How was Hirschfeld’s work received after World War II? I examine in the Introduction the complex fate of Hirschfeld’s own archive and the serendipitous circumstances that brought some of it back to light, first in 1994 and then in the early 2000s. Here I conclude with a consideration of Hirschfeld’s discursive afterlife in the postwar years, using the example of his reception by Alfred Kinsey and his contemporaries as a way into discussing how death and violence animate contemporary debates about queer culture and politics. To some extent the Coda is a reorientation of the forward-looking understanding of sexual debates in the 1950s, debates that are often conceptualized not in the present but as phenomena in anticipation of the sexual revolution and the gay liberation movements. Instead I give centrality to the backward glances of Kinsey and his contemporaries to Hirschfeld’s earlier sexological efforts, not out of a genealogical impulse—there is no denying the deliberate rupturing with the past of much postwar sexual rhetoric—but to examine what Sara Ahmed has called the “lines that accumulate privilege and are ‘returned’ by recognition and reward.” If Ahmed’s concern is with a specific “way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place,” I explore how antiquer sentiments are transmitted across time before concluding with a consideration of the shifts in alignment between power and queer politics in the twenty-first century.
Hirschfeld and Kinsey in the Nuclear Age

World War II and its immediate aftermath led to the end of what we might call the first phase of sexology in Europe. After the war the center of sexological research shifted from Europe to America as the rights-oriented sexology of Hirschfeld and his colleagues at the Institute of Sexual Science was replaced by the large-scale studies of “American” sexual behavior conducted by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues at Indiana University.¹ Like Hirschfeld, whose reception in gay history has been generally positive and sometimes reverent, Kinsey’s contribution to American sexual politics has been more controversial. While some critics have described Kinsey as a “sex crusader”² whose “research and the public debates it stirred in the United States helped to legitimate discussion of homosexuality and spur the growth of a gay political movement,”³ others have argued that the popularization of the distinction between “heterosexual” and “homosexual” supported the persecutory politics of the McCarthy era,⁴ not least because, as Janice Irvine has pointed out, Kinsey’s “refusal to take stands on political or social issues of the day” fashioned a particular “white, middle-class, heterosexual” sexology.⁵

The diverse responses to Hirschfeld and Kinsey share that they tend to examine prewar German and postwar American sexologies separately.⁶ Yet points of connection existed between the geopolitically distinct strands of sex research. Perhaps the most obvious link is Kinsey’s impact on West German discourses about sex in the 1950s, where his work received considerable public attention, not least because the newly set-up American cultural institutions in the country—the Amerikahäuser and Deutsch-Amerikanischen Institute—promoted Kinsey’s work as part of their efforts to “reeducate” and “reorient” a German population that had been complicit in the Nazi regime.⁷ Whereas in Germany, as Sybille Steinbacher’s research suggests, Kinsey’s work was deployed as part of a sociocultural, American-centric denazification process, in the United States Kinsey figured as a scientist whose rational objectivity encapsulated the values and scientific optimism of the beginning nuclear age. Arguing from the outset that his work represented “scientific fact completely divorced from questions of moral value and social custom,”⁸ Kinsey insisted in a later work, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (1953), that he rejected the common assumption that “sexual behavior is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual; and [that] many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme.”⁹ In place of the established binaries, he presented a model of sexual behavior that favored the metaphor of the continuum over the fixed categories of sexual types that had preoccupied many, but not all, earlier sexologists. One might argue that Hirschfeld’s
“sexual intermediaries” in their infinite variations anticipated some of Kinsey’s thinking, although it is worth noting that Hirschfeld’s emphasis on gender as well as sexual desire was considerably more complicated than Kinsey’s Heterosexual–Homosexual Rating Scale. Kinsey mentioned Hirschfeld’s work in his first major sexual study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). These fleeting references constitute unique sites of “deconstructive contestation”—points of access to the norms of the postwar past—revealing the (homosexual) limits of Kinsey’s avowedly value-free science of sex.12

Not long after Hirschfeld’s visit to the United States in the 1930s, Kinsey shifted his research focus from zoology to human sexuality. Acknowledging his debts, Kinsey notes that “Hirschfeld deserves considerable credit for having tried on a larger scale than anyone had before to ascertain the facts on a matter that has always been difficult to survey.”13 By “matter that has always been difficult,” Kinsey means homosexuality, a turn of phrase that indicates his take on the issue. Kinsey emphasizes his methodological connection with Hirschfeld, figuring the German sexologist as a scientific predecessor when he argues that “down to the beginning of the present study, no more serious attempt [than Hirschfeld’s study of homosexuality] has been made.”14 Yet the tone of writing changes quickly. Kinsey takes issue with the fact that Hirschfeld’s psychobiological questionnaire was aimed at examining the occurrence of homosexuality in German society, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Kinsey claims that “the uncritical acceptance of these inadequate calculations has delayed recognition of the magnitude of the medical, psychiatric, social, and legal problems involved in homosexuality, and delayed scientific interpretations of the bases of such behavior.”15 Here we find a subtle shift in emphasis from the discussion of method to that of readership, as Kinsey suggests that Hirschfeld’s work delayed sex research by encouraging an “uncritical” audience response that perpetuated his “inadequate calculations” within a nonscientific sphere. This dismissal problematizes Kinsey’s claim in the opening pages of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* that his aim is to provide an account of “the man of the street” by “the accumulation of a body of scientific fact that may provide the basis for sounder generalizations about the sexual behavior of certain groups and, some day, even our American population as a whole.”16 The rejection of an audience response in relation to Hirschfeld’s work suggests that it was important for Kinsey that the “man on the street” did not set the research agenda. This point is reinforced further by Kinsey’s reference to Hirschfeld’s “Sex Institute” in Berlin. Kinsey claims that Hirschfeld’s data is “uninterpretable,” because the patients and visitors who filled out the questionnaire, in Kinsey’s view, did not constitute a representative part of society.17 Ironically, Kinsey’s later study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, would be subject to similar criticism of “methodological
inadequacies,” because, as one commentator argued, “almost all [women interviewed] came from urban white collar or professional families.”

Kinsey’s suggestion that Hirschfeld’s work was too bound up in the milieu in which it was produced was a direct jibe against the queer orientation of Hirschfeld’s work at the institute. If Kinsey clothed his critique of Hirschfeld in terms of methodological differences, his collaborator and coauthor of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* Wardell Pomeroy in a later account of their work suggests that methodology was not the main divisive factor between Kinsey and Hirschfeld. Pomeroy points out that Kinsey’s findings and Hirschfeld’s findings were in fact remarkably similar. For instance, while Kinsey’s provided more varied data on homosexuality in relation to age, class, and religion, overall, according to Pomeroy, his findings chimed with Hirschfeld’s, whose “famous questionnaire on homosexuality had produced . . . an estimate of 27 percent of such behavior in the population, not far from Kinsey’s own figure.” Pomeroy goes on to explain that Kinsey objected specifically to the homosexual-as-scientist, claiming that Kinsey was “offended by Magnus Hirschfeld’s open proclamation of his own homosexuality—not because of the behavior, but because he thought Hirschfeld was a special pleader in his work and not an objective scientist.” This helps explain the paradoxical position Hirschfeld occupied in Kinsey’s work, acknowledged both as the American’s most important predecessor in the study of homosexuality and as someone who “delayed” science because of a flawed methodology that drew its conclusions from what Kinsey believed to be a biased database: for Kinsey, Hirschfeld’s homosexuality disqualified him as a scientist.

Kinsey’s complex relationship with Hirschfeld reveals that he considered heterosexuality both the norm and an implicit condition of scientific objectivity. This reading concurs with observations by some of Kinsey’s own homosexual subjects of study in a later reflection of their role in his survey of homosexuality. In an oral history project by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of Northern California conducted in 1983, historian Len Evans interviewed one of Kinsey’s unofficial informants, Samuel Steward, whose account of his working relationship with Kinsey is revealing. On the one hand, Steward emphasizes Kinsey’s positive attitude toward homosexuality, recalling with great fondness Kinsey’s “liberating influence” and explaining that “we [homosexuals in the 1940s and 1950s] looked upon [Kinsey] as a savior. He was the liberator. He was our Stonewall.” On the other hand, however, Steward suggests that Kinsey was keen to dissociate himself from the homosexual participants in his work. Pointing out that Kinsey engaged “a lot of unofficial collaborators whom he depended upon to a very large extent,” Steward notes that these collaborators remained
“unofficial” in the sense of not being publicly acknowledged. Although this could be explained by the persecution of homosexuals at the time, Steward claims that there were other reasons too: Kinsey “felt he couldn’t have any homosexuals on his staff or officially connected with him, because he thought it would taint the study.” According to Steward’s experience, then, Kinsey’s rejection of any official collaboration with homosexuals was not simply a response to the repressive political climate of his time but indicative of Kinsey’s assumption that homosexuality tarnished scientific authority.

The Discursive Half Life of Homophobia

Kinsey’s disqualification of homosexual authority through the figure of Hirschfeld shows how the process by which, as Heather Love puts it, “the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in the present” is played out in the past. Kinsey recycled a particular homophobic discourse of the prewar years when he discredited Hirschfeld’s authority by emphasizing the sexologist’s homosexuality. Overtly, Kinsey set out to challenge norms, arguing, for example, in his later work on female sexuality that “somehow, in an age which calls itself scientific and Christian, we should be able to discover more intelligent ways of protecting social interests without doing such irreparable damage to so many individuals and to the total social organization to which they belong.” However, the encounter with Hirschfeld, even more than Kinsey’s nod toward Christian America, shows up his own need to protect science, making clear that while Kinsey might have been supportive toward his homosexual subjects of study, he was deeply invested in not granting scientific authority to the homosexual to speak for himself.

This kind of policing of authority causes its own damage, as it reshapes expressions of homophobia in a way that allows them to return within new discourse formations. The reception of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male illustrates this point through the ease by which postwar commentators similarly reverted to older assumptions about sexuality when formulating their response to Kinsey’s work. Most contemporary American responses to the Kinsey reports tended to focus on the extent to which Kinsey’s findings reflected accurately on the state of the American population, as well as analyzing the implications of his findings. In West Germany, in turn, Kinsey was a feted figure, seen to be part of the inauguration of a progressive new nation ready to sever its links with the recent Nazi past. That such change operated, however, largely on the level of remodeling rather than rupturing the locations of power and privilege in German society is indicated, for instance, by the fact that one of the main people promoting Kinsey’s work in the country was the journalist Walther von Hollander, who had worked as a
scriptwriter at Universal Film AG during the Nazi regime. In contrast to the West German and American responses to Kinsey, which were forward looking but heterosexually focused, British commentators picked out Kinsey’s claims about the frequency of homosexual practices to distance their own nation from these findings. An early response to *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* published in the *British Medical Journal* in November 1948, for example, was at pains to dissociate British national life from what was implicitly figured as the excessive amount of homosexual occurrence found in the American population. The article noted that the chairman of the British Social Hygiene Council, Fred Grundy, broadly agreed with Kinsey’s findings on homosexuality, arguing that “much the same pattern would be found in this country [the United Kingdom]” while nevertheless insisting that in Britain “the incidence of homosexual practices would probably be rather less.”

Ensuring that the point about the lesser frequency of British homosexuality (and its flipside, the greater occurrence of heterosexuality in the country) not be lost, Grundy concluded with the observation that while “Kinsey had brought a fresh breath of realism to the subject of sex behaviour,” the same was “perhaps . . . not so much needed over here as it was in the States.”

This kind of rhetoric is resonant of older discourses about national stereotyping that located homosexuality in the realm of the “foreign” and sometimes ascribed the occurrence of homosexuality to nations that were considered direct political rivals (such as in the French slang term for homosexuality, *le vice allemand*). It also indicates that homosexuality remained a loaded term, the bearer of an unwanted otherness whose subjects continued to be figured as strange to the nation’s normal life.

That Hirschfeld’s name still had some currency in these debates is indicated by one of the first book-length responses to Kinsey’s work. In 1949, London-based Falcon Press published *Sexual Behaviour and the Kinsey Report*, written by two Americans, Morris Leopold Ernst and David Loth. The book shifted the tone of debate from Grundy’s defensive position of UK heterosexuality toward a more open attack on the homosexuality of German Nazism. Ernst and Loth were influential figures: Loth was a prolific journalist and writer, and Ernst was a well-known American lawyer, most famous, as the book’s jacket proclaims, “for his defence in cases of so called ‘obscenity’ in books such as Havelock Ellis’s *The Psychology of Sex* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses.*” Ernst’s contribution to the publication of these works (which also included, for example, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*) in the United States is well documented, alongside his somewhat paradoxical involvement in the setting up of the National Civil Liberties Bureau, support for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and anticommunist stance. Ernst and Loth celebrated Kinsey’s work with patriotic pride, claiming that “the Kinsey
Report sets Americans apart. For today Americans are the only nation who have some sound scientific basis for knowing what the sexual behaviour of their men actually is.” Yet if Ernst’s legal work suggests that he was sympathetic to sexual reform, supportive of the dissociation of sex from moral and other value judgments, the national framing of the discussion makes clear that he and Loth were no neutral observers. They contrast progressive America with an old European world where, as they argue, “the most sensational and widely reported trials for homosexual behavior have been conducted.” The examples they give are both from a German context: The first is the Eulenburg-Harden affair of 1907, in which, as I discuss in Chapter 1, a journalist accused members of the entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II of homosexuality, prompting a series of libel trials that dragged both the issue of homosexuality and Hirschfeld, who acted as an expert witness on the subject, into the German public sphere. The second instance Ernst and Loth mention is what they call “the Munich blood purge of Captain [Ernst] Roehm” in 1934, in which the Nazi founder of the SA was executed. The operation ostensibly aimed to rid the Nazi party of men Hitler distrusted politically, but it also marks the point when the party distanced itself from homosexual members such as Roehm.

Chapter 4 shows that the complex debates about homosexuality and Nazism clearly form part of the distinct national history of Germany and its reception. However, conceptualizing the homosexual as a threat to the nation did not start or end with the Nazi regime. It infamously resurfaced in North America during the McCarthy era with the report “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in the U.S. Government.” This was presented to the U.S. Congress in the winter of 1950 and is considered the motor that drove the persecution of homosexuals in the decade that followed. Ernst and Loth to some extent anticipate these debates, but in a way that implicates both homosexuality generally and Hirschfeld’s sexology specifically in Nazism. They write:

One of the great studies in sexual behaviour was that of Hirschfeld, who early in the century persuaded 10,000 men and women to fill out a questionnaire containing 130 questions. They were what he called “psychobiological” questions, but on the basis of them and of his medical practice, he reached some conclusions about homosexuality in Germany. One of these was that in the Germany of his day, with a population of 62,000,000 there were nearly a million and a half men and women “whose constitutional predisposition is largely or completely homosexual.” Just how big a proportion of his estimated million and half German homosexuals found their way into
Nazi uniform is not known, of course. But a good many of them were attracted by the Nazi principles and the society of their fellows in a bond which excluded all women.  

The chilling change of direction in the argument, which moves from a description of Hirschfeld’s “great” work to the suggestion that “a good many” of Germany’s homosexual men would have been “attracted by the Nazi principles,” illustrates the ease by which homosexuality was aligned with the abhorrent without needing further explanation. This is not to deny that some Nazis were homosexual but to question the alignment of homosexuality with Nazism, which is a way of rendering it hateful and justifying its persecution and attack.  

Morris and Loth show how easily Hirschfeld’s name could still be invoked as shorthand for an old, “homosexual” sexology, which is implicated in the rise of Nazism despite the fact that many of the early sex researchers, Hirschfeld included, were Jewish and, as in his case, homosexual victims of the Nazi regime.  

Hirschfeld’s postwar reception shows, then, that homosexuality continued to be disqualified even, or perhaps especially, in projects such as Kinsey’s that overtly sought to replace moral assumptions and social norms with an objective scientific approach to sex. If this realization is in many ways unsurprising—critics of both “scientific objectivity” and the history of terms such as tolerance have demonstrated the limits of rhetorical movements that speak progress while retaining the status quo—the backward glances of Kinsey and his contemporaries to the early homosexual rights activism nevertheless also indicate the complex allegiances and disavowals that demarcated queer speakability and livability in the 1950s. While Kinsey’s work in certain respects seems to continue Hirschfeld’s homosexual emancipation project—his observations on the frequency of homosexual practice normalize difference and in so doing seemingly contribute to a move toward greater tolerance of homosexuality within American society—Kinsey’s dismissal of Hirschfeld’s sexological authority nevertheless shows up the limits of his objectivity. Kinsey’s avowedly apolitical, future-oriented science of sex retains older, negative assumptions about homosexuality, as it implies that scientific objectivity is contingent on the heterosexuality of the scientist. It was partly via the popular success of Kinsey’s work that these assumptions were then absorbed into postwar culture. If the evidence of the damage perpetuated here is found in brief textual encounters, its reach is much broader. It shows how homophobia was transmitted through the scientific sphere beyond debates around homosexuality itself: Kinsey’s rejection of Hirschfeld marks the “straight turn” of sex research in the postwar years.
(Im)Mortal Queer

What is gained, then, from tracking the lines and allegiances that bind queerness to violence, including death? Lesbian and gay historians, literary and cultural critics, writers, and artists have, initially at least, focused specifically on challenging the denials of queer existence by recuperating the past, recovering affirmative evidence of the richness and persistence of queer existence across time. The recent rise of lesbian, queer, and trans historical novels and (graphic) memoirs, for instance—by Sarah Waters, Alison Bechdel, Jewelle Gomez, and Juliet Jacques, to name but a few—has importantly inserted trans and female same-sex lives in dominant narratives about (literary) history and society. Given the pernicious iterations and reemergences of anti-queer attack against people whose bodies and desires do not match social norms and expectations, the importance of such interventions can hardly be overstated. Sometimes in such creative and critical accounts the past is figured as an affective prop whose “queer touch” caresses and lingers with those who feel a connection with historical subjects.40 During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, for example, when the epidemic loss of queer life was widely treated with cynicism, contempt, and discrimination, the British novelist Neil Bartlett wrote an imaginative biography, *Who Was That Man?*, that affectively linked Wilde’s life and suffering to Bartlett’s own existence as a gay man in London in the 1980s.41 Bartlett’s assemblage of historical fragments and autobiographical narrative demonstrates that the figure of Oscar Wilde continues to animate gay lives long after his death. Bringing into queer touch the losses of the AIDS crisis with the iconic death of the man associated with the emergence of the modern homosexual, the novel troubles the heteronormative time of history. At the same time, however, works such as Bartlett’s *Who Was That Man?* are also a reminder that modern queer history tends to be told in foundational moments: the trial of Oscar Wilde and the AIDS catastrophe are just two of the defining moments in English and American male same-sex histories.

Yet queer lives across time are only partly graspable via attention to major historical events and transformations. This book examines the violence concealed in queer history, which is often difficult to bring into view. Considering the impact of violence, including death, on the formation of a collective sense of queer existence, I spend time with the dead and the injured. But I also try to signal where the “homosexual cause” is implicated in the racism and sexism that frame whose lives and deaths are apprehensible in modern Western culture and on what terms. My aim here is not to rehearse narratives of victimhood but to reveal both queer suffering and the suffering
that remained in the blind spots of early homosexual rights activism. One of the difficulties in discussing violence and death in relation to queer lives is to avoid, on the one hand, oversimplified cause-and-effect narratives about the impact of persecution and social denial. And on the other hand, I try to circumvent the celebratory imagination that figures some queer deaths, including suicide, in heroic and sometimes liberatory terms. This is not to say that certain queer deaths cannot or should not be understood as products of specific, devastating circumstances. Chapter 2 in particular shows that persecution, social attack, and a cruel carceral system can lead to death from physical illness as well as suicide, an insight that does not deny the agency and political potential of some self-staged deaths. But to claim, as I do, that modern queer culture is shaped by—or through—death and violence is fraught most of all because it asks that queer history be accountable not only for its death but for the violence and suffering perpetuated in relation to modern same-sex rights activism.

In their introduction to *Queer Necropolitics*, Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kunstman, and Silvia Posocco have pointed out that “in the place of simple dichotomies of repression versus visibility, or oppression versus rights . . . sexual difference is increasingly absorbed into hegemonic apparatuses, in a way that accelerates death.” Citing Jasbir Puar’s work they observe “a recent turn in how queer subjects are figured, from those who are left to die, to those that reproduce life,” noting, however, that this turn still excludes some gender-non-conforming bodies and that some queer lives “are targeted for killing or left to die” with some queer deaths remaining ungrievable. If Haritaworn, Kunstman, and Posocco are firmly focused on “the present and future(s) including . . . haunted futures,” their words nevertheless speak to my concern with violence and death in Magnus Hirschfeld’s work. *The Hirschfeld Archives* reveals the limits of queer apprehension at that point in time when homosexual rights activism was first beginning to take shape. The book documents the violence that made some queer lives (feel) unlivable even as it also reveals how a parochial focus on homosexual rights at times obscured other kinds of injustice and suffering, especially in relation to gendered and racial oppression. A testament to the queer dead whose existence left little trace in the historical archive but whose collective suffering nevertheless caused emotional shockwaves that reverberate across time and continue to haunt the present, Hirschfeld’s work shows that violence experienced, committed, and ignored is an intrinsic part of modern queer culture.