

A foundational text of gay and lesbian identity from the dawn of the 20th century

BERLIN'S THIRD SEX by Magnus Hirschfeld

Berlin, summer 2017: Germany's parliament votes to allow same-sex marriage, regarded as the last legislative step in the march to full civil equality for lesbians and gay men. It was a march that began in the same city 120 years earlier, when MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD established the first gay rights association in the country – or the world.

With his 1904 book *BERLIN'S THIRD SEX*, now published in English for the first time, Hirschfeld introduced the broader public to the lives and loves of sexual minorities. At the dawn of the 20th century, Germany's capital supported an astonishingly rich gay subculture, with cross-dressing cabaret, all-night parties and erotic licence at every level of society. Much that we associate with the Weimar era onward is here: rough trade, drag kings, tea dances, sporty dykes, coded classified ads, campy nicknames, passing, outing, hustlers, beats and even cruising at the YMCA. Police, blackmailers and moral crusaders are never far, suicide is all too common, but Hirschfeld also invites us to visit same-sex couples and witness tranquil scenes of domesticity and devotion.

Along with an informative afterword and extensive notes, this edition of *BERLIN'S THIRD SEX* also includes Hirschfeld's earlier work *What People Should Know About the Third Sex* (1901). As primary sources, these two titles complement the findings of Robert Beachy's *Gay Berlin* (2014), a widely acclaimed cultural history which explored the city's critical role in gay consciousness and activism. Here we have queer history captured by an insider, as it happened. *BERLIN'S THIRD SEX* originally formed part of the *Metropolis Documents* project (1904-1908), one of the most ambitious depictions of the urban experience ever undertaken. Edited by Hans Ostwald, this 51-volume panorama of early 20th century city living focused particularly on marginal existences.

MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD (1868-1935) was one of the world's first gay activists. Both a writer and a doctor, he sought not only to define sexual variation – homosexuality, trans identity – but also to repeal laws that policed their expression in his native Germany. His insistence that same-sex attraction was in-born, and that consenting adults should be free to form attachments without harassment from the law, was almost a century ahead of Western public consensus.

RIXDORF EDITIONS is a Berlin-based press which is introducing forgotten German classics to a contemporary English-language readership, focusing on the Wilhelmine period (1890-1918), a time of unexpected daring and innovation. Its first two titles are *Berlin's Third Sex* and Franziska zu Reventlow's fiction collection, *The Guesthouse at the Sign of the Teetering Globe*, with two further titles coming in spring 2018.



Magnus Hirschfeld

Berlin's Third Sex

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