

**Pleasures in confusion, complexity, and controversy:
Rethinking and redesigning sexuality**

The Institute for Queer Theory (iQt) in Berlin is a place where academic, activist, political, intellectual, and artistic practices intertwine. The institute has multiple objectives: As an organization for research, theory, and international academic exchange, it devotes itself to the study of gender and sexuality, bringing results into practice and to the public eye. As a space for cultural education, the iQt initiates projects which connect a critique of identity logic with strategies of queering, not least by putting experimental event formats to the test. As a political entity, the iQt relies on a wide notion of social and sexual justice in order to expand the possibilities of political and cultural participation in addition to promoting legal equality. Its multidimensional approach and its love of experimentation have made this independent institute, founded by Antke Engel in Hamburg in 2006, unique in all of Europe.

Queering makes use of language and imagery in order to disrupt the rule of normalcy. What has been taken for granted becomes questionable. Queering also makes one realize that desires are at work in the so-called normal that neither follow trodden paths nor affirm the power relations organizing the field. (Avowing these desires, which might be a political decision or an unconscious striving, means that queer politics shifts from a mode of critique to a means of flight.)

The institute's work is defined by taking pleasure in complexity, confusion, and controversy. Its overarching concern is a critical reflection on both the binary order of gender as well as heterosexual dominance. Its focus is on dismantling hierarchic, exclusionary, and normalizing modes of organizing gender and sexuality, without losing sight of how different power structures interweave with (and amongst) each other. The iQt questions how gender and sexuality interlace with other forms of social and geopolitical difference and thus articulate the presence of inequality and injustice.

Queer politics works within the paradoxical tension between fighting difference as a construction of inequality and fostering difference as uniqueness. The goal, however, is to promote non-hierarchic differences and to find an equally respectful and empowering way of interacting with asymmetries and the ineluctable otherness of others. In contradistinction to a policy of tolerance and diversity, a strategy and attitude of queersity might therefore emerge that strengthens the "difference of the differing within diversity" and subverts the appropriation of difference as cultural capital in the marketplace.

Queersity recognizes differences that resist classification and points out the political relevance of multiplicity, ambiguity, and alterity. Queersity is meant as a critique of depoliticized multiculturalism and neoliberal diversity, which functionalizes social differences as cultural capital. In contrast, queersity fosters the productive moments of conflict, in order to fight social inequalities, discrimination and violence.

Experimental methods which are seen as a crucial moment in the production of knowledge and political practice are characteristic of this work. The question as to what precisely constitutes practices of queering influences research and theorizing. How can these practices be implemented in subcultures, political movements, art, and science? How can queering be translated into novel means of disseminating knowledge and outreach work? What does it mean to free diversity from its connection to minority politics and instead practice it within a post-identitarian framework? The iQt works interdisciplinarily and seeks to provide mutual inspiration between academic, cultural, and political approaches. Contact and cooperation with actors within the various areas of practice are important to the institute's work. We encourage an examination of the different forms of knowledge production, representation, and communication customary in these areas in order to bring these actors together for a fruitful exchanges.

The content of the institute's work is organized into the following thematic blocks:

- embodiments
- racialization of sexuality
- desiring politics
- neoliberal <> queer
- art and cultural activism

Individual activities and events generally contribute not just to one but multiple thematic blocks. By presenting the contents from various perspectives, a rhizomatic net forms. Once in place it helps to discuss and outline their interconnections. The situation becomes all the more multidimensional by combining different event formats. This variety opens up approaches used by specific interest groups and invites diverse ways of questioning, understanding, and becoming entangled. Participation is an important factor in the iQt's work, as creating room for participation to assume different shapes.

Part of the iQt's program has been to expose different conceptions of what it means to practice queer theory, do research, write, work artistically, and stage interventions from a queer point of view. In order to have these different conceptions communicate with each other productively, we explored a wide spectrum of formats within the framework of the iQt. These formats build on an understanding of "theory as a result of societal practice and collective understanding" (Engel/Govrin 2014). Highly theoretical lectures were held by internationally renowned academics in the hallowed halls of the University of Hamburg or the inspiring setting of the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI Berlin). Workshops and salons encouraged participants to not only discuss but work hands-on with each other in project rooms, popular hangouts, and bars. The Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) Berlin invited us to create settings for events, where, for example, a work of art served as a partner for interactions to experiment with bossiness as a queer(ing) mobilization of power and desire (Dorrance/Engel, NGBK 2012). Other formats have included long-time research groups, entertaining symposia, and film series as a form of critique of capitalism...

It was clear from the beginning that the theme of sexual politics covers a wider field than intimate relationships. A queer critique of identity constructs and essentializing representations encompasses embodied subjectivities as well as social institutions, state policies, and established, habitual cultural practices. This led to the question whether and how it is possible to combine queer theoretical approaches with equality and anti-discriminatory politics. In order to introduce queer perspectives into policy consulting, we translated diversity to queerversity (Engel 2013). A critical view on connections between neoliberal transformations and a proliferation of gendered and sexual ways of life inspired by queer movements has been an important focus of activity throughout the years. The international conference "Desiring Just Economies – Just Economies of Desire" (6/2010) grew out of discussions in multiple working groups that had taken place before, and led to the publication of "Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy" (Routledge 2015).

The lecture series "Desire's Multiplicity and Serendipity" (2014/15) suggested a conceptual innovation with the introduction of the term serendipity, describing a lucky coincidence, which allows queer criticism to transgress heteronormative notions of desire.

Serendipity can be understood as a fortunate happenstance or pleasant surprise. In regard to desire, desire's serendipity may be grasped in its unpredictable, contingent modes that lead to unexpected encounters.

extracts from:
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