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Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston, eds., *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, in the series *Modern French Identities* (Volume 98). Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. xii + 330 pp. Illustrations, notes on contributors, and index. \$64.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-0343-0183-1.

Review by Carolyn A. Durham, The College of Wooster.

With *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, Florian Grandena and Christina Johnston have added a second collection of essays to those previously published in *New Queer Images: Representations of Homosexualities in Contemporary Francophone Visual Cultures*.^[1] The two successive volumes in Peter Lang's series on *Modern French Identities* include expanded versions of work presented at two conferences, "Hypervisibility I" organized by Grandena in 2006 in Montreal and "Hypervisibility II" organized by Johnston in 2009 at the University of Stirling; in the most recent publication the conference presentations are complemented by several commissioned essays. Despite the original audience, the articles included in *Cinematic Queerness* do not read like conference presentations; all are carefully crafted essays, at once theoretically and critically informed and centered on close textual analysis of particular films. The subtitle of the collection, in keeping with the focus of the two conferences, refers to a term coined by Julianne Pidduck in 2003 to refer to "a cultural moment of hypervisibility . . . when contemporary queer works are increasingly entering the mainstream."^[2]

In the editors' introduction, Grandena and Johnston present their collection as a "sounding board" for the polyphony of voices now emerging out of gay and lesbian-themed film production and an attempt to shift the focus of critical discussions of hypervisibility from an Anglo-Saxon context to the Francophone world (p. 2). In contrast to the essays in *New Queer Images*, which include discussion of a wide variety of visual media, *Cinematic Queerness* privileges feature film. Despite the editors' assertion that their interrogation of hypervisibility stretches "across Francophone cinema," readers should be aware that there is no discussion of the Francophone world beyond Québec and metropolitan France, and the majority of the essays collected here concentrate on French films (p. 2). In her introductory essay, "The Visible and the Sayable: The Moment and Conditions of Hypervisibility," Pidduck appropriately emphasizes "the tremendous geographical unevenness of hypervisibility" despite the diversity of its voices and images; in particular, gay and lesbian representation remains marginal and often illegal throughout Francophone Africa and the Antilles (p. 11). In an essay focused on the articulation of gender and sexuality and theoretically informed by the work of Michel Foucault, Pidduck concentrates on the specificity of lesbian and gay visibility in relation to Anglo-American cultural and linguistic dominance. Republican universalism, binary linguistic patterns, and a cinematic tradition of *auteurism* inform the particular conditions affecting hypervisibility in France. Pidduck concludes with a discussion of same-sex desire in French cinema grounded in a reading of Diane Kurys's *Coup de foudre/Entre nous* (1983) and *Sagan* (2008).

Cinematic Queerness is subsequently divided into what the editors call "clusters" of essays (p. 2). Following Pidduck's introduction, which alone constitutes part one on "Hypervisibility," each section contains two to three essays offering different perspectives on key films, directors, or emergent themes.

The bilingual volume is comprised of sixteen articles, seven in English and nine in French. Often a particular section features essays in both languages on the same topic or film, which creates the sense of a developing dialogue. All films cited are referenced by both the original title and its translation, a practice I have respected here. As a result, monolingual readers of French or English will also find much of interest in this collection as will any reader drawn only to the discussion of one or more individual films. Each essay has its own bibliography and filmography, complemented by a general index of names, titles, and key concepts and a central selection of illustrations from the films discussed. In general, all of the articles are well written and well researched, designed for a primarily academic audience knowledgeable about film.

Part two, "Hypervisibilities? Lesbians on the Francophone Screen," includes two essays. In keeping with the question mark in the section title, Alain Brassart's "Une Visibilité discrète: les lesbiennes dans le cinéma français des années 1990 à nos jours" analyzes Josiane Balasko's *Gazon maudit/French Twist* (1995) and Catherine Corsini's *La Répétition/Replay* (2001) as counter-examples, which, together, nonetheless illustrate how difficult it remains in France to portray non-caricatured lesbian characters. Balasko avoids shocking the general public by examining homosexuality within the context of the traditional heterosexual family and Corsini presents the subject of her film as a destructive female friendship rather than a love story between two women. Brassart refers to a significant number of other films in the course of his discussion to provide a useful intertextual context for his reading of the work of Balasko and Corsini. In "*La Répétition: Circulez! Y'a rien à voir*" Laurence Enjolras locates hypervisibility precisely in Corsini's depiction of female love as simply part of life's diversity unlike what he sees as Balasko's insistent representation of "toute la panoplie des attributs estampillés lesbiens" (p. 79). Although Corsini's discussion is heavily focused on plot, he also pays attention to *mise-en-scène* and to the filming of the single sex scene in *La Répétition*.

Part three, "Léa Pool," continues the discussion of the representation of cinematic lesbianism with three essays devoted to five of the eleven feature films directed to date by the Montréal-based *auteur*. In "Identité sexuelle dans le cinéma québécois. Les voies croisées du désir dans *A corps perdu*," Denis Bachand draws on René Girard's theory of mimetic desire to explore Pool's central problematic of the quest for a multifaceted identity, at once ethnic, aesthetic, and sexual. Bachand's discussion of *A corps perdu/Straight for the Heart* (1988) is preceded by an overview of the representation of gays in Québec cinema, which serves to highlight the exceptional role played by Pool. In one of the strongest essays in the collection, "Mères manquantes and Queer Triangulations: *Emporte-moi* and *Lost and Delirious*," Lucille Cairns focuses on the notion of queer hypervisibility, viewed as characteristic of Pool's body of work, to emphasize her resistance to the fixity of identity politics and to hegemonic norms of desire, gender, and sexuality. *Emporte-moi/Set Me Free* (1999) and *Lost and Delirious/Les Rebelles* (2001) introduce two topoi, mother-lack and triangulation, which will prove pervasive throughout Pool's oeuvre. Cairns's essay pays particularly close attention to the formal strategies of the director's cinematographic style. The third essay in this section, Julie Vaillancourt's "*La Femme de l'hôtel et Anne Trister: silences éloquentes, désirs saphiques et revendication d'un nouvel espace*" offers a Freudian reading of two of Pool's early films. Although Vaillancourt's dependence on psychoanalytic terminology makes her essay somewhat less accessible than others in the collection, her focus on triangles complements Cairns's discussion.

Part four, "Ducastel and Martineau," marks a shift from the representation of lesbianism to the work of specific gay directors, beginning with two articles that examine the directorial partnership of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau. Both Bénédicte Coste's "*Crustacés et coquillages: logique et éthique de l'identité post gaie*" and Grandena's "Things Unsaid and Stolen Images of Desire: Languages in *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen*" engage directly with the social and political context of contemporary French society. Coste discusses *Crustacés et coquillages/Cockles and Muscles* (2005) in relation to a shift in France from a climate of tolerance of homosexuality to one of social recognition of gay relationships following the passage of PaCS (*le pacte civil de solidarité*) in 1999.[3] He argues that Ducastel and Martineau's fourth collaborative work, which takes place in a universe organized by homosexual desire and features a gay

hero, is far more concerned with paternity than with heteronormativity. Grandena's absorbing study of the directors' third feature film, the mock home movie *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen/The True Story of My Life in Rouen* (2003), is informed by the notion of queer French as theorized by Denis Provencher.^[4] In response to the difficulty of expressing one's homosexuality in the French language and within France's republican tradition, Ducastel and Martineau create an alternative film language that recalls the rules of Dogme95 and Brechtian principles of distancing. Grandena locates the primary strength of *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* in its permanent positioning of spectators in the same state of frustration and unbalance experienced by the film's protagonist.

The two essays in part five, "Lifshitz and Morel," are devoted to representatives of a new generation of emerging gay *auteurs*. In "Developing Gay Con/texts in Early Gaël Morel," James N. Agar takes an unusual approach in his intertextual reading of Morel as an actor and a director. Agar discusses Morel's first full-length directorial project, *A toute vitesse/Full Speed* (1996), within the interpretive context of the director's best-known acting role as a gay adolescent in André Téchiné's *Les Roseaux sauvages/Wild Reeds* (1994). Agar's provocative argument attributes Morel's ongoing interest in issues of adolescence, explicit images of sexuality, and simple narrative structures to the direct influence of *Les Roseaux sauvages*. Renaud Lagabrielle also addresses the increased representation of gay adolescents in French cinema in the wake of Téchiné's film in "Presque rien? Homosexualité masculine et adolescence dans les fictions cinématographiques françaises contemporaines." Within this new context of hypervisibility, Lagabrielle concentrates on Lifshitz's *Presque rien/Come Undone* (2000) and Bernard Alapetite and Cyril Legann's *Comme un frère/Like A Brother* (2005). Both films structure realistic narratives around gay adolescents but use very different cinematographic approaches. What distinguishes Lagabrielle's essay within this collection is his particular interest in spectatorship and thus in films that present positive messages to gay adolescent viewers.

The two essays in the final director-specific cluster, "François Ozon," are devoted to one of the best-known and most influential of contemporary gay French filmmakers. In "Undressed Masculinities and Disrupted Sexualities in *Une Robe d'été*," Gilad Pavda locates Ozon's originality in a filmmaking style that defamiliarizes cinematic traditions. Ostensibly a reading of one of the director's short films, Pavda successively summarizes the work of so many other critics that his essay becomes less a textual study of *Une Robe d'été/A Summer Dress* (1996) than a compendium of theory on the male gaze, camp, drag, androgyny, and bisexuality, among other concerns. In "'Vous voulez jouer à un jeu?': désir et manipulation dans *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes*," Evelyne Szaryk focuses on Ozon's third feature film. An adaptation of a play written by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes/Water Drops on Burning Rocks* (2000) is both an example of Ozon's transgressive cinema and a successful homage to Fassbinderian melodrama and distancing.

Part seven, "The Case of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*," includes two essays devoted to Jean-Marc Vallée's 2005 French-Canadian hit. In "Invisibilités et mises en scènes de l'homophobie: variations françaises et québécoises, ou du *Placard à C.R.A.Z.Y.*," Dominique D. Fisher compares *C.R.A.Z.Y.* to Francis Veber's popular French film *Le Placard/The Closet* (2001) in order to explore the effects of hypervisibility on stereotypical representations of homosexuality within two national contexts.^[5] Equating the Christian argument that homosexuality is "against nature," manifest in Vallée's film, with France's universalist ideology, Fisher shows how each work, albeit differently, reveals the evolution of homophobic attitudes. In "*C.R.A.Z.Y.* Québec: Vallée's Performance of Masculinity and Sovereignty," David A. Powell focuses on the implicit analogy he perceives between Quebec's struggle to define its identity during the Quiet Revolution and the difficulties experienced by the gay protagonist of *C.R.A.Z.Y.* in coming to terms with his homosexuality. Together, Fisher's and Powell's articles offer a contextual and textual analysis of mainstream films whose commercial success depended on their appeal to a heterosexual audience.

The final section of the collection, "Transvestism, Transsexuality, Transgender," includes articles by Brigitte Rollet, "Queer or Not Queer Others: Gender Trouble and Postcolonial French Cinema" and

Jean-Pierre Simard, “Hypervisibilité et réception des représentations queer dans *Chouchou* et *Wild Side*: travestissement, transgenre et transexualité.” In an especially important contribution, given the emphasis of other essays on French and Quebec films and directors, Rollet explores *beur* films featuring male-to-female North African transvestites and/or gay hustlers. Within the context of queer theory, Rollet focuses on Mezrak Allouache’s *Chouchou* (2003) as the best example of a comedy that challenges the boundaries between sex, gender, and sexual orientation and questions dominant modes of the representation of marginalized subjects. Similarly informed by the thought of Butler, Simard offers a socio-semiotic and socio-aesthetic reading of *Chouchou* and Lifshitz’s *Wild Side* (2004) to examine how the two films alter the reception of queer representations in France. The contrast Simard establishes with Veber’s *La Cage aux folles* (1978) and Gabriel Aghion’s *Pédale douce* (1996), used to measure the evolution of institutional, social, and cultural tolerance of homosexuality in France, provides a fitting conclusion to the volume as a whole.

Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films is coherently organized around the concept of hypervisibility, explored from a variety of different critical and theoretical perspectives and beyond the Anglophone world. Its originality and importance lie in the conjunction of Quebec and France and in the attention paid simultaneously to close textual analysis, both formal and thematic, and to the specificity of socio-cultural context.

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Dominique D. Fisher, "Invisibilités et mises en scènes de l'homophobie: variations françaises et québécoises, ou du *Placard* à *C.R.A.Z.Y.*"

David A. Powell, "C.R.A.Z.Y. Québec: Vallée's Performance of Masculinity and Sovereignty"

Brigitte Rollet, "Queer or Not Queer Others: Gender Trouble and Postcolonial French Cinema"

Jean-Pierre Simard, "Hypervisibilité et réception des représentations queer dans *Chouchou* et *Wild Side*: travestissement, transgenre et transexualité"

NOTES

[1] Reviewed in *H-France* Vol. 12 (October 2012) by Scott Gunther.

[2] Julianne Pidduck, "After 1980: Margins and Mainstreams," in Richard Dyer ed. *Now You See It* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 266.

[3] The English title is clearly a pun; the film is also known as *Côte d'Azur*.

[4] Denis Provencher, *Queer French: Globalization, Language and Sexual Citizenship in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[5] *Le Placard* deals with gay parenthood in a post-PaCS society and *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, set in the 1960s at the time of the "Révolution Tranquille," was released shortly after Quebec legalized same-sex marriage.

Carolyn A. Durham
The College of Wooster
cdurham@wooster.edu

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