

## Introduction: Queering Paradigms

Queer Studies has come a long way ever since Teresa de Lauretis first used the term in 1991 (Kemp 2009: 3). In contemporary human rights' activism and scholarship, the usage of the term "queer" indicates much more than just the 1980s' re-appropriation of a highly pejorative term used for homosexuals; as Kosofsky Sedgwick underlined right at the beginning of Queer Theory, the choice of the term "queer" points to an underlying challenge to the view that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) as well as intersex people solely form a minority to the heterosexual essence of humanity (Sedgwick 1990: 1). In contrast to this "minoritizing view," Queer Theory challenges the prevailing "heteronormativity" (cp. e.g. Berlant and Warner 2000) – i.e. the hegemonic discourse of the assumption of heterosexuality – by fundamentally drawing into question any assumed identitarian stability of gender and sexuality. Instead, queer thought stresses the universal fluidity of gender and sexuality and their performativity (in the sense elaborated by Judith Butler) – through constant constructive reinvention through intentional or non-intentional performance of identity.

According to this difference in language in identity politics, someone who defines her/himself as *queer* rather than e.g. *lesbian* or *gay* refuses to be pigeon-holed and minoritized according to the heterosexist norm. This rebellious element of queer identity fits very well with the etymological connection of the word with German *quer* meaning "transverse, cross, oblique." A *Querkopf* in German is a person who thinks outside the box and against the dominant paradigms; a *Querschläger* in German is a ricochet – a missile which has left its expected trajectory. Queer theorists and activists are indeed "Querköpfe" and ricochets to the hegemonic binary discourses on gender and sexuality. "Queer" can hence refer to anybody regardless of her/his actual assumed gender and sexual identity/performance at any

given time. And it is also possible to be *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, or *transgender* without being *queer*; this might be true for the large apolitical and consumerist segment of LGBT communities in societies which have provided for a basis of gender and sexual human rights (though almost nowhere equality) deemed sufficient for comfortable living; this is also the case for assimilationist gay rights' activists who try to reassure the assumed heterosexual majority rather than challenge the very core of the heterosexist hegemony. Queer Theory formulates a revolutionary challenge not only to compulsory heterosexuality but to the entire panoply of heterosexist fundamentalism still underlying almost all societal and political discourses in the 21st century. Still, as Queer Theory is coming of age, the realization emerges that the challenge to any hegemonic sexual discourse can also entail the challenge to a lesbian or gay hegemonic discourse or "homonormativity." The greater the visibility and acceptance of gays and lesbians in any given society, the more likely is the emergence of new normativities that discriminate against non-conformers and marginalize groups and individuals just as the heteronormative discourse had done previously (cp. e.g. Ferguson 2005). This unfortunate paradigm of identity by exclusion can be observed e.g. in the prevailing attitudes of the gay community toward the transgender community, or in the invisibility of intersexuality (cp. e.g. Morland 2009). In this context, taking queerness seriously entails a careful and conscientious struggle for that very identitarian openness that resists the seduction of identity by exclusion and celebrates the whole potential of sexuality and gender fluidity and diversity.

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This book brings together cutting-edge research exemplifying the querying and queering of hegemonic paradigms regarding gender and sexualities from a broad multi- and trans-disciplinary, polythetic angle. The term *paradigms* relates to the diverse methodological and philosophical frames of scholarship within diverging and converging academic disciplines traditionally connected with separate and overlapping hermeneutical strategies. In this context, queering a paradigm means to challenge the hetero-/homonormative and gender binarist assumptions of any given academic discourse. The narrative of any scholarly discourse – be it in e.g. Health

Studies, Education or Cultural Studies – is seen to benefit widely from the impact of this queering challenge.

The contributing authors represent the broadest possible spectrum of academia. They conversely and discursively contribute to the evaluation, reformulation and (where appropriate) reclaiming of scholarly approaches in Queer Studies. The book draws on the most recent developments in Queer Studies as presented at the *Queering Paradigms* conference on February 27–March 1, 2009 at Canterbury Christ Church University (UK). By bringing together carefully peer-reviewed chapters, it offers a unique picture of the multifaceted endeavors within Queer Studies today. The present book consists of six parts, each of which discusses and exemplifies paradigmatic discourses in academia and public life.

The first part looks at *Queered Identities*. Christien Garcia re-evaluates the term “queer” on the background of Lee Edelman’s discussion of “queer oppositionality.” While Garcia furthers the theoretical discussion around queerness by introducing a non-oppositional reading of sexualities, Helen Sauntson and Liz Morrish’s chapter focuses on the question how queer identity is constructed and performed through the use of language from among the symbolic resources available within lesbian and gay communities. Gemma Commune furthers the points made in the previous chapters by addressing queerness within the context of the fetish/body art club cultures. She argues that a new direction must be taken by the queer community to critically address and to watch through careful ethnographic fieldwork the emergence and transformations of these body styles within these cultures and how this can be translated to transform normative gender and sexual structures in their entirety. Finally, Murray Couch addresses a striking discrepancy between transgender self-identification and its accompanying academic discourse. He engages with Judith Butler’s casting of gender performativity and considers whether “queer” provides theoretical resources to move beyond the disjunctions that appear between transgender lived experience and other clinical and theoretical accounts.

*Queer Politics*, the second part of this book, looks at queer experience from a historical and political angle. The chapters provide an insight into different socially relevant paradigms at play with queerness. Benjamin Shepard offers an analysis of the interwoven development of queer,

anarchist and anti-capitalism activism. Drawing upon the ACT UP movement, the chapter demonstrates how play engages activists in a politics of freedom and pleasure, which helps them to stay engaged. Moving to contemporary post-colonial political activism, Pulane Motswapong explores the challenges and limitations of the sexual rights' activism in Southern Africa. Her chapter on gays and lesbians in Botswana addresses the disjunction between the continuing denial of queer rights in political and legal discourses and the government's *Botswana Vision 2016* that advocates tolerance, acceptance and equality.

Part Three, *Queering Public Discourses*, moves from activism into the heart of social discourses impacted by queerness. Leonardo Raznovich analyzes how the successfully queered communities propel change in international legal systems. He argues that enshrined principles of international private law ought to lead to the recognition of *some* overseas same-sex marriages and that arguments regarding public policy are not tenable in court under English case law. He further demonstrates that although the Civil Partnership Act 2004 sought to undermine the operation of these principles by characterizing all overseas same-sex marriages as civil partnerships, it failed to override the effect of common law with regard to the recognition of *some* same-sex marriages on grounds of sound statutory interpretation and of equality and individual freedoms. While Raznovich is concerned about queer equality before the law, Ian Marsh raises questions about the queer equality in health care; his chapter discusses the dangers of uncritically accepting psychiatric thought and practices in relation to LGBT suicide. Marsh suggests re-framing the issue in non-pathologizing terms and giving priority to stories of LGBT resilience in the face of widespread homophobia and discrimination. In another aspect of social life, Matthew Ball and Sharon Hayes explore queer domestic dysfunction. Their chapter investigates why victims of same-sex intimate partner violence rarely seek assistance from police or other service providers. Ball and Hayes highlight differences between genders and sexualities in domestic violence experiences and propose an alternative model for understanding the same-sex domestic violence experience.

*Queering the Classroom*, the fourth part of the book, focuses on queer experience and identity in education. Sharon Hayes and Matthew Ball

investigate the student conceptualizations of queerness. Their research suggests that homophobia in the classroom is particularly difficult to challenge, while strongly homophobic students even refuse to engage at all in any form of discourse they perceive as threatening their core heterosexist identity. While Hayes and Ball shed light on students' perception of an inclusive classroom, Angela Dwyer investigates the public discourse at online news sites around queered school spaces and its connection with homophobic hatred. Her analysis demonstrates the complex and competing skein of strategies that constitute *queering* school social spaces as a social problem.

Part Five, *Pop Queer*, analyzes paradigm challenges and shifts in popular culture. Sharon Hayes and Matthew Ball take up the theme of queerness on the web focusing on homoerotic fan fiction. They suggest that authors and readers of this popular genre perceive sexuality predominantly as fluid rather than static and that fan fiction communities impact on the development of perceptions of sexuality in participants, providing a non-threatening space for exploring and expressing sexuality in self and others. While Hayes and Ball concentrate on queer popular culture on the internet, Wilhelm Leap explores gay sexual cinema (GSC); he is particularly concerned with queer linguistic inquiry into the communicative terrain of GSC and the image of gay masculinity it projects. His chapter demonstrates how in this popular genre gayness, whiteness and hyper-masculinity are closely connected and extend outside of the erotic context. This finding is suggestive of the neoliberal social agenda that is broadly redefining gender and sexuality in the contemporary social moment. Moving on from cinema to television, Alex Choat and Ken Fox exemplify popular representation of queerness in the HBO crime drama serial *The Wire*. Their chapter explores the subversive and dynamic potential of queer identity to move beyond pervasive and seemingly indomitable systems of thought and structures; conversely they illustrate the threat to the positive virtues of queerness posed by institutional pressure.

The final part of the book offers *Queer Readings*, in particular of 1990s' literature. David Peterson uses Foucault's category of *heterotopia* as a means of examining homophobic and antihomophobic configurations of western American landscapes in Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain* (1997).

His chapter opens up the discussion of the “rural” as queer space by exploring how characters’ conceptions of western landscapes enable or disable their abilities to contest compulsory heterosexuality’s prerogative to determine normative sexual and spatial boundaries, and thereby to reconstitute themselves and the geographies they occupy in antihomophobic ways. While Peterson’s analysis offers queering insights into the American literary space, Joanne Woodman provides a glimpse of how 1990s’ British literary realism can be queered. Her chapter focuses on the multiple notions of queerness in Paul Magrs’ Northern trilogy (1996–1999). She discusses how Magrs’ novels undermine and expose hegemonic discourses relating not only to gender and sexuality but also to class and literary classification. In particular, Woodman explores how Magrs’ narrative and style respect and celebrate diversity, while remaining mindful of the problematics of a queer politics of difference. Moving from Britain to Germany, Katharina Wiedlack offers comparative close readings of Judith Hermann’s short story “Sonja” (1998) and Annemarie Schwarzenbach’s novel *Lyrische Novelle* (1933). Applying Judith Butler’s theories, Wiedlack shows that both texts do not succeed in producing a definite, doubtless gender and therefore demonstrate how fragile and brittle the binary gender system is. Her chapter argues that both stories illustrate how the binaries male/female depend on their constant reproduction through words.

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