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Queer Berlin: Lifestyles, Performances, and Capitalist Consumer Society¹

I

"Ich bin schwul und das ist auch gut so!" When Berlin's Governing Mayor Klaus Wowereit used this memorable phrase during his election campaign to out himself, it seemed that being gay and being a prominent public figure was not only quite compatible but added an intriguing gender aspect to the capital's aggressive self-promotion as a dynamic space for innovative self-invention. In his introductory essay to the collection *Die bewegte Stadt*, Thomas Krüger, who was a member of the first freely elected GDR *Volkskammer* and later active in SPD cultural politics, describes Berlin at the end of the 1990s as a "Stadt der Unentschiedenheit," where the social elites of both former parties are undergoing rapid delegitimation and aging. Ghetto formation and social tensions are increasing while processes of suppressing harsh realities are beginning. Thus, melancholic and retrogressive attitudes are still dominant in the city. At the same time, however, after reunification many newcomers have appreciated the city as a *tabula rasa* for their own lifestyles and as a projection screen for new biographies and ideas, creating a professional and international culture of communication: "Berlin bietet in den Neunzigern als schnelles, vielfältiges und dynamisches Ideen-Labor beste Voraussetzungen für die individuelle Inszenierung völlig unterschiedlicher und differierender Lebensstile." Explaining that the diversity of activities is particularly strong in the economic and cultural spheres, Krüger continues: "Das Experiment, das Spontane und Unkonventionelle, das Schräge und Wilde, kurz: das Individuelle ist gefragt" (*Die bewegte Stadt* 22). The author's language, vague and coolly assertive at the same time, seeks to capture the ambiguous and free-wheeling atmosphere of a pluralistic capital in transition that must continually negotiate its path, from the divided city with a ruinous past to its aspiring role as a metropolitan center, actively participating in late capitalist consumer society, cosmopolitan culture, and the global economy.

Among the various lifestyles portrayed in *Die bewegte Stadt* we find Elmar Kraushaar's portrait of Oliver, who escapes from his provincial origins, lands a job in a large advertisement agency and finds himself a stable boyfriend. His

easygoing lifestyle which features shopping sprees around Kurfürstendamm is suddenly endangered when he is accosted by three young Turkish thugs in the subway. In response to the homophobic assault, Oliver defiantly decides that he wants to stay on in Berlin despite Turks and neo-Nazis, sublimating his anger by focusing on stereotypical aspects of a hedonistic gay consumer culture: "Er fühlt sich wohl und stellt keine Diagnose. Er ist dabei, sich neu zu entwerfen und will nichts aus der Hand geben. Kein Zufall soll mehr dazwischen kommen, keine lähmende Routine und keiner, der ihn bespuckt" (Kraushaar, "Oliver" 106).

Oliver's story is emblematic for what it tells about the ideology of queer self-invention and lifestyles in the consumer capitalist society of post-reunification Berlin. Yet the recent deluge of critical Berlin literature is marked by a curious absence of queer topics.² If the proverbial symphony of the big city of Berlin really continues in the new millennium, then it often sounds like a heterosexist composition without the polyphony (and dissonances) of queer voices. This is all the more surprising considering the fact that the legitimizing urban myth continually evoked by the new capital's quest for self-identity centers mainly on the Weimar Republic, whose vitality, of course, rested in no small measure on its thriving gay culture.³ It is hard to say whether the lack of scholarly interest in queer Berlin is due to a tacitly heterosexist bias in German cultural studies, or whether queer issues are overshadowed by other important topics, such as German reunification, the Holocaust, the GDR legacy, or ethnic minority problems that dominate the debate on Berlin's cultural significance.

In light of this marginalization of queer issues in German Studies, I wish to pose the following questions: How can readings of queer Berlin texts contribute to our understanding of the post-reunification capital and its situation before the fall of the Wall? What are the specific representational strategies employed by recent queer literature for re-inventing and recycling urban imagery from the 1920s and 30s to the present? Are literary representations of gay desire and identities being co-opted by Berlin's capitalist consumer culture, obsession with simulacra, and media industry, or can they develop a subversive potential counteracting these cultural dominants? And, finally, how can the analysis of the intersection of queer textuality with Berlin's metropolitan space promote a metacritical reflection on the relative lack of contemporary queer theory in German Studies?

To address these questions I focus on four novels—Friedrich Kröhnke's *Grundeis: Ein Fall* (1990), Martin Schacht's *Mittendrin: Berlinroman* (2002) together with its sequel *Straßen der Sehnsucht: Berlinroman* (2003), and Peter Rehberg's *Fag Love* (2005)—which seem to me symptomatic of what has by now emerged as an important tradition of gay-themed writings set in Berlin. This legacy can be traced at least as far back as Klaus Mann's *Der fromme Tanz* (1925) and Christopher Isherwood's *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and

Goodbye to Berlin (1939). It includes landmark autobiographical texts such as Napoleon Seyfarth's *Schweine müssen nackt sein* (1991) and Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's *Ich bin meine eigene Frau* (1993) and *Ab durch die Mitte* (1994). In Joachim Helfer's *Cohn & König* (1998), partly but at crucial moments set in the German capital, this tradition has attained one of its stylistically most brilliant achievements. The novels discussed in this essay are selected for their considerable formal and thematic diversity, which nonetheless is centered on the interplay of queer lifestyle performances with capitalist consumer society and its cultural traditions, a space that these performances negotiate through a complex dialectic of affirmation and subversion.

I employ the expression "queer lifestyle performance" in critical reference to Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), she deconstructs the notion of gender as a natural or inherent quality of the self's core identity: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33; see Jagose 83–93; Sullivan 81–98). Thus, the performative concept of gender posits that the signifying body and the self as the site of agency are not outside or prior to discursive regimes but are constituted by participating in them through complex processes of citation, reiteration, and resignification. This account seeks to undermine essentialist notions of a stable human identity articulating itself through authentic acts of self-expression (Butler 142–49; Jagose 84).⁴ Drag, by theatricalizing the "contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance," epitomizes the process of gender performativity through a specific act of denaturalizing performance: "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (Butler 137; italics in original). However, such performances are not entirely voluntary or autonomous, since the discourses and codes they actively reconfigure always already precede the subjectivity and will of the performer. In other words, performances enact individual self-articulations, desires, or cultural ideologies through preexisting practices, meanings, and values in the cultural archive. Or, as Butler puts it, "styles of being" (Sartre) are "never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" of constructing the gendered self (Butler 139; see Sullivan 89). Therefore, Butler considers gender "as a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (139; italics in original). As Sullivan argues in her discussion of the phenomenon of the gay male skinhead, it is difficult to decide whether a given performance can be "read as subversive" of the cultural codes it imitates/parodies, or whether it can be seen as "reinforcing particular hegemonic values and identities." The reasons for this ambiguity are that a particular performance has various effects on different audiences and that all performances are to

some extent affected by the very power relations and ideologies they seek to challenge (Sullivan 91; see also Butler 139).⁵

While Butler is generally interested in deconstructing the seemingly natural gender structure in the context of compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentric language, in order to allow for the recognition of a diverse range of alternative notions of sexuality, gender, and the body, her theoretical framework can be usefully adapted for an analysis of the multiple ways in which contemporary fiction opens up representational spaces for the construction of queer lifestyles in Berlin's cultural topography. Specifically, it is the triple dialectic of performativity/performance, construction/authenticity, and affirmation/subversion that the gay-themed Berlin novels discussed below renegotiate and interrogate. The particular lifestyles enacted by their protagonists function as intentional performances of self-stylization that are self-inventive without being totally autonomous, since they emerge vicariously through the reiterative participation in significations, practices, and ideologies that exist prior to the characters' subjectivities and choices, even as they are reconfigured by them for individual purposes. This cultural reservoir ranges from the myth of the Weimar Republic's liberal modernity to post-reunification late capitalist consumer culture, eras singled out for their capacity to promote gay sexualized city space. Berlin's (and other cities') literary legacy, trendy image productions, media-hype, and mythic allure set up a phantasmagoric and spectacular stage, which accounts for the reappearance of Butler's notion of denaturalized, "artificial" gender construction in the highly mediated, "artificial" performances of queer Berlin lives. Owing to cumulative effects of metropolitan discourses, most protagonists willfully or passively "buy" into capitalism's commodifying hegemony. Yet some characters try to distance themselves critically from the dominant social order even while remaining partially involved in it. Frequently, this kind of subversive resistance employs (or at least implies) the very language of authenticity—gendered or otherwise—that queer theory's notion of performativity seeks to disavow. Thus, these novels provide specific literary instantiations of some important tenets of queer theory while questioning their overall applicability; the possibilities and limits of queer theory are thus "tested," as it were, within the specific aesthetic, historical, and political parameters of Berlin's queer space.

I adopt the term "queer space" from Dianne Chisholm, who deploys Walter Benjamin's writings on modern capitalist city space for her suggestive reading of contemporary literary representations of queer urbanity. Chisholm argues that "queer space" designates the productive and performative appropriation of the metropolis for "bodily, especially sexual, pleasure"; it employs practices like cruising and parading in order to create "heterotopias" that open up alternatives to mainstream culture even if their subversive potential "is limited by the power grid and total domination by capitalist market forces."

As Chisholm explains, "queer constellations" are dialectical images constructed through Benjamin's devices of literary montage, *flânerie*, topographical memory, and other strategies, which reveal that the city of late capitalism is marked by "enhanced consumer seduction, where commodity spectacle and advertising technology saturate and dominate space." Here, she proposes, "the city itself is a commodity fetish-on-display, exhibiting and marketing its 'historic' sectors, and selling (selling-out) its 'alternative' neighborhoods and 'bohemian' lifestyles (10–11).

Gay-themed Berlin novels, as I will show, utilize devices such as montage technique, inner monologue, and narrative (or quasi-cinematic) forms of *flânerie* in order to inscribe queer desires and lifestyles into the political transition culture of the old/new German capital. The novels portray Berlin as a Benjaminian surface spectacle of metropolitan myths, consumer capitalism, and media culture, where gay desires are transformed into cultural commodities for a wide variety of lifestyle performances. These manifestations of queerness include the cultivation of nostalgic dreams, fashionable trends, promiscuous pursuits of fleeting delights, and tenuous hopes for meaningful relationships. In Kröhnke's, and, to a lesser degree, in Rehberg's novel, Chisholm's term "queer constellation" captures the protagonists' evocation of significant fragments of the urban past as contrastive foils for their own queer *flânerie*. In Schacht's work, by contrast, the scarcity of detailed historical referents is indicative of what he portrays as the relentless flatness and evanescence of the contemporary Berlin scene. In a way, then, Schacht's novel offers a limited constellation where the past is almost completely absorbed into the homogenizing (dehistoricizing) present.

II

Born in 1956 in Darmstadt, Friedrich Kröhnke is the author of twelve books; his most recent work, *Samoa, oder Ein Mann von fünfzig Jahren*, was published in 2006. His short novel *Grundeis*, written and set in the spring of 1989, is a retelling of Erich Kästner's classic children's book *Emil und die Detektive* (1929) from the perspective of its eponymous villain. Kröhnke's narrative is an example of postmodern pastiche, a nostalgic tribute to and ironic reversal of the original. Employing a fast-moving mix of police interviews, interior monologue, point-of-view narration, and diary entries, *Grundeis* restores the visibility of (homo-)erotic desire in the act of *flânerie*,⁶ an aspect that was only sparingly and evasively alluded to in the works of such modernist writers as Walter Benjamin, Franz Hessel, Joris Karl Huysmans, and Christopher Isherwood. In Kästner's original, the man named Grundeis is a petty thief stealing money from an innocent youth arriving in Berlin from the provinces, who is assisted in his attempt to seek justice by a local gang of street-smart boys.

Kröhnke's novel reinserts this plot into the situation of divided Berlin just before the fall of the Wall. His Grundeis, fixating on his prey less for financial than for sexual reasons, is a sophisticated *Jugendbuchautor* from East Berlin, endowed with an exit visa to the West. Driven by his desire for metropolitan street life and his lust for young boys, he shuttles back and forth between the *Stasi*-ridden, petty-bourgeois dreariness of the GDR capital and West Berlin's rampant consumerism, with its department stores, sex shops, enticing nightlife, broad streets, and efficient subway trains. Although he commodifies pederastic sexuality by "consuming" boys like objects circulating in the capitalist economy, Grundeis is at the same time fascinated and repelled by West Berlin's commodity fetishism; exemplifying this contradiction, he praises the over-supply of fashion, antiquities, and luxury specialty stores around Kurfürstendamm, but he also draws attention to the signs of heroin addiction, AIDS, suicides, and rampant crime (105–07).

Kröhnke's narrative suggests a significant shift in the perception of gay themes, which queer theory must acknowledge if it wants to keep up with the current emphasis in cultural studies on the semiotics of postmodern urban culture. As the character of Grundeis suggests, queer identity is not a socially stable category but the effect of highly complex acts of willful yet destabilizing self-construction in the context of divergent cultural environments. The literary construction of Berlin's queer space does not necessarily contribute to gay identity politics or social emancipation. Rather, the city's topography opens up a self-reflexive, even playful engagement with those aspects of a highly mediated culture that enable or limit the formation of queer desire and lifestyles in the first place. Thus, Grundeis's sexual exploits appear less as a hapless individual's unchecked passions than as provocatively perverse acts of self-invention, as the construction of a lifestyle whose motivations arise from the character's thoroughly self-conscious adaptation—queering—of the myth of Weimar Germany's capital and its cultural liberalism, moral "decadence," and cosmopolitan diversity.

For what Grundeis really longs for is neither West nor East Berlin, but the city's mythic and undivided past; he loves to pursue bookish fantasies about the lost cultural vitality of Weimar Berlin, which for him is the only metropolis whose allure could possibly match the cosmopolitan attractions of Paris and other international centers of modern life. Grundeis perceives himself as a latter-day *flâneur*, as a successor to the great city writers of the 1920s and '30s: "Kästner schrieb auf dem Kurfürstendamm in Cafés. Das interessierte mich. – Ich wollte auch so leben. Ich will es noch jetzt [...]. Ich lebte ganz in dem Berlin dieser Bücher. War ich nicht selbst einer wie dieser Kisch?" (34)—referring to the "rasende Reporter" Egon Erwin Kisch. Meeting Erik Tischbein (Kröhnke's reincarnation of Kästner's Emil) while on a train ride to Berlin, he advises the youth: "Geh einfach flanieren, wenns deine Verwandten erlauben, immer der Nase nach" (22). Grundeis's Berlin is a fantastically exaggerated

metropolis, replete with all sorts of "Monstrositäten": "Die einen Lokale sind für alte Damen, die anderen für—nicht rot werden!—schwule Männer, und wieder andere für alte Damen, die in Wirklichkeit schwule Männer sind" (23).

Spending a night in the Pension Eisenach, where he habitually takes his young boys, Grundeis dreams that he is a *flâneur* back in pre-World War II Berlin and feels as if he were in a film. Indeed, his phantasmagoric city vision resembles scenes from Walter Ruttmann's classic documentary montage film *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt* (1927): cars, trams, vulgar working-class men, whores, beggars, and attractive young guys hanging out at the train station. But instead of taking a rest at one of the fabled cafés on Unter den Linden, Grundeis is suddenly driven by an irrational fear into the Linden Passage, the famous shopping arcade off Friedrichstraße. As portrayed in John Henry Mackay's novel *Der Puppenjunge* (1926), this arcade, demolished after World War II, was not just a symbol of Berlin's *Gründerzeit* prosperity and 1920s commercial boom, but also a notorious meeting point for hustlers. Even though Kröhnke does not explicitly mention this precursor text, the Passage's ambivalent atmosphere resurfaces in the novel, as Grundeis rushes madly through the establishment, trying in vain to escape his frightful vision of ghosts and skeletons, which he believes can only be dispelled by his attraction to boys (85–88). He also watches Fritz Lang's *M—Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931), because he is attracted to the film's evocative theme of anonymity, which, according to the pioneer of (homo-)sexual studies Magnus Hirschfeld, was conducive to homosexuals at the time. Grundeis identifies with the aura of suspicion surrounding the film's paranoid protagonist, who tries in vain to escape from himself and the specters of his innocent victims (108–10). Thus, Grundeis enacts some of the typical characteristics of Chisholm's definition of queer *flânerie*, which shares with its classic precursor practice the leisurely pace and the desire stimulated by the city. Yet whereas the traditional *flâneur* practices dispassionate detachment and an objectless desire, the queer cruiser "loses composure (or decomposes) with exposure to the city's erotic spectacles" (Chisholm 46). Interestingly, this kind of decomposition reinserts a moment of authenticity into Grundeis's self-conscious cultivation of nostalgic *flânerie* because it is the attempt to run away from his "ständige Todesangst" that truly motivates his activities; his seemingly indifferent and sovereign explorations of metropolitan street life essentially highlight how "bitterernst" he takes his "Konstrukt vom Wunsch zu flanieren" (45).

This is one of a series of significant moments typical of gay-themed Berlin novels, where the discourse of authenticity, albeit temporarily and incompletely, disrupts the performative practices of queer lifestyles, partially subverting their artificiality, self-absorption, and consumerist phantasms. Recognizing that his pederastic cruising will never be able to liberate him from his existential fear of death, Grundeis sublimates this "authentic" personal problem by deliberately displacing it onto the larger political issue of Berlin's reuni-

fiction. As it turns out, Grundeis has staged the entire plot of the novel as a scheme to promote the fall of the Wall: "Wenn ich nicht genug Cafés und Reklameschilder bekomme, dann muß ich dorthin, wo ich genug davon finde. Wenn ich beim Umherstreifen auf eine Mauer stoße und ich kann nicht weiter, dann muß die Mauer weg" (56). What facilitates Grundeis's plan is the unlikely cooperation between Erik and the gang of street urchins, whose own performance must collaborate with the very evil it seeks to eradicate because one of the gang members, the Turkish boy Özgür, is designated by his friends to prostitute himself to Grundeis as part of the group's endeavor to bring the villain to justice: "Ganz klar," says the Polish boy Andrzej about Özgür, "Einem Engel kann keiner widerstehen, und der [Grundeis] schon gar nicht," whereupon the Turkish boy flashes his white teeth and—"braunhaarig, knopfäugig" and "wunderschön"—goes on his mission, whistling ironically (67–68). Here, the novel enacts a scenario where ethnic difference from the German/white majority is fantasized as a subject position that projects youth, beauty, and goodness as redemptive qualities in the fight against sexual aggression marked by white adult maleness.⁷ This multicultural solidarity finds its own way of dealing with Berlin's East-West dualism because it comes to the rescue of the West German Erik—"Ein Wessi" says Andrzej (46)—against the *Ossi* Grundeis.

Ultimately, however, the reader realizes that the boy's initiatives are only elements in the grander scenario serving Grundeis's vision of Berlin's reunification. Having noticed that Erik's friends are closing in on him during one of his stays in West Berlin, the villain barely makes it to the Eastern part at Bahnhof Friedrichstraße, only to return all of a sudden and let himself be caught by the police who have been alerted by the watchful boys. As they rush in great numbers to Erik's help from all over the city, Grundeis's vision of a reunified Berlin seems to turn into reality:

[N]un hört man Sprechchöre draußen, "Grund-eis, Grund-eis" und, wie es wohl in einem solchen Moment nicht anders sein kann, erst zaghaft und vereinzelt, dann lauter und häufiger dazwischen: "Die Mauer muß weg! Die Mauer muß weg! Die Mauer muß weg!" (118)

Thus, the sexually transgressive act of Grundeis's pederastic *flânerie*, although unable to resolve its "authentic" problem (i.e., his personal fear of death), leads to the political utopia of a transgressive border between East and West Berlin, which was to turn into sudden and surprising reality soon after the novel was completed. As Kröhnke remarks in an ironic postscript: "Diese Erzählung ist im Frühjahr 1989 geschrieben worden. Seitdem haben sich Dinge vollzogen, mit denen in dieser Tragweite nicht einmal Grundeis gerechnet hat" (125).

III

Whereas Kröhnke's novel links queer self-invention in the shadow of the Berlin Wall with the city's literary heritage, writings after German reunification depict such lifestyles as governed by the electronic media and consumer technologies in the age of global capitalism. A free-lance writer, Martin Schacht (born in 1965) has been active as gossip columnist, TV astrologer, and ghostwriter. His most recent publication is *Die ewige Zielgruppe* (2004), a pop portrait of the baby boomer generation in consumer society. Set in Berlin Mitte, Schacht's first novel *Mittendrin* portrays the reconstructed new city center as the crazy playground of contemporary media hype, the fashion industry, rampant consumerism, trendy art scenes, and endless partying. The fleeting nature of these alluring aspects of Germany's post-reunification capital is appropriately captured in brief, succinct chapters, which form a rapidly moving, montage-like kaleidoscope of colorful images, people, and scenes. After completing his *Zivildienst* on an exchange program in Australia and then hanging out on a Thai island, the protagonist Felix—who is basically straight but not against engaging in some rather juvenile gay games to acquire a highly desirable pair of snake-leather pants (46–49)—arrives in the new capital in search of a new and exciting life. He perceives the city as a quasi-filmic montage of stereotypical landmarks, which create a hallucinatory *déjà-vu* effect of prefabricated images from popular media: "Straße des 17. Juni steht auf einem Straßenschild, als er in Richtung S-Bahn schlendert, und der Name Tiergarten verschafft ihm schließlich ein Aha-Erlebnis. Er kennt diese Ecke aus dem Fernsehen, aus Berichten über die Loveparade." Or: "Zwar hat er die Kräne und Baugruben rund um den Reichstag oder das Kanzleramt oft genug auf Bildern gesehen, doch in natura ist ihre schiere Größe erschlagend" (10–11). Post-reunification Berlin appears as simulacrum, a phantasmagoric spectacle of depthless presence, in which a few references to the past, like the GDR Fernsehturm, are only noted in passing (11).

Among the gay personnel of the novel we encounter Roy Best, the flamboyant designer of the perfume Dream Come True. Popular through illustrated newspapers and talk shows, Best is an iconic product of mass media technology; off-screen he turns out to be little more than a silly caricature of contemporary homosexual stereotypes:

Ohne die Filter der Mattscheibe oder der Fotografie ist Roy Best vor allem ein bisschen zu viel: eine Idee zu blond, das Lächeln einen Tick zu künstlich und der Körper etwas zu trainiert für einen Mittfünfziger. Das Ergebnis ist so bunt, als hätte man den Fernseher falsch eingestellt, gleichzeitig aber irgendwie beeindruckend. (44)

Famous, rich, and witty, Best can talk about virtually anything, from nanotechnology to the legacy of the Nazi regime, proclaiming that today, money can best be made not by designing fashion but by dealing in "Lizenzen,

Kissen, Handtücher, Gartenmöbel, Geschirr, Nudeln" (45). Then there is Marc, a "Modemapst in spe," whose outfit is "die perfekte Mischung aus Wahnsinn und Couture," and who is totally enamored by his own "Fernsehpräsenz" (29–32). We meet this "blondierten Mode-Punk" again when he is picking up the party supply service employee Daniel. Living "in einer schmutzigen Bruchbude mit Treppenhaus ohne Beleuchtung in Friedrichshain," Marc exhibits a sexual behavior that is typical of Berlin Mitte's simulations and image fetishism: "Schon spreizt Marc seine Schenkel, und alles wirkt irgendwie falsch. Er agiert, wie er es wohl aus Pornofilmen gelernt hat, was Daniel endgültig abturnt" (50–51). The next day, Daniel's partner Alexander, who in vain insists on a faithful relationship, must get up alone, looking at nothing but his own image in the mirror, which seems to highlight only his rather trivial fashion dependency: "Er grinst sein Spiegelbild an. Schwarzer, enger Kaschmirswearer von Jil Sander, ergonomische Jeans, Oldschool-Trainer von Adidas—schlicht und cool: *Hallihallo, ich bin's, der Mann, der den Spaß und die Schnittchen mitbringt*" (54; italics in original).

Schacht's depictions include references to homophobic stereotypes about queer lifestyle promoted by heterosexist ideologies: "Das Gerücht, dass schwule Singles ständig, dauernd und überall tollen Sex haben, ist offenbar in die Welt gesetzt worden, um die Heteros zu demoralisieren" (176). Yet immediately after this utterance Daniel reconfirms the promiscuity that he just declared a homophobic stereotype by going to a porn movie theatre where he meets a young student "mit dem er schon bei mehreren Gelegenheiten unverbindlichen Sex hatte" (176).

The comic effect of Schacht's novel derives largely from such disclosures of the narcissistic motivations of second-hand, highly mediated lifestyles. The characters of *Mittendrin*, whether gays or straight metrosexuals, indulge in lifestyle performances that seem to be autonomous acts of self-invention but turn out to have internalized the worst homosexual clichés produced or reinforced by the popular media industry—urban gays as self-indulgent, smart, trendy, consumerist, promiscuous, and superficial sophisticates. Schacht exposes these denizens of Berlin Mitte as gleeful collaborators and self-pitying victims of late capitalist consumer society in the age of global financial exchange and image replication, a world in which the recycling of media messages, fashion industry products, and other trendy things almost totally commodify their own users. Here, gender performances generally serve to solidify the existing ideology without envisioning any kind of lasting subversion or critique through the assertion of authenticity or subjective autonomy.

Sporadically, some characters do explore such possibly alternative subject positions, but only to reject them in the end. After landing a role in a popular TV soap opera, Felix muses about his "Außenwirkung" and the perception of his clothing style by other people: "Das Komische ist, dass ihm fast alles steht, aber egal, was er anzieht, er sieht zu echt aus" (190). Here, Felix invokes the

category of authenticity only to disavow its potentially subversive power: instead of undermining the hegemony of arbitrarily changing fashion trends, the criterion of "echt" is reduced to a mere effect or simulacrum of the very consumer fetishism it otherwise could have served to dislodge. As a result, Felix must realize that his opportunistic self-styling according to the standards of others has undermined any true sense of identity as people begin to equate him with the character he plays on television: "[M]anchmal hat er das Gefühl, als Felix gar nicht mehr richtig zu existieren" (190–91).

Schacht's sequel *Straßen der Sehnsucht* shows that the overhyped capital's economic downturn threatens to destroy its (gay or straight) denizens' euphoric pursuit of phantasmagoric lifestyles: "Hier macht eine Fernsehproduktion dicht, da wird ein Werbeetat gestrichen, dort ist eine New-Economy-Klitsche zahlungsunfähig. Und die Leute, die bei diesen Firmen bequeme, gut bezahlte Jobs hatten, fliehen in der Hoffnung, dass man dort auf sie wartet, zurück nach München, Köln oder Hamburg" (15–16). On the other hand, Felix's old *Kiez* Kreuzberg is being thoroughly gentrified: it is now a district where Turkish families go about their daily business, where his favorite bakery still sells the best *Mandelhörnchen*, but where an old factory building is being remodeled into an Islamic culture center (51). In this climate of multicultural consolidation, it seems that "*Die nuller Jahre werden als die Zeit der Lifestyle-Apokalypse in die Geschichte eingehen*" (103; italics in original). But the economic and political changes in the new capital have no lasting effect on the characters' pursuit of trendy consumerism, public media events, and drug-induced escapism. Like Felix, Vera Magun, an actress long past her glorious prime, epitomizes the almost total hegemony of capitalist commodification, which again evokes the potentially subversive category of authenticity only to displace and co-opt it for its own purposes. It appears that Vera "in ihrem Roberto-Cavalli-Neo-Hippie-Look ein bisschen zu authentisch rüberkommt, sie wirkt wie eine nette, etwas aufgedonnerte Hippie-Mutti, und das will sie bestimmt nicht" (114). Here again, authenticity is invoked not as an alternative to consumer capitalism and its fashion industry but as an objectionable surplus: With Felix and Vera, "too much" authenticity appears totally inauthentic, revealing itself as something that they invoke against their own intentions of being artificial; thus "authenticity" poses no danger whatsoever to the phantasmagorias of metropolitan culture but merely reconfirms their ubiquity.

Vera's brush with an authenticity which she cannot really embody is related to her former fame as a practitioner of camp: during the 1970s, as a result of the disco wave, the French and Italians adored her as a "Dance-Diva," while students of film and homosexuals began to appreciate "den ausgeprägten Camp-Charakter ihres frühen filmischen Œuvres" (122–23). According to Susan Sontag's classic definition, "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (275). Questioning traditional gender

roles through the celebration of the androgynous (Sontag 279) as well as high culture's moral seriousness and the avant-garde exploration of "extreme states of feeling," camp is the "consistently aesthetic experience of the world" (287), which provides theatricalized opportunities for "Dandyism in the age of mass culture" (289). As such, camp appeals especially to homosexuals because it "neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness" while appealing to "the homosexual's desire to remain youthful" (290–91). Inasmuch as Vera sports a surplus of "authentic" looks, albeit involuntarily, she has betrayed her former camp fame, since camp of course seeks to transcend the traditional dichotomy of artifice vs. authenticity altogether. Certainly, many of Schacht's characters want to adhere to campy lifestyles as dandies of post-industrial consumer capitalism and its mass-cultural icons, but they fail to live up to this sensibility because their extravagance is too deliberate, inconsistent, and dispassionate to be true camp; therefore, what we get from them is what Sontag would call "pseudo-Camp—what is merely decorative, safe, in a word, chic" (284). Thus, whereas Schacht's characters themselves cannot break out of their affiliations with the dominant order, even while dreaming of a more fulfilling and less alienated existence, the novels themselves reveal their critical potential through their satirical and ironic exposure of the very contradictions, illusions, and blind spots that the characters are only dimly aware of. Still, one cannot help notice that Schacht's narratives, obsessively amassing minute details that test even the most attentive reader's patience, obviously delight in the very lifestyles whose vanity and evanescence he exposes to ridicule. Thus, the overall effect of his novels is an ideological meta-ambiguity hovering between affirmation and subversion, which replicates the ambiguity typical of the fictional characters themselves.

IV

In Kröhnke's and Schacht's novels, Berlin appears sexually charged as the illusory and elusive site for the performance of homosexual lifestyles; identifying his cruising of young boys metonymically with his pursuit of the metropolis, Grundeis declares: "Die Stadt jagen, indem man die Knaben jagt! Die Knaben, indem man sich der Stadt ausliefert. Das ist grandios gelungen, sobald ich schließlich die Stadt als Knabenmasse mich jagen lasse" (122). Even more explicitly, in Peter Rehberg's *Fag Love*, the German capital is thoroughly sexualized, turning into a myth of queer promiscuity, hopes, and despair, a site whose identity arises from the interaction of past and present as well as from the city's difference from other gay metropolitan centers (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles). Born in 1966 in Hamburg, Rehberg lived in New York and Chicago for ten years and taught German literature and queer studies in Bonn. Stylistically, his novel is perhaps the most experimental example of recent

queer Berlin fiction, consisting of a montage of elliptical reflections, fragmentary dialogues, and sketchy observations that more poignantly than the other novels articulate the lifestyle mobility but also the existential disorientation of queer experience in the postmodern metropolis.

After his return from a three-year stay in New York, the protagonist Felix finds himself abandoned by his partner Anton; at that point, Felix wants to design a new plan for a new life by getting to know the "schwule Berlin." He muses about having picked up the American Kevin two nights before in the basement of the gay *Gate Sauna* around the corner from the Brandenburg Gate. The establishment is housed "in einem dieser allerhässlichsten Achtziger-Jahre-DDR-Häuser" that have miraculously survived the capital's ubiquitous rebuilding frenzy, while this area between Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, right above the former Hitler bunker, has now become "mit Sicherheit eine *prime location*" (53). Later, still mad over Anton's loss, he races out of his Neukölln apartment, feeling that in Berlin, "Die Häuser waren dieselben, gleichgültig bewegten sie sich nicht und überlebten alle Geschichten," although the city now looks different: "Zerhackte Balkone flogen links und rechts vorbei. Blick, blitzig" (60–61). Like Kröhnke's *Grundeis*, Felix tries to inscribe the tribulations of modern gay life into the ruins and fragments of metropolitan history, even if his image of Berlin and other cities seems flattened by his obsessively sexualized gaze, which commodifies gay sexuality according to the capitalist ideology of freely available object choices: "Der Mythos Berlin lebte davon, dass man überall immerzu billigen Sex haben konnte. [...] In New York war es genau umgekehrt. Der Mythos New York lebte davon, dass Sex zwar überall versprochen, dann aber verboten war" (66). In Chicago's Boystown district, public rainbow color icons everywhere signal the co-optation of gay activity by business enterprises and the real estate market (83). Similarly, in corporate and tourist-friendly New York, sexual promiscuity has been sanitized by the recent media industry, commercialization, and tourist industry: "Gentrification = Disneyfication, wie man am Times Square deutlich sehen konnte [...]. Wo Schwule nur noch als Musicalschwule toleriert wurden" (83–84).⁸

Off Times Square, however, the streets of New York still exert sexual attraction. The classical theorists of urban *flânerie* had always allusively described the act of enjoying the urban spectacle in quasi-erotic, even voyeuristic language, while usually excluding cruising and other explicitly sexual pursuits. In Rehberg's novel, even more than in the other narratives discussed here, this (homo-)erotic subtext surfaces directly in the dynamic city streets, turning them into an anthropomorphic target of queer desire; this attractiveness is, like in Kröhnke's and Schacht's novels, highly mediated, as Rehberg's characters live their homosexual lives vicariously through the identification with discourses of popular music, films, and television shows. As the protagonist Felix stresses: "Man konnte in New York zwar superschwul sein, eine

Beziehung konnte man dort aber nicht haben. Man hatte ja schon eine Beziehung mit New York. Hatte ich irgendwann von den Mädels aus *Sex and the City* gelernt" (35).

Felix even reads his relationship with Anton as if it were a queer parody of a mainstream Hollywood movie:

Vor drei Jahren, als wir uns kennen gelernt hatten, dachte ich, jetzt wird mein Leben wie ein Film. Ein Film, für den die Pet Shop Boys die Musik geschrieben hatten. Anton und ich: ein Leben wie in einem schwulen James-Bond-Film, mit Pet-Shop-Boys-Soundtrack dazu. (42–43)

Not surprisingly, the quasi-cinematic language of *flânerie* seems to fit seamlessly into this kind of self-fashioning. Even more radically than Kröhnke's Grundeis, Felix re-employs the traditional *flâneur's* vocabulary of visual desire in order to consume the city as a site where the feeling of belonging to the crowds and the willingness to take sexual risks seem at least as erotic as the physical act itself: "Promiskuität fand in New York am helllichten Tag, auf der Straße, statt [...]. Die Straßen von New York waren sexy. Egal, ob man jetzt wirklich Sex hatte oder nicht" (68). By contrast, Berlin's sexualization begins only after sunset:

In Berlin musste man warten, bis es dunkel wurde. Dann erst wurde die Stadt schön. Berlin bei Nacht. In Berlin nachts so leben wie sonst nur in New York. Mit Berlin eine Beziehung haben, wie es sonst nur mit New York geht. Eine Beziehung mit einer Stadt, nicht mit einem Mann. Schöne schwule Städte für Sex, nicht für Liebe. (68)

As a result of this shift of sexual attraction from person to city, Felix believes that Anton deserted him not only because he no longer found his partner attractive but because Felix over-extended his own erotic relationship with New York: "Weil ich drei Jahre lang lieber eine Beziehung mit New York hatte als mit Anton. *Weil ich ihn drei Jahre lang mit New York betrogen hatte*" (80; italics in original). Not surprisingly, Felix's displacement of his personal responsibility to that of sexualized city aesthetics is deceptive; as his friend Lisa reminds him, Anton probably did not leave Felix because of his lover's preference for New York but: "Weil er gemerkt hat, dass er auch ohne dich in Berlin glücklich sein konnte" (96–97). It is only when Felix must struggle with genuine fears about pain and mortality upon discovering his new American partner's HIV-positive status that he regrets his "falsche[s] Leben" (152) and confesses: "Ich wollte mit Jack zusammen sein, egal wo. In welcher Stadt man lebte, war in Wirklichkeit nicht so wichtig" (161).

According to queer theory, such a position might be considered an illusory remnant of the post-Enlightenment notion of the autonomous self, leading to bourgeois notions of romantic love as redemptive union. In the context of this novel, however, Felix's quest functions as a re-assertion of a type of love that questions the fetishization of city space because it is not displaced to the sexu-

alized body of the city but focuses on the (other) person as an individual. This type of love seems preferable to the overly theatrical and self-indulgent perversity of the leather cult performed by Felix's Chicago acquaintance Manfred, whose silly provocations seem simply out of synch with his middle age and have lost their critical potential for sexual liberation and anti-bourgeois shock: "Ich hatte mir abgewöhnt das Wort *subversiv* zu benutzen" (141; italics in original), Felix dryly comments. Similarly, his assertion: "Mein schwules Leben soll wie ein Film aussehen, hatte ich auch gedacht, als ich nach New York kam. Wir wollten aber ein schwules Leben im wirklichen Leben. Wir wollten wirklich schwul werden" (174), expresses a desire for authenticity outside the cinematic depiction of sentimental gay romance, exemplified by a film about a promiscuous *Ledermann* who rekindles his love for a young gay poet when he listens to his friend's cheesy lyrics (175-76). Rejecting this stereotypical film for its lack of similarity with the dreariness of a real leather bar frequented by HIV-positive men and other customers who look like porn stars (176), Felix, on tour with Jack through California, looks for a "real" gay life based on genuine emotional communication, loyalty, and unmediated simplicity, including even plans for a gay wedding (186). Ironically, however, this vision of "authentic" love depends itself on other representations of popular culture, for Felix and Jack discover that their new favorite song is "Running" by No Doubt, which includes a reference to the values of romantic commitment ("Be the one I need/ Be the one I trust most/ Don't stop inspiring me") they try to cultivate in their own relationship (181). As an effect of cultural media, rather than as something that exists outside it, the assertion of authenticity attached to the ideal of romantic love thus unsettles and challenges the hegemonic order of capitalist entertainment culture and sexual consumer ideology without transcending it; while absolutely "real" from the point of view of the protagonists and thus powerful in its own right, it remains partial, incomplete, and possibly unrealizable in the long run (because of Jack's HIV-positive status, his and Felix's future together remains uncertain).

Partial opposition to the sexualized city space also comes from Felix's best friend Sven, for whom Felix's relationship with Jack is the first of his friend's affairs of which he wholeheartedly approves: "Good catch" (145). Although gay and finally experiencing what his friends call his coming-out as a "Lederchwuler" (138), Sven defies the consumerist equation of homosexual promiscuity and postmodern urban lifestyle by preferring friendship to sex and apparently living without a boyfriend or one-night stands. Although clearly fascinated by the bizarre sexual antics of the leather fetishist Manfred, Sven enjoys his performances as an intriguing spectacle without wanting to participate in them, beyond simply trying on Manfred's outfits (140-44). For Sven, the homoerotic orientation mostly provides an ironic philosophy and a detached perspective on life, not necessarily the motivation for sexual prac-

tices; thus, he prefers to delight his surroundings with aphorisms like this one: "Wenn Liebe bedeutet, vom anderen verstanden zu werden, und genau das, ganz grundsätzlich, gar nicht geht, dient der Zustand des Verliebtseins dazu, darüber hinwegzutäuschen" (40). Writing his own annotations to Felix's pop music play lists, "[s]ortiert nach den Stationen einer schwulen Liebesgeschichte," Sven points out that the stories of Felix and his friends are nothing but footnotes to popular culture: "Weil ihre Geschichten in Wirklichkeit schon zuvor von der Popmusik erzählt worden sind" (189). Turning himself into a meta-narrative commentator, Sven reveals both the ideology of homosexual promiscuity and the quest for romantic love as effects of popular culture, as competing lifestyles similarly conditioned by postmodern media and the culture industry.

V

The Berlin novels discussed here suggest that contemporary queer culture vacillates ambivalently between subversion of and collaboration with late capitalist commodity society. The exact terms of this relationship between queerness and capitalism are highly contested in current theories (see Jagose 109 and 115). In a polemical footnote to the introduction to his essay collection *Fear of A Queer Planet*, Michael Warner asserts that one of the obstacles against Marxist sexual politics "is the close connection between consumer society culture and the most visible spaces of gay culture: bars, discos, advertising, fashion, brand-name identification, mass-cultural camp, 'promiscuity'" (xxx). Warner identifies these spaces (which, one can add, characterize the postmodern metropolis in general and, in a particularly hyperbolic form, the literary representations of post-reunification Berlin), as the "most visible mode" in which gay culture is typical of "precisely those features of advanced capitalism that many on the left are most eager to disavow." As he memorably concludes, "Post-Stonewall urban gay men reek of the commodity." Hence, he argues, queer theory must develop a "more dialectical view of capitalism than many people have imagination for" (xxx). Jeff Maskovsky has criticized Warner's conflation of modern gay culture with advanced capitalist consumer culture for neglecting the differentiating categories of race and ethnicity. As Maskovsky shows, gay working-class people of color are usually not members of the (white, middle-class) stratum of consumers but belong instead to the work force that sustains bars, discos and other such places as sites of gay conspicuous consumption in the first place (267-70). Kröhnke's novel for instance mentions the presence of Vietnamese, Polish, and Turkish immigrants as members of a working class that defies the white bourgeois consumer capitalism of Berlin (23; 96, 105). Rather at odds with queer theory's pluralistic notions of non-heteronormative sexualities, Warner here seems to

lapse into notions of a seemingly homogeneous gay culture, an assumption that Maskovsky deconstructs as being symptomatic of neoliberal ideology itself (269).

Indeed, the relation of (some versions of) gay identity or queer lifestyles and late consumer capitalism is a complex and controversial issue. In his critique of recent normalizing and conservative trends in German gay politics, Eike Stedefeldt proposes that in the current era of mass unemployment, the dramatic decrease in social benefit programs, and the devaluation of human relations, gay men have emerged as prototypes of a new capitalist entrepreneur and consumer society; they have largely abandoned the legacy of the gay liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s, which was born out of the socialist-inspired protests against petit-bourgeois complacency, militarism, and the capitalist authority state. While at that time, gay emancipation was understood as a subversive interrogation of any kind of traditional power structures and heterosexual morality codes, gay bourgeois emancipation now simply means advocating the right to copy these heterosexual norms and to assimilate to the dominant social conditions. Thorough critiques of capitalism and the patriarchal order seem to have disappeared entirely from today's gay lifestyle culture (Stedefeldt 204–10). Similarly, Elmar Kraushaar argues that for homosexuals today, no real social and political change has occurred, only an image correction: instead of criminalizing gay lifestyles, mainstream society treats them as an optimal test market for new commodities and new consumer attitudes. For this image change, Kraushaar blames certain types of homosexual opportunists themselves, who misuse their traditional mimicry ability to gain social recognition by opportunistically mixing self-pitying awareness of (historical) discrimination with a dash of gay self-pride, without violating the norms and boundaries set up by the heteronormal majority. Grateful for any kind of half-hearted civil rights concessions, their self-denials promote continued self-hatred and lack of tolerance among homosexuals themselves ("Vorwort").

In these accounts, which confirm many specifics of the fictional lifestyle performances especially in Schacht's and Rehberg's novels, the alliance of homosexuality and contemporary consumer society seems regrettable but inevitable. However, in a position paper submitted to *etuxx*, a queer internet discussion forum, Volker Woltersdorff, a.k.a. Lore Logorrhöe, has argued that the stereotypical image of contemporary gay lifestyle—mobile and flexible, hedonistic and consumerist, individualistic and stylistically sophisticated—is a politically motivated "phantasm" that prescribes the ways in which homosexuality must present itself in order to be acceptable by mainstream (heteronormative) society. The impression that there is a "natural" connection between neoliberal capitalism and gay/lesbian emancipation, s/he continues, is an ideology that needs to be deconstructed in order to prevent the historically contingent affiliation of homosexual identities or subcultures with

neoliberalism from being hypostatized as a necessary "Schicksalsgemeinschaft." Queer politics seeks to intervene critically in this false equation, especially since neoliberalism is not always free from homophobia; therefore, s/he concludes, queer discourse must advocate the (utopian) solution of abolishing capitalism ("Gay Lifestyle").⁹

As this debate suggests, the question whether the relation between queer culture and neoliberal consumer capitalism is necessary or contingent, emancipatory or oppressive, cannot be decided definitively or even theoretically. This relation is never fixed but constitutes a highly contradictory, multifaceted and constantly shifting process of cultural negotiation, and the novels discussed here provide imaginary scenarios for enacting and exemplifying exactly this constitutive ambiguity. Thus, most of these novels' lifestyle performances are clearly the products of a media-oriented lifestyle ideology driven by economic consumerism, sexual promiscuity, trendy aesthetics, and other such manifestations of a highly mobile, socially privileged status in an increasingly global environment of post-industrial capitalism and late post-modernity. But while the novels do suggest that such lifestyles thrive on, and actively promote, neoliberal capitalism and its culture industry, they also stress that this relation is by no means necessary and certainly not "natural." On the contrary, the novels show that neoliberal queer lifestyles are highly artificial spectacles of self-fashioning, constructed vicariously through the appropriation of prefabricated discourses, images, and codes. Precisely because of their highly constructed character, these lifestyle scenarios provoke significant alternatives ranging from the multiethnic moral solidarity of boys in *Grundeis* to the visions of romantic love, friendship, and intellectual reflection in Rehberg's novel. Questioning the dominant sexual ideologies and trendy materialism of capitalist consumer and media culture, some of these positions assert forms of "authenticity" against the prevailing order of cultural performances, even while ultimately remaining inscribed into the very regimes they seek to subvert.

At the beginning of *Fag Love*, the protagonist muses: "Sven sagte, es gibt zwei Möglichkeiten, im Leben glücklich zu werden: leben, so schnell wie geht, oder, solange man lebt, nicht leben, sondern über das Leben nachdenken. Ich habe mich fürs Erste entschieden, Sven fürs Zweite" (9). Such dual perspectives of collaborative participation and critical observation permeate in a variety of ways the entire corpus of texts discussed here. In other words, each novel's position vis-à-vis the dominant ideology vacillates between the seemingly oppositional terms of subversion and affirmation. None of these novels seeks to offer utopian visions of abandoning the hegemony of late capitalist consumer politics over gay subjects (or any other people), but none of them is totally victimized by its power or agrees simply to reproduce its deceptively alluring surface signifiers. Rather, all novels work from within the established ideology that they destabilize, without purporting to transcend its para-

meters. Significantly, this internal narrative ambiguity is also replicated by the broad spectrum of publishing venues, which range from a major "gay" press (MännerschwarmSkript Verlag) to a large mainstream house (Rowohlt), which suggests that gay-themed fiction as a genre by itself is neither subversive nor affirmative but has highly variable and largely unpredictable effects on a pluralistic mass market.

These complexities of ideological subject positions, narrative strategies, and mechanisms of literary production and distribution strongly suggest that queer criticism needs to redefine or expand its methodologies if it wants to take account of dramatic changes in gay writing itself. Traditionally, queer theory had to spell out those cryptic representations of same-sex desire that the official literary canon tried to conceal or marginalize, even though this covering up implied the ultimate recognition of irrepressible voices of queer difference (see Lorey and Plews "Defying Sights"). Analyzing the strategies used by canonical texts, appealing to readers who knew how to decode queer meanings couched in seemingly heterosexual language conventions, is an important task of queer theory that works especially well for texts from early classicism to high modernism, written in a climate of social discrimination and very restricted opportunities for openly gay self-articulation.¹⁰ But things have changed, largely as a result of the relative progress of gay liberation, a literary canon more open to representations of alternative sexualities, and a more tolerant or even gay-friendly mainstream audience.¹¹ Instead of immersing themselves in the highly allusive metaphoricity of classical representations of homoerotic desire suppressed by bourgeois heteronormality, readers can now buy popular novels sold by mainstream commercial publishers that openly celebrate (or trash) the lives of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. Therefore, queer literary theory has to move from the decoding of hidden same-sex subtexts to the analysis of the multiple ways in which contemporary fiction openly foregrounds queer lifestyles as conformist or subversive performances in the present world of multiculturalism, global affairs, and postindustrial consumer capitalism. Since the complexity of this situation requires the analytical tools provided by interdisciplinary cultural studies, queer theory must expand and cultivate its affiliations with other disciplines, such as urban studies, film criticism, media theory, ethnic discourses, and global studies. In so doing, queer theory may perhaps overcome its relatively marginal position in German studies even while preserving its radical politics or culturally subversive aesthetics.

Notes

¹ Parts of this essay were presented at the Twenty-Ninth Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1 October 2005. I thank the commentator, Robert Tobin, and the audience for their valuable comments. I am also grateful for the suggestions made by two anonymous *GQ* reviewers.

² No sustained discussion of queer themes can be found in Taberner, Finley, or Costabile-Heming et al.

³ For an in-depth analysis of the Berlin myth and its literary appropriations, see Langer. Even this otherwise insightful and comprehensive study neglects relevant queer issues.

⁴ Queer theory has been criticized for deconstructing the notion of a stable gay or lesbian identity as the necessary prerequisite of meaningful political action, and for being male-centered, blind to race differences, and anti-feminist (Jagose 101–26 and Sullivan 37–56). For a critical survey of gay authenticity discourses since the 1970s see Woltersdorff, *Coming Out* 55–60.

⁵ See Pausch for an excellent survey of queer theories in the context of German literary history.

⁶ For recent scholarship on queer formations of *flânerie* and related themes, see Chisholm and Turner.

⁷ On the relation between race, sexuality, and gender in queer theory see Sullivan 57–80.

⁸ For a Benjaminian reading of the transformation of Times Square, as depicted in Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, see Chisholm 1–9.

⁹ See also Woltersdorff, *Coming Out*, for a detailed discussion of the research on the relation between gay normalization, homosexual emancipation, and neoliberal capitalism, which leads, among other developments, to the proclamation of homosexuality as the idealized paradigm for total equality beyond economic factors and gender-specific hierarchies (Anthony Giddens), as well as to the image of the metrosexual (Mark Simpson), a (heterosexual) concept of masculinity guided by gay ideals of physical beauty and consumer habits (83–96).

¹⁰ See, for instance, the studies by Detering and Tobin with their important insights into the different methodologies in *Germanistik* and U.S. German Studies.

¹¹ Lorey and Plews presents many facets of the changing conditions of literary history and its canon formations, from the Middle Ages to contemporary pop culture.

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