

Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Sexuality*

Article 3

November 2022

Expanding Views

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Recommended Citation

Fraser, Pernille (2022) "Expanding Views," *Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.
DOI: 10.9707/2833-1508.1114
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ought/vol4/iss1/3>

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Expanding Views

Pernille Fraser, *Ought* Visual Arts Editor

I am incorrectly female. I am incorrect, and that is a punishable offense. And this tension, it's yours. I am not helping you anymore. You need to learn what this feels like because this tension is what not-normals carry inside of them all of the time because it is dangerous to be different! To the men in the room, I speak to you now, particularly the white men, especially the straight white men. Pull your fucking socks up! How humiliating! Fashion advice from a lesbian.

—Nanette, Hannah Gadsby, 2018

Hannah Gadsby, an established international autistic comedian, came to prominence in 2018 with her Netflix special “Nanette,” a symbolic moment by and for those deemed unfamiliar, other, or “not-normals.” It took Hannah blood-letting for “other others” to understand though. For many “Nanette” is an unforgettable performance piece. The above quote is the section from her show I’ll never forget. Cuttingly familiar being told you’re “incorrect” by people who are so sure they are “correct” about autistic neurodivergent’s people and their selves. Gadsby’s comedy brings a deepening visibility to the diverse sexuality of autistic neurodivergent people, expanding the view. We can now all be witnesses to this broadening perspective. Or a regaining of what was always there. We exist beyond stereotypes.

But Gadsby is not alone. There are more neurodivergent people who identify as gay, bisexual, non-binary, pansexual, asexual, and queer than in the allistic population at large. I had hoped that a representative of this community might submit a cover image that visually explored this terrain—one that really knock everyone’s socks off. But when nothing materialized, I set off on a geographical side quest to find fitting images of neuroqueer culture in and around my home town of Brighton and Hove. I went looking for signs, possible testament of lived experiences or ephemera of autistic and or neurodivergent sexuality.



**Pride in Brighton and on display in the Queer on the Pier exhibit.
Pernille Fraser, 2022.**

Seeking Visible Symbols: The Pride Festival and the Queer on the Pier Exhibition

I've lived in Brighton and its neighboring and mutually subsumed Hove, on and off for 20 years. Brighton and Hove have the highest population of LGBTQI+ people per capita in the UK. So here, Pride feels more mainstream than ever, with institutions and commercial businesses taking up the idea and an ever-growing number of people who embrace the culture, history and necessity of Pride. It is expanding here! But it's not just the Pride rainbow flag, which was originally created in 1978 by Gilbert Baker. It's also the light blue, white and pink transgender flag, designed by Monica Helms in 1999, the Progress flag, made by non-binary American artist and designer Daniel Quasar in 2018, and the more recently designed Intersex-Inclusion flag by Valentino Vecchietti.

Queer on the Pier is an exhibition at the Brighton and Hove Pavillion Museum. It highlights previously missing Queer and gender non-conformity history in the Brighton and Hove Museum collections. I ambled round the exhibit, seeking out interlinked community symbols such as the rainbow infinity symbol, the Trans flag, Intersex flag, Demi-sex flag, or Asexual flag. .



Michelangelo Pistoletto's "Third Paradise Image by Cittadellarte, 2016.

The main symbol of the autistic neurodivergent community, the rainbow infinity sign, was missing from the Queer on the Pier exhibit. The infinity symbol comes from an intersection of the Pride and peceeding social rights movements. It is meant to represent the “diversity with infinite variations and infinite possibilities.” The first Autistic Pride day was held in 2005. Autistic Pride is run for and by Autistic community members internationally now. The infinity symbol is a rebuff to pro-cure charities, ableist institutions, and even pharmaceutical companies that promote he blue jigsaw puzzle piece, which also wrongly indicates that only boys could be diagnosed as autistic. Because the autism and queer communities overlap to a significant degree, I thought I might see the infinity symbol in the Queer on the Pier exhibition.

What started to emerge as I moved round the exhibit, however, were deepening stories conveyed in interviews, clips and short films with crossover and nuance throughout. I found the intergenerational aspects practically interesting, as the the exhibit showed knowledge passing between young and old. It made me consider how previous generations used more covert symbolism, a stark contrast to today's more vibrant icons. I

came across three zines, one of which was titled *Gender non-conformity & complicated histories* (see resources to download). This bit of ephemera made me think about all of the voids and niches of symbolism possibly not known or hidden in institutional archives, symbols not meant for those outside or beyond communities, kept secret because of fears of exposure and survival needs.

A community of over 40 LGBTQI+ individuals curated the exhibition, which addressed a gap by showcasing previously hidden histories of sexuality. This wasn't the first community-led exhibition I'd viewed, but there is a new presence I hadn't felt there before. An expanding outward. One curator of the show said that there is a growing understanding of the need for more crossover between LGBTQI+ and autistic or neurodivergent people openly participating and attending such exhibitions. Embodiment is a crucial aspect of community. I look forward to more exhibitions featuring representation of non-normative bodies but also of non-normative neurologies, as they are two in the same.

Michelangelo Pistoletto and The Third Paradise of Possibilities

In 2016, I visited the Fabrica Gallery, also in Brighton, to view Michelangelo Pistoletto's exhibition titled *The Third Paradise: The Labyrinth and the Well*. Pistoletto, an Italian artist, was part of the Art Povera movement in the 1960s and has since gained widespread recognition in Europe. His work has moved from more material applications to a more holistic social concept which he brought to consciousness from his preceding "mirror" pieces. Explaining his "Third Paradise" symbol, Pistoletto notes:

. . . The infinity sign's altered central loop represents The Third Paradise, while the two other loops are all the diversities, alongside nature and artifice . . . The Third Paradise seeks to reconcile the conflict between the first and second paradises of nature and human artifice. This conflict is leading toward global destruction but the third paradise offers a solution, a resolution that will save the planet and humanity.

It is fortuitous that the most enduring adopted symbol of the Autistic community is the infinity symbol—and it immediately evokes Pistoletto's extended infinity sign. I am not sure if Pistoletto would imagine his work being linked to autistic sexuality, but his interpretation of the infinity symbol and its possibilities, the connection of symbols to ever-widening interpretations, seem fitting for the cover of this issue.

My final image, titled *Expanded Views*, combines many of the symbols I discovered or rediscovered on my quest in and around Brighton. I began with Valentino Vecchietti's 2021 flag. Vecchietti's 2021 flag includes intersex people by adding a purple circle on a yellow background over the proceeding layers. It built on the Progress flag and Morgan Carpenters original intersex flag design of 2013 as well as Baker's, Helm's, Quasar's and others additions. Layer on layer of additions, attributes and nuances, all meant to foster understanding and expand views. I used the inclusive "Queering Font," by Adam Nac for the main title on the cover: Sexuality +? Throughout pulling the elements together for the front cover I had the following terms in mind : *plus* and *progress*. Everything is always in motion and there is always someone we can include.

Resources and References

Brighton Pride Festival. <https://www.brighton-pride.org>

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Gilbert Baker Foundation. <https://gilbertbaker.com>

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Pernille Fraser is a dyslexic, autistic artist who resides in the UK. Eleven years ago, Pernille returned to her creative roots as a multidiscipline artist, after initially working in fashion and textiles, finance, and teaching. She writes this about her work: “My practice sits between place and system, in the realm of sensory experience. It harvests from interactions with both internal and external space(s).” She is the visual arts editor of this journal.