

## Editorial

By Frederic Rukes, University of Cologne, Germany

1 In 2019, Stonewall celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. While rainbow flags and merchandise fill the streets of cities celebrating Pride all over the world, queer experience remains highly ambiguous, its status complicated. Although the commercialization of the LGBTQ\* movement points both to a growing awareness of pluralism in public discourses as well as to economy's comprehension of diversity's buying power, it may also represent the mainstream's grasp on what used to be exclusively queer spaces out of necessity: Pride month has just ended and already Boston's approved 'Straight Pride' is lurking. Scheduled for August 31 (Stock), the event exemplifies only a fraction of heteronormativity's ongoing reign<sup>1</sup> over global social structures, but almost symbolically stands for the rigor with which a privileged majority (here, in terms of gender and sexual identity) continues to take the lion's share. Normalized identity and behavior is maintained and only challenged temporally when the 'unusual' seems more profitable.

2 Because the above is a fairly general and figurative attempt to describe this issue's question of heteronormativity's reign—the bowing down of the queer rainbow despite all the progress of the past fifty years—the following papers serve both as an examination of the phenomena and as an intervention. Thus, one article discusses the ambiguity of coming out narratives and thereby offers a concise example of processing sexual identity under heteronormative pressure. The other three articles present queer readings of classic and contemporary storytelling comprising the genres of neo-noir film, comedy-drama television, and the short story. Such queer readings challenge and disrupt conventional and heteronormative readings of written and screen narratives, opening the discourse to a diverging and potentially more progressive input.

3 An adequate introduction to the discussion of the power proceeding from regimes of the 'normal' is Tyler Allen Tennant's "The Quiet Queer: Coming Out & Queer Fabrications". In his essay, Tennant examines how coming out narratives have been coopted and rearticulated in market-friendly terms through infocapitalist algorithmic and platform technologies. He reads "It Gets Better" videos as quasi-sequels to coming out narratives which further obfuscate difference in queer experience and uphold heteronormativity through resignation and indoctrination into the world of 'queer fineness'. In this context he examines

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the revelatory properties of the speech act of coming out as well as the structures demanding such an act, by looking at celebrity queer culture, fandom, and queer icons to interrogate the complexities and consequences of the coming out process.

4 In his article “‘This is the girl’: Queer Nightmares, Fantasy, and Reality in *Mulholland Drive*” Justin Holliday discusses how David Lynch’s film *Mulholland Drive* (2001) offers filmic clichés to deconstruct assumptions about queer identity. Although some critics of the film have suggested that the film upholds heteronormativity, according to Holliday, Lynch unravels the limits of linear space and time to contest a singular reality. Analyzing *Mulholland Drive* via theories of queer temporality, Holliday suggests that a singular, supposedly correct reading of this film’s chronology is undermined. In fact, a queer theoretical perspective shows that, despite the alleged privileging of the heteronormative order, the tropes of neo noir allow the characters to celebrate the possibility of queer desire through the negation of a unitary self.

5 By examining the ways the two protagonists of the Netflix show *Russian Doll* experience gender, madness, and interdependence, Meg Peters argues in “‘Realistically Queer’: Queer Connection and Interdependence in *Russian Doll*” that the series encourages open identities and highlights the importance of relations beyond hetero- or homonormative coupling. While both protagonists seem to fail at gender and at accepting help for their mental distress, their growing ability to connect with their surroundings and with the other characters allows them to heal from their respective traumas. Using queer theory, including understandings of vulnerability, interdependence, and gesture, Peters contends that even though both main characters are seemingly heterosexual, *Russian Doll* is queer in its insistence on queer temporality.

6 “Senselessness, Indeterminacy, and Sexual Ideology in Hemingway’s ‘The Sea Change’” by Sam Post contests many critics’ attempts of providing definite readings of Hemingway’s short story “The Sea Change” by showing that the story’s very evasion of determinacy is central to its thematic and narrative construction. In a detailed linguistic analysis of two of the story’s central conversations, Post argues that, in the process of naming, sense is paired with a normative heterosexual ideology and senselessness with a sexually non-normative ideology. Indeterminacy and paradox, analogous to the senselessness of the two analyzed conversations, accompany the protagonist’s metamorphosis, suggesting that his sea change is one in which he detaches from a heterosexual ideology and, like his counterpart, acquires a sexually non-normative ideology.

7 With different strategies and on different levels, all four articles of this issue of *gender forum* show how notions of indeterminacy and ambiguity that generate possibilities of resistance against heteronormative reign, ordering, and readings and, instead, open possibilities of simultaneity and coexistence of discourses. At the same, the essays disclose how normative structures of essentialism, categorization, and alleged definiteness work towards securing heterosexual ideology and turning the goals of the LGBTQ\* movement on its head. Piercing through the pressure of a forced coming out narrative, deconstructing sexual identity through the trope of the cliché, shifting the discourse of queerness from sexuality towards temporality, or reevaluating sexuality on the basis of linguistic indeterminacy can all be understood as attempts to refute the reign of a heteronormative order and are examples of queerness paving its way.

### **Works Cited**

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