GLQ Call for Papers

“Time after Time: On Cruising the Past”
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Across political spectrums, broad and varied affective attachments to and investments in the past proliferate. How do we distinguish between those that foster and those that attempt to extinguish queer and trans life? The twenty-first century has been plagued by the horrifying power of white supremacist nostalgia from Trump’s reprisal of the political slogan “Make America Great Again” to the weaponization of the European Middle Ages by Christian white nationalists as in the deployment of Crusades iconography in the 2019 attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and, perhaps more banally, to the desire for “the 1830s but without all the racists and getting married off for the highest bid” recently expressed by that exemplar of white capitalism Taylor Swift. At the same time, queer studies has rehearsed, time and again, a deep investment in the past writ large and its own past in particular. Think, for example, of Elizabeth Freeman’s landmark special issue of GLQ, Queer Temporalities (2007), and her subsequent self-referential reflection “The Queer Temporalities of Queer Temporalities” (2019). How do we differentiate, if possible, the deployment of the past in the name of white supremacist nostalgia from the queer attachment to temporal perversion itself, or what Freeman describes as the anachronistic and parodic embodiment of temporal drag?

One might argue that the difference between these two turns to the past is easily discerned, a mere terminological distinction—that the “nostalgia” of a Trump, a white nationalist, or a Swift is explicitly critiqued by thinkers of queer time, like Carolyn Dinshaw, Elizabeth Freeman, Dana Luciano, Carla Freccero, Heather Love, and José Esteban Muñoz, who share in characterizing “unabashed nostalgia” as one of the “more problematic feelings and attitudes.” But what is to keep any figure of white heteropatriarchal capitalism and nationalism from coopting queer orientations to the past like the “queer touch across time,” “queer spectrality,” “temporal drag,” “feeling backward,” or “cruising utopia”? How does queer history safeguard against the dangers of reproducing narratives of violence and exclusion? And what leads queer studies back to the question of queer temporality, time after time?

This special issue of GLQ assumes a mode of cruising in orienting ourselves to the past broadly construed. It, thus, asks contributors to engage in a form of temporal promiscuity in order to seek the queer potentiality that lays scattered throughout varied moments in time that we call the past. And, in responding to Muñoz’s call to cruise time, it also positions itself in relationship to queer of color critique, seeking, in particular, the crucial intersections of sexuality and race in studies of the past. So, we turn to our fellow rewriters of history, namely our comrades in the study of the global Middle Ages, of premodern critical race studies, and of race before race, not only to draw attention to the ways that knowledge production in the academy is structured by exclusionary ideologies of white nationalism, capitalism, homophobia, and misogyny, to name but a few, but also to interrogate the very historical methods, terms, and models of periodization that participate in exclusionary forms of academic disciplining. Taking a cue from medievalists and early modernists of color unafraid to think across time and across the globe, we aim to further
bring a global perspective to the theorizing of queer time in order to imagine the production of the past as an enactment of power. How does relegating some histories to the past while resuscitating others participate in colonial and imperial projects? What historiographic strategies for resistance or subversion are available to marginalized subjects of history? And how might formulating what is provisionally called queer of color history enable anti-homophobic, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, and decolonial approaches to the past? What other values might we associate with this approach?

This special issue aims to center affective attachments to, desires for, and devotions to the past cultivated by queer and trans writers and artists. Thus, we invite essays that explore queer history as a practice of devotion, that analyze the habits and conventions of queer engagements with the past, and that develop a robust sense of the practices of mourning, commemoration, imagination, ritual, and tradition- and community-formation that constitute queer cultural production. Like Dinshaw, we support work by “experts” and “amateurs”—that is, both those trained as classicists, medievalists, or early modernists and those whose work may serendipitously intersect with any aspect of the past. We are especially interested in scholarship that asks how the past dislodges our certainty about categories like sex, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity; scholarship that analyzes how coloniality renders racial and ethnic hierarchies inextricable from gender and sexual ones; and scholarship that moves outside of western Europe to center, instead, histories of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. Indeed, why, we ask, does the persistent queer devotion to time itself seem to be a structuring habit of queer studies? Through a collection of transhistorical essays, this special issue seeks to explore how queer approaches to the past are inextricable from the aims to support queer and trans of color life today and in the future.

Potential questions include:

- How do we distinguish between “good” and “bad” nostalgia, melancholia, or commemoration? Is this distinction a terminological or conceptual one, or are there varieties of, say, melancholia that differ in structure or aim?
- What kinds of rituals, practices, and habits shape queer cultural production and queer studies? How do these practices enable the production of queer communities and traditions across time without reproducing exclusion?
- What is the relationship between queer history and queer theory?
- How do citations of classical, medieval, or early modern figures from across the globe serve queer of color cultural production?
- How do queer of color approaches to the past respond to or play with the accusation of anachronism? How does the body of scholarship on race before race provide useful historiographic strategies?
- How do queer indigenous communities and queer communities in the Global South combat the imperializing of history? How do they respond to the hegemony of western European history? How do examples of co-opting such dominant histories raise questions about who owns which pasts in the first place?
- What kinds of exclusionary and anti-queer logics undergird historical methods, schemas of periodization, and terms like the “premodern”??
• In what ways do figures of the past or the “premodern” haunt the present?
• What might queer of color medievalism or queer of color/early/modern look like? Which archives are pertinent to these formulations of the queer past? How might we imagine a practice of queer archiving?
• How does queer of color critique problematize particular histories of modernization including narratives of sexual liberation, of secularization, or of global capitalism?
• Why does queer studies seem to always return to the question of time?

Please submit a 500-word abstract and a one-page CV by August 1, 2024, to be considered for inclusion in this special issue. You can send submissions and any inquiries to <cruisingthepastglq@gmail.com>.