

NEWSLETTER

Testimonial Cultures

“Convergence and diversity”

Study Day on the conditions within which we produce our testimonials



Espace La Fontaine is located in a chalet in the middle of La Fontaine Park.

Get ready to have an experience you'll long remember during the upcoming Study Day that will take place in Montreal on November 9th!

Barbara Legault, coordinator of the event, promises to get you talking and stimulate your brain cells during this festive day designed to foster solidarity in a context of open exchange.

The convergence of our testimonial practices as well as their diversity will be explored through plenary discussions, workshops, and informal exchanges, helped along by an energetic and interactive facilitation style. To broaden our horizons of thought and action, a

groovy "5 à 7" reception with DJ and performances is also in the works.

The overall goal of the event is to share our experiences, ideas and questions with regards to the production of testimonials as strategies for social and cultural intervention. Various topics will be up for discussion such as different types of testimonials, which media are used, practical tips, training tools, political challenges, the impact of giving testimonials, ethical issues, and more.

In the coming days, Barbara will be contacting project partners and collaborators to clarify your vision, discussion questions, and objectives for

the day. A detailed proposal for the program of activities will be presented and discussed during the General Assembly on October 9.

About 60 people are expected to participate in the Study Day, and each partner is encouraged to arrange for at least five members, volunteers or activists from your organization to attend. Registration (by invitation only) will start on October 12.

The event will take place in the meeting rooms of "Espace La Fontaine" in the heart of *Parc La Fontaine* – a bright and colourful place to spend the day together!

Testimonials in all shapes and sizes ...

Over the past year, we've compiled dozens of examples from the media and various types of artistic practice in order to document how testimonials are used by people from sexual and gender minorities, people living with HIV, and people with an experience in sex work.

Bruno Laprade recently undertook a preliminary

review and his findings show that this growing "corpus" of material is extremely diverse.

From soldiers to immigrants, from dominatrices to parents with transgender children, public testimonials have been given by a wide range of people using many different formats - podcasts, TV interviews, photo exhibits,

books, and more – in order to address a large number of topics: activism, love, criminalization, health, and sports, to name just a few.

To consult the collection or contribute your own examples, contact Thomas Haig (haig.thomas@uqam.ca). A portion of the corpus has also been archived on Dropbox.



Recently added to the collection: "Mile End Lesbian" Zoé Cousineau gives a testimonial in *La Presse*; Lana Wachowski comes out as transgender at the Toronto International Film Festival.

No. 6

October 2012

Upcoming meetings

General Assembly
Meeting of project partners and guests
Tuesday October 9
9am - noon
UQAM, room DS-1950
320 St. Catherine St. E.

Executive Committee
Tuesday October 9
noon - 2pm
UQAM, room W-4490
455 René-Lévesque E.

Study Day
Friday November 9
Espace La Fontaine
3933, av. du Parc-La-Fontaine
(Sherbrooke metro)
espacelafontaine.com
free admission, by invitation
LUNCH PROVIDED

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Deep in thought at the Sorbonne ...

Crossroads: a productive meeting place for new ideas

Three members of our study team presented a panel on the Testimonial Cultures project during the 9th edition of the *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* conference that took place at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris in July 2012.

Inspired by the conference's "crossroads" theme, the purpose of the panel was to present initial results from the project and enter into dialogue with other researchers and activists who share interests and goals similar to our own.

To this end, **Thomas Haig** gave an analysis of the methodological, ethical, and political issues and challenges that arose during the first year of the project.

Janik Bastien-Charlebois' presentation focused on the challenges of inclusivity that LGBTQI community groups face when using testimonials as a strategy for social change.

In conclusion, **María Nengeh Mensah** presented the first stages of a comparison of the testimonial cultures of people

living with HIV and people with an experience in sex work.

Team members also took part in a number of other formal and informal meetings during this busy international event, setting the stage for potential collaboration with partners in other countries in the future.

PowerPoint presentations from the panel will be made available shortly on Dropbox.

Application for ethical approval

We have recently submitted an application for ethical approval to UQAM's *Comité institutionnel d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains*. This application will make it possible for the project team to conduct interviews with people who have given testimonials in the media as a member of a sexual or gender minority or as a sex worker.

Obtaining ethical approval will

not mean that we are required to undertake such interviews, but will ensure that ethical principles are respected in the event that we decide to go in this direction.

In particular, our approach is oriented by the principles of "shared authority" over the personal stories that are told in the context of a research interview. In this regard, we have benefited from guidance from Concordia's Centre for

Oral History and Digital Storytelling. From the perspective of such an approach, sexual and gender minorities are considered to be full collaborators and equal partners in a dialogue. Respect for these principles will be important both at the interview stage and at the analysis stage of the research to ensure that project partners participate in collective interpretation of the data and co-construction of knowledge.

Two new video compilations coming soon!

The production of two compilations of excerpts from Canadian film and video is proceeding apace under the coordination of **Véro Leduc**.

The first compilation will illustrate different ways in which testimonials have been used in connection with sex work, drawing on a range of film and video work produced in recent decades. Excerpts will

be selected to cut across a wide spectrum of themes and formats: speaking out, performance, direct action, advocacy, education, etc.

The second compilation, drawn from material produced between 2000 and 2012, will feature testimonials from a diverse range of people living with HIV that address a variety of topics

such as criminalization, anti-retroviral treatment, stigma, and human rights.

Both compilations will be completed and launched in DVD format within the next few months and will be useful in the context of various research and educational activities. They will also be made available on the Internet.

Our approach is oriented by the principles of "shared authority" over the personal stories that are told ...

Dropbox makes collaboration easier

This past winter, we set up a collective work space on Dropbox (dropbox.com) that allows members of our partnership to consult and exchange documents related to the project using the Internet. At that time, you likely received one or more email messages inviting you to share folders that we created on Dropbox for this purpose.

This system helps reduce the exchange of documents by email by allowing us to archive and update project documentation in shared

"virtual" folders that each of us can easily access from our own computer. Whenever a file in Dropbox is added or updated, the changes are instantly saved for everyone else who shares the folder. It's as easy as pie!

Here's a brief overview of the folders that have been set up on Dropbox for our project:

- A "public" folder contains various non-confidential items (e.g. the *Newsletter*) and can be shared by anyone with an interest in the project.

- Other folders are reserved for a specific group (e.g. folders belonging to each working group; a partners' folder that contains a copy of the partnership agreement, etc.).
- Folders for the General Assembly and the Executive Committee allow participants to access a full archive of agendas and minutes from these meetings

We will shortly be sending out reminder invitations for some of these folders. For an easy introduction to Dropbox, see: www.dropbox.com/tour



Concordia Community Lecture Series on HIV/AIDS

For nearly two decades, this lecture series has confronted the challenges and issues raised by HIV/AIDS through an engaging format open to the academic community and members of the general public. The 2012-2013 edition features a range of accomplished presenters:

- **Dr. Jacques Pépin:** *Les origines du SIDA, nouvelles perspectives, et comment éviter la prochaine pandémie* (presentation in

French), Thu Oct. 11, 7 pm, 1590 Dr. Penfield (atrium).

- **Jim Hubbard:** *United In Anger: The ACT UP Revolution On Screen*, Thu Nov. 22, 7 pm, 1455 de Maisonneuve W., Room H-110.
- **Mia Donovan and Lara Roxx:** *Inside Lara Roxx: A Screening/Lecture about Porn, Prevention, Hype, and Hope...*, Thu Jan. 31, 7 pm, 1455 de Maisonneuve W., Room H-110. This lecture is

presented in collaboration with *Testimonial Cultures*.

- **DiAna DiAna:** *Curlers and Condoms: Grassroots Prevention, Then and Now*, Thu March 21, 7 pm, 1455 de Maisonneuve W., Room H-110.

Free admission. Unless otherwise indicated, lectures are held in English. For more information:

<http://aids.concordia.ca/lectures.html>

In brief

PolitiQ in search of testimonials about the Village

If Montreal's Gay Village projects the image of being a haven for equality, many of us have negative day-to-day experiences in this neighbourhood: ageism, sexism, transphobia, racism, sex-work-phobia, police brutality, etc.

PolitiQ is currently gathering testimonials and critical reflection on this issue and

invites you to make a submission if you have experienced discrimination: How do you feel when you are in the Village? What would you like this area of the city to be like? Contributions (between 500 and 1500 words, in English or French) will be published in a self-produced book.

Send your submissions to info.politiq@gmail.com by October 26.

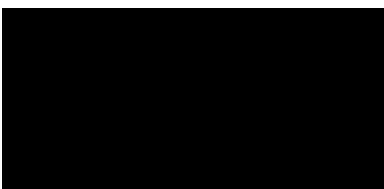
New film on experiences of HIV-positive women

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network recently released its very first documentary, *Positive Women: Exposing Injustice*. This 45-minute film features testimonials by four women living with HIV in Canada. For more information or to order a copy, see:

www.positivewomenthemovie.org



Detail from promotional poster for the film



Testimonial Cultures

A cultural study of testimonials as a social intervention strategy for sexual minorities: uses, challenges, issues, and benefits of a renewed practice

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Community partners:

Coalition des organismes
communautaires québécois de lutte
contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)
Groupe de recherche et d'intervention
sociale (GRIS-MONTREAL)
PolitiQ – Queer solidaires de Montréal
Prostitutes of Ottawa/Gatineau Work,
Educate & Resist (POWER)
Stella, l'amie de Maimie

Institutional partners:

École de travail social et Institut de
recherches et d'études féministes de
l'UQAM
Centre for Oral History and Digital
Storytelling, Concordia University

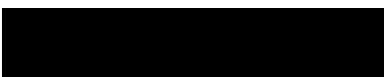
Research team:

Maria Nengeh Mensah (UQAM)
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Thomas Waugh (Concordia University)

Newsletter editorial team :

Thomas Haig
Maria Nengeh Mensah

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Staff news

A word of thanks ...

A master's student in sexology at UQAM, **Julie Marceau** completed her contract as a research assistant for *Testimonial Cultures* at the end of September 2012. Many thanks to Julie for her contribution to the project - we wish her every success in her future endeavours.

Welcome aboard!

Maryka Henry (calypso@msn.com) is a master's student in sociology at UQAM. Last winter, she did a great job completing a literature review for our project dealing with research and docu-

mentation on testimonials by sexual and gender minorities. She will be rejoining the team as a research assistant starting in October 2012 to provide support to the executive committee and working groups. Her research interests include the impact of LGBTQI representations in public space in Quebec.

Barbara Legault

(barbaralegaultoc@gmail.com) is a social worker and activist with over 15 years of experience in community organizing. Barbara will be responsible for coordination of the upcoming Study Day from Septem-

ber to November 2012 and is very excited to be joining our team.

Alain Ayotte

(ayottealain@hotmail.com) is an interdisciplinary MA student (Individualized Program) at Concordia University. A research assistant for the project since June 2012, he is helping with production of the compilation of excerpts from Canadian film and video made between 2000 and 2012 that feature testimonials by people living with HIV/AIDS.

Call for submissions : *PolitiQueer* No. 1

If the emergence of queer theory dates back to the 1990s, queer analysis is still primarily undertaken within English-language contexts. Relatively little has been conceptualized, published, or translated into French. This new journal aims to expand the dissemination of queer thought in the French language. The first issue of *PolitiQueer*, "Dimensions francopholles," will focus on the specificity of queer francophone theories and communities (Quebec, France, Belgium, Switzerland, francophone Africa, DOM-TOM, etc..).

Submission formats: articles (35,000 to 50,000 characters), essays (minimum 15,000 characters), interviews, book reviews, literary and artistic contributions. If you have ideas to share but find it difficult to write in French, *PolitiQ* can provide editorial assistance. If you would like to give a testimonial about an experience rather than writing it down, *PolitiQ* can interview you and produce a transcription.

Deadline: November 11, 2012. For more information or to submit your text or other contribution: revue@politiq.info

SEX WORKERS: SHARE YOUR STORY!

Stella Deboutte is a project led by sex workers and allies documenting sex workers experiences surrounding the criminal laws surrounding sex work. The interviews will be transcribed and published by the *Stella Deboutte* team. This material will be used to educate and sensitize the public and policy makers, as well as to document our collective and individual lived experience. Interested?

We're looking to talk to sex workers from all areas of the industry that experience criminalization, and who have worked in the last 2 years.

The interviews would last anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. Interviews are both anonymous and confidential.

For questions about the research contact: (514) 285-1599 or stelladeboutte@gmail.com



Stella Deboutte