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## Full Length Article

## Food practices, queer social reproduction and the geographies of LGBTQ+ activism

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of food practices –namely, *the sharing of food* – in the production of political solidarity within spaces of LGBTQ + activism. We suggest that focusing on food practices can help us understand how care and pleasure underpin the politics of solidarity. Drawing on two multi-site qualitative research projects on transnational activism around LGBTQ cultural and political events in Poland and a comparative study of queer film festivals as activism in different localities and geopolitical sites in Europe, we argue that food practices play a key role within the *queer social reproduction* of event-based transnational solidarities through a range of interconnected effects: Food practices (a) are constitutive of *community* creating withing transnational activist networks; (b) are tied in with the cultivation of *hospitality* and *care* in activist contexts; (c) allow for the experience of mutual *pleasure* that opens up possibilities for meaningful and joyful encounters. Following Elspeth Probyn's argument that thinking about food in relation to sex can help us understand the everyday ethics of living and value of pleasure in forging social connections, the paper shifts the emphasis of our understanding LGBTQ + activism from militancy or interest-based or rights-focused contestations towards emotional, embodied and material social reproduction. The paper further provides a significant contribution to current debates on queer social reproduction that tend to focus either on practices localised in the home or in the city, by showing how queer social reproduction operates in transnational networks and circuits, involving more transitory and temporary spaces.

## 1. Introduction

In this article, we demonstrate that food practices are key to the production of political solidarity among transnational LGBTQ + activists and play an important role in the queer social reproduction (QSR) of both the emotional bonds and the infrastructure that sustains and underpins activist transnational networks around event-based spaces of cooperation and solidarity. Inspired by Brown and Yaffe (2014: 35) who rightly complain that: 'too often, in the broader social sciences, discussions of political solidarity overlook the range of practices through which solidarity is mobilised and enacted,' we show how networks of solidarity are forged in acts of everyday creativity, responsibility, and practices of care and hospitality (Banerjee et al., 2018; Featherstone, 2012). Here we build upon the path-breaking work of Elspeth Probyn (1999, 2000) who has shown the close connection between food, gender, sexuality and pleasure/desire. Following Probyn's argument that thinking about food in relation to sex can help us understand the

everyday ethics of living and value of pleasure in forging social connections, the article shifts the emphasis of our understanding of LGBTQ + activism from militancy and interest-based or rights-focused contestations towards emotional, embodied and material social reproduction. Drawing on recent developments in geographical scholarship on QSR (Andrucki, 2021; Chlala, 2020; Lewis, 2017; Taylor et al., 2024), we argue that the 'queer bonds' of solidarity (Weiner & Young, 2011) that sustain transnational activist networks are partially forged through everyday food practices as examples of pleasure, care and hospitality.

Originating in socialist and materialist feminist debates on value and the division of labour, feminist social reproduction theory has shown that unpaid work, too, is productive of value (both use value and exchange value), but that this a commonly obscured and disavowed aspect of the relations of labour in patriarchal, racial capitalism, allowing for the exploitation of feminized and racialized labour in informal care-focused labour settings (Ferguson, 2020). Feminist and queer-feminist theorists have re-validated so-called reproductive work and shown its

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profound significance in the creation and sustenance of sociality and community (Federici, 2012, 2021; Dalla Costa, 2008). Many authors dedicated towards analysing *queer* protest or social reproduction contexts have further foregrounded the aspect of sex and pleasure within QSR (Andrucki, 2017, 2021; Shepard, 2009, 2013). We welcome this expansion of focus, but, drawing on Probyn (1999, 2000) and turning to food practices, we show that queer pleasure itself is a category that goes far beyond sexuality. We also suggest that focusing on food practices in LGBTQ + activism can enable a more varied or holistic comprehension of solidarity in contradistinction to representations of solidarity that depend merely hinge upon the wider imaginary of militancy, fight and struggle.

Our argument draws on data from two multi-site qualitative research projects on transnational activist networks around LGBTQ + political and cultural events in Poland and a comparative study of queer film festivals (QFFs) in Europe to further push the application of QSR theory beyond more clearly delineated spaces such as the home or specific cities, highlighting its usefulness to theorise more temporary and ephemeral spaces and event-based socialities. The article is structured as follows. In the first section, we review geographical and other work on political solidarity, LGBTQ + activism and QSR. We consider how the literature on QSR can inform the geographies of LGBTQ + activism and set out our framework for how food practices can offer new insights to the study of both fields. We then proceed to provide a brief outline of the two empirical projects on transnational solidarities and LGBTQ + activism in Poland and QFFs as activism before discussing how our research participants narrated the central role of food within LGBTQ + activism. This is followed by a longer section that shows and critically discusses the three most distinctive ways in which food practices (namely, the sharing of food) operated as methods of QSR in our research. We show that food practices: (a) are constitutive of a sense of *community* among transnational activist networks, producing the emotional ties that sustain cooperation across different localities and social positionalities; (b) are tied in with the cultivation of *hospitality* and *care* in activist spaces and event-settings; (c) allow for the experience of mutual *pleasure* that opens up possibilities for meaningful and joyful encounters that texture queer modes of activist cooperation. In the final section, we argue that geographical research into LGBTQ + activism would benefit from a reinforced focus on food practices as a key feature of political solidarity and that queer social reproduction theory is an indispensable resource for social movement research in the transnational sphere.

## 2. Geographies of political solidarity, LGBTQ activism and queer social reproduction

In this section, we review relevant work on political solidarity, LGBTQ + activism and QSR.

### 2.1. Geographies of political solidarity

Solidarity has been a key value in political mobilisation for centuries (Stjernø, 2005), and has figured as a master discourse in many social movements (Featherstone, 2012). There is no agreed upon definition of what solidarity stands for and different political actors apply different meanings to the term, depending on the ideological and geographical context. Solidarity has been key in either creating collective identities and group unity for mobilization around certain political goals or it has facilitated cooperation across different identities. Hunt and Benford (2004) distinguish between internal or external solidarity, depending on whether a person's actions relate to a group they belong to (assuming self-interest to be part of the motivation) or a separate, external group (involving a dimension of empathy).

In our own work on transnational activism regarding gender and sexual politics in Poland, we define solidarity as a 'critical practice' (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 453), a mode of cooperation that is necessarily

complex and contradictory, and often shaped by uneven power relations (Binnie & Klesse, 2011a,b). We think that Gould's (2007) notion of 'networked solidarities' is particularly useful for the context of the studies we draw upon in this article, because it allows us to conceive of the transnational geographies of solidarity as being shaped by networks of activists of variable identifications with multiple overlapping group affiliations in different locations.

This view is commensurate with Scholz's (2007, 2008) understanding of 'political solidarity' as a project-based and activist-related bond derived from a shared commitment to challenge injustice, as opposed to 'social solidarity' (evolving around shared group membership) or 'civic solidarity' (welfare state or citizenship-related). In this view, solidarity is not an entity offered from one person (or group of people) to another. Rather, it is conceived as being networked and interactional, based on reciprocity, complicity and a mutual commitment towards undoing power. In this respect, our understanding of solidarity aligns with Brown and Yaffe's (2014, p. 35) statement that 'relations of solidarity can travel in more than one direction simultaneously, building complex webs of reciprocity.'

The networked nature and geo-political dimension of practices of solidarity have been highlighted in path-breaking studies in political geography (Featherstone, 2012; Nicholls et al., 2021; Oosterlynck et al., 2017). At the same time, the work of transnational, postcolonial and anti-racist feminists (Mohanty, 2003; Dufour et al., 2011) has shown that all solidarities are troubled by multiple social divisions around gender, sexuality, race, class and geo-political location. Scholz (2007, p. 45) has argued that '[a]ctivism is the public side of political solidarity'. For her, the two concepts are closely intertwined. The emphasis on publicity, i.e., public voice or visible action, tends to prioritise forms of solidarity activism that are more on the spectacular side, bringing to mind street protests, media campaigns, and other interventions in the public sphere. Only subsequently have everyday acts of resistance and question of care and emotionality come to the fore (Featherstone, 2012).

### 2.2. Geographies of LGBTQ + activism

Like solidarity, activism is a concept that is notoriously difficult to define. The manifold definitions of activism in social movement each tend to involve the notion of 'collective action' aiming at the transformation of the status quo (Millward & Takhar, 2019). There is an extensive literature on the geographies of LGBTQ + activism (see Johnston (2017) for an overview, Bain and Podmore (2021) for a review of work on urban LGBTQ + activism). In our own work, we have found activism to be an open concept with many of the people who participated in our projects not using that term to frame their participation in LGBTQ + solidarity events, preferring to see it in terms of friendship, or something that they do not articulate as being overtly political. We therefore agree with Maxey's (1999, p. 201) expansive understanding of activism which emphasises the role of activism within everyday life that: 'The social world is produced through the acts each of us engages in every day. This resonates with our main arguments regarding the everyday components of activism, in particular because the study of LGBTQ + activism within geography has primarily been concerned within public protests such as Pride events. For instance, it is notable that the main body of Johnston's (2017) review deals with work explicitly examining LGBTQ + Pride marches and festivals in a range of geographical contexts, but predominantly in Europe, North America and Australasia. A key theme in this body of work is the commercialisation of such events, how they intersect with tourist and leisure spaces, and the extent to which they are inclusive or reflective of LGBTQ + communities as a whole (Browne, 2007; Johnston, 2005, 2007; Binnie & Klesse, 2011). There is also work that is concerned with spaces of radical queer activism, such as the Queeruptation events, which have an anti-capitalist and/or anarchist political orientation and ethos (Brown, 2007).

We agree with Fish et al. (2018, p. 1204) that we need a distinctive 'queer theory of everyday activism' that focuses on the everyday

practices and the everyday work that sustain growth and change for LGBTQ + communities. In their research with LGB people involved in support and social groups around mental and physical health, they observed a quest for affective bonds, friendship and mutual support around shared experiences, noting that: 'Quotidian activism quietly, but powerfully, works alongside the explicit, political moments in our history' (2018, p. 1196), arguing that because it is less spectacular it is often over-looked. We suggest that our focus on both food practices and QSR directly addresses Fish et al.'s (2018) call for a 'queer theory of everyday activism'.

### 2.3. Geographies of queer social reproduction

Laslett and Brenner (1989, p. 382) define social reproduction as the 'activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis'. A focus on the every-day is implicit in feminist geographical work on social reproduction (Hall, 2020). The roots of social reproduction theory lie in feminist debates regarding the role and significance of women's unpaid labour in the reproduction of the labour force, the relations underpinning capitalist production, or life itself, expanding or revising Marxist views on that matter (for an overview, see Ferguson, 2020). Reproductive work figures primarily as a matter of labour, exploitation and gender-based oppression in feminist social reproduction theory. At the same time, some authors, namely from the autonomist tradition, have also stressed the positive, generative, productive aspects of reproductive work, suggesting that they can be directed towards nurturing cultures of resistance, communities and collectives of the common, beyond and outside the regime of capitalism (Federici, 2012, 2021; Dalla Costa, 2008).

Rodríguez-Rocha (2021) highlights the body as a key feature of feminist geographical enquiry into social reproduction. At the same time, there is scope for geographers of social reproduction to consider the body as a key locus of contestation within queer politics and to approach social reproduction from a queer theoretical lens.

While Taylor et al. (2024) have argued that QSR has been a less frequently studied subject in geographical scholarship, we have lately witnessed a growth of geographical work engaging with the concept of QSR (e.g., Andrucki, 2017, 2021; Bhagat, 2023; Chlala, 2020; Lewis, 2017). This work has tended to focus either on the domestic (the home) or on the city, occasionally also on the interconnection between the two. For instance, Taylor et al. (2024: 1231) examine what they term 'queer shared housing practices' based on interviews with participants in queer house and flat shares in London from a QSR perspective. Likewise, Lewis (2017: online) focuses on the home as a site of QSR, while also acknowledging blurred boundaries and multiple vectors of the home and wider community relations: 'social reproduction has often been framed as something that occurs in the home and then diffused outward to communities in terms of norms, values, and the maintenance of economic productivity.' Lewis states that there is evidence that organisations in Toronto informing queer migrants about HIV had helped to enhance the resilience of migrant households by ameliorating relationships within migrant families. The focus on the home resonates with scholarship that emphasises the significance of the kitchen table as a key site and food practices as an important means for community building, debate and organising in different contexts of lesbian feminist (Scicluna, 2017), Black feminist (Smith & Taylor, 2017), and Queer of Colour activism (Haritaworn, 2015).

Much geographical work on QSR focuses on the city and the role of queer people in practices of urban social reproduction. For instance, Andrucki's (2017) discussion of QSR focuses on the urban geographies of gay men's social reproduction which he frames as: 'ongoing collective labour that is essential to the constitution not just of gayborhoods but of urban spaces in general, particularly through the way it might unsettle binaries of public and private that constrain our thinking around not just intimacy (Berlant & Warner, 1998) but caring labor'. Andrucki applies

this lens to examine the role of collective queer labour in the reproduction of queer neighbourhoods within San Francisco.

Lewis (2017) studies landscapes of QSR within a comparative urban framework by examining three different landscapes of QSR in diverse geographical contexts in North America i.e. the ways that QSR is configured within different types of cities, focusing on economic factors, such employment histories, city size, aged-based demographics, immigration regimes, LGBTQ + institution building, etc. Lewis's work attests to the significance of geographical context in shaping the forms that QSR take.

Geographical and other work on QSR has shifted the focus away from a heteronormative concern with heterosexual intimacies, families and identities towards a concern with the reproduction of queer communities (Lewis, 2017; Raha, 2021; Taylor et al., 2024). Moreover, QSR theory moves beyond gender-binary analysis and a singular focus with the work undertaken by (cis-gendered) women, opening up avenues to explore the socially reproductive labour of gay men, racialized men, immigrants of all genders, and non-binary people (Andrucki, 2021; Andrucki & Kaplan, 2018; Chlala, 2020). Work on QSR stresses how queer labour is shaped by wider economic, cultural, organisational, and systemic processes (Bhagat, 2023) and often precarious, often unpaid, and devalued in processes of racialization, class subordination, and anti-trans politics (Chala, 2020; Raha, 2021). Moreover, work on labour in QSR foregrounds practices of care in marginalised places, intimate settings, and/or workplace settings (Andrucki, 2021; Crosby & Jakobsen, 2020). QSR also transcends the private/public distinction, blurring boundaries of sectors, state and civil society, and spatial designations (Andrucki, 2017, 2021; Lewis, 2017; Wang, 2023), and is generative of new – often non-procreative – modes of sociality, kinship, community, and temporality (Wilkinson, 2020). While QSR theory has elaborated these insights into distinctive markers and qualities of queer reproductive labour across a wide range of social terrains, only a handful of studies has looked specifically at LGBTQ + activism (Andrucki, 2021; Wang, 2023). Importantly, for the argument of this article, QSR theory has created a critical space to focus on pleasure and sex as integral parts of activism and the reproduction of queer spaces and communities (Andrucki, 2021).

Our article expands the remit of QSR theory by relating it new contexts, i.e., the less bounded, temporary, and ephemeral spaces of QFFs and art-events. Andrucki's (2017) work already gestures towards this field, when he discusses the example of voluntary labour at a QFF in San Francisco to illustrate the precarious dimension of caring 'queer labour' in the city. Moreover, we argue that food practices are an understudied but emergent dimension in the geographies of QSR. Castelo et al. (2021) have argued that eating itself is one food practice within a wider network of interrelated complex practices, such as, for example, meal planning, selecting food, buying food, organising food, food storing, preparing food, cleaning/washing up, disposing food waste, managing leftovers, serving food, cooking, etc. These practices are loosely connected, even if not necessarily mutually dependent upon each other, and frequently are part of routinized sets of activities that make up the flow of everyday life, always embedded in social relationships (Warde, 2016). It is easy to see, how food practices, as defined by Castelo et al., (2021) are a relevant subject within social reproduction-focused analysis, where quotidian embodied actions, intersectional power regimes and the spatialities of everyday life are constituting each other. Like Castelo et al. (Warde, 2016) we suggest that these food practices are not only embedded in social relationships, but are themselves *constitutive of relationships, modes of sociality, identifications, and modalities of pleasure*. As such, we argue they are a key ingredient in wider practices of QSR.

In this context, we consider Probyn's (1990, 2000) work to be fruitful for exploring the interconnection between food practices, QSR and the ethical aspects of LGBTQ + activism. She succinctly states that: 'In short, food is the opportunity to explore the tangible links between what we eat, who we think we are, how and with whom we have sex, and what we are becoming,' (2000, p. 77). It is therefore no surprise that



references to Probyn figure prominently in the few texts that explicitly deal with the role of food practices in LGBTQ + political agency and activism (Bao, 2021; Menrisky, 2022).

In the empirical section of this article we will show how food practices operate as modes of QSR in LGBTQ + transnational, event-based activism, but in order to contextualise our empirical examples, we will briefly describe the 2 projects our argument is based upon.

### 3. Methodology – About the projects

The first project, *Transnational Solidarities and LGBTQ Activism in Poland*, examined the transnational dimensions of activist networks that relate to LGBTQ equality marches and related cultural festivals in Warsaw, Krakow, and Poznan. These marches had been notable for being subject to often violent counterprotest and are heavily policed. Marches in Poznan and Warsaw had been at various points banned by city authorities in the context of the growth of an aggressive public discourse against feminist and LGBTQ + politics (Graff, 2010; Gruszczyńska, 2009). It is important to note that this hostile public discourse has more recently been manifested in so-called LGBT exclusion zones primarily in the south and east of Poland, the electoral heartland of the nationalist, populist and socially conservative Law and Justice Party (Zuk et al., 2021). We sought to understand the conditionality and sustainability of solidarities produced through transnational networks that emerged in connection with these events. We were interested in what motivated organisers of and participants in these events to become engaged, as well as the issues that constrained their efforts. We undertook a total of 35 in-depth qualitative interviews with respondents in Poland, Germany, Belgium, and The Netherlands. Most were conducted in English, some in German and one in a mixture of Dutch and English. Interviewees included representatives from mainstream LGBT rights organisations, trade unionists, anarchists, entrepreneurs, and those without any affiliation. We also conducted participant observation of the Marches for Tolerance in Krakow in 2008 and 2009, the Marches for Equality in Poznan and Warsaw in 2008, plus international networking meetings within the main Dutch LGBT rights organisation the COC in The Hague and Arnhem in the Netherlands. This was supplemented by archival research on the Polish LGBTQ + movement in the International Gay and Lesbian Information Centre and Archive (IHLIA) in Amsterdam and the archive of the Schwules Museum (Gay Museum) in Berlin (see Binnie & Klesse, 2012, 2013a,b for more extensive discussion of the methodology of this study). This data set was supplemented with additional interviews with 4 activists in Krakow in 2017.

The second project, *Queer Film Festivals as Activism*, examined the role of queer film festivals in furthering LGBTQ + political agendas in different geopolitical contexts in Europe. The study focussed on QFFs as networked sites and social spaces for the production of queer visibilities and solidarities around LGBTQ + issues within a range of geographical and scalar political imaginaries – from the neighbourhood to the region, the nation and the global. We agree with Schoonover and Galt's (2016, p. 79) assessment of the queer politics of film when they argue that there is a profoundly transformative affective quality to cinema: 'Cinema makes spaces that did not exist before'. The 5 festivals in our study included the Sicilia Queer Film Festival in Palermo; the GAZE International LGBT Film Festival in Dublin; the Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage/-Hamburg International Queer Film Festival; the Mezipatra Queer Film Festival in Prague and Brno in the Czech Republic and the Merlinka International Queer Film Festival in Belgrade. These festivals were chosen because of a combination of theoretical, political, and pragmatic reasons. We sought to focus on festivals in diverse geographical locations and geopolitical contexts across Europe, including both older (as those in Hamburg, Dublin, Prague and Brno) as well as younger festivals (such as Palermo and Belgrade). The festivals in Prague and Belgrade have been of particular significance in cities where Pride events had not taken place regularly. The first Prague Pride did not take place until 2011, after events in other Czech cities such as Brno and Karlovy Vary

(Pitoňák, 2022). In Belgrade, this has been due to violent opposition by nationalist counter-protestors (Bilić, 2016). While our project was limited to queer film festivals in Europe, we recognise a rich body of work examining the organisation of queer film festivals elsewhere (see Bao, 2017; Richards, 2016; Schoonover & Galt, 2016). We sought to understand these events as key sites for the reproduction, articulation, and contestation of LGBTQ political agendas and the creation of spaces of solidarity, affinity, and connection. We also examined the motivations and political and aesthetic agendas of key organisers – including the directors, programmers, members of the organisational committees, and other volunteers. The research took place between June 2013 and August 2015 and consisted of 67 in-depth qualitative interviews. Most interviews were conducted in English, with some at the Hamburg festival taking place in German. Elsewhere, we have provided a more extensive discussion of the project's comparative methodology (Binnie & Klesse, 2018a,b).

Food practices were not a thematic priority during our design of these studies. However, their significance became clear to us when we began our data collection. We were moved by the hospitality of many of our interviewees who invited us to meet them for a discussion of our project in their homes or their cultural and/or political spaces. We were thereby nourished and sustained by the opportunity to socialise in some of the food spaces organised by activists that we will discuss in the following section. It is also noteworthy that the initial ideas for this article were sketched out on a phone over a meal in Krakow after a stimulating day conducting interviews. Sharing food – as much as sharing ideas – has been an important part of our collaborative work and pivotal to sustaining our own cooperation within institutional spaces where space for research on sexualities and queer themes must be constantly defended. In the following, we analyse some of the collective food practices integral to LGBTQ + activism that we encountered in our research. Our discussion falls in three parts. Identifying the key insights of our analysis: food practices in the context of transnational LGBTQ + activism are indicative of political solidarity and operate as key moments within QSR because they (a) are constitutive of collectivity and community; (b) involve the cultivation of *hospitality* and *care* in activist contexts; and (c) create opportunities for mutual *pleasure* that opens up possibilities for meaningful and joyful encounters with others.

### 4. Creating food spaces as sites of transnational queer collectivity

QFFs are a prime example for the proactive investment of LGBTQ activism in creation of affective bonds, a community spirit or a sense of queer collectivity. Dawson and Loist (2018, p. 3) suggest that the success of QFFs in staging emotive highlights come down to the 'liveliness of the event', resulting from their facilitation of embodied gatherings of audiences, filmmakers, and critics, supported by the performance of certain sets of rituals. In this section, we argue that food practices are key to what Dawson and Loist (2018, p. 3) describe as the 'hype and feeling of belonging to a group' which they see as exemplary of QFF experiences. We suggest that it allows for visceral bonding and an embodied sense of queer collectivity. An excellent example is the Hamburg Queer International Film Festival, where there is an extensive programme of events associated with the film screenings – such as the Nachtbar (nightbar) – a temporary event space within the city, reclaimed and repurposed for the duration of the festival, and transformed in separate spaces for dancing, partying and discussing film, where for instance visiting film directors are interviewed about their film showing in the festival on the 'talk-sofa'. Schoonover and Galt (2016, p. 92) state that: 'the Nachtbar repurposes an everyday environment and transforms it into a queer space', a space that certainly can also be described as a 'queer space of pleasure'. The Hamburg festival is notable on the queer film festival circuit for its scale, duration, community ethic and gender politics (Von Diepenbroick and Loist, 2009). As is the case at most queer film festivals, volunteers are essential to the

production of the festival, however Hamburg is distinctive in the extent to which a community of volunteers shape decision-making around the production of the festival including programming. For instance, [Loist \(2011, p. 272\)](#) notes how: 'Since the beginning the festival has been organized by a non-hierarchical (unpaid) core team'.

One key piece of organisational infrastructure in the Hamburg festival is the so-called 'lunch table' at a cafe in the St. Pauli neighbourhood, where organisers, volunteers and guests of the festival are welcome to eat, meet and informally chat and discuss the festival. Here, Xavier<sup>1</sup> suggests that hospitality spaces such as the lunch table and the Nachtbar are particularly important in providing a relaxed space to meet guests of the festival:

But in the contact with the guests, getting the feedback from them, this emotional contact is really rewarding, especially in the stress-free time like the lunch-table where we sit and eat and talk – that's really nice. Or the Nachtbar later on when everyone's happy where we don't have to care about anything but the alcohol ... really rewarding getting to know them, talking to them, knowing that they like the city, knowing they like the festival (Xavier, Hamburg).

We argue that it is significant that Xavier stresses the importance of the lunch-table in facilitating emotional contact through food practices: 'we sit and eat and talk'. Eating together slows down time and enables to fully focus on the Other in communication. It provides a relaxed space where volunteers and organisers are not so much on public display or are not burdened with organisational responsibility such as at screenings. It is at the lunch table – and at hospitality spaces such as the Nachtbar, which our respondents described as a playful setting of talking, dancing and drinking together – where emotional contact and bonds are forged. In his discussion, Xavier values the lunch-table as a key site in the organisational structure of the festival.

We see strong resonances here with the emphasis on the role of the kitchen table for political organising in lesbian and queer women's organising. [Scicluna's \(2017\)](#) study of the politics of domestic space within lesbian feminist households and collectives in London foregrounds the gender politics of food spaces arguing that the kitchen could serve as an important pedagogical and activist space to challenge heteropatriarchy and that: 'some lesbians experienced the kitchen as a place of solidarity, a symbol of democracy and decision-making' (ibid, p. 159–160). The kitchen has often been the place where certain projects originated, where ideas were first formulated, and organisational decisions taken. [Haritaworn \(2015\)](#), too, has highlighted the significance of the kitchen table for anti-racist urban political organising among queers of colour in Europe.

Both the lunch-table and the Nachtbar discussed above are semi-public or public event-based spaces, the first one being open to organisers, volunteers, and invited festival guests, the Nachtbar caters for all festival-participants who would like to share-in this space of drinking, partying and socialising. The food and hospitality practices concerned here always already exceed the notion of the private associated with the home, profoundly blurring the private and public. The *activist* nature of the kitchen-based food practices is most explicitly emphasised in the research by [Montes and Pombo \(2019\)](#) on cooking and distributing food as an activist practice, and the kitchen as a site of mobilisation. Their study focuses on The Patronas (The Patrons) who are a group of women volunteers in La Patrona in the state of Veracruz in southern Mexico who have been giving food to Central American migrants passing through their community en route to the United States since 1995. Montes and Pombo frame the collective action of the Patronas as part of an ethic of care for the migrant Other, contesting a culture of state violence and recognising vulnerability in others, arguing that: 'For the Patronas, cooking has become a project of creation and change, and the kitchen has shifted from a private and isolated space into a public, and collective

place that serves as a central axis where the collective action of solidarity begins.' (2019: 573).

Xavier's quote above, appreciating the creation of opportunities for stress-free socialising and joyful moments of relaxed communication, catering and caring for guests, also shows that food practices play a central role in the emotional aspects of forging queer solidarity. This echoes the work of other scholars on emotions in relation to LGBTQ + activism ([Gruszczynska, 2009](#); [Wilkinson, 2009](#)), as well as activism more broadly. We therefore need to recognise the distinctive role of food in shaping the possibilities for the production of emotional bonds between activists. We think this has been particularly well captured in [Routledge and Derickson's \(2015\)](#) article on scholar-activism related to climate change, gender and food sovereignty in Bangladesh, in which they describe sharing meals as 'formative rituals' (2015, p. 403), that allow for dialogue, communication and critical discourse and are formative of 'situated solidarities' (ibid.).

In Xavier's discussion of his experiences of serving as a volunteer at the Hamburg festival, the spaces of the lunch table and the Nachtbar are narrated as also being central to the sense of collectivity and solidarity more generally. Xavier refers to these queer bonds of 'situated solidarity' elsewhere in the interview as: 'a huge bowl of queerness'.

Christian: So the lunch time table and the Nachtbar, would also be the place where guests and teams socialise with each other?

Xavier: They're the main focus. [...] At the Nachtbar we have the festival visitors, too, so we get this huge bowl of queerness together – which is really awesome.

We think it is significant that Xavier uses a food serving metaphor for this 'awesome', particularly intimate character of solidarity produced at the dining table – the so-called lunch table, and the Nachtbar party space. In her discussion on food practices and lesbian identities, [Lindenmeyer \(2006, pp. 479–80\)](#) has stressed the significance of food metaphors for describing contested sexual identities and for highlighting nuances within and distinctions between certain categories of identification. In Xavier's case, the metaphor of 'huge bowl of queerness' envisions the queer collectivities produced at the festival as something nutritious and wholesome – like a bowl of food. At the same time the metaphor of a bowl of food also carries connotations of mixed-ness, signified through the mixing of different ingredients (as for example a stew or a mixed salad). The 'situated solidarities' here can thus be understood as inter-group solidarities ([Binnie & Klesse, 2011b](#)) or 'political solidarities' in the sense of [Scholz's \(2008\)](#) reading of the term.

For Xavier, the film festival is a unique moment in the queer social calendar of Hamburg and for the production of queer collectivity and solidarity that cuts across the divide between different groups. He frames queer collectivity primarily in relation to gender – about transcending the divide between what he calls the gay scene and the lesbian scene, which he suggests is pronounced in Hamburg. Xavier describes the festival as his first encounter with and experience of what he terms a 'community ethic' within the LGBTQ + community. It is this bridging of group- and identity boundaries, which for Xavier renders the festival a uniquely 'queer place' in the Hamburg cultural and political landscape:

Usually when I work in the community [as an educator] when we talk in the teams about queer places its always Filmtage [*i.e., the festival*], it's always Nachtbar [...]. We have the gay scene, we have the lesbian scene, and like some touching points, they divide into different groups. They have never been this queer collective. I think this is one of the places where you get this. I like its spirit and the idea of that [...] So I joined up. Now I am here and happy.

It is interesting that Xavier framed the experience in terms of collectivity – of being part of something that brings people together – 'how everyone just connects as one big working organism'.

Xavier's point about food practices as being core to the festival's community ethics and being a motor for forging the queer bonds

<sup>1</sup> All names of respondents are pseudonyms.

between hosts and guests and all those who somehow 'work' for the festival, creating a whole organism of those who make possible and are attending the festival resonates closely with what Probyn has said about the queer potential of merging a concern with food, sex and sexual politics. Probyn is an important theorist here, because her work allows us to see how examining the relationship between food, sex and sexuality can give rise to 'a new ethic of existence.' (1999, p. 215) and therefore to carve out space for theorising food practices as an important element in (transnational) political solidarity work. Reading Xavier's food metaphor of the festival as 'a huge bowl of queerness' through the queer lens provided by the work of Probyn we can also fully appreciate the potential of food practices to challenge 'the logics of categorization that now dominate much of the politics of identity.' (ibid, p. 216), since she perceptively claims that 'food has a propensity for hazarding the frontiers of categories' (ibid, p. 2016).

In this section, we have seen the importance of food practices (such as preparing food, sharing food, or creating food spaces for eating together) in forging queer bonds of community and solidarity within the Hamburg Queer International Festival. We have also noted the use of food metaphors in describing the forms of queer collectivity that is produced at the festival, which differs markedly from the more gender separated social spaces on the Hamburg commercial scene. The maintenance and creation of social bonds and community as by some theorists been identified as a key part of the labour of dissident social reproduction (Dalla Costa, 2008). Drawing on this line of reasoning we posit that creating, cooking and sharing food in activist spaces can be a motor of QSR.

## 5. Preparing or cooking food for others – spaces of care, hospitality and queer food magic

If we view cooking through the lens of queer social reproduction, it can be seen as a practice of caring labour (Andrucki, 2021; Catungal et al., 2021). Preparing or cooking for others as a form of mundane activism has been frequently discussed by participants in our studies who considered cooking for others from multiple angles, including hospitality, work, care and self-care. In this section, we focus primarily on care and hospitality. Care can never be separated from the question of work. In fact, cooking (the aspect of care we are talking about here) is one of the labour-based practices that makes the creation of the community creating and sustaining food spaces (such as the lunch table) discussed in the previous section possible in the first place. Since it is feminized, racialized, and classed, it is also the kind of labour that is frequently — devalued, unpaid, or non-recognized (The Care Collective, 2020; Raha, 2021). That notwithstanding, in our research many also stressed cooking for others to be joyful act, comprised both of care and self-care, that is vital to the kind of community formation discussed in the previous section.

We also suggest that the practice of preparing food to share it with Others can construe hospitality as a politics of care in ways that are also potentially queering the politics of gendered labour and is productive of queer bonds that transcend host/guest binaries. Scicluna (2017, p. 156) notes that: 'women have historically been deprived of food as compared to men and [...] food preparation has traditionally been associated as a woman's task and part of her role as a woman, which unfortunately resulted in women not being able to participate in public life.'. The historical feminization of food preparation within patriarchal gender orders, allows for the articulation of non-hegemonic, non-heteronormative gender identities if consciously engaged in by (queer) men or people on the trans\* spectrum. We also show that the politics of care under the umbrella of hospitality may well not be separate from but can intermesh with a politics of pleasure, which we discuss in more detail in the following section.

In Krakow, we interviewed Jana, who was part of the queer arts group, organising queer performance events in a rented house in the city. The events organised at the Queer Arts Centre had a transnational

dimension, as a number of participants came from outside of Poland, and it was part supported by paid work conducted both in Poland and abroad. The work at the arts centre was ambitious in its attempts to break down the barriers between art, life and politics: 'We are really trying to find new modes of production ... new modes of encounter, new modes of art-marking, now modes of politics-making', Jana explained. 'We are queering also these notions of institutions of art ... this is because we've been living in this town with other friends for many years ... so we have a community of people ...but since we run things here, the community is getting more and more caring for each other ...there is more and people getting involved not just in coming for the events but also just coming doing stuff ... helping with the garden, coming for the coffee coming for the tea. We also are kind of trying to establish this community which is caring for each other ...'. This also includes experiments with new ways of physical intimacy. Art, politics, community, erotics and food practices flow into each other here in a way that matches Probyn's (2000) advocacy for a queer ethics of living that aligns sex, food practices and other forms of embodied action.

Jana talked much about food and hospitality, while hosting us in the Queer Art Centre they were co-organising.<sup>2</sup> Jana invited us to take a seat outside on the veranda overseeing a wild and over-grown garden. To make us comfortable they kindly invited us to have tea or coffee and to share nuts in a gesture of generosity and kindness. We bonded in pleasure sharing this food, while Jana shared memories and stories of gatherings and parties that had taken place at the Centre, pointing out places in the garden where people had congregated to share meals and feasts. We talked during daytime, while Jana's stories were evoking images of crowds of people joking and socialising at a fireplace at night.

For Jana, cooking, care, an open house, welcoming strangers into your home is central to the production of a magical queer space. Jana's ideas about a magical queer space chime well with Kafai's (2020, p. 202) discussion of the role of food in queer futurity in which they state that: 'queering our food futures means reframing food as magic, as something that heals, that is playful, and that is delicious. It means reclaiming the softest, most pliable parts of ourselves'.

Jana suggests that preparing food together is a core practice in producing queer collectivity.

Interestingly, Jana also discusses paid labour in terms of their past work as a cook in a restaurant in Krakow:

This was very healthy, very grounding work you know. You make things, you see them, they are beautiful, people eat, they thank you. That's it. I really love it. It's from my grandmother. I have these skills from her to cook, to host. It's also I love visually working with food. Which also became part of our art practice – these oral pleasures, performances which is eating, but also kissing, whispering, fucking – all the oral pleasures we have as people. But cooking job, yeah I go there when I really like need to restructure, to have a structure in the daytime.

For Jana, cooking is a form of self-care, but cooking for others gives them pleasure and satisfaction. In the brief excerpt, Jana acknowledges with fondness the influence of their/her grandmother, underscoring the legacy of these feminine traits and skill sets in their/her family. This suggests the queering potential of cooking as a food practice, if engaged in a way that aims to destabilise gender binaries and heteronormative stereotypes of femininity or masculinity (Pradhan & Aden, 2023).

For Jana, food is essential to the cultural and political events they/she organise in the house. Food is part of the art practice of the collective, evoking all the different pleasures human beings may have, including 'these oral pleasures, performances which is eating, but also kissing, whispering, fucking'. This connection between sex/eroticism

<sup>2</sup> Jana did not discuss her/their gender identities and gender politics with us during the interview and currently uses alternate pronouns, primarily she or they, in public online media.



and food practices has rarely been touched upon in the literature on LGBTQ + activism and QSR. This is an exciting connection and we will return to the question of this emphasis on pleasure in the following section.

This focus on food preparation as a form of self-care in Jana's reflections also relates back to the discussion of care work and hospitality earlier in the paper. Yet in the hospitality ethos of the Queer Arts Centre, the group does not just cook for Others, but the guests, too, are invited to prepare or bring food, resulting in an effective blurring of the guest/host role, just as Derrida had envisioned it in his work on hospitality (Bell, 2007):

V: We try to always cook food. We really try. So there is this sense also of staying longer, preparing the food with people. A few times it happened that just some people just showed with lots of food – not being asked for. A few times during X-event, it was a miracle, the table was full of beautiful food. So we also have to structure in the preparation – this cooking and if there is no time we either ask people to bring some food, or make something small. So it's not only art delivering but it's also food, it's also a huge thing for the community making is sharing food, its spending time not just staring at art but being together in different modes.

This example shows how the preparation, cooking and sharing of food is central to an ethic of queer collective space – of being together. Food practices become subject of a politics of self-care and care for Others. Food practices are part of a radical culture of hospitality, which facilitates queer bonds of community in a very profound manner. Event-spaces are carefully choreographed by the art collective from the point of view of hospitality and community-making, as Jana explained:

We started to think in terms of community-making, thinking of choreographing community – its time, bodies and space – the main three elements of choreography-making. So there is time to deal with, there is bodies that come, and space – how we arrange space. We also shape shift a lot – there is a lot of shapeshifting, there is a lot of carrying stuff from one spot to another, to arrange, bring sofas, chairs so people feel comfortable.

As said, in this shapeshifting not also spaces are transformed, but also subjectivities, and relational binaries. Food sharing creates interdependence which ultimately erodes the boundaries between those who eat and cook, those who are hosts and those who are guests. This may happen accumulatively through time and memory or through spontaneous role reversal, as in the miracles induced by queer food magic referred to by Jana earlier.

In this section we have discussed the food practices of cooking and preparing food, as well as sharing and consuming food, as well as food-based performance art. We have argued that these practices are key to QSR in the sense that they create moments of beauty and intensity, facilitate intimacy, creative thinking, organising and decisions-making, but also of project-based, both localised, and transnational communities, as well as eroticism, and multiple pleasures. Cooking together, eating together, thinking together, eroticism, sex, all these are elements of a food magic of queer hospitality evoked in the examples analysed in this section. These food practices thus appear to be part of a wider bundle of practices as discussed by Probyn (2000) and Castelo et al. (2021). In the following section, we will expand our engagement with the question of pleasure, because we think this is one of the most distinctive features of QSR.

## 6. Pleasure and care in LGBTQ Activism

Most social reproduction theories highlight the significance of both unpaid and paid through work through a focus on the division of labour and stratified practices of value determination (implicated in the simultaneity of multiple, intersecting oppressions (Ferguson, 2020). Questions of sex and sexuality are frequently omitted from the

discussion. An exemption is feminist work from within the Wages for Housework Campaign that considered the reproductive significance of (female) homosexuality and sex work alongside the exploitation of heterosexual housewives (Federici & Linebaugh, 2019). In the more recent debates, on QSR, the work of Andrucki (2021) stands out, because he considers gay men's non-monogamous sex practices in US American cities as an important part of urban QSR. This kind of reasoning builds on a longer history within LGBTQ + studies that appreciates the generative aspect of casual sex, or sex with strangers for the creation of a distinctively gay (or queer) counter-cultural sociality (Klesse, 2007) or that value eroticised leisure spaces as key building blocks of LGBTQ + communities (Hilderbrand, 2023). Andrucki (2021) considers queer activism and organising in their interconnected modalities of politics, care, labour, and sex, valuing all these aspects as indispensable elements within QSR. The question of pleasure thus cannot be separated either from activism or work. We have seen this connection also in the explanation of Jana discussed in the previous section. Her reflections of cooking as self-care started with memorising her experiences of cooking in a paid job. In the activist context, even if unpaid, cooking as a mode of hospitality does not cease to be work, but elements of pleasure come to the fore to a much stronger degree. Food practices, such as cooking, become part of their art work, which itself strongly evolves around oral pleasures. 'I love visually working with food. Which also became part of our art practice – these oral pleasures, performances which is eating, but also kissing, whispering, fucking – all the oral pleasures we have as people', she states. Jana's way of connecting food and sex in terms of oral pleasure attests to the importance of recognising the connections between culinary and sexual pleasure, and the specific form they may take in the context of LGBTQ + activism as a mode of QSR. In the instance of Jana's discussion of food practices in relation to sexuality and queer collectivity, too, we see strong resonances with Probyn's discussion food, sex, identification, and pleasure as practices that are mutually constitutive of one other, that: 'thinking *through* eating to sex may make us "infinitely more susceptible to pleasure". Pleasure and ethics, sex and eating, are all about breaking up the strict moralities which constrain us.' 2000, p. 77), suggesting not only that eating involves pleasure just like sex, but that bringing the two together may have liberating epistemic effects.

Carving out new spaces for pleasure is important, because is often conceived as selfish, hedonistic, shallow or banal if compared with the larger aims of macro-political changes, but as brown (2019) argues, joy and pleasure around activities related to sex, the erotic, food, cooking and eating, humour, drugs, reading, music and the arts are key to any politics of liberation and justice. This is particularly the case for people exposed to racism, material hardship, class oppression, various forms of body-normativity and other intersectional forms of oppression, who tend to be denied rightful pleasure. As the historical research of Bronski (2000) and Shepard (2009, 2013) demonstrate, LGBTQ + politics – and in particular its liberationist and queer currents – have always put a strong emphasis on play and pleasure. We saw a dedication to playfulness, humour and pleasure at the heart of some of the LGBTQ + activists in our study engaged in.

For example, Jakub shared his experiences as an activist participating in queer activist and protest events in Krakow for a few years. Jakub narrates how food can be implicated in playful action even in contest that are heavily charged by violence (as it was the case in Krakow's Pride marches who were regularly attacked by far-right activists).

Jakub gives remembers that in one edition of the march activist Sarah had the idea to distribute ice cream on the march – as an act of hospitality but also as a joyful way of queering the scene, since eating (sucking) an ice-cream cone also symbolically alludes to oral sex. Distributing ice-cream functioned here both an act of hospitality and a subtle gesture of queer symbolic resistance through the use of humour that facilitates bonding over a reference to perverse pleasures.



Jakub: The same year when I was somehow driving the march's car. And the idea was - this was Sarah's idea to she would distribute free ice cream. The first turn I took of course, all the ice cream sort of flipped over [laughs] so we were swimming in this ice-cream in the car, it was so funny. And at some point, because Sarah was waving the rainbow flag from the car window and one nationalist actually grabbed the flag, and Sarah she's small and she liked rushed from the car and right into the middle of those guys - big guys. I was terrified, I stopped the car, and I said no Sarah! She wasn't beaten. The only thing somebody did to her was they poured a bottle of water. Sarah is a fighter.

Sarah distributes free ice cream as a queering gesture that subtly sexualises the street protest in a queer way. Even if the joke may have been lost on those who were there to inhibit the march, it was a source of great joy and fun for those involved in the action. This playful weaponizing of ice-cream against nationalist counter protestors, centres questions around the ethics of pleasure within activist very much along the lines suggested by Probyn (1999).

This quote attests to the level of fear experienced on the march with the humorous nature of the story associated with the use of food as metaphor, as well as the empowerment brought about through playing with food as an activist practice. In this section, we have highlighted the significance of pleasure as a key feature of QSR through food practices. The emphasis on pleasure (as play, joy, collective indulgence, and sex) is a distinctive feature of QSR in transnational LGBTQ + activist networks.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how a focus on food practices can enhance our understanding of LGBTQ + activist spaces and the production of queer solidarities and demonstrated that food practices (such as preparing or cooking food, sharing food, or including food in performance art of street-based action) are an important element of the QSR of LGBTQ + activism.

Focusing on food practices helps us to recognise the affective, embodied, and visceral dimension of solidarity activism. We also identified the articulation of a distinctively queer politics of gender, care, and pleasure at the heart of such food practices. We have thereby identified three key modalities through which food practices may facilitate QSR. Firstly, food practices such as the preparing and sharing of food are key to the production of the queer bonds of collectivity and community that underpin and sustain spaces of LGBTQ + activism. Drawing on Probyn we have shown that a focus on practices such as cooking for each other or eating together can break down rigid categorisations at the heart of identity political reasonings. We therefore argue that food practices are charged with a truly queering potential in the fields of political solidarity-based activism. Secondly, food practices such as the cooking and sharing of food are key technologies of hospitality and care. All care practices highlight our interdependence. We have further shown that engaging in hospitality through food practices carries the potential to un-do the binaries of hosting and guesting (Bell, 2007)). Furthermore, food practices in LGBTQ + activist settings are frequently countering hetero- and cis-normative expectations regarding hegemonic patterns in the division of labour. Thirdly, we have shown that pleasure is a key ingredient of QSR. Food practices (such as eating) are well suited for appealing to pleasure. Oral pleasures and erotic/sexual pleasures are closely aligned in the imagination, and frequently deliberately fused in QSR strategies in LGBTQ + activist contexts.

We argue that a focus on food practices in the geographies of LGBTQ + activism helps us to gain a better understanding of political solidarity. A focus on food allows us to explore examples of everyday practices of care that can sometimes be neglected if the focus is on the most visible public manifestations of solidarity. We agree with Fish et al.'s (2018) argument that the common emphasis in research on what they call 'iconic activism' (such as public manifestations, militancy or heroic

deeds) results in a lack of understanding the significance of what they term 'everyday activism'.

Yet the mundanity of 'everyday activism', namely practices of care, are the precondition for activism to be sustained and sustainable. Our research further allows us to maintain that geographical research on activism can benefit from an engagement with research into LGBTQ + activism and the growing body of work on QSR. For instance, as we have shown, QSR theory and the field of LGBTQ + research are significant in foregrounding the role of pleasure in activist work.

This being said, we consider it to be of utmost importance that geographical work on activism and QSR maintains a focus on the question of labour. Thinking activism through QSR means foregrounding labour (Andrucki, 2021).

LGBTQ + activist spaces that allow for intimacy, emotional recreation, purpose-free socialising, play, and communal eating depend on work, and as feminist, queer-feminist and transfeminist and decolonial, anti-racist scholars and activists have shown, this kind of work is often not acknowledged and seen, in particular because emotional and caring work - and the value attributed to it - has been framed in both gendered and racialized terms.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Jon Binnie:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Christian Klesse:** Writing - review & editing, Writing - original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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