

Lecture

Thursday 10 Oct
18:00 - 19:30
IMGWF Lecture Hall
Königstr. 42, 23552 Lübeck

Katie Sutton
(Australian National University)

Invitation to the joint
winter semester kick-off
of the CRC 1665 and
IMGWF

Technologies of Sex: Humanizing the Clinical Gaze in Interwar Social Hygiene Films

Abstract

Sex research in the early-twentieth century German-speaking world was a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary project, and by the 1920s popular interest in this booming field was facilitated by the exciting technological possibilities of film, as sex reform activists, doctors, feminists and advocacy organizations forged productive alliances with commercial studios. This talk argues that interwar Aufklärungsfilme were crucial in democratizing interwar sexual science, depicting doctors as not simply authoritative experts, but as sympathetic, accessible and even vulnerable mediators of the latest sex research. They show doctor-scientists taking their lectures and life-lessons out of the traditional clinics and laboratories into spaces such as nightclubs, funfairs, and domestic homes, at times ceding some of their authority to newly recognised social actors such as female medical students or gender-diverse subjects. Film, queer and affect theorists emphasize how the embodied experience of cinemagoing can foster unique forms of identification and empathy, from "prosthetic memories" (Landsberg) to "embodied affects" (Rutherford). We examine how these shifts worked to humanize the clinical gaze and gesture towards more emancipatory futures, even as we also consider ways in which these sources remain ethically troubling for historians of gender and sexuality today.

Bio

Katie Sutton is Associate Professor of German and Gender Studies at the Australian National University and a cultural historian of the German-speaking world. Working at the intersection of gender, sexuality, medicine and popular culture, Sutton's work focuses particularly on queer and trans histories and cultures, sexual science and psychoanalysis. They are author of *Sexuality in Modern German History* (Bloomsbury, 2023); *Sex between Body and Mind: Psychoanalysis and Sexology in the German-Speaking World, 1890s-1930s* (Michigan UP, 2019); and *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (Berghahn, 2011). Sutton's research has been supported by the Australian Research Council, DAAD, and British Academy/Leverhulme, including a current collaborative ARC Discovery Project with Professor Birgit Lang at the University of Melbourne on photography and film in early sexual science on which this presentation is based.



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