

**Date and Time:**

8 November 2014  
10 a.m. — 20 p.m.

**Location:**

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
,Medientheater', Institut für Kulturwissenschaft  
Georgenstraße 47  
10117 Berlin  
Ground Floor  
(S-Bahnhof Friedrichstraße)

Entry is free, but we do request that you register in advance per email:

[symposium.kamerad.diva@freenet.de](mailto:symposium.kamerad.diva@freenet.de)

**Further information:**

[www.kamerad-diva.de](http://www.kamerad-diva.de)

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[www.schwulesmuseum.de](http://www.schwulesmuseum.de), [kontakt@schwulesmuseum.de](mailto:kontakt@schwulesmuseum.de)  
Admission 6 €, concession 4 €, Wed - Mon 2 - 6 pm,  
Sat 2 - 7 pm, Tue closed

*Gefangenentheater Cottbus, 1914-1919 (detail)*  
Photographer: Paul Tharan, Stadtarchiv Cottbus



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# MY COMRADE - THE DIVA

Theater on the Front Lines  
and at the Internment Camps  
of the First World War

Symposium  
8 November  
2014



Schwules Museum\*

## Symposium

### MY COMRADE — THE DIVA

8 November 2014, 10 a.m. - 20 p.m.

#### Program

##### 10.00 – 11.00 Welcome and Introduction

Wolfgang Theis, board member Schwules Museum\* (Berlin)

Katja Koblitz (Berlin), Anke Vetter (Berlin)

Julia B. Köhne (Berlin), Britta Lange (Berlin)

##### 11.00 – 12.00 Jason Crouthamel (Grand Rapids, Michigan) Cross-Dressing, Comradeship and Homosexuality in the German Army during the Great War

This lecture explores the impact of the war on ideals of masculinity, homosocial bonds and perceptions of homosexuality. Industrialized warfare in 1914-1918 deeply traumatized men both physically and psychologically. To survive the experience, men experimented with sexual behaviors and fantasies, including cross-dressing. Trench newspapers (Schützengrabenzeitungen) reveal that heterosexual soldiers used sexual humor and entertainment to sometimes escape the pressures of militarized masculinity and fantasize about alternative gender roles. For homosexual soldiers, humor and entertainment destigmatized not only cross-dressing, but also love between men. Homosexual soldiers used this relative normalization of male-male love to fight for homosexual emancipation after the war.

##### 12.00 – 13.00 Eva Krivanec (Wien/Berlin)

##### Travesty on the Front. Theater on the Front Lines and the Transgression of Gender Codes in the First World War

Historically seen, theatrical performances in or near war zones were nothing new. But stage practices in the First World War took on dimensions that had theretofore never been seen. The spectrum of front theater extended from improvised “variety evenings” to guest performances delivered by famous opera ensembles. Artists and performers in the ranks attempted to continue working even on the front

lines and as the war dragged on, the army leadership itself got involved, having recognized the psychological – indirectly propagandist – potential of front theater. One hallmark of theater on the front lines, particularly in self-organized enlisted mens' theaters, is that men took on female roles. This may have been a direct consequence of the obvious lack of women, but did end up developing into an attraction in its own right. The effect of cross-dressing was not exclusively funny: It was also moving, for one thing because the portrayed women felt like messengers from home and for another, because the actors sent out ambiguous erotic signals.

##### 13.00 – 14.30 Lunch

##### 14.30 – 15.30 Peter W. Marx (Köln)

##### „Das [sic!] Kampfbereich war der Schauplatz der Damen-darsteller.“ The Cologne War Theater Archive and its Underlying Tensions

The talk puts the focus on the War Theater Archive at the University of Cologne Theater Studies Collection. The archive was founded with an open call initiated by Carl Niessen. In 1925, he published a request for documents and materials on theater during the First World War in *Der Neue Weg* (The New Path). The private collections of veterans were to coalesce in a special archive, and the objects would be presented to the public at the 1928 German Theater Exhibition in Magdeburg. How can we understand Niessen's motivations, in the light of his own involvement in the war as well as his academic work on the *Altes Kölner Spiel von Jedermann* and Hermann Reich's concept of the mimus?

##### 15:30 – 16.30 Christoph Jahr (Heidelberg/Berlin)

##### Forms and Functions of Theater Practice in World War I Civilian Internment Camps: The Ruhleben Example

The “English Camp” in Berlin-Ruhleben is perhaps the best-known, or at least the best-documented camp for so-called “enemy aliens” in Germany during the First World War. Since the percent of artists and intellectuals amongst those interned there was quite high, the camp developed a rich and varied artistic and intellectual life – all the more so since the prisoners were allowed a certain level of autonomy in managing their affairs.

Numerous sources from the time offer deep insights into the forms and functions of theater practice for the prisoners. Debates over artistic content can be traced just as well as gender aspects and the significance the stage had for the self-determination of people who had to live for years in a state of exception. The talk will contribute to the history of culture and mentalities during the First World War and put the spotlight on as yet less-discussed aspects of the “Century of the Camp”.

##### 16.30 – 17.00 Coffee Break

##### 17.00 – 18.00 Iris Rachamimov (Tel Aviv)

##### „Er war für die Gefangenen, was er darstellte.“ Gender Transgressions in First World War Internment Camps

Complex gender play was a common feature of internment camps during World War I. It took place within barracks where prisoners recreated versions of domestic households; it took place in camp workshops, in which prisoners produced representations of respectable and productive men; it took place in designated entertainment zones such as camp theaters and camp cafés; and it pervaded camp everyday life in daily walks, conversations and dress. POW officers and certain categories of civilian internees had more freedom for gender play due to their exemptions from forced labor, and because their greater access to outside money. Gender play could be of the normative kind (reproducing hegemonic displays of gender), or non-normative kind (challenging pre-war representations of sex and gender). This lecture examines the wide-spread occurrence of female impersonation in internment camps, and the ways it simultaneously reproduced and challenged contemporary European notion of gender.

##### 19.00 End of Event

Guided tour through the exhibition and reception at Schwules Museum\*