Homotopia?: Gay Identity, Sameness & the Politics of Desire

Jonathan Kemp

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Introduction

Refusals

“There is not one corner of the earth where the alleged crime of sodomy has not had shrines and votaries.”
– Marquis de Sade, Philosophy in the Bedroom

“Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are […]. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality.”
– Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’

Do opposites attract? Is desire lack? These assumptions have become so much a part of the ways in which we conceive desire that they are rarely questioned. Yet, what do they say about how homosexuality – a desire for the same – is viewed in our culture? This book takes as its starting point the absence of a suitable theory of homosexual desire, a theory not predicated on such heterological assumptions.¹ It is an investigation into how such assumptions acquired meaning within homosexual discourse, and as such is offered as an interruption within the hegemony of desire, a withdrawal of allegiance “from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna) which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an ac-

¹ By ‘heterological’ I mean a logic based on difference rather than sameness. The assumption that all desire can be reduced to lack is heterological. See Georges Bataille, ‘The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade’, in Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939, trans. A. Stoeckl, University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 91–102, where he writes about the “heterological theory of knowledge” (97).
cess to reality”.

As such, homosexual desire constitutes the biggest challenge to Western binaric thinking in that it dissolves the sacred distinctions between Same/Other, Desire/Identification, subject/object, male/female.

Under the epistemological regime of Lack/Difference, homosexual desire has become heterosexualised, and a hierarchical binarism of penetrator/penetrated is established within which the egality of a same-sex pairing is ignored. Without equality of status for both the anus and the phallus, there can be no true or complete sense of homosexual desire.

The book investigates the development of a homosexual discourse at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and examines how that discourse worked with heterosexualized models of desire. The texts discussed were published between the years 1891 and 1924, an historical moment when the concept of a distinct homosexual ‘identity’ took shape within a medicalized discourse centred on essential identity traits and characteristics. Prior to the medicalization of ‘the homosexual’, sex between men was regarded as a sin to which all men were vulnerable; after around 1870, it became the expression of a distinct and innate nature. The four primary texts to be discussed all work within this rubric of science, contributing to a discourse which saw the human race divided into two distinct categories: heterosexuals and homosexuals. How did this division come about, and what were its effects? How was this discourse sustained, and how were the meanings it produced received? For men whose erotic interest was exclusively in other men, what did it mean to see oneself and one’s desires as the outcome of biology rather than moral lapse?

Etymologically, ‘homosexuality’ means a desire for the same (homos = Greek for ‘same’), rather than the usual androcentric interpretation of a desire for men (homo = Latin for ‘man’);


an interpretation with which lesbians have been understandably uncomfortable. In a culture which champions so-called ‘masculine traits’ and misogynistically undervalues so-called ‘feminine traits’, the discursive and physical violence against the effeminate man is more consistent than that against the butch lesbian. Consider that a word was invented – effeminate – specifically to designate a man who acts womanly, but no word has been invented to describe exclusively a woman acting manly. Could this be because it is perfectly understandable within a heterosexual patriarchy that a woman would aspire to be a man (what Freud called ‘penis envy’), and utterly inconceivable that a man might aspire to be a woman, might want to abdicate his precious male privilege (no theory on ‘vagina envy’)? This thesis argues that for a man to desire men does not equate with aspiring to be a woman.

Andre Gide’s Corydon, Edward Carpenter’s The Intermediate Sex, and John Addington Symond’s A Problem in Modern Ethics are all pseudo-scientific texts written by non-medical men of letters, and were, in their time, highly influential on the emerging homosexual discourse. The fourth text I will examine, the twenty-odd pages of Marcel Proust’s novel A la recherche de temps perdu usually referred to as ‘La race maudite’, is the most problematic, in that it appeared under the guise of fiction. Its inclusion here is based on evidence that Proust originally planned this ‘essay-within-a-novel’ to be published separately. In it, he offers a pseudo-scientific theory of male–male love. It is as a piece of non-fiction that I shall approach this segment of Proust’s novel.

4 Within medical discourse, lesbianism was seen as resulting from a male soul trapped in a woman’s body, the exact converse of the male model. In this way, lesbian intercourse was heterosexualized along identical lines, with the top being stereotypically masculine (butch), the bottom stereotypically ‘femme’. There are no examples, however, of lesbian writers responding in a similar way to this medical model until Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness in 1928. A lesbian ‘reverse discourse’ did not emerge until the Well of Loneliness trials. See Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault, Oxford University Press, 1991, 48–52; 62.

5 “Consider how the two semantically opposed, morphologically identical words, effeminate and emasculate […] , instead of together defining a state of genderlessness, synonymously converge in a single attribute that may be predicated only of men.” D.A. Miller, Bringing Out Roland Barthes, University of California Press, 1992, 15.
What all four texts reveal is an extreme level of anxiety around sex, especially anal intercourse. Why did these texts deny, ignore or minimize anal sex? Why did they accept and therefore maintain the medical stereotype of the passive sodomite, rather than energize a radical departure from the conflation of homosexuality with gender inversion? Moreover, have they done homosexuality a huge disservice by accepting and perpetuating the link between same-sex desire and medicine (not to mention between same-sex desire and effeminacy)?

How far has this belief in the inferiority of the ‘passive’ partner informed our modern concepts of gay identity, to the extent that some tops believe themselves to be in some way more male than (ie, better than) the men they fuck? Could it be that some tops rely on this mimesis of heterosexual positioning in order to feel less of a homosexual (and therefore minimizing the inferior status allotted them within a homophobic culture)? Does this assumption that sexual passivity = effeminacy (and vice versa) determine gay men’s choices of sexual partner and sexual act, as well as affecting their self-image and self-esteem? (One need only look at the personal ads in the gay press to see how phobically this stereotype has been installed: ‘non-FM’, or ‘no effems’ invariably appears alongside ‘straight-acting’).

These four texts supply clues to how this discourse came to acquire meaning; how it shaped the perception of homosexuality as the expression of a particular type of person, rather than a sexual behaviour available to anybody. In this way, hegemonic notions of gender – the dominant social meanings of the categories man and woman – were increasingly seen as teleological.

Proust, Gide, Carpenter and Symonds were all fiction writers or poets. They were also homosexuals. As such, their pseudo-scientific responses to the medical colonization of their desires

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6 Given the historical evidence for the practice of sodomy in the period before and the period after that in which these writers worked, one must assume that anal sex didn’t suddenly take a drop in popularity.

7 See Colin Spencer, Homosexuality: A History, Fourth Estate, 1995, Chapter 11: ‘Colonisation by Medicine.’ The concept of colonization in connection with the medicalisation of homosexuality is particularly apposite given this book’s preoccupation with ‘reverse discourse’, for colonization was as much to do with language as with anything else. Fou-
dramatizes Foucault’s theory of reverse discourse. These four men wrote from a position of subjectivity, of first hand experience, acceding to the scientific nomination and yet resisting the objective naming from elsewhere, from outside, naming themselves. In this sense, their work is important in establishing a foundation for a discourse on identity politics which came to the fore in the last twentieth century and which has more recently been the subject of great scrutiny. The ‘authority’ of medicine gave these writers the opportunity, and permission, to write about what had hitherto been hidden or shrouded in normative discourse. It also gave them the opportunity to adopt the freshly polished category of ‘the homosexual’ and invigorate it with a liberationist politics.

These four writers were also, to greater or lesser degrees, homosexual pioneers, gay icons, seen as breaking new ground, making radical claims, and paving the way for our contemporary discourse on homosexual politics, their work rallying points for a nascent community and affirmative voices in the dark for isolated individuals in need of a life-line. They are our forefathers. There is, however, a certain nostalgia implicit in the way of seeing them which complicates their value and often forecloses proper critique. Late 60s–early 70s Gay Liberation, for example, unearthed the writings of Edward Carpenter and saw in them an historical precursor of coming out.

Foucault speaks of the homosexual using the same language as the one which constitutes the medical discourse by which he is disqualified, in a scenario analogous to the way in which non-whites had to master the tongue of the colonials in order to articulate dissent.

8 See, for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1990.

9 There were other literary men who took up the pen as doctors: the poet Marc Raffalovich, *Uranisme et unisexualité* (1896); Xavier Mayne [Edward Irenaeus Prime Stevenson], *The Intersexes: Simisexualism as a Problem in Modern Life* (1908). There were also men of science, such as Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, who wrote on literature.

Today, Carpenter and Symonds are largely forgotten, Gide outmoded, Proust rarely read, yet they nevertheless played an important role in the formation of a homosexual discourse. So whilst it is vitally important to critique them and not consider them beyond reproach, it is still as important to attempt to empathise with their position and to credit them for opening up debates which had been tightly shut, and making possible the current discourse from which a critique such as this book can be made. To use Carpenter again, his writings on male–male love appeared in the aftermath of the Wilde trials; when the realistic and popular thing to do was keep your mouth shut, he continued to publish essays on ‘homogenic love’. We might disagree now with what he wrote, but we cannot deny his bravery.

It is debatable whether these writers could have done otherwise but adopt the heterological medical model, given the theoretical tools available to them. Foucault, whilst being highly critical of liberationist discourse, nonetheless recognized the necessity of this discursive reversal of the medical model in the constitution of alternative sexual lifestyles. By taking the medical model literally, and thereby turning it around, these writers were, in effect, saying, “All right, we are what you say we are – by nature, disease, or perversion, as you like. Well, if that’s what we are, let’s be it, and if you want to know what we are, we can tell you ourselves better than you can.”11 As Foucault states, “It is the strategic turnabout of one and the ‘same’ will to truth.”12 These documents contributed to the construction of that ‘truth’. Through being homosexuals themselves, these writers were not merely commenting on the topic of homosexuality, they were preparing the ground for a stylistics of existence, creating an ethics of homosexuality, and defining the methodology of gay identity politics. For this reason, the texts are discussed in reverse chronology, as a way of moving towards the beginnings of this homosexual discourse, of stripping it down, working back

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11 Stonewall Experiment, Cassell, 1995, goes as far as to call him ‘Ted’, the name by which he was known to friends (30).

12 Michel Foucault, quoted in David Halperin, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Oxford University Press, 1995, 58.

13 Ibid., 59.
through its history to reveal its origins, to reveal that it could not have been other than it was. It is, in the Foucauldian sense, an archeology, asking “How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another? […] what is this specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else?” How did the ‘truth’ of homosexuality acquire meaning, and what are its limits, its exclusions? How do these four texts, these four statements, connect, and how do they differ in the construction of that ‘truth’? And, ultimately, is that ‘truth’ still true one hundred years on?

**Discursive Reversal**

The book takes as axiomatic Foucault’s claim that a reverse discourse emerged in response to the medical ‘invention’ of the homosexual in the late nineteenth century. This reverse discourse was a fluke response exceeding the discursive requirements of the medical discourse which sought merely to categorise and proscribe sexual behaviours and types as a way of establishing a surveillance of the body and thus broadening the field of social control. However, as Foucault writes:

> It also make possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledge, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.

This reverse discourse would seem to be

a mixture both of something more and of something less than a simple negation. On the one hand, a repetition amounting to acceptance of homosexuality as a personal identity; and,

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14 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, Penguin, 1979, 101. Subsequent references will appear in the body of the text, parenthesized and indicated by the abbreviation HS.
on the other hand, an appropriation consisting in turning to advantage this imposed identity.\textsuperscript{15}

It is a subjectivation that exceeds the normalizing aims by which it is mobilized. At the same time as constituting a form of resistance to power, this reverse discourse was also a strategy of power itself, for, as Foucault tells us, “there is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it another discourse that runs counter to it”, but, rather, “discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy” (\textit{HS}, 101–2). The very tools of domination are used as the tools of resistance; the homosexual subject embraces his new subjectivity and proceeds to vocalize his experiences in the new language available. As Judith Butler writes, “sometimes the very term that would annihilate us becomes the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political signification”.\textsuperscript{16}

Foucault’s theory of discourse is a positive power-model, allowing for conflictual movements. The category of ‘homosexual’ was not simply imposed from above on passive subjects; the efficacy was undermined by the homosexuals’ response as much as it was aided by their willingness to be defined in medical terms. It was a contradictory discourse, a strategic move “designed to justify claims for homosexual rights”.\textsuperscript{17} It took the form of political resistance. And these four texts bear witness to the political struggle for the right to define oneself, as much as they represent the ways in which the medical model was employed within the emergent identity politics of this discourse.

The most strategic approach to legislative reform became a capitulation to the medical model, because if homosexuals could be seen as having been ‘born that way’ and therefore constituting a recognizable minority (a ‘third sex’), then they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Diane Macdonell, \textit{Theories of Discourse: An Introduction}, Basil Blackwell, 1986, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Alan Sinfield, \textit{The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment}, Cassell, 1994, 14.
\end{itemize}
deserved tolerance and legal equality. As such, this reverse discourse, working within the same field of force relations as the discourse which identified homosexuality as a distinct category, wielded enormous power; in this case, the power to legitimate the scientific claim for the great ‘homo/hetero divide.’ By accepting the new category ‘homosexual’ – for however radical a purpose – homosexuals consigned themselves to a ‘third sex,’ recognizable by the diacritical marker of effeminacy.

This acceptance of a distinct category also hypostasized and reified ‘heterosexuality’, securing a binaric divide of not only gender but also sexual orientation. Further – and of greater concern for this book – if, as Foucault seems to suggest, this response to a medical categorization was the foundation of an emerging ‘gay identity’ to which we are heirs – what consequences did the denial of anal sex by these writers have on that emergent identity? How far can we see their apparent acceptance of the stereotype of the kind of homosexual who enjoyed anal sex as actually thwarting that identity? Could it be that the concept of gay identity inherited from this reverse discourse has imported more or less wholesale the medical model of active = male/passive = female to such an extent that “most gays feel the passive role is in some way demeaning”? Did these responses to the medical discourse unwittingly saddle future generations of homosexuals with a conceptual model of desire

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18 A similar reasoning fuels the gay gene or brain argument. Simon Le Vay, the chief proponent of this, himself a gay neurologist, argues for recognition within the American Constitution for legal equality, based on the fact that, genetically, homosexuality constitutes a similar status to race or gender. See Le Vay, *The Sexual Brain*, MIT Press, 1994.

19 David Halperin writes that this division of the human race into two distinct groups of people, “who possess two distinct kinds of subjectivity, who are inwardly oriented in a specific direction, and who therefore belong to separate and determinate human species”, does not “represent merely new ways of classifying persons – that is, innovations in moral and judicial language – but new types of desire, new kinds of desiring human beings” (*One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, Routledge, 1990, 43). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that the homo/heterosexual definition is responsible for the crisis that has fractured “many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth century Western culture.” Her *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 1993) argues “that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (1).

20 Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live (Interviews 1966–84)*, Semiotext(e), 1989, 277.
that is no more than an alarmingly inaccurate mimesis of the heterosexual coupling, a conceptual model that rapidly became a concrete and resilient stereotype?

The horror surrounding what Foucault calls “that utterly confused category” (HS, 101): sodomy, would seem to stem from its non-procreative use, and as such, there was no distinction necessary within ancient canonical law between the various types of sodomy: male–male, male–female, or human–animal. However, increasing use of sodomy as a definitional term for male–male desire throughout history, culminating in the translation of ‘the sodomite’ into ‘the homosexual’, bears witness to the conflation of the act with a specific sexual orientation. Furthermore, as the 1986 Bowers vs. Hardwick case in the States has shown, there is now a clear distinction drawn within the law between heterosexual and homosexual sodomy, the latter punishable by law, the former invisible and/or acceptable.

Lee Edelman suggests that men “must repudiate the pleasures of the anus because their fulfillment allegedly presupposes, and inflicts, the loss or ‘wound’ that serves as the very definition of femaleness”. The prohibition against anal sex between men goes to work even before the actual fulfillment of anal pleasure, on the very thought itself. In his history of British criminal law, Sir Leon Radzinowicz refers to the unnameable nature of sodomy, the impossibility of giving it a name, “lest its very definition inflict a lasting wound on the morals of the people.” Could this be what Symonds means when he calls homosexuality ‘the love of the impossible’? Not only the impossibility of love between men but also the impossibility of expressing that love physically without cultural erasure, cultural castration. Given recent work on queer performativity by Butler and Sedgwick, one can read

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23 Quoted in Edelman, Homographesis, 5.

this unnameability of anal sex between men as a linguistic omission of the act itself. To name it is not only to inflict a so-called moral wound but also to give it a reality that might encourage further replication of the act itself; saying it becomes as good (or bad) as doing it. Indeed, saying it is doing it. Sodomy, in this sense, is a performative, is ‘the love that dare not speak its name’.

In real, physical terms, of course, to be penetrated by another man does not result in castration. The phallic loss is a cultural prohibition on a behaviour deemed dangerous to the sexual status quo; the maintenance of the Law of the Phallus is only possible through the avoidance of this psychic loss. A ‘real’ man does not get buggered; therefore, to get buggered must cost one one’s masculinity; one abdicates one’s phallic privilege. In this exchange, the anus becomes the wound which defines one as female. The punishment, therefore, in a gynaecophobic culture, is cultural castration. The so-called passive partner must pay for his pleasure by being seen – and seeing himself – as somehow less than a man. Given that, in cultural terms, all homosexuals are construed as ‘passive’ (i.e., not truly active like real – straight – men), and given also that ours is a culture “always predisposed to observe and condemn the proffered ‘ass’ in ‘passive’”, this has resulted in a widespread and ongoing programme whose sole aim is the insistence on the essential and ineradicable femininity of all homosexuals; a femininity which finds its fulfillment in an almost pathological anal passivity.

So, whilst the reverse discourse exemplified in the writings examined here allowed for the development of a specifically gay identity and for cultural representation within the register of minority status, it was only able to do so within a scientifically validated ‘feminine paradigm’ which claimed the homosexual as a race apart, a third sex; a ‘woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body’.

This project is concerned not simply with the more or less exclusive cultural association of anal sex with male homosexuality, but, more importantly, its association with a particular type

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Art of the Novel’, in ibid.
of homosexuality: namely, effeminacy. As such, it constitutes a vindication for the right of – in porn-speak – the Butch Bottom. Drawing from the theoretical work of Guy Hocquenghem, Mario Miele, and, more recently, Leo Bersani, I will conclude with a rehearsal of an anal politics, a reclamation of the anus as a pleasure zone, a sexual organ in its own right, without reference to the normative tropes of gender or gender inversion.

**The Dominant Fiction**

Rancière’s term ‘dominant fiction’, as well as suggesting the artifice of ideology, usefully confuses the literary and the scientific, the two categories with which this study is concerned. The fact that it was novelists and poets who took up the gauntlet thrown down by the medical categorization of the homosexual suggests that reverse discourse is an act not only of immense bravery but also of great imagination. Resistance is not just a negation, but an act of creation. So it seems apposite that it should be poets and novelists who responded. Indeed, the man who invented the word ‘homosexual’ wasn’t a doctor, as is usually assumed, but a novelist, Karl Maria Kertbeny (1824–1882). Under the pseudonym Benkert, he published two pamphlets in which he called for full legal rights for homosexuals. In this struggle, he shared a goal with Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895), a jurist whose own series of liberationist pseudo-scientific pamphlets appeared between 1862–1874, in which he outlined his theory of *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*, or ‘a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body’. The two men corresponded for a while but differed greatly on their understanding of male–male love.

According to Ulrichs, the human embryo contained two important ‘germs’: one which would develop into the psyche or soul, and another which would become the body. In most people there was a synchronicity between the two germs, i.e., both

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27 For a detailed account of Ulrichs’ life and work, see Kennedy, *Ulrichs*. 
were of the same sex (resulting in heterosexual desire). Therefore, Ulrichs argued, in the case of homosexuals, “nature developed the male germ […] physically but the female spiritually”, resulting in Urnings, or physically ‘normal’ men who, possessing a female spirit, desire other men. The object of desire for such a being, however, would not be other Urnings, but virile, heterosexual men.

In the light of correspondence from other Urnings, Ulrichs’ subsequent pamphlets expanded his theories to incorporate other types of Urnings, but this only succeeds in showing up the futility of such taxonomic thinking. For once one has set up ‘the homosexual/Urning’ as a separate species with a clearly identifiable set of characteristics and a morphology all its own, the potential for same-sex desire in those not conforming to such a prescriptive type is immediately foreclosed. Should one then attempt to accommodate diversity within one’s theory, to allocate subspecies – as Ulrichs did with his Weblings and Mannlings and Uranodioninges – surely one disqualifies one’s entire premise that there is such a species; one would have to conclude that sexuality is manifold and malleable. The theory cannot withstand the weight of experiential data.

Like Symonds and Gide after him, Ulrichs sought to enhance the validity of his theories through association with a man of medicine. To this end he sent copies of his pamphlets to Richard von Krafft-Ebing, believing to have found in him an ally. Krafft-Ebing wrote to Ulrichs claiming that, “it was the knowledge of your writings alone that induced me to the study of this highly important field”. But on publication of Krafft-Ebing’s famous Psychopathia Sexualis in 1886, in which he describes homosexuals as suffering from a serious sexual pathology, Ulrichs regretted courting such support. After that, he referred to Krafft-Ebing as his “scientific opponent”.

Whereas Ulrichs’ theory was predicated on a feminization of the male soul, Benkert asserted his masculinity and his aversion

29 Kennedy, Ulrichs, 71.
to effeminate men. This possibly contributed to his coining the term, ‘homosexual’, a desire for the same sex, which he formulated alongside the concept of ‘heterosexuality’, a desire for the opposite sex. However, with an arbitrariness bordering on arrogance, late nineteenth century psychiatry adopted Benkert’s word and attached it to Ulrichs’ theory, and homosexuality was henceforth synonymous with gender inversion.

To realize that such a fundamental tenet of scientific thinking on male–male desire has such non-medical – even literary – origins (Ulrichs wrote poems and in 1885 published *Matrosengeschichten* [Sailor Stories], a collection of homo-erotic short stories; Benkert was a novelist); to acknowledge that Ulrichs’ work was adopted widely and unproblematically by scientific writers such as Krafft-Ebing, Forel, Rohlet, Laurent and Westphal, is to call into question the very objectivity and exclusivity upon which the discipline of science is predicated. It suggests a lack of boundaries between the two disciplines, despite the fact that by the latter half of the nineteenth century science had begun to define itself as a pure and exclusive epistemological field into which not everyone could gain access; a field based on hard empiricism and objective research – a world of facts, in contrast to the flighty, airy, fantasy world of literature.

This more or less wholesale employment of Benkert’s terms homosexual and heterosexual – as opposed to Ulrichs’ urning and dioning, for example – is the clearest illustration of an isthmus connecting the literary and the medical. And it was this very porosity of the boundaries between science and literature that enabled Proust, Gide, Symonds and Carpenter to write pseudo-scientific texts. Moreover, this conflation of the two theories occurred at a time when a discursive visibility was afforded to same-sex desire through such public scandals as Boulton and Park and the Oscar Wilde trials, which foregrounded the cross-gender trope.30

Yet, why were Benkert’s terms adopted over Ulrichs’? One reason is that the former weren’t embedded in a complex sci-

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entific theory and could therefore be taken up with reasonable ease; another is that homosexual/heterosexual sound more clinical, more scientific, than Ulrichs’ overly poetic terms, and therefore served more readily the medical discourse’s interest in objectifying or de-politicizing, the work of these emancipationists.

Benkert believed that regardless of whether homosexuality was inborn or not, what was needed was equality before the law. His writings were a tactical move, written from a radical position of defiance rather than Ulrichs’ more apologetic position of a victim pleading leniency. Silverstolpe calls this the ‘interest-model’, “where the historical invention of the homosexual category consciously serves the purpose to promote the legal and social interests of homosexually interested people”,31 and contrasts it with the ‘power-model’ of later thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks who, in his view, see homosexuals as passive victims of a domineering medical discourse. Reverse discourse was an act of resistance, however, involving autonomy, agency, politicalisation and creativity – it is not simply a ‘passive victim theory’.32

Silverstolpe argues that the medical intervention was a response to the liberationist categorization of the homosexual by the likes of Ulrichs and Benkert, “as well as an effort to control and redefine this new category when it was already there” (my emphasis). Therefore, the political move to reform the German penal code inspired the focus of medical attention, resulting in the unlikely marriage – what Silverstolpe calls an “unholy alliance” – of homosexual politics with normative science. Without this alliance, we might today conceptualize same-sex desire very differently.

However, rather than see it as an either/or, chicken-or-egg scenario, it may be more profitable to conceive the two discourses as emerging simultaneously, both feeding off and into each

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31 Silverstolpe, ‘Benkert Was Not a Doctor’.
32 This is a common criticism leveled at Foucault, who is seen by his critics as promoting a unidirectional, top–down concept of power; see Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, 1994, chapter 3 ‘From Discipline to Government’. Yet, Foucault explicitly states that power is multidirectional, with no primary or privileged site, and that “where there is power, there is resistance” (*HS*, 95).
other in a symbiotic relationship that culminated in the dominance of the scientific discourse due to the imbalance of power and the disenfranchised, minority status of the homosexual subject. Above all, it was a question of politics. This unholy alliance was only possible because, initially, sexology was viewed, as Weeks\textsuperscript{33} has pointed out, as a radical science, capable of altering the ways in which we thought about sex and sexuality. Why else would homosexuals like Ulrichs, Symonds, and Gide court allegiances with doctors?

But, emerging as it did within the normative sciences, sexology soon capitulated to societal and medical norms, casting the homosexual into the role of a diseased and degenerate being. Arguably, this could not have been otherwise, given that the majority of doctors were heterosexual and therefore approached the topic from their normative (and privileged) condition and construed in the homosexual act a mimesis of male–female intercourse. Much more surprising is the fact that these norms remained unchallenged in the work of these homosexual writers.

As Lauritsen and Thorstad point out, Ulrichs’ ideas “left their mark upon several decades of ideology – especially in medical literature – and upon popular thinking”.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, more than several decades later, in 1994, an article in The Independent quoted a neurologist who claims that gay men constitute, in neurological terms at least, a “third sex”\textsuperscript{35}. Like some phantom of the fin de siècle, biologism seems to be rearing its ugly head again, in the shape of a gay neurologist named Simon Le Vay, who states his allegiance with Ulrichs, believing the latter’s ideas hold a “kernal of truth”\textsuperscript{36}.


\textsuperscript{34} Lauritsen & Thorstad, The Early Homosexual Rights Movement, 47.


\textsuperscript{36} Simon Le Vay, The Sexual Brain, MIT Press 1994, 109. Subsequent page references will appear in brackets in the main text, indicated by the abbreviation SB. Le Vay’s research into the hypothalamus has led him to propose a neurological factor in sexual orientation, based on his findings that a particular section of the hypothalamus was larger in heterosexual men than in gay men, in whom it was the same size as in heterosexual woman (or at least Le Vay assumes his female brain sample came from straight women, though he has no way of knowing. His theoretical approach is highly suspect, based
Birke and Whisman have remarked on the dangers lurking within the biological model, as well as the dangers concomitant with its rejection. To reject the biological model is to side with the homophobes, who have changed tack and are now promoting homosexuality as a choice which should be avoided rather than a natural drive which cannot be altered.\textsuperscript{37} And yet, to accept the biological model is surely to condone an essentialism that posits sexuality as immutable and innate, which doesn’t move the debate any further on than it was a century ago.

In his use of quotations from Shakespeare for his chapter headings, Le Vay exemplifies the dialectical relationship between literature and science. Taking his cue from Ulrichs, Le Vay seems to think he has a poet’s soul trapped in a neurologist’s body: “Like waterlilies, we swing to and fro with the currents of life, yet our roots moor us each to our own spot on the river’s floor” (\textit{SB}, 138). What to make of this pseudo-poetic reflection in a work of science, a book whose aim is to focus “on the brain mechanisms that are responsible for sexual behaviour and feelings” (\textit{SB}, xi)?

Le Vay’s work perilously ignores the historical complexity and contingency involved in human sexuality, and its reductiveness should warn us against the adoption of biological explanations, which invariably work with a priori notions of gender and sexuality which frame and focus the research. Gender and sexu-

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ality become associated with the ‘right’ genes in what amounts to a frighteningly eugenicist argument. In an approach reminiscent of early sexologists, homosexuality is literally written on the body, encoded indisputably in the hieroglyphics of our DNA. Once again, the homosexual body is marked by difference.

**The Masculinist Model**

“The third sex has been a powerful metaphor, virtually monopolizing the image of homosexuals in social life for the last one hundred years.”

It has also, according to Gert Hekma, been a metaphor highly charged with shame, and as such has “prevented the development of gay identities” because those men unwilling to identify as a third sex/gender were unable to formulate a sense of self.

Yet there was an alternative to the effeminacy model – what we might call the masculinist model, centred around a small movement in Germany at the turn of the century, which refuted medical norms and claimed that homosexuality was an issue of culture and art rather than biology. Violently opposed to Hirschfeld and his third sex, the Community of Self-Owners (Gemeinschaft der Eigenen) promoted male bonding as the bedrock of culture, and sexual love between men as the pinnacle of masculinity.

But this model was not adopted and given wider application, as the third sex model was. Why?

A complex combination of factors contributed to the effeminacy model’s sovereign rule:

1. **Economic.** Doctors and psychiatrists were keen to establish themselves as professionals and the cornering of the market offered by the effeminacy model provided them with a whole

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new stable of patients over whom they could wield their increasingly esoteric knowledge.\textsuperscript{40}

2. \textit{Hegemonic}. The division of the human race into two main groups based on sexual tastes reinforced gender stereotypes at a time when movements like feminism and aestheticism were blurring the boundaries between what had hitherto been construed as nature-given roles and behaviours.\textsuperscript{41} The effeminacy model maintained the gender \textit{status quo} and reinforced masculine and feminine heterosexuality by suggesting that gender role behaviour was innate.

3. \textit{Tactical}. Homosexuals saw in the medical model a way of defining themselves which did not involve seeing their desire as either sinful or sick; the liberationist potential of arguing that one was ‘born that way’, however, was rapidly foreclosed by the homophobic theoretical framework available.

4. \textit{Epistemological}. By the mid-nineteenth century the human mind was so enamoured with and shaped by the concept of binary thought that its application in the sexual field was inevitable. The homo/hetero binarism needed recognizably different or opposed categories. Therefore, homosexuals were positioned in stark contrast to traditional heterosexual masculinity in order to reinforce the binary opposition.

5. \textit{Political}. The Self-Owners’ tendency to reject the effeminacy model went hand in hand with certain strands of nationalism, misogyny, anti-feminism and right wing politics that rendered their particular brand of homosexual liberation rather unpalatable. Their emphasis on manly strength and comradeship was virtually indistinguishable from the kind of heroism, masculinism and racism that led to Nazism.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{41} See Elaine Showalter, \textit{Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle}, Virago, 1990.

\textsuperscript{42} The youth movement Wandervogel had close links with the Community of Self-Owners and one of its first members, Hans Bluher, was to become “one of the most important right-wing ideologues of the Mannerbund, propagating a purification of German society” (Oosterhuis & Kennedy, \textit{Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Ger-}
6. *Orthodoxical.* The Self-Owners opposed medicine and therefore were speaking, ostensibly, without any authority. There was, in the early years of the 20th century, a great need to see in the medical profession a new order of Faith which, replacing the Church, became the moulder of opinions. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the field of sexuality.\(^{43}\)

7. *Reformist.* The third sex theory, positing homosexuality as inborn and immutable, best served the emancipationist struggle in Germany against Paragraph 175,\(^{44}\) and therefore gained the upper hand over the Self-Owners’ less essentialist theory. This ensured the durability of the inversion trope despite its failure in opposing anti-homosexual legislation. Medical discourse was a Trojan horse for homosexual emancipators, who, once through the gates, were not allowed to emerge from the wooden effigy.

**Homotopia?**

In *The Order of Things* Foucault investigates Western epistemology’s insistence on taxonomy, on ordering things through “our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other”. He cites a passage from Borges in which ‘a certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ lists the categorization of animals along the lines of:

\[\text{(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) in-}\]

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\(^{43}\) One of the members of the Community of Self-Owners, Benedict Friedlander, drew a comparison between medieval priests and early 20th century doctors. Prefiguring Foucault’s argument that the religious confession was replaced by medical inquiry, Friedlander wrote in 1907: "Just as doctors live from healing sickness, those medieval priests lived from the forgiveness of sins. Thus, just as the doctor is dependent on the presence of the real or imagined sick person, so too the medieval priest was dependent on the presence of people who held themselves, with or without reason, to be ‘sinners’" (Oosterhuis & Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, 82–3).

\(^{44}\) Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code, which punished so-called ‘vices against nature’ with prison sentences, was introduced into the legislation of the German Empire in 1871. See Kennedy, *Ulrichs*, 148–9; Oosterhuis & Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, 1–23; Lauritsen & Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 6–16; Martin Dannecker, *Theories of Homosexuality*, GMP, 1978, 15–24.
cluded in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.\textsuperscript{45}

Foucault concludes that all taxonomy is arbitrary, a product of thought processes which strive to identify along lines of sameness and difference. This taxonomic process is driven by a desire for comfort, a desire to make sense of the chaos of the world. But it is ultimately \textit{Utopic}, having “no real locality”. A no-place place. But none the less real for all that.

Utopias, Foucault argues, “open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy” (\textit{ot}, xviii). The opposite scenario he terms Heterotopias, which are “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together’” (\textit{ot}, xviii). Whereas utopias “permit fables and discourse”, their evil twin, heteropias, serves to “dessicate speech” and “dissolve our myths”. But surely the opposite of heterotopia would be homotopia? The chaos of difference versus the harmony of sameness.

The construction of human sexuality into two neat, distinct categories – homosexual and heterosexual – is just such a myth, intended to afford consolation and impose order on the terrifying chaos of human desires. The categorization of the homosexual as a separate type or species with a diacritically marked body is necessary to alleviate the anxiety that would ensue from the possibility of homosexual desire occurring in those not conforming to such morphology. The maintenance of the two categories is contingent upon the representation and promotion of

\textsuperscript{45} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences}, Vintage Books, 1973, xv. Further citations will appear in the text, indicated by the abbreviation \textit{ot}.
difference between the two, bordering on subspecies. Such difference extends, as I hope to show, to the categorization within the homosexual paradigm, to the extent that the heterosexual model of male/female informs the reading of homosexual activity: one partner (invariably the penetrator) is male, while the other (penetrated) partner is female. Sexual difference, it seems, haunts even sexual sameness. Positionality is all.

The destruction of the syntax that allows the myth to perpetuate could well be instigated by a refusal to see such a distinction, by an insistence on the sameness (and equality) not only of the two bodies engaged in homosexual sex, but also the radical sameness of heterosexuals to homosexuals, a sameness that democratizes sexuality. Not so much a free for all as a place of true equality, where bodies and pleasures are not locked in violent hierarchies\(^{46}\) which privilege and proscribe. A place I call *Homotopia*. I use this neologism to name a nexus of definitional concerns at the core of same-sex desire. To inscribe homosexuality as desire without lack, as rather, a form of poiesis, “an active intervention, a provocation: an interruption”\(^{47}\) It is a site of impossibility, unthinkability, but none the less heterotopic. Indeed, it is both utopic and heterotopic in the Foucauldian sense: a chimerical place whose function is to disturb, disrupt, dissolve.

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