Chapter 5

Pink Prisons, Rosy Futures? The Prison Politics of the Pink Triangle

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In 2010, a wave of sensationalist newspaper articles reported on six Swiss and one German correctional facilities designating pink prison cells for aggressive inmates (Riegg 2007, Anonymous 2010a, Eichenberger 2010, Hettinger 2010, Tissot 2010). The hue is called “cool down pink,” created by Daniela Späth, owner of the color consulting company Color Motion. In a radio interview, Späth claimed there is evidence that the blood pressure of those exposed to the color goes down significantly (Anonymous 2010b). The news reports describe how inmates who are put in the pink cells are bewildered at first: “Me, in here? I’m not a girl, nor am I gay” (Ud 2010: n.p.). What these articles do not mention, however, is who ends up populating these pink prison cells and whether their occupants might have good reason to be angry. In Switzerland, 72 percent of prison inmates are non-Swiss citizens; most are deported after completing their sentences (Swiss Federal Statistical Office 2011).

The pink prison trend purportedly started in the United States in the 1970s when psychologist Alexander Schauff conducted experiments with prison inmates to measure the effect of the color pink on human behavior. In these experiments he demonstrated how the use of bright pink reduced muscular strength and aggression and increased relaxation (Schauff 1979: 218–21, 1985). To the distress of many inmates, the color has made its way into correctional facilities in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Texas, Tennessee, South Carolina, Montana, Georgia, and Ohio since.

1 Späth (n.d.) is now marketing her “cool down pink” to prisons, psychiatric institutions, and schools. She also advises parents to paint the rooms of newborns in her shade of pink. According to her, the color has a calming effect on both girls and boys.

2 According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office this percentage has been stable since 2004. It goes to show that not just the infamous detention centers but “regular” prisons buttress what is commonly referred to as “Fortress Europe” as well (see Gordon 2008).
It is as much the way that journalists report about pink prisons as a seemingly slight, innocuous piece of news—what harm can a little pink do after all—as the investment in producing “scientific proof” about the calming and weakening effect of pink that prompts me to trace pink’s gendered and sexualized prison history in this chapter. I first look at how the color pink is used in prisons in both the US and Central Europe. I then discuss how the color pink became associated with both femininity and homosexuality in West Germany and North America, focusing on the lesbian/gay liberation movements’ affective investments in tracing their history back to the pink triangle prisoners in the Third Reich. I critically interrogate the narratives and counter-narratives about a shared past as Nazi victims as well as analogies between gay and lesbian oppression and prison oppression formulated by the 1970s lesbian/gay liberation movement. Moving within the confines of giving oneself a history and a particular history at that, what did this analogy enable and where were its limits? This leads me to the knowledge about gender and sexuality produced in US prisons. It allows me to interrogate how the sexual and gender practices in prisons affect the lesbian/gay liberation movement and vice versa. On a more abstract level, I am interested in how both the lesbian/gay liberation movement’s prison activism as well as its appropriation of the pink triangle shed light onto the temporal and affective aspects of movement (Gould 2009: 3). In fact, recent scholarship on queer temporality and affect (for example Goldberg and Menon 2005, Halberstam 2005, Freeman 2007, Rohy 2010) offers insights for understanding the liberation movement’s investment in a teleological historical project. In the last section, I return to historical and current color theories’ preoccupation with gender, sexuality, and race.

The “Pinkification” of Prison: Therapeutic and Punitive Discourses

One way of thinking about the use of pink in prison is as an efficient, low threshold therapeutic instrument to decrease aggression in prisoners. This at least is how color specialists like Daniela Späth like to frame it (Anonymous 2010c). One is hard pressed to believe her claims, however. For one thing, there is no research (yet) that supports pink’s soothing abilities. In fact, inmates seem less than thrilled to be sent to a pink cell. Moreover, the therapeutic use

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3 A separate portion of the project this chapter stems from intends to engage the racial history of the prison in its full complexity, and what it means that pink is forced onto a largely African American prison population.

4 Späth recently conducted an experiment on Swiss National Television where she measured the heart rate and pulse of shoppers at a Swiss shopping mall before and after they spent one to five minutes in a cabin painted in “cool down pink”

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of pink is inconsistent with how Arizona's Maricopa County sheriff Joe Arpaio and some of his colleagues use the color. They believe in pink's punitive quality.

In 1989, a jail in Polk County in central Florida caught the attention of the media after its practice of "pink-tagging" homosexual prisoners was challenged by the American Civil Liberties Union (AP 1989). Polk County had been identifying gay men and women with pink bracelets as well as segregating them from the general prison population for 15 years, supposedly to protect them from that population.

In South Carolina an inmate sued the Evans Correctional Institution in Marlboro County for its sexualized use of pink in prison. It appears that when an inmate is caught masturbating or exposing himself to a correctional officer in a South Carolina prison, his disciplinary charge is solitary confinement, and he is made to wear a pink jumpsuit for about three months. "The color pink in an all-male environment no doubt causes derision and verbal and physical attacks on a person's manhood" (Prison Talk 2008), the inmate wrote in his lawsuit. For the corrections director, however, the pink jumpsuit serves yet another purpose: It is supposed to warn and protect female correctional officers from "perverts" (Hicks 2007: n.p.). The US program of Human Rights Watch objects the practice of color coding "to identify inmates according to the rules they have broken—particularly where sexual conduct is involved" (Hicks 2007: n.p.). They claim it leaves inmates vulnerable to (sexual) violence by others.

Whereas in Florida and South Carolina pink is used in prisons to single out individual prisoners as "perverts," sheriffs in Ohio, Texas, or Arizona are more interested in how pink affects the prison population as a whole. Georgia's Ben Hill County sheriff believes in the discomfort the color produces in men. His rationale for using pink in jail is similar to pink's best known proponent, sheriff Joe Arpaio. In true chattel logic, Arpaio had an entire prison population parade in pink underwear—for the general public to see. His motivation for demeaning the inmates is just that: he believes in shaming inmates to the extent that they won't offend again. Arpaio's goal is to keep prisons from overcrowding (Anonymous 2008). Why the color pink is so shameful, he does not (need) to say.

It would be easy to dismiss the pink prison trend as just one of the many excesses of the highly dysfunctional prison industrial complex in the United States. In light of European prisons following suit, this is too narrow a view. One might also be tempted to regard the European use of pink in prisons as therapeutic, and the American use as merely punitive. Listening to the ever growing praise of the color's calming effect by European color marketers, prison staff, and journalists, this distinction seems too easy.

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5 Female inmates at Ben Hill County Jail are surrounded by a different color: lime green. Only men are believed to feel uncomfortable around the color pink.
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More often than not, testimonies of pink’s pacifying ability are coupled with an explicit desire to denigrate prison inmates. In fact, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish between therapeutic and punitive discourses on pink. Moreover, both discourses rely on the color’s decidedly feminine and/or homosexual connotation. Depending on how the color is implemented, however, the intended effect differs: pink is either used to feminize, sexualize, and thus expose selected “perverts” to the rest of the prison population or to symbolically put all prisoners in their place, both in terms of their sexuality and their gender: to be likened to girls and gay men is supposed to incite inmates to “go straight rather than come back” (Montague 2009: n.p.).

The Pink in the Pink Triangle: From Oppression to Liberation

One way of better understanding the recent trend of prisons painted in a supposedly soothing and/or humiliating shade of pink is to find out more about how pink became associated with femininity and (homo)sexuality. In the 1970s, the Euro-American lesbian/gay liberation movement appropriated the color pink and the pink triangle more specifically. In the Third Reich, many German men suspected of homosexuality were criminalized, imprisoned in concentration camps, and stigmatized by a pink triangle on their jacket. About 7,000 of the pink triangle prisoners died.

In what is to follow, I won’t focus on the fate of gay men during National Socialism (see Micheler 2002) but on how the 1970s lesbian/gay liberation movement constructed and framed the Nazi past. Thus I am interested in the Nazi Era mediated through the appropriation of the pink triangle in the 1970s, a time when no one seemed to wonder why the Nazis had chosen the color pink to stigmatize gay men. It must have seemed self-evident that the stereotype of the “effeminate homosexual” let the Nazis choose this particular color.

While in the 1970s pink was generally considered a feminine color in both the US and West Germany, this was not the case in the early 1930s. US textile historian Jo Paololetti shows that debates about whether pink was more suitable for girls or for boys took place as early as the 1910s but that there was no consensus reached on this question until the 1940s (Paololetti 1987, 1997). In fact, in 1918, readers of the Lady’s Home Journal generally agreed that pink was more suitable for boys because it was a “more decided and stronger” color than light blue (Paololetti 1987: 143). In 1927, leading US retailers still recommended dressing boys in pink (Magliatti 2011). It is only in the late 1930s that pink was perceived a girl’s color: “In 1939, Parents magazine polled customers in a New York department store and found that, while most preferred pink for
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girls, about one-fifth favored blue for girls and pink for boys” (Paoletti n.d.: n.p.).

It remains thus unclear as to why the Nazis chose pink to stigmatize men suspected of homosexuality (Jellonke 1990: 11, Till 2000: 73), especially since the color most prominently used in the German gay subcultures of the 1920s and 1930s was not pink but lilac (for example Lila Nacht 1932). In fact, the homosexual connotation of pink most likely did not become dominant until the gay and lesbian movement’s appropriation in the 1970s.

Inspired by Rosa von Praunheim’s controversial film Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt [It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives] (1971), the Frankfurt group Rote Zelle Schwul (RotzSchwul) formed with the goal to mobilize and politicize gays and lesbians in West Germany. In March 1972, the members of RotzSchwul decided on wearing and handing out pink triangle pins at a public demonstration. Certain group members were skeptical as to whether their choice of symbol—a pink triangle against a white background—would be commonly understood and recognized (Schickstedt 1972). A debate ensued: Some feared that the pink triangle pin would be misread as a hedonistic fashion statement, which is why the group decided to add the word “schwul” [gay], at the time considered a political statement as opposed to “homosexual” (Schwinn 1972). Other local groups, most notably the Homosexuellen Aktion Westberlin (HAW), adopted the symbol shortly thereafter (Daten 1971–1976). For the HAW the pink triangle emblematized the lesbian/gay movement, which it situated firmly within the socialist left. The pink triangle was to remind both lesbian/gay subculture and the public at large that for homosexuals oppression has not stopped with the end of WW II (Rosa Winkel 1975: 2). The 1972 publication of Heinz Heger’s The Men with the Pink Triangle and the way it described the torture and murders of gay men by the Nazis and other prisoners in concentration camps, deeply affected many activists in the movement. Some admitted that it was the first time that they felt genuinely touched by historical events, that they completely identified with the gay men in the camps, and physically felt their pain (Rosa Winkel 1975: 29).

The Nazi “origins” of the pink triangle did not feature in everyone’s story of why they believed in the effectiveness of wearing the pink triangle. Almut for example carried the symbol because of the gender ambiguity it conveyed. S/he explained that by wearing the symbol s/he personifies the image of the homosexual, who’s a bit of both: “[F]eminine—yet with a penis,” which would

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6 My preliminary research on pink/blue, girl/boy birth announcements in Central Europe indicates that the blue/pink gender color coding seems to hold later than in the US and that these are substantive class, religious, and regional differences (see also Biggs 1956 and Heller 1999).
force others to take a closer look at their own gender and sexual identification (Kosa Winkl 1975: 30). A number of activists claimed that they wore the pink triangle because of their solidarity with “queens” and other effeminate gay men who tended to be most exposed to violence within and outside of the lesbian/gay community. Mostly though, the symbol was worn for its potential to reach others intellectually and affectively, promoting an image of gays as innocent and sexual victims of the Holocaust.

In the US context, it was around 1973 that the pink triangle was first used to foster gay identity, visibility, and political mobilization.7 As one of the first, the San Francisco Journal Gay Sunshine called to display the pink triangle as a sign of remembrance in June of 1973 (Jensen 2002: 325). Subsequently, the US lesbian/gay community frequently referenced the Holocaust, and drew overt comparisons between the situations of gays and Jews which sometimes even ended in mass games of “competitive victimhood” (Jensen 2002: 345, uncritically Steakley 1975 and Plant 1987).8

A statement by activist John Mehring in a November 1979 issue of the Gay Community News sums up what was at stake in adopting the pink triangle as a symbol of gay and lesbian identity. “If we are refused acknowledgement of our darkest hour, how can we possibly feel safe and secure in our contemporary, emerging-into-sunshine exhilaration?” (qtd. in Jensen 2002: 338). The enlightenment imagery of this progressivist scenario speaks for itself: The oppressive past serves as the backdrop against which “our coming out into the light” can be celebrated. “Liberation” is thus expressed in temporal terms, and in distinct color shades at that: the “darkness” of the remote Nazi era is used as a contrast to the current movement’s sunshine and joy. The 1970s lesbian/gay activists saw themselves as the rightful “heirs to the homosexuals who perished through Nazi genocide” (Stein 1998: 533, also Epstein 1996 and Marshall 1991). They deployed emotionally saturated genocide-rhetoric to dramatize the discriminations they faced in 1970s German and American society. As a symbol, the pink triangle thus contributed to the formation of an identity based on victimhood with a distinctly German-American quality to it.

7 Activists in the United States, more so than in West Germany, directed the memory of Nazi persecution outward in order to secure the support of the broader society (Jensen 2002: 342).

8 Much of lesbian/gay history claims that the Nazis pursued a campaign against homosexual men, similar to the mass murder of Jews, which lead to a Holocaust, the systematic extermination of homosexual men. In an article published in 2002, Jum Steakley, an American activist and historian, looks back self-critically at how he and others contributed to the myth of a Holocaust in the early 1970s (Steakley 2002: 55, also Jelloniek and Lautmann 2002: 12).
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At this point it bears mention that numerous scholars and activists called the dominant history of oppression and its strong ties to pink triangle prisoners into question. German sociologist Rüdiger Lautmann's *Seminar Gesellschaft und Homosexualität* (1977) is one example of such a counter-narrative. When dominant lesbian/gay history and activism insisted on half a million or more homosexual men killed by the Nazis, Lautmann spoke of 5 to 15,000 deaths (1977: 333, 1990). When others painted a homogeneous group of persecuted homosexuals, he ruptured this category by pointing out that working class, transvestites, and politically active gay men tended to be arrested more frequently.

In 2002, Lautmann calls attention to the striking similarities between the way the Nazis persecuted and criminalized gay men and the fate of “common” criminals under Nazi rule. Both had broken the law and that same law was still in place when the Nazi regime had ended. In fact, the end of the Nazi regime did not affect the general consensus that both criminal and homosexual acts were both immoral and illegal. Lautmann and others’ contestations of the Holocaust narrative led to extensive debates about the comparability of different histories. Debates about the use, misuse, and abuse of the Holocaust called the singularity of gay and lesbian history into question and may have played a role in fostering new alliances and affiliations.

Analogies of Oppression: Pink Prison Activism

Indeed, in the early days of the lesbian/gay liberation movement, right around the appropriation of the pink triangle, there also emerged notable prison activism. In West Germany, the *Homosexuellen Aktion Westberlin* founded a prison group, arranged talks with inmates at Berlin’s Tegel prison, regularly expressed their solidarity with “criminals” at rallies and in print, and provided a platform in their monthly *Info* for gay inmates to share their experiences in prison (HAW Info 9, April 1973: 8).

The lesbian/gay prison group expressed its bond with inmates in analogized terms. In homage to the already mentioned film *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverted, But the Society in Which He Lives* the prison group proclaimed: “It is not the law breaker who is criminal, but the society in which he lives” (HAW Info 10, June 1973: 26). By adapting the title of Rosa von Praunheim’s seminal film the group conveyed both unity and solidarity with prison inmates. Paragraph 175, the Nazi law that criminalized homosexuality, had only recently been revised to legalize homosexual practices (as of 1973 only same-sex relations with minors remained a criminal offense). So even if the legalization of homosexuality empowered gay activists of the HAW to act “gay” in public, lesbians and gays still found themselves in a precarious state of being tolerated in West Germany (HAW Info 10, June 1973: 25). Their experience that rights could be revoked at
any time might have motivated German lesbian/gay activists to form ties with inmates as fellow victims while only marginally referring to (homo)sexuality. In fact, expressions of solidarity hardly ever invoked activists and inmates sharing the same sexual identity or engaging in similar sexual practices. Instead lesbian/gay activism concentrated on prisoners’ needs as fellow humans, and the degrading, inhumane conditions in prison, especially when directed at political prisoners (HAW Info 16, November 1974: 52). In this context, the lesbian/gay prison movement’s analogy of oppression drew on a common mythical past as pink triangle (political) prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, in order to point to continuities in the here and now. The activists were convinced that, despite the German state’s democratic rhetoric, it had reintroduced torture methods against its dissidents. Five days prior to the hunger strike death of Red Army Faction’s Holger Meins in the Wittlich prison on November 9, 1974, the lesbian/gay activist group called on all homosexuals to support the “legitimate” demands made by the “political prisoners” (HAW Info 16, November 1974: 52). Nonetheless, West Germany’s lesbian/gay prison activism remained marginal.

In the US in contrast, lesbian/gay activists formed alliances with other left wing social movements with a longer tradition of prison activism, prison advocacy, and prison abolitionism. Regina Kunzel (2008a, 2008b) and Jessi Lee Jackson (2011) describe how in the early 1970s, lesbian/gay activists initiated a wide range of projects on behalf of prisoners: newsletters, investigating and publicizing prison conditions, offering legal council, sponsoring pen pal outreach projects, and assisting parolees. A prominent rallying point in the struggle against lesbian/gay and prison oppression was the Women’s House of Detention in New York City’s Greenwich Village. Because of its location on Greenwich Avenue in the midst of gay bars and cruising spots, the infamous women it had housed over the years, and its reputation as a rat infested, poorly maintained facility, most gay marches and Christmas vigils involved the House of Detention (Kunzel 2008b: 11). When the city decided to close the jail and move its inmates to Riker’s Island in the early 1970s, Karla Jay, New York based activist and journalist for the Lesbian Tide, remarked critically: “They think progress means bigger and better prisons with more guards and concrete playpens. How can we convince them that progress means no prisons at all and especially not bigger prisons built like castles with huge moats around them to keep us out?” (1973: 26). Jay conveys that she was not interested in a movement that only addressed those who identified as lesbian or gay, since progress, to her, would not be achieved until “all my sisters are out here in the sun walking with me” (1973: 26). Other activists focused on more concrete discriminatory practices in prison: They, for example, fought against homosexual rapes, and the underlying assumption that if gay men were raped in prison, they would enjoy it. Mostly, lesbian/gay activists just reversed the equation between sexual violence and homosexuality though: not gay men but heterosexual men were...
the rapists. Also, their solidarity went only thus far: Most white gay and lesbian activists left the myth of the “black rapist” untouched (Carroll 1977, critical: Mogul et al. 2011, 104–6), a concern Angela Davis (1981) raised in Women, Race, and Class. Not part of the lesbian/gay movement at the time, Davis (1989) took issue with the butch/femme organization of prison sex, deeming sex in prison a mere copy of heterosexual life on the outside and, what’s more, a ploy by the state to depoliticize prisoners. While Davis was prioritizing the race politics of the prison, lesbian/gay activists focused on the sexual politics.

By the end of the decade, the analogies of oppression between gays and lesbians on the inside and on the outside had worn thin. On the outside, reciprocal relationships and a move away from gender transgression had become dominant norms in middle class lesbian/gay communities (Kunzel 2008a: 214). In this light, it became more and more difficult for gay activists to understand the gender roles of prison sexual culture in any other way than as coerced (2008a: 213). Those who were affected most by the gay movement’s turn to respectability and gender-conformity were those who identified as ladies, queens, or transsexuals. As the movement for sexual liberation started to more narrowly focus on gaining civil rights, the potentially violent sexual or gender-nonconforming behaviors in prison were perceived to impede progress in the struggle for legal recognition. This ultimately led the movement to ostracize “perversive” identifications and practices—in and outside of prison—from the category of the homosexual (2008a: 216). Any affinities between the homosexual and the criminal were severed.

As lesbian/gay identity stabilized in the early 1980s, a split occurred between a past that was called upon on a regular basis, a common history as Nazi victims, and a past that was disavowed, “pervasive” sexual and gender practices on anachronistic spaces such as prison. Prisoners had effectively been relegated to the pre-modern. Increasingly, prisons were seen as a “separate universe” (Jackson 2011: 35), and the gender roles of prison sexual culture the evidence to support that claim. By contrasting liberated lesbian/gay relationships with the uncivilized, primitive sex in prison, activists resorted to temporal and spatial terms to make the differences between (homo)sexual practices on the “outside” and the “inside” seem insurmountable (Kunzel 2008a: 215). Imprisonment was perceived to prevent any kind of (sexual) freedom. “Freedom, that is, the control of our time, is conceived as the keystone and the most coveted possession in modern society,” seemingly equal to all (Hardt 1997: 65). Thus, taking away time is the ultimate form of punishment, especially since prison-time is repetitive, moves at snail’s pace, lacks novelty: each day is the same. In this respect, prison-time may be considered the antithesis of “straight” progress and future-oriented “free” time so vital for the lesbian/gay movement into the light (see Freeman 2007: 180).
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To be clear, the seemingly anachronistic sexual practices and inefficient organization of time in prison are neither past nor fundamentally different from lesbian/gay practices in the so-called “free” world. Rather, they play a constitutive part in creating and modulating what the lesbian/gay liberation movement understands as lesbian/gay identity. On the one hand, correctional facilities are geared to force state-authorized gender identities onto inmates. On the other hand, prisons may in fact be considered queer spaces in the sense that they call the lesbian/gay liberation movement’s notion of identity, respectability, and progress into question (Jackson 2011: 39). The prison system is a product of (state/sexual) violence that simultaneously queers prisons and punishes queerness and gender transgression (Mosuli et al. 2011: 103).

These insights into the prison not only challenge portions of the lesbian/gay movement committed to sexuality as a stable identity “freed” and “freed” from State violence. They also rumble the neat succession of past, present, and future. Seemingly retrograde prison sex haunts the present, which brings us full circle and back to the recent pink prison trend.

Sexism, Racism, and Homophobia in Color Science

In the 1970s Alexander Schauss, Director of the American Institute for Biosocial Research, conducted experiments with the color pink in US correctional facilities. In a journal article published in the early 1980s, Schauss reports on difficulties in finding collaborators for his experiments. Apparently, the color pink not only solicited strong reactions from prisoners but from those in the position of granting permission to conduct these experiments too. This reflects a general ambivalence about the color of things in modern Euro-American society; on the one hand, colors are considered merely decorative, intuitive, trivial, and feminine; on the other hand, they have been perceived to be the foundation of epistemology since Descartes (Gage 1999, Young 2004). Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century color theorists explicitly gendered (Blanc 1867, Huculbert and Ling 2007), infantilized and exoticized (Goethe 1790), and racialized colors (Gobineau 1853–1854). In a book first published in 1947, influential Swiss psychologist Max Lüscher proclaimed that the “mentally immature”—among them “pre-adolescents,” “the homosexual and the lesbian” as well as “Iranians, Africans and Brazilian Indians”—are drawn to violet, a color many consider a shade of pink (1969: 66). Schauss’s experiments explicitly draw on Lüscher’s color psychology.

Colors are not just carriers but producers of knowledge about social formations. Colors foster analogies and constitute collective identities. Pink is just one example of how colors are implemented for their unifying effect, in the case of the lesbian/gay liberation movement, and as classificatory systems.
in the case of prisons and concentration camps. Colors even inform us whether something or someone is regarded as possessing agency or not. This last point seems particularly relevant in the case of pink. Feminists deem pink to promote passivity and conformity in girls. In the context of prison culture, where pink is implemented to calm and humiliate aggressive male prisoners, pink itself is attributed agency as a pacifier and feminizer.

Pink was instrumental in creating a past and a future for the 1970s lesbian/gay liberation movement in both Germany and the United States. The collective uncovering of a common past of sexual repression not only unified lesbian/gay identity, but kept the struggle for sexual liberation moving forward. While this understanding of the lesbian/gay movement is not per se wrong, my intention was to show the ambivalence of any scholarly or political project seemingly liberating sexuality from history or uncovering the (sexual) truth about the past by making the silence about sexuality speak. As Anjali Arondekar (2009) observes, an exoticized investment in a yet to be discovered archive—in need of coming out—is grafted onto emancipatory projects, and onto historical research as well. Arondekar is critical of those who put themselves in the noble role of the liberator of the hidden truth of sexuality (2009: 8). She instead points to the activists’ and historians’ pleasures in recovering that supposed truth. In view of the emotional and affective investment in the lesbian/gay movement’s sexual liberation and progress, my aim was to critically discuss how the modern and the pre-modern were invoked concurrently, be it by insisting on the continuity with a forgotten past or by assuming an epistemic break between the pre-modern and the modern.

Tracing pink’s gendered and sexualized prison history allows a different articulation of events in history. In fact, pink’s entanglement with lesbian/gay prison activism not only invites us to take a critical look at lesbian/gay identity politics, it encourages critical reflection on the use of colors and symbols in identity politics and activism tout court. If we concede that the pink triangle contributed to streamlining the LGBT past into a progressivist model and sexualities and genders into definite identities, then pink’s queering potential seems limited. Pink, however, may also be perceived as a visible reminder of what current homonormative rainbow politics tend to disavow (Piontek 2006): a history of feminization and infantilization, a history of gender transgression and sexual perversion, of racism and misogyny on the “inside” and on the “outside.”

Sources from Schwules Museum Archive, Berlin (Germany)

References


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