

International Conference: “Queer Journeys in North American Literature and Culture”

University of Innsbruck (Austria), 14–15 November 2025

This two-day conference will consider the diverse ways in which journeys undertaken by queer people have been represented in North American literature and culture, as well as how queer journeys more broadly interact with and impact social structures, transnational relations, and cultural forms. LGBTQ+ people in North America and beyond continue to experience forms of mobility characterized by complex and often fraught economic, cultural, and affective dynamics. The conference topic is especially politically urgent as transphobic legislation recently enacted in a number of US states and provinces across Canada has forced many transgender people to migrate in order to access gender-affirming care (Phares), severely impacting the mobilities and freedoms of trans individuals.

Discussions of queer mobility draw on a growing field of scholarship across the research areas of globalization and diaspora (Aizura), Indigenous studies (Driskill et al.), ecocriticism (Cram), and regional studies (Tongson), among others. Such research has shown that the contested mobilities of LGBTQ+ people have deep historical roots. Many queer communities within North America have been shaped by internal migration from rural environments to more anonymous, heterogeneous urban centers, which has led to the growth of LGBTQ+ populations in large metropolises such as San Francisco, Toronto, and New York (Chauncey; D’Emilio; Kaiser). Yet scholarship has demonstrated that there are also forms of queer migration from urban to rural environments and within rural spaces that may be obscured by the privileging of the metropolitan in queer culture and discourse (Halberstam; Herring; Thomsen). More widely, a focus on queer journeys in transnational contexts sheds light on additional obstacles to movement and rigid hierarchical structures. During periods of particularly intense legal and social oppression of queer people, such as the “Lavender Scare” of the Cold War era in the US (Johnson), many LGBTQ+ citizens were forced into exile to foreign countries, where they could enjoy relative freedom (Kramer; Mullins) but also had to grapple with the detachment and alienation that often typifies exiled lives. Today, the US and Canada serve as destinations for many LGBTQ+ asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their home countries, yet those whose asylum claims are granted may face discrimination and marginalization once they settle in a new country. Meanwhile, queer tourism has created connections between LGBTQ+-friendly global destinations, yet such tourism often replicates and perpetuates economic inequalities through travel (Cantu; Puar

2002). We invite contributions that examine these diverse forms of mobility and migration within the North American context in their many transnational and global dimensions, including but not limited to topics such as the erasure of Indigenous queer identities, the enforcement of border regimes, and environmental migration.

The brief overview above demonstrates that queer journeys within the North American context may contain forms of movement that are voluntary or involuntary, joyful or exploitative, expansive or inhibiting, and normative or deviant. These different queer journeys in North American society have been portrayed in and have shaped the production of literature, film, TV, performance, and digital and gaming cultures across diverse forms and genres. We welcome papers that analyze queer journeys in and across any of these media and through the disciplines of literary and cultural studies, media studies, gender and queer studies, history, the social sciences, and other interdisciplinary approaches in relevant fields (please see the **suggestions for potential topics** below). Within this intermedial and interdisciplinary context, we are interested in discussing how queer journeys may challenge the dominant forms and conventions for narrating movement. Eithne Luibhéid suggests that “the majority of accounts of queer migration tend to remain organized around a narrative of movement from repression to freedom,” which can lead to an erasure of “the struggle, suffering, and resistance experienced by subordinated groups” (xxv). We invite you to reflect on how queer journeys, and the narrative forms that underpin them, may trouble or complicate such limiting teleologies. We particularly invite interested participants to approach the subject from intersectional and transnational perspectives.

- Please submit abstracts for individual presentations (250 words) along with a short bio (50 words) to queerjourneys2025@uibk.ac.at. **Deadline: Friday May 16th, 2025.**
- In addition to individual paper proposals, we invite proposals for panels of 3–4 participants. To propose a panel, please include your panel title alongside a short (100 word) description, a list of speakers, and a title and brief summary (150 words) for each speaker’s contribution. Please submit to queerjourneys2025@uibk.ac.at.
Deadline: Friday May 16th, 2025.

We look forward to your submissions! A selection of essays based on the conference papers will be published in an edited volume.

Suggestions for potential topics

Potential topics could include, but are not limited to, the following...

Identities:

- How are queer journeys shaped differently by race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, and other categories of identity?
- In what ways do queer journeys correspond to related forms of mobility, such as identity development or changes in social position?

Narrative and genre:

- How have genres that often focus on travel—such as the road movie (e.g. *Transamerica* 2005 or *Drive-Away Dolls* 2024), the Western (e.g. *Brokeback Mountain* 2005 or Lil Nas X’s music video “Old Town Road” 2018), or science fiction (e.g. *Sense8* 2015–18)—been revised for queer purposes?
- How do North American literary and cultural works portray migration between rural and urban environments? Or, alternatively, how might these works challenge the idea of the “metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making” (Herring 4) by engaging with queer journeys from urban to rural environments?
- What are the origins and destinations of queer journeys, and how do they shape narrative structures?

Hierarchies and inequalities:

- How have certain international groups been exoticized through colonial journeys by queer subjects?
- What are the affordances and problems of queer tourism as depicted in and across North American media, such as the exploitation of those in the Global South, the perpetuation of inequalities between international visitors and local populations, and the exclusive “homonationalism” (Puar 2017) of Western queer subjects?
- In what ways do queer journeys intersect with and relate to other forms of migration (e.g. war- and climate-related migration)?

Boundaries and borders:

- What relationship(s) do queer journeys establish with borders?

- How has North American literature and culture depicted processes of immigration and asylum for queer migrants and refugees?
- How have internal and external migration as a result of queerphobic legislation shaped the production of North American literature and culture?
- How do queer journeys relate to concepts and structures such as cosmopolitanism, exile, and diaspora?
- What forms of community and collaboration are made possible by queer journeys?

Space and counterpublics:

- How do queer journeys negotiate different spaces and establish new relationships with spatial environments?
- How can we mobilize the concept of a “queer journey” in conversation with other forms of minority movement (e.g. the practice of cruising)?
- How have ideas about spaces and (social as well as natural) environments been shaped by queer journeys?

Works Cited

- Aizura, Aren Z. *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*. Duke UP, 2018.
- Cantu, Lionel. “De Ambiente : Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, 2002, pp. 139-66.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. Hachette UK, 2008.
- Cram, Emerson. *Violent Inheritance: Sexuality, Land, and Energy in Making the North American West*. U of California P, 2022.
- D’Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li, et al., editors. *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. U of Arizona P, 2011.
- Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York UP, 2005.
- Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*. New York UP, 2010.
- Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. U of Chicago P, 2023.
- Kaiser, Charles. *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America*. Grove Press, 1997.
- Kramer, Lloyd. “James Baldwin in Paris: Exile, Multiculturalism and the Public Intellectual.” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 27, no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 27-47.
- Luibhéid, Eithne. “Queering Migration and Citizenship.” *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U. S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr., University of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. ix-xlvi.

- Mullins, Greg. *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester Write Tangier*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
- Phares, Kirby. "Lgbtq+ Adults Do Not Feel Safe and Do Not Think the Democratic Party Is Doing Enough to Protect Their Rights." *Data for Progress*, 8 June 2023. Accessed 22 Oct. 2024.
- Puar, Jasbir Kaur. "Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, 2002, pp. 101-37.
- . *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Tongson, Karen. *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. NYU Press, 2011.
- Thomsen, Carly. *Visibility Interrupted: Rural Queer Life and the Politics of Unbecoming*. U of Minnesota Press, 2021.