



INTRODUCTION

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In November 2024, we published the first number of the special issue “LGBTIQ+ Representations and Media in US Popular Culture: Exploring New Directions, Challenges and Queer Heritage” including five original articles dealing with the ways in which queer lives and identities are represented, celebrated, commodified, or silenced in contemporary examples of popular culture while examining how these portrayals can speak to the legacies of queer history. In this issue, which includes six new contributions to the field, we broaden the scope of the special edition to cover LGBTIQ+ representation in comics, videogames, queer fiction, digital fandom narratives in Tumblr, and trans narratives.

Everyone involved in this two-part special edition need to be commended for helping in building a queer and feminist world that, according to Sara Ahmed, are those which “are built through the effort to support those who are not supported because of who they are, what they want, what they do” (2017, 48). At a time when rights already achieved can be deemed expendable or can be found trembling in the face of the possibility of taking several steps back in time, critical thinking, such as the one that the six contributions to this issue provoke, needs to be recognized and the authors given a voice. Following Judith Butler’s latest *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* (2024), “critique engages with problems and texts that matter to us in order to understand how and why they work, to let them live in thought and practice in new constellations, to question what we have taken for granted as a fixed presupposition of reality in order to affirm dynamic and living sense of our world” (21). This way, each and every contribution not only published in this special issue but also elsewhere proposes a clash against the rising waves of hate, oppression and violence that continue to spread worldwide. Drawing back from the introduction piece of the previous issue, when the system fails to represent its diversity, those who have no chance to represent themselves are inevitably found at a higher risk of being regarded as less human or not regarded at all (Butler 2004, 147). Ultimately, this representation conveys resistance, which emerges from being seen and acknowledged (2016, 14).

Nao Tomabechi opens the special issue with the article “Queer Antiheroism of DC Comics’ Secret Six” examining the largely overlooked yet richly subversive representation of queerness in the *Secret Six* comic series (2006-2011), written by Gail Simone. Framing the analysis within ongoing discussions of LGBTIQ+ visibility in superhero comics,

the study critiques the prevailing focus on normative portrayals, especially those that align with homonormative ideals, and argues for the recognition of *Secret Six* as a significant departure from such trends situating the series within a landscape of queer and superhero scholarship engaging with theorists like Lisa Duggan, Eve Sedgwick, and David Halperin to argue that the team's queer antiheroism disrupts embedded binaries of hero-villain and heterosexual-homosexual.

Oscar von Seth follows with a timely contribution to both academia and the popular TV series adaptation of *The Last of Us*. In his article, "A Bad Gay Waiting for Vengeance: Ellie in *The Last of Us Part II*," von Seth offers a rigorous and provocative analysis of Ellie, the lesbian protagonist of the videogame and positioning her as a morally ambiguous figure whose queer identity intersects with themes of violence, grief, and vengeance. Drawing from queer studies, game studies, and philosophy, the author challenges the dominant idealizing tendencies of queer representation in media, advocating instead for a deidealization approach that embraces complexity, imperfection, and antagonism in queer characters. Central to the argument is the phenomenology of waiting, drawn from Heidegger's distinction between waiting for and waiting upon, as a structuring force in both the game's narrative and gameplay.

Turning to queer fiction, Audrey Heffers presents a nuanced, intersectional analysis of how contemporary queer fiction, particularly by and about women, reconfigures the domestic space as a simultaneous site of sanctuary and threat. In her article, "Dualities of Safety and Terror in Queer Fiction," draws on theory from queer studies, feminist theory, and gothic criticism, Heffers argues that homes in these narratives reflect the broader sociopolitical structures of heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, and state violence foregrounding how female and queer characters are often forced to create alternative sanctuaries because the normative systems and domestic spaces meant to protect them instead become sources of terror and repression. The author turns to speculative and gothic fiction as generative spaces where these oppressive norms can be subverted to argue that safety is not as given within traditional structures, but as a radical, self-made, and often monstrous act of survival.

Lucía Bausela Buccianti, in "Demisexuality in Ali Hazelwood's STEMInist Series: *The Love Hypothesis* (2021) and *Love, Theoretically* (2023)," explores the representation of demisexuality within contemporary romance fiction, focusing on two bestselling novels by Ali Hazelwood. Grounded in queer and asexuality studies, Bausela Buccianti examines how the protagonists embody demisexual traits, and the ways in which these narratives challenge and simultaneously uphold genre conventions, particularly within the framework of contemporary romance. Outlining the definitions and development of demisexuality and situating it within the broader asexual spectrum, the author highlights how demisexual individuals experience sexual attraction only after forming strong emotional bonds, differentiating this from other identities. Although increasingly

recognized within online space and fan fiction communities, demisexuality remains underrepresented in mainstream publishing, often sidelined by prevailing erotonormative and amatonormative ideals. Against this backdrop, Hazelwood's novels emerge as rare, albeit complex, contributions to the visibility of demisexuality in mass-market fiction.

From the cognitive lens, Alba Roldán-García offers an exploration of the phenomenon of *Goncharov*, a fictional 1973 mafia film allegedly directed by Martin Scorsese, created collaboratively by Tumblr users in late 2022. In her article, "Goncharov: A Self-Aware Queer Mirror on Tumblr," Roldán-García presents *Goncharov* as a complex cognitive and cultural construct emerging from the interplay of fan labor, queer identity, and platform affordances rather than treating the event as a digital prank or isolated meme. The study is grounded in Text World Theory and cognitive linguistics, examining how meaning is contextually constructed through frames, structured sets of knowledge that shape understanding. Roldán-García employs this framework to address two core questions: which cognitive frames Tumblr users activated to articulate the text worlds of *Goncharov*, and how these reflect the evolution of LGBTIQ+ media from the 1970s to the present day. For this, the author draws from a curated corpus of 150 Tumblr posts and identifies two principal text worlds, that of *Goncharov* as a cultural artifact and Goncharov as a fictional character.

Closing the issue, Andres Ayala-Patlan addressed Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* (2013) as a foundational work in contemporary trans literature. In his article, "The Strategic Use of Shifting Point-of-View Narrations in Imogen Binnie's *Nevada*," Ayala-Patlan focuses on Binnie's experimental use of shifting narrative perspectives to portray trans subjectivity. Rather than following a conventional coming-of-age arc that culminates in personal transformation or resolution, *Nevada* employs a fragmented narrative structure to reflect the instability and social mediation of trans identity. The author argues that this literary strategy challenges normative expectations of both genre and gender by illustrating the entangled relationship between interior self-understanding and external social recognition. Ultimately, Ayala-Patlan contends that *Nevada* reconfigures narrative voice not merely as a stylistic device but as a tool for exploring the phenomenology of trans existence, where the self is continually constituted through social misrecognition and mediated embodiment.

All in all, the contributions introduced cover a range of cultural products, from fiction to videogames, comics and digital platforms, to further contribute to the task of analyzing how LGBTIQ+ representation can serve as a space for recognition, reconfiguration and reclamation of compromise and existence. Combined, the authors not only embark on the exploration of ongoing challenges when representing LGBTIQ+ lives and experiences but also celebrate the possibilities of broadening the scope of queer and trans visibility in academia.

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