

Queer Coding: Art, Activism and LGBTQ+ Identity

by

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Abstract

QUEER CODING: ART, ACTIVISM AND LGBTQ+ IDENTITY.

This thesis explores the concept of queer coding within art and how it relates to identity. By comparing and contrasting the work of American LGBTQ+ artists from the 1990s and 2010s, I shall discuss the impacts of context on creative expression. This is in relation to events such as the AIDS epidemic and the commercialisation of queer culture within mainstream society.

Introduction.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the work of LGBTQ+ artists and discover the ways in which their artistic expression was impacted by the social context that the work was created in. For example, how are LGBTQ+ artists of the 1980s and 90s viewed compared to modern day queer artists, and how this contextual difference impacted their practices. For the sake of continuity, the main arguments of my thesis shall be constructed using the works of North American-identifying artists, given the important role that North American activism played in changing the social perception of people with HIV, but also may include artist from other countries. This is to build a more cohesive perspective of the queer experience. The main artists to be discussed are Felix Gonzalez Torres and Martine Gutierrez. To some extent, these artists exist within multiple different contexts, but both share one particular experience: the queer artist experience.

The acronym LGBTQ+ stands for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Allies, Asexual and Pansexual community (Upsu, 2021). Before I begin, I believe it is important to note the connotations of the word queer, as it is a multifaceted term. Originally viewed a derogatory word for homosexual, queer was recently reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community as a source of pride. The word queer originated around 1513 and meant that something was abnormal, or that it was odd. It wasn't until 1914 that the word queer began to mean homosexual, which originated in the United States. But, when the American group Queer Nation - an AIDS activism organisation founded in the 1990s - adopted the word queer as a positive one, the term queer began to transform. By co-opting the word queer, the Queer Nation claimed that they had disarmed homophobes (Perlman, 2019). Now, queer is an umbrella term to describe someone from the LGBTQ+ community, as well as being its own identity. This emphasises the importance of context, a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

John Berger states in *Ways of Seeing*, that “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (Berger, 1972, p. 8). Therefore, as artists, we are arguably unable to separate our experience from our practice, as it is all that we know. Throughout history, many queer artists have learned to conceal their identities using subtext. This was especially common during times when being queer could lead to imprisonment and death (MacKay, 2017). Historical examples of this include Simeon Soloman’s 1864 piece titled *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*.



Figure 1: Simeon Soloman (1864), *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*

Simeon Soloman, was a pivotal figure within the English Victorian avant-garde scene. Despite this, Soloman was arrested twice and imprisoned once for his sexuality. This led to the downfall of his career and his passing at the age of 65 in 1905, caused by alcoholism (MacKay, 2017). But, despite the difficulty and oppression he faced in his life, his work often depicts a queer paradise of sorts. In *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*, he displays the beauty and delicacy of devotion to another, contrasting greatly to his personal

experience of love and identity. Perhaps his work acted as an alternate world, an idyllic fantasy the artist could escape to. Regardless, his experience directly impacted the way he expressed his identity within his work. This has been a common theme for many LGBTQ+ artists throughout history (Burk, Raffel, 2015). Although Solomon was an English artist from the 19th century, I believe it's important to include his perspective in order to develop a global understanding of LGBTQ+ rights throughout history, and its relation to art.

Queer Coding.

Symbols and labels have been a method of identifying a member of the LGBTQ+ community for years. Symbols such as the pride flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978, hold great significance to the LGBTQ+ community as a symbol of solidarity, inclusion, and acceptance (SAYiT, 2020). These days, rainbows have become synonymous with queerness, but this wasn't always the case. Other symbols such as the pink triangle, were originally used as a way to identify and persecute gay men in Nazi Germany. This symbol was later reclaimed by the gay community in the 1970s as a way of remembering the atrocities that occurred during that time and to never let it happen again. (Waxman, 2018).

The method of dissecting these symbols is called Queer coding (Jaigirdar, 2021). Essentially, this is the way LGBTQ+ themes are coded into media and art, without outwardly stating it. In theory, art from before the turn of the century should be more heavily coded as LGBTQ+ topics were more transgressive. In 2020, the website Artnet wrote that by the 1980s, "Many artists not only publicly and proudly identify as queer but produce bodies of work with content directly connected to their sexual identities." Despite this celebration, there were still elements of oppression there, as seen with the Aids crisis and hate crime towards LGBTQ+ people (Artnet, 2020).

Queer coding is therefore a term traditionally used in television and film to describe when a character is not stated as queer, but there is enough subtext for the audience to read them as such (Jaigirdar, 2021). This can be seen in films such as *Calamity Jane* (1953), where Doris Day wore buckskins – a type of leather clothing associated with masculinity – and sang of a ‘secret love’ (Wilson, 2021). Whether intentional or not, the connotations of this provided LGBTQ+ people with some level of representation. The subtlety of this coding was due to the context of the time period. For example, the 1950s were a difficult time for queer American people, as they had little to no legal rights in addition to being actively discriminated against. For example, the US Post Office was screening mail for any pro-gay content, and 100,000 service members were discharged from the Army and labelled as “Class II Homosexuals” – a felony offence at the time (Blum, 2020). Because of this social climate, LGBTQ+ people had to find different ways to express themselves. In a 2017 article for CNN Style, Al-Kadhi discussed the ways in which queer artists expressed their voices and their experiences through their practice. They state that “Many men developed sophisticated codes to coexist as queer in a world that criminalized their identities.” (Al-Khadi, 2017). Often times these symbols were used to ensure the safety of LGBTQ+ people whilst still including them as a part of the community. In this essay, I shall be analysing the works of North American queer artists over the past 40 years and compare the ways in which queer coding has developed within the LGBTQ+ creative community. To begin, I shall be taking a look at the work of the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Loss and Absence: The 1990s

Queer art over the twentieth century has been shaped by, on the one hand—the need to conceal references to queer identity and experiences and, on the other—a desire for visibility: the cultural imperative to create representations of queer identity because none exist.

(Burk, Raffel, 2015)

As Burk and Raffel write in their 2015 analysis of *Queer Art: 1960s to the Present*, our identities tie directly to our freedoms of expression, which in turn emphasises the importance of context within art. It's important to note how social perception of queer issues and identities impacts the freedoms of queer artists. This is significant because it reflects a wider cultural perception on LGBTQ+ identities and issues that were prevalent during the 20th century.

“Losses, disappearances, and absences are invoked constantly” said Alex Greenberger when describing Gonzalez-Torres’ art in a 2021 article for *Art in America*. Born in 1957, Gonzalez-Torres was a Cuban-born American visual artist. Much of his work discussed matters concerning identity, desire, loss, and originality (Brittanica, 2022). Gonzalez-Torres sadly passed away from AIDS-related causes in 1996 at the age of 38 but his work left a lasting impact on the queer community. Often described as ‘Lightweight Minimalism,’ his work felt the impacts of time and pressure, proving to be less delicate than the previous minimalist work that Donald Judd and Carl Andre made in the 1960s and ’70s, perhaps due to Gonzalez-Torres’ unique openly queer experience (Greenberger, 2021).

Felix Gonzalez-Torres is known for making work of an ephemeral nature. An example of this is his 1991 *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* piece which consisted of a mountain of multicolour sweets. The audience was invited to view and eat the candy, so over time, the mountain would slowly disintegrate, until it was replenished again (Folland, 2015).



Figure 2: Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1991), *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*

The impact of this piece lies within its ephemerality and simplicity. Interestingly, the ideal weight of the work, 175 pounds, is the average body weight of an adult male. Within the context of the time it was made, this is especially important as gay men were seen as disposable by many, as seen by the lack of action by the US government to protect those with the HIV and AIDS (Padamsee, 2020). Unspoken words and unexplained meanings flood this artist's work. To fully comprehend the work of Gonzalez-Torres, an understanding of his environment and experience as an LGBTQ+ person needs further exploration.

During the late 20th century, a number of homosexual men began falling ill to an unusual illness, one which cause opportunistic infections and rare malignancies. (Greene, 2007). In 1981, this mysterious illness became recognized and was given the name AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Since then, awareness and education about AIDS has improved, but at the time, it was considered a death sentence. By 1999, it was estimated that 14 million people had died from AIDS worldwide since the start of the epidemic (avert, 2019). The impact of this is clear within Gonzalez-Torres' work as he, as well as his partner,

lived with HIV and eventually passed away from AIDS (Greenberger, 2021). Once piece which captures the pain of loss and fear of the future is his 1991 *Untitled* piece.



Figure 3: Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1991), *Untitled* (billboard of an empty bed)

Displayed on a billboard in the middle of a busy street in New York City is an empty bed. Despite there not being anybody in the bed, the imprints of two people are pressed into the stark white sheets. It causes one to wonder who these two people were, and what is their relation to each other? There is an intimacy behind this piece, especially when you consider the privacy that your bedroom provides you with. This contrasts heavily with the method of display that Gonzalez-Torres has chosen. Additionally, the commonality and simplicity of the bed emphasises how the ones suffering from these illnesses are regular people and could be somebody that you know and love. The all-white colour reflects purity and innocence, defying typical stereotypes referring to homosexuality as a 'sin' (Roberts, 2020).

At the time of making this, both Gonzalez-Torres and his partner had been diagnosed with HIV, and so perhaps this was his way of expressing his fear and sadness. Sickness is often a very difficult topic to comprehend because, to a certain extent, it is entirely out of our control.

This must have felt even more impactful when you consider the US Government's lack of support for people suffering from HIV and AIDS at the time (Padamsee, 2020). It could be interpreted as Gonzalez-Torres confronting his fears head on and accepting the ephemerality of his, as well as his partner's, existence. Additionally, the artist could be referring to how LGBTQ+ people are perceived by wider society. Three years after this piece was made in 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" into law. Under this new law, people of the LGBTQ+ community were allowed to serve in the US military, as long as their sexuality or gender remained a secret. Some argued that this law was a positive thing, as it allowed LGBTQ+ people to serve in the military, whilst gay rights activists complained that it was more detrimental than helpful, as it forced many people to live in secrecy without doing anything to combat the prejudice against them (Pruitt, 2018). Either way, this law is arguably a microcosm of America's views towards LGBTQ+ people.

Until recently there was little to no positive representation of LGBTQ+ identities within mainstream culture. Historically, queer themes in media are either viewed in a negative light, are the butt of the joke, or simply don't exist. This can be seen throughout television and media in the 1990s. Emily Garside writes that in the popular television show *Friends*, there are running jokes about how Chandler must be gay due to his mannerisms and his upbringing, or how it is insinuated that Ross has 'turned' his wife gay (Garside, 2021, p.8).

Representations such as these can be detrimental because it encourages negative stereotypes associated with the LGBTQ+ community. Despite this there has been a change within the last two decades, as seen with popular mainstream Television shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which gave drag artists their own platform to express their creativity (Abraham, 2019), and *Dan Levy's Schitt's Creek*, which portrayed a positive queer relationship and won nine Emmy awards for its sixth and final season in 2020.

As John d’Addario writes, “Gran Fury used a heady combination of bold graphic design, guerrilla dissemination tactics, and art institutional support to express the urgency of the situation” (d’Addario, 2011). In both *Aidsgate* and *Read my Lips* (Fury, 1987) Fury employs a direct method of approach, displaying the title of the piece in text and accompanying it with provocative imagery. The design of both images is reminiscent of advertisements of the time, perhaps this was to parody the ways the American corporations spread messages to consumers, as seen below with the Barbie advert, aimed towards children.

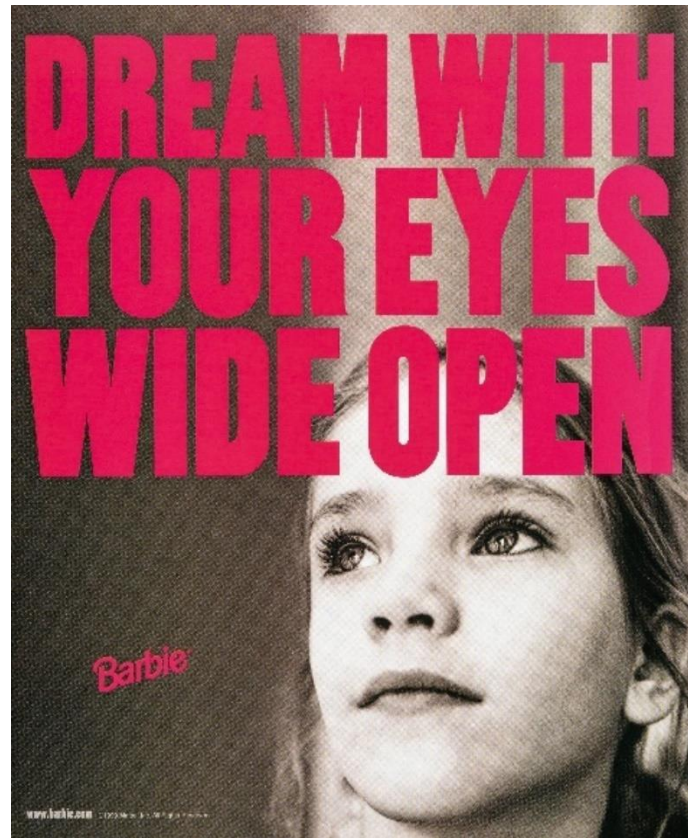


Figure 6: Mattel (1990), *Dream with Your Eyes Wide Open*

Similarly, Keith Haring used his platform as a successful artist of the time to spread awareness of the impact of the HIV crisis on the gay community. He did this using text, directly addressing the issues at hand (Fields, 2020). By the time Haring was diagnosed with HIV, his signature art style had become recognisable. Because of this, Haring was able to use

his creative practice to express his opinions and to raise awareness about the effects of HIV.

In *Act Up for Life* (1989), Haring uses the branding of the Act Up organisation in combination with his own style to make his voice heard.

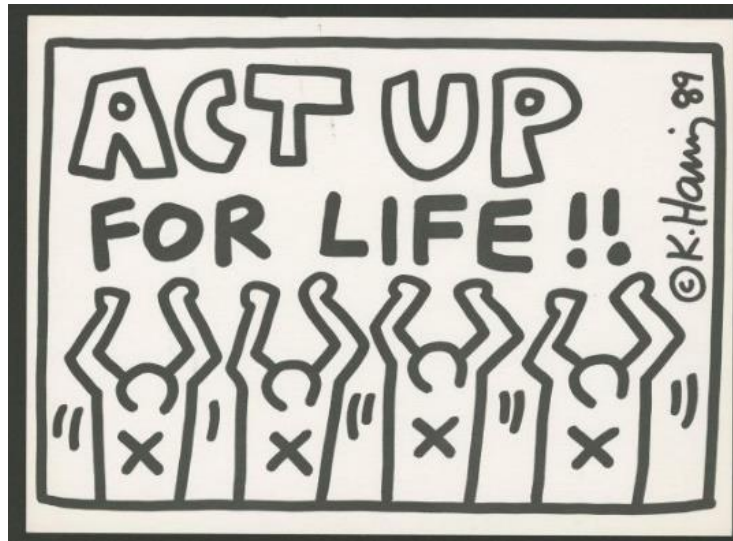


Figure 7: Keith Haring (1989), *Act Up for Life*

In contrast to both of these artists, Gonzalez-Torres demonstrates a much quieter method of protest. The queer influence within Gonzalez-Torres' work lies not in its activism or its fearlessness, but rather in its secrecy and delicacy.

But, if we looked 20-30 years into the future, it'd be interesting to see to what degree this has changed based on context. Queer art is an extremely fluid thing, and so it's likely that through time LGBTQ+ methods of creating have shifted. Next is the work of an individual whose self-image transforms along with her practice.

Queer Consumerism: The 2010s

Martine Gutierrez, born 1989, is an artist, a performer, and a provocateur. Much of her work manifests in the form of self-portraits, as she is the subject of her work. Her work questions traditional understandings of identity by challenging the binaries of gender. As a non-binary transwoman, Gutierrez has a somewhat unique life experience which contributes to the flexibility of her practice. Because she is the model, costume and set designer, makeup artist and director of her art, she has complete control over her image. Gutierrez is like a chameleon, reinventing herself with each image she creates (Sheets, 2021).



Figure 8: Martine Gutierrez (2018), *Queer Rage, Growing Up Bites*

In the above image, *Queer Rage, Growing Up Bites*, (2018) Gutierrez presents a playful representation of what it's like to grow up queer within a heteronormative society (Morse, 2020). Gutierrez herself is stationed in the centre of the image, on top of a sofa that partly transforms into a white tiger. This artist often plays with notions of fluidity. Here she blends the material with the natural, as seen with the rectangular glass windows and the waterfalls that are imposed on top. It could be a representation of Gutierrez's experience of being pressured to conform in order to fit societal norms. *Queer Rage, Growing Up Bites* (Gutierrez, 2018) expresses this frustration, and defies it by being as visually loud as possible. Noticeably, the figure is just as colourful as the water and just as expressive as the white lion.

Barker and Scheele write in *Queer: A Graphic History* (2016), “Artistic forms can, in themselves, be recognized as valid ways of knowing, thinking through, and experiencing queer worlds,” (p. 108), and here Gutierrez is showing us her personal creative universe. This is just one way Gutierrez represents herself within her practice. In another piece, titled *#MARTINEJEANS* (Gutierrez, 2016), the artist explores her own gender identity in relation to consumerist culture.



Figure 9: Martine Gutierrez (2016), *#MARTINEJEANS*

#MARTINEJEANS (Gutierrez, 2016) is a fictitious advertising campaign displayed on a billboard over Manhattan's Garment District. Contained within an acidic pink border is a feminine presenting person laying provocatively in a pair of jeans. Here, Gutierrez has nestled an art piece in between brand advertising and television posters, but it doesn't stand out as something completely separate. Because the artist studied and mimicked the style of this advertising campaigns, it blends in well with the surrounding images. This demonstrates an understanding of the culture that she lives in, as well as the way she is perceived by it. Additionally, Gutierrez seems to be mimicking advertising methods similar to Calvin Klein.



Figure 10: Calvin Klein (2016), *Calvin Klein Spring 2016 Ad Campaign – #mycalvins*

Above is an image created by the brand Calvin Klein showcasing their product, worn by model Kendall Jenner. In *#MARTINEJEANS* (2016) Gutierrez mimics a pose similar to Jenner's, lying seductively, in an almost unnatural way. Similarities also include the typography, as Gutierrez uses the same font and branding, as seen within the text and with *#mycalvins* & *#MARTINEJEANS*. The purpose of this is to keep it familiar to the mainstream public, so that people understand what the image is attempting to convey. The key difference between Calvin Klein's campaign and *#MARTINEJEANS* (Gutierrez, 2016) lies within method of address. In many of Klein's photographs, the model is looking away from the camera, but Gutierrez is looking directly towards it. This emphasises a confidence and an

unapologetic attitude towards how she presents herself. Additionally, Gutierrez is encouraging us to wonder what matters more; the thing being advertised or the person wearing it? In reality both are a product you're being persuaded into wanting but are simply idyllic and romantic representations of average things (McKevitt, 2017). But in *#MARTINEJEANS* (Gutierrez, 2016), there is no product, just her. Perhaps Gutierrez is challenging the commercialisation of female bodies within our society and asking how she fits into the narrative based on her identity as a trans woman. In a 2017 interview with Houda Lazrak about her piece *#MARTINEJEANS* (2016) Gutierrez said

My work has always stemmed from the reality that it does not serve as a definitive statement on gender. Instead, my art has been cultivated into a language for self-reflection and understanding of how I identify in the world.

(Gutierrez, 2017)

In terms of queer coding, Gutierrez is challenging traditional modelling well as consumerist culture by using herself as the subject. Her experience as a trans woman holds significance here because of the traditionally transphobic and misogynistic modelling culture. For example, in 2018 when Victoria Secret's chief marketing officer Ed Razek was asked about having trans models in the show, he stated "No. No, I don't think we should. Well, why not? Because the show is a fantasy" (Real, 2018). Despite this occurring after Gutierrez's work was made, it's clear that this attitude towards trans models within designer brands has been, and remains, negative. Gutierrez is aware of this fact, and so she uses her identity to defy expectations of trans women.

Rosemary Hennesy discusses similar themes within *Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture* (1994). In this text, she analyses and criticizes the commodification of queer identities for a profit. She emphasises the importance of positive representations of LGBTQ+ identities, as it can influence public perception of queer topics. In connection with Gutierrez's work,

particularly *#MARTINEJEANS* (2016), it is important to note the ways in which queer topics can be used for profit, not only for representation.

In reference to how LGBTQ+ visibility is mainly used as a lucrative market, Hennesy states that “money, not liberation, is the bottom line “(Hennesy, 1994, p. 32). A modern example of this would be the notion of queer baiting. Different to queer coding, queer baiting is when a piece of media hints at a queer subtext and will purposefully draw LGBTQ+ audiences to it but without including any actual representation (Harris, 2019). To clarify, an example of queer coding would be the way villains are designed in Disney movies, as they are often drawn with ‘feminine’ characteristics, which directly oppose the male hero’s masculine features. Although continually coding villains as queer does have a negative impact, the difference between queer coding and queer baiting lies in the intention. An example of queer baiting would be how J.K. Rowling, after she finished writing the Harry Potter series, claimed in 2007 that Dumbledore was gay, without ever writing him as explicitly queer or even coding him as such (Harris, 2019). This has a negative impact because there is no direct representation in the books, and so queer fans cannot even see themselves in the character that is meant to represent them. Queer baiting can often be seen as performative or a way to draw in queer audiences in the hope of making profit. It is important to note the complexities of queer identities and how they can be exploited. Queer baiting has become more prevalent during the 20th century and is especially common within mainstream media (McAlpine, 2018). This is why this image of Gutierrez holds such power because she is reclaiming her identity and displaying herself with pride. Queer people have historically rarely had the chance to represent themselves proudly in mainstream spaces (Hennesy, 1994). So, Gutierrez is allowing herself to unapologetically take up space as a non-binary trans woman. This is increasingly impactful because of the hostility towards trans women within the modelling community, as well as the commodification of queer identities. Gutierrez defies these

stereotypes by taking control of her own representation. But how is this different to Gonzalez-Torres' self-representation? How did both of these artists respond differently within their own personal contexts?

Conclusion.

First, it is important to note the significance of choosing a billboard as a vehicle for the work. They are not private, not quiet. They are large scale advertisements meant to draw our attention. Within the context of LGBTQ+ identities, this is especially impactful as we have already seen, historically, queer voices were suppressed (Roberts, 2020). By exhibiting their experiences on such a massive scale, both Gonzalez-Torres and Gutierrez subject their work to a large, unpredictable audience. Additionally, the way they both express themselves is very unique. Gutierrez is presenting herself as a high fashion model posing provocatively, which contrasts greatly to Torres' empty bed. Gutierrez displaying herself to the world unashamed of her own identity in #MARTINEJEANS (2016) reflects a shift in public opinion and cultural context. Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* (1991) is starkly timid in comparison. But this emphasises the importance of context when looking at art, as the motivations and situations behind each piece is tied directly to where, when and who made it. Because of Gonzalez-Torres' placement within history, he was unable to separate his identity from his art. As a young gay man suffering from HIV and AIDS in the 90s, he had to find alternative ways to express his frustrations and make his voice heard.

Through my research I have discovered the ways in which queer art has become more expressive and open over time. I believe this has been due to a shift in public perception of queer issues, and an active attempt to better the lives of LGBTQ+ people. An example of this would be the legalisation of gay marriage in the United States in 2015, after a long and hard-fought campaign which began after a man from Ohio sued the state to get his name listed on

his late husband's death certificate (Roberts & Siddiqui, 2015). Massive political shifts such as this can completely alter the lives of LGBTQ+ people. It's also worth noting that the experience of different LGBTQ+ identities differ from person to person. For example, Gonzalez' Torres' identity as a gay man and Gutierrez's identity as a non-binary transwoman provide both of them with different life experiences. But, because they both exist within the LGBTQ+ community, they will often share similar experiences, such as rejection from close family or discrimination in the workplace (Durso & Singh, 2017).

It's clear, when comparing both *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* (Gonzalez-Torres, 1991) and *#MARTINEJEANS* (Gutierrez, 2016) that the queer coding is subtler within Gonzalez-Torres' work in comparison to Gutierrez. This is due to their individual contexts, but as well as their personal means of expression, aside from their identities. Historically Gonzalez-Torres' work tends to lean more minimalist whilst Gutierrez's work is very direct and outspoken. But despite that, could this method of creating again tie back to their upbringings and environment? It's difficult to know exactly why art styles are different from person to person, and if that is due to nature or nurture.

Whether loud or quiet, the voices of LGBTQ+ artists have a strong impact on how queer culture is viewed by mainstream society. For example, Emily Garside discusses the connection between art and activism in *Art, Fashion & Activism – Dr Emily Garside on Dan Levy's Wojnarowicz-inspired 2021 Met Gala look* (2021). During the 2021 Met Gala, *Schitt's Creek* creator and star Dan Levy wore a rendering of the work of artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz.



Figure 11 (left): David Wojnarowicz (1984) *Fuck You F*ggot Fucker*



Figure 12 (right): Dan Levy at the Met Gala (2021)

Wojnarowicz passed away from AIDS-related complications in 1992. He was a key figure within the ACT UP organization and often made work of a provocative and political nature. Interestingly, the theme for the 2021 Met Gala was ‘In America: A Lexicon of Fashion.’ With that in mind, could this be Levy’s personal rendition of American art? By wearing *Fuck You F*ggot Fucker* (Wojnarowicz, 1984) on his body, Levy is acknowledging the impact, the importance, and the relevance of protest through art (Garside, 2021). This is an example of how radical political art of the 20th century still holds weight today, and so it should be discussed and celebrated. With the ability to reflect upon the past 40 years and how LGBTQ+ rights have changed, acknowledging the work of Queer artists is essential. Because artists such as Gonzales-Torres provided LGBTQ+ representation through queer coding, voices that would have otherwise been lost, were heard. Considering the queer art of the present, such as the work of Gutierrez, it’s interesting to consider the impact it may have on future generations of artists. Indeed, the connection between art and identity is a powerful one, a connection which can shape the very world we live in.

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Appendix.

Campbell, A. *Queer x Design: 50 years of Signs, Symbols, Banners, Logos, and Graphic Art of LGBTQ*, 2019

This book illustrates more than 5 generations of LGBTQ pride and activism within art and design in the 20th century. Campell connects the dots between semiotics and context, all while providing an interesting deep dive into their connotations and denotations. He emphasises the importance of symbols within queer culture, dating from the reclamation of the pink triangle to the modern pride flags of today. LGBTQ culture is dipped in hidden meanings, and Campbell dissects these articulately. Unfortunately, *Queer x Design* mostly focuses on American LGBTQ art and culture, which limits its content and the possible alternate perspectives. Despite this, American LGBTQ culture is extremely rich, and so this does not weaken Campbell's analysis or arguments. As the book covers 50 years of queer design, there is a wide range of content to be explored. Campell forms out a timeline which clearly illustrates the transformation of symbol making within LGBTQ culture, and how this impacts a wider mainstream cultural narrative. This text will be of great use to me in my project as it provides an in-depth exploration into the recent history of queer art and design. It acts as the basis of my exploration, as many of the artworks I shall discuss are mentioned within this book. To write accurately, I must be fully informed. Campell provides this information in a clear and concise fashion.

Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing*, 1972

In this text, Berger analyses visual culture and its impact on our social psyche, using traditional art as an example. Originally a television series, *Ways of Seeing* transformed the way we understand semiotics within images forever. Berger covers the subjectivity of images, the depiction of women, the politics of oil painting, the impact of advertising, and much more. True to its name, this text deconstructs the way we digest images and their impact on us as consumers, all while providing alternative ways of seeing. The weakness of this text is that it was published almost 50 years ago, meaning that its contents, though informative, are rather dated. It is a visual language from another time. Despite this, the arguments and theories proposed within the text are still relevant today, and so I shall be considering this text when constructing my arguments, with a modern lens. This text is important when discussing my subject matter, as often queer themes in art are hidden through coding. To be able to fully deconstruct these themes, *Ways of Seeing* is an essential text.

José Esteban Muñoz: *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2009

Cruising Utopia proposes new and revolutionary ideas surrounding queerness. In this book, Muñoz insists that the queer cultural and political imagination must stop its stagnancy to reach a better future. It explores a strain of queer utopianism found in art, poetry and performance surrounding the years of the 1969 Stonewall uprising. Muñoz discusses the works of artists, philosophers, and writers such as Andy Warhol, Frank O'Hara, and Ernst

Bloch to support his theories. Because the book focuses on semi-recent events, it urges us to reflect on our current treatment of queer culture within society, allowing us to then look to the future. Muñoz writes with a creative clarity, building his ideas over 10 chapters which discuss different theoretical or aesthetic aspects of his work. This piece will greatly impact my writing as queer philosophy is key to understanding queer coding. As Muñoz implies, you must look towards the past to understand the future. This book will provide me with the proper language and concepts to properly dissect the subject matter.

Wheadon, J. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 1997-2003

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a supernatural drama which follows a teenage girl after she is chosen as the Slayer. What follows is a series of metaphors contextualised within a supernatural environment. For example: the portal to hell is quite literally beneath the high school; Vampirism is a metaphor for humanities' sins, such as lust, gluttony, and greed; and witchcraft is used as a metaphor for queerness. This is where the notion of Queer Coding comes into play. At the time, the network refused to show a sapphic relationship on screen, and so I shall be analysing how they conveyed this through metaphors surrounding magic. It's important to note that the show was written by a cishet man, and so queer relationships are not perceived through a queer lens but rather through the male gaze. Additionally, this reference is not a modern example of queer representation in media. Despite this, it is important for my research as I shall be looking at examples of queer coding in art and media

over the past 50 years, and television is as important of a visual art for as any, due to it's heavy impact on our cultural psyche.

Hennessy, R. *Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture*, 1994

This text discusses notions of queer visibility within commodity culture within the 20th century. Hennessy analyses the ways in which the visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification within late-stage capitalism. The idea that LGBTQ+ representation is a commodity is an interesting argument, something that Hennessy references in their text with the phrase: “money, not liberation, is the bottom line.” This is an intriguing text as not only does it discuss different examples of queer coding and representation, but also its impact. Hennessy emphasises how queer representation paves the way for LGBTQ+ for civil rights protection, and how affirmative images of queer people has a positive impact on the cishet public's perception. This expanded perspective of the impact of queer media will be extremely useful when writing my dissertation, as it's impossible to separate subject from context