

# Something a Bit Peculiar? Sex, the Germans and the History of Sexuality

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# Something a Bit Peculiar? Sex, the Germans and the History of Sexuality

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VICTORIA HARRIS

- Jennifer Evans, *Life Among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 336 pp. (hb), £60.00, ISBN: 0230202012.
- Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 250 pp. (pb), £19.99, ISBN: 0521727618.
- Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal: The Erotic Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 320 pp. (hb), £28, ISBN: 0226325210.
- Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 238 pp. (pb), £17.99, ISBN: 0521691435.
- Annette Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 374 pp. (hb), £66, ISBN: 052119539X.

Historians of sexuality are uniquely placed to act the *flâneur*. Loitering in an archive's seedier or more obscure files, they tour the marginal landscapes of the past. They can vicariously experience deviant activity while maintaining historical detachment, writing histories which titillate as much as educate.<sup>1</sup> Fun though this may be, there is the danger that producing such texts benefits only the writers themselves. Michel Foucault famously suggested that writing about the history of sexuality occurs purely for the 'speaker's benefit'.<sup>2</sup> Historians have thus sought to prove that 'marginal' histories are of true academic, not just voyeuristic, significance. This quest has been particularly fruitful for histories of sexuality – stories which are fascinating not least

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire described the *flâneur* as a person who walks the city in order to experience it, who at once partakes in its experiences and is separate from it: Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964). The original essay appeared in *Le Figaro* in 1863. For an example in his poetry: 'À une passante', *Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857). See also: Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1973) [Ger. orig., *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (1955)].

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, I: The Will to Knowledge* (London, 1976), 7.

because they are simultaneously marginal, or unspeakable, and utterly central to human life.

Historians of sexuality have helped to remove the history of the margins from academic marginalisation, creating a rich academic field that reveals the extent to which sexuality, the margins, and marginal sexualities all permeate the physical spaces of nations, cities and neighbourhoods.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as one of the authors under discussion here, Annette Timm notes, she, together with two of the other authors discussed, want to demonstrate how central sexuality is to our understanding of history. Dagmar Herzog's research, she suggests, demonstrates that 'historians of sexuality can no longer treat the history of sexuality as marginal to political events'. Elizabeth Heineman's work, Timm continues, 'reveals how debates about sexual practice and restrictions on sexual expression have been integral to the national identities of several modern German states' (p. 26).

But difficulties remain. In working to demonstrate marginality's significance, historians have often gone to extremes, focusing too narrowly or too superficially. Some works on sexuality, particularly sexual deviance, rescue obscure historical agents, but fail to demonstrate meaningful connections between the margins and wider society. Conversely, other works ignore the crucial subtleties that exist within processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the categories of 'good' and 'bad'. By claiming that the margins can represent all society, they reduce marginal actors to emblematic types lacking true individual agency. Scholars also have an uneasy relationship with the very categories they need to employ. Taking definitions of terms such as deviant, marginal and citizen at face value, without exploring the historical context of their use, carries the risk of the historian becoming entwined within a past society's own power structures, or our own contemporary taboos. However, attempts to resist these power structures, either by viewing deviants as rebels and writing teleological histories of their liberation over time, or by rejecting altogether the idea that the experiences of the marginalised can be distilled from the socially constructed labels and discourses which oppress them, cloud our understanding still further. Thus, in focusing either on sole actors or wide tropes, viewing marginal historical actors as rebels or victims, or eschewing actors' experiences altogether in favour of discourse, historians of sexuality marginalise the individuals and communities who create the very marginal spaces that they wish to study.<sup>4</sup>

What makes the books under discussion here particularly interesting is the multiple ways in which they succeed in refocusing our attention on *both* marginalised historical actors and the debates which surrounded them. In other words, all five books investigate the sexual histories of individuals and groups of historical actors, while at

<sup>3</sup> For a larger discussion on the theme of marginality in the history of sexuality, as well as the discipline's attempt to find academic acceptance, see: Victoria Harris, 'Sex on the Margins: New Directions in the Historiography of Sexuality and Gender', *The Historical Journal*, 53, 4 (2010), 1085–104.

<sup>4</sup> For more on these issues, see: Harris, 'Sex on the Margins'.

the same time contextualising these actors' sexual activities and identities within the societies which surrounded them.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Jennifer Evans' innovative book uses the 'divided city' of Berlin 'as a device to explore how the exigencies of danger and desire, pleasure and panic, were mapped out amidst the challenges of the early Cold War'. She focuses on the actors who moved between spaces like ruins, cellars, railway stations, streets, bars and workhouses. Additionally, and fascinatingly, Evans also makes the cityscape itself 'an actor in the analysis' in order 'to examine how various city sites 'became hosts to changing estimations of sexual danger, victimisation, endangerment and also excitement for those who inhabited them' (p. 5). This physical geography allows Evans to analyse the moral as well as the physical rebuilding of the city of Berlin, looking at the positive and negative sides of sexual expression – (re)awakening and control. In addition to exploring those marginal spaces which transcended permissible and taboo sexual expression, Evans also focuses on the ways in which Germans sought to cross the boundaries between experiential normality and abnormality – in other words, the ways in which they attempted to build 'for themselves a sense of normality in abnormal times' (p. 221).

Elizabeth's Heineman's captivating study takes on a different set of actors: Beate Rotermund, the creator and director of the famous German sex shop Beate Uhse, as well as her customers, competitors, employees and opponents. In doing so, Heineman sets out to narrate and analyse the 'history of sexual morals in the Federal Republic' of Germany, in addition to the developing global domination of Beate Uhse, and the image of Germany as a haven for soft porn and sexual free expression (p. 1). Thus, Heineman's book explores the constant renegotiation of the margins in Germany after the Second World War, as the sexual-moral order shifted and became (sometimes) more permissive. Compelling, too, is her discussion of the relationship between state interference in sexual norms and the complications of the state's regulation of the commerce that surrounds sex; the development of liberalism – both economic and social – in Germany was inextricably connected, in her view, to the increasing acceptance of formerly taboo individuals and practices.

Josie McLellan's piece moves us into a different post-war Germany – that of the German Democratic Republic. It focuses on actors who had similar (if not identical) sexual desires and practices, but who operated within a very different political and cultural context. At its heart the book focuses on sexual actors as they moved through youthful sexual discovery and education, relationships and marriage, as well as on how others dealt with gay and lesbian subcultures, erotica and nudity.

<sup>5</sup> As such they all look to concepts of 'everyday history' whether implicitly or explicitly, starting their analyses with low-level social histories. For more on the idea of social history, see: Alf Lüdtke, ed., 'Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are its Practitioners?', in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, tr. William Temple (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1995); Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt, eds, *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn: Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008); Geoff Eley, 'Labor History, Social History, "Alltagsgeschichte": Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday—a New Direction for German Social History?', *The Journal of Modern History*, 61, 2 (1989), 297–343.

The book offers two competing narratives of love and sex behind the Berlin wall. The first contends that the East German regime was highly traditional and controlling, interfering in citizens' private lives and making it impossible for them to renegotiate the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour. The second presents a far more romantic – even nostalgic – view of life and love in East Germany, in which former citizens remember a freedom and equality surrounding a sex that was free from consumerist pressures and controls. Here, formally marginal families and sexual actors suddenly gained acceptance – so too did the naked human body. McLellan finds that the real story seems to be in a marginal space somewhere between these two fictional extremes, and argues compellingly that the state and its citizens were caught up in an understanding of sexuality that was neither fully private nor public, neither permissive nor repressive. Ultimately, though, she concludes, East Germany's 'focus on monogamy and childbearing did not just affect attitudes towards' marginal groups including homosexuals, 'it also undermines the claim that East German sexual mores were more liberal and progressive than those in the West' (p. 142).

Annette Timm's book takes the *longue durée*, allowing us a fascinating glimpse into Germans' experiences of sexual and population policy during the first half of the twentieth century. She looks particularly at how local Berlin authorities created and applied dubious policies that were intended to prevent population decline, but also to improve the so-called 'genetic stock' of future generations. Timm persuasively contends that policies developed to promote higher birth rates also had a secondary effect of creating social belonging, despite compromising personal autonomy in the process. Conversely, however, those deemed undesirable for the future of the state for various reasons – including as a result of their venereal disease status, mental or physical health, and/or criminal history – were increasingly marginalised both by those on the left and those on the right of the political spectrum. Again, citizens found that the margins of sexual appropriateness were constantly shifting, and they employed a variety of strategies to try to maintain some control. In the end, it was technology, not regime type which dictated a liberalising change in sexual norms, by separating sex from reproduction.

Finally, Dagmar Herzog's outstanding work lengthens the narrative still further – and also wider – exploring the history of sexuality across Europe in the twentieth century. She challenges a dominant narrative of incremental improvement with regard to sexual permissiveness, arguing instead that the margins of acceptable and non-acceptable sexual behaviour and expression were highly complicated and ambivalent, and, what is more, were subject to cyclical, rather than linear, changes. In other words, 'to tell only a narrative of gradual progress would be to misunderstand how profoundly complicated the sexual politics of the twentieth century in Europe actually were' (p. 1). Despite the wide scope of her survey, Herzog manages to focus throughout on the idea of and quest for individuality, while at the same time demonstrating the power of collective social and cultural change.

All five books, either implicitly or explicitly, define the margins as political, economic, and social spaces. Pleasingly, all five also investigate individuals on both the 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' side of these margins. In other words, their histories

of sexuality treat the margins as spaces which link, as well as divide, deviance and normality. This approach reveals that belonging was fluid and often temporary. One could be defined one moment as normal, and thus included, the next as abnormal and excluded. These chosen or imposed identities could – and did – change rapidly. Furthermore, these books all consider how and why these labels were constructed, while not forgetting that historical actors experienced them as real, fixed identities. These analyses reveal subtle contradictions in societies' moral codes and taboos; they demonstrate that states and citizens were simultaneously powerful and impotent to control processes of belonging and exclusion, and that societies, regardless of governmental structure, were concomitantly permissive and repressive. Uniformly, these books seek to make rigorously academic work accessible, situating themselves within wider contemporary conversations about citizenship, belonging, and the negotiation of control and power.

Uniformly, too, these books focus on one particular (and, perhaps, peculiar) nation – Germany. Doing so complicates, and perhaps compromises, their discussions of the concepts of participation and exclusion, and the ramifications for sex, sexual identity and the history of sexuality. On some levels this is a totally unfair charge. The books under discussion here all discuss Germany because they were grouped together by an editor to make a 'logical' collection for a reviewer. Given that I, the reviewer, work primarily on both the history of Germany and the history of sexuality/marginality, questioning this national focus is all the more unfair. And, finally, of course, Herzog's book is, ostensibly (and, indeed, explicitly) a history of sexuality in Europe, not Germany.

However, Herzog's is a European history which is preoccupied with Germany. While a contemporary European history which did not take Germany as one of, if not, the primary provocateur would look rather odd indeed, it does not necessarily follow that this holds true for histories which suggest that at their 'center(s)' is 'not political organisation or economic change, but rather sex'.<sup>6</sup> Germany's urban geography certainly helps with some of the concepts under discussion. For example, and to return to the idea of the *flâneur*, Evans writes that in post-war Berlin 'in their meanderings and reflection . . . *flâneurs* helped lay a foundation for new understandings of life under occupation and division' (p. 152). Thus, here, the destroyed city is crucial for understanding the renegotiation of sexual norms and behaviours. But is it necessarily the case that although 'the story takes place in West Germany, it has worldwide significance', as Heineman suggests for her book, given that, although when asked about sexuality 'post-war Germans told a distinctly German story', but 'when they lived sexuality, they differed little from other Westerners' (pp. xi, 9).

Thus, it remains to be seen what it means to base a history of sexuality within Germany – or for that matter within any other specific national context. In other words, while a 'case study' of Germany may elucidate wider aspects of sexuality's history, population policy, communist approaches to sex, post-war moral reconstruction and the rise of sexual consumerism, it does not necessarily follow that

<sup>6</sup> Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*, 1.

studies of these aspects of the history of sexuality elucidate something specifically about Germany. In reading these books, I was left asking the question of whether sexuality – or sex – can have a national history. And, similarly, whether nations can have a sexuality.

Certainly, Germany has a particularly interesting history of sexual practice, policy and identity creation. As Timm and Heineman deftly illustrate, Germany was a pioneer in sexual research, the development of contraception, and, most problematically legislation concerning who was able to fornicate – and reproduce – with whom. And it is a country that still elicits global fascination. Only recently an article in *The Guardian* highlighted the opening of an intergenerational LGBT housing project in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> It is in fact ‘Europe’s first multi-generational house for lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual residents’. This may not surprise those aware of Germany’s openness towards sex. But the article continues by noting that the appeal of the housing project for many of the residents is that they can live openly without having to ‘shy away from their sexuality’. In the land of pornography and Beate Uhse sex shops, sex between men was criminalised until 1994.

Few examples illustrate so neatly the deep ambiguity in the development of (Germany’s) sexual morals over the contemporary period. On the one hand, governments have long been able to interfere in sexual activity, companies have long been able to sell devices to heighten sexual pleasure and reduce the chances of conception, and certain citizens have long been able to parade their sexuality – or even to sell their sexual services – legally. On the other, the expression of desire or love between two male individuals has been outlawed. Perhaps worse, the idea that two women could actively engage in sexual activity seems to have remained so bizarre in the minds of lawmakers and moralists that practically no legislation dealt with it at all. Thus, Evans notes that ‘to be effective and lasting, the generation of new knowledge about sex relied on mechanisms of entitlement as well as coercion, power and pleasure, surveillance and seduction, in an uneven process of fits and starts’ (p. 4). None of this is a specifically German story. There are, of course, specific German cases, however. McLellan, for example, counters the idea of an innocent sexuality free from consumerist pressures by detailing the Stasi’s use of prostitutes and sex to manipulate those under surveillance, something that ‘given the regime’s criticism of the West, and its loudly trumpeted commitment to female equality . . . was hypocrisy of the highest order’ (p. 104). But this uncomfortable, even perverse, hypocrisy could probably be found anywhere.

In the western world at least, sex and sexuality have had many, largely similar, manifestations; all seem to sit soundly on what has been a line between permissible and prohibited. Or, at least, it is these marginal, and debated, activities which have appealed most to historians. Evans spends a considerable chunk of her book discussing the problematic, and criminalised, interactions between men, and men and boys in post-war Berlin. Herzog focuses attention on prostitution, sterilisation, male violence

<sup>7</sup> ‘LGBT housing project unites generations out in Berlin. Gay pensioners persecuted by Nazis live alongside young workers in pioneering community’, *The Guardian*, 28 Oct. 2012.



and disease – in its most deadly incarnation, AIDS. Timm too explores disease, and the state's desire to control and shape public health. Most horrifying is her discussion of interference with the sex lives of people with physical and mental illness. While McLellan explores many of the positive aspects of intimacy in the GDR, her discussion is constantly inflected by issues of surveillance, persecution, and denial of love to problematic relationships, including those between Germans and foreigners. Even Heineman, whose book ostensibly focuses on pleasure, and the heightening of sexual joy, is, throughout, primarily interested in those who tried to deny that pleasure ('conservatives') and the dark side of sexual pleasure in the rise of the porn industry.

It is true that it is the very ambiguity of sexual activity and policy that makes it so compelling as a subject of study. The simultaneous existence of permissiveness and repression is fascinating. But there is remarkably little about love or happiness in these books. Herzog's comment that sex became 'burdened with enormous significance' during the contemporary period is telling. 'Sex does not always make people happy,' she writes (p. 2). In reading about the history of sexuality in these books, one wonders whether sex *ever* makes people happy. In the GDR, at least, 'the intertwining of the public and the private under state socialism' seemingly left very little 'space for love', despite the nostalgic memories of Ossi after the fall of the wall, and people's own sense of personal autonomy.<sup>8</sup> In the immediate post-war period, 'sexual liaisons . . . fuelled a renewed sense of desperation and malaise', says Evans (p. 67). For Heineman, consumerism stifled a 'conjugal harmony' that had already been shaken by the war, its trauma and even the reality of injuries that affected sexual performance (p. 159). Even in the Halcyon days of the Weimar Republic, couples' attempts to find happiness were constrained by eugenic social welfare policies and the desire to control citizens' ability to marry depending on their venereal disease status.<sup>9</sup>

There are two potential conclusions we can draw from these books which, although they compellingly reveal that sexual liberation could also be controlling, and that repressive states could also be highly sexualised and permissive, tend to focus more on prohibition than pleasure. These two conclusions lead neatly back to the question of the value of writing national histories of sexuality. The first is that Germany's history of sex and sexuality is particularly, or even uniquely, depressing. The second is that Germany's national history presents itself as an obvious case study because of the trend for negativity within histories of sexuality more generally. In other words, because the wider history of sexuality is interpreted as depressing, it is appealing to examine this narrative within the context of a country with a depressing history. The focus of these books on Germany, and the fact that they find much negative within Germany's contemporary history of sexuality, might lead one to conclude that the first is indeed the case. It is fair to say that there were particularly negative aspects of Germany's sexual history. How unique these were, is, however, up for debate. Beyond this, given that Herzog's wider European sexual

<sup>8</sup> McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 211.

<sup>9</sup> Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, esp. 80–117.

history is in filled with similar ambivalences, and given the fact that more general discussions of contemporary sexuality have tended to focus on issues of power, denial and marginality, it is worth investigating the second conclusion in more detail.

And with that, it is time to face the elephant in the room – the Third Reich. While I managed to get more than halfway through this review essay without mentioning the government which ruled Germany for twelve short years of its contemporary history, none of the authors got past page four (indeed three of the five of them mentioned Nazism on the first page of their books). This is hardly surprising. But as historians of Germany and as historians of sexuality we have to think about whether it is right – or helpful. Obviously any book which explored Germany's or Europe's twentieth-century history and did not attend to the Third Reich would be rightly and soundly criticised. But we have to consider the weight we give this moment in time, how it casts into shadow other compelling twentieth-century events and debates, and whether a continued national focus makes it impossible for us to move beyond it. Hitler's regime still has a firm grasp on popular consciousness, both within and outside Germany. This, too, is hardly surprising. But as historians and public intellectuals we, again, have to question whether it is right, and whether continued scholarly fixations prevent the popular consciousness from moving on, or at least reassessing. The same *Guardian* article I mentioned above continues its comments about residents' embrace of their new home environment after years of discrimination, by quoting a representative of the housing project as follows: 'Many of our older residents spent their youth and often a large amount of their adult life in gay-hostile environments. Several even experienced persecution under the Nazis.'<sup>10</sup> While this is still shocking, and rightly so, what the article neglects to mention is that the paragraph of the penal code which enabled the Nazis to persecute gay men between 1933 and 1945 was the same one that remained (largely) in place until 1994. Indeed, as Evans points out, there were more arrests for homosexuality during the immediate post-1945 period than there were during the Third Reich (p. 87). What does *that* mean?

Dagmar Herzog writes in her history of sexuality in Europe that 'no regime before or since' Nazism 'did so much to intervene violently in the bodies and intimate relationships of its citizens' (p. 66). This may be true, but does that necessarily mean that the twelve years of Nazism had more impact on sexuality in the twentieth century than anything else during the century's other eighty-eight years? All of it? Everywhere? Even within Germany, for heterosexual couples the Third Reich probably had less impact than the appearance of the birth control pill on the West German market in 1961. Moreover, for some people on the margins of society, such as prostitutes, despite changes in policy directed towards them, surprisingly little changed in their recorded daily experiences under Nazism.<sup>11</sup> Far more important

<sup>10</sup> 'LGBT housing project unites generations', *The Guardian*, 28 Oct. 2012.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this see: Victoria Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich: Prostitutes in German Society, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

were the effects of the Great Depression and resulting welfare changes in 1930, the start of war in 1939, and the intensification of bombing towards the end of that war.

More problematically, the Third Reich makes it easier to ignore the often repressive intervention of liberal democracies in citizen's sexual lives and practices. I am not trying to suggest that the authors themselves are not saying this in their texts – the continuity across both 1933 and 1945 is made very explicit. Both McLellan and Timm, for example, demonstrate that repression continued across the 1945 divide, and Timm shows convincingly how much repression there was to be found amongst progressives during the Weimar Republic. Conversely, it is clear that the Nazis' permissiveness towards some aspects of heterosexual sexuality primed Germans for the emergence of Beate Uhse in the post-war period. Heineman even states explicitly that Germans had more diverse memories of the period pre-1945 than simply Nazism (p. 9). However, the Third Reich still acts as a pivot point, around which liberality and conservatism can move. In other words, the Nazi period gives historians something absolute that can be used to demonstrate stark contrasts as well as shocking continuities. As Evans comments in her conclusion (p. 221): 'Daily life in Cold War Berlin was not only marked by worsening political conditions, but the city lived under the spectre of Nazi brutality and the lingering presence of what had come before.' Historians too live under this spectre.

This constrains what sorts of stories about sexuality we can tell. It makes it particularly difficult to fully embrace histories of East Germany, so dominant is the story of the west's post-Nazi liberalisation and sexual awakening. McLellan's story is eye-opening, and Evans' focus on movement between the two sectors revealing, but they are exceptions to the norm. Herzog's book talks more about West Germany until the collapse of communism. So too, do Timm's and Heineman's. While there is no doubting the logic of their geographical and political scope, such a focus limits our understanding of the Germanies' history and histories. McLellan, for example, is reluctant to deny sexual change in the East, because of the risk of 'drawing a false dichotomy between East and West' (p. 9). Even without focusing on it, the presence of the West is constant in her analysis. But, the concomitant presence and silence of the West in stories which try to focus on the East, is also unfortunate. For example, when McLellan discusses statistical manipulation within East Germany, it would have been interesting to have a fuller comparison with the West, which surely would have made for uncomfortable reading, and would have contextualised the specificity of government control in the East.

The focus on the Third Reich, its rise, and its aftermath also leads to an almost exclusive focus on the history of Berlin within histories of Germany. But Berlin was, and is, not Germany. One of the most compelling aspects of Germany's post-unification history is the continuation of local and regional control, even under the Third Reich. Berlin is undeniably important – as the capital, as the seat of Hitler's government, as the setting for the most famous pieces of Nazi propaganda, and as the prime example of Germany's destruction and post-war division. But, while, for example, officials in Berlin cracked down on prostitutes' activities after 1933, as Timm discusses, officials in Leipzig and Hamburg, for example, acted very differently. Evans'

picture of post-war Berlin is compelling – but what did life look like in similarly destroyed Dresden or Hamburg, or cities where the physical damage may have been less but the emotional damage just the same?

The Third Reich's function as a pivot point also distracts us from properly problematising other moments of supposed change, or revolution, both within and outside Germany. I was struck by how forcefully these books questioned the degree to which the 1960s presented a 'sexual revolution'. Evans refers to the 1960s as having had a 'so-called' revolution (p. 5). McLellan assesses the differences between East and West German developments in sexuality and sexual openness and concludes that while the East may have only had a sexual 'evolution' it was, in some ways, more meaningfully progressive than the changes which took place in the West. This is fascinating and, given there is still relatively little robust historiography on the revolutions of the late 1960s, or 1968 more specifically, these authors' challenge to this accepted transformational moment deserves more scholarly attention, without the long shadow of 1945 and its aftermath getting in the way. The focus on the initial cold war period within these books, and the discussion of how significant changes during this time were, are a huge step in the right direction, but it would be interesting to establish the 1960s as another pivot point, and to explore what that does for our understanding of twentieth-century sexual mores.

This is important for two further reasons. The first is because it will allow us to more fully explore the role of capitalism, and particularly economic success and crisis, in the development of sexual practices over the twentieth century. Heineman notes (on p. 85) that the 'sex wave' of the 1960s 'followed the other waves of consumption that had marked the economic miracle . . . This transition from a consumer regime of subsistence to one of plenty helps to explain the next generation's difficulty in understanding their parents' sexual worlds.' Indeed, Heineman argues that the economic miracle, which allowed Germans to focus on matters beyond their daily bread, had a 'greater impact than the sexual revolution of the late 1960s. Rhetoric linking sexual and political liberation attracted much media attention but directly touched only a small part of the population (p. 14).

Finally, 1968, and the wider sexual revolution is important to revisit because of how it has informed academic feminism's development, and the resulting interests of historians of gender and sexuality. Herzog notes in her critique of the period that, although women succeeded in obtaining greater autonomy over their sexual activities and their reproductive choices, they were still forced to operate within a resolutely patriarchal world. To cite a particularly chilling observation from Herzog's text (p. 16), one feminist noted: 'There was lots of promiscuity . . . but we were *all* unhappy.' This female discontent may, as Heineman suggests, be linked to the increasing consumerisation of sexual activity. But, as McLellan points out, this period saw the rise of the female erotic nude in the distinctly un-capitalist East Germany as well.

While it may relate to the effects of capitalism, changes in men and women's views towards sexuality and sexual expression, are also related to developments in feminism. Specifically, the move of feminists, academic and popular alike, from pro-sex to

anti-sex positions over the course of the late 1960s and 1970s, has strongly informed both the history of sexuality and its writing. This is particularly important to note here, given that, despite their varied topics, and their attempts to engage with both genders throughout their pages, all five of these books were written by women – women, who, I would imagine, identify with feminists. Given that the tendency of academic feminists has been to view some popular sexual activity, including pornography and prostitution, as fundamentally oppressive to women, we must reflect more thoroughly, I think, on whether those feelings inflect our treatment of the study of sexuality's history. Heineman's book takes a surprisingly angry turn when chronicling the rise of pornography in West Germany; her concluding paragraph asks explicitly about the 'connection' between 'pornography' and 'sexual activity' (p. 177). Given the richness of her book's content, reducing the end of the twentieth-century's sexual history to a discussion of the harm of pornography seems problematic. Viewing it as specifically compromising for women's ability to experience emancipated sexuality is equally so – what space does this, after all, leave for gay viewers of pornography or women who may enjoy porn (and who are now even further marginalised). Is it our current feminist perspective that leaves us seeking negative moments in the history of sexuality? Is that why Germany appeals? And, if so, is it Germany which is a bit peculiar, or us?