

Genre, Sexualité & Société – Call for Article Proposals.

**LGBTI and Queer Art, Culture and Activism.
Cultures, identities and collective mobilizations in art and media production.**

Special Issue Editors:

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In 2017, *120 Beats per Minute*, Robin Campillo's third full-length feature film, brought the history of ACT-UP Paris, a grassroots political collective founded in 1989 as a response to the AIDS crisis, into movie theaters. Appraised by audiences and critics, the movie received multiple awards, including at the Cannes Film Festival and at the Césars ceremony. In our opinion, the success of *120 Beats per Minute* presents several interests. First, the movie depicts the history of a fight that has been carried, from the 1980s onwards, by LGBT and queer activists. Moreover, the popularity gained by *120 Beats per Minute* in France has revived a long-standing debate, urging institutional representatives to take position on the foundation of an LGBTIQ archive center in Paris – a project that grassroots activists had enduringly been advocating for. As such, the history of *120 Beats per Minute*, from its creation to its reception, exemplifies the complex interrelations of art, culture and politics in LGBTI and queer movements – a topic that this special issue of *Genre, Sexualité & Société* aims to question and analyze, in all its diversity.

“LGBTI and Queer Art, Culture and Activism” is a title loaded with polysemic terms, underpinning the development of various concepts that stemmed from distinct academic disciplines. In anthropology, for instance, “culture” refers to the distinctive traits (i.e. rituals, lifestyles, beliefs, knowledge or norms) characterizing a specific community (in LGBTIQ studies, see for example Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Lewin & Leap, 1996). Yet, “culture” could also involve popular culture (de Lauretis, 2007), cultural industries, or the so-called “high” culture. Meanwhile, “queer” is sometimes used as an umbrella term, encompassing the entire array of LGBTI identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex alike). But it also designates a radical form of activism, label gender identities troubling the male-female binary (Butler, 1990), as in (gender)queer, or describes an anti-identity (Alexander, 1999; Gamson, 1995). While we wish to leave the prospective authors free to determine which interpretation is the most relevant to their own research, reflecting on their diversity and interactions calls for the formation of inter- and transdisciplinary dialogues. To introduce these approaches, we will first recall some of the relationships that tie together LGBTIQ cultures, aesthetics, identities and collective actions, as outlined by previous accounts of academic research.

Examining the art and cultural production of LGBTIQ movements, as well as their modalities of creation, presentation, consumption, or critical reception, implies that we consider them as tools to understand how contemporary societies are organized and structured by power relationships, as already highlighted by cultural studies scholars (Cervulle, Quemener & Vörös, 2017; Neveu, 2010). Indeed, media and cultural production, art creation, as well as community spaces often provide

LGBTIQ people with a form of agency, helping them to counter or bear the weight of “cisheteropatriarchal” norms; even though limits may sometimes arise in the process, constraining the movement’s actions (see Espineira, 2017; Giesecking, 2020). Therefore, cultural objects cannot be treated as mere simple symbolic representations of the politics of LGBTIQ communities and movements: rather, they produce and reinforce collective identities (Almar, Cantacuzène & Lefaucheur, 2014), or renegotiate their significations (Amato, 2016). Plus, as Hall recalled (1981 [2010]), cultural production is impregnated with hegemonic *and* counter-hegemonic dynamics. Consequently, studying how popular culture and media perpetuate and sustain homonormativity, whose normalizing interests also draw on a political stance (Vanlee 2019), is, for example, as important as analyzing the underground movements which keep resisting incorporation into mainstream areas. In doing so, the term of “identity” should not be treated as an essentialist, stable and unaltered “oneness”, but as a “strategic and positional” concept, emerging within “the play of specific modalities of power” (Hall, 1996: 3-4). It is in that sense that activists, artists and other individuals gather around a collective identity that encompasses several demands, starting with the right to “live livable lives” (Butler, 2004) – an elementary claim in which lies the origin of their political dimension.

In the 1980s, Fillieule (1988) noticed the birth of media venues dedicated to “homosexual lifestyles, cultural characteristics or commercial services”, such as journals or pirate radios. Later, Eleftheriadis (2018) analyzed how the organizers and audience of queer festivals gather around an “anti-identity”. In the study of “new” social movements, all of these examples epitomize what Duyvendak terms “identity-oriented movements” (1996), for they blur the boundaries between their own means and goals. Yet, they also foster spaces of expression that could be observed in regard of their relationship with the public sphere. The well-known concept of “subaltern counter-public”, developed by Fraser designates “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990: 70), and has largely circulated within the field of queer studies (see for instance Halberstam, 2005 or Muñoz, 1999). A few years after Fraser, in 1997, the geographer Gordon Brett Ingram coined the term “queerscape”. The concept designates an “aspect of the landscape” or a “social overlay” which “embod[ies] processes that counter those that directly harm, discount, isolate, ghettoize, and assimilate” sexual minorities (1997:40-41). Since Ingram’s “Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations”, the “queerscape” has been adapted to numerous cultural activities and objects, such as film (Gras-Velazquez, 2012; Keshti, 2009; Kim, 2017; Leung, 2001; Marchetti 2017), music (Clifford Napoleone, 2015, 2016), or media (Schwartz, 2016). Such theoretical circulation shows how fiction also nurtures spaces of withdrawal, refuge or political action, that do not replace, but rather supplement local and virtual community gatherings.

Therefore, identity is also a matter of aesthetics. The concept of “Camp”, as theorized by Sontag (1964 [2018]) or Newton (1972), has served the theorization of LGBTQI cultural and political identities. Harvey, for instance, described *Angels in America* as a play that turns Camp into a “sign of gay resistance and solidarity” (1998: 256). He argued that, in Kushner’s writing, the concept “is invested with a political charge predicated upon an irreducible and subversive gay difference” (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, Le Talec considers that Camp, its theatricality, its humor, and foremost the sociabilities it enables, have played a “significant role in the fight against AIDS” (2008). In so doing, as Dyer writes, Camp illustrates how gay people “have sought to make some impression on the culture of the society they live in” (Dyer, 2002: 52). Claiming a camp sensibility has become part of a specific gay cultural identity, and is deemed to reflect a sense of marginality. However, the formation of such communities of taste often draws on the development of power relationships within LGBTI and queer communities, which inevitably lead to the reproduction of (il)legitimacy norms (Le Guern, 2007)... While other alternative, radical or marginalized aesthetics are canonized,

and incorporated in academic research or mainstream industries (see Paudler, 2019; Shetina, 2018, amongst others).

In embodied art forms, the body of the artist also crystallizes political issues and emergencies, and channels both individual empowerment and collective emancipation. In this context, the praxis of creation draws on a history of struggles (Lebovici, 2017), and exemplifies the singular place that individuals may occupy in collective and artistic movements. Therefore, creative activities should also be analyzed as political strategies. Through the lenses of art and direct actions, personal trajectories merge with the community: Renate Lorenz's research – but also her creations with Payline Boudry for *N.O. Body* (2008) – reveals the cross-fertilizations of art, science and activism, and explores new perspectives in the history of marginalized embodiments and their representations. Similarly, the concepts of “lineages” (Alfonsi, 2019) and “transhistorical queerness” (Villemur, 2007) open up new possibilities to understand the subjective and affective dynamics articulated in theoretical, visual or aural corpuses, on the one hand, and compose not just one, but a plurality of histories of representations, on the other hand.

The intertwinements, frictions and tensions between art creation, media and cultural production, mobilizations and collective identities in lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex or queer communities are multifold and reveal a myriad of questions, objects and events that could be analyzed. Therefore, article proposals may, for instance but not restrictively, tackle the themes and topics detailed below. Though we do not impose any geographical nor historical boundaries, we do nonetheless stress that we will pay special attention to proposals located at the crossroads of several disciplines and fields of research, amongst which sociology, cultural anthropology, aesthetics, art history, music and sound studies, cultural geography, media and information studies, or cultural studies. More specifically, we insist that analyzes shouldn't separate art works, representations, media and cultural products from their contexts and modalities of production and/or reception.

In each case, it is also primordial not to turn a blind eye to gender, class, race, handicap or age power relationships, which also occur within LGBTIQ and queer movements and communities (Clay, 2017; Logie & Rwigema, 2014; Ukaegbu, 2007). We will particularly pay attention to proposals that rely on intersectional perspectives (Collins, 2016), and contributors are encouraged to study the ways in which LGBTIQ and queer collective identities interact with race, class or gender, in order to reinforce power relationships or strengthen coalitions.

• **Creation, Reception, Circulation and Activist Knowledge.**

From mainstream TV shows, such as *The L Word* or *Queer as Folk*, to (underground) queer fanzines, theater pieces, movies, contemporary art exhibitions, records and concerts, novels, and so on, LGBTIQ collective identities are represented, disputed or constructed with the help of a wide array of art and cultural products that crystallize heterogeneous stakes. While some of them exert a normalizing power, others blur the boundaries between art and direct action. Reception is also informed by similar dynamics, as LGBTIQ fan activist communities mobilize for more or better LGBTIQ representation in media and cultural production. In between, professional and amateur creators appropriate, remake, hack or parody cultural content in order to queer it.

Some of these productions draw on collective work, others reflect the work of a single author. But all of them carry a specific point of view on LGBTIQ communities and their struggles, or echo community knowledge. Thereby, they reinforce dialogues between communities, artists, creators and their productions. How does analyzing the modalities of creation or reception shed a light on the dialogues and debates that (re)structure LGBTIQ collective identities? How are cultural (counter-)canons constituted, within underground communities, or through the circulation of LGBTIQ art and cultural production within mainstream institutions?

• Mediations and Media Coverage of LGBTIQ Struggles

Just like the history of ACT-UP Paris, depicted in the movie *120 Beats per Minute*, some LGBTIQ struggles have been mediated. Meanwhile, the art and cultural productions of LGBTIQ communities are sometimes designated as communal heritage. If media and cultural productions are at stake in LGBTIQ struggles and collective actions, their mediations and mediating devices outline the modalities of transmission and circulation of ideas, objects and practices within LGBTIQ communities and beyond, thereby serving a variety of institutional, sub- or counter-cultural interests. Which moments of LGBTIQ struggles are represented, emphasized or overlooked in art, media or cultural productions? And how do the diffusion or consumption devices also reflect identity issues or community interests?

• Embodying LGBTIQ Cultures and Struggles

LGBTIQ bodies of the past and their representations sometimes find echo in contemporary collective mobilizations. As such, prospective authors are invited to develop alternative or critical art histories and epistemologies. Emancipatory approaches of art history, as they shed a light on marginalized practices and art forms, and actualize (or *re*)activate bodies of work through the lens of recent theories on gender and sexuality, induce political challenges for activists, artists, researchers and their institutions alike. What is at stake in these approaches? How do researchers engage with them?

The process of forming and articulating coherent corpuses highlights the ways in which practices, testimonies, images, texts, and more generally creations are related, in their original context or in later (affective) readings, to LGBTIQ struggles and cultures. Prospective authors may therefore reflect and analyze the ways in which *bodies* of art, texts, sounds, and so on, are composed or articulated in LGBTIQ studies.

Yet, “embodying LGBTIQ cultures and struggles” may also refer to the ways in which artists address political issues through their own bodies, for instance during public performances or happenings. Therefore, we invite prospective authors to question the boundaries between art and activism, including, potentially, in their own engagements with research creation.

Submit an Abstract

Articles proposals of approximately 500 words should comprise a title, a presentation of the article, its objects and methods, as well as the author’s first name and surname, their status, academic institution and email address. Proposals should be sent by March 15, 2021, to both special issue editors, Louise Barrière (louise.barriere@univ-lorraine.fr) and Mélodie Marull (melodie.marull@univ-lorraine.fr), and to the editorial board of the journal (revuegss@gmail.com).

Authors will be advised by email by April 15 if their proposal has been accepted or not. Original articles (35.000 to 60.000 characters) will then have to be sent no later than September 1, 2021. Authors’ guidelines are available online: <https://journals.openedition.org/gss/747>. Each article will be evaluated by double blind peer-review. The acceptance of an article proposal does not automatically lead to the acceptance of the article. Selected articles will be published in issue 23 of *Genre, Sexualité & Société*, in Spring 2022. Articles in English will be translated into French.

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