring to the common understanding of drug addiction. How do they produce, shift, reinforce or reject the meanings of such notions as responsibility, risk or vulnerability? How are drugs, drug use and drug users talked about and thought about in a society governed by restrictive drug laws, in a narcophobic society where harm reduction activities are still considered "morally controversial" (Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014)? To understand and unravel the "Polish drug wars" and their impact on the everyday functioning of harm reduction programmes, one has to look at the ways in which drugs, drug use and addiction are constructed in public discourse. Jarret Zigon (2019) writes about a certain fantasy world produced by the drug wars globally, a world that associates drugs with notions of addiction and addicts, but also with transgression, crime, and immorality. In order to fit into this fantasy, drug users, are socially constructed as internal enemies, as a threat, or as an enslaved population. Punishment, interestingly, can also be accompanied by concern. A person who uses psychoactive substances may, under certain circumstances, acquire the status of a "victim" of addiction who needs to be cared for, who needs to be helped to break free from drug use. Researchers refer to this strange yet pervasive combination of punishment and care as carceral care (Abbasi, 2020), which manifests itself not only at the level of discourse-fantasy worlds, but also at the level of policies and their concrete programs and solutions, and even more importantly, at the level of users' experiences. The wars on drugs across the globe share similar tropes, yet they take on different faces locally. These wars produce certain social images of what psychoactive substance use looks like, fabricating the subjectivities of drug users, and entangling them into the notions of vulnerability, risk, or responsibility.

Extensive scholarship on the harm reduction approach in different contexts indicates how these programmes often implement a logic that enforces the accountability of drug users who, through the implementation of successive tasks, are supposed to be able to re-shape their subjectivity – as responsible, rational, and productive citizens (and thus as useful to the state) (Moore, 2008; O'Malley and Valverde, 2004; Race, 2017). Locally, however, this logic can be shaped by a range of factors that alter the meanings attributed to harm reduction. My research shows how the criminalisation of the possession of psychoactive substances, on the one hand, and the abstinence-based model, on the other, have formed thinking about harm reduction in Poland as a solution that does not so much eliminate the problem but rather exacerbates it, as a solution that "absolves users of responsibility."

Importantly, this particular narrative of harm reduction did not emerge in a social vacuum. The first harm reduction programmes in Poland were implemented in the 1990s, a period of rapid and dynamic political and economic transformation. The then ongoing transition to democracy and a neoliberal economy fabricated citizens primarily in terms of their economic utility and usefulness in sustaining a vision of a healthy, productive, and disciplined nation (Dunn, 2015). Echoes of such a vision could be heard during parliamentary discussions on the need for stricter drug laws at the end of the 1990s. During one session of the Polish parliament MP Henryk Kisielewski, in favour of criminalising the possession of psychoactive substances, said:

> And since we talk so much in this Chamber from time to time about our belonging to the leading part of Europe, in which we want to take the position of subject, and not of object, not of a second-class state, let us enter it [the European Union – author's note] as a strong nation, with a strong identity and moral value, let us be a healthy, strong and stable, and not a contaminated [by drug use – author's note] component of this newly shaping Europe[2].

In addition, Catholic ideology was also strongly mobilised during this period – the Roman Catholic Church became an important political player, imposing ideas of abstinence and sobriety and conservative values. According to this vision, a responsible individual is one who demonstrates a strong will and moral purity and is able to reject pleasurable, yet "deviant," practices (Keinz, 2011). Parallel to the activities in the drug field, harm reduction activities also developed in the field of non-heteronormative sexuality and demanded the recognition of the rights of this group. The arguments put forward by opponents of a more liberal approach in these two areas (sometimes called "permissivism" in the media) were similar and reinforced each other.

Polish drug laws became more restrictive in the late 1990s. Political discussions at the time revealed ambivalent voices: criminalisation, although presented as a legitimate trend in drug policy, was to some extent resisted by some policymakers who saw opportunities for solving the "drug problem" in the need to introduce treatment and harm reduction programmes rather than in punishing people who use drugs (Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014; 2016). Importantly, however, approaches to psychoactive substance use since the 1980s have been dominated by the belief that total abstinence is the only valid solution to the drug problem. This model was pursued for years by the most influential organisation working in the drug field – MONAR (Youth Movement Against Drug Addiction). Abstinence and total rejection of psychoactive substances – ideas implemented in numerous stationary facilities across the country with a clear daily regime and community control – were supposed to teach people who use drugs responsibility for their own lives and give them the opportunity to demonstrate a strong will (Kotański, 1984; Dziuban *et al.*, 2021). Thus, they were part of the carceral care approach: they offered care to people who use drugs, at the same time disciplining them and

[2] The verbatim transcript of the sitting of 19.03.1997 is available here: bs.sejm.gov.pl

not accepting any form of rule transgression on their part (for some time, for example, relapse meant that MONAR patients could not be re-admitted to the facility again). Criminalisation of drug possession (now taken for granted by most politicians), introduced gradually since 1997, complemented the drug-free model. Over time, in the eyes of politicians, criminalisation started to be seen as a way to protect young people from the "massive and increasingly visible degradation" of drug use, and users themselves from death.[3] New legal regulations, which were introduced just before and after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, established a new figure in the social imagery of drugs, the drug user, previously defined in terms of a disease, who now became a criminal. Harm reduction, which was then in its infancy, did not fully fit into the emerging model of managing addicted bodies – it was perceived by policymakers rather as a tool for "deepening addiction" and weakening the chances of recovery (Dziuban *et al.*, 2021). The slowly developing harm minimisation programmes (needle and syringe exchange programmes, substitution therapy, drop-ins) are only partially responsive to the needs of users (Bartnik and Kwiatkowska, 2015). The support offered in harm reduction programmes is often conditional – substitution programmes, for example, are based on a high-threshold model and a lack of trust in drug users. Patients are not allowed to use any psychoactive substances during their treatment, they are also subjected to unannounced urine tests for the presence of these substances, and for the first 6 months of treatment they must attend the treatment centre every day to collect methadone. This last rule can be relieved after six months of treatment, provided that the patient has not violated any of the rules of the facility. One interviewee described the support model for people with drug addiction as follows:

> This is part of such a systemic destruction of this population, which has been going on for decades. This is a systemic extermination of addicts who do not want to take advantage of the abstinence offer, i.e. they continue to use and in their use they simply take this crap [poor quality drugs – author's note] and not the other; some switch to drinking. They do not stay in treatment because they drop out of treatment, but not because they want to drop out themselves, but because they get kicked out of treatment for taking substances.

People with drug dependency I interviewed during my research pointed out, for example, that substitution is still not available on prescription; in order to receive it, one has to join one of the substitution programmes located in one of the largest cities in Poland. Their functioning, however, is out of touch with the needs of patients, forcing them to travel frequently and to be regularly monitored by doctors. Quite recently, the dominant narcophobic narrative has been reinforced by the emergence of new psychoactive substances (so-called "legal highs"; in Polish *dopalacze*) on the drug market and has strengthened criminalising and punitive tendencies.

[3] In this context, the words "Better children in prison than in a cemetery" were spoken by the liberal politician Barbara Labuda, who expressed her support for the introduction of restrictive anti-drug laws. For a discussion of this approach see: Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014.

Significantly, in contemporary political discourse, narcophobia and aversion to harm reduction meets queerphobia expressed in state actions. In recent years, we have observed a clear shift in the formation of homophobic public discourse in Poland. Representatives of the state often resort to homophobic arguments in order to mobilise such concepts as nation, healthy and functioning society and normality, and to use the concepts to manage society (Korolczuk, 2020). This shift is important because it reveals new dynamics in the relationship between the state and the citizen. A citizen who does not fit into the vision based on heteronormativity and productivity/usefulness becomes disposable for the state (Wang, 2018). Thus, there is no need to invest in harm reduction programmes.

In his report mentioned at the beginning of this text, Kaleta attacked above all those activities that go beyond the usual model of helping people who use drugs, the LGBTQ community and sex workers. What the report criticised were approaches that reject seeing these groups only in terms of their vulnerabilities, that consider the agency of individuals and groups and avoid disciplining them for transgressing socially accepted norms. In the Polish drug wars, responsibility is linked to abstinence; a responsible user is someone who stops taking drugs, accepting the logic reproduced by the state policy. Given the current political climate, the possibility of a shift in thinking about drug use, responsibility and users' subjectivity, remains unclear. However, campaigns denigrating the social action of organisations, implemented by those in power, encourage social mobilisation from below, leaving hope for new and more just drug policies.

This text is based on research conducted within the project CrimScapes: Navigating Citizenship through European Landscapes of Criminalisation, supported by a New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Co-operation in Europe (NORFACE), Democratic Governance in a Turbulent Age (Governance) Joint Research Program, project no. 462-19-020.

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INTERVIEW

"AIDES is an organization of seroconcerned people": An Interview with Dr Bruno Spire[1]

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/BHJQ2301

Rafał Majka: AIDES was founded several decades ago, in 1984. Throughout the years, it has gained a lot of experience and knowledge and has always been eager to share. The founder of AIDES, Daniel Defert, sought to create "a place of reflection, solidarity and transformation." How have the ideas been practiced by AIDES?

Bruno Spire: Solidarity came first. The first actions were performed under the umbrella of solidarity. People were very shocked by the new epidemic in the 1980s and everybody in AIDES knew someone who got infected or was personally confronted with HIV. A lot of people were diagnosed with HIV, and nobody knew what to do, so there was a need of support in a time when families were excluding people with HIV. Some people had to conceal they were gay, as homosexuality was stigmatized in many communities. People were alone and solidarity was what was needed. It was practiced as self-support groups, people informing each other about the disease and sharing ideas on how to resist in the absence of any treatment. Then a couple of years later, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, there was a big schism in AIDES. Some members of AIDES who were professionals thought that the response to the HIV/AIDS crisis needs to be professionalized so that AIDES should become a space for doctors and social assistants, but it was against the idea of Daniel Defert who was defending the model of community-based activities. It was not that all members had to be volunteers; volunteering was not enough. AIDES had to be able to have staff, but the staff should be anchored in the community. We didn't want to be like a private organization hiring doctors and nurses. We wanted to be a community-based organization where people using their life experience were able to be involved in the response. And so there was a split. Those who wanted to have a type of service organization, and who are now in a group called Group SOS, formed of ARCAT-SIDA and it grew to include other services organization, but politically they didn't wield any power. They were just interested in providing services, and they are doing a really good job, but it's not the project of Daniel Defert. And then the social transformation… The first social transformation was that the rights of patients were recognized, the rights of all patients, no matter their serostatus. Now when people go to hospital, they must be fully informed by doctors. This is a big change compared to the past, thanks to the HIV crisis and its related activism.

[1] The interview is part of Rafał Majka's research project Pre-exposure Prophylaxis and MSM: Researching the French Experience, which was carried out in 2021 in Marseille, Nice and Paris thanks to the BGF French Government Scholarship. The interview was conducted on the 27th of June, 2021, in Marseille.

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Another change was the participation of patients' representatives in all the hospital boards where decisions are taken. It's called "health democracy" and that's also a transformation that came from the HIV fight. AIDES was instrumental here. Patients' organizations act like trade unions. We think that we are the trade unions of patients. That's the role of associations – to defend the rights of patients in the health system. We are now able to sit at the table and it's not possible to make big decisions without any patients' representatives. That's in the law and it was voted in 2002 on the rights of patients. It's not only for HIV, but it was HIV patients who conducted this fight. And in more recent times there was also a big transformation in prevention which made it possible to do lay testing by people who are not doctors or nurses. It happened during my presidency [2007-2015]. AIDES was not expected to do any HIV testing. It had to be done in healthcare institutions with doctors, but we were able to demonstrate through research that this procedure of testing, when it's done by lay people, is efficient, even more efficient because it attracts people who don't want to go to conventional testing centres. We don't steal the patients of regular doctors. We attract other people that would not go anywhere if there weren't any community centres. They come to us because they feel more confident around people from their communities, especially gays who are not very educated and take a lot of risk. They prefer to be tested at a community organization where there's no moralizing like "oh, it's bad that you're not using condom." And we managed to get the right to do the testing.

Another example of a social transformation was the right of drug users to have a substitution therapy and needle and syringe programs. Thanks to the AIDES fight, drug users were recognized by the society as people who need care and not only prison. This fight is not over yet because people who use drugs are still negatively viewed. There is still a lot of stigma against drug use, but at least people now think that those who use drugs need care. Harm reduction did not exist at the beginning when Daniel Defert created AIDES, and AIDES started the concept of harm reduction with progressive doctors and addiction specialists. We made an alliance with the doctors to push the recognition of harm reduction as the national policy for drug users and now it's in the law. Harm reduction was recognized in the public health law in 2004, but there were some reservations. For example, we had to convince the authorities that safe injection facilities and drug education, which we have been doing in AIDES programs, are good regulations. We had to do an experiment to show that when you help drug users to inject safely, it has a positive impact on their health. We then set up a research program showing the positive outcomes of drug education by peers. Drug users would inject substances in the AIDES facilities, of course they had to bring their own drugs (we don't provide), and when they were making a mistake, they were stopped and educated how to inject properly and safely. There are several courses like this and we did interview the participants 6 months and 12 months after the course, and we could show that they were much more empowered not to make any mistakes. Also, we were able to show that people who inject drugs in harm reduction facilities are at a much smaller risk of developing infections around the places on their bodies where they inject. And the law changed and now it's possible to do these education programs.

The other social transformation was of course PrEP and sexual risk reduction. It was a big fight and took a lot of years. Other community organizations and a number of doctors were against AIDES in this area and in the beginning we were alone to say U=U [Undetectable=Untransmittable]. We didn't say U=U because it wasn't this slogan at the time. We used "treatment as prevention" (TasP), but for a lot of people it was very controversial – for medical doctors and also for ACT UP Paris, which is an activist organization that has been fighting a lot for the rights to access to the treatment, but in prevention they were like condom Talibans with a mindset like "if you don't use a condom, you're a criminal, you should be excluded from the gay sauna, from the gay darkroom." My sense is that it was a strategic mistake for them, because, just like us, they are trade unions of people, they should represent people who have problems with condoms and not fight them. It's like a workers' trade union would say to the members: you are so lazy, you should work 7 days on 7 and give up your holidays to save the company. But we were able to push the researchers to do PrEP experiments, and we helped them to do the research. AIDES was involved in the IperGay study which proved the positive effect of intermittent PrEP and the government was finally convinced that PrEP should be authorized and fully reimbursed. France was the first country in Europe to reimburse PrEP.

R: It's a very big success for a social movement…

B: Yes, a big success. It also opened the way to a model of the sexual health centre. Before the implementation of PrEP there was almost no sexual health-oriented place except one in Paris called 190, which was a small centre, and there were no guidelines for sexual health at the national level. Now you have all the doctors claiming that they want to develop sexual health clinics in which gay people or sex workers can do tests for STIs. Doctors want to do PrEP and counselling programs, but back in time they were going on with the condom mantra. Thanks to the IperGay study, it became possible to establish the sexual health centre model and to attract numbers of people to such places where they are offered STI check-ups, counselling and proctology, all in one place. In the PrEP study, half of the participants got PrEP, the other got the placebo. Yet, when people got involved in the trial, they didn't want to give up because they were happy to visit these facilities, they needed them. When you do use condoms, nobody checks your STIs, and you can get STIs even when you are wearing a condom, because a condom is usually for anal or vaginal sex, but not for all sex. In the studies it is estimated that less than 5% of people use condoms for oral sex, and it's this way you get most of STIs. Now AIDES contributes to the new strategy of sexual health which is run by the government. However, everybody tends to forget what they were saying before in the matter…

R: The name of the organization takes a plural form. Again, it was the idea of Daniel Defert to put the name in the plural so that different kinds of help AIDES seeks to provide are emphasized. What kinds of help do you provide?

B: As a social movement, the pillar of our help is collective empowerment, I would say. It's the possibility to put people together, use their personal experience and make it a collective experience. When

they are brought together, people realize that everyone has a different experience. There was a situation that will stay with me forever. I was animating one of the first, we call it, therapeutic groups. It was at the beginning of the antiretroviral therapy era and there were still people with HIV that didn't want to go to treatments because they feared side effects, a bit like people that don't want to be vaccinated today. And so, we were putting up groups for weekends, two days, where people were individually speaking about how they deal with treatment. They spoke about the fear of treatment, they exchanged information, they shared tips how to be adherent. In those days treatments were very complex. You had to take some pills with food, other pills without food, it was quite complicated. And there was this one guy in this group, weighing maybe 40 kilos, completely skinny with almost no more CD4s [lymphocytes that help to fight infection] and he was saying: *I'm of German origin*, *I don't need any treatment, I don't want to take pills, treatments will kill me, it's horrible, I don't want them, my doctor tries to convince me and I will never accept these treatments coming from a pharmaceutical company that just wants to make profits*. He stays two days with us listening to the experiences of other participants, and at the end of the weekend he says: *OK, I'm going to see my doctor tomorrow and tell him that it's OK for me to start the treatment but only with Efavirenz*, and the next day he went to his doctor and said he wanted this particular drug. The doctor was so happy that he even didn't bargain to find another drug. I met this guy one year later, and he recovered completely from most of his problems, and he was very happy with this treatment. And the doctor was also very happy because it was this collective help that was able to convince the patient. The collective experience and the validation of knowledge through peers. And I think that the basic thing in AIDES is the collective ways of helping.

In the past we experimented with some services like hiring social workers, renting apartments for the social workers to work, but it didn't turn out right. It's important but it's not the rule of AIDES to do this. There are several other institutions which can do that. We hired social workers and we had numbers of people coming not interested in any social transformation, seeking help only for themselves, queuing in lines to see the social workers of AIDES just because their social workers didn't do their work properly. We decided to stop this kind of help. Now there are many things that we are considering to do in the future that might need that infrastructure. For instance, for illegal migrants who come to France and don't have any place to go, who live with HIV. We could imagine such social services, but they would have to be performed by non-social workers who have this experience of arriving in France with a very precarious status. They could help the new ones who arrive to find a job, to organize documents to get a legal stay in France and to welcome them in apartments that could be rented by AIDES. That could be a possibility. That could be done in the future. It's not in the agenda yet, but it's there in the thinking. It's more the colour of AIDES to do activities with people who have knowledge of life than with people who have just university knowledge or a diploma.

R: With peers from inside the community rather than people from outside the community.

B: When you were visiting our Spot Marshall in Nice or Spot Longchamps in Marseille, you saw that we also have doctors, but the important thing is that doctors do not have the power, the power is the lay people. The board of AIDES is elected by the volunteers, not by the employees of AIDES. The doctors are employees and they, of course, have to share the values of AIDES – we don't want any racist or homophobic doctors, but we want the doctors to stay "technical" like the AIDES accountants who do all the bureaucracy. We cannot do our 45 million Euro yearly budget with lay people, it's too technical. It's the same with medicine. We are not against "technical" people, but we think the power has to come from lay people, the inspiration has to come from lay people.

R: You have also organized the space in your spots in a way that makes the patient feel close to the sexual health advisor – the doctor sits not behind the desk but next to the patient, so it's not like a formal meeting with an authority figure but rather a chat with a peer.

B: All the things that make up the relationship between the provider and the patient are changed when you compare it with the conventional hospital setting. The principle in AIDES is that if you are helped, you should consider becoming a member of AIDES, getting involved in the activities for the community. The first people who were tested through lay testing would say that it was fantastic what we were doing, and we would say to them: *yes, it's fantastic, please, join the staff and do it also for the community*, and some did join and are doing community work. We have to mobilize people so that there is not this divide between users and those who have the knowledge, even the lay knowledge. Now and then there are some tensions in AIDES because sometimes lay people who do lay testing behave a bit like doctors, conventional doctors, and I think it's a danger. You can't think that you know things and the other person doesn't know anything. You have to be on the same level, equality attitude. It's part of our job in AIDES to attract the public we target so that they could become members as well.

R: You can also learn a lot from the people coming to your spots because they share their own intimate socio-cultural experiences.

B: Yes, but not only learn. The learning part is also there because people usually arrive with what they have heard and share. However, it is important to give them the idea that they could also volunteer in AIDES. To be a volunteer means that you have been affected by HIV, whatever that may be – your friend has got infected or you need to get tested, or you need to take PrEP, so you are legitimate to be a member. It's important to show that AIDES is open, that we need more people.

R: Why is it important for social organizations to adopt the community-based focus?

B: The founder of AIDES, Daniel Defert, from the beginning wanted AIDES to be a community-based organization, which works with, and not a service organization, which works for. Working with means that you need to recognize the knowledge acquired by experience and not be fully led by the knowledge acquired by training. There are four pillars of community-based organization. First, you have to

imagine the activities from bottom to top and not the other way around, so it's not the president of AIDES who decides that, for example, tomorrow everybody will be providing testing services. Actually, it's the people on the ground who come and say that people in the community ask to be tested and they need non-judgmental peer-based testing, so that's how testing comes up as important. The second one is recognition of lay expertise. The third is social transformation and the fourth is collective process, the magic of the group, collective intelligence. Sometimes you put up a group in AIDES and they provide answers to a question which can be difficult to work out on one's own. You bring ten people together and after one hour they arrive with a number of ideas and a ready plan of action for the next year. That's the magic of AIDES, really, to decide collectively.

R: What do the communities you work with think of your approach?

B: Well, there are people who understand what we have been doing and they like this approach. Yet, there are many who actually do not really understand what we are doing. Some of them think that we are just an activist association claiming rights and claiming things. Others think that we are just a service organization and we don't transform anything. We are in kind of a centre position between those who are purely activist organizations fighting the government on laws and others who are completely service organizations. Our in-between status is a bit complicated for a lot of people to get. For us, the advocacy part has to be based on what we observe in the field. That's why we need to be inspired by what the militants find in their daily activities. The thing I hate is the activists at conferences who represent only themselves… They are super activists, you see them at all conferences, invited to talk in the name of patients, but most of the time they are not linked to any organizations, they don't see any other patients than themselves… OK, they are HIV positive, but you cannot pretend you represent a group of people only because you are HIV positive yourself, so it's a kind of tokenism which is used especially in all these international organizations, and this is a very Anglo-Saxon thing. They are free electrons, not connected with any collective group, and when you are discussing things related to patients, it is important to be involved with a group. People think about things said by those whom they see at conferences and what I'd say is that our position between service organisations on the one side and activist organizations on the other side, the fact that we are in the middle, when we say something, what we ask, what we demand, it's based on what we have observed in the field and not only on what we think… It has to be corroborated by facts. For example, at this moment there are a lot of discussions about so-called injectable therapy, that is, instead of pills, you take an injection every two months. The producer of the therapy has not demonstrated that the injectable therapy works better. Recently, doctors have started to voice a need for this drug and the producer is asking us what we, in AIDES, think about it. So what we are doing now – and this is the answer that I'm giving to all who want to know our position on it – is a survey among the people who are connected with AIDES to get to know what they think and only then, after the survey has been done, we can arrive at some advice. People approach me because they know I'm in AIDES, but my personal opinion is not something that can be given as advice. In such situations a study has to be done so that the community gets represented. Representing the community means that you have to be connected with the community and not only decide for them.

R: The AIDES motto is "Le seul moyen d'arrêter le sida c'est vous" [The only way to stop AIDS is you]. Why is an individual, the "you," so important in the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis?

B: It is you because you can join us, the movement. You can do it. You can become a volunteer, a part of the movement. It's not a moralistic way to say: oh, if you behave well, you can stop AIDS. It means: come with us. It's the community-work context. Come with us, you can be a donator, an actor, a volunteer, there are different ways of being with us. You can be what we call an actor: you can't vote if you're an actor, you have fewer rights in AIDES, but you have to attend the meetings where you discuss the values of AIDES and after that, if you agree with what you've heard, you share the values, that is no homophobia, no stigma, you sign an agreement and you can be part of the activities, working either with our volunteers or our staff. If you want to go further, be an elector, be part of the decision process, you need to be a volunteer. To be a volunteer you need to do a three-weekend training in Paris. After you officially become a volunteer, you gain the right to vote and to be elected. There are also some other possibilities – you can work in AIDES and have a salary, but if you are an employee of AIDES, you cannot vote. The political decision and the power in AIDES belong only to volunteers. The staff cannot vote and it's a very important regulation. When I was the President of AIDES, we decided to stop the specific help for patients at home. The context is that in the 1990s there were many people with AIDS who were too sick to do the cleaning, shopping or food preparation activities on their own, so we provided help. After many years of ART [antiretroviral therapy] this kind of help didn't need to be provided. However, the people who had been delivering this kind of help were trying to reinvent themselves as help providers in the context of other diseases and other things. We then decided that it's not our role, so we closed down those services and with the money we saved, we were able to do more therapeutic education or other prevention activities that are more useful than those that were relevant in the 1990s but are not relevant any more in the era of effective antiretroviral treatment. If the staff was on the board, it would have been impossible to close those services, that is why the board of AIDES needs to be excluded from the voting process.

R: Through all these decades, AIDES has worked with different communities. What inspiring practices of self-organizing, mutual care and social solidarity have you seen and/or helped to develop?

B: We have approached and worked with several communities in the history of AIDES. First, it was the gay people in the 1980s. In the 1990s came the drug users. Then the migrants and more recently also transgender people. What is most fascinating in this is the solidarity between these groups. It's not an apartheid of groups and people are learning from each other. With chemsex on the rise, gay communities need a lot from drug users in terms of harm reduction. The borders between the groups are collapsing because even if there are some specificities, there are a lot of common things between gay chemsex and drug use in terms of legal barriers. Through this solidarity we were able to create the identity of seroconcerned people. Another barrier which has started to collapse recently is that between HIV-positive and HIV-negative people. Before PrEP only HIV-positive people had to take pills and now when PrEP has been introduced, if you see someone taking a pill, you don't know if it's

PrEP or ART. Now people understand each other because, with HIV-negative guys who take PrEP, it is like you must not forget to take your pills whatever your status. It's this kind of solidarity in terms of your relationship with your treatment, your doctor, the health system. AIDES has created this. It's also very positive to meet, for example, transgender people, when you didn't have any idea how they were living. Now I'm doing work on transgender people living with HIV and it's a study that my research team [part of the French National Institute for Medical Research (INSERM)] does with AIDES and another association (Acceptess-T), a sex worker and transgender organization based in Paris. It's a national survey, quantitative research. We are trying to interview all the transgenders living with HIV in France.

R: You mentioned the seroconcerned identity. Could you elaborate on what it means to you and to AIDES?

B: The seroconcerned identity is a concept I developed when I was the President. AIDES is an organization of seroconcerned people, which means that you are concerned – either you are HIV-positive, or exposed to HIV, or have people around that are HIV-positive and you are affected because you care about them, or you can be just angry about discrimination and be concerned because you want to change the society. We are then all seroconcerned and not the positive on one side and the negative on the other side.

R: What do you see as the role of the state (city authorities, government officials) in the fight against HIV/AIDS epidemic?

B: The role of the state should be first to have a political vision concerning the HIV fight, and increasingly HIV is not on the top of the government agenda. They know it's important, but my fear is that, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, HIV means too small a number of people to be equally important. My first expectation from the government is to recognize that HIV is still a problem. We are almost 38 million people living with HIV in the world. There's no cure and no vaccine, so the authorities have to be aware of this. The second expectation is the financial support given to organizations that do public help activities. We should have money. We need to be sure that the funding is continued. We also expect that the decisions have to be taken with us – the government needs to apply the principle of health democracy and not make any HIV-related decisions without the people concerned. We should also, I would add, take the lesson from the HIV field to other pandemics, which hasn't been done especially in the context of the coronavirus crisis. It's a bit the opposite to the HIV crisis. For the HIV crisis the French government did not take any decisions for years. The crisis arrived in 1983 and the first decision was taken in 1986. It was a specific decision, giving the possibility to buy needles in a pharmacy without a prescription. But the government of Mitterrand didn't pronounce the words HIV or AIDS ever; it was too politically risky for them, they were not interested… However, in 1988 the government had to take a certain number of decisions, but we had to push them to take those decisions. With the coronavirus it is the opposite, everything is decided by the

President who doesn't want the advice of the French civil society. He knows better than anyone else, and all is top to bottom. And now they are a bit angry because there are some people who don't want to be vaccinated… Everything was imposed from top to bottom, and there are no group decisions to convince those who are not willing to take the vaccine. The civil society is not involved, the trade unions are not involved… And there are lot of associations, not only health associations but also sport associations, and associations in the countryside or in cities, where people could have been consulted, where group discussion could have happened… The French authorities don't take the experience of HIV when making decisions. It's like it has never existed. They don't learn the lessons.

R: What challenges do you see as emerging in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the near future?

B: The international aspect. Today we cannot do activities only with the domestic view. HIV is mostly present in Africa, also in Asia, and it's also a pandemic, so the model of AIDES and the community vision we have could be ushered with other organizations in the world. We have been doing that since the very beginning, but now it has to be even more developed. It started long before me, with bilateral collaborations between AIDES and associations in Mali or Morrocco. We also had a bilateral collaboration with a Polish organization in the 1990s on the harm reduction experience and it was very close to the ideas of Daniel Defert. So, we had bilateral collaborations in Eastern Europe, in Romania and Poland, and in Africa, and after a while the French government tried to push us to develop the collaborative project even further, but we were a bit hesitant about this because we had the impression that we as a country in Europe still have this kind of colonial way of doing things. We then decided to create Coalition Plus in 2008, together with three other associations, Moroccan, Canadian and Malian ones. This organization now has 14 members and all the members are on the board and everything is shared globally. The governance is not in AIDES. We give money to Coalition Plus. At the beginning it was 100% and now it is maybe a third of its budget because they were able to develop and find other sponsors. Coalition Plus then carries out many activities. Each member receives 1000 Euros, and they can do what they want with the money. It is different with formal, institutional grants where you need to do exactly what the grant states. For example, you want to organize a congress with organizational members in your country, make a democracy in your organization – with formal grants you don't have the possibility to do it, you don't have the money to do it. A free grant allows the members to do what cannot be obtained with a formal grant. However, to be a member of Coalition Plus, you need to meet very specific criteria, including a community-based focus. People living with HIV have to sit on the boards. We don't fund boards which are composed only of people from institutions. It has to be controlled in terms of governance by the very people the focus of the organization is related to. When an organization applies, we conduct meetings and check whether they meet a number of criteria, before we decide whether to accept them or not. If we decline, then it's always possible for the organization to implement some changes and reapply. Today in Coalition Plus there are 14 official members and 100 partners in 52 countries.

BOOK REVIEW

Brad Fraser, *All the Rage: A Partial Memoir in Two Acts and a Prologue* [book review]

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/ELGQ8921

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"Cleanse my heart [...] give me the ability to rage correctly."
Joe Orton, *Diaries*

In late May, 2021, shortly after the publication earlier in the month of Brad Fraser's memoir *All the Rage*, a shocking discovery of 215 unmarked graves of students was made on the grounds of the former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. Indian residential schools in Canada date from the late nineteenth century and were instituted by the Federal Government and administered by Christian churches, mainly the Roman Catholic Church. Their purpose was to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society by wiping out their language and culture and replacing them with English and with European culture. On May 31, a few days after the horrific discovery, Brad Fraser tweeted his response: "Dear Canadian Politicians: Many of the people involved in the residential school system are still alive. When are they going to be prosecuted for manslaughter and murder? Start with the Catholic Church please." Brad Fraser is descended on his mother's side of his family from what in Canada are called Métis, people of mixed race descending from Plains Indigenous peoples and Canadians of French descent. He once told an interviewer, "I am a queer mixed-race person from a rough background." Fraser's response to the discovery at the Indian Residential School in Kamloops is just what one would expect from the author of *All the Rage*, whom the *Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia* has labeled a "maverick gay playwright."

In 1956, playwright John Osborne, one of the angry young men of the fifties, changed British theatre forever when his play *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Canada had to wait a generation for Brad Fraser to do the same for Canadian theater. At the premiere of his breakout 1989 play *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*, several people walked out at the midway point in act one where a woman kisses her lesbian friend. "That delighted me," reports Fraser. "I've always felt that theatre the right people walk out of is theatre that matters." "Any good play has elements that make you uncomfortable," he said in an interview about his most recent play, *Kill Me Now*. "Isn't that the whole point of going to the theatre?" Early in the AIDS epidemic, an interviewer asked Fraser, "Do you have to be so angry all the time?" To which he replied, "Yes. I do. It's the only thing that keeps me going while everyone around me is dying."

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All the Rage tells the story of how an angry young Bradley Fraser successfully channeled the anger arising from an upbringing in an impoverished family, in which he endured emotional, physical and sexual abuse, to become the award-winning Brad Fraser, one the most important playwrights, gay or straight, in Canada and the world: "I knew that my upbringing had instilled a tremendous anger within me," he writes at the end of the Prologue, "and that if I didn't find a way to channel that anger constructively it would end up directed at those around me or myself. I also knew it would trap me in the world I came from. Creative activities had always been the best way for me to channel my negative emotions and I knew my salvation would be with them." *All the Rage* tells a story that sexual outcasts of all kinds can identify with and that the straights who have cast them out can learn from if only they would read and absorb it with open minds and receptive hearts.

Playwright Fraser is a gay political activist whose politics takes place in a darkened theater where the creative imagination rules, just as the subconscious does in dreams. Although not autobiographical, his plays nevertheless come from a place deep within his psyche. "All my plays have come from very personal places," he reveals in the introduction to *Martin Yesterday* (1998). That play, which premiered at Toronto's gay theatre, Buddies in Bad Times, was, he writes, "going to be my response to the psychic trauma [...] I'd had to endure because of my sexuality." It is perhaps Fraser's angriest play, certainly as angry as Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985). "I wanted *Martin Yesterday* to be the most honest play I could write," says Fraser. "I wanted to create something that accurately reflected the gay world that many of us were living in, with all of its squalor and questionable behaviour. I wanted to talk about the self-hatred and abuse of emotion I saw in our community, and I wanted to talk about the straight world's control of how we felt about ourselves and each other and how we let them get away with it by co-operating in their societal narrative rather than creating our own."

Fraser's anger is also evident in his dissatisfaction with the state of the theatre, especially in Canada, when he was emerging as a new voice. Assessing the early responses to *Unidentified Human Remains*, his first hit and most produced play, he remarks: "Reactions to the play among those working in the theatre were varied. A lot of the old guard were flummoxed by the show's popularity. There was something about it that threatened them, which probably had to do with every character in the play being under thirty, but also had to do with a traditional sense of class decorum within the theatre which I'd just roughly butt-fucked with my play." Fraser's innovations were not simply a matter of offensive content. "I wrote *Remains*," he says, "to challenge the ways we usually created theatre." At the same time that Fraser has been committed to renovating theatre conventions, to 'make it new" in Ezra Pound's clarion cry to artists, he is also aware of his relation to antecedent playwrights: "All playwrights echo within one another," he acknowledges. For example, *The Ugly Man* (1992) was inspired by *The Changeling*, a Jacobean tragedy by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. He is an admirer of the gay English playwright Joe Orton. Fraser never attended university, but he is familiar with the history of the theatre and aware of his complex relationship to it. As a playwright, Fraser moves easily between the literary tradition and popular culture.

Almost all Fraser's plays have been influenced by popular culture. "In my childhood dreams," he confides, "I'd always imagined myself to be the illegitimate love child of Wonder Woman and the Empire State Building," The plot of *Remains* was inspired by the popularity at the time of movies about serial killers, and the original subtitle of *The Ugly Man* was "A Gothic Horror Melodrama." An early play, *Chainsaw Love*, was a hit at the Edmonton Fringe Festival. *Remain*s opens with a choric recounting of a Gothic urban legend, "The case of the headless boyfriend."

Reviewers frequently criticized Fraser's plays because the characters were not "likeable." "One of the main criticisms of *Remains*," he recalls, "was that the characters weren't 'likeable' enough. I had no idea what this meant [...] I never looked at characters in my shows through the lens of likeability, but rather in terms of complexity and nuance. Who's likeable in *Hamlet*? Who's likeable in *Oedipus Rex*? [...] The Canadian theatre's obsession back then with likeability drove me crazy, so I decided I would challenge it with a play [*Remains*] driven almost exclusively by plot. All the characters would serve the storyline and none of them would be 'likeable.'"

All the Rage is not narrowly focused on Fraser the playwright. It's a compelling narrative of Fraser's life as a gay man and cultural critic. He is not afraid to acknowledge how he can be as unlikeable as his characters. His failed personal relationships are openly acknowledged: "In Toronto I despaired because of my lack of a lover or life partner. I prayed for the right guy to come along who was ready to share the madness that was my life at that time. In truth I was in the worst possible position for having a boyfriend. I was too full of myself. My inspirational bulletin board that I'd curated for so many years was no longer filled with ideas, images and articles for further inspiration for my work, but covered in articles about me and photos of me." He has little tolerance for political correctness and the absurdities of identity politics: "The negative feedback [to his plays] wasn't entirely from the right. There was a contingent of university grads redolent of developing identity politics who insisted the 'sex and drugs/hard living/hard talking' world I depicted was not conducive to the creation of aspirational queer/feminist role models. When I explained that I wasn't writing role models, I was writing characters for popular culture, I was denounced as callous to the minoritarian representatives I was writing about, I found it hysterical that people who could afford to go to university would lecture me about privilege. For me, there is no more fascistic an impulse than to try to limit anyone's imagination, and I refuse any such attempt under any circumstances."

All the Rage is a memoir for a wide range of readers. Every young person who aspires to be an artist should read it. Everyone who wants to better understand how potentially self-destructive anger can be transformed into art should read it. It's required reading for critics and scholars who want to understand the arc of Fraser's career up to 1999. And everyone who wants to understand the compatibility of political activism and artistic vision should read it.

NON-THEMATIC

Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt: The Production of Undisciplined Knowledges in the Neoliberal Age

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/YBGF1042

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As an intervention into a domesticated academic knowledge production and an increasingly normative queer theorizing, Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt asks for the proliferation of other modalities of thinking and writing. The context of such interrogation is the neoliberal restructuring of the university which comfortably accommodates criticality. Where criticality has lost its sting, this paper calls for a daring indiscipline opposing political, public, and scientific disciplining. This brings practices of doing knowledge and not the knowledges as such into attention. An intimacy between the queer and the undisciplined is established by referencing the resistance to assimilationist politics and practices as queer theory's principal asset. Yet, undisciplined knowledges are not only geared towards challenging the bounds of the discipline(s), but also, and more broadly, towards decolonial futures. Queer Indiscipline, Decolonial Revolt explores various moments of concomitant unlearning and improvisation on and beyond the academic stage. The piece conducts three non-linear explorations. The first part analyzes the making of a hierarchical knowledge machine as part of capitalist modernity and revisits moments of queer and black queer theorizing that challenge the dividing lines between high/low, sensible/nonsensical, intellectual/corporeal, theory/practice, speech/chatter, etc. The second part discusses the masterful subject as the agent of knowledge. While the persistence and the pervasiveness of such master fantasy gets acknowledged, the verve of this paper is oriented towards the modality of queer dispossession. The final section gives way to the sabotage inherent in the unruly rhythm of life. Such sabotage is tested to counteract the frameworks, formats and concepts which articulate intellectuality on a more fundamental level. This advances the deconstruction of intellectuality to the terrifying and beautiful point where intellectuality is co-extensive with the social.

Keywords: *knowledge production, intellectuality, decoloniality, indiscipline, dispossession*

Undisciplined knowledge practices invite the responsiveness to curiosity – the responsiveness to a question, an impulse, an intuition – in short: a doing that is not corrupted by the restrictive protocols of disciplinary thinking. It could be aptly described as an attitude that allows for a local, context-specific, and situated defiance. And it operates from a place in which the joyous celebration and a determined political positioning are not mutually exclusive.

As a preliminary proposition, I'd like to pit the *queer* antithetically against the *disciplined*. There's a raft of notions associated with this latter term: *discipline*, *disciplining*, *disciplined* and *disciplinarity* – all of which establish normative and normalizing forces. In its negation we find another set of terms: *indiscipline*, *anti-disciplinarity*, and *undisciplined*. These latter notions accompany this project's commitment to safeguard queer politics as an anti-assimilationist and non-normative project. They negate the discipline in its double valance as both an enforced order and an academic field. This double valence proves important in this inquiry; not only offers it a key to the normative force at work in the order of the academic discipline, but also to ways of sabotaging such vehicle.

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This conceptual outline is complemented by a third element: *decoloniality*. The three elements aligned – *queer, indiscipline/undisciplined*, *decoloniality* – form the lines that run transversally through this piece. Decoloniality proves indispensable in this interrogation. This is a normative proposition expressing the urgency of coming to terms with the colonial past that lures in our postcolonial present. But I also argue *that* we necessarily hit on matters of coloniality as soon as hierarchies, exclusions and practices in the production of knowledge are exposed and addressed. With this conceptual constellation, the interplay of these three elements, I seek less to establish a strict conceptual coherence but to open up a reflexive space in which our practices of doing knowledge are revised.

Roberto Kulpa and Joseli Maria Silva test the importance of doing knowledge in decolonizing queer theorizing:

> [D]are we play the devil's advocate role and say that the feminist and queer epistemologies we represent across many disciplines have yet to face their colonial legacy, and their mostly (Northern) American– and Eurocentrism, and Anglophone squint? A proliferation of "post–colonial queer studies" and works attaining to geographies "beyond the West" is not enough, if we are to take the decolonial project seriously. [...] Rather, and perhaps foremost, we must reconceptualize our own practices of "doing knowledge." (Kulpa and Silva, 2016: 141)

While the first direction of impact in the larger project of decolonizing queer theory – the expansion of the geopolitical scope – has been further advanced in the last decade, the second direction – the reconceptualization of practices of knowledge – does not sit easily with academia's status quo. Decolonial resistance practices in the latter sense target the epistemic hegemonies on a more fundamental level. They challenge, in other words, the rules of the game – some of which are foundational for the academic knowledge production.

Of course, the knowledge as such carries the traces of its doing. The doing is always already implycated in the text, the reasoning, the canon. Yet, displacing the question *What knowledges are being produced?* by the questions *Who generates knowledge? How is knowledge generated?* and *For whom?* opens up very different interrogations. What are the rituals, gestures and styles that support the making of knowledge? Who profits from knowledge, who pays its prize? Who counts as a theorist, who as an informant? What counts as theory, what as prose? While some of these questions apply to innerscientific discourse as well, they also – and necessarily so – challenge the line that divides utterances into scientifically valid and invalid. In this context, the indiscipline figures as a response and resistance to public, political and scientific disciplining which is part and parcel of colonial modernity.

"Read this book like a song," (Tinsley, 2018: 1) reminds Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley the readers in the very beginning of *Ezili's Mirrors*. Tinsley's reminder also reminds us of the fact that reading books like songs is out of the ordinary. But what if we allow songs, meditations, and murmurs permeate our knowledge production? The point in doing so is not only to challenge the bounds of the disciplines, but to challenge on a more fundamental level Western epistemology. *Ezili's Mirrors*, which is discussed later, testifies – and impressively so – that the choice of references, methodologies, and style are the ingredients that allow other epistemologies to flourish.

We could say queer theorizing has always been undisciplined. This is true if we understand the resistance to assimilationist politics and practices as queer theory's principal asset. This, however, doesn't contradict or annul the diagnosis that there *is* a lot of normative queer theorizing nowadays. So it seems worth to revisit early texts of queer theorizing in which such undisciplined spirit comes across intensely alive. Such venture figures as a self-questioning internal to queer theory. Over and above, queer theories' unruliness – the close alliance of the undisciplined with the queer – could also open a path for the interrogation of knowledge practices in the humanities more general.

One of the beginnings I'd like to visit is Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's editorial piece *What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?*. They argued that *queer commentary* might be more adequate than *queer theory* as an umbrella term for the things "most of which are not theory" (1995: 343) assembling under such rubric. At the time of their writing, in 1995, the term *queer theory* had been relatively young, having circulated only for roughly five years.[1] The authors of this essay were concerned with the stylization of queer critique to a meta-discourse and to a theory dignified with capital letters by the restrictive protocols of academia. Opposing such reduction, Berlant and Warner sought to revive queer critique as a multifaceted venture that wields its clout from "multiple localities of queer theory and practice" (1995: 345). Unsurprisingly, they also offered a witty comment on the positioning of queer commentary in relation to academia:

> Queer commentary has involved a certain amount of experimenting, of prancing and squatting on the academic stage. This is partly to remind people that there *is* an academic stage and that its protocols and proprieties have maintained an invisible heteronormativity, one that infiltrates our profession, our knowledge, and this editorial. [...] Queer commentary has also distinguished itself through experiments in critical voice and in the genre of the critical essay. Along with queer experiments in pedagogy and classroom practice, it marks a transformation of both the object and the practice of criticism. (Berlant and Warner, 1995: 348 f.)

[1] It is worth to remind that the term *queer* itself is not an invention of the late 1980s or early 1990s, but has been around for centuries. While the growing surge of the term around 1990 certainly corresponded to a changing reality, the term took shape precisely at the threshold of academic discourse, trading and reworking queer activism, queer sentiment and intellectual discourse alike. Thanks to Ludovica d'Alessandro for this reminder.

In the last 25 years, the university has undergone major transformations in the US, in Europe and beyond. The bottom line of these changes: Things got worse. The problems addressed by Berlant and Warner are more pressing than ever. In order to counteract the disciplinary and disciplining force of the economically determined university, the authors resort to the vivid imagination of "prancing and squatting". This could be neatly aligned with another improvisation on the academic stage, one brought forward by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney: "to be in but not of" (2013: 26). But Berlant and Warner remind us also of the fact that the "protocols and properties" of academia are all along and cannot be discarded by a simple token or a unique twist on stage. What's required is an ongoing self-reflexive practice of unlearning and undoing.

This piece is dedicated to such concomitant unlearning and improvisation on and beyond the academic stage. Yet this is not to be misunderstood as an invitation for arbitrary transgressions. I don't want to state that dissidence within the stratified field of knowledge production is favorable *per se* whilst such dissidence being tethered somehow to queerness. The virulent circulation of fake news and the emerging realities imbued with conspiracy are topical examples that show that the departure from the codes of proper knowledge production does not necessarily play in the hands of the emancipatory project. Contrary to this, they're the expressions of the phantasmatic power of the new right and new algorithmic formations that rework the subject at hand: "Knowledge" becomes – in a blatant way – the discursive extension of dominion. The rogue rule of white hypermasculinities as Trump, Bolsonaro and Johnson has shed a different light on the (not only) natural sciences. Once the project complicit with capitalist rationality, its status has become more contested in the context of crisis capitalism – the COVID-19 pandemic and an ecology out of joint. Against this backdrop, I cannot stress enough the necessity to couple the undisciplined production of knowledge with a critique of dominion as exemplified in section two of this paper.

There's an intricacy that affected this project in profound ways. It's the trouble with criticality. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney offered one of the thought-provoking impulses by reminding us that criticality is not enough. In *The Undercommons*, they examine the critical academic's compliance with power and the inadequacy of a critical consciousness to inspire social change (2013: 25-43). The second reminder of such inadequacy is owed to indigenous theorizing, more precisely to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's famous essay *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*. Tuck and Wayne argue that the pursuit of a critical consciousness – "the decolonization of the mind" – may well serve as a strategy to deflect from material restitution, from the demand to give up land, privilege, and power. According to them, decolonization is, first and foremost, the restitution of land (2012: 21). Such statement is prone to unsettle critical minds whose domain is the crafting of concepts as the weaponry in political struggles. But such unsettling is program: "Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an 'and.' It is an elsewhere" (2012: 36).

This piece is an open invitation to explore the elsewhere of colonial modernity – while it acknowledges the colossality, if not impossibility, of such aspiration. It is a beginning without end. It is a tribute to the unruly kid in the house whose virtue is the playful and vital transgression of demarcations – while it later gets diagnosed with ADHD in the rectangular thinking of psychiatry. It is an exploration of the epistemological value and the beauty that derives from such unsettling and the position of un/knowingness. It is neither a proper argument – while it certainly argues against the *proper –,* nor a systematic approach to queer and decolonial epistemologies – while it values the interesting work done under the rubric of radical epistemologies: Autoethnography, Participatory Action Research, Affective Pedagogies, Militant Research and others. It is a text that – at times – enacts what it orbits around.

Interventions in the Colonial-Modern Hierarchies of Knowing

One of the most glaring historical example in which a vast body of knowledge got eradicated is the Great Witch Hunt in early modernity. There's one point of convergence in the scientific interpretation of the awful crimes carried out on women: The women who got charged with witchcraft were at odds with the new requirements of early capitalism. However, while most commentaries would argue that the women prosecuted as witches were the most "disempowered" by these changes, Silvia Federici challenges the myth of disempowerment by raising a defining question: If already disempowered, why should they be further tortured and destroyed? How could such wretched creatures instill so much fear? In Federici's view, the prosecuted women were anything but powerless, but a disturbing and fear-instilling presence for the reformers. They were the holders of particular knowledges and magical powers: "[O]ld women's going from house to house circulated stories, secrets, knowledge; binding passions, weaving together past and present events" (2012: 14). Women's sexuality figured as the quintessence of female "magic" and witchcraft. Sexuality and pleasure had to be controlled by the new elite. A regime of terror was instituted, and a new female subjectivity emerged from it: "sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world" (2012: 13).

Clearly, the Great Witch Hunt occurred at a specific time in history. The formation of colonial-capitalist modernity and the modern regime of property relations was premised on the eradication of knowledges in colonialism and the witch-hunt. Despite of their historical exceptionality, neither colonialism nor the witch-hunt figure as primal scenes and secluded historical events. Federici makes clear that the underlying scheme of the witch-hunt is still operative in the present – as campaigns designed by the elite to check oppositional powers. One important component of these campaigns is the destruction of autochthonous and magical practices and knowledges.[2]

[2] In this context, the terms *destruction* and *erasure* have to be evaluated carefully. In colonialism and the witch-hunt, erasure meant a literal erasure in the form of a unprecedented attack on singular lives, means of livelihood and the systems and rituals that assisted, produced and circulated knowledges hostile to the the colonial-capitalist reform. But this doesn't mean that these knowledges have disappeared entirely. There's a resistance peculiar to these varied forms of thinking. There are enclaves and hideouts in which marginalized knowledges have survived and flourished.

Federici's line of argument is a case in point of how colonial-capitalist modernity has produced a mode of rationality that defines objective knowledge and delineates it from the knowledges dismissed as nonsensical. So the historical confrontation of two competing systems of knowledges made an imprint on the order of knowledges. It remains highly stratified and fiercely contested until the present day. Some knowledges are disqualified and nullified. Others were destined to disappear, but still survived. What evolved increasingly is a system of knowledge codified by a binary logic: scientific/non-scientific, high/low, intellectual/corporeal, theory/practice, speech/chatter, rationality/superstition, academic/popular, etc.

But how to break the codes and protocols that negate subjugated knowledges? How to access a varied, alternative history of thought? How to stimulate an insurrection on the level of epistemology? On the academic stage, one of the most notable experiments that challenged profoundly the hierarchies in the production of knowledge was set in motion at the university of Birmingham in the 1960s with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) as its flagship. The primary point of attack of the CCCS was the opposition of *high* and *low*, bringing into focus those aspects of culture that were previously cast outside the scope of academic research: popular culture, subcultures, and youth cultures. Yet the endeavors of the CCCS were not exhausted in the shift of the subject. Rather the emerging *Cultural Studies* remodeled its relation to hegemonic knowledge in opening up a space for oppositional readings. Cultural codes were interpreted as in flux, allowing for processes of resignification – *decoding* and *encoding* in the words of Stuart Hall (1993: 128-138). In its three decades lasting heyday, the CCCS encouraged interdisciplinary, self-reflexive, contextual, and fiercely political research indebted to the idea of popular knowledge. As such, it was a vortex in the production of oppositional knowledge within academia that figures as a role model until the present day.

The relation of queer and feminist scholarship to Birmingham's project of Cultural Studies is one of affinity and conflict. While queer commentary is indebted to the CCCS' stirring up of the academic knowledge production, the exploration of queer life-worlds was – paradoxically – seemingly impossible within the tradition of CCCS. There is only one piece that gives evidence of a scholar of the early CCCS tradition paying attention to a phenomenon such as gay "whole body eroticism." In the prevailing climate in the Left of that time, in which rock and punk were hailed as the sole expressions of cultural defiance, Richard Dyer's seminal essay *In Defense of Disco* (1979) set out to do justice to gay disco culture. Dyer's piece was published in the magazine *Gay Left*; this alone testifies to the blurring of the boundaries between academic and subcultural knowledge production, between research, pamphleteering and activism (McRobbie 2011: 139 f.).

Reversing positions, displacing binaries, short-circuiting conflicting terms. Jack Halberstam's messing around in the hierarchies of knowledges is as faithful to the tradition of Cultural Studies as determined to smash the heteronormative oedipality adhering to the early Cultural Studies' project (2005: 159 ff.). Halberstam belongs to a generation of queer cultural studies scholars that explore modes of knowledge production that "feeds off of and back into subcultural production" (2005: 163). In *Female*

Masculinity, Halberstam puts forward a *scavenger methodology* which turns shying away from a disciplinary rigor from inadequacy into a virtue. This venture aspires to a radical inclusion (of topics) and recombination (of methods). And perhaps it draws its creative force from queer theory's constitutive impasse: the factual inaccessibility of the immediate object of research, namely sex. If the object of research is inaccessible to observation and to traditional research methods, how, then, can research be conducted? (1998: 9-13) More than a decade later, in *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam complemented his older methodological experimentations with the concept of *low theory*. Low theory can be thought of as an attitude, a deviant way of being and thinking that opts for "the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising" (2011: 16). The dark, the dirty, and the deviant are the privileged domains of this kind of reasoning. Nothing is excluded from the matrix of stimulating theorizing, neither in scavenger methodology, nor in low theory.

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley describes herself as a person who was "raised to be academically monogamous: to be 'married to' a single, coherent subject, 'faithful to' a line of theorizing" (2018: 172). Despite of this training, Tinsley grew fond of the transgression of compulsory academic monogamy: *Ezili's Mirrors. Black Queer Genders and the Work of the Imagination* (2018) traces Black queer sexuality, genders and same-sex kinship. Hybrid in genre and style, composed of real and fictive historical figures and led by three authorial voices, *Ezili's Mirrors* is not only a daring, surprising and ambitious piece of writing, but also an amorous exploration of imaginations, seductions and sensations that could not be expressed in academic prose. Tinsley calls her methodology *theoretical polyamory*: "a philosophy as well as a practice, theoretical polyamory encourages movement between different modes of theorizing" (2018: 172). Tinsley's love for the many resonates with the excessiveness with which Halberstam gathers subjects and methods seemingly being at odds with each other. Tinsley's fictional-theoretical liaison is composed of and decomposed by practices and genres as distinct as dance, Vodou spirituality, erotica, performance, science fiction, pop music, music videos, and fashion. If it derives from Halberstam's project it is for reasons specific to Tinsley's experience as a Black queer woman being raised in a Black womanly sociality, in which multiparenting, the exchange of children among a bunch of parental figures, was the norm: "This is a queer family, yes – but also just the way African diaspora women parent. [...] Treading in this black womanly tradition, I've found my theoretical polyamory necessitates theoretical multiparenting" (2018: 186 f.). What's more and perhaps most laudable: Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley resists the temptation to fit her explorations of Black queer sexuality and gender in the conceptual coordinates laid out by Queer and Gender Studies. The text performs an epistemological rupture from European frameworks articulating gender and sexuality. Here it is – an upheaval on the level of expistemology. *Ezili's Mirrors* as "a wild-colored quilt" (2018: 187): utterly misfitting Eurocentric academic reasoning, finding, if anything, a queer, non-linear and cross-temporal companionship in the particular powers of the social, weaving and magical practices of European women prosecuted as witches in early modernity.

Undoing Mastery

"[D]isciplines," writes Jack Halberstam, "actually get in the way of answers and theorems precisely because they offer maps of thought where intuition and blind fumbling might yield better results" (2011: 6). Clearly, *The Queer Art of Failure* advances the argument that disciplinary thinking works in the service of the domestication of writing. Yet Halberstam's quest for an undisciplined thinking-doing is driven by a desire for another subjectivity: a queer desire to inhabit the other side of the disciplining disciplinarity under the guidance of mastery. That's what Halberstam's concept of failure is about: Failure is not just something that is endured involuntarily, rather it offers an avenue to a mode of being in the world that is premised on the rejection of hegemonic notions of success. Hence, the primary loss in disciplinarity are not the messy and slippery modes of knowing, but a subjectivity tethered to the "intellectual worlds conjured by losers, failures, dropouts, and refuseniks" (2011:11). Such ambiguous desire translates into an imperative: "Resist mastery!" (2011:11).

I strongly agree with Halberstam about the need to challenge mastery. But isn't Halberstam's dismissal of it, perhaps too easy and doesn't it come too quickly? Doesn't it disregard the complex ways in which a desire for mastery is implicated in our doing, perhaps even where we least expect or recognize it? Even through Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's masterfully undisciplined piece *Ezili's Mirrors*, runs a sense of mastery. For Tinsley, theoretical polyamory is not a license for a "shoddy interdisciplinarity", but rather – and very similar to conscious non-monogamy – it requires the multiplication of responsibilities: "Trained in literature, I delved into religious studies, dance history and theory, film theory, BDSM studies, and performance studies (among other things!) to write these meditations [...]. I've had to be respectful of all the disciplines and theorizings I enter, to know their histories, possibilities, and limitations" (2018: 177 f.).

Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery. Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (2018) is a strong contribution in deciphering colonial traces in subjectivity and knowledge production. While Singh and Halberstam share spirit in their charge of mastery and their desire to reach for "other modes of relational being" (Singh, 2018: 1), they differ significantly in the way they carry out this venture. Singh doesn't merely oppose or dismiss mastery, but rather opts for another approach in dismantling mastery: She acknowledges mastery's ubiquity and obdurate persistence. Hence, the undoing of mastery involves a self-critical evaluation of the function of mastery in the cultural text and ones sense of self. Mastery gets always in the way, mastery is everywhere – that's why Singh calls *Unthinking Mastery* an "impossible project" (2018: 1).

The argument that cuts to the core of *Unthinking Mastery* is that mastery is a colonial-modern legacy:

> The most contentious claim of this book [...] is that there is an intimate link between the mastery enacted through colonization and other forms of mastery that we often believe today to be harmless, worthwhile, even virtuous. [...] [A]s a pursuit, mastery

> invariably and relentlessly reaches toward the indiscriminate control over something – whether human or inhuman, animate or inanimate. It aims for the full submission of an object – or something *objectified* – whether it be external or internal to oneself. (Singh, 2018: 9 f.)

Singh tackles the complexities in challenging colonial mastery in the first two chapters analyzing anticolonial texts. Mastery *is* a colonial technology. But what Singh endeavors to show with anticolonial writings as those of Frantz Fanon is that mastery was equally deployed as a means of decolonization. Practices of countermastery – militant, corporeal, linguistic, and intellectual – held the promise to produce thoroughly decolonized subjects, while their proponents were largely unaware of a complicity with colonial warfare on the level of subjectivity.

Mastery infuses the realm of knowledge production as well. Disciplinary thinking involves the comfort of being in control of one's production of knowledge, following its rules and conventions. Drawing from feminist, queer and deconstructive sources, Singh develops the methodology *vulnerable reading* which displaces the master code in the production of knowledge: the knowing subject. In vulnerable reading, knowledge is not acquired in appropriating it and applying it masterfully according to the script of the discipline. Rather than this, vulnerable reading meets a precarious condition – both frightening and rewarding – a gate that allows opening ourselves to something else; it's an openness to undergo a transformation, to be undone. This means: not to be the same after having encountered a text, a project, an idea, a sensation.

> I sympathize with [the] refusal of disciplinary marginalization, with the desire to find oneself 'at home' within disciplinary knowledge production and within languages intimate and once foreign to us. And yet one of the claims of *Unthinking Mastery* is that we must begin to exile ourselves from feeling comfortable at home (which so often involves opaque forms of mastery), turning instead toward forms of queer dispossession that reach for different ways of inhabiting our scholarly domains – and more primordially, of inhabiting ourselves. (Singh, 2018: 8)

What might such queer dispossession be? Is it the moment we cut loose of deliberate choosing and let our supposed "objects" of knowledge taking over? What if our objects visit us, haunt us, and possess us? Anthropologist Saba Mahmood gave testimony of being possessed and dispossessed by her object of study, namely Islamism:

> Perhaps [...] it is through this process of dwelling in the modes of reasoning endemic to a tradition that I once judged abhorrent, by immersing myself within the thick texture of its sensibilities and attachments, that I have been able to dislocate the certitude of my own projections and even begin to comprehend why Islamism, at least in one of its renditions, exerts such a force in people's lives. (Mahmood, 2005: 199)

While we might be tempted by the certitude of an intellectual position as it equips with self-confidence, territory, and rewards, it proves limiting. It hinders coming alive in thought, undergoing transformation, arriving at a place of knowing unknowingness. Yet that's the pathway to becoming "vulnerable to other possibilities for living, for being together in common, for feeling injustice and refusing it" (Singh, 2018: 21).

Sabotaging Intellectual Time and Space

In her 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (1987: 7). Maybe the title misleadingly monopolizes the attention to the spatial aspects in the process of writing. The omission of questions of money is a severe distortion and I don't intend to be complicit with the same fatal erasure. Nevertheless, I'd like to dwell on questions of space and time for the time being. Woolf's genre is a specific, it's literature, but her concern transgresses the boundaries of her specific genre. Woolf is concerned with the absence of women in English literature, or, where women are present, their mediocre performance as writers. She's quick in identifying the reasons why women fail to match the standards of literature set by man: the lack of money and space. Woolf intervenes in a spatial setting in which the women's realm is the parlor, the reception room or the walk-through room; constantly interrupted in her activities, interrupted by conversations, guests. Her duty is to weave the social fabric of the bourgeois household.

The Afro-American theoretician bell hooks invites in a completely different environment and another architecture of knowledge production. In her essay *Black Women Intellectuals*, she reflects on the absence of female Blacks in the intellectual field. We find ourselves in a Black working-class sociality, in which women are assigned to the duties of the household: cooking, cleaning, caring for others. They seem other-directed and fully absorbed by multiple tasks of family life. What shrinks to nothing in this setting is the alone time that allows for profound reading, thinking and writing. Despite the differences of the social environments described by Woolf and hooks – they're manifest, even tremendous! –, I'd like to cautiously approach the similarity of their experience: It's the specific regime of space and time that is part of female bourgeois subjectivity and female Black subjectivity. The misery of writing of (Black) women, they conclude, lies in the firm grip of duties, the involuntary presence of people, the interruption and the architecture that does neither offer a room of one's own, nor allow for time of one's own. In their desire for an intellectual life, they claim unanimously space and time. They lay claim to an intellectuality they feel bereft of in a world structured by sexism and racism. They both seek – in different times – to reclaim the term and function of the intellectual they had been bereft of since time immemorial.

To be sure, there is a significant difference between Virginia Woolf and bell hooks. Woolf's imagined space of writing is in accord with an utterly bourgeois model of intellectual activity: It appears as individualistic and elitist, as a space suspended from reproductive obligations and social relations. Woolf reclaims the space that was the exclusive privilege of the white, bourgeois man and she claims

right to the freedom when to isolate from and when to enter in social relations. Unlike Woolf, hooks is acutely aware of the risk of buying into this model of bourgeois intellectuality. She seeks to negotiate her intellectual life with the life of the community. In her vision, the intellectual and the communal life are not juxtaposed and mutual exclusive. She strives, reversely, for a socially integrated model of intellectuality and vehemently repudiates the widespread assumption that one has to choose either between the life of the mind or the life of the community. hooks writes: "Certainly not all intellectual work occurs in isolation (some of our best ideas emerge in the context of exchange) but this reality co-exists with the reality that solitary contemplation of ideas is a crucial component of the intellectual process" (hooks, 1991: 160). According to this account, isolation is not the sole place of intellectuality, but still its indispensable part.

Writing fiction requires a certain rhythm of life, so does the production of theory. Writing, then, urges – at least occasionally – the taming of the unruly rhythm of social life, both the chaos and the humdrum of the daily life. In this view, the task of the intellectual is to coordinate and orchestrate time, space and desires in accordance with the demands of the intellectual activity. This is an exercise in asceticism, though not fully asocial in nature: in the best case indebted to social change. I don't seek to deny the rewards we gain from intellectual seclusion, both personally and politically. But we pay a prize for it. There are other rewards out there, yet to be explored. So what if we accept the givens? What if we accept the spatial, temporal, architectural, emotional, mental and bodily states that make up our lives and which are – at least sometimes – at odds with the requirements of the ordered regime of the conventional form of intellectual activity? If there is sabotage inherent to our traumatized and indebted subjectivities and our ways of life, why not submitting to this sabotage? Why not give in to the interruption, the chatter, the noise, the repetitions, the exigencies of reproductive and social life, the disobedient revolts of affect and desire, yes, to all unglamorous aspects of life? Why not letting these forces freely evolve, and, along with it, letting them sabotage the conventional regime of intellectuality? But this is not a call for anti-intellectuality – I believe we have to be protective of the precarious intellectual activities of mind and body in the thin air in which we live today. But why not opening doors to a sense of intellectuality implicated in the rhythm that is supposedly hostile to thinking and writing?

bell hooks addresses the decolonization of the mind. But what is the decolonization of the mind? Does it mean, as hooks suggests, to remove all obstacles – some of them internalized – that hinder a marginalized Black woman from entering into the sphere of intellectuality? "Within a White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal social context like this culture," she writes, "no Black woman can become an intellectual without decolonizing her mind" (hooks, 1991: 160). Of course, decolonization is not a process of assimilation, but one of profound transformation of one's subjectivity as well as the structures and institutions within which the production of knowledge takes place. Decolonization requires the courageous modification of the bourgeois ideal of intellectuality.

But we could tackle the question of decolonization also from the other side, from the trajectory of sabotage: Why not counteracting the frameworks, formats and concepts given by the colonizer, the white bourgeois man? Why not letting implode his terms and practices? Stepping to the side instead of taking one step further. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney resort to what they call *study*: "The point about study is that intellectual life is already at work around us. When I think of study, I'm as likely to think about the nurses in the smoking room as I am about the university" (2013: 112), states Harney. In *The Undercommons*, Harney and Moten tear knowledge production out of its traditional setting bound up with the university, books, and the figure of the intellectual. What comes to the fore are modes of being and thinking together uncorrupted by the history of Man:

> Study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of the rehearsal – being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory – there are these various modes of activity. The point in calling it "study" is to mark the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activity already present. (Harney and Moten, 2013: 110)

With Harney and Moten, the figure of the intellectual – whether bourgeois-individual or community-oriented – gets displaced by a mode of intellectuality which is co-extensive with the social. It's helpful to remember that Moten and Harney declare their writing first and foremost indebted to Black women: "And this is so because black women have been for so long theorizing" (2016: 1); it's a theorizing that barely left an imprint on libraries and archives, but still was and is there. The intellectuality at work in study is not addressed to future generations. It's made up of bodies and affects assembling in the present moment – even in most unfavorable settings as the assembly line of the factory. Study is the collective production of desires and intensities that can be said to happen if the irreducible relationality is actualized in a doing – in the magic moment in which the illusory fortress of the individual is punctuated and torn apart by the contagious cohesion of the social.

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The Lived Experiences of Queer*[1] Teachers in İstanbul Within the Scope of Institutionalized Heteronormativity and Neoliberal School Policies

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/CQVY6921

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Even though the challenges that Queer employees face in the workplace because of their intersecting identities of gender, sexuality, race, and class continue to be one of the rarely studied topics in social sciences, there has been a resurgence of interest in recent years, concerning how Queer* teachers experience the conflation of their sexual and professional identities. Informed by the recognition that schools are one of the most representative prototypes of gendered organizations with their ever-adapting regimes of inequality, this study is motivated by the question of how Queer* teachers in İstanbul deal with the enduring institutionalized homophobia, which has only got worse in terms of its silencing and pathologizing mechanisms. Claiming one of the fundamental functions of schools to establish strictly heteronormative spaces of learning, where any form of gender nonconformity or sexual dissidence stands before disciplinary punishment or reprimand from other students and teachers, I have examined the current working conditions of Queer* teachers in İstanbul within the contexts of schools, which compel Queer* teachers to abide by their institutionalized rules and norms of compulsory heterosexuality. This study attempts to learn what kind of experiences Queer* teachers in İstanbul articulate regarding the conundrum of being forced into presenting themselves as non-sexualized and non-gendered professional figures, as neoliberal policies and capitalist expectations of a rigid separation between professional identities and personal lives of workers continue to negatively affect the occupational well-being of Queer* teachers. A careful analysis of the interviews has revealed that the Queer* teachers in İstanbul are burdened with the aesthetic labor they are constantly expected to perform due to the emergent neoliberal schemes of professionalism and that they suffer under closely monitoring mechanisms of heteronormative school policies and work climates.*

***Keywords**: queer studies, neoliberalism, institutionalized heteronormativity, education, LGBTQ+ teachers*

[1] Throughout the paper, I employ the term *Queer** whenever I refer to my interlocutors instead of using the terms "gay" or "homosexual," even if each of my five interlocutors may customarily be assigned as males by the general, heteronormative public. The main reason for this is the fact that two of the teachers I interviewed stated that, despite having identified as gay before, ever since they have become aware of the term "queer" and its popularization in the "scene," they have come to find liberating and subversive power in it for being more inclusive and critical as "it shows how difficult it is to talk about this stuff" (Meriç they/them, 26). Adhering to the teachings of feminist and queer research strategies on the importance of the active involvement of the research participants in the ways their stories are narrated and interpreted (Browne and Nash, 2010: 10-21; Lykes and Crosby, 2014:148; Davis and Craven, 2016: 84), I have opted to consult them about their choice of pronouns and terminology during our interviews. Hence, I opt for this once-pejoratively used term since I see politically empowering potentialities in reclaiming and re-appropriating a slur, turning it into a linguistic instrument of defiance against homonegativity. The use of the asterisk is a homage to Jack Halberstam's term *Trans**, through which I similarly maintain the volatility and permeability of identities as well as differentiating it from those, who identify themselves specifically as "queer." This usage applies to other individuals of non-heteronormative sexualities in general – a myriad of gender and sexual identities, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, bi+, trans*, intersex, queers, non-binaries, asexuals, greysexuals, demisexuals, aromantics, genderfucks, gender non-conforming and others who do not identify themselves as allosexual or alloromantic. It should be stated that the shared awareness and affirmation of queer theory and activism on the part of my interlocutors likely stem from the fact that all my interviewees graduated from exceptional universities in Turkey, and spend, according to their statements, most of their leisure time reading about social problems and gender issues. All the interviewees in this study are given a pseudonym to respect and protect their anonymity, and the names of the places have been changed for the same purposes.

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1. Introduction: Que(e)rying a Teacher's Responsibilities

"The kids had a narrow escape," wrote a popular Turkish newspaper (Aytalar, 2003), regarding the news of Nedim Uzun's dismissal from his twenty-year-long teaching career on the grounds of having "forced" his teenage students to cross-dress at a costume party in a summer camp in Erdek, where he taught English, pretending to be a native English teacher called *Ned*. Following the "scandal," Nedim instantly became a source of fervent interest for the press. According to many news reports, he had not only disrespected the highly esteemed profession of teaching with his "bizarre" ways of talking and acting (referring to his feminine behaviors), but he also forced his "perverse sexuality" into the young minds he had promised to set an example for. Only a few at the time questioned the reason why he might have had to present himself as a foreign English teacher (feminine behaviors of foreign male teachers may sometimes be attributed to cultural differences and hence not construed as signs of homosexuality) or how much he wanted to avoid being judged by the norms of hegemonic Turkish masculinities (Keskin, 2018: 2; Özbay and Soybakış, 2020: 6-8; Yunusoğlu, 2011: 29). Nor did anyone attribute any agency to the teenagers at the party, who might have wanted to do something "funny" and experimental for the event, which, from my perspective, resembles the collective shock and the horror of the Victorians, who were aghast at the implication that their children might actually have solid knowledge about gender and sexual relations of the adult world.

Certainly, the hardships and misfortunes of being a Queer* teacher or a Queer* worker in service sectors are not specific to Nedim. As Hande Eslen-Ziya and Yasin Koç note (2016), the traditional gender roles and the hegemonic norms of heteronormative and patriarchal sexuality in Turkey not only exacerbate the dominant negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals but also fortify the pervasive institutional discrimination against them (p. 802). Due to the increasing levels of negative attitudes towards homosexuals in Turkey (Sakallı, 2002: 116; Bakacak and Öktem, 2014: 819), Queer* workers in different sectors of the workforce are more likely to experience formal and informal forms and degrees of discrimination and inequality based on gender and sexual differences. As Emir Özeren *et al.* have demonstrated, many Queer* employees decide to remain silent when they encounter or experience a homophobic utterance or incident in the workplace for fear of repercussions (2016: 229). Confronted with the expectation of a rigid separation between their professional identities and personal lives, most opt to remain in the closet, fearing that they might be fired and not wanting to jeopardize their chances of being promoted or getting a raise. However, the silence they reluctantly embrace as a self-protective measure becomes the very mechanism that traps them in a work environment, where they feel not represented or respected (p. 1204).

Even though the challenges that Queer* employees face in the workplace due to their intersecting identities of gender, sexuality, race, and class remain among the least studied topics in the social sciences (Özeren, 2014: 1203), there has been a rise of interest in recent years in how Queer* employees in the education sector, particularly teachers, experience the interaction of their sexual and professional identities (Khayatt, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Evans, 2002; Harris and Grey, 2014; Connell, 2015), albeit all conducted with Queer* teachers in Western Countries like United States, Canada, Australia,

the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Based on in-depth interviews with five Queer* teachers who have worked at various schools in İstanbul, my research builds upon the previous work by exploring how some of the Queer* teachers I interviewed navigate through the institutionalized regimes of inequality and discrimination whereas some of them changed careers after enduring institutionalized homophobia for years. Discerning that inequalities in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality in the workplace are maintained through regimes that create and regulate discrepancies of power and control over resources and outcomes by means of particular discourses and practices (Acker, 2006: 443), schools may be considered one of the most representative types of gendered and sexualized organizations with their idiosyncratic regimes of inequality. While even in the United States, Queer* employees – their number is estimated to be 8.1 million (The Williams Institute 1) – are not protected against workplace discrimination based on homophobic attitudes, regardless of sector, the situation of Queer* teachers in Turkey is more precarious in terms of legal protection and future financial security compared to the situation in most Western countries[2].

2. Institutionalized Hatred of Diversity: Queer* Teachers in Turkish Context

Traditionally, the proliferation of homophobic and transphobic rationalities and prejudice against the LGBTQ+ population in Turkey has been traced to the modernization period in which the authoritarian state implemented social engineering projects of compulsory heterosexualization of the Turkish family and the patriarchal domestication of women as mothers (Kandiyoti, 1997: 127; Sancar, 2021: 57). These diligently delineated gender roles of the new republic culminated in the suppression of any individual who defied the prescribed gender roles and sexual scripts. Following Ferhunde Özbay's three-phase periodization of women's and gender studies in Turkey from the Republican era to the late 1980s (1990:1-8), we are now beyond the fourth phase, which is marked by increased interest in LGBTQ/Queer studies and collective, feminist demands for equal citizenship rights, perhaps, a fifth phase which has been identified by an increasingly insecure, dangerous and anxious atmosphere for LGBTQ+ individuals who are publicly condoned and ostracized by eminent state officials and state-sponsored institutions (Savcı, 2021: 20-1; Selen, 2020: 5525). Even though the LGBTQ+ rights and equality politics in Turkey have gained momentum in activist circles and public discourses, the state-sanctioned ban against the Pride Parade in 2015 (following the Gezi events), and the subsequent homophobic and transphobic statements of Prime Minister Erdoğan marked the beginning of an insidious, state-sponsored war against gender non-conforming and sexually dissident individuals whose mere existence, as the current Head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs stated, is conceived as "perversion against nature" (SPOD, 2020).

[2] While the experiences of Queer* teachers in rural and non-industrialized regions of Turkey remain to be documented, it is likely that the ways they encounter and experience homophobia in the workplace will be more different compared to the narratives of their urban and metropolitan Queer* colleagues as their experiences of sexual identities differ from those of Western gay men (Bereket and Adam, 2006: 146). Due to the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ideological differences across different regions of Turkey, I would like to underscore that the experiences of my interlocutors are specific to İstanbul. The question of how these findings will differ is up to future research.

If one is to consider the recent findings of numerous studies that document LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey being at higher risk than heterosexuals of numerous psychological problems due to social prejudice (Eskin *et al.*, 2005: 186; Bakacak and Öktem, 2014: 840-1; Göçmen and Yıldız, 2017: 1063), it becomes necessary to question what the current government and its officials aim to achieve through their discriminatory policies and regulations. As it has been seen in the recent events surrounding the protests against the state-appointed rector trustee to Boğaziçi University (one of the most acclaimed, highest-ranking universities in Turkey) and the following unlawful detention of almost 200 students on the grounds that they were rioting against state forces and carrying rainbow flags with their indication of the flag as a "terrorist insignia" (Korkmaz, 2021), many influential public figures, including the Minister of Interior Affairs, continue to target vulnerable populations and incite hate speech on television and in the social media, defining Queer* desires and identities as being against Islamic doctrines. While it is indisputable that Islam plays a large role in restructuring and actualizing Queer* sexual politics in Turkey which has lately been crystallized around a Boğaziçi student's artwork on the Kaaba and the attacks on LGBTQ+ students for "polluting" the sacred values of Turkish people, it should be noticed that state officials are systemically attempting to exploit "the long-standing fusion of religious and national identities" (Grzymala-Busse, 2012: 429) – a fusion that thrives on the increased differentiation of otherness in the public sphere and the unreserved violence against LGBTQ+ individuals and anyone who challenges the state's androcentric and heteronormative worldviews. In such a macabre climate, investigating how LGBTQ+ teachers, as the engineers of our futures, manage to survive in their work environment comes forth as a pressing social issue.

As one of the fundamental functions of the Turkish education system is to establish strictly cisheteronormative spaces of learning (KaosGL, 2012: 31), where any sort of gender nonconformity or sexual dissidence leads to daily harassment, disciplinary punishment, or the termination of one's teaching contract as we have recently seen in the case of Can Candan, a lecturer at Boğaziçi University who was unlawfully dismissed from his position due to having supervised the LGBTQ student's organization's activities (KaosGL, 2021), one of my fundamental goals in this paper is to document the past and current working conditions of five Queer* teachers at various schools of İstanbul and explore how they abide by or challenge the institutionalized rules and norms of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980: 637). As one of the most illuminating studies in the field, Catherine Connell's study (2014) revealed that the lesbian and gay teachers she interviewed, because of the constant burden of trying to maintain a balance between their sexual and professional identities, acted in three different ways: (i) attempted to split their so-called conflicting identities, (ii) created ways of knitting these identities into a harmonious whole, or (iii) simply left teaching, the latter being the more prevalent option for many Queer* teachers in İstanbul, depending on the interviews and my observations and personal experiences of eight years of teaching introductory-level English in İstanbul. Positioned as a male-presenting, Queer* researcher and a previous Queer* teacher who has had their own share of systematic discrimination, mobbing, and institutionalized forms of homophobia, I have been challenged by the Queer* teachers I interviewed to realize the experiences they disclosed are not to be interpreted as the stories of perseverance or giving up. On the contrary, their

stories revealed their diligent attempts to constantly monitor, navigate, and balance their positions as teachers in a larger web of power structures and hierarchal workplace inequalities which had been structured upon the heteronormative standards and expectations of the Turkish education system and its policymakers.

Even though the Queer* community in Turkey has achieved some public recognition (whether this has always been positive is debatable), Turkish society's attitudes towards LGBT rights and Queer* individuals are still negative, especially in areas, where material and cultural capital is low (Gelbal and Duyan, 2006: 574; Özbay, 2015: 871-2). As Dedeoğlu *et al.* pointed out, although many heterosexual teachers were not even aware of the many concepts related to gender and sexual dissidence, they were nevertheless conversant with the myths and parables about Queer* desire and its perils (2012: 262). It should not come as a surprise that teachers, just like any other employees, might be homophobic in their ideologies or actions (Shelton, 2015: 117). Even if they do not entertain such beliefs themselves, C. J. Pascoe effectively showed that teachers might sometimes use homophobic language to establish rapport with their students or they might simply allow such language to be used in the classroom without comment (2007: 78). But we need to recognize that heterosexual teachers and students are not the only actors in schools who generate and maintain these myths. As is the case in many organizations, schools have their own systems of organizing relations in a hierarchal manner and distributing power accordingly. Principals, in this case, are the ones who have more institutional power and help maintain the homophobic school environment and the heteronormative discourses in the daily lives of students and teachers by not addressing it or simply not regarding such incidents or statements to be homophobic (Farrelly *et al.*, 2017: 162). As I realize that Queer* teachers are situated in a complicated matrix, in which they frequently encounter the heteronormative, patriarchal beliefs and expectations of their students, and the principals, teachers, and the other school personnel during the regular flow of their work, in our in-depth interviews, in addition to learning about their gendered and sexualized experiences at schools, I also asked questions about their relationships with each group of people they interacted with, whether they experienced a conflict between their personal and professional lives, what kind of normative social scripts they encountered, and how they processed the negative emotions arising from their confrontations with heteropatriarchal school policies.

In the following pages, I try to reveal what sorts of experiences Queer* teachers in İstanbul articulate regarding the conundrum of being forced into presenting themselves as non-sexualized and non-gendered professional figures (yet oxymoronically, already gendered and sexualized from the beginning) because of the pressing supposition that there cannot be any other representation than heterosexuality or cisgenderism. This treatment of teachers' gender expressions and sexualities creates several outcomes on the part of the Queer* teachers: the burden of the aesthetic labor they are expected to perform due to the emergent neoliberal schemes of professionalism (i), and the indisputable necessity of maintaining the heteronormative school cultures through self-monitoring mechanisms (ii). As I focus on the myriad ways in which Queer* teachers experience the ramifications

of the aesthetic requirements of behaving in particular manners and embodying specific attributes and capacities espoused by the Turkish education sector (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000: 4), I also meditate upon the theoretical and practical efficacy of thinking through the processes of sexualization and desexualization of Queer* teachers and their work, which mandate that teachers, parents, and students are systematically ensured that there are no 'queers' in their schools "thanks to" the managerial prescriptions of an implicitly normalized cisheteronormativity regarding the personal lives of their teachers, their pedagogic approaches, and the curricula.

3. Looking Cis and Sounding Het: Aesthetic Labor and Performative Scripts

Schools are peculiar (work)places, functioning as the early spaces in our life trajectories, where we are present on a daily basis for long durations of time, being exposed to numerous worldviews and construals of the world, which are generally known to be quite static, hegemonic, and intolerant of other "readings". One of the most representative of these monolithic teachings is the axiom that considers gender the most salient criterion of differentiation (Epstein, 2017: 130). From the way we talk to the way we play in the school ground; children are always under close scrutiny in schools. Not surprisingly, this "hidden curriculum" (Williams, 2016: 147) not only forces teachers to preach to their students that there are only two genders, but they are also themselves forced into these norms, not letting any non-conforming action or doubt emerge or be heard, including their own. One can, of course, question why the teacher would accept this in the first place. Even though some teachers may strongly believe in the heteronormative worldview and arguments they teach, others who find such doctrines problematic may still abide by the system in order to keep their jobs. However, this "forced" compliance on the part of Queer* teachers in İstanbul (in the case of "take it or leave it") consequently damages their relationship with their personal and professional selves. Even in schools that do not care about a teacher's sexual orientation or treat it as a problem, the teachers are compelled not to carry their personal lives into the school. The neoliberal worldview, which is always seeking workers whose individuality does not create any nuance or unexpected scenario that might endanger its profit-maximizing goals, demands that teachers engage in some form of "deep acting" – constantly trying to feel in a particular way (Hochschild, 1983: 85). The main argument goes: "You might be gay, but do not show it!", even though cisgender and heterosexual teachers express their gender and sexual identities all the time, both in the classroom and in the teacher's lounge. On these unequal, implicit school policies, Meriç (a 26-year-old English Teacher at a private school in Kartal, İstanbul) stated:

> I've never worked in a school where I did not feel administrators breathing down my neck. I don't know how to put it… You know, people always made fun of the way I speak. I always sounded like a woman. Ever since I've known myself. I get that it was funny to other kids as we were growing up but the reaction is still the same. I mean, once there was a Memorial Day ceremony on November 10 and the principal asked for someone to read an English poem for the special occasion. I was the only teacher who had the right pronunciation skills but they did not want me,

> a deeper, more masculine voice. Of course, they wouldn't accept that they are homophobic. But I guess I am still very lucky. Even though they realize, no one would say a thing about me. Unless I flaunt about it.

Meriç's words reveal that some sort of aesthetic labor is constantly expected from them, and the female teachers. According to the stories Meriç recounted, it became apparent that the schools they worked at before (and the current one) have strict opinions and policies regarding how the teachers should look, dress, and behave, which they made explicit in the emails they sent to the teachers, specifying that a "proper" female teacher should always be careful about the amount of "skin" they show or that a male teacher should always wear dark-colored shirts rather than t-shirts or other colorful garments. Due to the administrative and the social demands and rules on the part of teachers to present a "professional" outlook, which is expected to be not only performative but "rather expressing deep-seated dispositions," the teachers find themselves burdened with the arduous task of trying to appeal to the norms and expectations of middle-class professionalism and the hegemonic patriarchal and heteronormative masculinities. As Meriç recounted numerous incidents when they were "warned" about the way they dressed and the topics they introduced in their lectures, it became evident that there are deeply-entrenched structural norms and expectations that require that teachers act and present themselves in a strictly delineated manner of "looking good and sounding right" (Williams and Connell, 2010: 350). If there is a discrepancy between a teacher's assigned gender and their gender performance, they are either not accepted for the positions or they are expected to "pass," for the benefit of the students, parents, and other teachers.

My personal experiences of teaching English in private schools also confirm the stories presented here. Similar to the ways Meriç was repetitively warned about their demeanor and the way they presented themselves, I also experienced daily tensions between the school policies and the gender non-conforming manners in which I experienced my daily non-binary self in my personal life. In one of the parents-teachers meetings, for instance, a father kept incessantly asking whether I was married, stating to the principal that he had some worries about my stance on teaching and morals. The next day, the director of the school "kindly" suggested I started wearing a fake engagement ring so that I would not be bothered by such negative comments. As Bergeron argued, the gender segregation of male and female workers, and heterosexual and homosexual workers (I would add) into different jobs do not follow from their gendered and sexualized tendencies; instead, they are the results of managerial imperatives produced at work (2016: 194). Following her argument, I want to suggest that the binarism of homosexual vs. heterosexual is created and reinforced in schools through constantly positioning heterosexuality as the natural, normative category against the "deviant" and "statistically rare" homosexual. Although Queer theorists such as Butler (1997: 142-143) and Sedgwick (2008: 11) examined the systematic processes of creating the "hetero-vs-homo" binarism in great detail, we lack knowledge regarding the ways this binarism affects real people in workplaces

(in this case, Queer* teachers outside the Global North[3]), and how this binarism (hetero/homo) proliferates and transforms itself in relation to the rapid neoliberalization of the education sector.

As marketization and financialization have deeply changed our subjectivities and everyday practices (Marchand and Velazquez, 2016: 447), schools had their share of this neoliberal "upgrade" as to their understanding of success, profit, and organizational functioning. By using the term "neoliberal" within the spheres of the social, cultural, and politico-economical, I refer to a particular, ideological state of mind and rationality that regards human beings as essentially rational decision-makers whose actions should not be controlled and regulated by governments by promoting privatization of the public sector, lesser social provisions, and commodification of almost everything (Harvey, 2005: 15-40). These tenets of neoliberal ideology come into prominence especially in the privatized education sector and private schools, in which the parents are treated as customers, buying the highest quality of teaching that they might expect. The lives and behaviors of the teachers are no longer beyond the scope of the parents' consumption expectations, as I personally experienced as an out English teacher in a private English course. Even though the administration claimed not to care about a teacher's sexuality, stating to me several times that it is an "extremely personal aspect" of one's life (implying that it is left outside the course), they were not eager to let me go to the bimonthly parents' meetings, for I might not quite "reflect the values of the firm cordially" – which should be read as an organizational HR tactic that would not bring me into close contact with parents who might find my gender expression weird or alarming. Following Williams and Connell's ideas on aesthetic labor, I would suggest that Queer* teachers are burdened not only with the expectations of presenting their best selves to impress students and parents, but they are also forced to act according to the heteronormative dictates of national education systems and their curricula.

4. Having the Capital to Split or Quit: Self-Monitoring Mechanisms

In her analysis of gay and lesbian teachers working in California and Texas, Catherine Connell tackles the intersections of sexuality, class, and race, demonstrating how the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers related to these categories are inseparable from each other since the black and Latinx gay and lesbian teachers from the lower classes were also the ones with lower physical and cultural capital. While Turkish teachers' experiences of race do not say much in the Turkish context, as only ethnicity might play a determining role for teachers (as in the case of Kurdish Queer* teachers), class has presented itself as a significant criterion for the benefits and advantages it provides the Queer* teachers. To recognize the complex interplay of economy, gender, labor, and subjectivity through history and culture, it is necessary to attend to Carla Freeman's statement that "these forces and

[3] For this study, I rely on the Western theories of gender and sexuality as the social scientific theories grounded in the actual experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey are still in process of their incipience and cumulation within the scope of sociology and anthropology of work (Özbay, 2010). While the Western theories of gender and sexuality have been a vital, effective part of LGBTQ+ activism and academic work in Turkey since the nineties, I situate the lived experiences of my interlocutors in a critical position that could mobilize, challenge, and detest these theories' arguments and assumptions to refrain from the possible danger of engaging in epistemological and ethical violence towards my interlocutors by prioritizing the Western theorizations and conceptualizations of queer living and queer becoming.

processes inevitably change each other, manifesting themselves in new forms, expressions, and subjective experiences" (Freeman, 2014: 135). For instance, a gay, male teacher, who has the necessary capital to be able to live in a region or neighborhood that has many friendly cafes and pubs for the Queer* community would naturally experience a higher sense of belonging and representation than a Queer* teacher with limited physical capital, who might have to travel long distances in order to reach these "gathering places," spending both more time and money. Moreover, if they do not have the cultural capital that would enable them to construe their non-heteronormative sexual identity in a more affirmative manner, they might take it to be a merely "personal aspect" of one's life and thereby not seek interaction with the Queer* community. This might leave them vulnerable to feelings of alienation and loneliness both in their lives and in the workplace. But, for some, material/financial capital, especially in cases where a conflation of sexual identity and professional identity is not possible, provides the means to separate their personal and professional identities without endangering their work performance or their sexual identity. On this intricate relationship between sexual identity and class of Queer* teachers, Erdem, a 32-year-old English teacher working in a private school in Şişli, said:

> I don't think it is anyone's business, you know, me being gay. What has it got to do with my performance in class, anyway? Of course, it would not matter how good a teacher I am if the parents heard about it. So I have to monitor myself all the time in case I let something slip. But even if the word gets out, I am sure the administration would protect me… Like, there was this PE teacher before. A student saw him in a gay bar and took pictures of him dancing with another man. The parents went wild, but our principal was adamant about protecting the teacher. They handled the issue efficiently and soon it was somehow forgotten, but if this had happened in another school, you know that they would have already fired the teacher.

Even though two of my interlocutors[4], who had "quit" teaching, later informed me that they do not want their stories to be shared and published for believing that they are stories of "giving up" and "failing," I believe that all the stories and experiences of the Queer* teachers in this study are real-life

[4] Two of my interlocutors contacted me a couple of days after the interviews and informed me that they did not want their stories published for (i) believing that it might discourage other Queer* teachers in the profession, and (ii) feeling about their decision in retrospect. Even though my commonalities as a researcher with my interviewees (sexual orientation and occupational status) helped me establish rapport and a relationship of confidentiality (Bacio and Rinaldi, 2019: 38), this news did not come much as a surprise to me, as our in-depth interviews, at least in my experience, were rife with moments of silence, resistance, and reluctance when it came to the topic of why and how they decided to change careers, and the events and the reasons behind their decisions. They did not want to listen to my interpretation of their experiences and the data they provided in the interviews, which ensured me that they were not feeling ready for "sharing authority" in documenting and interpreting their stories (K'Meyer and Crothers, 2007: 85). In total respect for their decisions, I do not share any of the information they disclosed in our interviews, however, I try to interpret their reticence and self-censorship during the interviews as an indicator of the depth of the emotional burden of the hardships and stress they experienced, and a sign of the psychological difficulty of even thinking and talking about those events (Layman, 2009: 218). While both of them named their acts of deciding not to teach anymore as "quitting," as I believe in the potent effects of naming and reframing, I construe their stories not as of quitting, but as of being left with no other viable, healthy option, and hence they are, in my perspective, are great "examples" of caring and dedicated role models who have shown me the importance of protecting one's self-worth and psychological well-being by not falling for the morally-infused, illusionary grand narratives of the self-sacrificial teacher.

proof of the adaptive strategies and survival techniques they employed in the face of structural inequalities and processes of silencing and ostracizing. These hardships and the efforts these teachers have to show became more evident when Mertan (a 41-year-old English teacher who is the only interlocutor that identifies himself as gay) talked about his experiences in a school he used to work at. Having been forced to "quit" teaching in 2010 for "potentially being improper and dangerous" for the kids, Mertan had to resign and sought jobs in the other areas of the service sector. He recounted the incident as follows:

> I worked in a school at Sarıgazi for almost two years. It was a very conservative neighborhood, deep in that godforsaken Sultanbeyli. It wouldn't be wrong to describe it as a place where no good thing ever happened! (he laughs). Everyone was wearing those kufis and niqabs. I think the teachers were not very different in terms of mentality, I mean, their worldviews. They would always ask me why I wasn't married and all… So, one day I was texting with a guy on Facebook. On my fake account, of course. We exchanged photos and stuff. But then he immediately blocked me. Just as I was fidgeting about the whole thing, it turned out that a student baited me. I am still curious how that student went to the administration and told them about it. In two days, our principal called me into his office and told me to resign. He reprimanded me on morals and appropriate conduct. I said: Damn your school and your ignorance all the way to hell, and I have never worked as a teacher since then. I did some translation jobs, I worked as a cashier, and then I ended up here (referring to the office of foreign education consultancy he was working at the time).

To make sense of how the workplace experiences of Queer* teachers are affected by their class status, it is necessary to analyze Erdem and Mertan's quotations above in relation to each other. While both schools seem to expect similar behaviors from their Queer* teachers, in that explicitly heterosexual acting, the school located in Şişli, tends to embrace a somewhat protective policy. On the other hand, the second school, both in terms of its policies and the homophobic work culture they promote, makes it almost impossible for a Queer* teacher to work without experiencing certain hardships. While we might argue that it is the class of the students, other teachers, and the school that makes it a more hostile environment for a Queer* teacher, it should also be realized that Mertan did not have the financial security Erdem enjoyed at the time. While Erdem stated that he worked because he liked being busy and particularly being a teacher, Mertan reported that he was sending money to his sister, who was taking care of their ill mother, and he was living in a rented apartment, barely making ends meet. It was probably this lack of alternatives that caused Mertan to work in that school for a year and a half. Moreover, Erdem saw his sexual identity as disconnected from his professional identity, whereas Mertan was unable to do so. I argue that Erdem's frequenting of gay cafes and pubs and having a small group of Queer* friends, as well as the money that enables him to enjoy his Queerness*, allow him to split the two identities in a manner that is non-threatening towards his

identity as a teacher (as it was necessitated by the environmental and social factors). Following Catherine Lee's findings that LGB teachers in rural communities lack the opportunities to speak their identities, which worsen the level of their work experiences as a Queer* teacher (2019b: 12), Mertan's experiences in Sultanbeyli (an outer, rural part of İstanbul at the time) make more sense considering the conservative beliefs and the religious inclinations of its people.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate how five Queer* teachers in İstanbul experienced the neoliberal school policies, which promoted sexual neutrality for the sake of professionalism, bearing in mind how "power works in the flow of connected affectivities in and across bodies, discourses, practices, relations, and spaces in ways that maintain a collective orientation towards heterosexuality" (Neary *et al.*, 2016: 251). As the experiences of Queer* teachers in the study point out, teachers are not treated differently from other workers on the labor market: They are constantly required to examine and control not only how they behave, but how they feel as well. Moreover, their professional identities, different from a factory worker or a nurse, are burdened with the quest of setting an example, which can only be shaped and presented in accordance with heteronormative sexual morality and its norms. From the stories my interlocutors narrated, the ambivalent, if not hypocritical, treatment of Queer* teachers' sexual identities are stark. In that, whereas heterosexual teachers are free to mention their husbands or wives whenever they feel like it, not fearing the consequences of sharing details about their personal lives with other teachers or employees in school, Queer* teachers have to work within a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" system. In a work environment where various forms of inequalities are legitimized and solidified with the stigmatization of non-normative expressions of sexuality, it is not quite possible for Queer* teachers to come into their politicized sexual subjectivities (Connell, 2015: 188). Instead, many Queer* teachers, feeling that they cannot be good role models if they do not acclaim their identities proudly and wholly, change careers in the end. If they choose not to give in, as Henderson wrote, "in their fears of the future, they are at best, the 'lonely flag bearer,' and at worst unable to function as teachers at all" (2019: 862).

While many studies conducted indicate that coming out has, overall, positive effects for the teachers (Smith, 2008: 16; Macgillivray, 2008: 87-8; Nielson and Anderson, 2014: 1100), in İstanbul the current situation in schools and the level of institutional control over teachers' actions seem to suggest that it is not possible to present such radical claims for now. In a country, where two teachers were condemned by MEB, the Ministry of National Education, through disciplinary action for hugging each other (Özmen, 2020), we need to continue having discussions whether coming out can ever be beneficial for a Queer* teacher, at least in the current state of affairs.

As LGBTQ+ teachers continue to experience debilitating psychological problems because of the heteronormative school environments (Lee, 2019a: 688), coming out can be a beneficial solution only if school culture, and more importantly principals and other managerial staff, work hard on protecting the rights and liberties of Queer* teachers before any homophobic student or parent. The need for

structural changes at the institutional level is strengthened by studies (Wright and Smith, 2015: 405), which argue that it does not matter much whether a Queer* teacher is out or not if it is not accompanied by legal protection and policies that ensure equal treatment in the workplace. As long as we do not implement policies that protect Queer* students and Queer* teachers from homophobic bullying and workplace discrimination, schools will continue to be stress-inducing places. While there are a few schools, colleges, and universities that embrace gender-inclusive educational agendas and/or aim to create queer-friendly workplaces and campuses, it remains to be answered how effective they have been in achieving these goals in the face of the AKP government's increasingly conservative, phobic, and heteronormative educational policies and top-down interventions. In these difficult times, when we as educators keep complaining that students do not question things or simply are not curious enough, perhaps we first need to realize when and how our practices silence the early curiosities of the students when it comes to inequality, gender, and sexuality, and dare to take action when a student calls another a "fag."

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"Dynamite Scrupulously Packed": A Revaluation of Henry Blake Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year*

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/RUMA9891

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The essay proposes a reinterpretation and revaluation of Henry Blake Fuller's 1919 novel Bertram Cope's Year *and argues that it deserves permanent currency within the canon of gay fiction. My reinterpretation and revaluation of it is based on the premise that readings of it over the past 50 years (since Edmund Wilson's 1970 essay on Henry Blake Fuller's fiction in the* New Yorker*) have failed to understand its representation of homosexuality. Criticism of the novel has been based on post-Stonewall assumptions of what a 'gay novel' should be and what cultural work is should perform. The post-Stonewall paradigm of the gay novel is that it is a coming-of-age story, a Bildungsroman, focused on a protagonist who, through a process of self-discovery, arrives at an acceptance and affirmation of his sexual identity. The prototype is Edmund White's* A Boy's Own Story*, with E. M. Forster's* Maurice *a precursor. To appreciate* Bertram Cope's Year*, we must, I argue, abandon post-Stonewall presuppositions of what we should expect from a gay novel.* Bertram Cope's Year *is not a coming-of-age novel. Rather it is a comic novel formed from Fuller's successful fusion and subversion of the romantic comedy, the comedy of manners, and the campus novel. Bertram Cope is a comic hero who ultimately triumphs over the efforts of a college town, presided over the matchmaking socialite Medora Phillips, to marry him to one of the three young ladies in her circle. He is rescued from this unwanted marriage by his boyfriend, who arrives to save him from the unwanted marriage. Fuller successfully exploits the conventions of the comic novel to tell a story that anticipates one of the aspirations of the gay liberation movement half a century later. As such, it deserves permanent currency.*

Keywords*: Henry Blake Fuller, Bertram Cope's Year, gay canon, comedy of manners*

> "Compressed form is itself one of the manifestations of force – an evidence of vigor." – Henry Blake Fuller, *A Plea for Shorter Novels*

How do we read and, more importantly, judge a "gay" novel written and published long before the emergence of a modern, post-Stonewall gay sensibility and consciousness? What is required to forestall readers today from imposing their expectations and assumptions on the past so that they can appreciate a pre-Stonewall novelist's art of fiction? These are the questions raised by post-Stonewall responses to Henry Blake Fuller's novel *Bertram Cope's Year*, privately printed in Chicago by Fuller in 1919, after he had tried, unsuccessfully, to find a New York publisher for it. In the words of Carl Van Vechten, writing in 1922, the novel "drop[ped] from the presses still-born, to meet with absolute silence on the part of the reviewers, and to find itself quickly on sale at the "remainder" tables of the large department stores" (140). A disappointed Fuller burned the manuscript together with the unsold copies, and the novel was virtually forgotten until it was reprinted in 1998 by Turtle Press, and then reprinted later that year by the Quality Paperback Book Club in its Pink Triangle series.

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A positive review of the Turtle Press edition in *The New York Times Book Review* did little to win the book a wide readership, although that edition, with an introduction by Edmund Wilson, might have been a factor in getting Fuller named posthumously to The Chicago LBGT Hall of Fame in 2000. So it is not all that surprising, then, that in 2014 when the *Gay and Lesbian Review* asked "What Was the First Gay Novel?" *Bertram Cope's Year* was not among the eight novels the editors nominated for that distinction[1]. Instead of continuing neglect, the novel deserves permanent currency as one of the masterpieces of the gay canon for its unprecedented acceptance of a gay male relationship as wholesome, unproblematically normal, and hence unobjectionable, as well as for its affirmation of the subversive force of the homoerotic.

It is not difficult to see why *Bertram Cope's Year* has failed to achieve canonical status. Half a century after Stonewall, the novel's apparent reticence in portraying gay experiences, particularly sex, will seem to most readers outdated, even prudish. The nude swimming scene will not elicit recollections of the homoerotic paintings of Fuller's English contemporary, Henry Scott Tuke. "The novel treads gently around the edge of the erotic," says Andrew Solomon in his "Afterword" (291). "For readers responsive to the uninhibited fiction of Edmund White, Dale Peck, David Leavitt and others," observed Joel Connaroe in his 1998 review, "Fuller's approach to sensuality will seem almost comically prim" (13). The novel certainly does not advocate modern gay liberation, personal or political. Although there are three and likely four gay characters in a novel that Edmund Wilson thought was "not really a book about homosexuality" (xxvii), none of them comes close to exhibiting a post-Stonewall consciousness of his sexual identity or confronts the challenge of living an openly gay life. So for today's reader there are rather a lot of obstacles to overcome.

The problem that critics both inside and outside the academy have struggled, with varying degrees of failure, to grapple with is how to take the novel's representation of and attitudes to homosexuality. Although Carl Van Vechten wrote perceptively about the novel in 1922 – in a letter to him Fuller called his commentary "the only intelligent one I have encountered" (qtd. in Scambray, 153) – modern criticism of it begins with Edmund Wilson's seminal reappraisal of Fuller, which appeared in *The New Yorker* in May 1970, not quite a year after Stonewall, and was reprinted in 1998 in both the Turtle Press and Quality Paperback Book Club editions. At the time, Wilson was still one of the most influential and respected literary critics and public intellectuals in New York. Who better to make the case that Fuller's novels, and specifically *Bertram Cope's Year*, deserve permanent currency? Wilson was trying to get critical recognition of Fuller's entire *oeuvre* (he discusses all his novels), and he singles out *Bertram's Cope's Year* for especial praise, calling it "perhaps Fuller's best" and regretting that "it seems never to have had adequate attention" (xxx). Yet, despite his praise of it, Wilson could still declare that it was not really about homosexuality, claiming: "At no point has the reader been given any clue as to Bertram's sexual inclinations" (xxx). (There are only slightly fewer clues than in

[1] Richard Schneider, Jr., "Special Issue: 'The First Gay Novel.'" *The Gay & Lesbian Review* 21.6 (Nov.-Dec. 2014), pp. 4-5. The six novels nominated were *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Maurice*, *The Well of Loneliness*, *The City and the Pillar*, *Giovanni's Room*, *A Single Man*, and *The Charioteer*. The issue included essays on all the nominees.

one of Joseph Hansen's Dave Brandstetter mysteries.) Deliberately downplaying the homosexual theme, Wilson argues that the novel "has a kind of philosophic theme," namely "the power exerted by a 'charismatic' personality, extended to what was then the conventional range" of the realist novel (xxxi). Wilson set the precedent for later critics, who have repeatedly tried to identify the "real" subject of the novel, and post-Stonewall critics, with very few exceptions, share Wilson's ambivalence. Praise for the novel, when it comes at all, is always qualified. Writing four years after Wilson, Bernard Bowron acknowledges the homosexual theme, but like Wilson he believes that the "major theme" lies elsewhere. The novel, he says, is really "about the careless ingratitude of youth toward yearningly helpful middle age. And, with uncharacteristic daring, Fuller wove into this major theme a restrained but quite undisguised treatment of homosexuality" (226). It is hardly surprising, then, that he dismisses it as "not a very interesting novel" (227), or that Joel Conarroe finds its enduring value in its "beautifully evoked period atmosphere, its sly humor and its picturesque diction" (13). This comes close to damning with faint praise.

Writing nearly two decades after Stonewall, Kenneth Scambray deals much more directly with the homosexual theme, yet still finds Fuller's inadequate treatment of it to be the novel's major weakness, which he attributes to Fuller's unwillingness to portray his protagonist's homosexuality with sufficient psychological complexity for fear that doing so would reveal his own (repressed) sexuality:

> Cope is a weakly drawn character, but given the limitations that Fuller was working under, Cope's irresolute nature is somewhat understandable. A deeply probing psychological view of Cope's character and the conflict he faced as a homosexual in Churchton would have exposed far too much about Fuller. A more socially assertive Cope would have caused him to challenge more directly and more openly the values of those around him. [...] This would have been far too revealing and even dangerous for Fuller. [...] Fuller realized that if he exposed his protagonist more, according to contemporary views of homosexuality, Cope would have been judged either insane or morally decrepit. To have his novel read at all, the only route open to Fuller was a circuitous one. (150)

Scambray's implied assumption is that to be successful Fuller's novel – indeed, any gay novel – must deal openly with the protagonist's sexuality and offer "a probing psychological view of his character" in the way that, for example, Edmund White does in *A Boy's Own Story* (1982), or David Leavitt in *The Lost Language of Cranes* (1986). For Scambray, Cope is "weakly drawn" because Fuller could not in 1919 write openly about his protagonist's sexuality. Cope's weakness translates into the weakness of the novel. Similarly, Roger Austen criticizes Fuller for failing to write about gay relationships "with understanding and incisive candor" because to do so would have revealed too much about himself (30).

But even if we grant the limitations Fuller was working under (most novelists have worked under at least some limitations imposed by their times), critics like Scambray still fail to recognize that, although Fuller never intended the novel to be a "deeply probing psychological" representation of a gay man coming to terms with his sexual identity, he still managed to work successfully within those limitations and strike an early blow for what would, half a century later, be called gay liberation. Fuller deserves recognition and praise for writing the first novel to tell the story of a gay man who, with the support of his lover, successfully negotiates the pressures of being gay in an unsupportive society that not only lacks models of how to be openly gay but that also tries – although it ultimately fails – to subject him to heterosexual norms, specifically marriage. This was no insignificant achievement in 1919. In portraying two male lovers' rejection of and ultimate triumph over the restrictive and conformist society of a provincial mid-Western college town, *Bertram Cope's Year* is one of the first novels to anticipate a basic principle of the 1970s gay liberation movement and its subsequent evolution. Fuller deserves recognition for what he achieved, not criticism for what he did not even try to do. To gain that recognition, a revaluation of the novel must address four critical issues: critics' inappropriate post-Stonewall expectations of what a gay novel should be and do; the novel's indebtedness to the tradition of dramatic comedy and Bertram Cope's characterization as a comic figure; Fuller's subtle yet sophisticated treatment of the erotic in the novel, and Arthur Lemoyne's subversive role as the embodiment of the erotic.

To these four I would add the aesthetic criterion implied by my epigraph: Fuller's complete and assured mastery of form and style. Fuller, like the modernist novelists who were his contemporaries, was very much preoccupied with the form and art of fiction. He acknowledged the importance of form in an article on him by Charles C. Baldwin in which Fuller said, "As may be gathered, I am as much interested in form and technique as with any of the other elements involved in fiction; all because these two features seem to be increasingly disregarded by the ordinary reader" (194). And in an essay written just two years before the publication of *Bertram Cope's Year*, he affirmed: "'Real art' is, and will remain, largely a matter of form, of organism, of definition, of boundaries. The artist will express his interest [...] but it must be an interest disciplined by, and within metes and bounds, an interest which will result in a disciplined impression" ("A Plea," 141).

In my view, the major obstacle to reassessing the novel is that in the decades after Stonewall the criterion for evaluating a gay novel has been inseparable from the privileged position in the gay canon enjoyed by the coming-of-age/coming-out novel. This criterion has meant that pre-Stonewall novels are often interpreted and judged – or rather *mis*interpreted and *mis*judged – from a post-Stonewall perspective. This critical practice and the judgments that follow from it are clearly exemplified by Mark Lilly's analysis and evaluation of David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes* (1986) in his book *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1993):

> *The Lost Language of Cranes* is an outstanding example of the recent tradition of coming out novels, many examples of which appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. The

> formula normally used in such novels involves, first, showing us the family relationships before the coming out, then the more or less traumatic coming out period itself, and finally, some time later, we see whether and to what extent, the family/friends have adapted to the new information. *The Lost Language of Cranes* conforms to this pattern, but in a particularly fine and perceptive way which makes it exemplary of the genre. (206)

It is not just that Leavitt's novel exemplifies this sub-genre; for Lilly the sub-genre itself exemplifies the gay novel as a genre. While I agree with Lilly's judgment of Leavitt's novel, the "formula" for this particular kind of (post-Stonewall) novel is inappropriate for interpreting and judging what Fuller was trying to do fifty years earlier. There is no reason why we should expect Fuller in 1919 to conform to Lilly's post-Stonewall formula. When Joel Conarroe concludes his review of *Bertram Cope's Year* by saying that Fuller's novel is "[a]udacious for its time" (13), he is implicitly faulting it for being outdated, for not being gay enough.

This reigning paradigm of the gay novel explains why in 2014 readers of the *Gay and Lesbian Review* chose E. M. Forster's *Maurice* as the first gay novel, awarding it more votes than the next two choices combined (*The City and the Pillar* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). Written just a few years before *Bertram Cope's Year*, it was not published until 1971. In his essay on *Maurice* in the *G&LR*, John Gorton described Forster's novel as

> the prototypical gay-affirming, coming-of-age novel. [...] The theme of *Maurice* can be described as essentially the search for a compatible social construct by which the protagonist can understand himself and go on to self-actualization. [...] The book's publication in 1971 brought it to the attention of a newly awakened audience that could find in it a vision for actualizing the dreams of gay liberation. (13)

It is easy to understand why readers voted for *Maurice*: it clearly meets their (post-Stonewall) emotional and political needs[2]. If, however, *Bertram Cope's Year* is approached with the expectation that it should fulfill these needs, it will inevitably be found less than satisfying. If the novel "treads gently around the edge of the erotic" (Solomon, 291), it refuses altogether to embrace post-Stonewall gay politics. Solomon regrets that Fuller "is always somewhat less than one would like him to be" (296), that is, less than the liberated, post-Stonewall reader would like him to be.

[2] In a recent issue of *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, Jeffrey Round writes movingly about how as an adolescent he read Maurice, and explains why it might have saved his life. "Forster's Maurice May Have Saved My Life." *G&LR* 28.1 (Jan.-Feb. 2021): 22-23.

To understand and appreciate Fuller's novel, then, we must abandon our post-Stonewall preconceptions of what a "gay" novel is and what it must offer to be taken seriously. In spite of the fact that Fuller's novel is obviously very different in form and purpose from the coming-out novel, both readers and critics have nevertheless persistently come to it with the expectation, often only tacitly acknowledged, that it should be a character-driven psychological novel that focuses on the main character's effort to come to terms with his sexuality, accept and affirm it without guilt or shame, and "go on to self-actualization." It is scarcely surprising that such readers are disappointed. Viewed through the lens of identify politics, pre-Stonewall novels will inevitably be judged deficient. But should we impose post-Stonewall criteria on pre-Stonewall novels? We must recognize that Fuller is not writing a *Bildungsroman* about a gay man discovering his sexual orientation and overcoming the obstacles to its full social and sexual expression, and we should further grant that there is no reason that Fuller should be expected to have written in 1919 a novel that anticipates a post-Stonewall "vision for actualizing the dreams of gay liberation."

A defining difference between *Bertram Cope's Year* and novels like *Maurice* and *The Lost Language of Cranes* is that Cope and his partner Arthur Lemoyne have *already* accepted their sexuality *before* the novel begins, and they are portrayed throughout as being entirely comfortable with it. They are as "out" as they will ever be. When Bertram Cope arrives in Churchton as an English instructor and graduate student, he has been in a relationship with Arthur for close to a year, as the letter he writes to him makes clear, and there is no evidence anywhere in the text that their sexuality as such is or has been an issue for them. As Andrew Solomon observes, though without seeing the full implications of his remark, "Arthur and Bertram do not seem to find any aspect of their relationship peculiar; they never ponder on it as exclusionary, illegal, or morally suspect" (293). After they have successfully dealt with the threat to their relationship by Bertram's unexpected and unintended engagement to Amy Leffingwell, the happy lovers are able to return to their earlier bliss: "They spent ten minutes [on a walk] in the clear winter air. As Cope, on their return, stopped to put his latch-key to use, Lemoyne impulsively threw an arm across his shoulder. "Everything is all right, now," he said in a tone of high gratification; and Urania, through the whole width of her starry firmament, looked down kindly upon a happier household" (211). There are no indications of angst, shame, or self-hatred here – or anywhere else in the novel. The allusion to Urania is particularly significant. "Uranians" was a term, first introduced by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in the 1860s and later adopted by such English writers as Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds, to refer to homosexual men[3].

If *Bertram Cope's Year* is not, like *Maurice* or *A Boy's Own Story*, a coming-of-age novel, then what kind of novel is it, and what expectations should readers bring to it? To write a novel is to participate in a tradition of novel writing. No one who had never read a novel would set out to write one. And

[3] See Robert Beachy's Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity (New York: Vintage, 2015), especially Chapter One, "The German Invention of Sexuality." How much Fuller knew of this German movement is uncertain, but the allusion to Urania is revealing. Joseph Dimuro comments, "The Uranian allusion suggests Fuller's awareness of the various codes that were available for writing about homosexuality, but it also seems clear that he was cautiously selective with regard to the developing vocabulary of same-sex attraction" (30-31).

thus to interpret a novel accurately and to judge it fairly, readers need to known what intertextual grid they are expected to read it against. Despite its obvious difference from later gay coming-out novels, *Bertram Cope's Year* does share one important similarity with Forster's nearly contemporary novel. As Gorton points out, when Forster decided to write a novel with a new subject matter, he did not invent an entirely new narrative form. Rather he appropriated old forms to create "a hybrid of the traditional marriage novel and the Bildungsroman genre" (13) in which to embody his subject matter. Now the Bildungsroman and the courtship-marriage novel, a staple of nineteenth-century fiction that Forster used in his other novels, were easily amenable to his innovative subject matter – but not to Fuller's. New genres are never entirely new; they are transformations of earlier ones. And so, like Forster, Fuller the novelist had to find the antecedent narrative patterns suitable for his different purpose, and he found in three genres – the campus novel, the comedy of manners, and especially the romantic comedy – the appropriate antecedent forms to tell the comic story of a homosexual man who triumphs over a society that attempts and fails to assimilate him into its marital norms.

Contemporary reviewers of *Bertram Cope's Year* were quick to recognize elements of the campus novel in it, even though very little of the action takes place on campus. Fuller's first biographer, Constance Griffin, complained that the novel "fails to catch the 'spirit' of university life" (66), as if that were what Fuller was trying to "catch." The college novel was a popular genre at the time; just a year after *Bertram Cope's Year* was published, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* appeared, the first part of which recounts the hero's college years at Princeton. Fuller, however, is not writing a college novel. Instead, he appropriates and adapts this familiar form to his own purposes by incorporating two of the structural patterns that, according to Steven Connor, define the campus novel: "The one concerns the disruption of a closed world, and the gradual return of order and regularity to it, while the other concerns the passage through this closed world of a character who must in the end be allowed to escape its gravitational pull" (71). These two patterns are clearly evident in *Bertram Cope's Year*. Bertram's arrival disrupts the closed world of Churchton, but as the title of the novel indicates, Bertram is destined to spend only one (academic) year there. Its restrictive mores will not become his, and he, along with Arthur, escapes its "gravitational pull" towards heterosexual marriage. The novel ends with the closed, insular world of Churchton returning to its accustomed order and regularity, but that world is one that Bertram and Arthur are, Fuller implies, well rid of. They have escaped.

As a comic novel, *Bertram Cope's Year* is clearly indebted to the conventions of dramatic comedy. As well as a novelist, poet, and essayist, Fuller was also a playwright, and his 1896 one-act play "At Saint Judas's," boldly published just one year after Oscar Wilde's trials, is widely recognized as the first American play on a homosexual theme[4]. Writing about Fuller in 1925, Charles C. Baldwin remarked,

[4] The play is included in the Broadview Press edition of Bertram Cope's Year, edited by Joseph A. Dimuro. It is also available on line at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/puppetboothtwel01fullgoog

"He is familiar with Marlowe's mighty lines and the terrific tragedies of Kyd. He knows farces in which [David] Garrick played and the comedies of Molière" (190). Not surprisingly, then, there are numerous references in *Bertram Cope's Year* to acting and the theatre, including allusions to Sophocles' *Antigone* and Schiller's *Wallenstein*. Bertram, who is considering writing his M.A. thesis on Shakespeare, is named after the hero of *All's Well That Ends Well*, and his sister, Rosalys, is confused with Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Either of those titles would make a fitting subtitle for the novel. All the major characters are, to varying degrees, playing roles. Arthur is an actor who plays a female role (in full drag, no less!) in the college dramatic society's production of *The Antics of Arabella*. Dramatic comedy, it is pertinent to note, has a long history of cross-dressing.

As an actor, Arthur relies on his memory of the plays he has acted in to help Bertram get out of his engagement. The letter he composes for Cope to send to his fiancée, breaking off their engagement, is modeled on similar letters that Arthur recalls from plays. His mind, we are told,

> was full of *clichés* from his reading and from his "scripts." He had heard all the necessary things said: in fact, had said them himself – now in evening dress, now in hunting costumes, now in the loose habiliments of Pierrot – time and time again. The dissatisfied *fiancé* need but say that he could not feel, after all, that they were as well suited to each other as they ought to be, that he could not bring himself to believe that his feeling for her was what love really should be, and that — (209)

Arthur's letter perfectly illustrates Oscar Wilde's critical axiom that life imitates art, a truth that is further confirmed when Bertram's fiancée Amy preempts Arthur's conventional letter breaking off Bertram's engagement by sending him a similarly worded letter of her own containing the very same clichés: "'She says what you say!' exclaimed Cope with shining eyes and a trace of half-hysteric bravado. 'She does not feel that we are quite so well suited to each other as we ought to be, nor that her feeling toward me is what love really [...] Can she have been in dramatics too!'" (210). In Fuller's comedy all the characters have their prescribed roles to play, and consequently readers unfamiliar with the comic tradition will miss much of the pleasure of this conventional comic novel that also subverts conventions – both literary and (as we shall see) sexual.

The comic plot of the novel reverses – and subverts – the standard plot of romantic comedy, which typically focuses on a pair of lovers whose union is thwarted by a blocking character, such as the heroine's father or guardian, whose obstruction is finally overcome, allowing the happy couple to proceed to the hymeneal altar. (This pattern goes back to the Roman comedies of Terence and Plautus.) In Fuller's clever reworking of the formula, the (male) lovers are already together when the action begins and their happy union is threatened by the matrimonial machinations of, Medora Phillips, the widow of an artist and art collector and Churchton's preeminent socialite. Fuller's comic plot puts the lovers' stable relationship in danger when three young, talented women – The Three Graces, as Bertram dubs them in a letter to Arthur – as well as one middle-aged gay man threaten it.

Medora is cast in the role of the blocking character as she seeks a suitable wife for Cope, Churchton's newest eligible bachelor.

When Bertram finds himself unexpectedly engaged to Amy Leffington as a result of a boating accident in which Amy portrays Bertram as the hero who saves her (actually, she saves him), it gives the resourceful Arthur the incentive to leave Winnebago, Wisconsin, where the two met when Bertram was teaching there the previous year, and join him in Churchton. The comic plight of an endangered Bertram is explicitly signaled by many of the chapter titles: "Cope Shall Be Rescued," "Cope Regains His Freedom," "Cope in Danger Anew," "Cope in Double Danger," "Cope Escapes a Snare." It is this comic form – an unheroic and matrimonially imperiled hero rescued at the eleventh hour – that governs the novel's innovative plot structure. As a comic novel that blends the romantic comedy and the comedy of manners, *Bertram Cope's Year* does not focus on Cope's struggle to accept and then affirm his sexuality, but rather on how Cope successfully overcomes the threat to his relationship with Arthur arising from the efforts of the provincial society of Churchton, embodied in the formidable Medora, to force him into an unwanted marriage. Medora Phillips is a character type familiar in comedies of manners. She is a literary descendant of Lady Bracknell in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. The innocent and inexperienced Bertram is initially outmanoeuvred by Medora – her name, of Greek origin, means "ruler" – and she rules Churchton society like a Greek tyrant. (In her first encounter with Cope, she peremptorily orders him to fetch her some refreshments, as if he were a servant.) The inexperienced Bertram sees no way of getting out of the unwanted engagement and spending the rest of his life in Churchton – until Arthur arrives to save him.

It is not just Medora's protégées, the Three Graces, who threaten Bertram. At the same time as the main plot of impending heterosexual marriage is unfolding, Bertram is also being amorously pursued by the middle-aged and sexually diffident Basil Randolph[5]. While Bertram is planning to set up a *ménage-à-deux* with Arthur, Randolph, a wealthy, middle-aged stockbroker, scholar *manqué* and friend of Medora Phillips, takes a fancy to Cope and in pursuit of him is eagerly acquiring a larger, well-appointed apartment (complete with a cook) that he hopes will entice the disappointingly reluctant Bertram to acquiesce to sleepovers and – dare he hope? – perhaps more! Randolph has a passion for collecting curios, antiques, *objects d'arts* – and attractive and youthful college boys:

> The least old of all things in Randolph's world were the students who flooded Churchton. There were two or three thousand of them, and hundreds of new ones came with every September. Sometimes he felt prompted to "collect" them, as

[5] Basil shares his Christian name with Basil Halliwell, the artist whose infatuation with the beauty of Dorian Gray leads him to paint his picture. In Fuller's novel, Hortense Dunton, the niece of Medora Phillips and one of the Three Graces, is in love with Cope and starts to paint his picture but never finishes it. The uncompleted portrait represents Hortense's failure to win Bertram's love – she can't figure out how to capture him on canvas – and the doomed relationship between the two may be Fuller's covert allusion to the doomed affair between Dorian Gray and the actress Sybil Vane. Bertram's youth and beauty, like Dorian's, elicit the same intense erotic response in both men and women. These multiple allusions to Wilde's novel, hitherto unnoticed by critics, are too insistent to be unintended.

> contrasts to his older curios. They were fully as interesting, in their way, as brass-work and leatherwork [...]. (31)

His carefully planned "courtship" of Cope includes an excursion to the Big Town (Chicago) for dinner and a play. Fuller handles the intrigues and misunderstandings arising from these twin romantic plots with a sureness, subtlety, and lightness of touch that is one of the many charms of this "light, bright and sparkling" comic novel.

Once the crucial importance of the novel's comic form is recognized, the widespread criticism of Fuller's portrayal of Bertram's character can be seen as a failure to appreciate Bertram's role as the comic hero of the novel. Although comic novels rarely focus on the psychological complexity of their protagonists – characters in comedies tend to belong to recognizable types – much criticism of *Bertram Cope's Year* is directed at the alleged weakness of Bertram's characterization, which in turn is seen as an artistic flaw in the novel. This criticism arises, as we have seen, primarily from the expectation that the central character in a gay novel needs to be psychologically complex, and especially from the presupposition that a gay novel ought to depict the struggle of the protagonist to affirm his identity as a gay man in a society that resists such an affirmation.

The criticism of Cope's characterization and, by extension, of the novel begins with Edmund Wilson, who argues that Fuller's portrayal of Cope undermines his effort

> to dramatize convincingly the spell of enchantment he is supposed to cast. This is seen in his effect on the other characters, but the reader is not made to feel it: Bertram is represented as behaving in an agreeable enough way, but in his self-centeredness, he never does anything that is made to seem really attractive. And the result [...] is a kind of deliberate flatness. (xxx)

This fault, Wilson concludes, renders Cope "intrinsically uninteresting" (xxx).

Two decades after Wilson, Solomon, despite his praise of the novel, continues to focus on the characterization of Bertram as the source of the novel's weakness:

> Bertram Cope is a man without real qualities and feelings, and feelings themselves are quite alien to him. He never has a flash of admirable passion. Unintentionally, he disappoints or injures everyone, and he leaves in his flat wake a trail of flat destruction [...] . [The novel] is about the impossibility of achieving intimacy when one is drawn to chilliness (Fuller compares Bertram more than once to an icicle). What may appear to be understatement and a cautious stepping back from the frightening cold water may in fact be simple selfishness. (299)

Virtually all of these criticisms of Bertram arise from misreadings. Bertram is certainly not "a man without real qualities and feelings." He does not possess a "hard, self-sufficient core of character." Nor is he "intrinsically uninteresting," or "drawn to chilliness," or self-centered, or incapable of achieving intimacy. None of these are intrinsic character flaws. Rather they are flaws attributed to him by the other characters as a result of their misperceptions of his lack of interest in women and of his sexual relationship with Arthur. This criticism of him is first expressed by Medora Phillips to Randolph when Cope fails to show any romantic interest in her "poor girls":

> "He sings," said Medora [...] . "Entertained us the other Sunday afternoon. Cool and correct, but pleasant. No warmth, no passion. No special interest in any of my poor girls. I didn't feel that he was drawing any of them near the danger line." (34)

In contrast, Arthur certainly does not find Cope uninteresting or lacking in feeling. If "feelings [...] are quite alien to him," if he really did have a "hard, self-sufficient core of character," would Arthur have fallen in love with him? And if Bertram never had "a flash of admirable passion," would he have fallen in love with Arthur?

The obvious reason that the reader does not, like the three young women, feel Cope's "spell of enchantment" is that the reader knows what Medora and her three protégées do not know: that Cope is homosexual and in a fulfilling relationship with Arthur. The reader is far more aware of the depth of that relationship than any of the characters. Cope's lack of romantic interest in Medora Phillips' three young *protégées* arises not from his coolness or lack of warmth, or from his "hard, self-sufficient core of character" (Wilson xxx), but from what today we would call his sexual orientation. The three young women who are attracted to him obviously do not know that his lack of romantic interest in them arises not from an intrinsic emotional deficiency, or from his inability to achieve intimacy – he certainly achieves intimacy with Arthur – but rather from the simple fact that, as a gay man with a devoted boyfriend, he obviously has no romantic attraction to women and, moreover, is incapable of such an attraction. Contemplating what appears to be unavoidable marriage to Amy, Cope muses, "Most of all he saw – *and felt to the depths of his being* – his own *essential repugnance* to the life toward which he now seemed headed" (176; italics added). As this description of his feelings reveals, Cope obviously is capable of strong feelings, although the other characters, except for Arthur, have no access to them.

As a gay man in a relationship with a man, Cope has never had any experience of or interest in heterosexual courtship. Relating romantically with women demands, as Bertram acknowledges to Randolph, "a knack [...] a technique – that I don't seem to posses. Nor do I seem greatly prompted to learn it" (76). But the reason he is not prompted to learn it is not that he is incapable of intimacy. Lacking this technique or knack with women is not equivalent to being incapable of intimacy. His failure to respond emotionally to the three women has nothing to do with his coolness, self-centeredness or lack of feeling. If it were he would not be in a relationship with Arthur. According to Solomon,

the novel is about "the impossibility of achieving intimacy when one is drawn to chilliness (Fuller compares Bertram more than once to an icicle)" (299). Bertram is not *drawn* to chilliness. We are repeatedly shown examples of the intimacy between Bertram and Arthur.

The serio-comic situation Cope suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself in arises not only from his own inexperience but also from a historical situation (a common one in Fuller's time and for decades afterwards) in which a closeted gay man of marriageable age has to negotiate his relations with women, especially unmarried ones in search of a husband, within a society that *assumes* him to be heterosexual and therefore naturally in search of a wife. (This was less of a problem for the middle-aged gay man who, like Basil Randolph, is stereotypically perceived as a "confirmed bachelor.") Today, someone in Bertram's position would much more likely be "out" – especially in the tolerant, liberal environment of a university – and therefore the awkward situation Bertram finds himself in would be much less likely to arise. (It's virtually impossible to imagine the story of *Bertram Cope's Year* being set in 2019.) Today, if a young, handsome man of marriageable age is not dating and shows no signs of romantic interest in women, then most people – especially today's equivalent of Bertram's circle of acquaintances – would be predisposed to assume that he is gay rather than 'a confirmed bachelor' – especially if he were in a relationship anything like the one between Bertram and Arthur.

The misinterpretations of Bertram as cool, unfeeling, and self-centered also arise from a failure to perceive Fuller's strategic use of focalization in the novel. Solomon, for example, erroneously assumes that the perception of Bertram as someone "drawn to chilliness" is Fuller's representation of him, and hence one that the reader is supposed to endorse: "Fuller compares Bertram more than once to an icicle" (Solomon, 299). But this is simply not true. Solomon has confused the other characters' judgments of Cope with the narrator's and hence with Fuller's. The reader rarely has direct access to Bertram's consciousness (his letter early in the novel to Arthur and the revelation of his feelings about marrying Amy are the rare exceptions.) It is the characters in the novel – not the narrator or Fuller – who describe Cope as cool, unfeeling, remote, and self-centered. Consider, for example, the repeated comparison of him to an icicle. Early in the novel Basil Randolph reports to his friend Joe Foster his first encounter with Bertram at one of Medora's parties, and Foster asks if Bertram sang with passion. Randolph replies, "Well, hardly. With cool correctness. An icicle on Diana's temple – that would be my guess." Randolph is describing the musical voice with which Cope sang a particular "really good" song at Mrs. Phillips's salon. Randolph is not evaluating Cope's character, only his musical performance on that occasion as a singer. Moreover, he explicitly says that his interpretation of Bertram's voice is only a "guess," not an objective judgment. So we should not take Randolph's words as a disinterested and hence reliable assessment of Bertram's character endorsed by Fuller. Bertram's coolness towards Randolph arises partly from the fact that he knows that Randolph is sexually attracted to him and does not want to encourage the older man.

The comparison of Cope to an icicle reappears later in the novel during a trip to the opera. Mrs. Phillips wonders just what it is that makes Cope so attractive to her:

> He looked well as he sat on the back seat of the limousine with Medora Philips, during the long drive in; and he looked well – strikingly, handsomely well – in the box itself, Indeed, thought Medora, he made other young men in nearby boxes – young men of "means" and "position" – look almost plebian. "He is charming," she said to herself, over and over again.
>
> What about him took her? Was it his slenderness, his grace? Was it his youthfulness, intact to this moment and promising an extension of agreeable possibilities into an entertaining future? Or was it more largely his fundamental coolness of tone? Again he was an icicle on the temple – this time the temple of song. "He *is* glittering," said Medora, intent on his blazing blue eyes, his beautiful teeth ever ready for a public smile, and the luminous backward sweep of his hair [...] . (214)

We view Cope here entirely from Medora's point of view, not the narrator's or Fuller's. It is Medora, not the narrator or Fuller, who compares Bertram to an icicle. She is the focalizer, and the passage reveals far more about Medora than Cope. Significantly, we are not privy to Cope's thoughts here. The passage provides no insight into Cope's feelings; it is Medora's mind we peer into. So there is no justification for inferring that he is in fact as cool as an icicle, or that coolness is a "fundamental" quality of his nature. The fact that he does not feel passion for a middle-aged woman does not mean he lacks passion.

Criticism of the novel has, understandably, tended to focus attention primarily on Bertram, but an appreciation of its complex design, and especially its representation of the erotic, must pay attention to Arthur Lemoyne's important role and to the couple's relationship. For not only is Arthur cast in the role of Cope's rescuer, he is also the character who infuses the erotic into a novel that, according to Solomon, "treads gently around the edge of the erotic" (291). Granted, the novel lacks the explicit representation of sex and sexual feelings we find in post-Stonewall novels. But we must not therefore conclude that Fuller is repressing the erotic[6]. He has, in fact, successfully found a way to express it. There are three erotic scenes in the novel, and they are carefully sequenced so as to build climactically towards the scene in which Arthur, after a performance of *The Antics of Arabella*, kisses one of the male actors. The sequence begins with the nude swimming scene, which Joel Conarroe calls "unexpected" and insists that it "includes no hint of surreptitious voyeurism" (13). The scene might

[6] For a Freudian interpretation of sexual repression in the novel, see Keith Gumery, "Repression, Inversion and Modernity: A Freudian Reading of Henry Blake Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year*. *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.3/4 (Summer 2002), pp. 40-57.

initially seem to be "unexpected," but it is clearly part of Fuller's artistic design. It subtly foreshadows the subsequent scenes in which the erotic becomes increasingly more pronounced.

During their swim in Lake Michigan while visiting Medora's summer cottage, Cope and Randolph discuss marriage, and Cope, who fears that marriage will be a trap for him, remarks, "I'm pretty sure to get caught some time or other" – Chapter 27 is called "Cope Escapes a Snare" – to which Randolph responds, "You're manoeuvred into a position where you're made to feel you 'must.' I've know chaps to marry on that basis" (76, 77). Cope's remark that he will likely "be caught" should be interpreted not as evidence that Cope is ambivalent about his sexuality, but rather as a revelation of his fear that one day he "must" succumb to the social pressure to get married. That, in fact, is what almost happens to Cope later when he finds himself engaged to Amy and feels that he "must" marry her. Since at this point in the novel, gay readers know that Bertram is gay, the fact that Cope's conversation with another gay man occurs in the course of a nude swimming scene adds a covert sexual frisson to the discussion of how a gay man in 1919 should deal with the social expectation that he must eventually marry. While there is no hint of voyeurism, the nude swimming scene subtly alludes to the fact that one of the ways in which homoeroticism could be acceptably expressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was through paintings of nude youths, as the paintings of Henry Scott Tuke demonstrate[7].

Although the sexual relationship between Bertram and Arthur could not in 1919 be explicitly portrayed in the novel, Fuller circumvented this obstacle through his erotically charged representation of the duet they sing at one of Mrs. Phillips' evening receptions. It is difficult not to take Fuller's description of their impassioned rendition of the nautical ballad "Larboard Watch" as a bold metaphor for sexual consummation:

> Lemoyne felt the composition to be primitive, antiquated and of slight value; but he had received his cue, and both his throat and his hands wrought with an elaborate expressiveness. He sang and played, if not with sincerity at least with effect. His voice was a high, ringing tenor; not too ringing for Cope's resonant baritone, but almost too sweet: a voice which might cloy (if used alone) within a few moments. Cope was a perfect second, and the two went at it with a complete unity of understanding and of sentiment. Together they viewed – in thirds – "the gath'ring clouds;" together – still in thirds – they roused themselves "at the welcome call" of "Larboard watch ahoy!" Disregarding the mere words, they attained, at the finish, to something like feeling – or even like a touch of passion. (192-93)

[7] See Flora Doble, "Henry Scott Tuke: Capturing Light and the Homoerotic Gaze." ArtUK. org <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/henry-scott-tuke-capturing-light-and-the-homoerotic-gaze> Accessed February 16, 2021. (Fuller and Tuke were born one year apart and died in the same year.)

The description of the duet (Fuller was an amateur musician) abounds in *double entendres*: "the two went at it," "Together," "complete unity," "together," "they roused themselves," "they attained, at the finish [...] a touch of passion." Significantly, when Cope sang solo earlier in the novel at another of Medora's parties, his performance was far more restrained: "He sang with care rather than with volume, with discretion rather than with abandon [...] *as if some temperamental brake were operating to prevent the complete expression of the singer's nature*" (24; italics added). In reporting the event to Basil Randolph, Cope tells him, "I do best with my regular accompanist" (55). His "regular accompanist" is, of course, Arthur, and when he sings the passionate duet with him there is no "brake" on the "complete expression" of his true nature. In 1919 Fuller would not have been free to directly describe sex between two men, but in the duet sung by the two lovers he finds the perfect vehicle to express it indirectly.

On this occasion Medora recognizes something she has not seen before in Cope's singing, which she had earlier (before the arrival of Arthur in Churchton) described as "cool and correct, but pleasant. No warmth, no passion." Significantly, she immediately follows this assessment of Cope's singing by complaining about his lack of romantic interest in the Three Graces: "No special interest in any of my poor girls. I didn't feel that he was drawing any of them too near the danger-line" (34). Yet when he sings the duet with Arthur, he does more than draw near the danger line – he crosses it. "Medora Phillips," we are told, "had never heard Cope sing like that before; had never seen so much animation in his singing face. By the fourth bar there had been tears in her eyes, and there was a catch in her breath when she exclaimed softly, "You dear boys!" (193). Dear boys, indeed! Beneath the novel's placid surface there runs an undercurrent of suppressed – not repressed – sexual passion that critics have failed to fathom. Novelists and film makers have always found ways to get around the censor. The duet here reminds me of the memorable scene in Michael Gordon's *Pillow Talk* (1959) in which Rock Hudson and Doris Day flirt on the phone while, on the split screen, each is taking a bath. Sex will always out. Had the novel been made into a film, the perfect scriptwriter and director would have been the Billy Wilder of *Some Like It Hot* (1959).

The submerged sexual undercurrent running through the novel – prefigured by the nude bathing scene and intensified by Bertram and Arthur's duet – finally erupts, boils over, after a performance of the farcical comedy *The Antics of Arabella* in which Arthur has a role impersonating a female character. "This is the gay life," Arthur exclaims shortly after arriving in Churchton, "just the life I have come down here to lead" (208). His performance of the role is such a success that he cannot restrain himself from sharing his pleasure in it with another actor: " [...] in his general state of ebulliency he endeavoured to bestow a measure of upwelling femininity upon another performer who was in the dress of his own sex" (270). (The word "ebullient" comes from the Latin *ebullire*, to boil over, an etymology Fuller would certainly have known.) Kept on the back burner until now, the erotic, embodied in Arthur (his name is a pun on art), suddenly boils over. Both the university and the town are

scandalized by the incident and Arthur is expelled from the dramatic society, loses his job at the university, and is forced to return to Winnebago.

To understand the significance of this scene both for the representation of homosexuality and for the expression of the erotic in the novel, we need to look more closely at the (sexual) relationship between Bertram and Arthur, and especially at Fuller's decision to portray Arthur as the primary locus of the erotic. Although the university and the town of Churchton are shocked by Arthur's scandalous "antics," their moralistic reaction needs to be balanced by Fuller's portrayal – and approval – of Arthur's sexuality. A clue to Arthur's role in the novel is provided by the non-judgmental and affirming reaction to Arthur and his relationship with Bertram by the members of the Cope family, especially Bertram's sister Rosalys:

> Lemoyne presented himself to the combined family gaze as a young man of twenty-seven or so, with dark, limpid eyes, a good deal of dark, wavy hair, and limbs almost too plumply well-turned. In his hands the flesh minimized the prominence of joints and knuckles, and the fingers (especially the little fingers) displayed certain graceful, slightly affected movements of the kind which may cause a person to be credited – or taxed – with possession of the "artistic temperament." To end with, he carried two inches of short black stubble under his nose. He was a type which one may admire – or not. Rosalys Cope found in him a sort of picturesque allure. Rather liking him herself, she found a different reason for her brother's liking. "If Bert cares for him," she remarked, "I suppose it's largely by contrast – he's so spare and light-colored himself. (183)

The first thing to notice here is that we view Arthur from the Cope family's perspective: "Lemoyne presented himself to the combined family gaze [...] ." At the same time, Fuller carefully balances the disapproving and the approving responses to Lemoyne, as the phrases "credited – or taxed" and "admire – or not" reveal. Especially relevant to Fuller's subtly subversive representation of Arthur is the implied contrast between Rosalys's response to Arthur's "artistic temperament" and that of the characters in Churchton. For Rosalys, who finds in her brother's friend "a sort of picturesque allure," it is sufficient that her brother "care for" Arthur in order for her to approve of him. Moreover, in calling attention to the physical differences between Bertram and Arthur, she also, even if only unconsciously, recognizes – and significantly does not condemn – their mutual sexual attraction. It should also be pointed out that Bertram's father "came to look upon him [Lemoyne] as an able, if somewhat fantastic, young fellow" (185). The father's "fantastic" is a variation on Rosalys's "sort of picturesque." Fuller carefully contrasts the approving response of Bertram's Freeford family to Arthur with that of the disapproving Churchtonians, who find him effeminate. In post-Stonewall gay novels, the family is often the primary source of the conflict and resistance that the protagonist must confront and eventually resolve. Cope's family, in contrast, is completely accepting of the relationship between the two men. (I am reminded of Robert Ferro's 1984 novel *The Family of Max Desir*, in which Max's family slowly comes to accept his relationship with his partner Nick Flynn.) Finally, the

contrasting connotations of the names of the two towns, which Fuller has carefully chosen, Churchton and Freeford, are very revealing. It is impossible to imagine Fuller reversing the towns' names.

Critics have tried to account for Arthur's scandalous behaviour and subsequent expulsion from Churchton by interpreting it as evidence of Fuller's attempt to retreat from the whole issue of homosexuality. Scambray, for example, argues that

> Fuller uses Arthur's female costume and the backstage incident to draw the homosexual theme closer to the surface of his story. [...] But the incident becomes not a means to explore further the homosexual theme, but rather the very excuse Fuller needed to complicate and even cloud Cope's relationship with Arthur. [...] Arthur is separated from Cope, and because of the embarrassment Arthur has caused everyone, in the end Cope breaks off his relationship with his impetuous friend. To complicate matters further, Fuller attempts to relieve Cope of any suspicion in his affair with Arthur. (151)

He goes on to claim that as a result of Arthur's behaviour Cope learns "something about Arthur's character, presumably his homosexuality that Cope had not known before" (151). He also claims that Fuller "caves into social pressure," calling the sacrifice and banishment of Arthur a "kind of atonement even an attempted retraction of much of what Fuller had initially developed in Cope's character" (151). Conarroe takes a similar view, describing Arthur as " [...] the one character who comes to grief. His fate may well offer a clue to the author's restrained, indirect approach to erotic feelings and actions. Fuller was clearly not oblivious of the era's assumptions [...] that any sort of 'perversion' must necessarily be associated with guilt, disgrace and even punishment" (13). Even Joseph Dimuro, whose reading of the novel is clearly indebted to recent queer theory, argues that "Lemoyne neglects to separate his female stage persona from his real life off stage, in which he assumes what might be called a 'fairy' persona that repulses a (presumably) straight man," adding that the 'theatrical aspects of Lemoyne's personality repel Cope as well" (Dimuro, "Introduction," 33). This view is endorsed by Keith Gumery's Freudian reading of the novel[8].

These interpretations exemplify the current orthodoxy that Lemoyne's impetuous action reflects Fuller's effort to pull back from the homosexual content of the novel. However, the fact that Fuller is "restrained" in his representation of erotic feelings and actions is not evidence that he is trying "to minimize the homosexual content of the novel." The problem with all these readings is that they are not supported, and are even flatly contradicted, by the evidence in the text. Moreover, they fail to

[8] In Gumery's view, "Lemoyne's behavior threatens the construct of acceptability that has been so carefully put together by Randolph and his kind [of repressed homosexual]; if Lemoyne and Randolph are seen to be of the same 'type,' then the danger to Randolph's position in society, caused by association [with homosexuals like Lemoyne], becomes tangible. In very much the same way, Henry Blake Fuller's position within his society could also be threatened were he (as Harriet Monroe put it) 'to tell his whole story.' By writing this book, and creating Arthur Lemoyne as a foil, Fuller could [...] show how the kind of action and appearance demonstrated by Lemoyne should be dealt with" (57).

perceive that Fuller, in opposition to the scandalized Churchtonians, is in fact implicitly endorsing Arthur's transgressive behaviour. It is impossible to believe, as Scambray claims, that only at the end of the novel does Cope realize that his Arthur is homosexual. Fuller is not "ambivalent" in his treatment of homosexuality. Nor is he trying "to complicate and even cloud Cope's relationship with Arthur." Although Solomon recognizes that "Arthur has a Wildean streak, and Bertram goes in for cautious restraint" (292), he fails to grasp the full implications of Arthur's "Wildean streak." The narrator remarks that Arthur's actions "are the risks run by the sincere, self-revealing artist" (271), and it is through Arthur that Fuller introduces a Wildean transgressiveness into his novel. The climactic placement of the erotic "antics of Arthur" gives the staid and conformist Churchtonians the comeuppance they so obviously deserve.

Nor is it true, as Scambray asserts, that "Cope breaks off his relationship with his impetuous friend," or that the letter Cope sends to Carolyn at the end implies that he has rejected his homosexual relationship with Arthur and plans to marry her:

> This letter and Cope's implied interest in a female after all were Fuller's way of setting out a smoke screen, of deflecting attention from his homosexual theme [...]. That he was finally ambivalent in his treatment of [homosexuality] in *Bertram Cope's Year* reflects his lifelong conflict with society; his desire to tell his whole story while at the same time maintaining his respectability in the eyes of his friends and readers [...]. The risks in 1919 were still too great for the homosexual writer. (Scambray, 152)

Cope does not, in fact, end his relationship with Arthur. We are explicitly told that Arthur "returned to Winnebago a fortnight before the convocation [...] and it was the understanding that, somehow, he and Cope should share together a summer divided between Winnebago and Freeford" (272). Nor does Cope's letter to Carolyn imply, as Medora Phillips believes, that Cope has any matrimonial interest in Carolyn. Scambray has failed to perceive Fuller's obvious irony. Addressed to "My dear Miss Thorpe," – his letter to Arthur early in the novel begins "Dear Arthur" – the letter, consisting of "two small pages," is cool, formal, and matter-of-fact in tone:

> "Yours very sincerely, Bertram L. Cope" simply told "My dear Miss Thorpe" [no first name] that he had been spending three or four days in Winnebago, Wisconsin [visiting Arthur], and that he had now retuned home [to Freeford] for a month of further study, having obtained a post in an important university in the East, at a satisfactory stipend. A supplementary line conveyed regards to Mrs. Phillips. That was all. (282)

If Bertram really were intent on rekindling Carolyn's affection for him and intimating the likelihood of marriage, would he mention that he has just spent several days in the company of the man whose behaviour had so scandalized the university and Churchton that he was banished? Surely the obvious

implication – to the reader if not to the willfully blind Amy and Medora – is that now that "Bertram T. Cope" has "a satisfactory stipend" he will be sending not for Carolyn but for Arthur to join him in the East, just as he had earlier asked him to come to Churchton. The careful designation of the eastern university as "important" clearly implies that the college in provincial Churchton is rather less important. When Carolyn shows the letter to Mrs. Phillips, it is described (by the narrator) as "a brief, cool, succinct thing, and not at all unsuited for general circulation" (283). Again, would a letter intended to express Cope's romantic feelings for Carolyn, assuming he had any, be suitable for *general* circulation? After Mrs. Phillips reads the letter, "she retired for meditation," and what follows is a transcription, in free indirect style and laced with irony, of her willful misreading of it:

> Well, from his dozen or fifteen lines several things might fairly be inferred. "Three or four days in Winnebago" – a scanty pattern for a visit. Had three or four been enough? Had Lemoyne been found glum and unpleasant? Had those months of close companionship [in Churchton] brought about a mutually diminished interest? Not a word as to Lemoyne's accompanying him to Freeford [where Cope's family lives], or joining him there later. On the contrary a strong implication that there would be sufficient to occupy him without the company of Lemoyne or anybody else: evidences of an eye solely on the new opportunity in the East."
>
> "Well, if he [Bertram] is going to get along without him [Arthur]," said Medora to herself, "it will be all the better for him," she added, with an informal and irresponsible use of her pronouns. But she knew what she meant and had no auditor to satisfy. (283)

The "several things" she infers would certainly not be inferred by an alert reader attuned to Fuller's obvious irony. Medora – scarcely the most perceptive character in the novel – wildly imagines that the letter will initiate an exchange of letters between Cope and Carolyn, ending in a marriage proposal from Cope. Medora's questions, speculations and conclusions are hers alone, not the narrator's, and she is determined to make what Cope says, as well as what he does not say, confirm her absurd hopes that marriage to Carolyn is still a real possibility. "She will marry him," she confidently tells Randolph (287), and then goes on to imagine an extended correspondence between them, leading to marriage.

Randolph undermines Medora's unjustified optimism by composing an imaginary letter to himself from Cope, as brief, cool and formal as Cope's to Carolyn and much more believable than Medora's invented correspondence between Cope and Carolyn:

> "My dear Mr. Randolph, – You will be pleased, I am sure, to hear that I now have a good position at the university in this pleasant town. Arthur Lemoyne, whom you recall, is studying psychology here, and we are keeping house together. He wishes

> to be remembered. I thank you for your many kindnesses," – that is put in as a possibility, – "and also send my best regards to Mrs. Phillips and the members of her household. Sincerely yours, Bertram L. Cope." (287)

The ironic tone, bordering on sarcasm, of Randolph's imagined letter reveals that he clearly recognizes what Medora does not: that Cope's succinct, curt, formal letter to Carolyn is his polite but firm way of severing all his links with Churchton, and letting his former acquaintances, including Medora and Randolph, know that now that he has moved up in the academic world, they are all irrevocably consigned to his soon-to-be-forgotten past. The three letters – Bertram's to Arthur (which was sent), Bertram's to Amy (composed by Arthur but never sent), and Bertram's letter to Randolph (wholly imagined by Randolph) – are all crucial to understanding the true relationships among the characters and, furthermore, offer evidence of the subtleties of Fuller's art of fiction. As a romantic comedy, the novel does have a happy, although unconventional, ending: Cope escapes from the danger of spending the rest of his life unhappily married in Churchton.

A few years after *Bertram Cope's Year* was published, John Farrar wrote about it in his column in *The Bookman*: "It is a story delicately done with the most exquisite taste, of a sublimated irregular affection. It received scant and unintelligent notice from the reviewers, and though it was filled with dynamite scrupulously packed, it fell as harmless as a dud, only to be whispered about here and there by grave people who wondered why Mr. Fuller should choose such a theme" (649). *Bertram Cope's Year* is not about "a sublimated irregular affection," although Farrar may be using that quasi-medical term non-judgmentally. The affection between Arthur and Bertram is certainly not sublimated. However, Farrar's insight that the novel is "filled with dynamite scrupulously packed" is, in my judgment, one of the most perceptive remarks ever made about the deftness and subtlety, the complete mastery of form, with which Fuller handles his potentially explosive theme. So scrupulously has Fuller packed his dynamite with stabilizers that readers have detected scarcely a whiff of the explosive nitroglycerin. Fuller has expertly packed the subversive dynamite in his novel, counting on the perceptive reader to light the fuse. *Bertram Cope's Year* is one of the earliest novels to portray a gay man's successful resistance to the pressures of a parochial society to subject him to its marital norms. It is also one of the wittiest gay novels in the canon, its innovative comic form perfectly adapted to its subtly subversive treatment of what then was still a taboo subject. For its perfect fusion of comic form and subversive theme, it deserves permanent currency.

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VARIA

Museari: Art in a Virtual LGBT Museum Promoting Respect and Inclusion

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/NQBD3367

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Museari is an online museum dedicated to upholding human rights and sexual diversity through art, history, and education. Museari was born in 2015 and since then more than 70 exhibitions have been presented. This paper analyzes Museari's interest in teacher training, something that has been especially positive during the Covid-19 pandemic. The objective of the research is to reflect on the opportunity to use a virtual museum to address issues of art and education. For data collection, we used assessment instruments specific to the case study, such as diagnoses, discussions, focus groups, and participant observation. We highlight museum's positive reception by the students, particularly the role it plays in overcoming stereotypes and conventional taboos to achieve inclusive environments.

Keywords*: queer studies, queer art, education, museum, teacher training.*

Introduction

Examining the initial training of primary school teachers, we found a lack of art education in the curricula and classrooms. This deficit is due to the fact that little attention is paid to art in the school programs (Huerta and Domínguez, 2020). Since the Spanish educational system makes no effort to counteract ignorance of the visual arts at all levels, from kindergarten to the university, there is little curricular interest in training students in art. Discussions of sexual diversity are likewise practically absent from the teacher-training classroom. Students arrive at the university with serious gaps in their knowledge: they know little about both art and LGBT cultures. In effect, they are completely out of touch with the dissident realities, and with the artistic cultural heritage in general (Panciroli, 2016).

We think that it is possible to overcome this problem by creating an environment conducive to learning about the arts and dissident realities. We believe that such an environment is necessary for improving general knowledge about art, artists, and sexual diversity, and teacher training is a significant way of achieving this. Exposing future teachers to art also creates room discussing art made by LGBT artists. In addition to a theoretical training, we incorporate art workshops and participatory experiences through which future teachers can put their creative potential into practice, taking advantage of the digital media (Rodríguez Ortega, 2018).

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Through art education we promote situated knowledge, as well as fostering creativity and multiculturalism. We approach this challenge by combining theory with workshops; we attempt to translate learning into lived experience; we promote creative thinking and develop proposals that defend "things well done" (Sennett, 2009). These initiatives have yielded very positive results. Our research indicates that there is a need to incorporate LGBT art and creativity in teacher training to make future teachers more respectful of diversity in an inclusive and demanding educational environment.

Studying the art made by artists from the Museari online museum (https://www.museari.com) allows us to reflect on and question traditional gender roles and gender prejudices. We promote respect for diversity, fostering subjecttivities free of stereotypes, attending to issues as diverse as the gender transition that trans people undergo and homophobic bullying of the most vulnerable students.

Art and culture are part of the collective imagination and they connect the present with the past (Mérida Jiménez, 2020). They may also be understood as the images that transmit discourses created and disseminated by the power to generate certain impressions, expanding the imagination in which political ideals persist and influence public opinion. According to Duncum (2008), visual culture exerts a particularly powerful influence on the people who consume it without questioning the information that it conveys as absolute truth (Pérez Navarro, 2018). Although this applies to all age groups, visual has a stronger influence on the young, who are in the process of discovering their environment, and more specifically, on those people who make up the school body, both students and teachers (Alonso-Sanz, Jardón and Lifante, 2019). The power of the audiovisual media and communication companies is also very important.

From the wide range of available visual culture, for our project we selected the culture of sexual dissidence and art created from a queer perspective. We focus on artists and works exhibited in the Museari online museum, which specializes in LGBT advocacy (Arriaga and Aguirre, 2013). We emphasize inclusivity in the classroom, attending to the need to incorporate quality visual literacy, understood as that which teaches students to decode, analyze, question, and criticize the messages they receive (Huerta, 2010). We assume that various visual images, including art, can be used as devices for reflecting on inequalities. Through these strategies, students are encouraged to develop respect for diversity while being fully involved in each activity.

Methodology

The present research is qualitative, based on a hybrid methodology that includes a case study (Stake, 2005). We also incorporate Arts-Based Educational Research (Rolling, 2017). We are interested in improving teacher training in the field of art, artistic culture, visual culture, art education, and sexual diversity, questioning our teaching practices and the ways in which we generate knowledge, interact, and learn. We incorporate experiences and knowledge from alterity. We affirm the everyday and the diverse, which have always been marginalized. We promote reflection, creativity and the construction of knowledge in learning environments, favoring a dialogue with social problems from critical peda-

gogy, humanized praxis, and implied participation. This formative openness fosters the development of an environment conducive to reflection. Those who inhabit the learning spaces are able to debate about the types of difference that merit inclusion in the shared experiences (Hernández and Sancho-Gil, 2015). All this allows us to problematize the teaching practices that affect us, through a pedagogy that crosses limits.

This article analyzes a research project carried out in university classrooms, where we covered aspects of diversity and inclusion and trained the participants in visual literacy (Duncum, 2015), involving them in the teaching processes. We also problematized the educational space and its power relations as a reflection of our society, where conditions of inequality are reproduced and dissidents are discriminated against. Our reflection made it possible to give visibility to sexual and gender diversity, so the context determined how to approach the learning process.

We conducted an analysis of visual sources and a comparison of different artists through case studies, to carefully observe from the perspective of the teacher-in-training what the students pursuing the degree of primary-school specialist teacher detect with respect to the subject studied. Based on a survey and the comments provided by the focus group, we reached a series of results. According to the categories elaborated by Robert Stake (2005), this is an instrumental case study, since it involves generalizing from a specific situation, examining the case to delve into a topic, so that the case supports the formulation of statements about the object of study. The power of art serves both to show as well as to hide certain realities, ultimately affecting our analysis of social and communicative processes (Briggs and Burke, 2009). Unraveling media products through visual culture will be beneficial for our students as future teachers (Karpati, Freedman, Castro, Kallio-Tavin and Heijnen, 2017).

We need a school highly impregnated with the knowledge and values of art, art history, and artistic practice, incorporating LGBT diversity; a school in which teachers' own visual culture serves as an incentive to work towards greater diversity (Escudero, 2017). The school environment is pervaded by the visual, so studying its schemes of visual culture allows us to investigate sociological, semiotic, and artistic issues, promoting teaching practices aimed at educational innovation (Planella and Pie, 2012). We reinforce these actions to help our university students to grow, precisely at the time of initial training. We take into account the interests of the students themselves, attending to the construction of their personal narratives, activating artistic practices in pedagogical mediation environments, conceiving education from a critical perspective (Escaño, 2019).

Our projects incorporate artistic experiences as gears of social transformation. We are interested in discovering our environment in order to improve it. Since the struggle against discrimination plays a fundamental role in this work, we propose a school environment as a place for reflective processes, generating debates about problems that directly affect the student body, such as gender discrimination, marginalization, or inequality.

We build artistic knowledge based on the direct experience of art (Hamlin and Fusaro, 2018), fostering social involvement and a political sense that goes from the intimate and personal to the shared and common (Péchin, 2017). We generate critical thinking from artistic practice to increase both creativity and freedom in a transforming society, so that art education becomes a motor for social transformation (Huerta, 2016). We develop a research model that understands artistic practices as articulating agents of subjectivities, always attentive to gender problems and social issues. Ours is a qualitative approach and its character is exploratory due to the novelty of the issues addressed in this particular context (Yin, 2009).

Case Study: "Museari Artists" Project

A total of 100 Spanish students of the Arts and Humanities participated in the project which was carried out as part of an optional course titled "Didactic Proposals in Art Education" chosen by students interested in the arts and their educational possibilities. Surveys were delivered to 100 students enrolled in the Primary School Teacher's Degree program at the Faculty of Education of the University of Valencia, with 100% responding. 72% of the respondents were female and 28% male. The students' average age was 22. The majority (88%) were between the ages of 20 and 30.

The aim of the study was to investigate the possibilities of using images from *artivism* (activism thar deploys art) to transform everyday environments by eliminating prejudices and taboos regarding non-normative sexuality and gender roles. We introduced the participants to artistic languages that go beyond mere representation and that promote expressive and reflective processes. The study stimulated students to rethink the social dynamics in the school environment and the need to distance themselves from gender violence, homophobia, and transphobia. As future teachers, they were encouraged to affirm gender and sexual diversity, create a more collaborative classroom environment, and use activities associated with art to improve situations of inequality.

Since the study was carried out during the academic year 2020-2021, we had to make the double effort of investigating while simultaneously attending to the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, which sometimes forced us to change from the face-to-face to the virtual format. In the classroom we initiated debates based on the students' initial reflections on art and we found that the pandemic affected the opinions and responses to the problems presented. The dynamics of each activity also included creative and participatory workshops, with which we attempted to help students overcome their prejudices regarding art and its dynamics, especially those related to the art market. The data collection and construction techniques were defined based on different parameters, namely: initial diagnosis of each activity; development of workshops; organization of focus groups; and final diagnosis of each action performed. The analytical procedure was established on the basis of the discussion of the data collected through qualitative research. Categories of analysis emerging from the initial diagnosis were established, and a survey of the data was carried out based on the construction of a double entry matrix. From the beginning, what the students already knew was taken

into account, since their previous knowledge can open paths and integrating options, in addition to allowing them fully participate in the study.

The analysis of the collected data allowed us to elaborate an inquiry about what university students who are training as teachers know about the influence of the arts on their knowledge of certain problems (Giroux, 2018). Since in everyday life sexual diversity tends to be invisible, art can be attractive for future teachers as a way of rediscovering concepts such as "dissidence" or "diversity" that allow us to get closer to the lived reality of people with the greatest need for care. Teachers should be trained in art and artistic cultures, including the social, cultural, and economic aspects of art (Freire, 2015). Other issues highlighted by our analysis arise from the study and knowledge of meaning structures based on humor, irony, or the conceptual reworking that the language of art allows (Barthes, 1986).

We began with the assumption that we must be attentive to the realities that affect people who suffer harassment or persecution for their sexual dissidence, especially students and teachers. In order for citizens to be aware of minorities and attend to their needs, their problems must be made visible. We can approach dominant narratives from a skeptical perspective, thus achieving a greater degree of immunity against the messages that such narratives continue to spread (Appiah, 2018). The communicative role of art has a relevant social function (Benjamin, 1969).

At the beginning of the project, we presented the online museum and the way to access its more than 70 temporary exhibitions. These are samples in which topics related to the different experiences of LGBT groups are addressed. Talking with our students about these artists through works in the virtual museum, we encouraged them to generate educational resources for the future, since as teachers they would need arguments to connect art, diversity, and education (Greteman, 2017) and they would be sharing with their students their interpretations of everyday life (Dewey, 2008). We also incorporated historical references to movements in defense of LGBT rights which paved the way for a true effervescence of activism.

The workshop involved developing a didactic proposal based on the knowledge of the work of artists exhibited in Museari. In the course of an initial preparatory and participatory class, a series of sessions were taught in which the topics covered in Museari exhibitions were explained. Then each student made their personal proposal, based on a sample of art that was especially meaningful to them. A number of the students stated that they "do not know much about art" and that "they were never good at art." When it comes to incorporating art into teaching, starting with what they already know greatly simplifies the task. For this reason we resorted to the students' formative experiences involving art. Significantly, we were not working with students of art or art history, but rather future elementary school teachers, undergraduate students who only take just one required arts course (6 credits, one semester) during their academic career.

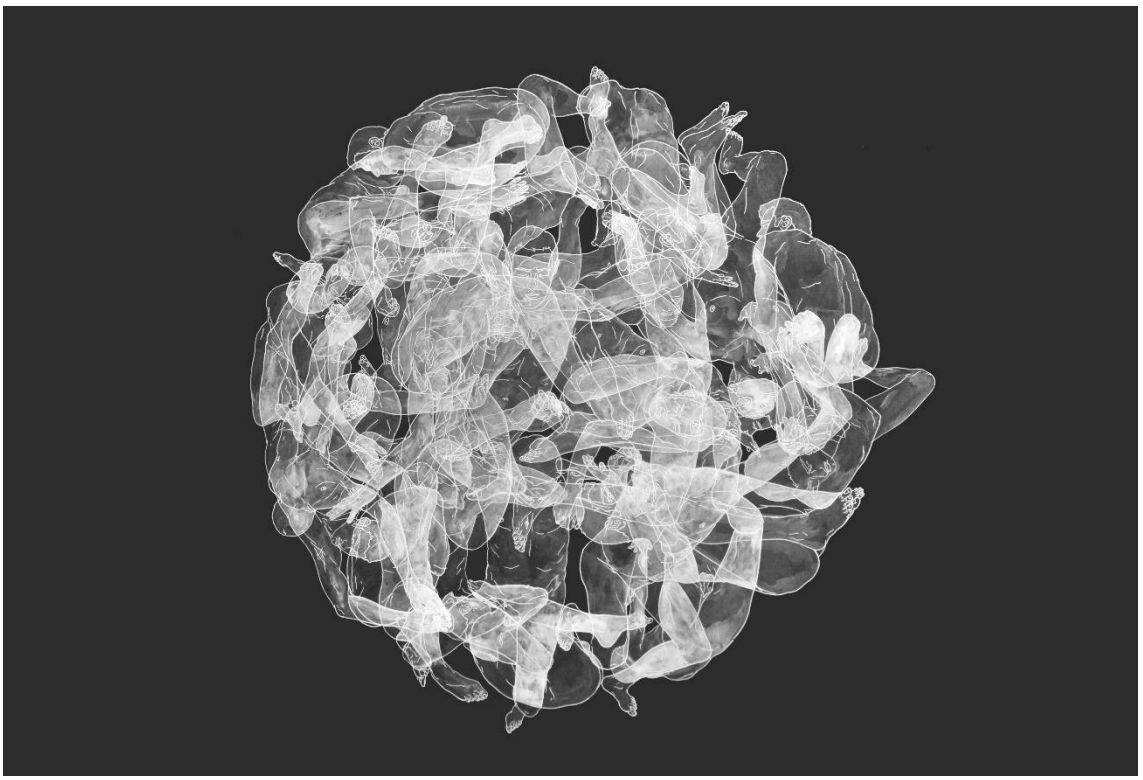

Figure 1. *Snowball 32*, Moisés Mahiques. Work exhibited in Museari.

8% of the participants chose the exhibition *Game Over #2* by the artist Moisés Mahiques (fig. 1). The phrase "game over" has always been associated with the world of video games, and it has always indicated the end of the game which the player either wins or loses. In this case, "game over" serves as a metaphor that highlights certain elements of control and order hidden under something as innocent as the act of playing. Using the concept of the game, associated with fun and childhood, allows us to conduct an exercise in which the participants reflect on the question when and how we begin to build or define certain roles. These roles are often the result of different forms of power, discipline, and submission within in a particular social model.

15% of students chose the exhibition *The Line of your Back* by Abel Azcona (fig. 2), a retrospective consisting of seven pieces on the theme of sexuality and eroticism. Azcona is an artist associated with processual art. He hybridizes performance with photography, video art, installation, and sculpture. Among the controversial themes he explores are: human rights, social injustices, gender, prostitution, neglect, violence, child abuse, feminism, sexuality, pornography, inequalities, politics, terrorism, and religion. Over 500 performance projects and more than 100 individual exhibitions at the international level make Abel Azcona a key figure in social and political art. His work, which has been seen in more than forty countries on four continents, can be interpreted under two axes, the autobiographical and the critical, which are in a constant synergy. Azcona works from the personal and the intimate to the social and pedagogical, with the aim of evoking a collective catharsis. As a

form of social and political critique, Azcona's art implies a denunciation of a society guilty of its own experience marked by pain and abandonment.

Figure 2. *Confinement*, Abel Azcona. Work exhibited in Museari.

Figure 3. *Collages 6*, by Alex Flemming. Work exhibited in Museari.

Alex Flemming's exhibition *Body Builders* (fig. 3) was chosen by 9% of the students. Flemming lives between two cities that are world capitals of art: São Paulo, the Brazilian city in which he was born, and Berlin, the European metropolis where he lives with his husband Henrique Luz. Flemming has received international recognition as a photographer, painter, sculptor, printer, multimedia artist, and poet. Always surprising and somewhat enigmatic, he constructs his personal narrative through the creative use of his own clothes, but he also reflects the social reality through portraits and approaches suggestive to the human skin.

12% of the students chose the exhibition *Identity Constructions,* by Mar C. Llop, who started this project in the spring of 2013. To explain the idea of gender construction, Llop uses texts and photographs of bodies that elude the male/female dichotomy (fig. 4). In her unique way she examines the evolution of the bodies of transsexual people (Planella, 2015). Since the moment she decided to transition from the gender that she was assigned at birth, she has been meeting people who are on the same road. One day, she started documenting and translating the experiences, feelings, thoughts, concepts, and debates of transgender people into art. Her work, which occupies the space between pink and blue, between black and white, can be interpreted as looking for a body and looking for a form of expression that feels comfortable.

Figure 4. *TR Gabrielle*, by Mar C. Llop. Work exhibited in Museari.

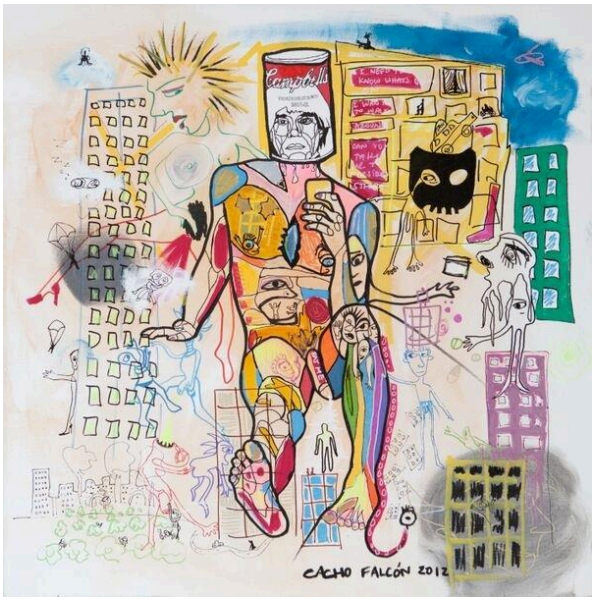

Figure 5. *Bodies and Cities*, by Cacho Falcón. Work exhibited in Museari.

The exhibition *Bodies and Cities* by the artist Cacho Falcón was chosen by 7% of the students. Falcón questions society, particularly its conceptions of beauty and success. Whoever studies his works will find that they ask countless questions and offer an infinite number of answers. Some are characterized by a naughty innocence, others offer sharp satire, but all of them attest to Falcón's mastery which is present in every detail, every stroke, every fragment that unfailingly leads the observer to seriously question the status quo.

Figure 6. *Sucking Heels*, by David Vila. Work exhibited in Museari.

The artist David Vila's exhibition *De cuerpo presente* was selected by 8% of the students. Body and matter – these are the concepts with which the work of David Vila is most strongly associated (fig. 6). In this series of works based on his personal experience, a retrospective of a trip is used to reflect

on the fundamental issues of existence, such as the relationship of the body with the environment, with itself, or with other bodies, all of which are connected with the search for identity.

Figure 7. *Follarse la ciudad Vol. III (Hokusai squeerting*)*, postcard, various sizes, by O.R.G.I.A group. Work exhibited in Museari.

The O.R.G.I.A exhibition *Fucking the City Vol. III* was chosen by 7% of the students. *Fucking the city* is an open project that questions the public order of the western (bourgeois and heterocentric) polis, and perverts the concept of the "souvenir" to highlight the tourist commodification that the major world capitals produce from their most polished image (fig. 7). Using the imaginary of the giantess-monster, as well as pulp and fanzine iconography, a quasi-alien and hypersexual invasion of the urban public space is carried out to resignify it, and the symbolic values of a certain type of (phallic) architecture are permuted. In this way, the city is redefined as a sexual playground for "the invader," where dichotomies such as active-passive, public-private, and male-female are reversed. Desire and drive are engines for chaos and the imbalance of the characteristic urban system.

10% of the students chose the exhibition *Think a Brazil Black and Woman* by Maria Macêdo, artist, researcher, and teacher, with a degree in visual arts from the URCA Universidade Regional do Cariri. Member of the NZINGA research group: Novos Ziriguiduns (Inter) Nacionais Gerados na Arte / CNPq. She is a researcher in the YABARTE project "Processos gestacionais na arte contemporânea a partir dos pensares e fazeres negros femininos." We highlight her performance art with a vindictive view of blackness and the struggle of women (fig. 8).

Figure 8. *Performance Tálamo* (2019, Crato-CE, Brasil) by Maria Macêdo. Photo: Jaque Rodrigues. Work exhibited in Museari.

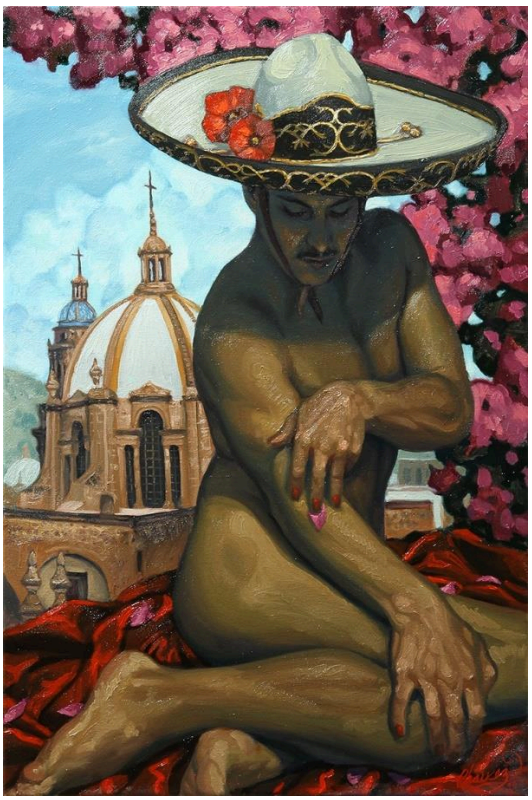

Figure 9. *Carica baja*, by Fabian Cháirez. Work exhibited in Museari.

The Mexican artist Fabián Cháirez is best known as the author of the controversial painting of a naked Emiliano Zapata riding a horse, which attracted public attention and led the family of the revolutionnary Emiliano Zapata to sue the artist for "denigrating the figure of our general by painting him as gay." Born in Chiapas, Cháirez studied at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas. In a characteristic painting style, he depicts representative Mexican figures in stereotypically queer poses that are incompatible with traditional Mexican masculinity (fig. 9). He thus seeks to draw attention to the fragility of "masculinity" and the sexual diversity present in his country. Although his works inevitably cause controversy, Fabián Cháirez takes it in his stride.

To initiate the debate, students were encouraged to present the works of art they had chosen to the whole class and comment on them. Afterwards, a workshop session took place during which the chosen models were explained in detail. This exercise was designed to familiarize students with non-normative sexualities, and to generate inclusive activities for the class. We then carried out a diagnostic process, evaluating not only this activity but also others involving theoretical reflections and the students' prior knowledge on the subjects discussed in class. We asked the students to fill in a questionnaire about their attitudes towards sexual minorities and their knowledge about non-normative sexualities. Based on the diagnosis, the responses were organized into two categories: 1) *Knowledge about LGBT cultures* and 2) *Design of art activities for primary school students*.

Knowledge about LGBT cultures

We found that while the students lacked knowledge about non-normative sexualities, they found them very interesting. The questionnaire also revealed that the respondents were unfamiliar with visual representations of non-normative gender and sexuality, and that they harbored prejudices towards sexual minorities. Below is a sample of responses to the question: "Did you ever considered the importance of images of LGBT cultures before enrolling in the course?"

> LGBT issues are very rarely explored in school, and very few teachers would know how to make [gay and lesbian students] feel safe, understood, and included. (student 19)

> The topic [non-normative sexuality] challenges us to aim for real equality in school. The matter deserves our full attention and these presentations are a good pretext to discuss the subject with our students. (student 65)

> Although these works can sometimes make the viewer smile, you have to dig a little deeper and see the message they convey to us. (student 80)

We found evidence that before taking part in the workshop the students had not considered sexual diversity as a theme in art, nor had they imagined LGBT culture in terms of a visual scenario. The vast majority (89%) confirmed that they had discovered new motivations and found the workshop attractive.

In this sense, our work with the students really challenged them, since it provided new knowledge and allowed them to reflect on identity, inclusion, and social justice. The students were then asked to consider on the power of art and its potential for social transformation. Thus the discussion moved towards the possibilities that inhabit the field of visuality.

Design of artistic activities for primary school students

Initially this category generated doubts among the students, who are not used to considering artistic solutions to problems. Since their prior training did not involve much attention to the visual arts, they were mostly unfamiliar with the visual potential of artistic resources:

> We must adopt an inclusive language, avoid derogatory or outdated terms like "hermaphrodite," and eliminate harmful language, such as talking about "normal" boys and girls. (student 9)

> The exhibition touched me very deeply because in my family there is an openly homosexual person, something that still has negative consequences, since part of our society does not accept [homosexuality]. (student 33)

Based on the stories incorporated into this diagnosis, the participants developed their own plans for artistic activities. We put the ideas of each participant at the center of the analytical and critical process (Pook, 2020). The students' work responded to such relevant and burning issues as the need to defend human rights and respect people who transgress sexual norms. We identified stereotypes that are part of the students' daily lives and asked them to problematize the stereotypes based on their own experiences, attitudes, and ways of showing themselves to the world. Once the selected works of art were presented, we initiated a debate to determine which aspects were the most interesting or motivating and how students could apply what they learned in the primary school classroom where they will work in the future (Bourriaud, 2009).

The process described above allowed us to critically evaluate the students' proposals, which conveyed feelings and raised problems. It also served to explain the use of different materials and procedures, applying elements of visual language for expressive purposes (Errázuriz Larraín and Fernandois-Schmutzer, 2021).

Next, we assessed the students' knowledge of representations related to the struggle against homophobic and transphobic bullying. They were encouraged to construct meanings evidencing symbolic violence in their daily environments, looking especially for meanings in visual representations (Mirzoeff, 2006). This led to a debate on the role of LGBT claims and possibilities of intervening through art, as well as the communicative capacity that visual representations entail. This element of the workshop gave the participants a better understanding of the LGBT experience. Some ideas that emerged in the course of the assessment addressed these issues:

> It seems to me that we need to make the population aware of the real problems that women and LGBT groups face. (student 41)
>
> I liked seeing the exhibitions and they made me think and react. (student 77)
>
> The answers to questions about gender and sexual diversity were less precise than in the case of previous questions, but they also incorporated elements of reflection: I think that it is a really important issue, that must be dealt with, and that it has a lot to do with the education received. (student 3)
>
> Transgender people are among us and the spaces they occupy and should occupy are the same as those of any other person, but their presence does not go unnoticed due to the transphobia that exists. They are stared at, they are pointed out, observed, scrutinized in a way that has nothing to do with the way other people are looked at. It is the gaze that stigmatizes. (student 18)
>
> We live in a totally binary society in which the duality of roles that men and women must adopt is still emphasized. (student 36)
>
> The pride flag represents much more than belonging to a group. It is the reflection of a group that has been fighting for its rights for years. It is one of the strongest symbols that makes the group visible. It sends a direct and clear message in defense of diversity, with six simple stripes and one word. It is simple but all that it entails is complex. (student 54)

We questioned the collective imaginary about gender to develop a deconstructive exercise on the social meanings of the images present in the school discourse on gender (Foucault, 1990). At the methodological level, we attempted to link the topic of the discussion with personal experience, verifying the students' accounts of activities and representations that are "for boys or for girls," questioning the traditional gender divisions and roles. The reflections of the students point to the questioning of social duty, freedom of expression, and the need to build educational scenarios freer of stereotypes.

While 83% of participants said they were interested in and concerned about LGBT issues, only 6 said they had participated in LGBT initiatives, protests, or solidarity activities. Most of the participants had not regularly participated in art-related activities like those they had developed and presented, yet they declared the intention to do so in the future. Thus, the majority of the participants – future primary school teachers – had developed a social concern.

When asked "How important is it to raise LGBT issues in education?" 48% of the respondents said they considered it to be very important, 43% important, and only a minority of 9% as saw it as being of average importance. Our findings were similar in relation to the question "How important do you think art is in incorporating LGBT issues in the classroom?" 53% considered art important, 42% very important and only 5% saw it as being of average importance. In the case of the question "Do you think it is important to address LGBT issues in a transversal way in primary education?" all the answers were positive. The participants also considered it necessary to introduce visual literacy in the first years of school. All this points to a greater concern for the presence of art education in the classroom (Irwin and O'Donogue, 2012).

The answers to such questions as "Do you think that in the case of non-normative sexuality, being a man or a woman can make a substantial difference?" or "Do you think that discussing the LGBT experience can improve primary-school education?" provided us with significant data on what this generation of students thinks. The majority recognizes gender inequalities due to the heteropatriarchal social structure that still persists and makes it difficult to empower women as a group (Butler, 2010). A minority (23%) is unaware of gender inequalities and does not detect the existence of social micromachisms (everyday instances of male chauvinism). All the participants affirmed the LGBTIQ minority and their answers indicated that they understood this group to be susceptible to difficulties in the social sphere. They considered it appropriate to introduce all these topics in the classroom via art and visual culture. They had clearly understood that the normative gaze, which stigmatizes and systematically eliminates otherness, can be harmful to many people who are affected by discrimination, violence, or invisibility.

The surveys also showed us that there is great interest in issues such as violence against trans people or bullying children who do not conform to the sex and gender norms. Despite their social and political awareness, we found that the students were not aware of the extent to which both the media and the school curriculum itself marginalize these issues. After analyzing the obtained results, we found that future teachers need more training on issues of non-normative gender and sexuality, to raise awareness of the educational power of a school curriculum free of taboos.

Conclusions

This research project revealed important information about the treatment of LGBT diversity in the training of primary school teachers. We examined this issue from the perspective of art education and we came to the conclusion that non-normative gender and sexuality continue to be practically non-existent in both school curricula and teacher training. The absence of this subject matter in education erases a problem affecting millions of people, including teachers and students. Fears and prejudices, particularly homophobia, lead individuals to conceal their non-normative gender or sexuality, which impedes pedagogical work that is invested in promoting respect and inclusion of difference.

The educational approach we propose, which foregrounds the defense of human rights and respect for diversity through the study of art, incorporates visuality into the teaching resources and involves the analysis of objects made by artists involved in dissents movements, as well as their modes of creation, presentation, consumption, and critical reception (Even-Zohar, 1990). In this approach, which is grounded in cultural studies, works of art are not treated as autonomous objects but rather as tools that allow us to understand the organization of contemporary societies and the power relations that structure them. These visual artifacts are not to be treated as simple cultural symbolic representations of the policies at work in LGBT communities. We wish to underline their capacity to produce and strengthen collective identities, and to renegotiate their meaning.

Identity should not be understood as something fixed and essential, as a naturally stable and unaltered unit, but as a strategic and situated concept. Identity is also an aesthetic issue, a fact that calls for a broad reflection on the cultural and political dimensions of non-normative gender and sexuality. Dissident artistic practices, which must also be considered as militant strategies, attest to the unique place of the individual in active dissent, which always has an aesthetic aspect. Knowledge about such dissident practices helps us to better understand the problems and modalities of subjective and affective dynamics in the articulation of iconographic and theoretical corpus, as well as in the construction of representations.

We need to improve the teaching of art at the primary school level since students who are encouraged at an early age to closely examine images of the LGBT world will be able to perceive the creative possibilities of dissidents. At the same time, we see a need to update the language in which LGBT issues are discussed in school, as well as the visual art resources used by teachers who now heavily rely on digital technology. The use of an online museum like Museari fosters the new approach we propose. Our goal is to bring the LGBT universe closer to university students, showing it from multiple perspectives and attending to aesthetic, cultural, ethical, and social involvement issues. The workshop sessions we conducted at the University of Valencia as part of our research project have shown that by working with LGBT dissident art it is possible to overcome the prejudices students may harbor towards the LGBT minority, and thus to release the creative potentials of all students.

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Introducing: Queer Theory (in Three Shorts)

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/DVHI6885

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Antke Antek Engel, member of the editorial board of InterAlia*, co-operated with Filmfetch (Magda Wystub; Tali Tiller) and FernUniversität Hagen to create three educational films which discuss the tenets of queer theory in a manner suitable for non-academic viewers. The films were released in 2021 and are available on the university's website:*
https://e.feu.de/queer-theory-videos
and on Youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCh98rBDWATF6bkxKNvpR4gQ

The three shorts, which are jointly titled *Bodies, Figurations, Worlds: Video Introductions to Queer Theory* are dialogues among three main characters dressed in close to primary-colored, strangely shaped costumes decorated with various appendages. These characters are U-M/M-U (Saboura Naqshband), who wears a reddish costume and sometimes a cone-shaped hat, KI-WI (Neo Huelcker), shaped like an oversized blueberry and dressed in blue, and TAM* (Pasquale Virginie Rotter), wearing a yellow costume shaped like a magnetic audio cassette. They are a cross between the animal-shaped or amorphic dolls of *Sesame Street*, or perhaps Teletubbies, and the bigger-than-life gods of the Greek Olympus. These characters' powers include being shapeshifters, for example, U-M/M-U has various pendants added to their costume in "Bodies," while in "Worlds" the three characters are transformed, respectively, into CONE, BALL, and JAGGED SHAPE. The transformation of TAM* into JAGGED SHAPE is especially dramatic, as the magnetic tape gives way to two brightly shining CDs worn in the manner of spectacles. In each episode, these characters interact not just with each other but also with SQUARE BRACKET (Magda Wystub) and with CURLY BRACKET (Antke A. Engel and Jayrôme C. Robinet), and in "Figurations," with a picture by the American artist Laylah Ali, known for depicting ambiguous race relations with comic-strip like figures. While SQUARE BRACKET presents as moving lips colored purple, reminiscent of Tim Curry's lip-synching in the opening sequence of the camp classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), CURLY BRACKET is a Janus-faced creature who tightens its two bowstrings, like a two-faced Eros, to underscore a point being made or when offering a discursive intervention. Both BRACKETS, but especially the CURLY BRACKET, act as *chora* to the more Olympian figures occupying centerstage. Robinet additionally performs as herself/himself in extended, very effective soliloquies in "Bodies" and in "World," commenting on gender performativity in speech and body language.

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All three shorts are very proficient at introducing a range of theoretical perspectives not easily brought together in a relatively brief introduction. Desire, performativity, intersectionality, cyborg, resignification, heteronormativity and homonationalism are among the terms invoked and elucidated in these films. Desire occupies a special place because it is presented as the *spiritus movens* behind the various normative orderings of sexuality and gender – as desire is defined in terms of the duality between the desiring subject and the object choice, determining, for example, the distinction between homo- and heterosexuality – while it is also the agent capable of motivating resistance against these norms, a transgressive force. However, at the end of each episode pleasure rather than desire is invoked with a line spoken by Engel in voice-over, "Pleasure in complexity, confusion and conflict – that's queer," which at the end of "Worlds" becomes, "Pleasure in complexity, confusion and contact in conflict – that's queer." This emphasis on pleasure (and on contact) arguably de-centers desire and offers an alternative way of imagining queer as not just a discursive formation (with desire implicitly understood to be an effect of language) but in terms of bodily experience. Body language is responsible for eighty percent of communication, a character notes, and this should make us hopeful about the effectiveness of drag, a campy version of which we find ourselves watching in these films.

Video Introductions to Queer Theory (Engel and Filmfetch, FernUni Hagen 2021).

A deliberate focus on complexity, confusion and conflict is a way of ensuring that queer theory does not get reduced to a set of simplistic assertions. Queer theory is discussed in the films as, on the one hand, invested in an anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, and broadly anti-discriminatory agenda; on the other, it is shown as subverting the very identity categories whose ideological function is to struggle against discrimination. On the one hand, a Deleuzian perspective within queer theory posits desire as endlessly productive; on the other, a nuanced understanding of intersectionality inevitably

complicates single-issue politics of sexuality and gender by looking to race, class, and other analytical categories. As is perhaps especially the case of trans* theorizing and activism, both access to identity categories and their questioning are central to the intellectual and the political agenda.

Despite some (necessary) repetition and a general similarity of tone and style, each film has its own intellectual focus and its own characteristic aesthetic. "Bodies," the longest of the three (at ca. 20 minutes) is the only one to be subdivided into chapters titled, for example, "Doing Sex_Gender" and "Gender Vertigo." Bodies are represented by the costumes worn by characters, to which other characters append various bits, and by Robinet's queerly performing body positioned in the middle of street traffic. In "Figurations," emphasis is laid on images and on the manner in which media create, rather than merely represent, reality. An image of a kissing pair by Laylah Ali is first an object of a debate among the characters and then it, too, becomes a speaking character, somewhat in the manner of Horace's *ut pictura poesis*. The image is discussed in terms of the relationship to which it invites the viewer by presenting its two figures against an empty, blank background and by having them turn their gaze toward the viewer and away from the frame. The viewer is thus co-constructing the world imagined in the work rather than merely observing it from a safe distance. In "Worlds," the characters are first submerged under the sea and later find themselves in outdoor spaces, as emphasis is placed not just on "worlding," that is, the emergence of a world, or worlds, but on the mutual co-dependence of agents and their surroundings. "Differences are more complex than binaries," a voice-over lets us know early on, and the film has a definite ecological spin to it, as a call for "inter-action" is replaced with a call for "intra-action," and as "sympoesis, not autopoesis" is indicated as the preferred mode of worlding.

This short series of films is a very recommendable introduction to queer theory and a thoroughly enjoyable one at that. Shot in German, which testifies to the creators' popularizing ambition, the films have been given English subtitles and, on many occasions, English words and expressions are used amidst the German. ("Worlding" is cited as an example of a word which does not have a satisfactory German equivalent.) It would not be difficult to add subtitles in other languages, including Polish – while Spanish subtitles already exist. Whatever the language version, these shorts are worth recommending to both the young and the old.

Niewygłoszona homilia tęczowego księdza. Recenzja monodramu *Wyznania* OT Rondo w Słupsku

https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/OBLL2427

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Monodram *Wyznania* Ośrodka Teatralnego RONDO w Słupsku – w reżyserii Stanisława Otto Miedziewskiego, z Grzegorzem Piekarskim w roli głównej i jedynej – stwarza unikalną szansę. Daje możliwość uczestniczenia w mszy świętej, podczas której ksiądz ją prowadzący robi coming out, obnaża hipokryzję i nadużycia instytucji, której jest częścią, oraz mówi bez ogródek o swoim zagubieniu emocjonalnym. Wpisuje się tym samym w rodzący się kanon przedsięwzięć artystycznych podejmujących temat trudnej, toksycznej i przemocowej relacji Kościół-społeczność LBGTI z perspektywy mało znanej – homoseksualnego księdza, który niczym koń trojański przedstawia swoją wersję konfliktu z wewnątrz paszczy lwa.

Przywodzi choćby na myśl wyróżniony nagrodą Teddy film *W imię* (2013), w reżyserii Małgorzaty Szumowskiej, który opowiada historię duchownego (w tej roli Andrzej Chyra) uciekającego od prawdy o swojej seksualności w wiarę. Ostatecznie nie dochodzi jednak – jak w słupskim monodramie – do coming outu, los księdza pozostaje nieujawniony, a jego kochanek wstępuje do seminarium, co sugeruje, że ta historia będzie się powtarzać w nieskończoność. Kluczowy dla *Wyznań* w reżyserii Miedziewskiego wątek nieheteronormatywnej seksualności duchownego katolickiego jest w filmie Szumowskiej potraktowany subtelnie, przy użyciu aluzji i niedomówień. *W imię* nie wikła się w politykę, nie jest też głosem w debacie o systemowej homofobii Kościoła katolickiego – to przede wszystkim uniwersalna historia o wykluczeniu.

W *Wyznaniach* Miedziewskiego można się też doszukiwać nawiązań do głośnego medialnego show księdza Krzysztofa Charamsy, który w 2015 podjął samozwańczą (i zakończoną spektakularnym niepowodzeniem) batalię o odnowę Kościoła katolickiego i zaprezentował światu swojego narzeczonego, żądając od hierarchów kościelnych większej tolerancji wobec mniejszości seksualnych i poparcia dla małżeństw jednopłciowych, czym wzbudził w Polsce skrajne reakcje. Duchowny był jednocześnie celebrowany i potępiany, jakby opinia publiczna nie była w stanie zdecydować, jak odczytywać jego

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ujawienie jako geja. Kontrowersje, także wśród tzw. liberalnych mediów i – jak ich określa dwumiesięcznik *Replika* – pseudosojuszników społeczności LGBTI, wywołał też styl księdza Charamsy – konfrontacyjny, bezkompromisowy i obsceniczny, tym samym stojący w sprzeczności z oficjalną kościelną doktryną skromności i pokory. Taka postawa została uznana za narcystyczną i niestosowną przez komentatorów, którzy być może byliby skłonni rozważyć przyznanie równych praw osobom LGBTI, ale tylko jeśli ci dostosują się do schematu zachowań i reguł gry narzuconych przez liberalną elitę.

Prawdopodobna wydaje się też inspiracja mniej głośnym, ale za to entuzjastycznie przyjętym monodramem *Wściekły pies* w reżyserii Dariusza Jezierskiego, wystawionym w 2010 roku w katowickim Teatrze Kortez przez gliwicką grupę teatralną Teatr Nowej Sztuki. Ta adaptacja reportażu Wojciecha Tochmana pod tym samym tytułem stawia widzów w roli spowiedników księdza, który doświadcza kryzysu tożsamości spowodowanego własną odmiennością seksualną. Będąc rozdartym między służbą Bogu a słabością do mężczyzn, szuka – jak pisze w swojej recenzji Dariusz Korytko (*Gazeta Wyborcza Katowice* nr 14, 2010) – „zaspokojenia w nocnych klubach dla gejów. A potem podnosi na mszy hostię, która w jego dłoniach wydaje się coraz cięższa. A mimo to rozdaje komunię, przypominając wiernym, że to Ciało Chrystusa".

Analogii do *Wściekłego psa* w słupskim monodramie według scenariusza Miedziewskiego można znaleźć sporo na poziomie narracji. Oba spektakle mają prowokować i budować napięcie poprzez swobodne przejścia pomiędzy sferą sacrum i profanum, poprzez przeplatanie uduchowionych wywodów gęstych od nawiązań biblijnych z dosadnymi opisami początkowo nieśmiałego, a potem coraz bardziej zuchwałego odkrywania uroków i mroków świata gejowskiego. Prócz podobieństw na poziomie narracji oba przedstawienia łączy też ascetyczna scenografia. Miedziewski umieścił swojego księdza w skromnie urządzonej kancelarii parafialnej – właściwie składającej się tylko ze stołu i krzesła. Korytko postawił aktora w jeszcze bardziej wyeksponowanej pozycji, pozbawiając go możliwości ukrycia się lub podparcia jakimkolwiek rekwizytem. Jest tylko aktor, wpatrzona w niego widownia, pusta scena, smuga światła i wyczerpujący emocjonalnie tekst.

W słupskich *Wyznaniach* 32-letni ksiądz rozpoczyna swój dramatyczny monolog półnagi, z ręcznikiem owiniętym wokół bioder, jakby dopiero co wyszedł z sauny. Ta scena otwierająca – mimo swojej cielesności i przyziemności, bo sauna to też miejsce seksualnych schadzek – ma też budzić skojarzenia religijne i symbolizować „zmartwychwstanie" czy też odrodzenie tożsamości, gotowość na wejrzenie w siebie. Robi się ciemniej, młody duchowny nakłada czarne spodnie i sweter, a my stajemy się świadkami jego próby kazania, które nigdy nie zostanie wygłoszone. Co dziwi, bo przecież to, co ma do przekazania nie zaskakuje: że wśród księży są ho-mo-se-ksu-a-li-ści, którzy grzeszą myślą, mową, uczynkiem i zaniedbaniem; że piękni klerycy są mile widziani i faworyzowani w seminariach; że to problem pedofilii, a nie tzw. ideologii LBGTI, toczy Kościół katolicki. Trudno w tym przekazie doszukiwać się braku uczciwości i zacietrzewienia ideologicznego. Jak piszą na stronie Słupskiego Ośrodka Kultury twórcy monodramu (pisownia oryginalna), „nasz teatr wtrąca się w problem egzystencjalnego

konfliktu między przestrzenią ducha i ucieleśnieniem natury ludzkiej a «OPRESJĄ TRADYCJI». Owa opowieść «a Bóg lubi opowieści» jest zwierciadłem, w którym każdy może rozpoznać los bliźniego ….albo «rzucić kamieniem»".

W jednej osobie ogniskują się napięcia całej instytucji: ksiądz-gej staje się jej zakładnikiem i ofiarą, ale też współsprawcą jej systemowej skostniałości. Spowiada się przed nami z różnych perspektyw-klisz: ministranta ślicznego jak z obrazka, ulubieńca proboszcza i oczka w głowie nadopiekuńczej matki; niewinnego kleryka, który odkrywa swoją seksualność w Berlinie, w saunach i na czatach portalu Interia; młodego, przeżywającego kryzys wiary księdza, dzielącego się swoimi dylematami. Jest też druga, ciemniejsza strona przedzierająca się do monologu, dochodząca do głosu jak sumienie i kara: hierarchowie nawołujący do opamiętania i do zaprzestania interesowania się ich życiem prywatnym i seksualnym, bo na to monopol powinni mieć duchowni i sprzymierzeni z nimi ideologicznie politycy.

Psychoanalityczny klucz do odczytania spektaklu wydaje się być uzasadniony. Młody ksiądz jest targany namiętnościami (id) i ograniczany regułami (superego) opresyjnej instytucji i tradycji. Przez wciągający i momentami elektryzujący monolog przebija się kompromis między tymi skrajnościami. Aktor (Grzegorz Piekarski) nie mówi egzaltowanym, natchnionym, wytrenowanym w seminarium głosem znanym nam z kościelnych ceremonii, co tylko dodaje wygłaszanemu tekstowi autentyczności. Ponad dekadę temu, gdy wystawiano „Wściekłego psa", odtwórca głównej roli – Kamil Frey – podobno przyznał, że ze strachu i świadomości podniosłości momentu trzęsły mu się nogi, a momentami nawet odczuwał ucisk w gardle.

Wydawałoby się, że dziesięć lat po tamtej premierze, w czasach dominującego w polityce nurtu katolicko-narodowego i systemowej nagonki na osoby LGBTI, nikt nie odważy się wystawić podobnego spektaklu z obawy o napiętnowanie w tzw. mediach narodowych. Jednak Piekarski, wygłaszając swój monolog w mieście, które swego czasu wybrało na prezydenta Roberta Biedronia i do dziś ma u władzy ludzi przyjaznych mniejszościom seksualnym, robi to bez kompleksów. Z jego monologu emanuje przekonanie, że warto skonfrontować się z perspektywą tęczowego księdza i wysłuchać kazania, które najpewniej długo jeszcze w polskim życiu pozateatralnym ciałem się nie stanie.

W przeważająco katolickim kraju takim jak Polska, gdzie rozdział państwa i kościoła jest fikcją, spektakle z perspektywy księży-gejów to wciąż nowatorskie zjawisko. W świecie pozateatralnym szerokim echem odbił się coming out Łukasza Kachnowicza, byłego księdza, a dziś aktywisty LGBTI, który w rozmowie z Marcinem Wójcikiem w „Dużym Formacie" z 9 września 2019 roku opowiadał o kulisach swojego odejścia z kapłaństwa: „napisałem do biskupa, że nie mogę żyć spokojnie w ukryciu, kiedy sypią się gromy na homoseksualistów". To mógł być moment przełomowy uruchamiający lawinę podobnych wyznań w Kościele katolickim, ale od czasu wywiadu żaden z duchownych nie poszedł śladem Kachnowicza. Można się jednak spodziewać, że w związku z postępującą w Polsce sekularyzacją,

rosnącą liczbą osób dokonujących apostazji (wg nieoficjalnych źródeł, w 2020 roku tylko w kurii krakowskiej takiego aktu dokonało 445 osób) oraz kryzysem instytucji kościelnych temat kryzysu wiary księży-gejów będzie zamiast kontrowersji budził coraz większe zainteresowanie.

Premiera monodramu w wykonaniu Grzegorza Piekarskiego odbyła się 24 października 2020 roku w Ośrodku Teatralnym RONDO w Słupsku przy udziale widowni. Spektakl transmitowano też na żywo online 27 marca 2021 roku, by uczcić Międzynarodowy Dzień Teatru. Organizatorzy zapowiadają kolejne wystawienia monodramu po zniesieniu obostrzeń związanych z pandemią.

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Mateusz Marecki jest wykładowcą na anglistyce Jilin University w Changchun (Chiny) oraz członkiem Pracowni Literatury oraz Kultury Dziecięcej i Młodzieżowej przy Instytucie Filologii Angielskiej UWr. Autor recenzji muzycznych i teatralnych publikowanych w polskiej prasie oraz ponad 20 artykułów naukowych z zakresu poetyki kognitywnej i badań partycypacyjnych. Współredagował tom pokonferencyjny *War and Words: Representations of Military Conflict in Literature and the Media*.

Zoran Milosavljevic, MD, PhD, is a medical anthropologist and epidemiologist in training based in Belgrade, Serbia. Over the past 13 years, he has carried out research and published in the fields of gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Serbia. He holds PhD in social anthropology from the School of Social Sciences, University of Hull/UK. He is a research associate at the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU), and at the Department for HIV/AIDS and STDs prevention in the Institute of Public Health of Serbia. He contributes to state-level policies on the public health of LGBTIQ+ community in Serbia.

Laura Murray is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at New York University. She holds a graduate Certificate in Culture and Media from New York University, where she trained in filmmaking at the Tisch School of the Arts; an MA in anthropology from Columbia University; and a B.A. from the University of Toronto. Laura's dissertation research ethnographically examines the gendered, classed, and casted politics of human-animal relationality in India's increasingly industrial dairy sector. Her research is supported by grants from the American Institute for Indian Studies, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is the director of Strangers Ourselves, a documentary short that has screened at festivals and conferences internationally. lcmurray@nyu.edu

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Adrian Shanker is the founding executive director of Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center in Allentown Pennsylvania, which includes the Lehigh Valley LGBT Community Archive. He is editor of *Bodies and Barriers: Queer Activists on Health* (PM Press) and he serves as Commissioner and Health Committee Co-Chair on the Pennsylvania Commission on LGBTQ Affairs.

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InterAlia welcomes submissions from authors and guest editors!

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Zapraszamy do współpracy!