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Florian Grandena and Christina Johnston, eds., *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures*, in the series *Modern French Identities*. Oxford: Peter Lang. 220 pp. \$56.95. (pb). ISBN 978-3-0343-0182-4.

Review by Scott Gunther, Wellesley College.

Florian Grandena and Christina Johnston have assembled an intriguing collection of texts in *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures*. The book includes an introduction written by Grandena and Johnston followed by eleven articles (nine written in French and two in English), most of which are drawn from work presented at two conferences: Hypervisibility I in 2006 in Montreal and Hypervisibility II in 2008 at the University of Stirling. The articles are arranged in three categories: "Alternative images," with articles on representations of homosexuality in pornography, experimental cinema and contemporary visual arts; "Small Screens and Stage Performance," with articles on homosexuality in television shows and in French stand-up comedy; and "Printed Images," with articles on homosexuality in graphic novels and in French gay magazines.

The first entry for "Alternative Images" is "Le Sexe de la 'racaille': pornographie ethnique et volonté de sa/voir" by Maxime Cervulle, which examines representations of *Beurs* on the pornographic website *Citébeur*. The site's videos often portray bourgeois, white French men being sexually dominated by groups of thugs from the *cit *. Yet Cervulle questions politically correct condemnations of the site that claim that such scenes serve only to perpetuate negative stereotypes of *Beurs* as over-sexed and potentially violent. He argues not only that the eroticization of power differences in these scenes often has more to do with class than race, but also that it is wrong to deny ethnic minorities the potential erotic pleasure of being objectified. In the second article, "Une Affaire de go t : palimpseste orphique et hypervisibilisation homosensuelle," Candice Nicolas locates parallels between Jean Cocteau's *Orph e* et Bernard Rapp's 2000 film, *Une Affaire de go t*, noting in particular how homosexual tensions are brought to the forefront through the "homosensuality" of the male protagonists. In "Ixe: l'anormalisation des normes," Yekhan Pinarligil examines Lionel Soukaz's 1980 film, *Ixe*. In 1979, Soukaz made a film with Guy Hocquenghem, *La Race d'Ep*, which told the history of homosexuality in Europe and which received an X rating immediately upon its release. Soukaz made *Ixe* in direct response to the X rating of *La Race d'Ep*. In *Ixe*, sex scenes are presented directly, without any embellishment, and are interrupted with images of political and religious figures, along with images of isolated parts of Soukaz's body. Stylistically, the film makes no effort to frame images and editing appears disordered. Pinarligil argues that the film's strategy is to disobey cinematic norms, to embrace abnormality, and thus to free itself from the obligations and expectations of traditional cinema. In the final article of this section, "Fixing the Fluid: Coagulating Masculinities and the Homo/Hetero Struggles for Visibility in Contemporary French Visual Arts," Matthieu Sabourin analyzes three art pieces made of human fluids: Elia Eliev's *Disposable After Use* (saliva and chewing gum), Philippe Meste's *Spermcube* (coagulated human semen), and Mathurin Stokh's *Chocolate Salary* (chocolate dollar coin cast in coagulated human semen). Sabourin explains how each of these pieces exemplifies Leo Bersani's notion of "homoness," where lines between seemingly different or even opposite concepts are blurred. For example, to the extent that each of these pieces is composed of a solid form of something we normally think of as liquid, the sameness of these two states is accentuated.

The second section, “Small Screens and Stage Performance,” begins with Jean-Baptiste Chantoiseau’s “L’Homosexualité à saturation? L’expérience identitaire et esthétique de la série *Courts mais gay* (2001-2007).” Chantoiseau examines a collection of 101 short gay and lesbian films made since 2001 and finds that their narratives rely on a relatively small number of themes; in particular, nocturnal cruising for sex, desperately avoiding solitude, and struggling with coming out to friends and family. He argues that the repetition of these topics exemplifies the lack of originality in contemporary gay hypervisibility and the extent to which sadness and disenchantment, rather than frivolity, provide the dominant tones of today’s gay cinema. He acknowledges that this hypervisibility is better than the invisibility that preceded it, but calls for a broader range of cinematic representations of homosexuality in the future. In “Un secret sous surveillance: *gender passing* et (sa)voir dans l’émission de télé-réalité *Secret Story I*,” Fabien Rose analyzes the trans male character, Erwan, in the French reality show *Secret Story*. The concept of the show is that every character is hiding some secret from the others, and for Erwan, his secret was his passing as a male. When his secret is eventually revealed, the other characters shift from a notion that a person’s real gender is genitally determined to the idea that gender is merely what they see in the person in front of them—indeed they all agree that Erwan should continue to be identified as a male for the purposes of the game (at various points in the show, tasks are assigned by gender). Martine Gross examines representations of gay and lesbian parenting in both documentaries and fictional films in her article, “Visibilités homoparentales.” All these films are mostly concerned with providing preemptive responses to potential worries that an audience might have when considering children raised by parents of the same sex. In particular, Gross points out that they all are concerned to show that none of the children raised in these families turned out to be gay or lesbian and argues that the primary function of these films is not aesthetic or neutrally informative, but pedagogical and political. In the final article from this section, “Humour et homosexualités: vers une queerisation de l’espace public,” Nelly Quemener looks at homosexuality in French comedy since the 1970s. He argues that homosexuality is rarely treated directly by gay French comedians, but more obliquely through cross-dressing, gender-switching, or bisexuality, a sign that French gay comedy is made for a broad, mainstream audience, as opposed to a gay-identified one. As Quemener points out, the reluctance of French gay comedians to make comedy specifically for a gay audience may have a silver lining by providing a unique terrain for the creation of new forms of queer comedy that rely on blurred, rather than fixed sexual categories, especially among more contemporary comedians.

The third section, “Printed Images,” begins with a study of Fabrice Neaud’s graphic novel, *Journal*. In “‘Pas un putain de témoignage de merde’: au-delà de la visibilité d’un homosexuel dans son journal,” Mathilde Brissonnet looks at Neaud’s refusal to classify his work as “gay,” even though the largely autobiographical story focuses on the gay protagonist’s sexual and romantic adventures. In an interview, Neaud explains that in the same way as it would be wrong to classify *Romeo and Juliette* as a heterosexual play, *Journal* is concerned with broader questions, and in particular, the issue of tolerance. In “Sur la représentation de la communauté gaie dans la publicité du magazine *Têtu*,” Luc Dupont analyzes advertising in France’s most popular gay magazine and is struck by the uniformity of the images and the lack of innovation. Collectively, they produce a universalist image of the French gay man, who is young, physically fit and white. In the final article, “Graphic Design and the Construction of Gay Masculinities in *Kaiserin* and *Têtu*,” Bharain Mac An Bhreithiún compares the imagery in the mainstream, glossy gay magazine *Têtu* with that of a new magazine *Kaiserin*, which he claims has managed to open new possibilities for an avant-garde visual aesthetic for a gay, male public.

In a field that tends to be dominated by Anglo-American scholarship, it is refreshing to read these new queer perspectives from France.[1] Unlike Anglo-American articulations of queer that can trace their origins to separatist identity politics, “queer made in France” needs to respond in one way or another to the French Republic’s universalist model, in which a group distinguishing itself based on sexual or racial identity is not construed as a desirable outcome, standing as it does in direct opposition to the goal of social integration. Indeed, the articles from this work collectively demonstrate at least some reluctance

among French queers to embrace communitarian, separatist sexual identities, whether it be in French comedy, films, documentaries, reality shows or graphic novels.

It should not come as a surprise that queer ideas are articulated somewhat differently in France. In his analysis of the alleged Americanization of French gay and lesbian movements, William Poulin-Deltour explains that “while there may be agreement that American forms, such as ‘community centers,’ have crossed the Atlantic, the content or filling of these forms varies widely between French and American contexts.”^[2] He adds that changes associated with the American model “do not simply sweep away French social and cultural characteristics. Rather, they are appropriated, structured and deployed in relation to those characteristics, thereby reproducing national differences between France and the United States.”^[3] To the extent that each article in this work responds to the specific context of France, it is clear that whatever “queer” comes to mean in France, it will have a distinctly French flavor.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Maxime Cervulle, “Le Sexe de la ‘racaille’: pornographie ethnique et volonté de sa/voir”

Candice Nicolas, “*Une Affaire de goût*: palimpseste orphique et hypervisibilisation homosensuelle”

Yekhan Pinarligil, “*Ixe*: l’anormalisation des normes”

Matthieu Sabourin, “Fixing the Fluid: Coagulating Masculinities and the Homo/Hetero Struggles for Visibility in Contemporary French Visual Arts”

Jean-Baptiste Chantoiseau, “L’Homosexualité à saturation? L’expérience identitaire et esthétique de la série *Courts mais gay* (2001-2007)”

Fabien Rose, “Un secret sous surveillance: *gender passing* et (sa)voir dans l’émission de télé-réalité *Secret Story I*”

Martine Gross, “Visibilités homoparentales”

Nelly Quemener, “Humour et homosexualités: vers une queerisation de l’espace public”

Mathilde Brissonnet, “Pas un putain de témoignage de merde’: au-delà de l’hypervisibilité d’un homosexuel dans son journal”

Luc Dupont, “Sur la représentation de la communauté gaie dans la publicité du magazine *Têtu*”

Bharain Mac An Bhreithiún, “Graphic Design and the Construction of Gay Masculinities in *Kaiserin* and *Têtu*”

NOTES

[1] Though the title uses the broader term “francophone,” the primary focus of every article is France.

[2] William J. Poulin-Deltour, “French Gay Activism and the American Referent in Contemporary France,” *The French Review* 78/1(2004): 118.

[3] Poulin-Deltour, “French Gay Activism,” p. 125.

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