The Hirschfeld Archives
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The previous chapters show that colonial violence formed the hidden framework of emerging homosexual rights discourse, that both direct experiences of persecution and witnessing of attacks against others wrought a collective sense of queer existence, and that certain kinds of physical violence were normalized in modern society. This chapter examines how violence shaped the relationship between sexological archives and the people who inhabit them. It focuses on Hirschfeld’s Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin, which housed the first full archive of modern sexology, including some of the first modern lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and intersex collections. Exploring life at the institute, a space in which sexual research and subcultural life intersected, the chapter’s opening parts consider the institute’s relationship to other intellectual and political contexts of Weimar Berlin, its gender politics, and broader questions about the possibilities and limits of queer and transgender (self) archiving. The remaining parts then examine the impact of the “deviant” collection, first, on the people who in some way saw their own desires and sense of self reflected in the objects gathered at the institute and, second, on the Nazi men who attacked the institute in May 1933. By reassessing life and work at the Institute of Sexual Science and its destruction, then, I here address broader questions about what Hirschfeld’s archives can tell us both about the imbrication of sexology in modern queer and transgender self-fashioning and about the violence issued
against bodies that did not fit binary sex/gender norms and the spaces that archived their existence.

An Institute of Men?

While the history of the institute has been documented in some detail, existing studies tend to pay relatively little attention to the feminist connections that shaped its work.¹ The institute was founded by Hirschfeld in 1919 as a space for “research, teaching, healing, and refuge” that could “free the individual from physical ailments, psychological afflictions, and social deprivation.”² At the institute Hirschfeld and his colleagues hoped to realize a new kind of sexology that would be open to all members of the public and use science, including eugenics, to bring about greater social and sexual justice.

The institute was housed in the former home of the German ambassador to France. Hirschfeld had bought the building during the reshuffling of property and political power in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Around the same time, he also set up the Magnus Hirschfeld Foundation, a charitable organization that would—using donations from anonymous private supporters and Hirschfeld himself—provide the necessary funding for the institute’s many activities. The American birth control reformer Margaret Sanger, who visited what she called “The Institute of Sex Psychiatry” in 1920, described it as “a most extraordinary mansion,” “sumptuously” furnished and full of “pictures of homosexuals.”³ Sanger noted that the institute “was not a place [she] particularly liked” but that she was nevertheless “interested to see how a problem which had cropped up everywhere in the post-War confusion was attacked.”⁴ The description of a “problem” to be “attacked” is typical of Sanger’s eugenicist take on birth control, which for her was a means of regulating what she considered social problems such as the spread of “feeble-mindedness,” “degeneracy, crime and pauperism.”⁵ While Sanger was part of the antidisabilist and antipoor strand of the emerging birth control movement her observations on the institute refer not to birth control but homosexuality. In the early 1920s, the institute’s fame rested primarily on its work on sexual and gender deviancies despite the fact that its activities covered a broad range of clinical research and practice, including development of medical, anthropological, and psychological research on all aspects of gender and sexuality and marriage counseling, eugenics research, and provision of sexual health clinics.

The institute was a male space, not least because all the medical practitioners employed were men. Yet its work was nevertheless also shaped by a sometimes uneasy dialogue between homosexual rights activists and contemporary
feminists. Hirschfeld was close to several influential feminists, one of whom was his sister, the writer Franziska Mann, with whom he felt connected and who in a private note affectionately described her “joy” at realizing that “nature had given her a brother who was also a friend.” In 1918, in the lead up to the foundation of the institute, the siblings published a pamphlet together, *Was jede Frau vom Wahlrecht wissen muß!* (What every woman needs to know about the right to vote!), which tried to impart a sense of urgency to the feminist cause by claiming that the end of World War I offered a unique opportunity for action as “the eyes of the world are now resting on German women.”

Hirschfeld also had close links with Helene Stöcker, the radical feminist activist who in 1905 cofounded the Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform (League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform) and a related journal, *Mutterschutz* (later renamed *Die Neue Generation* [The new generation]). Stöcker, like Hirschfeld, was critical of the institution of marriage not least because it restricted women’s financial autonomy. Also like Hirschfeld and many other sex reformers, she actively promoted eugenics as a way of protecting “the health of the race” at a time when prostitution and the spread of venereal disease were thought to threaten national well-being. The journal she edited promoted Hirschfeld’s work by, for instance, reviewing positively his *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (Yearbook for sexual intermediaries). It published articles by other sexologists such as Iwan Bloch, whose contribution on “love and culture” reiterated some of the ideas of his *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit*, and Havelock Ellis, who published articles on pregnancy and prostitution.

Stöcker and Hirschfeld shared the belief that feminist reform and homosexual reform were connected and that science—via the discriminatory practice of eugenics—would provide the way to a better future. In 1909 they joined forces when a proposed legal reform threatened to extend the remit of Paragraph 175 to criminalize female as well as male same-sex sexuality. Stöcker subsequently joined Hirschfeld’s Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Kommitee (WhK; Scientific Humanitarian Committee) as the first woman on the board of directors, and in the 1920s she helped set up the World League of Sexual Reform, an international organization that brought together feminist, sexual, and social reformers and that had office space at the Institute of Sexual Science.

The links between Stöcker and Hirschfeld were further strengthened by Hirschfeld’s support of the campaigns for the reform of the antiabortion Paragraph 218 of the German Penal Code. In 1928 he published with the communist Richard Linzert, who was also a member of the WhK, a study of birth control, which became recommended reading for women seeking advice on family planning matters. Stöcker in turn shared Hirschfeld’s pacifist
views, which by the 1920s had taken firm root, and published a critique of violence in 1928. While it is thus fair to say that women were not formally employed by the institute, Stöcker’s role in some of the key organizations associated with it shows that women were involved in its work, helping shape, as Kirsten Leng has argued, “the elaboration of a field of knowledge” around sexual matters.

At Home at the Institute of Sexual Science

The institute was more than a place of work, however. It was also a home. Hirschfeld himself occupied rooms on the second floor with his long-term partner Karl Giese; other rooms were rented out to permanent and temporary staff, visitors from around the world, and Hirschfeld’s widowed eldest sister, Recha Tobias. Recha, who would be murdered by the Nazis in Theresienstadt in 1942, rented rooms to Walter Benjamin, who stayed for around three months. Benjamin mentioned the view from his window of Berlin’s Tiergarten park, but made no reference to the institute’s work in his writings. Dianne Chisholm, who has pointed out the absence of sexological references in Benjamin’s work, notes that “despite his expressed fascination with transvestism and transsexuality . . . Benjamin shows no familiarity with [Hirschfeld’s] groundbreaking research on ‘sexual intermediaries.’” This silence indexes a curious footnote in Berlin’s radical and reform history: the parallel existence of the city’s various intellectuals even when they were brought into physical proximity. After Benjamin left, Recha rented out his rooms to the recently widowed philosopher Ernst Bloch. Bloch too did not write about his time in Hirschfeld’s institute or sexology more generally. If these silences indicate a disjuncture in the 1920s between sexual reform and other kinds of philosophical and political efforts, the biography of another famous institute occupant, the communist Willi Münzenberg, the press officer of the German communist party and a member of parliament, nevertheless suggests that the institute deliberately made space for radical left-wing activities. Münzenberg, together with his partner, the political activist and publicist Babette Gross, organized many meetings of the Comintern, the Communist International, from his rooms at the institute. In her biography of Münzenberg, Gross referred to Hirschfeld as the socialist “with a heart for communists,” a moniker that alluded to Hirschfeld not only offering Münzenberg accommodation at the institute but also being known for his fascination with Soviet Russia and publication in 1919 of a pamphlet in support of nationalizing health care. While the Comintern did not directly engage with the institute’s sexological work, Gross nevertheless noted that she
and her comrades had greatly valued the institute because the busy space was well suited for meetings with “illegal visitors from abroad.”

While the institute was a hive for radical political as well as sexual reform activities, it was also characterized by the blurring of boundaries between professional and private space. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its founding, for instance, one of the librarians wrote a curious celebratory note in the voice of the institute, thanking the “beloved papa,” Hirschfeld, for setting up a “life and work community.” Despite the avowedly communal aspect to the institute, everyday life was in many ways similar to other middle-class households at the time. For instance, the recollections of Hirschfeld’s own housekeeper, Adelheid Rennack, which were recorded under her married name Adelheid Schulz in an interview with her granddaughter, suggest that the workload of domestic servants remained fairly heavy, in keeping with the conventions of the time. According to the Hirschfeld Society, Adelheid Schulz’s working hours were from 7 A.M. to 6 P.M. Schulz herself, however, who remembered her time at the institute fondly, explained that she worked “as much as necessary,” which could include long workdays.

In Münzenberg’s revolutionary rooms a certain Frau Kröger, who had previously worked as a cook on a country estate, managed domestic affairs. Little is known about her other than that she was employed on Hirschfeld’s recommendation. According to Gross’s biography of Münzenberg, Frau Kröger would withstand a Nazi interrogation that took place after the Reichstag burning of 1933, during which she did not reveal the identities of the communist visitors to Münzenberg’s flat. Gross dismissed the significance of this brave act of resistance, trivializing it by suggesting that Frau Kröger was not politically motivated but simply “charmed” by Münzenberg.

Such glib and sometimes contemptuous attitudes to women working in domestic service have a long history. A recent study by the geographer Rosie Cox, *The Servant Problem*, shows that even in the twenty-first century the professional commitments of middle-class households remain propped up by cleaners and private child minders whose pay and working conditions tend to be poor and who are often immigrants, legal and illegal, whose disenfranchised status is reinforced through the precarious nature of their employment. A growing body of scholarship on the history of domestic service in turn has further problematized the contingencies of servitude including in relation to the interactions between radicals, writers, and artists and their servants. Alison Light’s *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, for example, has turned attention to the difficult, sometimes abusive, relationship of the modernist feminist icon with the women she employed as servants. A similar point about the limits of middle-class feminism was already put forward in 1909
by the feminist Edith Lees Ellis in a roman à clef titled *Attainment*. Based on the London-based socialist Fellowship of the New Life, whose members included founder Thomas Davidson, as well as Edith herself and her husband, the sexologist Havelock Ellis, *Attainment* lampooned the failures of the radical community to involve their domestic help in their reform efforts. The critiques of servitude highlight the classed and gendered blind spots of middle-class householders, showing that domestic labor remained one of the areas in which the perpetuation of gender inequality was most deeply entrenched—including in homes that otherwise challenged the status quo.

The domestic arrangements at the Institute of Sexual Science both affirm and complicate this history. While domestic labor at the institute was mostly conventionally gendered, there were some notable exceptions to this rule, which give a queerer—if not a more feminist—framework to the institute’s domestic life. For example, the English archaeologist Francis Turville-Petre—another of the institute’s renowned inhabitants, who was famous for his excavations in the Galilee region of Palestine and involved in the work of the WhK—employed a certain Erwin Hansen as his servant on the recommendation of Hirschfeld’s partner Giese. Hansen in turn hired a boy named Heinz, and the two of them ran Turville-Petre’s household affairs. Unlike the institute’s female housekeepers, whose lives remained separate from those of their employers, the lives of Erwin Hansen and Heinz became intimately entwined with those of Turville-Petre and his friend, the American writer Christopher Isherwood, who also resided at the institute. Isherwood gave an account of his time there in the autobiographical *Christopher and His Kind*, which was written in the third person and not published until 1976, the time when gay liberation had gained momentum in the wake of the Stonewall Riots. According to Isherwood, Francis and Erwin socialized together, “bringing with them one or more boys from Berlin’s bars” when they returned to their home at the institute. We are also told that Isherwood started a relationship with Heinz and that “as soon as Francis realized that Christopher and Heinz were going to bed together, he announced that Christopher must pay half of Heinz’s wages.” In the early 1930s the four men traveled together to Greece. Isherwood and Turville-Petre would not return with Erwin and Heinz to Germany, which by then was already in the grip of Nazism. It is not known what happened to Heinz, the boy without a surname, but Erwin is believed to have been murdered in a Nazi concentration camp. The queer connections between the four men, then, started out as a financial contract but went far beyond the conventional terms of a relationship between male servants and their employers, and they were enabled by life in the environment of the Institute of Sexual Science.
A Space for Transgender

The institute was not only a place where homosexual relationships could flourish. It also provided a safe space for people whose assigned gender did not match their sense of self. In 1910 Hirschfeld coined the term *transvestite*, today associated with cross-dressing but then describing a much wider range of transsexual and transgender phenomena and identities.\(^{42}\) K. J. Rawson, in the introduction to the special issue “Archives and Archiving” of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, comments on the complex history of transgender terminology as well as the lives indexed by certain words in certain spaces and at particular moments in time. Paying attention to the fairly recent emergence of the term *transgender*, Rawson acknowledges that by using the word in historical research “we must always be mindful of how we are imposing an identity category onto pasts in which that identity is anachronistic and onto places where that identity is foreign.”\(^{43}\) Rawson also notes, however, that “problematic as it may be, *transgender* appears to be the most efficient and effective mechanism available for us to cohere . . . transhistorical and transcultural practices under the same banner.”\(^{44}\) Or to say this differently, the reason for using words such as *transgender* is not to obscure historical detail or reduce the range of experiences under discussion but to indicate that there is a shared realm of experience—and transition, whatever form it may take—for people who do not maintain the gender that they were assigned at birth. With this in mind, I refer to Hirschfeld’s coinage of “*transvestism*” and related historical words where they appear, but I too use *transgender* as an umbrella term when trying to capture something of the historical realities of people at the Institute of Sexual Science who, in the words of Susan Stryker, “move[d] away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross[ed] over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender.”\(^{45}\)

Hirschfeld first set out his ideas on the subject in a study, *Die Transvestiten* (1910), which examined the etiological, critical, and historico-ethnographic contexts for different kinds of transgender phenomena.\(^{46}\) While *Die Transvestiten* was in many ways radical—Stryker calls Hirschfeld “a pioneering advocate for transgender people” because of it and his related work—the study also indicates some of the gendered limits that, somewhat paradoxically, circumscribed Hirschfeld’s ideas.\(^{47}\) As Geertje Mak has pointed out, the introduction of the “transvestite” focused mostly, albeit not exclusively, on male-to-female *transitioning*, relegating female-to-male transitioning to the realm of *passing* for economic privileges or sexual fulfillment.\(^{48}\) While Mak’s attention to assigned gender in some ways runs counter to the recovery work of transgender history, it nevertheless usefully documents that assigned gender shaped the conditions of, and possibilities for,
transitioning. For Hirschfeld, male-to-female transvestites were defined by their gender identity and, as Mak and Darryl B. Hill have shown, hetero-
sexual identifying. In contrast, he understood female-to-male “passing” mostly either in economic terms, as a way for women to gain male privileges, or in relation to their perceived sexual inversion. The difficulties of thinking masculinity without men have been aptly demonstrated by Jack Halberstam in the groundbreaking study *Female Masculinity*. There is little question that Hirschfeld’s transvestite categorization helped inaugurate a new way of speaking transgender collectively and publicly and that his work could offer, as Ina Linge has argued, a “prosthetic support” for the way people articulated their sense of self. However, his work also is an example of the persistence of binary gender norms even in projects that overtly challenge them.

The Institute of Sexual Science prided itself in supporting transvestites in a number of ways. Perhaps most famous today are the medical interventions it offered, but it also supported, more widely, transgender people whose lives were threatened by gender-related laws and social norms. One of the institute’s surgeons, Ludwig Levy-Lenz, for example, a gynecologist who took part in many of the early *Genitalumwandlung* operations (the term literally translates as “transformation of the genitals”), wrote in his memoirs that because it was difficult for “transvestites to find a job . . . we did everything we could to give such people a job at our institute.” He points out that the institute employed five “male transvestites” as maids, claiming that they were “the best, most hardworking and conscientious domestic workers we ever had.” Levy-Lenz emphasized that no visitor to the institute “notice[d] anything” when encountering these maids. Christopher Isherwood, in his third-person account of his time at the institute, describes how the disclosure that an “apparently female guest was a man” challenged his perception of himself: “Christopher had been telling himself that he had rejected respect-
ability,” he writes, but “the Hirschfeld kind of respectability disturbed his latent puritanism.” Isherwood’s words, which suggest that initially at least he was uncomfortable with encountering transgender people, reveal some of the fault lines between homosexual and transgender cultures at the time. They reinforce why doctors such as Levy-Lenz and Hirschfeld wanted the institute to be an oasis for people whose bodies did not match their assigned gender and who were, as Rainer Herrn has shown, sometimes in conflict with the law because of it.

The domestic labor of the transgender maids shows that a certain kind of class expectation shaped the expression of transvestite femininity at the institute, where it was located in the domestic sphere. Katie Sutton, in a meticulous analysis of the emergence of a transgender subculture and its public reception, has shown that a particular kind of “middle-class transvestite
identity” dominated debates in Weimar Germany. She reveals that a “politics of respectability” underpinned both affirmative subcultural and scientific discourses about transvestism, which sidelined those people deemed unspectable, including prostitutes, criminals, “female-to-male and homosexual transvestites [and] individuals who voiced what would now be termed ‘transsexual’ desires.”

In 1930 the institute offered rooms to one of the newly founded protransvestite organizations, the Vereinigung D’Eon (D’Eon Union, named after an eighteenth-century nobleman who lived the later part of his life as a woman). While it thus supported on a number of levels people who wanted to transform their assigned gender, the institute also was part of a larger movement of making transvestism respectable.

Arguably the most famous of the institute’s maids was Dora, more commonly known as Dorchen, the diminutive form of her name. Born Rudolph Richter, Dorchen was referred to the institute by a judge after having been arrested for cross-dressing. The institute became the place where Dorchen’s body was transformed. In 1922 she underwent a castration procedure, followed by hormone treatment, which was overseen by Hirschfeld. In 1931 she received a penectomy and a vaginoplasty. The success of these operations was widely publicized, publicity that, according to Joanne Meyerowitz, formed part of the institute’s attempt to establish itself as the place of expertise for Genitalumwandlung. It soon became famous not only for its sex change work but also for its hormone-related research, including early experiments with hormone treatments relating to “rejuvenation” and impotence. These activities, which show that apparently specialized transgender-related medical innovations have close links with treatments considered more mainstream, considerably raised the institute’s national and international profile. An article in the English-language Malayan Saturday Post, for instance, noted that the experiments by Hirschfeld and Bernard Shapiro, one of the institute’s leading experts on andrology, had led to cutting-edge insights into the treatment of impotence via hormonal treatments. Thus, technologies developed to transform physical sex and those aimed at people adapting to heteronormative expectations were interdependent, as the hormone research, for instance, was also used in the budding erectile dysfunction and popular beauty industries.

Dorchen’s operations were performed by one of the institute’s own doctors, Levy-Lenz, and the surgeon Erwin Gohrbandt, who worked at some of Berlin’s most renowned hospitals and who had invented the vaginoplasty technique. Only a few years later, Levy-Lenz, who was Jewish, had to flee Nazi Germany, while Gohrbandt added the role of chief medical advisor to the Luftwaffe (the Nazi air force) to his portfolio. In this role he would contribute to discussions about experiments conducted in the Dachau
concentration camp, thus giving them “an appearance of legitimacy” that would further contribute to normalizing the dehumanizing cruelty of Nazi medicine. While it would be both reductive and misleading to read Gohrbandt’s Nazi work back into his involvement in the institute’s sex change surgeries, it nevertheless reminds us of the ethical issues raised by advances in medical technology, advances that at times rested on the treatment of patients as subjects of experimentation rather than medical care. In Dorchen’s case her status as a patient was complicated by her role in the household. She was given a home at the institute, working as a maid there until the Nazi raid of 1933. Dorchen’s fate is yet to be discovered—there are speculations that she was killed around the time of the raid—but her life story survives as a case study by Felix Abraham, the institute’s specialist in transvestism. Abraham described her surgery as a “radical treatment for extreme transvestism,” a diagnosis conflating his understanding of cross-gender and cross-dresser identifications. Abraham was a sympathetic doctor who emphasized Dorchen’s medical needs. He countered claims that genital operations were “a kind of luxury surgery with a playful character” with the argument that it was better to operate if the patient asked for the procedure because otherwise they would in all likelihood mutilate their bodies. Indeed Dorchen herself, as Rainer Herrn has shown, had already tried to castrate herself before seeking help at the institute. In the absence of Dorchen’s own words, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which she had a say in her medical treatment. Yet while ultimately her feelings and desires, and the external pressures she might have experienced, are lost to us, the surviving evidence from Dorchen’s time at the Institute of Sexual Science suggests that here she found a space, literally and metaphorically, to live. Attention to the domestic life of the institute thus helps close some of the critical divide between the discursive and social histories of sexology and the gaps in experiential evidence, even as it shows how transgender identity was put into a certain kind of place in Weimar Germany.

**Sexual Bodies in the Frame**

How, then, did Hirschfeld and his colleagues treat the people who came to the institute’s clinics? Arguably the most famous aspect of the work was Hirschfeld’s so-called sexual intermediaries work. *Sexual intermediaries* describes the existence of infinite variations in gender and sexual desire. Hirschfeld understood sexual desire and the manifestation of gender to be encoded in the body, arguing that infinite variations exist in desires, bodies, gender expressions, and the intersections between them. To some extent the overlaps and confusions between the terms Hirschfeld used to describe same-sex and transgender phenomena reflect the impossibility of producing neat
sex-gender distinctions. Hirschfeld swung, for instance, between a focus on gonads and ovaries as “primary sex markers” and discussions that destabilized the fundamental categories of man and woman with the argument that “infinitely variable mixtures” of “femaleness” and “maleness” could exist in a human. For some critics these inconsistencies mark Hirschfeld’s essentialist failings. However, given that Hirschfeld worked at a time when binary gender essentialism was the norm and that he overtly tried to challenge this norm, framing his work entirely in terms of the constructionism versus essentialism debates that concerned gender theorists in the 1980s and early 1990s forecloses understanding of the issues that preoccupied Hirschfeld and the people whose self did not match their assigned gender. While essentialist debates about biology and nature clearly played a role in the conceptualization, self-understanding, and medical views of transgender, the in many ways more urgent questions dealt with issues relating to the silences around transvestism and the livability of lives that did not conform to binary norms and expectations.

If as Judith Butler has argued, the discursive framing of lives in the public sphere is directly linked to the apprehension of lives as such, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the key aims of gender “deviants” and their allies was to insert their existence into the public frame. Trying to document the existence of sexual intermediaries formed a key part of Hirschfeld’s work at the institute. Figure 4.1 indicates how he went about this process with the help of photography. It shows photographs of sexual intermediaries produced as part of the work at the institute. The upper part and side of the wall are taken up with nonstandardized images of varying sizes, which are mounted behind glass and framed in thin dark wood. They depict, as we can just about make out, individual images and occasionally a set of pictures of the same person in differently gendered outfits and poses. The main, lower part of the wall is taken up with large, dark panels, each of which includes a set of four pictures. The subjects of these images, which sometimes depict a single person and sometimes a couple, are, as a large text panel announces in English, French, and German, “Sexuelle Zwischenstufen”: individuals whose bodies, desires, and gender presentations challenged the conventional binaries about femaleness and maleness, femininity and masculinity. Unlike the photographic traditions of criminology and anthropology, which tended to put certain humans on display to act as specimens that would reveal truths about larger groups of people, the photography here focused on individuals, displaying them together to prove the larger point that an infinite number of gender variations existed in nature.

The sexual intermediaries panels had a practical function. Used both as research data and to illustrate Hirschfeld’s ideas, they played an important
role in transmitting long and complex written texts to a wider audience by depicting at a glance phenomena that in their written exposition covered hundreds of pages of scientific writing. In contrast to the often forbidding size of the printed books—and as part of some of his publications—the photographs offered a visual shorthand to the ideas of sexual intermediaries, providing more instantaneous access to Hirschfeld’s ideas. Furthermore, the display panels were portable, which increased the audiences Hirschfeld was able to reach with them, because he and his colleagues used the panels in public talks. The sexual intermediaries panels thus opened up the institute’s archives, making them accessible to the wider public who were introduced via the photographs to people who were “anders als die andern”: different from the others.

Critics have rightly questioned the ethics of turning humans into objects of scientific study in this way, which exposed them to the gaze of expert and lay viewers. This criticism seems particularly apt in relation to the institute’s collection of close-up photographs of the genitals of intersex people, which employ the visual language of medicine and criminology to turn people into case studies by training the lens on certain parts of their bodies—such as the breasts or genitals—to highlight somatic deviations from a standard male or

Figure 4.1 Hirschfeld’s archive, including display panels depicting “sexual intermediaries,” 1925. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 10002255.
female norm. In recent years the medical interventions aiming to “correct” intersex bodies have come under sustained criticism, led by people who were subjected to invasive surgeries as children and including scholarship on the links and overlaps between intersex history and other histories of sex, gender, and the body. Hirschfeld’s role in this context was complex. For he too considered intersex in relation to questions of “treatment,” as discussed in Chapter 3, but his main interest in intersex related to the support it lent to his sexual intermediaries idea. David James Prickett has argued that while there was a “normative message” to Hirschfeld’s use of photographs, the message was nevertheless “intended to guarantee those of ‘abnormal’ gender performance, sex, and/or sexual orientation the same legal rights as those in ‘normal’ society enjoyed.” With this in mind, the photographic display of people and their bodies at the institute cannot be understood merely within a framework of pathologization. According to Katie Sutton the institute’s photographs “illustrate how cultural representations of ‘third sex’ individuals . . . do not simply posit sexual science as a pathologizing, hierarchical force, nor are they uncritical of the theories and practices of sexologists.” Instead, she suggests, these photographs are “cultural translations of sexological knowledge [that] employ science as a resource in actively redefining categories of sexual citizenship.” In other words, the institute’s photographic collection cannot be understood merely as an archive of medical practice. It also constitutes an early auto-ethnographic document of modern queer and transgender lives.

Hirschfeld’s own role in Berlin supports this point. He was a well-known figure in the city’s sexual subcultures, which he frequented with his lover, and where he was also known, as his American colleague Harry Benjamin later noted, as “Tante Magnesia.” An early book, *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* (1904; Berlin’s third sex) can be described as an anthropological study about, but also to some extent *for*, the city’s sexual subcultures. Hirschfeld gathered stories and pictures about Berlin’s “third sex,” an endeavor clearly indebted to the personal links he had forged. For instance, the book includes a photograph of a twenty-five-year-old “female invert” and a handwritten note explaining that the woman was “delighted to present [Hirschfeld] with [her] experiences of, and views on, female homosexuality.” The combination of photo and explanatory note reinforce that the sexual intermediaries collection was not merely an archive of clinical images but also a document of Berlin’s sexual subcultures.

Many of Berlin’s cross-dressers and other “sexual deviants” visited the institute and had their picture taken. These portraits were then displayed alongside images of the institute’s transgender and intersex visitors and patients. Margaret Sanger, in the account of her visit to the institute, described
how “on the walls of the stairway there were pictures of homosexual men decked out as women in hats, earrings and feminine make-up; also women in men’s clothing and toppers.” This description is an example of the use of *homosexual* as a catch-all term for all kinds of sexual “deviancies” in the 1920s. “Further up the steps,” Sanger continued, “were photographs of the same individuals who had been brought back to normality, some of them through adaptation of the Voronoff experiments in the transplantation of sex glands.” If Sanger’s encounter with the sexual intermediaries photographs challenged her perception of gender, it did not prompt her to become more accepting of gender variation. Instead she interpreted the visual display, according to her own set of expectations, as a journey from abnormality to normality, thus figuring the institute as a place dedicated to fixing or curing gender.

Sanger’s reading of the photographs as a straight(forward) journey into normality contrasts with accounts of queer visitors for whom the photographs and other objects collected by Hirschfeld and his colleagues had an affective appeal. According to Christopher Isherwood, for instance, it was precisely the encounter with the objects, rather than the people, gathered at the Institute of Sexual Science that proved to be transformative. In *Christopher and his Kind* he writes that

Christopher giggled nervously when Karl Giese and Francis [Turville-Petre] took him through the Institute’s museum. . . . Christopher giggled because he was embarrassed . . . because, at last, he was being brought face to face with his tribe. Up to now, he had behaved as though the tribe didn’t exist and homosexuality were a private way of life.

Here, then, the institute’s collection of objects, rather than its people, is given center stage. Isherwood suggests that the encounter with the “sex museum”—the fetishes, fantasy pictures, and photographs—forced him to “admit kinship with these freakish fellow tribesmen and their distasteful customs.” This is in many ways a curious passage, as it displaces sexual identification from people to the objects that are used to document their existence. But this displacement also provides for an intimate archival encounter: a flash of recognition that makes real for Isherwood the existence of homosexuality, which he now no longer understands in terms of private acts but, for better or worse, as a public display. In other words, the publicly framed material archive of Hirschfeld’s sexology, the objects of fantasy and desire gathered at the institute rather than the humans who pass through it, prompt Isherwood’s affective admission of queer kinship.
The objects and materials gathered at the Institute of Sexual Science became one of the earliest points of attack after the Nazis rose to power. On Saturday, May 6, 1933, Nazi men raided the institute, an event that not only destroyed Hirschfeld’s life work but also marked the end of the first phase of European sexology. The attack, which took place after months of observation and threats against the institute, inaugurated a new phase in the intensification of Nazi terror. It happened in three stages: in the morning, Nazi students entered the institute and began to destroy its interior. In the afternoon, members of the Sturmabteilung—the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party known as the SA—joined the fray to conduct a more systematic search. Together they removed large parts of the institute’s library, which were then loaded onto trucks, ready for stage three of the attack, the destruction of the materials four days later in what would be the first in the series of infamous Nazi book burnings.

The raid on the Institute of Sexual Science has received considerable critical attention, not least because it inaugurated a most violent time in the history of attacks against queer women and men. Between 1937 and 1939 alone, persecutions under Paragraph 175 increased nearly tenfold and the number of forced castrations on men who were, or were considered to be, homosexual, multiplied. On April 4, 1938, a Gestapo directive ordered that men convicted of homosexuality be incarcerated in concentration camps. According to the historian Rüdiger Lautmann, an estimated ten thousand inmates held in various concentrations camps were classified as homosexual; the number who died remains uncertain. The raid on the institute foreshadowed this escalation of organized violence against homosexuals and anticipated the antisemitic pogroms that preceded the death camps. Since the Jewish contribution to sexology was considerable, including at the institute, where many prominent members—such as Hirschfeld, Abraham, and Levy-Lenz—were Jews, it should come as no surprise that antisemitism as well as homophobia fueled the attacks.

While Levy-Lenz claims that what he calls “the purely scientific institute” became “the first victim which fell to the new regime” because its members “knew too much” about the taboo subject of sexuality generally and the sexual behavior and proclivities of German women and men more specifically, the critical consensus today is that it was precisely the institute’s associations with both homosexuality and Jewishness that made it the focus of Nazi attack. The details of the attack remain, however, somewhat contested. This is partly because of differing views on what the actual target under attack was. According to a Nazi rallying call, “Brenne Hirschfeld” (Burn
Hirschfeld), which was picked up by the contemporary press, Hirschfeld himself was the symbolic target of the raid—symbolic because it was known that he was no longer resident at the institute.\textsuperscript{99} If this suggests that all his work was under attack, according to an eyewitness there was a degree of selection in the raid on the institute. The unnamed observer who was present during the attack claims that after the morning’s indiscriminate vandalism by the students, the SA seemed to approach their destructive task in a more methodical fashion: after having removed “basket after basket of valuable books and manuscripts,” including “bound volumes of periodicals,” “the material belonging to the World League for Sexual Reform,” and “the whole edition of the journal \textit{Sexus},” the SA then “wanted to take away several thousand questionnaires . . . but desisted when they were assured that these were simply medical histories.”\textsuperscript{100} The questionnaires were one of the most famous and controversial aspects of Hirschfeld’s work. He first developed what he called the Psychobiologischen Fragebogen (psychobiological questionnaire) in 1900 for use as a diagnostic tool in his clinic.\textsuperscript{101} According to Walter Benjamin, “Some of the prominent [Nazis] had been patients of Hirschfeld [which] is why his records and books and his Institute were destroyed so promptly.”\textsuperscript{102} While others too have argued that what they call “the apparent destruction of the Institute” was in fact “a cover operation to retrieve . . . incriminating evidence against both prominent Nazi leaders and their opponents,”\textsuperscript{103} the Hirschfeld biographer Charlotte Wolff has claimed that “confessional” materials such as the questionnaires were deliberately spared so that they could later be used by the Gestapo to root out homosexuals.\textsuperscript{104} None of these arguments seems entirely convincing, however, if we remember that it was a group of students, rather than Nazi soldiers, who were first let loose on the institute and that a careful selection of materials would have been difficult in such an attack.

However, attention to material circumstances, rather than questions of intent, can deepen understanding of how the events played out. The questionnaires, for example, were distinguished from other medical books and manuscripts held in the institute’s library less by their content than by their physical form: they consisted of a large volume of loose paper. Each questionnaire contained more than a hundred questions ranging from inquiries about language development in childhood to reflections on sexual preferences in adulthood.\textsuperscript{105} By the time of the Nazi raid, Hirschfeld had collected more than ten thousand questionnaires, the longest of which was 360 handwritten pages and had taken almost six months to complete.\textsuperscript{106} If these numbers are correct, it seems possible that the practical difficulties involved in removing such a large amount of loose paper aided the serendipitous survival of this archive. The end of the institute, which marks the escalating Nazi violence
against certain groups of people, also indicates, then, that the life and death of archives is subject to a degree of random circumstance and that attention to such circumstances can provide insights into why certain collections of paper and objects come under attack.

**Handling Homosexual Texts**

That the library earmarked for destruction contained “deviant” writing posed a particular problem for those managing the destruction of this material: how to handle it without being tainted by sexual perversion and degeneracy. Judith Butler, in her observations of what she calls the “risk of sociality” in torture, has emphasized the complex role played by the body in negotiating the relationship between the subject and the social. She writes:

> As bodies we are exposed to others, and while this may be the condition of our desire, it also raises the possibility of subjugation and cruelty. This follows from the fact that bodies are bound up with others through material needs, through touch, through language, through a set of relations without which we cannot survive. To have one’s survival bound up in such a way is a constant risk of sociality—its promise and its threat.\(^{107}\)

If we accept that our relationship to others is partly mediated through the body, then homophobia and transphobia can be understood as forms of aggressive risk management by those who feel threatened by the proximity of bodies and desires that challenge their sense of self. The idea that the body exposes us to a “constant risk of sociality” is particularly useful for understanding how homophobia, transphobia, and antisemitism shaped the messy interplay between visceral and psychic forces in the attacks on Hirschfeld’s institute. Whereas materiality played a role in the serendipitous survival of certain texts, their content influenced how these materials were handled. Seen as a threat as much as objects of desire, the queer content of the institute’s library could not be touched by the Nazi men without raising questions about the relationship established in the encounter.

Photographs taken during the raid on the institute suggest that the Nazi thugs, consciously or unconsciously, attempted to manage the “risk of sociality,” which emerged for the Nazi men in the encounter with queer objects under attack. Figure 4.2 indicates that the dissociation of Nazi men and homosexuality was taken seriously. The photograph shows a student and an SA man standing atop a mountain of books and photos. Both men appear to be intently focused on the materials in front of them. The student is looking
at pictures, while the soldier is reading a page in a book. Closer inspection suggests that the photograph was staged in a way that sought to dissociate the Nazi men from the content of the materials in which they are so immersed. The picture is well lit and carefully composed. Strategically placed at the front of the mountain of books and papers are a number of photographs of topless women, apparently taken from the journal Die Ehe, the institute’s publication on marriage. The conspicuous inclusion of these images heterosexualizes the materials handled by the Nazi men. Nazi propaganda and policy tended to decry and persecute both pornography and homosexuality. However, here the prominent placing of photographs of topless women suggests that homophobic anxieties shaped the raid on the Institute of Sexual Science. The representation of Nazi hands on naked women manages to maintain the institute’s association with sexual immorality even as these images also ensure that the Nazi men sent to cleanse the institute of its holdings are dissociated from homosexuality. Sharon Patricia Holland has argued that “if touch can be interpreted as the action that bars one from entry and also connects one to the sensual life of the other, then . . . racism has its own erotic life.” Holland’s observation on “the erotic life of racism,” by which
she means the paradoxical intimacy of racist acts and gestures, complicates understanding of the issues at stake in the Nazi raid on the Institute of Sexual Science. It helps us see these acts not merely as part of the general group psychology of Nazi totalitarianism but more specifically as evidence of how antisemitism and homophobia together dictated the actions during the attack on the institute. The photographs are evidence of the influence of deeply entrenched cultural fantasies about Jews and homosexuals and “tradition[s] of homophobia” as well as the antisemitism that guided the simultaneously quotidian and spectacular destruction of the institute.\(^{110}\)

Other evidence exists that Nazi men were forbidden from engaging with Hirschfeld’s work. In 1934, the *Palestine Post*, the leftist predecessor of today’s *Jerusalem Post*, when reporting on the escalation of Nazi violence mentioned the case of a German student who “ha[d] been excluded from the Nazi party . . . his offense being that he was found reading the book on the Great War morals by the Jewish author Dr Magnus Hirschfeld.”\(^{111}\) There is no indication whether the article refers to Hirschfeld’s jingoistic commentary on World War I, published in 1915, or his later, more critical, reassessment of events. What is clear, however, is that the *Palestine Post* picks up on the importance the Nazi regime placed on dissociating itself from the influence of the Jewish and homosexual Institute of Sexual Science.

**Hirschfeld’s Head at Stake**

The role of the institute in the Nazi book burnings is often forgotten in mainstream histories of the events and their aftermath even as their images have gained a degree of iconic status in twentieth-century historiography, where they have become synonymous with the Nazi attack on culture. In Anglo-American popular discourse, the book burnings are seen as the moment when Nazi barbarism revealed itself, inaugurating the escalation of the regime’s reign of terror and anticipating the mass killings in the camps. However, in a recent reassessment of contemporary reactions to the book burnings, the historian Matthew Fishburn has shown that they did not immediately influence debates in the United States and United Kingdom. He points out that famous responses, such as the letter of President Theodore Roosevelt to the American Bookseller’s Association meeting in 1942, which includes the much-quoted line that “people die, but books never die,” were only gradually assembled into the neat narrative of condemnation by which the book burnings are memorialized in Anglo-American culture today.\(^{112}\)

According to Fishburn, an article in a 1940 issue of *Life* magazine brought together many of the words and images of disapproval that are today associated with Anglo-American responses to these events, including the focus on
the destruction of “literature.” While Fishburn thus rightly points out that a significant number of the texts destroyed were nonliterary, it is noteworthy that he does not mention that the first book burning was largely fueled by materials removed from Hirschfeld’s institute.

Few contemporary observers in 1933 would have failed to notice that Hirschfeld and the institute played a key role in the Nazi book burnings. In the lead up to the raid Hirschfeld had frequently come under attack by right-wing hatemongers. While most of the violence directed against him was verbal or visual—the Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer* published several Hirschfeld caricatures—he also suffered physical attacks, most famously surviving the 1920 beating by right-wing thugs that left him so severely injured that he was mistakenly declared dead. Just over a decade later, in 1932, a portrait of Hirschfeld featured in a Nazi election poster as an example of Jewish and homosexual un-Germanness. The poster, which was directed against Hitler’s opponent Paul von Hindenburg, describes Hirschfeld as a “famous expert witness in the courtroom and fighter against Paragraph 175,” a statement that indicates that homosexuality itself retained a degree of unspeakability in Nazi propaganda even as it was acknowledged as a political concern. The historian Dagmar Herzog, who has undertaken a detailed examination of how “Nazis eager to advance a sexually conservative agenda drew on the ambivalent association of Jews with both sexual evil and sexual rights,” makes a persuasive case for why Hirschfeld was a particular target: his “contention that sexual orientation was biologically determined.”

His image on the Nazi campaign poster further indicates how attacks on Hirschfeld came to focus on his head as a symbol of un-Aryanism. The poster depicts Hirschfeld alongside portraits of nine other Hitler opponents, ranging from members of the Social Democrats to MPs from the staunchly conservative Center Party. They are brought together under the heading “We vote for Hindenburg!,” which is rendered in pseudo-Hebraized font. The images of these ten men are contrasted in the lower half of the poster with portraits of leading Nazis, including Herrmann Göring, “Hauptmann Röhm,” and “Dr Goebbels,” whose allegiance is pronounced in bold neo-Gothic lettering that declares, “We vote for Hitler!” At the bottom of the poster, even larger neo-Gothic writing exclaims, “If you look at these heads, you will know where you belong!” The poster’s divisive visual language insists on a distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan physiognomies, a distinction typical of Nazi polemic against Jews. Yet it is noteworthy that many of the Nazi opponents included here were, in fact, not Jewish. However, by likening them to the well-known Jews Magnus Hirschfeld and Bernhard Weiss—the vice president of Berlin’s police force—the poster made a claim for the visibly un-German facial features of these men.
A few months after the poster’s circulation, Hirschfeld’s head would again play a key role in the violent symbolism of the Nazi book burnings when the physically absent Hirschfeld would be figuratively burnt at the stake. A single, blurry photograph survives that shows a bronze sculpture of Hirschfeld’s head being paraded through the streets of Berlin on May 10, 1933 (Figure 4.3). The bust, made by the Jewish sculptor Kurt Harald Isenstein (1898–1980) and presented to Hirschfeld on his sixtieth birthday in 1928, had been removed during the raid on the institute on May 6. Four days later it was carried through the city to be thrown onto the bonfire in Berlin’s Opernplatz. The famous left-wing author Erich Kästner, who witnessed these events and the burning of his own work that night, later described the sense of disturbance he felt at seeing how “the head of a smashed up bust of Magnus Hirschfeld, staked high above the crowd, swayed to and fro” amid the crowd that had congregated to watch the events. Hirschfeld himself, who witnessed the events from the precarious safety of his French exile, where he saw in a Paris cinema a newsreel of the attack, wrote in his diary about his deep distress, removing himself from the symbolism of the action by referring to his bust simply as a work by the sculptor Isenstein. The display of Hirschfeld’s head in this way clearly heightens the threatening symbolism of the book burnings by reminding the audience of the link between the human body and the textual corpus committed to the flames. But the carrying of the bust on a stake also tells us something about the psychic structures of hate and antihomosexuality behind these attacks. While the stake clearly serves as a means of display, ensuring that the Hirschfeld bust could be seen by as many spectators as possible, it also created distance between the bust and its bearers, who avoided direct touch to safeguard the Nazi men from Jewish homosexuality.

Nazi film footage of the events on May 10 makes clear that some planning had gone into constructing the bonfire. It shows that, to enable the burning of more than ten thousand books and other materials, the Nazis had stacked up numerous wooden palettes and filled them partly with books, constructing a solid framework for a bonfire that would need to be slow burning yet well ventilated. The footage also shows men and women, some in Nazi uniform, others in civilian clothes, move around the lit fire, throwing whole books at it as well as what looks like the occasional individual sheet of paper or piece of cardboard, items that appear only just heavy enough to make the short flight into the flames. The labor involved in this task creates visceral links among the perpetrators and between them and the objects they pass through their hands. In one scene, twenty-eight seconds into the footage, we see a human chain passing books from an unseen place somewhere in the dark toward the fire, while in another scene we see a civilian in a shirt
and tie gathering piles of books from the ground and hurling them toward the flames. The voiceover explains that German students had “eingesammelt” (collected) the books for burning. The camera then moves to Hitler’s propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, who addresses the masses, trying to impress on them what he calls the “strong, great and symbolic undertaking” of “entrust[ing] to the flames the intellectual garbage of the past.”

According to the historians George Mosse and James Jones, “The tossing of the bust of Hirschfeld into the flames is the sole instance where an image was burnt with the books.” It is not clear, however, whether the bust actually reached the flames—some historians have argued that it would simply have been too heavy to be tossed into the fire. It is likely not only that the bust was present on that night but that it somehow withstood the Nazi attack.

A story goes that the Hirschfeld bust was found the day after the bonfire by a street cleaner who took it home and kept it safe until after the end of World War II, when he donated it to the Berlin Academy of Arts, where it is on display today. Whatever the truth of this account, it is fair to say that circumstances aided the bust’s survival as much as the street cleaner’s initiative. The sculpture of Hirschfeld’s head was made from bronze, an alloy containing copper and tin. The melting point of bronze, which varies according to the ratio of its constituents, tends to be significantly higher—between 1,900 and 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit—than the temperature reached by burning
paper, which combusts at around 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit. Wood also burns at about 1,100–1,500 degrees Fahrenheit, so the book bonfire simply would not have been able to reach a temperature high enough to melt the bust. The Hirschfeld bronze, symbolically rendered untouchable when it was staked up high above the hands of Nazi men, thus literally remained untouched by the brutal events of May 1933.

An (Im)Material End

Maryanne Dever, in a thought-provoking reassessment of the archive, has argued “for the necessity and value of moving away from our ingrained habit of ignoring the material instantiation of the archival artifacts with which we work.”123 Dever, who is specifically concerned with “the potential of the thing that is the paper,” demonstrates beautifully that attention to the materiality of archival documents can aid the process of recovery and deepen understanding of how the material relates to the cultural.124 My own analysis of the Institute of Sexual Science in this chapter differs in significant ways from Dever’s project, not least because I have not lingered on my own encounter with the materiality of the objects under discussion. I am well aware that it might, therefore, seem somewhat disingenuous to close with a reference to Dever’s work. But I mention it here because her insistence that understanding the material is central to our relationship to the archive and what we might recover from it helps bring into relief my own concern with the Institute of Sexual Science as a place in queer history. The Institute of Sexual Science was in many ways the first LGBTIQ archive, a place where certain kinds of information were formally collected, stored, and analyzed. But this archival work, which anticipates the development of later, formal library collections, was undertaken not in institutional isolation but amid the activities, private and political, of people who called the institute home and went about their everyday lives within its walls. It was precisely the institute’s very real presence in interwar Berlin and in the international sexual reform circles of the day that made it an easy point of attack for Nazi thugs. Attention to the Nazi violence that brought to an end both the institute and the activist sexology that had gained prominence via Hirschfeld’s work reveals how the materiality of the objects got caught up in the psychic realms of hate and a fear of contamination that shaped how the attack was conducted.

The blurring of boundaries between antisemitism and homophobia during these attacks indicates that it can be difficult to untangle the histories of homophobia from other forms of hatred. Similarly, as the earlier part of the chapter shows, it can be difficult to distinguish queer histories from feminist or transgender histories because the lives and discourses that inhabit such
histories often overlap, even as different vocabularies or groups of people come to compete with each other. The aim of this chapter is not to untangle the messiness of this past but to reveal the knots and fine threads that held together sexual lives and labors at the Institute of Sexual Science and that would eventually unravel, collectively but also in many cases on an individual basis, in the violence of the Nazi onslaught. By focusing on the Institute of Sexual Science in this way, I have shown how attention to the materiality of sexology encourages broader thinking about the sexological archive and the violence issued against the place and the people who inhabited it.