

Queering Histories and Temporalities

AS WE WRITE this editorial and complete the second double issue of 2016, the world is still processing the shock of Donald Trump's triumph in the US election and its immediate and anticipated effects, not only on global politics, climate, and finance but much more acutely, in the lives of already disenfranchised populations, including the LGBTQ community. That a man with endorsements from the KKK, with pending rape and sexual assault charges, known for hate speech against Muslims, immigrants, people of color, and women, someone who has threatened to overthrow the Marriage Equality act, and who has a running mate who supports "conversion therapy" for "curing" homosexuality and combatting AIDS, is hardly a sign of the "progress" of history. It is a horrifying testimony of the enduring anger and hatred of white heterosexist capitalist patriarchy against all others. The fact that it is estimated that Trump received 14% of the LGBTQ vote is only the latest of painful reminders of what we already know: there is no "unified" stance on matters of immigration, racism, sexism, or even basic human rights within "our" community. As gains have been made for LGBTQ populations, they have never been equally distributed. While the topic queers in history and queer history are hardly new to those of us concerned with LGBTQ studies and ongoing activist struggles, the importance of studying and learning from (queer) history has never been more urgent than it is now, as we witness with escalating fear, the rise of fascism,

nationalism, and racism across Europe as well as in the United States. As Trump's flip-flopping in relation to LGBTQ issues makes clear, "our" issues can be used both in the name of such agendas and as part of what those agendas wish to put a stop to. *lambda nordica* will remain committed to publishing research that contributes to enriching and complicating the picture of LGBTQ issues, past and present.

If the personal is political, it is clear that as we come to terms with, or research, what it means to live in bodies and movements that are outside what is considered "normal," many of us have at some point searched our history and found comfort in realizing that we are not alone, nor are we the first. Scholars and activists frequently turned to archives, hidden or known, studied its silences for traces of what we can recognize, and brought new questions to bear on authors and to both literary and historical figures. Frequently, we also take pride in and make political use of announcing that they too, were like "us." There are at this point many and some quite massive books devoted to "Gay" or "Trans*" history. Most of us are familiar with the stories of how the "homosexual" subject was invented and with how it has gone through stages of deviance, criminalization, and pathologization, not to mention stages of closetedness and openness. To make matters more complex and more scholarly, of course there is also a whole science, and certainly a lot of debate around how to read and interpret the (queer) past. Is it even possible to use the terms of our time to interpret the past? Have things gotten better?

This special issue on queering histories and temporalities is timely in several respects. The open call for papers generated more abstracts – more than twenty – than any other issue of this journal ever has. The response indicates that questions of time and history are important to queer scholars at this particular moment in history. Is it the feeling that history repeats itself in a horrifying manner as anti-immigrant sentiments and racism spread across Europe and even in the United States? The fear of the fact that the president-elect in a powerful country made up mostly of immigrants (not to forget the indigenous peoples who were there long before the first Europeans entered the land) wins supporters because he promises to build a wall to keep immigrants out? Or is it the

perhaps most obvious answer: that historiographers and scholars of temporality along with long-term activists *know* that the idea of progress is deeply flawed: that basic rights need continued defending and that we need to learn from the past? This is a moment when history is more important than ever; we need to remember and understand past mistakes in order not to make them again. Queer scholars are particularly good at standing up for the marginalized and oppressed, and this knowledge is needed at a time when human rights are threatened.

Queer scholars are also skilled at challenging the normative, including normative understandings of history. Several contributors to this issue discuss and question so-called progress narratives – the idea that history evolves in a linear way, from past, through present, to future. In queer contexts, progress narratives have usually been connected to the idea of development from repression, persecution, and medicalization of homosexuality to liberation, visibility, and civil rights. Along with feminist and postcolonial scholars more broadly, these contributors argue that this might not be the most productive way of viewing history, and they suggest other ways of conceptualizing and queering histories and temporalities. And indeed, what we experience in the present – Fort Europe, Trumpism, Orlando – suggest that there is nothing progressive, or even linear, about history at all; rather, it seems to repeat itself, thus moving in circles, or even going backwards. Another theme that generated many submissions to this special issue is queering the archive and the very idea of queer archives; these articles deal both with the establishment of queer archives and their functions and definitions and with different ways of analyzing material from queer archives. Even if we understand this interest in queer(ing) archives in a more hopeful light – that a certain historical linearity, or progression, has made it possible for the mainstream society to accept and even be interested in queer history – it has not come without a fight; it is the result of tireless efforts by queer activists and scholars over many years. And as public debate in Sweden and other Nordic countries recently have made clear: the very notion of what is at times called “norm-critical” approaches to museum collections and national historical archives remains controversial.

The articles in this issue remind us of the continued importance of approaching histories and temporalities in a critical way. For instance, Mathias Danbolt, this issue's invited contributor to *We're Here*, points out that the celebration of the anniversary of women's rights and suffrage in the Nordic countries risks obscuring the fact that these countries are making it more difficult for large groups of refugees, who have fled their homes, to gain citizenship and thus the right to vote. Danbolt's and other contributions to this issue bring out with clarity that viewing history from a queer perspective means being critical of stories of success, since they usually hide the marginalization of people who are excluded from the success. They also highlight the importance of remembering and documenting the past, in their various attempts to queering history. The contributors to this issue come from the Nordic countries as well as other parts of the world, and they represent a diversity of perspectives on histories and temporalities.

Maira Pérez takes issue with progress narratives in LGBT or queer histories. Progress as the driving force of history has been questioned before, especially in LGBT and queer history, but Pérez shows how the idea of progress persists in 21st century narratives and even in LGBTQ projects that are explicitly critical to the idea of progress as history's driving force. She is interested in how progress narratives are built – their plots, themes, and strategies – but she also discusses their political consequences and suggests that we rethink and question the division past/present/future.

Elsi Hyttinen's article challenges the heteronormative understanding of Finnish literary history. By tracing queer moments in two literary works from the 1910s, Hyttinen shows how the existence of heteronormative order is dependent on its queer others. Queer moments play a curious part in these narratives; they are acknowledged but left unresolved and thus become loose threads in the narratives. Hyttinen argues that this is a recurring trope in Finnish literature of the period; to make a spectacle of silence and thus setting limits to the stories that can be told – limits that have to do with sexuality and normalcy.

As already mentioned, several contributions in this special issue deal

with queer archives. Michela Baldo and Olivia Fiorilli are interested in the concept of queer archive in relation to the idea of queer temporalities, with a particular focus on a book on Italian drag king experiences that they co-edited with Rachele Borghi. The book is based on material (photos, drawings, texts) sent to the editors after a public call inviting people, who were or had been part of drag king practices in Italy to take part in the construction of a drag king archive. Baldo and Fiorilli trace a variety of queer temporalities, both in their own making of the book and in the participants' different narratives of drag king practices. In addition, the book itself generated new connections between participants and new opportunities for drag king practices and thus opened up queer futures.

Riikka Taavetti discusses memories of queer youth in Finnish life writing, more precisely a collection of life stories called "Rainbow Youth Present and Past." Taavetti's analysis of these personal narratives shows that there are several similarities across generations of queer youth – from the 1950s to the early 21st century. For instance, medicalizing discourses of homosexuality are present in the narratives of queer people of different ages, which challenge progress narratives of increasingly more liberal attitudes to sexuality. However, there are also differences between generations of queer youth, especially concerning naming the queer self, where labels – and an unwillingness to use identity-based labels – are more varied among younger generations.

Queer scholars both study and help build the archives of our own past lives and movements. In this issue, Tone Hellesund's essay depicts the process of establishing a queer historical archive in Norway, *Skeivt arkiv*, which opened in 2015. Hellesund was one of the originators of the archive and worked with it before its opening, securing funding, and infrastructure for the project, as well as collecting material. This essay thus becomes a kind of archive in itself as it tells the story of the archive's establishment, thus saving it for future generations and making future queer histories possible.

Ending what we hope is only the first of many more issues concerning not only queer history, but also our historiography and sense of temporality is Mathias Danbolt's contribution to this issue's *We're Here*. Danbolt

explores other ways of dealing with history that challenge progress narratives and the way of thinking of (feminist) history as ocean waves following upon each other. Using examples from contemporary art and Ednie Kaeh Garrison's figuration of radio waves, Danbolt suggests that we "tune into" history as a series of overlapping and coexisting frequencies, which are broadcasted simultaneously. This distortion of progress narratives allows us to conceptualize history in new ways and mobilizes a kind of political "deep listening" that makes it possible to hear different voices and understandings of queer and feminist matters.

With this double issue, we also hope to fix a time-related issue concerning the publication of *lambda nordica* – we finally seem to have caught up with the slight delay causing the last issue of the year to appear the following year. Journal editing is, as we often note on these pages, rarely able to keep up with the expected speed of academic assembly line knowledge production. Rather, it is a slow and unpredictable process, mainly because there are so many different people involved in a single issue – authors, peer-reviewers, book reviewers – who all have busy careers with other deadlines and too little time to deal with everything. We are extremely grateful to all our contributors who do their best to contribute to the LGBTQ research field despite the fact that many of them do not have permanent academic positions and little time to write and review. Together we are making *lambda nordica* a robust, accessible and scholarly journal and this shows: the number of contributions is on the rise as is the interest in curating special issues. In 2017 we will continue to present timely and important scholarship, among other things we will offer a double special issue on queer postcolonial Europe. We urge all our readers to keep up the fight for a better world than the one we are currently living in, and to care for one another in these horrifying times. With this latest issue of *lambda nordica*, we wish you some engaging holiday readings and to borrow an expression from Mathias Danbolt's essay: tune in!

JENNY BJÖRKLUND and
ULRIKA DAHL, CO-EDITORS