

# Excursions

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# Outside/rs 2022

Making Space at the Queer Intersections of Sex and Gender

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Foreword: Exploring the Meaning of Outside/rs

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# Foreword: Exploring the Meaning of Outside/rs

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Background and key themes

*Outside/rs 2022* was a postgraduate conference held on 2nd and 3rd April 2022 at the University of Brighton. The conference aimed to build a common understanding of the challenges in accounting for what we called Outsider experiences and positions, as they relate to gender, sex and sexualities. We invited criticisms, definitions and explorations of what *Outside/rs* might mean in relation to queerness, transness and beyond. This *Excursions* Special Issue showcases selected papers from this conference to continue the conversations we began at *Outside/rs 2022*.

Exclusions and inclusions make pervasive impacts on individual lives, whether they work through dynamics of gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, able-bodiedness or other metrics of difference. Indeed, Outsides are produced through the social and political relations even we, as Outsiders, often, promulgate. Thus, we identified a pressing need to interrogate our relation to *Outside(s)* and to collectively posit strategies to make space(s) for Outsider identities and experiences.

*Outside/rs 2022* provided one such space to explore how marginalised – or Outsider – groups negotiate a relation to exclusion and establish viable cultural possibilities on the margins. Just as the monikers

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Insider and Outsider shape communities through the creation and spatialisation of difference and sameness, we asked: what do the Inside and Outside mean for LGBTQIA+ people? And how can we understand and challenge their impact on our collective belonging?

In designing the conference we were mindful of the need for an accessible design that would facilitate discussions from a variety of voices. Organising during the Covid pandemic and mindful of disparities of financial security both within and beyond the postgraduate field, *Outside/rs* was delivered in a completely hybrid form: online and in-person. Stallholders from local initiatives were offered free stalls, over 75 groups in Brighton and beyond were invited to deliver cost-covered 'community workshops', and a community consultant advised the committee throughout the decision-making process. The University facilities were made gender-neutral, staff briefed, and the conference communication designed in accessible formats and texts. A tiered ticket system allowed us to provide food to conference guests whilst also reserving funds to provide travel subsidies for those who needed them. All these supported us in extending the reach and accessibility of the conference. We created a temporary *Outside/rs-Inside*, without of course resolving fundamental issues in academic space-making, but rather finding and testing these limits.

The conference brought together participants whose work – as in this Special Issue – explores the possibilities of constructing or imagining Outsides and that examines and critiques how queer acceptance, visibility and politics are established and contested on the Inside(s). Our call was expressly anti-disciplinary, welcoming academic, creative and interactive contributions regardless of 'field', and intended to generate a space for the expression of *Outside/r*, fringe or marginal topics of study, practice and research. We hoped to promote lively critical interactions between participants and endeavoured to create an environment where all were encouraged to engage in constructive enquiry, beyond (and against) the ostracising hierarchies of conventional intellectual spaces.

*Outside/rs 2022* was kindly supported by The Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender (CTSG, University of Brighton) and the University of Sussex's School of Media, Arts and Humanities (MAH). The institutional support encouraged our development of a conference that foregrounded these topics and allowed for a new iteration of the conference to be held. In fact, at the time of writing this the 2023 *Outside/rs* conference is being organised to further explore the theme of solidarity with/in the community.

### Different Interpretations of 'Outside/rs'

For those who exist in queer, marginal or dissident relations to normativity in its various guises, the Outside is a familiar place. To be locked out of or barred from spaces of privilege is a common experience for queer, trans or LGBTQIA+ people, as well as BIPOC communities, disabled and neurodiverse people, working-class and colonised populations, and others still. That which creates and acts upon our difference(s) doesn't just constitute the 'Inside' and the boundaries or borders that comprise it, but also makes multiple subjective other-Outsides possible.

Such Outsides appeared in the conference, considering lesbian spatialities, queer geographical figures such as the cruiser and even the paradoxically Outside-Inside of the prison. One panel, 'Remembering the Outside' offered the provocation that queer and trans history might already constitute a kind of discursive Outside. This opening gambit collapsed into other panels concerning what form memory can take for sex and gender Outsiders, what we do with histories of lesbian and gay spaces – past 'Outsider-Insides' – and what *Queer History Now (2023)* can look like.

Acquiring a relation to exclusion and communing Outside can be a source of power for many, who might 'choose the margin' (hooks, 2015 (1989)). Accepting the terms of the Outside offers an escape: the chance to propagate new possibilities, whether a politics of ambivalence (Phillips

and Watt, 2000) or disidentification, fugitivity and waywardness (Hartman, 2019), or a radical refusal of the terrain that makes the Outside outside (Honig, 2021). These possibilities were entertained in the form of panels on family and kinship, asking how Outsider status can feel in intimate contexts. Other panels undermined the absolutism of terms like ‘invisible’ or ‘excluded’ to insist on the productivity of such discursive spaces, and the viability of lives through them.

Outsider is perhaps a phenomenological term, a matter of lived experience. Through it, queer, trans and LGBTQIA+ people ‘become’ Outsiders in particular, personal and political ways that are not easily generalisable. What one does, or is able to do, with and against an Outsider status is nuanced, complicated and often complicit with still other regimes of power (Oswin, 2004). Despite this, there are numerous ways to step ‘into’ Outsider (Ademolu, 2023) and – together – to organise, feel and queer as Outsiders. This mode of organising and feeling contains also the echoes of historical figures such as Virginia Woolf, her Outsiders Society (*Three Guineas*, 1938) and the Bloomsbury group, the latter of which was the subject of one panel at the conference.

Indeed, to find oneself an Outsider is to note how the body is recognised, narrated and made by terms outside of oneself. *Outside/rs*, we hoped, would foster such moments of ‘finding’, as modelled in the forward-slash of our conference title. The ‘/’ signifies both the overlap and separateness of the Outside(s) and the Outsider(s). It allows a reader to see the constitutive Outside and then to consider also the subjectivity of such a terrain. The slash enacts a kind of grammatical separation, a cleaving, and embodies the precise border-effects that create the Outside(s) or Outsider(s) in contrast to something else. For this reason the slash bisects the *Outside/rs* logo – demarcating our own conference position, outlining an ambition, giving shape whilst also cutting away. This act of slashing and its attendant politics in queer, trans and other lives subject to violence, brutalisation and control also cut through the conference. Panels on segregation, detention and border regimes were

complemented with community workshops on industrial action – ‘breaking points’ – and immigration raid resistance.

The themes we have discussed did not end after the final keynote and thank you emails were sent. In fact, some of the presenters have since published work extending the conference themes through other avenues. We have chosen to include a Further Reading section at the end of this introduction to celebrate their achievements and to provide a starting point for those interested in exploring Outside/rs.

For instance, Rachel Friars and Anna Forringer-Beal both presented at the conference and have published on the themes they explored. Rachel Friars presented on lesbain erotic symbolism in two literary works, Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* and Emma Donoghue’s *Frog Music*, which was published as an article in 2021. The article explores how Lesbian neo-Victorian novels interrogate where and how lesbian desire might manifest, specifically through erotically charged consumption. Anna Forringer-Beal presented on the ‘impossible insides’ of anti-trafficking systems, applying a queer critique to regimes that adjudicate who, or what experience, is considered ‘victimised’ (or not) in ways that also involve conditional figurations of race and gender. The themes from the presentation were turned into an article entitled *Why the ‘Ideal Victim’ Persists: Queering representations of victimhood in human trafficking discourse* (Forringer-Beal 2022).

#### Selection of Papers and an Overview of Order

The papers in this issue represent only a small selection of the presentations and workshops at the conference. In curating the issue, we have selected presentations that showcase different subject areas to reflect the breadth of topics found in the conference. We have highlighted a diverse range of voices and perspectives. These authors bend, push, and counter the idea of what it means to be an Outsider. In doing so, they showcase a variety of ways Outside/rs are constructed and reconstructed.

We have included different modalities from essays and traditional articles to conversational pieces and photo essays. This choice is intentional: to present something that might be termed ‘queer research’ necessitates a flexible and diverse approach to publishing. If to be queer is to challenge normativity, then to present queer research in only one format is to stand against ‘queer’ itself. We are excited that *Excursions*, University of Sussex’ postgraduate journal, has supported this endeavour, as we have been able to extend invitations to peer-review to other postgraduate ‘queer research’-ers and respected subject specialists.

The papers in this issue are ordered as they appeared in the conference programming. We are intentionally following the order of the conference to best reflect and represent the flow of ideas as they surfaced at the conference. Our aim in doing so is to provide a chronological, albeit selective, snapshot of the conference to a wider audience.

Tomara Garrod opens with the essay “*How Did We Get Here?*” *Etiology and Erasure in Trans Historiography*, which explores how history can be used to create an ‘outside’ that can contribute to an erasure of the very people it highlights. Garrod focuses on trans historiography and they argue that the erasure of trans people has caused erasure itself to be a defining condition of transness, which renders transness unthinkable. To account for developments that have produced this erasure, the essay focuses on the two sites historians have typically used as anchors of contemporary trans identity: medical and political discourses. In this exploration, Garrod illustrates how everyday experiences are absent in these discourses. They end by arguing for a new methodology to counteract the everyday erasure that takes the social lives of people living outside of contemporary gender norms as the focus of study.

In a further exploration of trans historicity, Jay Szpilka’s article *Lesbian with the attributes of a man’. Is a trans history of male masochism possible?* conducts a broad review of BDSM scholarship through the lens of trans subjectivity. Herein she develops a persuasive account of the largely neglected connections between modern

theorisations of trans feminine sexual desire and historical framings of male masochisms as gendered disorders. In doing so, Szpilka invites us to interrogate our understanding of sadomasochistic practices, arguing that a trans-oriented re-reading exposes a fundamental epistemological tension concerning gender and BDSM. This, she argues, provides an opening for new perspectives on gendered lived experience – a perspective which sees transness as a potentially emancipatory category, that rather than being outside a history of male masochism, is radically present in lacunae and speculatively potent.

James Chantry's photo essay *Queering the Fens: an exploration of land, supernatural, folklore and queer reproduction as art making* turns attention towards the outside spaces of the Lincolnshire fenlands and the historical Outsiders – clairvoyants and folk figures – who troubled them. Through a range of media, Chantry explores the reproductivity of mediumship and birth, considers left-feminist critiques of reproduction, and also stakes a claim, through their art practice, to the rural wetlands themselves. Through this photo essay, Chantry defers to images to communicate queer research, via video stills of their practice-based research output *Darklins*.

Steph Berens' essay *The Outsider's Space In-Between: Renegotiating Monstrosity in Contemporary Transgender Short Fiction* asks 'who is able to truly reclaim monstrosity?' By acknowledging the impossible forms of life delivered by a position as complete Outsider, Berens tends to strategies of in-betweenness that animate trans monster-identification. The in-between surfaces in this essay as a zone for negotiation, survival, corporeal and political transformation, and disidentification. Berens traces through trans studies, queer studies and two texts, Julian K. Jarboe's *I Am A Beautiful Bug!* and A.K. Blue's *God Empress Susanna* how those marked as Outsiders need not always operate in complete exclusion.

Kayleigh Charlton and Sally Evans are put into conversation in the essay entitled *Queer and Queering in the Prison*. Their essay draws on their backgrounds and research focuses to explore the idea of 'change'



and the complexities of challenging the prison system. The conversation weaves between the two authors to discuss issues from LGBTQ+ social exclusion to the housing of trans prisoners within the gendered prison service. In doing so, both Charlton and Evans aim to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of queer prisoners and the challenges researchers face in “not perpetuating the very thing [they] want to dismantle.”

Drawing on previous analyses within cultural and gender and sexuality studies, in *Cosmic Dancers, Cosmetic Shells: Exploring the Queer Potential of London's Blitz in the Early Thatcher Era*, Chloë Edwards examines the ways in which masculinity and male (homo)sexuality were challenged, depicted, and expressed within the New Romantic subculture of Margaret Thatcher's first term as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979-1983). Considering the intersections of and tensions between the prevailing Conservative ideology and the New Romantic subculture of the early 1980s, Edwards argues that prominent figures spearheading this specific cultural moment, namely Steve Strange of *Visage* and Boy George, transgressed and queered masculinities from the outside to the inside of the mainstream popular music scene, inspired by punk's contradictory attitudes towards non-heterosexual identities. Edwards proposes that prior evaluations of the subculture as only aesthetically oriented are ultimately dismissive of its greater role in aiding a shift in mainstream representations of queerness and iterations of masculinity within the popular culture in Thatcher's Britain.

In an expansive review of scholarship on queerness and women of colour, Pooja Marwaha's essay *Care and Loyalty in the Closet: A Review of Scholarship on Sexual Identity Disclosure in Queer South Asian Women* presents a novel take on the role of honour and familial loyalty in queer South Asian women's decisions to remain 'in the closet'. Marwaha highlights how contemporary understandings of 'coming out' are often tied to Western ideas of liberal tolerance, especially in relation to freedom of/for identity expression. This, she argues, is not necessarily the appropriate framework for understanding the lived experience of queer

British South Asian women. Instead, a critical reading of the relevant literature hints at an alternative perspective; one in which the closet can be seen as a space of care – care both for others and care for oneself.

Karolína Zlámalová explores the role of multilingualism in two queer life-writing texts in her article *Multilingualism in Akwaeke Emezi's Freshwater and Zahra Patterson's Chronology*. Both texts are autobiographical in theme and interweave English with African influences: Emezi's *Freshwater* utilises passages in Igbo and non-Western English while Patterson's *Chronology* has significant passages written in Sesotho. Zlámalová argues that the authors employ multilingualism for similar purposes, challenging the presumed Western-universality that is exemplified through writing in English. In doing so, the authors challenge concepts of identity, gender and sexuality, express the hybridity and heterogeneity of the narrated identities, and potentially create intimacy in the language.

In *Sex Workers: The Outside/r's Outsider*, Brit Schulte posits that the figure of the sex worker is confronted by an ever-increasing demand as well as proportionately increasing criminalization and persecution. They also see the “sex working person” as a representative of queer and trans\* communities – truly, of Outsider subjectivity. The tension produced by these coextensive increases creates the conditions that compel an Outsider (sex worker) to fight for an end to stigma and marginalisation. This necessary struggle takes place in broader movement spaces, grassroots collectives, smaller mutual aid networks, and between fellow workers. Their essay highlights experiences within the above categories of queer and trans\* sex worker-led community organising, specifically drawing upon full service sex worker-run mutual aid networks, harm reduction formations, tech-centred activism, and fetish provider-led collectives. Through personal and broader movement analysis, Schulte links sex workers' political fights to the broader struggle for labour justice under capitalism, locating sex worker organising in our contemporary moment in a rich tradition of hustle and survival.

Thinking Outsider survival in a different way, Phyla Kupferschmidt's article *Queering the Schizophrenic Body* turns its attention to the now-canonical psychoanalytic case of Daniel Schreber. Kupferschmidt sets a course through phenomenological psychoanalysis and, by attending precisely to Schreber's (self-)documented 'delusions', intervenes to think this schizophrenic case study through Sara Ahmed's concepts of 'disorientation' and 'use'. In doing so, Kupferschmidt is able to stay with the trouble of the Outsider's autonomy, describing how Schreber petitioned for his own release from psychiatric care even as his symptoms persisted. Additionally, Kupferschmidt explores how Schreber's schizophrenic 'delusions' were manifest affectively in his experience of both God and his own nervous system. She demonstrates, through queering, that schemas of 'voluptuousness', gender transgression and sensuality might become available to the 'mad' without stripping them either of their autonomy, experience or the possibility of recovery.

Also attending to phenomenology, Lucien Meadows turns our attention to the narration of physical spaces in his essay *A Black Queer Phenomenology of Space in James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room*. In doing so, he troubles both the 'interiority' of the mind, showing how space becomes for us in concert with our own desires, as well as the 'fixedness' of the world outside of ourselves. Meadows considers the architectural composition of spaces as depicted and queerly negotiated in Baldwin's text, *Giovanni's Room*, finding in and in-between the walls and lines of the novel the limits of racialised desire and, possibly, their overcoming. Meadows' text culminates in a slashing forward, towards the in-between negative space of the architectural *poché*, dropping us into a productive realm beyond even the scope of this Issue; the perfect punctuated end to this Special Issue.

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## Further Readings

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