Sex in the Archives

Homosexuality, Prostitution, and the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris

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ABSTRACT The Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris have served as an important source base for historians of both female prostitution and male homosexuality during the nineteenth century. Although the archives often place these two forms of sexual marginality in the same series, cartons, and dossiers, historians have almost always treated the two as distinct social categories. This article argues that this separation results from an overreliance on the modern sexual identity categories that serve as our point of departure. Instead, we should approach the archive without identifying with it in order to formulate a vision of the sexual past that may or may not reflect our own sexual organization. In dialogue with a broader discourse that conflated male same-sex sexual activity with female prostitution, these archives participate in the production of a sexual category that has as much to do with the selling of sex as it does with same-sex sexual desire.

KEYWORDS archives, homosexuality, prostitution, police, Paris

In his recent appreciation of Jeffrey Merrick's contribution to the history of same-sex sexuality in French history, Bryant T. Ragan contrasts histories of "representation" with those of "real people": "For [Merrick], there's a balance to be struck between naively believing in the 'real' and seeing everything only in terms of representation. . . . Although we cannot ever know gay history *wie es eigentlich gewesen* [as it really was], going to the archives to try to compile and understand the experiences of real women and men is meaningful, and it is essential."[1] This contrast portrays the archive—collections of primary sources—as representative of our ability to locate the historical "real." Even as he tries to find common ground between these two approaches, Ragan positions the archive—and thus history itself—on the side of those who seek out "real women and men." The archive thereby becomes the representative of an

1. Ragan, "Same-Sex Sexuality according to Jeffrey Merrick," 5.

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essential truth, recovered and recoverable by historians. More specifically, Ragan advises "queer theorists [who] assert that homosexuality was born in the eighteenth or nineteenth century," and who argue that the emergence of homosexual identity marked "some huge shift," to "get thee to the archives and you might be surprised what you will find."[2] Thus positioned, "queer theorists" avoid the archive in favor of analyses of representation; historians enter the archive to locate real people. While the study of representation outside the archive calls into question the stability of homosexual identity, the archive puts it back in place.

Like many of my compatriots whose own sexuality propelled them to seek out the history of homosexuality, I followed this advice and entered the archives, but I did not necessarily find the "real people" Ragan implies would be there. Specifically, I decided to focus on nineteenth-century Paris and followed the path set by historians such as Michael Sibalis, William A. Peniston, and Régis Revenin, who had used the collections of the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris to reveal the contours of a nascent homosexual community during the period.[3] Once there, however, I immediately came up against the far more numerous and detailed records documenting the policing of female prostitution, often in the same series, cartons, and folders where I was hoping to find evidence of male same-sex sexuality. This encounter should not have been surprising. As Hollis Clayson has argued, "The existence of prostitution on a scale so widespread and obvious that it alarmed contemporaries was a distinctive and distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century Parisian culture."[4] A system of sexual policing defined by its attention to female prostitution gave provenance to the documents that remain from the moral police of the nineteenth century, and this dominance proved an obstacle to locating the evidence of male homosexuality in the archives. In response to this apparent silencing, historians of homosexuality have sifted through the material, picking their way across and over evidence of female prostitution to locate documents or cartons relevant to their search for the gay past.[5]

This approach reinforces an already strong connection between the history of sexuality and modern sexual identities. The search for the sexual past always seems to begin with the sexual present; we choose, in advance, the kind of

2. Ibid., 6.

3. Sibalis, "Palais-Royal"; Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*; Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines*.

4. Clayson, *Painted Love*, 1. On the ubiquity of the prostitute in French literary, artistic, and sociological discourse, see Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*; and Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*, pt. 1.

5. See, e.g., Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines*; and Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*. Although emphasizing published sources, Murat, *La loi du genre*, is a major exception.

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sexuality we are looking for in the archive. As David Halperin has put it, "Homosexuality . . . defines the horizons of our immediate conceptual universe and inevitably shapes our inquiries into same-sex sexual desire and behavior in the past."[6] However, historians have more recently begun to see the link between modern homosexuality and the sexual past as a kind of limitation.[7] By presupposing its object of inquiry, the history of sexuality has failed to exceed the identity formations that gave it provenance in the first place. For this reason, the history of sexuality has not spread very far into the broader historiographical conversation.[8] In response to this difficulty, Laura Doan has suggested a form of queer historicizing that refuses to take contemporary identities as its starting point. Rather, she advocates an approach she deems "queer critical history" that makes "use of queer analysis to construct the historical meanings of sex and sexuality . . . not by tracing back modern sexual identities with a knowingness of what these identities mean to us now but by acknowledging at the outset the unknowability and indeterminacy of the sexual past."[9]

Doan's queer method rests on two fundamental assumptions. First, the forms of sexual identity one finds in the past may be so different from those of the present day that we cannot use our own identities as anchoring devices. Rather, historians must accept an inability to know the full contours of the sexual past in advance. Second, Doan emphasizes historians' own role in the process of making history. History is not something that is found in the past; instead, the historian constructs that past.[10] The proper response to the indeterminacy of the sexual past is not to impose our own identities on it but to make new meanings out of it. While Doan's recent work relies on archival material to make her point, it does not take the archive as a concept or institution as its point of departure. In this article I attempt to apply her queer method to the archive and, in doing so, show that the queer impulse to disrupt our categories of analysis may entail a refusal of our ability to capture the historical real. But, I argue, doing so is actually more in keeping with the historical impulse more generally. The refusal of a direct relationship between contemporary categories, the "reality" of the past, and the process of historical reconstruction has the ironic effect of bringing us closer to the past as it was. The only way, in other words, to avoid anachronism and presentism in approaching the archive is to

6. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 107.

7. See, e.g., Howard, *Men like That*, 14–15; Marcus, *Between Women*, 13–14; Johnson, *Just Queer Folks*, 17–18; and Clark-Huckstep, "*History of Sexuality*."

8. Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, 13–14.

9. Ibid., 61.

10. Ibid., 87.

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acknowledge at the outset the incommensurability between the sources of the archive and our own selves.

This article argues that the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris put female prostitution and male same-sex sexual activity into a conversation that historians of sexuality have thus far refused to hear. Few indeed have taken up the ramifications of Jeffrey Weeks's argument regarding fin de siècle London that "in terms of social obloquy, all homosexual males as a class were equated with female prostitutes."[11] By refusing to untangle this association to extricate "homosexuality" from prostitution, I demonstrate that these archives participate in the construction of a sexual subject bound to a discourse on female prostitution and therefore defined as such. The folding of male same-sex sexual activity into female prostitution disrupted and should continue to disrupt attempts to stabilize the figure of the "pederast," as men who sought sex with other men were often called in the nineteenth century, as a coherent subject along the lines of the "homosexual." This process calls into question both the meaning of pederasts' sexual attraction and their gender identity.[12] I therefore posit that the history of homosexuality cannot be found in the archives of the nineteenth-century police because there is no homosexual subject to be found. Instead, the archives reveal a different kind of sexual subject, one among many, which I leave purposefully unnamed: a female prostitute who was neither necessarily biologically female nor necessarily engaged in prostitution. Men who had sex with other men were thus rendered into women who sold sex, neither totally "straightening" nor "queering" their desire since it was always both hetero and homo at the same time. The emergence of this possibility discomfits any attempt to fully know the desires of the men described in the archive because they cannot be accessed outside this framework. Neither having access to their particular desires nor wishing to impose my own on them, I use the archives to construct a figure subsequently lost in our quest for a historical identity.

The Archive, Queer Theory, and the History of Sexuality

Histories of homosexuality in modern France have not generally been receptive to the insights of either the cultural turn or queer studies. At the same time, those working within queer studies have underappreciated their affinities with the kind of work represented by the best of this tradition. Even as both fields stand the other up as useful contrasts, they share a preoccupation with drawing attention to certain relationships between present-day sexual subjects and past

11. Weeks, "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes," 200.

12. This argument thus follows that of Laure Murat, who explores the figure of the "tante" as a third sex in *La loi du genre*, chap. 1.

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forms. While social historians of homosexuality have asserted or implied a direct relation between modern homosexuality and its forebears, recent trends in queer studies have emphasized a desire to locate a "queer historical impulse" that binds together past and present.[13] Although queer studies often couches itself in anti-identitarian terms, its efforts to locate and preserve queer desire signals a recuperative project similar to the one enunciated by historians who seek out homosexual identity in the past.[14] Although both define in advance what they seek in the past, I take from the latter a willingness to acknowledge how past forms of queer desire may not be entirely recognizable. Rather than try to straighten these fragments of subjects once lost to history into a narrative of my choosing, I reconstruct them as remnants of a history that may, in the end, be impossible to fully know. Rather than fill in the silences of the archive, I reflect on what the archive contains and allows us to produce ourselves.

My perspective on both the archive and the history of sexuality is indebted to the work of Michel Foucault, David Halperin, and Joan Scott. The project that Foucault laid out in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) was not to complete a history of "representation." Rather, as Halperin emphasizes, the task set before us is to understand how "the subject of desire" was itself historically produced.[15] In his earlier work Foucault defined the "archive" as precisely what determines the possibilities for expressing and reckoning with the historically contingent nature of the human subject. The archive, in this sense, is more than a physical repository of documents; it also signifies the coming together and ordering of all the various discourses that determine the possibilities of what can be said in a particular historical moment. "The archive," of which institutional archives such as the one I discuss here form only a part, therefore, does not contain an already existing historical subject. Rather, it actively creates the very conditions under which any particular subject can and does emerge: "The analysis of the archive, then, involves a privileged region. . . . It is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us."[16] The archive defines, even as it constructs, the possibilities of historical recovery itself. The archive "specifies" that which could be and can be said in the first place.[17]

Foucault's project sought not to recover the truth of a particular historical moment but to understand how specific truths became possible in the first place.[18] Both Halperin and Scott emphasize Foucault's genealogical method as

13. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1.
14. Bartle, "Gay/Queer Dynamics," 544.
15. Foucault, *Introduction*; Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 85–89.
16. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.
17. Ibid., 129.
18. Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, 28.

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one mode of breaking apart the truths of the present to understand their historical constitution.[19] This "history of the present" spurs the radical project that seeks to understand, in Scott's words, "an individual whose very self is articulated—conceptualised—socially, through language, the result of historical processes that need to be explored."[20] That said, the project I propose is not a genealogy, nor do I claim that this article successfully reconstructs a clearly identified subject through just one archive.[21] The materials contained in the police archives do, however, contribute to a discourse, given impetus by the administrative power that struggled to give meaning to particular kinds of social practices and relations.

Recent histories of male homosexuality in modern France have generally not addressed these insights. Instead, important studies of legal repression, cultural representation, community formation, and political organizing have left the precise subjects of their histories relatively unquestioned.[22] For instance, Sibalis's article "The Palais-Royal and the Homosexual Subculture of Nineteenth-Century Paris" demonstrates the sheer visibility of men who sought sex with other men in central Paris. However, the article reads the turn to prostitution by men seemingly uninterested in sex with other men, the attribution of effeminacy by experts, and the pursuit of younger men by their richer elders as "misconceptions" about "the Parisian homosexual." Sibalis is careful not to attribute desires to the men he reveals, but his insistence on reading their lives in light of modern homosexuality effaces their historical difference and reconstructs the very identities that need to be interrogated.[23]

The essentialism of this position has proved a ripe target for a particular kind of queer theorizing that views historical approaches to sexuality as either empirically naive or politically problematic.[24] Yet certain strands of queer studies share some of the same preoccupations. This similarity is especially acute respecting the archive itself. Queer scholars may reject the search for an identity, but they often begin from a similar perspective as they seek out forms of queer life once thought lost to "an unyielding archive," as Abram J. Lewis has put it.[25]

19. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, chap. 4; Scott, "History-Writing as Critique," 27–31.

20. Scott, "History-Writing as Critique," 29.

21. On genealogy and its contrast with "queer critical history," see Doan, *Disturbing Practices*, chap. 2.

22. See, e.g., Merrick, "Commissioner Foucault"; Sibalis, "Regulation of Male Homosexuality"; Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*; Tamagne, *Histoire de l'homosexualité*; and Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*.

23. Sibalis, "Palais-Royal," 127. Although primarily concerned with social constructionist approaches, Scott Bravman's critique of historiography remains essential in this context (*Queer Fictions of the Past*, 5).

24. See, e.g., Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 3; and Dinshaw et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities."

25. Lewis, "I Am Sixty-Four and Paul McCartney Doesn't Care," 16–17.

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Suspicion of the "traditional archive" and its (in)ability to contain the remnants of queer desire—mediated as they so often are by authorities unsympathetic to queer life—has animated the search for new sources and new reading methods, as well as the production of new kinds of archives.[26] Ann Cvetkovich's formulation of an "archive of feeling" has proved especially powerful to the queer critique of institutions deemed suspect by virtue of their participation in normalizing processes.[27] According to Cvetkovich, "traditional archives" fail to document the "intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism" that constitute queer life and fail to "address the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics." The "radical archive of emotion" she calls for, however, would "sort the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect."[28] Put differently, an archive of feelings would not only collect the ephemera of queer desire today but also document the forms of that desire that institutional archives have erased as they collaborated in the formation of modern sexual subjects.

In this light, historians of sexuality such as Ragan and Sibalis actually have a great deal in common with queer scholars like Cvetkovich in their shared desire to "identify" with the archive in ways that have been heretofore denied to modern queer subjects.[29] Both ultimately struggle to recover out of silence people who were in some sense "like us." As Carolyn Steedman has argued, this search is a form of validation "that confirms the searcher in his or her sense of self, confirms them as they want to be, and feel in some measure that they already are."[30] The recovery of gay and lesbian communities, women, racial minorities, or the poor powerfully connects contemporary marginal subjects to a history that legitimates our own projects and identities. However, Steedman also reminds us that "the very search for what is lost and gone . . . alters it, as it goes along, so that every search is an impossible one."[31] Neither the archive nor the historian is innocent of the histories constructed from them. The attempt to undo the exclusions of the archive re-creates history anew even as it disavows that process. Undoing the exclusions of the archive thus remains a form of historical production; reckoning with and using those exclusions to create new possibilities is another. To engage with the silences as they appear is not to be

26. Martínez, "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination," 163–65.

27. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, esp. chap. 7. On the relationship between queer archives and traditional historical archives, see also Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 169–74; and Edenheim, "Lost and Never Found."

28. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 241.

29. Edenheim, "Lost and Never Found," 44.

30. Steedman, *Dust*, 77.

31. Ibid.

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innocent of the present, either, but it is oriented toward contextualizing those silences themselves as revelatory of archival power.[32]

Recognizing the exclusions of the archives, then, does not necessarily require "rescuing" individual histories from them, nor does it demand that we rework the archives to serve the needs of present-day communities. Queer literary critics such as Scott Herring, Heather Love, and Peter Coviello have highlighted the significance of forms of sexual identity and community that have been obscured from view, live on as fragments and anachronisms in the present, or disrupt the progressive narratives of sexual identity.[33] This strand of queer studies has spurred historians such as Colin R. Johnson and Laura Doan to reckon with the fragments of the sexual past that remain in some ways unrecognizable. According to Johnson, queer historical work functions as a process of mourning as it reminds us not only of what we have gained but also of what we have lost.[34] The specific formations of the archives may indeed produce unfamiliar, almost unnameable figures that cannot be captured by the concept of homosexuality even as it figures the past as a lost possibility. In its emphasis on the alterity of the past, this method ironically reinvigorates our connection to history, because even as it refuses contemporary identity categories, it emphasizes and acknowledges the ways that all history is driven by the contemporary desire to construct the past.

Prostitution and Pederasty in the Nineteenth Century

At one level, the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris presents, in an almost ideal form, the problems with institutional archives described by Cvetkovich. Few interrogations, letters, or self-affirmations from men who sought sex with other men are captured by the documents.[35] Queer desire, when it appears at all, is revealed only in highly mediated form. Yet with few exceptions, the lives found within them—and these archives do reveal a relatively vibrant community of men who sought sex with other men, especially during the 1840s and after 1870—have been written as "homosexual" by historians. This interpretation is not surprising, but it needs to be interrogated. Exploring judicial archives, according to Arlette Farge, "gives rise to the naive but profound feeling of tearing away a veil, of crossing through the opaqueness of knowledge and, as if after

32. I am inspired here by Scott's notion of critique as an attempt to "make visible those blind spots in order to open a system to change" ("History-Writing as Critique," 23).

33. Herring, *Queering the Underworld*; Love, *Feeling Backward*; Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties*.

34. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks*, 17.

35. Some of the autobiographical statements that do exist have been translated and published in Peniston and Erber, *Queer Lives*.

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a long uncertain voyage, finally gaining access to the essence of beings and things."[36] The documents seem to reveal an immediate historical truth, but this "profound feeling" remains "naive." As Farge continues, the archives' "importance lies in the interpretation of its presence, in the search for its complex meaning, in framing its 'reality' within systems of symbols—systems for which history attempts to be the grammar."[37] Farge's emphasis on the instability of the reality contained in the archives reminds us not to reveal the archives for the truth they contain but to understand how they construct truth in the first place.

The meaning of the archives arises through the broader symbolic order that gave it provenance. In the context of the nineteenth century, this order collapsed the figures of the prostitute and men who sought sex with other men. Faced with this cohabitation, historians have tried to untangle the various documents and assertions about men who sought sex with other men from those regarding prostitution. For instance, in his comprehensive study of "homosexuality and masculine prostitution" during the early Third Republic (specifically 1870–1918), Revenin opens by explaining his difficulty in distinguishing the two categories: "If masculine prostitution is not masculine homosexuality, the one can be considered a 'subsection' of the other, but remains *de facto* a minority phenomenon within homosexuality more generally, contrary to the 'observations' of the authorities." While the "authorities" may have collapsed the two figures, Revenin understands them as fundamentally distinguishable. The scare quotes surrounding "observations" underscores his skepticism. Revenin thus entered the archives with a category that had to be wrestled away from the incorrect understanding of fin de siècle experts. Revenin laments his inability—thanks to the authorities—to distinguish "homosexual prostitution from masculine prostitution practiced by heterosexuals or bisexuals, if only occasionally and out of a purely monetary goal."[38] While Revenin argues that his choice of terminology was "the most opportune," it in fact showcases a key assumption: these men can be "homosexual," "bisexual," or "heterosexual," even if we have difficulty uncovering who was who.

I am not so ready to read nineteenth-century discourse as "incorrect." The actions and words of the authorities are not a problem that needs to be solved. The archives do not simply repress the histories of marginal individuals; they also construct their sometimes unfamiliar and unlikely stories. The very structure of the archives encourages this different vision of the sexual past. Evidence of male same-sex sexual activity remains contained within and between the far

36. Farge, *Allure of the Archives*, 8.

37. Ibid., 12.

38. Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines*, 12.

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more complete traces of women who sold sex. Rather than automatically understand these two sexual practices as stand-ins for identities we already know—the female prostitute and the male homosexual—that need to be disentangled, we can take the intersection as a form of cultural production. The archives construct sexual subjects tightly bound in a conception of "antisocial" sexual activity as a form of prostitution. The emergence of this figure depended on the broader understanding of same-sex sexual activity in the nineteenth century that, in turn, shaped the behavior of the police as they encountered evidence of male same-sex desire enacted on the streets of Paris.

The documents contained in the police archives are the remnants of an administrative structure dedicated to the regulation of prostitution.[39] Nicely symbolic of this fact is a turn-of-the-century document ordering a raid on a wine merchant and hotel "signaled as serving as the refuge of pederasts," where the handwritten word *pederasts* replaced the printed words *filles de débauche*, a common designation for female prostitutes.[40] During the early nineteenth century the French police constructed a system of enclosure and surveillance designed to ensure the access of state authorities to female prostitutes. The police registered brothels and prostitutes, conducted medical examinations, and sought to push "clandestine" prostitutes onto the rolls. While the documents remain fragmentary, the survival of thousands of records attests to the significance of the issue to the police, the complexity of the administrative apparatus set up to capture information on prostitutes, and the dedication of individual police inspectors and officers to addressing the "problem." Prostitutes entered the archives as they regularly encountered the police, and the archives produced the prostitute in turn as the raw material was processed in sociological and moral commentary during the nineteenth century.[41] Although many of these women engaged in prostitution only temporarily and haphazardly, traces of their lives remain present in the regulatory impulse of the French system of sexual management, which tried to inscribe them clearly as prostitutes.[42]

In contrast, police attention to same-sex sexual activity rested on much more informal strategies. Sodomy had been decriminalized during the French

39. Féray, *Pédés*, 15.

40. Untitled, Sept. 11, 1901, JC 43, formerly BM2 28, Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris (hereafter APP).

41. The most important text of the period was Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, which was written through both firsthand investigation and consultation of the archives. The book remained the touchstone for studies of female prostitution until the end of the nineteenth century. The police archives have served as the basis for several important studies of nineteenth-century Parisian prostitution. See esp. Corbin, *Les filles de noce*; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*; and Berlière, *La police des mœurs sous la IIIe République*.

42. Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*, 26–27.

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Revolution, and no administrative structure emerged in the subsequent century that could compare to the one that surrounded female prostitution.[43] Instead, the moral police used sections of French law against vagrancy, "public offenses against decency," and sexual assault to harass and arrest men they suspected or caught in the act of engaging in same-sex sexual activity.[44] The morals police began to organize "pederasty patrols" in the eighteenth century, a practice that continued into the twentieth, but in the archives the capture of men who sought sex with other men remained much more circumspect than the way that female prostitutes appeared in the documents.[45]

These different legal regimes shaped the relationship between sexual practice and administrative categorization. As Peniston has explained, while a woman who sold sex became a prostitute at the expense of her many other social roles, men so accused remained "clerks, servants, artisans, or laborers" as well. While female prostitutes were differentiated from their clients, male prostitutes were not. While female prostitutes had little legal recourse once arrested, men accused of same-sex sexual activity maintained at least some protection.[46] These differences highlight the complicated interplay between social behavior and identity. Men who misbehaved in public retained a measure of agency vis-à-vis the police as they received the protection of the law and relied on their roles as fathers, husbands, and workers. At the same time, however, that very possibility disrupts any attempt to ground their actions exclusively in light of their sexual behavior. The man caught in flagrante delicto—as was sometimes required for an arrest to take place—did not simply become a "pederast" or a prostitute, as women caught selling sex were labeled.[47] The apparent coherence of the category of the prostitute highlights the lack of a clear social identity linked to same-sex sexual behavior. According to the police, the female prostitute was only a prostitute; the man who sought sex with other men could be other things as well. This is not to reinscribe gender as a static category and sexuality as a fluid one but to highlight how the construction of gender itself shaped the process through which certain sexual behaviors became codified in legal and moral discourse.[48] Indeed, one result of this process was to create an instability in the field of gender itself, where forms of femininity no longer always seemed attached to biological difference.

43. On the decriminalization of sodomy, see Sibalis, "Regulation of Male Homosexuality," 82.

44. On these laws, see Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*, 13–22.

45. Merrick, "Commissioner Foucault." See also Sibalis, "Palais-Royal," 122.

46. Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*, 29–30.

47. Rapport: Réponses à des lettres signalant des rendez-vous de pédérastes, Mar. 23, 1869, DA 230, doc. 356, APP; Rapport: Surveillances au Palais Royal, July 1, 1872, JC 32, formerly BM2 32, APP.

48. Martin, "Extraordinary Homosexuals," 101.

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The apparent transparency of female prostitution—which simultaneously revealed and effaced the authorities' own fear that it was never actually such—enabled female prostitution to serve as the foundation for elaborating on the meaning of same-sex sexual behavior. Female prostitutes, of course, had already been long associated with the potential for sexual activity between women.[49] Indeed, in some ways one could say that all female prostitutes had, within them, the potential to become tribades. The history of female same-sex desire in nineteenth-century France may indeed also be inscribed within the history of prostitution.[50]

In any case, it was not just female same-sex desire that was associated with prostitution. Ambroise Tardieu, the famous early medical pathologist, claimed, for instance, that "the most common and dangerous conditions in which pederasty takes place is as true prostitution, which, if it is not sheltered under the tolerance which protects female prostitution, is no less very spread out, organized in a way, and constitutes in certain large cities, its necessary complement."[51] Tardieu at first implies a distinction between male prostitution and other kinds of male same-sex desire. However, by labeling the former as "the most common" form of pederasty, he simultaneously collapses the two. By then defining male prostitution as the "necessary complement" of its female counterpart, he implies that the one exists only by virtue of the other.

In fact, Tardieu continues by explaining how these two prostitutions use one another on the streets of Paris. This cooperation involved more than brothels providing services for men of different sexual inclinations.[52] It also involved a form of gender manipulation. Procurers, Tardieu claimed, sometimes "employ, to attract pederasts, women disguised as men," while pederasts themselves sometimes dressed as women "to evade the police, or to hide their shameful preferences for men who seek them out and taken them home with them."[53] Although Tardieu remains most famous for his assertion that men who sought sex with other men revealed their activities by virtue of physical signs written on their physical bodies, he also highlights his continuing anxiety about their ability

49. Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 1:161–72.

50. On the relationship between lesbianism and prostitution, see, e.g., Van Casselaer, *Lot's Wife*, chap. 1; Choquette, "Degenerate or Degendered"; and Murat, *La loi du genre*, 68–78.

51. Tardieu, *Etude médico-légale*, 125.

52. Ibid., 128–29. The police also noted prostitutes and pederasts together on the streets and in public places as well. See, e.g., Carlier, "Extrait d'un rapport du service des moeurs joint au dossier de la 1ère Section," Nov. 24, 1864, 1–2, DA 230, doc. 308, APP; "Note: Au sujet du Théâtre des Folies-Bergère," Feb. 24, 1873, JC 61, formerly BM2 7, APP; "Rapport: Surveillance aux Folies-Bergère," Nov. 11, 1876, JC 61, formerly BM2 7, APP.

53. Tardieu, *Etude médico-légale*, 129.

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to shift and move between different social categories.[54] To acknowledge the ability of pederasts to so easily fool the authorities, onlookers, and other men signals an incommensurability between Tardieu's confident identification of the signs of same-sex desire and the fear of their ability to mix and move between those identities at the same time.

Historians and critics such as Peniston and Murat have noted how the police mobilized designations of female prostitutes to render men who sought sex with other men comprehensible.[55] Here I follow Murat's reading of this terminological promiscuity not only as a convenient shorthand but also as a process that produced new ways of understanding various sexual acts. While I remain unsure whether Murat's use of the term *third sex* always applies, her emphasis on the ways that police discourse tended to refuse the possibility of clearly defining the men they were targeting remains productive.[56] For instance, about three decades after the publication of Tardieu's study, the one-time head of the morals police, Félix Carlier, published *Les deux prostitutions* (1887), a title that referred not to female and male prostitution but to female prostitution and pederasty. In the book Carlier declared that "pederasty and female prostitution are in fact the same whole; it's prostitution in the general sense of the word. The scandals that they are able to occasion, the hazards that they spread throughout society, are of the same nature."[57] Carlier conflates not men who desired sex with other men and men who were paid for having sex with other men, or men who sold sex and women who sold sex, but men who had sex with other men as a whole and female prostitutes. This schema connects various forms of public sexual activity but also tends to subsume—as in the archives—male same-sex sexual activity under the veneer of prostitution. Even more, it folds forms of male desire into and renders it a form of specifically female prostitution.

Although many of these commentators tried to differentiate between those who engaged in same-sex sexual activity for taste and those who did so for money, they often failed to uphold the distinction. For instance, in his memoirs, the police inspector Louis Canler distinguishes between four groups of "anti-physicals," as he called pederasts: the *persilleuses*, the *honteuses*, the *travailleuses*, and the *rivettes*.[58] The first and third groups both came from the working class, but while the *persilleuses* were simply prostitutes equated with female prostitutes (also called *persilleuses* in the slang of the day), the *travailleuses* were workers who engaged in male same-sex sexual activity out of "taste." Yet Canler also

54. On Tardieu's system of signs, see esp. Rosario, "Pointy Penises," 148–53.
55. Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*, 25–34; Murat, *La loi du genre*, 35–39.
56. Murat, *La loi du genre*, 60–61.
57. Carlier, *Les deux prostitutions*, 467.
58. Canler, *Mémoires*, 265–66.

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argues that the *travailleuses* "are perfectly recognizable by their languorous and drawling voice, as well as their gait, which does not at all differ from that of the *persilleuses*."[59] While Canler thus strives to distinguish men who sought sex with other men on the basis of desire, he ultimately falls back on collapsing the categories into the very one that signifies venality: female prostitution. In doing so, Canler disavows the very possibility of same-sex sexual "taste" among the working class and instead inscribes these forms of same-sex desire within a literal economy. Indeed, as Murat notes, the sheer weight of police attention, their will to connect same-sex male desire to criminality and prostitution, weighed heavily on men who sought sex with other men; their attempt to locate sexual partners and clients was intimately bound up in the ways that the police understood their lives.[60]

This discourse tended to efface the supposedly clear signs of sexual difference; men who sought sex with other men became female prostitutes in all senses of the term. Both Carlier and Gustave Macé, the head of the *sûreté* during the early Third Republic, declared that male solicitors shared the same sentiments and behavior as prostitutes. Macé argued that "they imitate the walk of *filles soumises*" and are "almost all beardless or freshly shaved, never smoking, and walking in couples while laughing loudly like prostitutes."[61] Carlier, meanwhile, declared that "the solicitors, the *persilleuses* as one calls them, are true male prostitutes in all senses of the word. Between them and *filles publiques isolées*, there is an absolute identification of sentiments, of manner of being and of instincts."[62] Not even the physical signs of sex sufficiently separated prostitutes from these men. The strongest language is Carlier's, who attributes to men who sought sex with other men not simply a behavioral style that was like female prostitutes, but their entire being. This construction intersects with the gendered and classed dimensions of prostitution as well. Those men who sold themselves were most closely identified with their female counterparts. The poorest men who had sex with other men, the ones who rendered themselves available, were thus reconfigured not just as women but as the lowest class of woman. Put differently, those least able to be "private" in their sexual encounters became *filles publiques*. Their publicity was rendered illegitimate in gendered terms.[63] Those who purchased sex from another man had the potential to remain more aloof from this construction, but they often remained indebted to a vision of sexual commerce that rendered them into the purchasers not solely

59. Ibid., 268.
60. Murat, *La loi du genre*, 52–54.
61. Macé, *Mes lundis en prison*, 156.
62. Carlier, *Les deux prostitutions*, 354–55.
63. Thanks to Stephen Harp for helping me clarify this point.

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of men but of women as well. All forms of male same-sex sexual activity were thus rendered in terms of exchange rather than of desire. One of the primary subjects of the history of male same-sex sexuality is thus actually the female prostitute and female prostitution.

Historicizing Sex in the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris

The police archives participate in the disassembly of male same-sex sexual desire in favor of prostitution. Documents relating to the history of sexual regulation in the police archives are contained primarily in four series: DA and DB (*Police administrative*), BB (*Service des moeurs*), and JC (*Brigade mondaine*).[64] Series DA and DB are both organized thematically and cover the broad range of police activities during the nineteenth century, from the regulation of markets and festivals to public hygiene and infrastructure. There is no official division between the kinds of materials contained in DA versus those in DB, though the latter more often includes published sources such as newspaper clippings, medical and conference reports, and legislative documents, and the former contains more documents emanating directly from the prefecture itself. DA 220–32 are classified under the heading "Moeurs," while DA 389 and DB 407–13 are classified under the heading "Prostitution." These cartons contain traces of the administrative organization tasked with managing a variety of aspects of the sexual life of the city, including "pederasty," brothels, pornography, venereal disease, the abolitionist movement, blackmail, and especially female prostitution. For the most part, individual dossiers or cartons revolve around one of these issues at the expense of the others. DA 230, for instance, contains most of the documents relating to male same-sex sexual behavior within this series. But individual cartons also often contain materials on a variety of social practices and institutions. DB 407, for instance, may be classified as "prostitution," but it also contains a document containing an order for greater surveillance of pederasty on the boulevards during the July Monarchy, a midcentury circular warning that some public bathhouses were allowing men and women to share the same room, and a newspaper clipping of a 1908 modification to obscenity law.[65]

Series BB contains some of the surviving records of the moral police from the Second Empire and Third Republic, constituted by a series of registers

64. Series JC was formerly series BM. As of May 2016 the JC series was still under reclassification and unavailable to researchers. The staff at the APP estimate that reclassification will be finished later in 2017.

65. Préfet de Police to Commissaire de Police du quartier Saint Georges, Apr. 18, 1832, DB 407, doc. 1, APP; "Circulaire: Relativement aux entrepreneurs de bains qui favorisent le débauche des Baigneurs," Apr. 2, 1850, DB 407, doc. 20, APP; "Loi relative à la repression des outrages aux bonnes moeurs (Journ. Off., 9 avril 1908)," Apr. 9, 1908, DB 407, APP.

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documenting police surveillance of *femmes galantes* (courtesans) and clandestine prostitutes (BB1 and BB2), pornography (BB3), pederasty (BB4–6), and "étrangers suspects" (BB7). Some of these dossiers have been published in France, with BB1 appearing as *Le livre des courtisanes* (2006) and BB4 published as *Pédés: Le registre infamant* (2012).[66] It is not hard to understand their attraction. The registers contain fragments of stories of both the famous and infamous, the known and unknown as the morals police sought to document the contours of the urban sexual economy that existed at both the highest and lowest points of the sexual order. They recorded arrests and observations, noting the physical appearance of their objects of study, their connections, and their professions, as well as the circumstances surrounding their arrest or entry into the register.

Finally, JC contains the records of the Brigade Mondaine, an early twentieth-century creation within the Service des Garnis, and its predecessors. Scholars who have previously encountered JC would have used its older designations BM1 and BM2; the former held records on brothel keepers during the first half of the twentieth century, and the latter contained sixty-five cartons—2,671 dossiers—consisting of thousands of documents from the Second Empire and especially early Third Republic. Each dossier was composed of information on a specific address or general location and surveillance reports and complaints written by Parisians regarding instances of prostitution or other kinds of public sexual activity at a particular location. JC is being reorganized and is not accessible to the public, but the strategy of classifying much of the nineteenth-century material by *lieu* will remain the same. It is interesting to note that much of the twentieth century will be organized by subject, ranging from pornography to homosexuality. The very divide thus reinforces homosexuality as a specifically twentieth-century category, at least according to the police.[67]

This archival organization links each carton or series to the administrative order that gave each document its provenance. In doing so, the archive places an effective barrier in front of the researcher seeking to identify with it.[68] Rather than understand these documents as an entry point to a surer truth than that of the public statements of the police, as the editor of the published version of BB4 encourages us to do, we should read the structure in light of that discourse.[69] The archives are not a corrective to discourse; they help constitute it. The dossiers of series JC, for example, document attention to specific locations, but its

66. Houbre, *Le livre des courtisanes*; Féray, *Pédés*.

67. Many thanks to Pascale Etiennette and Isabelle Tarisca at the APP for describing the new organization, for helping me locate the new codes in advance of its completion, and for allowing me to see some of these dossiers during reclassification.

68. Edenheim, "Lost and Never Found," 44.

69. Féray, *Pédés*, 19–20.

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interior contents remain completely jumbled. Although the morals police tasked certain agents with policing female prostitution and others with seeking out suspected "pederasts," the distinction between the two fades as the cartons bring together the remnants of the variety of illicit sexual practices that took place in the city. The structure of the archives thus reproduces and participates in folding same-sex sexual activity into female prostitution even as it destabilizes our ability to precisely name and recognize those who engaged in it.

In JC, evidence of male same-sex sexual activity not only is in the minority—by a great deal—but also often emerges only incidentally, almost by accident. One letter written to the police in 1876, for instance, complained that "the Tuileries, when the weather permits it, is frequented every evening once night falls by a half dozen [prostitutes] who come to conduct their commerce there," and briefly claims—sandwiched between the discussion of female prostitutes—that "there are also pederasts known by these women."[70] The letter indicates the way that the archives situate male same-sex sexual activity in relation to prostitution; in fact, it replicates in microcosm the very structure that contains and constrains it. The letter mentions same-sex sexual activity in passing, as if it was barely worth speaking about, and explicitly in relation to female prostitution. Pederasty is collapsed in the information about the prostitutes. To specifically seek it out is to flip through hundreds if not thousands of documents "irrelevant" to the subject at hand. Read differently, the archive produces the possibility of same-sex sexual desire through its emphasis on female prostitution. Because pederasty was a form of female prostitution, to speak of the latter gives content to the former. This letter, briefly referencing those pederasts who work with prostitutes, participates in an ongoing process whereby the one social practice is enmeshed with the other. To speak of female prostitution, in this sense, is precisely what enabled the writer to acknowledge evidence of male same-sex sexual activity as well.

Even those materials that seem to specifically reference the significance of same-sex sexual desire produce more complicated visions. The register "Pederasts and Others" (BB6), for instance, at first seems to offer an exception to the general rule of the absence of same-sex sexual desire in the archive. Its very title showcases its explicit concern with men who sought sex with other men. Peniston, in particular, has effectively used the register to reveal the connections these men formed among themselves.[71] Yet the title also insists on a relationship between pederasty and "other" forms of marginalization. In addition to

70. Anne Josephine Petit to Sous-chef du 2e bureau de la 1re division, Jan. 1876, JC 34, formerly BM2 60, APP.

71. Peniston, *Pederasts and Others.*

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pederasty, the dossier directs its reader as well to the distribution of pornographic images, female prostitution, theft, and murder, to name just some examples.[72]

In fact, the register refuses the coherence of many of these social and legal categories. Even if it is primarily concerned with men who sought sex with other men, those caught in it were understood in light of the other figures the documents reveal. The female prostitute was one of those figures. For example, the register records the arrest of a clandestine prostitute in December 1873 and reads in its entirety: "Prostitution on the boulevards as an unregistered prostitute, soliciting men following her abandonment of the pederast Gondouin, called the Marquis, with whom she had slept with [*avec lequel elle avait couché*] the night of December 26–27, 1873."[73] There is little question that the Marquis did enjoy sex with other men: he was arrested in a urinal near the Champs-Elysées about a year after this incident.[74] But what are we to make of the claim, so briefly made, that the prostitute and the pederast were sleeping with one another? We could read "couché" innocently, as just sharing a bed. We could read the Marquis as "bisexual." The register itself makes no remark about the ambivalent sexual desires of the Marquis and thus leaves his "orientation" totally unmarked. Even the record of his arrest fails to mention his ultimate aim: "Public offense against decency . . . for a series of offenses in the urinals of the Champs-Elysées and in the area of the Café concerts."[75] While the category of *outrage public à la pudeur* (public offense against decency) was often used to justify the arrest of men who sought sex with other men, it was used to regulate a wide variety of public acts, of which male same-sex sexual activity was probably a minority.[76] The implication is clear, but the act and the motivation for the act are left unsaid and are thus left relatively unimportant. Ultimately, we have to admit that we do not and cannot know the desires that motivated him to spend the evening in the same bed as a female prostitute, nor do we know why he was in the urinals of the Champs-Elysées. The categories of homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual fail utterly, because to assign him to one of these categories is itself a form of erasure and does violence to the complexity of his life, even one that has come down to us in just these two fragments.

When male same-sex desire emerges it is often, as in the case of the Marquis, linked to prostitution and other forms of social marginality. I emphasize

72. "Pederastes et divers," BB6, 2, 4–5, 52, 183, APP.

73. Ibid., 27.

74. Ibid., 62.

75. Ibid.

76. For a history of Article 330, "Offenses against Public Decency," including its varied uses, see esp. Iacub, *Par le trou de la serrure*. See also Peniston, *Pederasts and Others*, 48–49.

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our inability to firmly re-create men who sought sex with other men as coherent subjects because of the way they were constantly caught up with and became a part of other social categories that seemed clearer to the police. While some segments of the archives emphasize male same-sex sexual activity, they ultimately reveal, even as they produce, a fundamental incoherence in light of what the police felt surer of: female prostitution. While this assumption itself speaks to an unearned confidence—the female prostitute was not an entirely clear category, either—this relationship is fundamental to understanding the lives of men who sought sex with other men because they constituted the regulatory apparatus that participated in the construction of queer lives.[77] If the regulation of prostitution gradually transformed the temporary act of selling sex into a "permanent label of deviant [burned] into the flesh of the prostitute," as Clayson has put it, then it also threatened to mark men who sought sex with other men, but the precise meaning of that mark was never consistently defined.[78] The construction of the queer subject in the nineteenth century, then, had less to do with specific sexual object choice than with the myriad associations the police and other experts made between men who sought sex with other men and other marginal sexual subjects, especially the female prostitute. This is not to say that men who sought sex with other men did not perceive their desires as important to their sense of self, or as something that differentiated them from their male peers. Indeed, insofar as they appear in the records of the police at all, the archives enforce that difference. They do so not in terms of homosexual desire, however, but in terms of prostitution.

Conclusion

The history of male homosexuality is thus in some sense "lost" because it was never there to begin with. While Sara Edenheim sees this loss as evidence of the institutional archive's essential emptiness, I regard it as providing a new way of understanding the contingency of desire and therefore the possibility of building new forms of community.[79] The association of prostitution and pederasty gives new meaning to our encounters with the police archives. Combing through these documents one often moves from a series relating to female prostitution to an individual mention of same-sex sexual activity and vice versa. These encounters with the "other" subject of the history of sexuality need to be reevaluated in light of a discourse that produced same-sex sexual activity as a kind of female prostitution. The overshadowing of same-sex sexual activity by

77. On some of the ambiguities within the category of the prostitute, see Ross, "Serving Sex."
78. Clayson, *Painted Love*, 10.
79. Edenheim, "Lost and Never Found."

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female prostitution in the archives is not, in other words, a silence; rather, it is constitutive of the construction of deviant sexuality in the nineteenth century. Brought into dialogue with the archives, this interpretation constructs the documents differently. It is not that evidence of homosexuality hides among evidence of female prostitution; rather, it is that all the material is evidence of prostitution in a broader sense. The fragments of same-sex lives are evidence of desires lived differently, understood in constant relationship and/or identification with women who sold sex. Desire thus always intersected with calculation. It is not enough to simply assert that *homosexuality* is a good enough term to capture the complexity of the sexual lives of the nineteenth century, because doing so effaces the relationship between same-sex sexual activity and female prostitution that structured men's encounters with the police and therefore with the whole symbolic system that captured them and produced different ways of understanding their sexual desires.

We have tended to shape these archives to the histories we desire. And in an era when the success of an identitarian gay rights movement can no longer be held in doubt, we have desired "our" history. I propose allowing them to construct histories we did not know we had. We can use the archives to construct other histories that will perhaps draw on the contemporary moment to recognize not simply the contingency of a singular identity but the ways that our very desires emerged in relation to those people who now inhabit "other" places than we do. As Brent Hayes Edwards argues, "The recalcitrance of certain artifacts—their apparent muteness—might be understood, in the right light, as a kind of potential, the remnants of an alternative history rather than the worthless shards left behind."[80] In the case of nineteenth-century France, men who sought sex with other men were not constructed as a singular class but were debased as a form of prostitution. The presence of prostitution is not an obstacle, therefore, but an opportunity to understand how same-sex desire participated in the construction of a queer community based on a certain kind of social position defined by sexual marginality in a broader sense. This abject identity perhaps does not align with the progressive narrative of the gradual construction self-identified gay men, nor is it innocent of state violence and repression. It does, however, present a vision of a different kind of community that crosses gender and engages with the power of sex to build social connections.[81] By emphasizing the relationship between forms of same-sex sexual activity and venal sex, the

80. Edwards, "Taste of the Archive," 948.

81. I am thinking here of Samuel Delaney's emphasis on "contact" as a way of building a democratic urban culture (*Times Square Red*, pt. 2).

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archives construct this possible present even as they call into question the past we have constructed from them.

The connections the archives build between two forms of social dissonance are of course not the only history that they reveal. They also allow historians to reconstruct the emergence of a community based on same-sex desire. And they structure our understanding of sexual regulation based on the marginalization of working-class women as a discrete class. The story I draw from the archives does not exclude these others, because sex remained a powerful, if incoherent, practice that bound together various administrative, cultural, and social developments. Yet detaching the use of the archives from the identitarian impulse and situating them in a more diffused relationship between people, institutions, and discourses demonstrate the value of queer approaches to history even while calling into question the motivating force of that history.

In many senses this approach represents a "return" to insights we have not fully reckoned with. As Scott and Sylvia Schafer have recently argued, historians seem ready to move on before they have fully appreciated the insights of the theoretical inflections of the cultural turn. I agree with both Scott and Schafer in sensing a palpable relief that the epistemological questions that emerged with the cultural turn seem to have passed, and we can get back to the "real" work of historicizing.[82] It is a relief that we can, in a sense, get back to the archives. But the archives do not settle these questions; they raise them. There is little reason indeed that cultural history cannot engage the archives even as it remains attuned to the ways that we construct, rather than recover, the past. The questioning of our own motivations, refusing to use our own position to cudgel the past into the shape we desire, brings a different kind of perspective to the archives themselves, enables us to put old documents to new uses, and provides a narrative that is less presentist even as it is more relevant to the contemporary moment. This approach can thus be situated within the optimistic strand of queer theory epitomized by José Esteban Muñoz, who argued that "the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds."[83] In other words, the constructed past can provide visions for an alternative contemporary queer politics that acknowledges both the "otherness" and the constructed nature of the queer past while remaining rooted in archival practice. The archive, in this sense, provides the raw material not only for a queer history but also for a queer present.

82. Scott, "History-Writing as Critique," 19–21; Schafer, "Still Turning," 166.
83. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27.

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