CfP 2022 GSA - "Style as a Way of Life: Queer Sexuality, Aesthetics, Ethics"

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**Title:** Style as a Way of Life: Queer Sexuality, Aesthetics, Ethics

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**Paper Abstract Due Date:** February 1, 2022 (to ddesocio@vassar.edu)

In a 1981 interview with the French gay magazine Gai Pied, Michel Foucault posited that sexual desire—and in particular homosexual desire—could be used to invent a multiplicity of new relationships between individuals and to oneself, posing the question, “What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?” Viewing the rise of the homosexual in the twentieth century as an “historic occasion” to (re)create our world, he proposed a “homosexual askesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent...a manner of being that is still improbable.” For Foucault, (homo)sexuality was a question of ethics, a medium and source for us to probe the contours of our conduct and our lives.

This panel takes Foucault’s contentions concerning queer sexualities and ethics as a starting point; it seeks, first, to investigate the roles that aesthetics may play between and with these two terms and, second, to introduce perspectives and voices from German Studies into queer theoretical debates long-dominated by Anglo-French contexts. Our investigation begins by asking: how do queer sexualities, aesthetics, and ethics come together to spark new visions, forms, and practices of life? We wish to approach this problem by exploring how style—understood broadly and across medium—interacts with sexuality to bring about ethical thinking. Like queerness, style is defined by its paradoxical reception, deemed significant and insignificant in turn. On the one hand, it appears as a frivolous excess removed from substance. As D.A. Miller has put it, style boasts its “deliberately embraced” dispensability. On the other hand, style can determine that which it represents: Erich Auerbach notes how style often elevates reality by endowing it with the “seriousness” that it deserves. Both sexuality and style can, then, in their deceptive insignificance, shape the worlds we construct, narrate, and endow with meaning.

Reflecting upon the contiguities between sexuality and style, we pose the following questions: How can sexuality cultivate forms of style? Conversely, how can we understand style as a generative form for sexuality and ethics? What does it mean to pursue a vision of life through style? How do our understandings of ethics change when inflected by sexuality and style? What would an “ethical style” mean? What are the potentials and limits of style?

Papers are welcome from any time period, medium, or geographic region related to the German-language context.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Style as lifestyle

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Camp, fashion, and self-presentation
Superficiality and depth/detachment and earnestness
Stimmung/mood/ephemerality
Politics and citizenship
Selfhood and relationality, i.e. romance, friendship, etc.
Desire and pleasure
Humor, irony, and satire
Cultural heritage/tradition
Temporality

Please submit paper abstracts (300-400 words) to Domenic DeSocio (ddesocio@vassar.edu) by February 1.