This paper is an attempt to link the historical shifts of homosexual culture and psychoanalysis. It is based on two assumptions about historicisation: firstly, that historical experience varies both phenomenologically and in terms of its conditions of production; and secondly, that concepts and categories of thought are historical in themselves, emerging at particular junctures and carrying within them traces of their origin, even as they are reconfigured over time. My contention is that the conference title ‘Homosexuality: Why psychoanalysis?’ has to be thought through in terms of the shifts that each term has undergone, as well as through the story of their confrontation.

In one sense, we can see psychoanalysis and homosexuality as historically coeval formations. As Foucault has made clear, the term ‘homosexuality’ does not denote a single condition or identity, with some essential substrate underlying the different manifestations of same-sex sexual behaviour across cultures; rather, it is the name for a particular node within a developing discursive formation on sexuality. Such a formation is dependent on the broader shifts within industrial society, where the family is privatised and excluded from the main centres of production, and sexuality becomes isolated, autonomous and specialised. Psychoanalysis—as an explanation of other phenomena within the social—perversely only becomes possible to the extent that its *explanans*, sexuality, has become detached from the social and developed into an independent sign system. However this specialisation, involving the emergence of an autonomous sexual culture, is precisely what allows homosexuality to take on an existence as a visible and threatening behaviour in need of explanation. Psychoanalysis can be deployed as a particular form of explanation of and intervention into homosexuality only because it shares similar discursive and social pre-conditions. Thus, psychoanalysis and homosexuality are heir to a similar logic but distinctly different development, and have been engaged in long-term dialogue and acrimony. Homosexuality was one of the objects which psychoanalysis helped to construct, even as it made its own claim for authority and knowledge: it leans on homosexuality in order to produce some of its fundamental concepts and self-narratives. The theory of narcissism springs to mind, as does Freud’s account of the dynamics of his relations with other psychoanalysts, notably Jung and Ferenczi, and the deployment of the notion of sublimated homosexual libido as the basis of sociality. There is an obvious Derridean *interrogatoire* which interrogates the centrality of a continuously objectified homosexuality to the production and articulation of psychoanalysis.

The experience of homosexuality has not remained static over this period. If for much of the time, homosexuality was the constitutive outside of a vigorously normalised and coercive heterosexuality (itself the site of complex bio-political interventions) and a particularly abjected moment of the articulation of masculine identity, over the last half-century, at least in the West, homosexuality has shifted from its designation as individual or minority exception—and hence something to be policed—to one of culturally articulated plurality. The very process of autonomisation of sexuality that made homosexuality into a discrete phenomenon has intensified with all sorts of effects on the construction of sexual binaries and the experience of sexual identity. Homosexuality is no longer the object simply of a scrutinising gaze in search of pathological traits to be theorised in terms of a fundamental causal difference. Rather, it is now the site of a production of possibilities of desire, what might be seen as a space of intensification or incitement of pleasures: ‘gay culture’ is a sexual culture, not merely in the sense of the culture of an extant sexual minority, but in the much stronger sense of an active creation of possibilities of jouissance, to purloin Lacan’s term.
Wolfenden (I use the term as a synecdoche for the whole complex of liberalising reports and legislation of the 50s and 60s) reordered the legally administered boundaries of public and private just as other powerful tendencies within society and the economy were effacing those boundaries altogether. The emergence of an extensive space for the enjoyment of diverse sexual practices fed by the broader capitalisation and commercialisation of sexuality and the reorganisation of social conceptions of sexual threat have allowed the notion of ‘the homosexual’ to quietly expire. In a move which is more resonant of earlier conceptions of sexual possibility and practice, the culture of sexual experimentation is now predicated less on sexual identity and more on the generation and enjoyment of sexual intensities.

Even the AIDS crisis has failed to produce the threatened regression to exclusion and recriminalisation—a fantasy held by many in the depths of the 80s. Indeed, it could be argued that the social recognition of AIDS, the public imaging of erstwhile taboo sexual practices and the mobilisation of sections of the state in the management of the health crisis (involving the co-option of sectors of the gay movement) have produced a new set of discourses about the biological and human rights that were instrumental in reorganising the social body of homosexuality. In a sense, AIDS enabled a certain social ‘coming-out’ which fed directly into the legitimising of new forms of affective relationships. The experience of gay ‘families’ rallying round to look after ill and dying men, often after their biological families had disowned them, was both touching and confirmatory of a new possibility of emotional life. The AIDS crisis produced a culture of affective plurality that was, ironically, a complement to the sexual pluralism that had unwittingly been one of its causes.

The experience has produced contradictory consequences. The new visibility of gay men as carers, as affectively potent, fed into the shift in attitudes that would lead to the wholesale reorganisation of the legal position of gay men (and lesbians) with regard to partnership and child-raising. The legalisation itself was refracted through the priority given to coupledom, which is increasingly seen as the sole domain of non-mediated human interactions—that is the valorisation of partner love as the basis of what is left of the private: the homosexual couple is privileged and becomes the ‘ideal’ of emotional commitment, erasing the more complex forms of affective engagement, precisely revealed in the crisis, and endlessly permuted within gay modernity. The traumatic effects of the experience of illness, death and stigma that was the lot of many during the first years of the epidemic have also been repressed. In many ways, a certain repudiation of the memory of the epidemic, and the sexual and social possibilities that found a voice before it, have led to an unexplored and untheorised melancholy within gay culture, even as it undergoes radical reconstruction, in part through changes in the production of the subject as such. What Deleuze and Guattari have called the ‘direct social investment of the body’ has been reconfigured: a new array of cultural, mediated and institutional forms address the nascent subject, outside the paradigm of familial patterns, and reinforce subjective forms through an unmediated access to libidinal configurations. What I have in mind here is the techno-cultural penetration of the erstwhile private sphere, the proliferation of a sort of haptic imagery that works directly on the body. What these shifts reconfigure is a new terrain of tension, uncertainty and competing choices, which duly become the site for psychoanalytic intervention.

Over the same period how we understand psychoanalysis has changed too: the current field that bears its name shows no signs of unity, synthesis or consensus, but only a genealogical relation to a past set of problematics and institutional histories and an active engagement with a changed experience of ‘dis-ease’. Not only have psychoanalytic concepts been invented, developed or discarded, but the very objects
that psychoanalysis investigates have shifted. Hysteria, depression, the various forms of ‘psychic misery’ also have their histories, their historically variable explanations, and their historically variable articulation and importance. As Derrida once remarked, psychoanalysis is only unified by the name of Freud and, one might add, by the notion of the unconscious (Derrida 1998: 80). How the unconscious is understood, and which ‘Freud’ any practitioner is faithful to, is a matter for debate. It is telling that many of the papers in this issue offer quite un-Freudian accounts of the social trauma surrounding homosexuality and locate the difficulties encountered by gay analysands not in the foundations of the subject, but in mechanisms of insult and repression, or in an extended notion of the Freudian subject that sees the absolute otherness of the other as traumatic in itself. The many traditions of psychoanalysis are open to recombination in a way that is finally limited only by the performative ascription of the title ‘analyst’, and by the outcome of agonistic discussions within discursive communities.

In consequence, the intersection of homosexuality and psychoanalysis has altered profoundly. For the most part psychoanalysis has claimed the high ground as a discursive formation that can illuminate homosexuality. Through much of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis was a mechanism for explaining and managing homosexuality—either allying with other institutional apparatuses in its repression, or at its most liberal, producing a species of tolerance—Freud’s own position, and Lacan’s, despite the latter’s theoretical waywardness. The epistemic thrust of this psychoanalysis as a form of explanatory sexual taxonomy could be seen as bringing psychoanalysis close to a positive psychology that was part of a Foucauldian disciplinary apparatus: the homosexual was an object of scrutiny, knowledge and control, and psychoanalysis one of the forms of that knowledge, that with state and religious definitions of the deviant, policed the field of sexuality. It is this viscerally experienced collusion of psychoanalysis with the general climate of social ostracism that leads to a near universal condemnation of psychoanalysis by the gay movements of the 60s and 70s, and to the exploration of other accounts of the subject that might provide an alternative account of sexuality. Foucault of course is central to this project—both historicising psychoanalysis and looking to a Deleuzian model of desire as positive flow as an alternative. For Foucault of course, the construction of sex as the secret of the subject was part of the secular deployment of the dispositif of sexuality: it is the importance given to sex as such that gives theoretical and moral weight to the contingency of sexual choice. If sexuality were to be revalorised, then homosexuality—and object choice in general—becomes of transient significance, merely the site of a particular, quasi-aesthetic work on the self.

Foucault also provides the inspiration for another engagement of psychoanalysis with homosexuality that marks Judith Butler’s work, although he might be surprised at the consequences. As several other papers here illustrate, Butler takes Freud’s model of desiring bisexuality and its vicissitudes to give an account of the melancholic structure of heterosexuality: the forced repudiation of a homosexual component of desire originally present in all subjects, lends a constant aura of loss and hence a melancholy colour to all heterosexual relations. This view, then, mobilises psychoanalysis as a critique of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ but is double edged, especially with regard to male homosexuality, since the loss of the possibility of a heterosexual object choice must be seen as producing a melancholic homosexuality: all sexuality is shrouded, marked by melancholy. Something similar—that is, a critical use of psychoanalytic concepts which then seem to rebound evaluatively on homosexuality itself—can be seen in the nineties development of ‘queer theory’ with its intermittent embodiments in artistic and sexual practice, which sees exclusive identity and object choice as the problem. Opposing any disjunctive organisation of sexuality, ‘queer’ valorised all those phenomena that lay ‘in-between’, or better, ‘prior-to’ sexual difference: the transsexual, the mixed body, the sexual chimaera, and buttressed such valuations with thefts from Lacan: the contrast
between a marked ‘phallic’ sexuality and some putative beyond, another jouissance. But such a deconstruction of binary sexuality—in the name of an in-forme and against the supposed commodification of desire in gay culture—ends up equating all non-queer sexual forms, and seeing them as reactionary. Homosexuality becomes somehow retrograde, too fixed. As I argued above, this disowning of homosexuality was in part a disavowal, in the wake of AIDS, of the very sexual experimentation that gay culture had endorsed, in favour of a utopian fantasmatic of identity.

Homosexuality and psychoanalysis have engaged in a sequence of missed encounters, in part because psychoanalysis tendentially aims at a totalising theory of the subject, a tendency that Freud is constantly disavowing, thereby testifying to the strength of the desire (Freud 1913). But this may have to do with the surface on which the approach occurs. An account that rather promiscuously mixes Adorno and Foucault might see psychoanalysis as the discourse (and practice, under the ambivalent sign of therapy) that emerges where a certain social process fails. To put it another way, it emerges where a certain relation between the individual and the social, the body and meaning is both necessary and impossible. I refer to this as intensity and interpellation, that is, the experience of the body and the forms of social address to that body, which could be seen as the material instantiations of particular and universal. At one level neurosis is just another name for the insistence of a demand for coherence and the repeated failure of that demand’s satisfaction. Psychoanalysis is the recognition of this repetition and failure and its discourse is the attempt to name and suture the gap. Or to put it in quasi-i_ekian terms, psychoanalysis is the recognition that the universal and the particular are only unified by their non-coincidence. What is important in psychoanalysis is not so much its ‘positive’ content (its transformation into a positive psychology, or a quasi-medical support for a particular form of normalisation) as its perpetual, testifying openness to the ‘negative’, non-identity of subject and other and their antagonistic relationship. Looked at from this point of view, the positive content of psychoanalysis is the conceptual mapping of the historical forms that such a non-coincidence takes.

For Deleuze and Guattari this recognition by psychoanalysis of non-identity becomes a struggle to overcome it. Psychoanalysis discovers Oedipalisation, that is, the attempt to reterritorialise, to bring into bounded fixity, what has become a continuous process of deterritorialisation under capitalism. This, for them, is Freud’s achievement, his recognition of Oedipus as the imposition of a triangular meaning on desire. In discovering Oedipus, Freud comes to endorse it, and explanation corrals desire: or to revert to Adorno, the particular of a contingent desire is subordinated to the universal which explains and dominates it. Positive psychoanalysis disavows what its very existence signals: its explanations are testimony to the anxiety generated by its own central discovery.

In his 1972 book Homosexual Desire, Guy Hocquenghem used Deleuze and Guattari’s model of positive desire—desiring production—to develop an account of homosexuality that still has interest. Homosexuality is defined not by negation, loss or absence, the dominant codings of sexuality within the psychoanalysis of the time, and still residually mobilised in queer theory, as we saw above, but as a positive conjunction of organs and bodies. For Hocquenghem, the Oedipal machine makes homosexuality meaningful by seeing it as a molar linkage between whole gendered bodies: men and men, women and women. Hocquenghem wanted to see homosexual desire as a way in which the territories of gender and totalised bodies might undergo a sort of dissolution, leaving new surfaces for connection—for ‘plugging in’. Psychoanalysis theorises, or rather is the representation in theory, of a particular coding of desire which it later endorses. Hocquenghem thus sees Freud’s account of the various developmental stages of the libido, with their final outcome in the suzerainty of the phallic, as a sequence of socially
functional repressions, limiting the possibilities of pleasure and connection. The repression of anality becomes the foundation of the private self: the phallic ordering of the body sacrifices anal jouissance in the service of an external order, one of separate gendered individuals. By contrast a de-Oedipalised homosexuality opens up the anus to desire, to interconnection, to exchange. The body is disarticulated into a congeries of erotic machines, which can interact with other machines to generate flows and pleasure. The utopian vision that Hocquenghem proposes foresees a generalisation of the dérive, the cruising that gay men have traditionally practiced in liminal spaces, now transferred to the social field as a whole. Rather than a confined encounter between persons, homosexual desire seeks a perpetually open gamut of connections, of greater or lesser duration. For Hocquenghem, homosexual desire is not a derivative desire harking back to a lost object (real as with Freud, or always already lost, as with Lacan), or a moment of transgression that maintains the law, but a drive to new connections. Crucially, desire is not tied to a fixity of fantasy: rather than a supercoded route to jouissance, Hocquenghem posits the creation and endless novelties of pleasure through multiple connections.7

The culture of modern homosexuality seems to carry utopian aspirations of this kind and as indicated above might be seen as a space in which a Foucauldian sexual aesthetics is practiced: the cultivation of jouissance (within or at the borders of safety) is not concerned with the promotion of relationships, but is rather devoted to the maximisation of intensities, that are not totalised as persons, indeed might precisely shatter such totalities.8 Such a sexual reconfiguration might well enmesh with a new articulation of affect that would be antagonistic to the reduction of the couple and open to a filled-out conception of friendship, now no longer restricted to its gender-patterned idealisations.

Yet clearly this space is also implicated in a new regime of desire currently in production. The heterotopias of the ‘sex clubs’ are configured in terms of the leisure industry of the large metropolis and are also consonant with the cultural incitement of desire that is marked by the ‘pornographisation’ of the image world. The connections here are quite difficult to discern: on the one hand the possibilities of desire are expanded, on the other they may be part of a cultural compulsion. For someone like _i_ek, the case is clear: there is now a new superegoic imperative, ‘Enjoy!’ which is tied to consumption, and which marks the successful subsumption of the individual under the universal of capital. This echoes Adorno’s nostalgia for the psychoanalytic subject of repression as he discerns the direct colonisation of the id by mass society, without the mediation of the ego. Yet both positions fail to hold fast to their own primary understanding of psychoanalysis as the site and representation of the failure which their more pessimistic accounts of the social assume to have been overcome, that is the coincidence of universal and particular. What their reflections on post-bourgeois culture indicate is the demand on psychoanalysis to think beyond the conditions of its own emergence, that is beyond the Oedipal forms of desire. Hocquenghem gives a utopian rendition of this thought in terms of homosexuality as infinite conjunction. Perhaps a more grounded and historical account would look at the emerging field of a culture of sexual and affective creativity, its inflexion and capture by other forms of interpellative address–intensity just as consumer choice—but also a collective appropriation of those materials in a dialectical supersession, and the necessary tensions of all this with those affective relations eulogised but also Oedipalised in the cult of love. It is in these tensions and their lived traversal and conceptual reflection that we might find not only the proper object of a psychoanalysis open to homosexuality that is finally removed from the insistent trace of its first pathological theorisations, but also the development of a psychoanalysis proper to its time; in the spirit of Adorno we might call this a negative psychoanalytics, a psychoanalytic critique of psychoanalysis, or a constant historical
reflection on the historicity of psychoanalysis, as well as the site for a new exploration of the possibilities of desire and affect beyond identity and the couple.

References


1 See Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Interpretation as a Socially Symbolic Act, 64-65, for a sympathetic account.

2 It is the question of reproduction which now becomes problematic, as we can see with the bio-political anxieties about late motherhood, appropriate parenting, and the incipiently racist concerns about ‘immigrant’ fertility.

3 Whilst adult relations are less policed, adult-child relations seem to be increasingly freighted with anxiety and subject to forms of invasive scrutiny.

4 Barbara Ehrenreich’s recent history, Dancing in the Streets, points up how melancholy became an extensively experienced affect in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in part because of the isolation of the Protestant self. Unfortunately, she simply identifies this melancholy with ‘depression’, a much later production that is in part organised around a hegemonic biologism.

5 Especially in the 50s, Lacan was notable for taking on homosexual analysands without attempting to change their orientation. However, he was also unscrupulous in using them for his own ends. One of his analysands, François Wahl, was instrumental in editing the Écrits into an almost readable form. Elisabeth Roudinesco gives an often comical account of Wahl and Lacan’s relationship. Lacan analysed another gay man, Jean Beaufret, and his boyfriend. According to Roudinesco, Lacan used Beaufret’s analysis to secure access to Heidegger, whom they both met in Freiburg in 1953. He also absorbed Beaufret’s interpretation of Heidegger into ‘The Rome Discourse’ (Roudinesco 1997: 224-226 and 332ff.).

6 Lacan’s belated engagement with feminism at the level of desire can be seen in his notion of the other jouissance developed in Seminar XX; Encore.

7 For those interested in philosophical connections, one might see this Deleuzian account as oddly consonant with Lacanian notions: the Deleuzian body is the body before the mirror stage, but also the body after subjective destitution, the body beyond meaning, where intensity is pure and unrestricted. The relations between Lacan and Deleuze (and Guattari) would be a useful study.

8 Bersani reads the figure of the man being penetrated as a jouissance which involves the anti-social destruction of the ego and identity.