Twenty years after the emergence of “queer” as a political concept, the contributions to this anthology discuss the radical potential of queer theory and activism within different spatial, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Both the term “queer” as well as initial concepts of queer critique are not only closely connected to the English language but also to the Anglo-American socio-political context. Nevertheless, queer has traveled a lot since its emergence in the 1990s. Therefore, this collection explores how and for what purposes the term “queer” is and has been appropriated within different settings and locations, such as academia, activism, and popular culture. The volume opens up a space for trans-regional, intersectional, trans-disciplinary, and genre-transgressing exchanges about queer theory, queer critique, and queer activism.
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Introduction

More than twenty years ago, Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer theory,” introducing it to academia as “another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (de Lauretis 1991: iv). Even before it appeared in academic contexts in the US, the once derogatory term “queer” was appropriated by activists in the wake of the AIDS crisis and its overtly homophobic political climate. Ever since, the political use of the confrontational term “queer” has been contested from different angles: it has been described as “theoretical tofu” (Goldman 1996: 172), as a “conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (de Lauretis 1994: 297), as elitist, as Western, as white, as part of consumer culture, as both neglecting and erasing power relations within sexual minority groups, and as an umbrella term that—despite its criticism of fixed identity categories—has itself become such a category.

Notwithstanding these contestations, both the term “queer” and the theory that stands behind it have traveled the world, entered universities, conferences, discourses in academia as well as in activist and pop cultural settings, and have continuously gained popularity over the last twenty years. On the surface, these developments may seem to mirror queer theory’s complicity with hegemonic power relations. It can be argued that the successful distribution of queer theory in Europe and beyond is a manifestation of US hegemony. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency to canonize certain US-based publications within the emerging field of queer studies. Yet, the corpus of work subsumed under the term “queer theory” exceeds the limitations of a canon or an academic field. Queer theory has always been manifold and multi-dimensional, a self-contradictory work-in-progress.
meant to disrupt, irritate, and counteract both institutional and academic power relations. Moreover, even though queer theory has gained recognition within some areas of US academia, more often than not, its position still remains marginal. In addition, it is important to note that US-based as well as non-US-based scholars continue to critique, adapt, and appropriate queer theory. Such new critical approaches continue to count on the potential of queer theory to deconstruct and intervene in hegemonic discourses beyond a focus on gender and sexualities.

This anthology is a collection of interdisciplinary articles, essays, and artwork presented at the 2011 conference *Import – Export – Transport: Queer Theory, Queer Critique and Activism in Motion.* While distancing itself from an overly enthusiastic appraisal of queer theory as counter-hegemonic *per se*, the conference centered on the question whether “queer” as a theoretical concept and as a political practice (still) has the potential to challenge normative structures and discourses. With the geo-temporal framework of its origin in mind, it furthermore aimed at exploring the dynamics involved in the traveling process of “queer”: one of the conference’s main questions was whether and/or how meaning changes when “queer” is transported to different contexts that do not share the same history or language. Moreover, what repercussions does traveling have on queer research practices and on the political impact of queer activism? By opening up a conference-space for dialogue between different methodological approaches, forms of activism, research fields and interests that pay attention to specific local settings, the conference also intended to strengthen “import-export relations” within and outside a “Western” European context. Accordingly, the idea was to challenge what we perceive as a one-way street, with the import of queer theory and activism taking place almost exclusively in one direction, namely from English-speaking contexts to “others.” Thus, this volume also seeks to contribute to the practice of “de-centring queer studies”—to borrow Robert Kulpa’s and Joanna Mizielińska’s demand as stated in their anthology *De-Centring*
The articles and essays we have selected for this volume mostly continue to focus on questions of cultural translations and the traveling of theories and concepts. They highlight queer activism as a cultural and social activity within the dynamics of global/transnational academic knowledge production and (trans-)local community engagement. While the authors take a variety of routes to meet their target of discussing issues highly relevant to the flow of queer theory and queer activism, they all unmistakably gather at the crossroads of queer critique. And even though a large number of articles are rooted within the humanities, a remarkable number of contributions are generated from the perspective of legal studies, social sciences, and/or transgress the boundaries of single scholarly disciplines.

We have selected and organized the individual articles based on the conceptual framework of the conference. Accordingly, the anthology opens with a re-evaluation of the potential of the term “queer” in a political setting. In “Relax, It’s Not Only a Ghost—On the Im/possibility of Queer Collectivity: An Unfinished Conversation,” Bini Adamczak and Mike Laufenberg engage in a dialogue to answer the question of how to redefine “queer” in order to make the term useful for contemporary queer activism and politics. They agree that identity politics and politics of individuality and inclusion have proven to tie in too nicely with the logics of neoliberal capitalism. What seems to be a more promising project instead is to rethink collectivity and belonging. However, even then the referring question, “How might we create a collectivity that we wish to belong to?,” is still prevalent. And even though Adamczak and Laufenberg do not give a definitive answer, their heated discussion challenges us to rethink “queer” in political activism as well as in theory. Moreover, their text can be seen as a strong, provocative statement against the hierarchy implicit in the distinction between academic theory and queer life.
In “Montrer patte blanche and Experiencing the Margin(alization),” philosopher Sanja Milutinović Bojanić takes a very different route on her search for queer theory’s potential to shake up normativity. In her contribution, she closely analyzes the metaphor “montrer patte blanche,” tracing it back to its origins in the seventeenth-century parable “The Wolf, the Goat, and the Kid” by French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine. “Montrer patte blanche” generally stands for proving someone’s credentials, here, it specifically means one’s gender identification and the gender classification in official documents. In reference to Gilles Deleuze, Bojanić offers a radical queer reading of the fable’s underlying norms and the impossibility of proving someone’s identity. She metaphorically “dons the wolfskin” to reflect on becoming marginal and thinks about a new type of institution: a space that, in her words, “may allow any subject to be thematized and identified without succumbing to any forced normalization and normative form of community.”

Petra Sußner continues the quest for deconstructing normativity and identity politics in “Queer Legal Theory: Conflicts, Contradictions, and Coexistence.” Her article addresses the tensions between lesbian and gay equality politics and queer approaches towards the law. In an attempt to bridge what she perceives as a deep gap, Sußner draws on the concept of intersectionality in order to link legal reasoning and queer insights to the problematics of (legal) identity categories.

In “Queering Exclusion: Revisiting the First Case of Collective LGBT Litigation in Hungary,” Erzsébet Barát takes up the challenge of thinking about non-exclusionary, intersectional acts of categorization. She investigates the argumentative strategies of a liberal human rights approach applied by the NGO Háttér: Baráti Társaság a Melegekért in their lawsuit against the Calvinist University in Budapest for violating antidiscrimination law. Barát argues that, situated in the reproduction of a binary logic that lead to an exclusionary and hierarchical categorization of free speech and equal treatment, the NGO did not stand a chance against the university. Instead, she suggests queering binary thinking by
deconstructing the positions of the target/non-target of hateful language in pointing out the losses all citizens have to face when hate speech is tolerated.

Ivana Pražić shares Barát’s skepticism about liberal human rights discourses. In her contribution “Belgrade Pride Parade 2010: Queer Politics in Serbia” she offers a hermeneutics of discourses surrounding Belgrade Pride by investigating how the global human rights phenomenon of the “Pride Parade” became translated into a local human rights phenomenon. She hereby focuses on the asymmetry of the overlaps/disjunctures among various socio-historical and power-relation flows that resulted in the realization of the event and its depiction as a “political success.” Thus, she points out the shortcomings of a human rights approach to justice by illuminating the homogenizing and exclusionary potential of the event.

Whereas the above-mentioned contributions apply queer theory and queer critique to their specific research topics and questions in various ways, the following articles pursue the topoi of the adaptation, translation, and appropriation of “queer” in local contexts:

In “(Un)translatable Queer?, or What Is Lost and Can Be Found in Translation…” Robert Kulpa, Joanna Mizielińska, and Agata Stasińska problematize the hegemonic over-determination of Central and Eastern European queer studies and activism by models rooted in the “Western” tradition of queer theory. Their article makes the biases of queer theoretical approaches visible and critically questions the applicability of such accounts to the Polish context by analyzing strategies applied by the NGO “Campaign Against Homophobia.” In addition, drawing on the recent campaign “Love Does Not Exclude,” the authors focus not only on what is lost when using “Western” concepts of queerness for this specific local context, but also on what is “brought to life” through such trans-cultural appropriations.

Cornelia Möser offers insights into another important aspect of the import, export, and transport of theory and knowledge production across boundaries, drawing on the background of
cultural translation. Her article “Translating Queer Theory to France and Germany: Tickets and Boundaries for a Traveling Theory” contextualizes the appropriation and, literally, the translation of key texts of queer theory in Germany and France and reflects on the emerging effects of these translations on a specific academic and/or activist environment.

Vendula (Esteban) Wiesnerová’s text “LGBTQ Activism and the Appropriation of Queer Theory in Spain” provides the reader with insight into the multifaceted LGBTQ political activism in present-day Spain. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this article focuses on the effects of queer theory and its critique of identity on the politics of independent activist collectives such as l@s precari@s trans-mari-bollos or El Bloque Alternativo por la Liberación Sexual, which established their politics in opposition to that of the mainstream Spanish LGBT organizations.

In “Queer Trouble in Ljubljana,” writer and activist Tea Hvala examines the various interpretations and meanings of the term “queer” within the LGBTI activist community in the Slovenian capital. Her essay sets a variety of adaptions and usages of “queer” in relation to local academic discourse as well as to the increasing political differentiation of the LGBTI community.

“Is it possible to find a common aesthetic and shared politics of sexual and gender non-normativity in countries of former Yugoslavia? And if so, is it legitimate to refer to such commonalities as ‘regional queer’?” These are questions posed by Sanja Kajinić in her contribution “Imagining the Regional Queer or Queering the Region? Symbolic Geographies of Queer Festivals in Former Yugoslavia.” Critically expanding the conceptual framework of “regional queer” allows Kajinić to detect a “shared affective and political ground in the apparent multiplicity of strategies of queer festivals in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Macedonia” while, at the same time, remaining cautious about the problematic implications of linking “queer” to a geographical understanding of the region.

In “‘Queer Comrades’: Socialist Past, Postsocialist Present, and Ideological Battles in Transnational China,” Hongwei Bao
investigates the use of the term “tongzhi” in modern Chinese history. Bao outlines the cultural and political transformations of the term’s meanings, from “comrade” to “gay,” and expands on the present-day usage of the term tongzhi as an “indigenous representation of queer politics.”

In her article “Cultural Representations of Non-Hegemonic Genders and Sexualities in Japan and Singapore: Global Transmissions of Queer Critique?” Nicole Alecu de Flers looks at “beautiful boy” comics in Japan and “Asian Mardi Gras boys” in Singapore. She asks to what extent these phenomena have been influenced by and/or relate to “Western” images and articulations of queer subjectivities. Critically taking notions of “Westernness” and queerness into account, Alecu de Flers exemplifies how “Western” imagery is adapted for specific local settings.

With the next contribution by Leopold Lippert, we take an “affective turn.” In his article “Writing Transnational Queer Histories, or Stonewall in Wien,” Lippert invites us to “feel transnationally” as he investigates the alliances, unexpected associations, and affective bonds created by the writing of histories across and beyond national frameworks. By examining the historiographical strategies employed in the brochure Stonewall in Wien, Lippert illustrates how the Stonewall riots, apart from being an important historical event that took place within a certain geo-political space, serve as a source for transnational emotional bonds.

Kateřina Kolářová highlights yet another significant arena of the politics of affect by analyzing the biggest public protest of people with disabilities in the Czech Republic, prompted by proposed cuts in the social welfare system in 2011. Her text “Affective Politics of Disability Shame in the Times of Neoliberal Exceptionalism” critically examines the effects of a demonstration becoming a collective body of community-in-action against neoliberal austerity policy through affective politics of shame.

Jack Halberstam’s contribution “The Traffic in Gender” shares insights into and observations about some key issues of the circulation of queer scholarship in a Euro-American context. The
author’s reflection on queer discourses and knowledge produc-
tion names the difficulties of bringing the concepts of “race” and sexuality into European debates. Halberstam further elaborates on the theorizing of new models of transgenderism by referring to current discussions of the reading of the trans*body as a “form of political autonomy;” or theorizing “transgenderism as part of the shifting meaning of social identities in the wake of globalization.”

In “Autoethnography of a Femme-as-Professor: Queer Dissi-
dence between (Global) Development and (Local) Academia,” Hanna Hacker broaches the dissident participation of scholars within hegemonic academic discourses. She maps out the frag-
mented and liminal space of the femme professor within the field of development studies and the structural sexism and ho-
mophobia of an institution that “by no means […] wants to be queered.” Using an autoethnographical approach Hacker em-
ploys explicitly poetic language, transgressing academic writing, to point out that the boundaries between the personal and the structural, between the descriptive and proactive, have always been permeable.

In her notes on the aims and methodological framework of the workshop “Queering Imperial Antiracism?” Johanna Schaffer continues along the line of academic self-reflexion, shifting the focus from the sphere of institutions to that of a broader femi-
nist context. In a workshop held together with Vlatka Frketić at the Import – Export – Transport conference, Schaffer tried to examine the dynamics of a discussion that took place on a German-speaking feminist academic mailing list in Austria. Following a call to sign a petition against the stoning of a woman for adultery in Iran, a heated debate arose, which Schaffer and Frketić interpreted as the articulation of white privilege combined with heteronormative ignorance. Taking this discursive situation as a point of departure, they attempted to understand the power relations at play, striving to overcome the feelings of frustration and confusion with which the discussion left the two of them (as well as many others).
With “Gender\==/=\Bending the Wall, or Rain on Our Parade” Marty Huber offers a hybrid text which perforates the boundaries between theory, poetic writing, and performance in an attempt to create language which is adequate to translate memories into a narrative. Stitching together Derridaian theory with examples from popular culture, political propaganda, and political activism, Huber transports the reader to the Austrian borderlands of the 1980s and early 1990s, to the time of the Iron Curtain and its downfall, opening up a new queer perspective on history as well as on contemporary LGBT politics.

Persson Perry Baumgartinger uses a collage to offer a glimpse into his “Queeropedia Workshop.” “Queeropedia” is a work in progress, a multidisciplinary project which critically looks at queer theories and practices. The participants of the workshop created their own queer space as well as a queer dictionary by collectively sharing their experiences, ideas, and discussions. The collage contains some examples of these productions.

In “MONSTERS ‘R’ US: The Emergence of a Workshop,” Anthony Clair Wagner shares his appropriations of the figure of the monster and the development of his personal beast persona(s), which he uses to act up artistically against the violence of representation in a heteronormative society. Wagner’s Monster Workshop at the conference encouraged participants to transform and perform their own monstrosity and to queer the public space of the University of Vienna. A documentation of the participants’ friendly invasion of the campus is to be found on the cover of this book.

We hope that the selection of articles for this volume will provide the reader with an impression of the multi-faceted discourses on the import, export, and transport of queer theories and activism across borders and boundaries and will contribute to push this critical conversation forward in the future.
Notes

1 The conference took place from 28 to 30 April 2011 and was hosted and organized by the Gender Research Office at the University of Vienna. For further details please see our website http://gender.univie.ac.at.

References


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