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# Queer Historiography

From Contemporary Queeries meeting 11/25

David Halperin, Introduction to "How to do the History of Homosexuality" (2002)

- Responding (10 years later) to Sedgwick and others' critique of *100 Years of Homosexuality*
- 100 years of homosexuality (1990): (1) purpose, by disconnecting Greek sexuality from the present, was to call attention to sexuality as culturally and historically specific and (2) to bridge the gap between classical scholarship and the newly emerging field of LGBT studies; to consolidate the field, too
- Here, Halperin defends himself against misreadings, primarily those that call him a bad Foucauldian
- Corrects misreadings of Foucault (8) — this is the argument of "Forgetting Foucault"
  - Acts and identities
  - No categories before the enlightenment
- "Historicizing the subject" — argues against "the history of sexuality as the history of classification or representations" (9)
- Sought to denaturalize heterosexuality (in *100 Years*) (10)
  - Sedgwick's critique of Halperin and Foucault: denarrativizing social constructionist history
    - Halperin respond to this with an even more genealogical approach
- Halperin still insists that homosexuality is a modern cultural production that didn't exist in the pre-modern world (13)
  - Then a politically unfortunate position
    - He is now less stringent about insisting that it is wrong for contemporary gays to identify with the Greeks and other non-heterosexual figures from the past — this is politically useful (16)
- Still a committed historicist (17)
- Contemporary and historical constructions of sexuality are not temporally distinct — they can exist simultaneously (18)
- "Modern" homosexuality can operate as a hegemonic norm (19)
  - Makes non-modern sexualities archaic and pathological — poco critique
- However, not all historical worlds exist at once and not all are the same — specificity is important (21)

Goldberg and Menon, "Queering History" (2005)

- They are critiquing Halperin by using Sedgwick and theorizing a way of studying the queer past without historicism
- They resist the production of queerness as an object of scrutiny

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debunked as a possibility (homogenizing view) (1613)

- Unhistoricism would refuse the "compulsory heterotemporality of historicism" (1616)

#### Valerie Traub, "The New Unhistoricism" (2013)

- Defends Halperin and criticizes the eschewing of historiographic methodology and the attacks on chronological time in queer studies
- Argues that the move towards queer historiography has become obsessed with teleology
  - Teleology = normalization — Foucault-inspired genealogy
- Antiteleological turn in queer historicism is part of a broader turn toward temporality (22) (e.g. Halberstam, Edelman, etc.)
- Applied broadly and in different contexts, but Traub focuses on examining 3 scholars in her field: 3 early modernist critiques of teleology
  - Freccero, Goldberg, and Menon make similar arguments and frequently cite each other
    - Against alterity and sameness
    - Particularly critical of work that reaffirms modern homosexuality's teleological approach by finding/assimilating other/earlier identities to it (24)
- Review of Sedgwick's critique. Against:
  - Narratives of supersession
  - The conceptual consolidation of the present
  - The historically specific emergence of the homosexual
- However, critically, **she does not endorse other historical models**
  - Halperin's response
- Freccero, Fradenburg and Dinshaw: rejection of identity and alterity/periodization
- Post-colonial critiques made a similar move (26)
  - Medieval scholarship too
- Traub's critique: deconstructive exposure is not history (30)
  - Useful for understanding queerness at particular moments but not across time
- No necessary relationship between time, period, and sexuality (31)
  - When they are associated, it is due to ideology (32)
- **Chronology/sequence and teleological progress are not the same thing!** (33)
  - This flattening is dangerous and ironic in queer studies, which resists definitive meaning
- Queer itself is not ahistorical
- Unhistoricism is hostile to empiricism, which has produced important work that the field would not exist without (34)

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