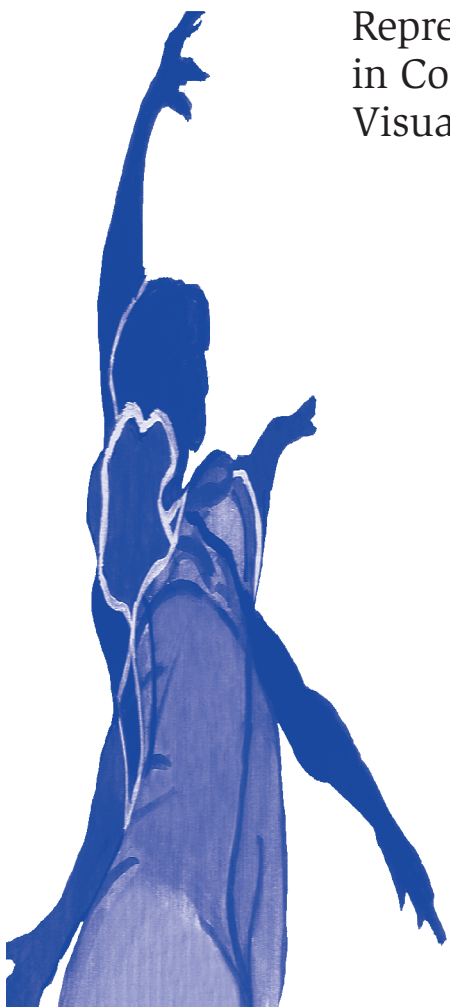Florian Grandena and
Cristina Johnston (eds)

New Queer Images

Representations of Homosexualities
in Contemporary Francophone
Visual Cultures

Modern French Identities

Since the early 1980s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of international gay/lesbian-themed visual productions, ranging from pornographic images and television programmes to advertising and graphic novels. Often originating from countries with a multicultural tradition (most notably Great Britain and the United States), this cultural phenomenon has now reached many territories, including the French-speaking world.

What are the thematic and aesthetic convergences/divergences of such visual productions? Do such works develop problematics and approaches specific to areas such as metropolitan France or French-speaking Canada? The eleven essays included in this collection (two in English and nine in French) aim to answer these questions by offering in-depth and challenging discussions of various queer-themed visual productions made in a contemporary Francophone context. Each contribution focuses on specific case studies drawn from *auteur*, pornographic and experimental cinemas, as well as those based on analyses of images from television, printed media and contemporary art.

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Cristina Johnston is a Lecturer in French and Visual Cultures in the School of Languages, Cultures and Religions at the University of Stirling. She has published articles on sexuality in contemporary French cinema, transatlantic cinematic relations and French Republican citizenship in the post-PACS era, and the monograph *French Minority Cinema* (2010).

New Queer Images

Modern **F**rench **I**dentities

Edited by Peter Collier

Volume 97

Florian Grandena and
Cristina Johnston (eds)

New Queer Images

Representations of Homosexualities
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Visual Cultures

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Figure 13. *Têtu* Sport cover. © *Têtu*. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 14. © *TÊTU* #132, avril 2008. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 15. KAISERIN 03 cover. © *Kaiserin* Magazine. Reprinted with permission.

Acknowledgements

The essays presented here draw on work presented at two conferences. Hypervisibility I was organised by Florian Grandena in 2006 and took place in Montreal. In 2008, Hypervisibility II, organised by Florian Grandena and Cristina Johnston, took place at the University of Stirling. The volume also includes a number of commissioned articles.

In particular, we are grateful to Claire Boyle, Anne Cadoret, Véronique Chagnon-Burke, Hugues de Chanay, Claude Cossette, Bénédicte Coste, Andrew Ginger, Luca Greco, Eric Macé, Catherine Mavrikakis, Shana McGuire, William Menvielle, Wendy Michallat, Laure Murat, Julianne Pidduck, Denis Provencher and Lawrence Schehr.

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Introduction

In early 2010, French photographer/journalist Philippe Castetbon published *Les Condamnés : dans mon pays, ma sexualité est un crime/The Condemned Ones: In My Country, My Sexuality Is a Crime*, a photography book that is both a reflection of, and testimony on, the role of images in the expression and (re)negotiation of one's sexual orientation and desires within a homophobic and dangerous environment. The work was originally inspired by the author's virtual, online acquaintances with gay men from repressive (read: anti-gay) nations. Interested in the ways these individuals attempted to strike a balance between anonymity and seductiveness in their picture profile, Castetbon gathers fifty-one testimonies written by anonymous male homosexuals from countries where homosexuality is still punishable by law, including Guyana, Jamaica, Singapore and Uzbekistan.

Each entry in Castetbon's book strictly follows the same layout and contains the same visual elements: the flag and the name of the individual's country of origin; the testimonial text (moving tales of fear and hatred, but also of hope); the translation of the book's subtitle into each man's native tongue; the legal texts describing the specific punishments in each man's country of origin (these range from fines and jail sentences to institutionalised torture – whipping in Yemen, for instance – and even death sentences, as is the case in Afghanistan, Iran and Nigeria); and finally, a photograph of each subject accompanied by a short caption (limited to the individual's first initial, his age and his place of residence). All contributors use photographic portraits that, for safety reasons, must not divulge their identity. This self-imposed anonymity on camera is obtained through various devices: some photographs are taken from a safe distance (as is the case for the individual from the Maldives) or from a high angle shot (Senegal), whereas others show their subject purposely turning their back to the camera (the Bahamas, Burundi). However, most portraits are close-ups taken by the individuals themselves: here, the models/photographers usually cover their

face with one or two hands/arms, clasping fingers sometimes suggesting pain and misery (as the example of twenty-four-year-old P.M., Mauritius, illustrates). Specific objects (masks and, rather ironically, national flags) and various fashion items (fans, hats, caps, scarves, sunglasses) are also used to keep the men's identity concealed. Other contributors have recourse to more original means: M., A. and S. (from Egypt, Jamaica and Tunisia respectively) use blurred photographs of themselves, and R. from India takes a picture of his own reflection in a mirror while hiding his face behind the camera. In some cases, an effort of *mise-en-scène* manifests itself: down on one knee in front of an armchair, M., from Lebanon, holds a sunflower in front of his face, the petals of the flower delicately scattered around the young man, whereas O. takes a photograph of his unrecognisable reflection in a broken car mirror, graphically illustrating his shattering experience as a gay man in Liberia. A. (Iran) sensually flaunts his gayness by sporting black underwear, a tie and leather gloves, his hands dramatically crossed over his face; in a similar fashion, eighteen-year-old K. (Mozambique) suggestively shows off his bare and lean torso while dissimulating his features behind a black cap.

In sum, the photographic portraits grouped in Castetbon's book address issues related to the political economy of (self)representation of gay (male) subjectivities within a refractory environment. To a certain extent, *Les Condamnés* reproduces the androcentrism that still seems to dominate both queer-themed visual cultures and academic approaches to homosexuality: for this particular project, the exclusive use of male participants can be explained by the fact that the author had to become a registered user of a gay male website to gather photographic material (in the introduction, Castetbon also explains that, given that the exchanges between the participants and himself were based on trust, he did not want to pass for a woman and therefore lie to potential female participants; nonetheless, one can indeed regret the absence of women in this book). The photographs previously described and their virtual circulation in cyberspace are also indicative of a number of phenomena: the development and the democratisation of increasingly efficient technologies (digital photography and the Internet, the latter helping its users transcend time and geographical borders as well as to constitute a transnational virtual community); the centrality

of art and visual cultures in the expression and the (re)formulation of gay subjectivities (particularly when such expression is directly predicated on specific social and political contexts, often stamped with fear, hypocrisy and religious zeal); and finally, the emergence and the entering of queer visual cultures into the mainstream, a cultural shift described by Julianne Pidduck as 'hypervisibility' (2003, 266). Castetbon's book is, indeed, symptomatic of the appearance of, and dramatic increase in, queer-themed visual productions, and one noticeable feature of such hypervisibility is precisely its presence in countries other than the United States and the United Kingdom, which have a strong multicultural tradition.

The greater visibility and attention paid to queer communies and cultures throughout the world is striking: LGBTTI rights are now commonly found on many political agendas, the list of queer-related cultural and political events is virtually endless and out-of-the-closet celebrities are now more numerous than ever. Although there are reasons for optimism, there is still a need to foreground the continued repression of male and female homosexuals, as well as gender non-conformists, in many national contexts; symbolic and economic censorship represents at once an enemy and an obstacle to queer hypervisibility. In sum, a unified, transnational definition of queer hypervisibility cannot be taken for granted.

The purpose of the articles grouped together under the heading *New Queer Images* is to map the specific modes of representation of queer-themed visual cultures from the French-speaking world (the *francophonie*) where questions related to minority identities are relatively more recent – and less 'traditional' – than in the United States and the United Kingdom. The eleven chapters are based on expanded versions of works presented at two international conferences (Hypervisibility I and II, held in Montreal in 2006 and Stirling in 2008), as well as a number of specially commissioned articles. Focusing on visual cultures, from both metropolitan France and the wider Francophone world, the texts build on examples drawn from contemporary Francophone film and TV productions, but also expand the realm of study to encompass such diverse areas of visual culture as *auteur*/experimental/pornographic cinema, graphic novels, documentaries, advertising, graphic design, stand-up comedy and contemporary art. Questions of homophobia and 'gender passing', the role of testimony in auto-fiction,

gay parenting, constructions of gender, corporeal representation and the queering of public space lie at the core of *New Queer Images*, firmly embedding gay 'hypervisibility' (that is, Pidduck's 'cultural moment characterised by the coming together of the queer and the mainstream' [2003, 266]) within the domains of the visual, the social and the political.

The first section ('Alternative Images') is made up of four chapters that focus on alternative visual treatments of homosexuality and sexual identities in pornographic and experimental films, *auteur* cinema and contemporary visual arts. This section opens with 'Le Sexe de la « racaille » : pornographie ethnique et volonté de sa/voir', in which Maxime Cervulle discusses the ways in which the eroticisation of *Beurs* (individuals of North African origin born and raised in France) in the series of gay films 'Wesh Cousins' (produced by *Citébeur*) can contribute to a better understanding of the French postcolonial context. More precisely, *Citébeur* productions have recourse to stereotypical representations of the Arab (hypersexualised, active, aggressive and well-endowed) in order to strategically reappropriate such stereotypes for themselves and develop a cultural mode of resistance to the French universalist tradition. In her '*Une Affaire de goût* : palimpseste orphique et hypervisibilisation homosensuelle', Candice Nicolas analyses Bernard Rapp's little-discussed eponymous film by underlining its transtextual debt to Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950) (an influence that is rarely addressed in discussions of gay-themed films). Although they are not overt in this particular cinematic work, (homo)sexual tensions occur through dialogues, Nicolas argues, and are foregrounded thanks to the transgression of the sensual realm (hence the presence of a 'homosensual hypervisibility' in which the two male protagonists are engaged). The following text underlines transgression of a different type: in his contribution ('*Ixe* : l'anormalisation des normes'), Yekhan Pinarligil takes as his main object of study *Ixe*, one of independent queer filmmaker Lionel Soukaz's most challenging films. Here, the author identifies the formal possibilities that experimental modes of productions offer in terms of identity expressions and focuses on the necessity of a censorship-free platform that allows new forms of expression of gay identity to emerge and flourish. This first section closes with Matthieu Sabourin's 'Fixing the Fluid: Coagulating Masculinities and Homo/Hetero Struggles for Visibility in Contemporary French

Visual Arts'. Sabourin's contribution examines selected contemporary transgressive performance-based artworks drawn from the French visual arts. Putting into practice Leo Bersani's notion of *homoness* and its inherent aspiration to recognize ourselves in others, Sabourin analyses artworks that – willingly or otherwise – epitomize representational strategies of masculinity. The pieces are examined as systems where fluidity is frozen so as to demonstrate, influence and/or claim a particular position within contemporary homo/hetero visual power struggles.

As its title indicates ('Small Screens and Stage Performance'), the second cluster of articles take as their main objects of study images originating from television and shows by French stand-up comedians. The series of shorts 'Courts mais gay' constitutes the main focus of 'L'Homosexualité à saturation ? L'expérience identitaire et esthétique de la série *Courts mais gay* (2001–2007)'. According to the author, Jean-Baptiste Chantoiseau, this series (made up of a total of 101 short films produced by the French company *Antiprod*) is emblematic of the emergence and the heyday of gay hypervisibility but also the decline of the latter. Chantoiseau problematises the pertinence of the series *Courts mais gay* and underlines its repetitiveness and lack of originality. In sum, it is the idea of an increased diversity and 'hypersensibility' that the author defends. In 'Un Secret sous surveillance : *gender passing* et (sa)voir dans l'émission de téléréalité *Secret Story I*', Fabien Rose adopts a Foucauldian perspective in order to examine the ways in which Erwan (a female-to-male transgender person) negotiates his gender passing in the pressurised context of a reality show, the latter, not unlike gender passing, relying on the sight-truth paradigm. More specifically, if the public 'staging' of Erwan's gender passing seems to reinforce the idea that seeing constitutes a form of knowledge, it simultaneously challenges the view according to which biological sex necessarily determines gender. The reader will then move on to Martine Gross's 'Visibilités homoparentales' that considers French-speaking documentaries on gay parenting (*homoparentalité*). Taking the discrepancy between conservative political discourses and the life of same-sex parents at its starting point, Gross's chapter concentrates on the representation of gay families in French-speaking documentaries made during the last thirty years. Indeed, building on many documentaries, Gross's contribution illustrates the nuanced evolution of

such portrayals, which focus, in turn, on gay and lesbian parents, gay men and lesbians' desire to create a family, and the children's point of view. Such documentaries do not aim to offer an idealised view of gay parenting (guilt and interiorised blame inherited from social pressures are sometimes underlined, for example) but they nonetheless offer a lucid and deproblematised account of the lives of both gay parents and their offspring. Finally, Nelly Quemener's 'Humour et homosexualités : vers une queerisation de l'espace public' considers French stand-up comedians (such as Gad Elmaleh, Florence Foresti and Muriel Robin) who include/have included queer-themed numbers in their shows. As Quemener argues, such comic sketches are opened to contrasted, if not contradictory, readings: on the one hand, such stage performances can have a distanciating effect on spectators and contribute to deconstruct types and stereotypes. On the other hand, homosexuality is no longer problematised, but nor is it politicised, which seems to indicate a representation both close to abstraction and distant from queer/identity politics.

New Queer Images closes with a cluster of three articles dedicated to printed media ('Printed Images'), more specifically graphic novels, male pin-up covers and advertising in French gay magazines. The first chapter of this section ('« Pas un putain de témoignage de merde » : au-delà de l'hypervisibilité d'un homosexuel dans son journal') is dedicated to French graphic novels: the author, Mathilde Brissonnet, places particular attention on Fabrice Neaud's four-part autobiographical *Journal*, which covers a four-year period (from February 1992 to July 1996). Brissonnet's discussion of *Journal* takes as its starting point Neaud's refusal to admit that, despite the minute description of both his – mostly unsuccessful – affairs with other men and his uneasy relation with his local gay scene, the artist's graphic production is about homosexuality as such. Combining formal and thematic considerations, Brissonnet demonstrates how Neaud actually addresses issues of homophobia, the latter being indirectly redefined by the artist. The two concluding articles cast an objective and critical look on the French gay press. By analysing a series of advertisements destined for young male gay consumers published in the main French gay magazine, the glossy, youth-oriented *Têtu* ('Sur la représentation de la communauté gaie dans la publicité du magazine *Têtu*'), Luc Dupont ponders the representation

of the gay community. Focusing on specific aspects of gay advertising in *Têtu*, Dupont points at the conservatism of such images, which promote a universalist vision of beauty at the expense of age and ethnic diversity. The section and the volume draw to a close with Bharain Mac An Bhreithiún's 'Graphic Design and the Construction of Gay Masculinities in *Kaiserin* and *Têtu*', in which the author analyses the role of graphic design in projecting stereotypes of gay masculinities in *Têtu* and the more subversive *Kaiserin* (a journal that is heavily influenced by the Dutch magazine *BUTT* and that mixes cultural commentary, graphic design and alternative pornography). In line with Dupont's conclusion, Mac An Bhreithiún discusses *Têtu*'s conservatism, that is, the magazine's lack of innovation and its strong emphasis on the youthful and athletic white body.

The eleven chapters that make up the present collection offer a sustained engagement with the politics and implications of gay and lesbian representations beyond the Anglophone queer world. Although other studies have been written on individual aspects of the broader topic dealt with here, rarely have these studies attempted to bring together analysis of visual cultures, through the prism of gay, lesbian and queer studies, in the French and Francophone context. We hope that the dialogue that emerges between the essays included in this volume will go some way towards filling this gap.

— FLORIAN GRANDENA AND CRISTINA JOHNSTON
Ottawa/Edinburgh, May 2010

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Alternative Images

MAXIME CERVULLE

Le Sexe de la « racaille » :
pornographie ethnique et volonté de sa/voir

Le coût social de la visibilité peut être élevé et parfois à tel point que le jeu n'en vaille pas la chandelle. Nous ne payons pas tous le même prix et être visible reste aujourd'hui encore en France l'apanage d'une minorité des minorités sexuelles, principalement les hommes blancs de classe moyenne. Certes, cette visibilité a été acquise par les gays, lesbiennes, queers et trans-genres au terme de luttes continues autour des politiques de la représentation. Toutefois, il nous faut reconnaître que le privilège de la visibilité reste largement un privilège lié à d'autres variables sociales telles que la race, la classe et le genre. Ainsi, point de *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), de *Transamerica* (Tucker, 2005), de *Queer as Folk* ou de *L Word* pour ces minorités absentes de nos écrans, ces minorités que, paradoxalement, on appelle « visibles ». À l'heure où une partie des activistes gays français reprennent à leur compte le discours républicain sur « l'intégration » par le biais de politiques assimilationnistes souvent anti-communautaires, nombres de critiques s'élèvent contre la blancheur unidimensionnelle de l'hypervisibilité gay… et sa politique d'effacement systématique de la diversité parmi les minorités sexuelles.

Nous étudierons ici les films du label pornographique Citébeur qui, à l'inverse, tentent depuis quelques années de rendre visible les « beurs gays », dont les représentations sont encore peu nombreuses en France, et nous essaierons, au travers d'une lecture de ces films de déterminer quels enjeux politiques ils soulèvent en termes de représentation.

Qui est ethnique ?

Tout commence pour Citébeur en 2000 avec l'ouverture du site Internet Citébeur.com, le « site des beurs gays avec vidéos de racailles et beurs gays ». Entre histoires érotiques, espace *chat*, petites annonces et informations de prévention, le site propose des photos et vidéos X téléchargeables *on-line* qui feront très vite sa réputation. Dès 2004, la société compile sept de ses meilleures séquences pornographiques sur un DVD intitulé *Wesh Cousin*, dont les ventes propulseront la société au premier rang des producteurs français et européens de films pornographiques gay, tandis que le site compte plus de 960.000 visiteurs par an (à raison de 80.000 par mois). Avec la sortie de sept autres opus, *Wesh Cousin* devient une série et renforce le succès de Citébeur.[1]

 Les DVDs de Citébeur se trouvent généralement classés par leurs revendeurs dans la catégorie pornographie « ethnique » ; appellation reprise par la société elle-même qui revendique, avec le site BeurX.com, d'avoir ouvert le « premier shop online 100% ethnique ». Dans *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors (1986, 332) évoque une caricature parue en 1972 dans le *New Yorker*, dans laquelle une famille blanche de classe moyenne s'interroge dans son élégante salle à manger : « sommes-nous ethniques » ? Après une analyse succincte de cette image, Sollors pose la question de l'attribution de l'ethnicité : « qui est ethnique » et qui décide du caractère ethnique ou non d'un individu ou d'un groupe ? Sollors distingue deux définitions des termes « ethnique » et « ethnicité » : la première selon laquelle nous serions tous ethniques – nous aurions tous une identité culturelle définie relativement à celle d'autres groupes culturels – (conception *dynamique* de

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[1] *Wesh Cousin* (Citébeur, 2004) ; *Wesh Cousin 2 : Kiffe la racaille* (Citébeur, 2004) ; *Wesh Cousin 3 : Mate la puissance !* (Citébeur, 2005) ; *Wesh Cousin 4 : Caïd Superstar* (Citébeur, 2005) ; *Wesh Cousin 5 : Relax Man !* (Citébeur, 2005) ; *Wesh Cousin 6 : Cho Bouillants* (Citébeur, 2006) ; *Wesh Cousin 7 : C'est d'la balle !* (Citébeur, 2006) ; *Wesh Cousin 8 : Cailleras en force* (Citébeur, 2007). Contrairement à Jean-Daniel Cadinot et Jean-Noël René Clair, le réalisateur derrière les films de Citébeur, Stéphane Chibikh, a choisi de signer ses films du nom de la société – sans doute peut-on voir là une manière de contrer la dimension souvent « auteuriste » de la pornographie (post)coloniale.