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# “SUI GENERIS” JOURNALISM?

visibility, identities and journalistic  
practices in a 1990s Brazilian gay  
magazine

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**ABSTRACT** – This article examines the *Sui Generis* magazine (1995-2000), one of the most relevant gay press magazines in Brazil. We study the importance of this publication and the field of journalism in terms of producing and reproducing representations and processes of identities and relations of gender and sexuality. The methodology involves a discursive reading of editorials, cover stories and reader letters published between January 1995 and March 2000, as well as a restructuring of journalistic work and daily practices in newsrooms through interviews with reporters, columnists and editors. We reached the conclusion that choosing a policy of visibility based on outing and concepts of gay “identities” and “communities” allowed the magazine to create specific and more valued ways of what homosexuality is, which leads to a critical reflection on what these policies have achieved, and what their limits and tensions are.

**Key words:** Gay Press. Homosexuality. Visibility. Journalism. Identities

## UM JORNALISMO SUI GENERIS? Visibilidade, identidades e práticas jornalísticas numa revista gay brasileira dos anos 1990

**RESUMO** – O artigo propõe uma investigação da revista *Sui Generis* (1995-2000), título do segmento especializado designado como “imprensa gay” brasileira. Busca-se compreender a relevância da publicação e deste campo jornalístico como instâncias historicamente produtoras e reprodutoras tanto de representações como dos processos de agenciamento de identidades e relações de gênero e sexualidade. Adota-se como metodologia a leitura discursiva de editoriais, reportagens de capa e cartas dos leitores publicados entre janeiro de 1995 e março de 2000; e a reconstituição, por meio de entrevistas com repórteres, columnistas e editores, do fazer jornalístico e das práticas cotidianas da redação. A análise permite constatar que, ao eleger como estratégia uma política de visibilidade calcada no *outing* e na elaboração de noções de “identidade” e “comunidade” gays, forjam-se modos específicos e mais valorizados do que seria a homossexualidade, exigindo uma reflexão crítica das conquistas dessas políticas, dos seus limites e de suas tensões.

**Palavras-chave:** Imprensa gay. Homossexualidades. Visibilidade. Jornalismo. Identidades.

## UN PERIODISMO “SUI GENERIS”? Visibilidad, identidades y prácticas periodísticas en una revista gay brasileña de los años 1990

**RESUMEN** – En ese artículo se propone investigar la revista *Sui Generis* (1995-2000), título del segmento especializado denominado “prensa gay” en Brasil. En él, se busca comprender la relevancia de la publicación y de este campo periodístico como instancias históricamente productoras y reproductoras tanto de representaciones como de los procesos de agenciamiento de identidades y relaciones de género y sexualidad. La metodología elegida fue la lectura discursiva de editoriales, reportajes de portada y cartas de los lectores publicados entre enero de 1995 y marzo de 2000; y la reconstitución, por medio de entrevistas con reporteros, columnistas y editores, del trabajo periodístico y de las prácticas cotidianas de la redacción. El análisis permite constatar que, al elegir como estratégica una política de visibilidad basada en el outing y en la elaboración de nociones de “identidad” y “comunidad” gays, se forjan modos específicos y más valorados de lo que sería la homosexualidad, exigiendo una reflexión crítica de las conquistas de esas políticas, de sus límites y de sus tensiones.

Palabras clave: Prensa gay. Homosexualidad. Visibilidad. Periodismo. Identidades.

There is a vast number of studies in fields ranging from linguistics to sociology to communication research that tackle important questions of gender and sexuality and the fields of journalism and the media (Funck & Wildholzer, 2005; Gill, 2006; Pelúcio et al., 2012). In Brazil, the editorial segment known as “gay press” has a number of academic works that use different methodological and theoretical methodologies to address how homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality and transsexuality, and their corresponding policies (both private and public) are represented in newspapers and the media (Péret, 2011; Leal & Carvalho, 2012; Feitosa, 2014; Rodrigues, 2010; Monteiro, 2000).

The ways that gender is represented in discourse both in studies on the press and the media in general help to provide a better understanding of media as a “technology of gender” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 3), or in other words, as an important reproducer and negotiator of its construction and deconstruction.

In this article I will investigate whether these representations constitute a fundamental relationship between gender and sexuality<sup>1</sup> and journalism and the media, and to do so requires an approach that places these relationships inside the practices of journalistic production, the ways that journalists live them and, at the same time, negotiate

them with a reader audience assumed to be “gay”, such as the case here. In other words, analyzing how discourses and representations articulate to a broader phenomenon defined by North (2009, p. 1) as “gendered nature of production processes” in journalism.

From this premise, I will analyze the specific issue of homosexuality expressed in a magazine which speaks for, with and from “gays and lesbians” in Brazil from the mid-90s. This magazine is called *Sui Generis*, a printed publication featuring culture, news, entertainment and a range of other topics directed mainly towards a masculine “gay” audience which circulated in Brazil between 1995 and 2000.

During its six-year existence, the magazine became a reference for “gay press” in Brazil. It represented the strength to retake the existence of a “gay” public in “reference journalism” (Zamin, 2014), making it a credible, informative and newsworthy publication of prominence and quality. It helped address questions of restructuring the LGBT movement in Brazil and expanded on what was known as the *pink* or GLS market<sup>2</sup>. It is no accident that the editorial from the first edition in January 1995 wrote in a clearly optimistic tone that “There is no better time for *Sui Generis* to be released. It is the beginning of summer and a fresh start; this first edition invites you, the reader, to usher in these new beginnings that the 1990s have provided so well” (Feitosa, 1995a, p. 4).

The title of the periodical might suggest it was the only publication of its kind. It isn’t that informative publications in Brazil for gay and lesbian readers didn’t exist at the time, but they were more specific initiatives with a very limited number of printings in the forms of newsletters or small journals. They tended to circulate within more specialized groups such as non-governmental gay and lesbian organizations tackling the HIV-Aids epidemic, fields of sexual and human rights, or freely distributed in bars, nightclubs and saunas (Rodrigues, 2010; Péret, 2011).

*Sui Generis* operated out of a house in the Copacabana district and used North American and European gay magazines as references. It was published on a monthly basis (estimated between 25 and 30 thousand copies) covering topics such as “culture, fashion, behavior, politics & entertainment” and inspired to be the “first Brazilian magazine to have serious insights and chic trivialities aimed at gay men and women” (Feitosa, 1995b, p. 3).

Claiming to offer “quality journalism” (an expression used in the debut editorial), *Sui Generis* wanted a broader fan base than just the

“gay activism” public of that time; it wanted to reach a public that was interested in politics yet at the same time identified itself as sophisticated and “modern”, a consumer of fashion and had an interest in the arts.

In this scene, the dynamics of the magazine’s production were faced with the issues of gender and sexuality of the time coupled with the challenge of legitimizing itself as a product that was both journalistic and “gay”, positioning itself as an “openly gay” magazine. From there, the focus of *outing* and *coming out* in reference to an (editorial) policy was to cause/force or stimulate/open up, respectively, a space in media for the “gay” personalities and individuals represented in the magazine, and to a lesser degree, “lesbians” and other gender identities or sexual orientations. In line with this, the magazine also places an importance on news topics, agendas and guidelines that talk of a public and equally “positive” gay identity and culture.

In order to further analyze these dynamics, I shall focus on two points: the question of the “closet” as a regime of visibility (Sedgwick, 1990; Miskolci, 2017), which is essential not only for understanding strategies behind *outing* and/or *coming out* but also towards a broader understanding of the experiences of (homo) sexuality and the editorial policy at *Sui Generis*; and in correlation with this, valuing the notions of gay “identity” and “community” so widely present in the magazine’s discourses and professional practices.

Apart from these points repeatedly appearing in an early discursive reading of *Sui Generis* and in the interview statements, the “closet” historically shapes itself as an important device for problematizing the relationships between (homo) sexuality and certain policies of visibility (on an individual and collective level, in private lives and in the lives of LGBT political activists). This does not derive from representing an imperative, since the terms “be in” or “come out of the closet” are positions and policies which are privileged in certain social segments.

If it is important, then, to relativize or question its universality, then look at it through a critical eye and investigate what the effects are of an “accept yourself” policy. We need to examine the way we look at a “gay” magazine that wants to be in harmony with and also “guide” this debate at a crucial time where demands are being made for LGBT subjects to receive more media and social visibility, just like in the 1990s, identified here as a challenge for both researchers of gender and sexuality and our press (gay and general).

The following questions then emerge: what are the dimensions, contradictions and effects between the media claiming a certain homosexuality as “public” and discourses that label them as “honest”, “coherent”, “legitimate”, etc.? How do policies of gender and sexuality, social practices, and professionals in journalism and media converge, particularly inside a printed press that is known to be or claims to be “gay”?

In order to develop a viable analytical corpus, the decision was made to select samples (*Sui Generis* published 55 editions between 1995 and 2000) in order to be able to examine a reduced number of editions at greater depth. The goal was to identify the strength of the magazine’s editorial line, the way it adjusted to and addressed its readers, and how possible shifts, changes, tensions and recreations were handled in creating agendas and addressing issues. Ten samples were selected from years I and II, eight copies from years III and IV, and eight copies from years V and VI<sup>3</sup>.

A discursive reading was made of cover stories, editorials and reader letters. These sections were chosen based on the following criteria:

1) As Vaz and Trindade (2013, p. 255) point out: the cover story is the “window to any publication”. The cover story “has to translate the magazine’s intentions, position and identity”. Keep in mind here that the visual and textual elements in the magazine are usually a reflection of what content, in the praxis of journalism, is considered more influential or more “newsworthy”<sup>4</sup>;

2) The editorial was recognized in journalism for its excellence in displaying its position on social and political contexts or issues it deems to be important. As Marques de Melo points out (2003), it traditionally “expresses the company’s opinion on important current events” and the role it takes as “speaker” refers to a web of articulations between the vehicle’s strengths and interests, and the need for this vehicle to address a collective;

3) The readers’ letters section allows one to examine how discourses at *Sui Generis* are developed from negotiations with a specific reading public, within the dialogical relationship of newsroom-public. Even though letters go through a selection or filtering process in newsrooms before they are published, they must also be analyzed by investigating ongoing negotiations of how the editorial proposal is received and readers who say they do not identify with certain approaches or discourses that the periodical values.

In conjunction with the discursive reading of magazine

samples, there were also individual and semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists from *Sui Generis* throughout 2011. The idea was to listen to their life trajectories, particularly their education and/or professional performance. These interviews span a narrative that ranges from labor expectations to how they pertain to questions of sexuality and gender, as well as personal experiences related to the gay/GLS/LGBT world of the 1990s. I looked at the specific circumstances that led to each one of them to be included in the periodical and then asked that they write down the day-to-day work routine at the magazine. These meetings were a chance to talk with the journalists about reports selected from the *corpus* that they themselves had produced or edited, discussing more specific aspects about producing agendas and carrying them out. At the same time as reconstituting, even partially, specific characteristics for writing texts it also created a chance for journalist and researcher to share their thoughts about the journalistic practices and discursive production which was the basis for the analysis.

### **1 *Sui Generis* and outing as editorial and visibility policies**

I met journalist Marcos Mazzaro on an April afternoon, in a café in south Rio de Janeiro, in 2011. He was the first journalist I interviewed for my doctoral research on gay press in Brazil. Our conversation started with Marcos retelling stories that he described as “unheard-of routines in the newsroom”. At one point he touched on an issue that had previously been addressed in copies of *Sui Generis*:

There was something about *Sui Generis* that nowadays I think would be complicated to do, but at the time was not, which was *outing* as an issue in itself. Nowadays, I don't think it is even a question, is it? That's a good question...either it's kind of promoting this *outing* or it casts suspicion on this story. And there are many examples of this in the magazine; there have been some lawsuits around this, sometimes unjustified (M. Mazzaro, author interview, April 15, 2011).

I have included the following dialogue about how this *outing* is one of the pillars of the magazine's editorial line:

\_This “question of *outing*” that you mentioned is one of the issues I explore in my study.  
 \_I thought it might be...  
 \_Did this generate a lot of debate in newsroom meetings?  
 \_A discussion about procedures?  
 \_“We'll ask the interviewee”...

\_ (Interjects) This was a joke that was going around, that us reporters heard from the magazine owner who ended up playing along with it. That's kinda what it was, a kind of recommendation. One time, I went to a collective with [comedian] Tom Cavalcante who had nothing to do with the story, I think he played a gay character, and as soon as I asked the question everyone knew that I was from *Sui Generis*. And I didn't have an i.d. badge, nothing, but they knew it...Because the question was a direct one, I think it was something about homophobia, even though at the time it wasn't called that, it was talked about but didn't have this term attached to it. Anyway, I don't know, there was a recommendation to ask, and yes, sometimes we pushed the limits! [...] And since I've always liked comedy, we played around a lot with this, just to relieve stress because I think it's ridiculous that you come across [in a deepened voice] "You are gay and...", you need to be flexible to negotiate this with the interviewees (M. Mazzaro, author interview, April 15, 2011).

I tried to find out how this "negotiation" existed between journalists and interviewees at *Sui Generis*:

\_About "being direct" or "negotiating", was it something the whole team shared? I imagine there wasn't any manual in the newsroom describing what you could or could not do...

\_Look, the magazine owner basically left us alone on this one, but there was something like "get stories that have something to do with gay culture or this *outing*...Ask him if he really is gay!". But like I told you, this was taken all in stride [...] I think it was kind of hinted at, and we were just joking around, nothing serious, there wasn't even a real investigation. Sometimes we had to be careful once it was released in the magazine, in a strong situation, it led to, let's say, to a kind of forced *out* (M. Mazzaro, author interview, April 15, 2011).

The reporter's statement was in line with the discursive readings of *Sui Generis* by indicating there was a strong connection between an editorial policy that needed to distinguish the magazine as being *gay* and valuing a policy of *coming out* or provoking the interviewees to "come out of the closet". This was written in an editorial published in the eighth issue which was covering a retrospect of 1995, the year the magazine came out:

And 1995 was, according to gays and lesbians, a year to remember. You don't even need to remember the events, it will go down as **our social coming out**. We stylishly showed who we were and the country realized that we existed. And the best thing was seeing that it didn't hurt that much and they didn't even think we were that ugly, really. All in all, we won them all over. We start 1996 living in a society which is a little less hypocritical. (Feitosa, 1995b, p.3, emphasis added)

This is also confirmed in the editorial from the following issue in January 1996:

Nobody planned it, but *Sui Generis* is becoming more and more interactive (...) A lot of people don't have any idea of where to start to beat this isolation. Even more so when it is not an out in a world that is constantly talking about sex (...) Actually, we really want to talk about it. **All gays and lesbians definitely want to come out.** Who would prefer to hide and live with a lie? Accepting who we are makes things easier, only those who have traded in the embarrassment of living in fear (because whoever hides themselves suffers from the possibility of being discovered) for the pride of being free. And this desire to communicate has everything to do with the desire of freedom (Feitosa, 1996, p. 6 emphasis added)

These two texts clearly reiterate the idea that coming out represents being “free”, in that context and in the sociocultural universe of the magazine's readers, as an indispensable position and policy towards personal and collective realization. There is, however, another equally relevant aspect in those two passages which is the association between “speaking”/“communicating” as a visible policy, and of the magazine presenting itself as an agent privileged of this policy. It shows the direct correlation between practices of “coming out” and an idea of “pride” since it destroys the values of “hypocrisy”, contradicting the idea that things are “easier” with “lies” and “hiding”. There is a discursive strategy using the first person plural (or the variant “we”) where “we” connects both the magazine to its reader audience and also establishes that “coming out of the closet” should be indistinctly shared (“all gays and lesbians”).

This strategy sews together the dawn of the magazine on the Brazilian editorial market with the public scene by acquiring visibility and respecting homosexuals. At the same time, there is an idea of *truth* in the texts and practices (the reporter suggesting or asking directly if the interviewee was gay) where “coming out” is a “natural” desire of all “gays and lesbians”.

The other journalists interviewed at *Sui Generis* (three gay men and two women who identified themselves as heterosexuals or “supporters”) all said that “coming out of the closet” was something the magazine's owner and editor-in-charge, Nelson Feitosa, claimed as an editorial position that crossed over into the newsroom's daily decision-making. The following interview is with columnist Gilberto Scofield Jr, who helped rebuild this dimension and, at the same time, reveals his personal and political convictions on the issue of “closet” inside a gay magazine:

\_ Do you think *Sui Generis* has always been openly gay?  
\_ I think so, there isn't much doubt about it. Nelson was like that a lot. Nelson didn't like people who were in the closet. He didn't like it [*emphasis*]. So, the magazine was a kind of reflection of him, that was who he was.  
\_ Was this obvious in the newsroom?  
\_ For sure.  
\_ Nobody had any problems with this?  
\_ Nobody, and not everyone was gay. There were people who weren't gay. But in the newsroom this was not a problem, everyone thought that...Because it doesn't make any sense having a gay magazine that kept issues in the closet, you know what I mean? It doesn't make any sense at all. The idea of shedding light on something, having references, building an imaginary, building a history, describing situations, speaking about the gay universe in general. Oh, is the closet a part of this? It is, but it is a negative part of it. The closet only exists because people are afraid, because people are forced into the closet. Anyway, this isn't a decision you make because you think it's cool, unless you're a hypocrite, married and going around having sex...This is the model that we do not want, this model that we had. We have always had this model throughout human history, and now it's time to speak about something else. All gay magazines should be like this! It can't be any other way! Don't patronize the closet (Scofield Jr., author interview, May 10, 2011).

Here the question of “closet” represents a “model” of “historical” relationships for gay and lesbian subjects to overcome. A “gay magazine’s” legitimacy is derived from becoming a place for building another discourse, another “historicity” where “hypocrisy” would be combatted by the ability to “speak”.

It is fundamental to analyze this statement in a context in which convictions combine around “coming out of the closet” and articulating subjectivities, beliefs and values on many levels: personal, political, editorial, professional, etc. It also requires understanding *Sui Generis* as a segmented vehicle, established within a journalistic reality where the universe of gay magazines itself is permeated by financial limitations, embodied in a continuous struggle for the magazine’s financial independence and its reputation as a “quality” publication. This does not prevent the closet from being a problem to the magazine’s position in this specialized segment of the press.

Sedgwick (1990) proposes the idea of “closet” as a “regime of knowledge”. In the past, one was able to identify “coming out of the closet” in a clearly Anglo-American sociological tradition as a personal and politically collective position/imperative for elaborating and recognizing “gay liberation”, as Altman suggests (1998 [1971], p. 306) by affirming that “the essence of the gay liberation is that it enables us to come out” and ““out of the closets and into the streets’ becomes a liberating process which if not sufficient to overcome oppression [...]

is certainly a necessary first step”. Simon and Gagnon (1998 [1967], p. 62) define *coming out* as “that point in time when there is self-recognition by the individual of his identity as a homosexual and the first major exploration of the homosexual community”.

Eve K. Sedgwick understands the “closet” as an important dimension in the life of “gay” subjects and their daily experiences. She believes there is a relationship that emphasizes the existence of a regime of knowledge based on negotiations between “gay” subjects and their “interlocutors” about “the know” and “the unknow”, of “knowledge” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 3). She believes that “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1”).

Sedgwick’s writings are valuable and have been an important reference on the “closet” as a policy and regime of knowledge for analyzing the life experiences of homosexuals, as well as interdependent relationships that are not only restricted to this but concurrently to its actual definition (and not privilege) of “homosexuality”. It is important to highlight, however, that the author traces her analysis from specific canonical references (North American, British and French literature) which represent what she calls “modern Western culture”. This tendency to “universalize” allows her to develop an original epistemological approach on “gay and lesbian studies” regarding the dynamics of secrets/visibility in homosexuals, and also needs to be continuously problematized in other “local” realities. It needs to break free from the effects of placing the “closet” in a “centrality” and “continuity” of a “historic narrative” trapped in its own essence.

In addition to a critical tradition that questions the universality of the “closet” that could be generalized for other local/regional/peripheral realities (Quiroga, 2000; Pereira, 2012) it is necessary to point out two aspects highlighted by Miskolci (2017). The first aspect is the need to contextualize a “policy of visibility called *coming out* or “coming out of the closet”; a trait that spreads between “homosexual political groups that widely contest heterosexual hegemony” in countries such as the United States, Argentina, France and Brazil, most notably since the 1970s. It marks an expression “created by these political layers of middle class for describing its own experience of publicly accepting homosexuality” (p. 73). Apart from that, the policy

of coming out of the closet used to coincide with, in the author's words, "the same grammar of power against that which [it wanted to] return to" (Miskolci, 2017, p. 76).

Taking these exceptions into consideration, what is demonstrated here is the historical and sociocultural reality that *Sui Generis* was born into, a policy of outing was central in making "gay journalism" coincide with values, experiences and subjectivities of its editor and that it was shared, more or less in general, by professionals in newsrooms about how they faced "coming out of the closet" and "homosexuality" as well as the need to value positions based on notions of "truth" for identities and relationships of gender and sexuality. Statements from professionals at the magazine fell in line with the editorial policies valued in North American and European gay magazine publications. Editor Roni Filgueiras describes how foreign periodicals represented a parameter for *Sui Generis*:

\_Since the magazine's public was very demanding there was a lot of attention paid to the graphics, the esthetics, and the photos. Nelson [Feitosa] also paid a lot of attention to what existed outside of the country. So, he would buy all the American and European gay magazines and we would put out similar content. And since there was no competition in our niche due to the fact that most magazines had just naked men in them and weren't concerned with discussing dreams, expectations, the international press became the reference for the question of behavior and of gay.

\_What did you guys do in the newsroom, was it a kind of "clipping"?

\_We used to buy them and read them! The magazines were always there for us to read (R. Filgueiras, author interview, Nov. 21, 2011)

Beto Pêgo, intern, reporter and columnist at the magazine narrated on the same procedure:

\_Since we didn't have many references of magazines here, we would read Out, we would try to find references for other magazines and try to read those issues and see what could be used here, at *Sui Generis*, for our public in Brazil.

\_Did you always do this at the newsroom?

\_Yeah, we subscribed to the magazines. We subscribed to some of the magazines and Nelson would buy and bring in others. We had a collection of them, a bookstand of magazines we used for references. We needed a standard because there wasn't any local or national standard to compare ourselves to. Sometimes we printed images from other magazines to try and bring something to our public that was hard for them to access. At the time, the internet was still a "baby", access was not so easy. Finding out where homosexuality was visible in other countries and here. And give *Sui Generis* this visibility, include topics in the magazine, show what's happening, what is being done for gays and to gays in Brazil and throughout the world, in the arts and civil rights (Author interview on April 15, 2011)

It is important to situate, even briefly, that in North American “gay press” the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s was an important one because of the policies of “coming out of the closet”, as Streitmatter (1995) and Baim (ed. 2012) attest to. Even though *outing* was not a consensual theme at the time in gay and lesbian periodicals in the United States and Europe, which were still trying to answer to the stigma and homophobia that was amplified with HIV-Aids, it was seen as a major challenge to the “status quo” of publications (maintained by the secret of the “closet” for influential people), making up one of the main forms of building a “gay visibility”.

This policy of visibility was associated with the editorial construction of a model of gay identity and community which is socially assimilated and affirmed, based on recognizing a positive and successful self-image, something the *Sui Generis* model was trying to do. At the same time, this was continually being negotiated or tensioned with other identities and possibilities of identification, which are described in the next section.

## 2 Gay identities, the “lesbian” question and the “supporters”

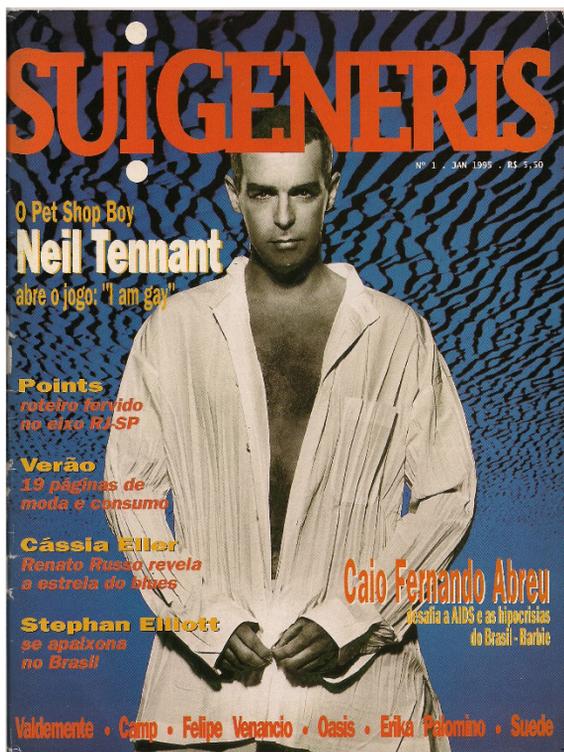
Since *outing* is the magazine’s editorial policy, how it portrays the visibility and experience of “gay identity” needs to be examined. One of the main strategies of building this identity was to highlight personalities in cover stories and reports – particularly singers and actors/actresses – who, even though had not publicly assumed their gay and/or lesbian identity, looked like or tried to look like they belonged to the *gay* universe. An excerpt from the eighth edition of the editorial shows this,

In its first year, *Sui Generis* tried to be a sense of pride for all gays and lesbians in Brazil. Dozens of reports tried to avoid the social isolation and invest in what was similar between us all. We were also looking to tell our story, talk about our idols. At the same time, we were also looking to **establish our identity** and show that gay culture was in every society (Feitosa, 1995b, p.3, emphasis added)

A self-realization of gay and lesbian subjects takes precedence here, both individually and collectively (“what was **similar** between **us all**”, “tell **our** story”), guided by granting visibility to models of artistically and professionally successful people (who identified themselves as gay, lesbian or connected to the “cause”).

It is important to note that this editorial strategy marks a shift from the emphasis of “homosexuality” as a “condition” or “behavior”, as it was defined in the first homosexual movements in Brazil (Macrae, 1990; Simões and Facchini, 2009) and in the pages of Brazilian gay magazines from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s (for example, in papers like *Lampião da Esquina* at the end of the 1970s) to more effectively value the notions of gay “identities” and “communities”.

**Figure 1-** *Sui Generis*, year I, n. 1



Irvine (1998, p. 579) recalls that, as the modes of “social organization of gay men and lesbians” were growing during the twentieth century, the forms of classifying them also became more complex: “lifestyle”, “community”, “ethnicity”, “culture”. This last term (culture) gains importance by circulating as “a significantly more susceptible and extensive shared identity”.

We need to stress that affirming ideas like “culture” or “gay community” can neither be homogenized nor taken as being

both geographic and temporary. Equally, an idea of “gay culture”, even when taken as total/global, does not do away with how it is questioned or reshaped by sociocultural differences of class, race or sex and gender. The frequency with which “gay culture” and, to a lesser degree, “gay community” appears in *Sui Generis* shows us how they were strategic in the process of delimitation of public readers who shared their interests and in the elaboration of a “positive gay” policy based on values such as self-realization, “positivity” and “similarity”/homogeneity among “gay” subjects. This is illustrated in the editorial’s first edition where Editor Nelson Feitosa explains one of the magazine’s objectives:

We want to make an intelligent, happy, vibrant gay culture and take it out of the slums. We want to offer quality journalism that quickly brings about a social awareness where our similarities far outweigh our differences (Feitosa, 1995a, p. 4)

This proposal echoed the desires of a significant number of readers who wrote in to the magazine. In the seventh edition, one of the readers praises the magazine’s importance to the Brazilian “gay community” by saying he had “hopes that our Brazilian magazine would continue to be informative, entertaining and focused on improving the gay community” (Silva, Cláudio. Incrível. Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 2, n. 7, 1995, p. 6). In the ninth edition, another reader praised the “quality” of the magazine for “talking about homosexuals [...] in a more authentic, intelligent way” (Ronaldo. Sem estigma. Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 1, n. 9, 1995, p. 8). This same edition had “a 15-year old homosexual boy” who talked about the obstacles he faced every day, finding “a kind of a friend in *Sui Generis* who I could share my distress with” (Steve. Vai passar. Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 2, n. 9, 1995, p. 8). The boy’s letter is an opportunity for the magazine to reiterate discursively an idea of “gay culture” that, once recognized and shared by homosexuals, would represent forms of individual and collective realization.

The magazine draws on and elaborates on notions of gay “culture” and “identity” in order to remove the stigma from homosexuality. It used a policy of visibility that was built on new forms of positive representation where the mediums of communication were recognized as a space for discussion. For example, I highlight the editorial article, the cover page, and the report published in the sixth edition in October, 1995. The topic was the repercussion

of a young gay person in a television soap opera on Rede Globo Television, played by a heterosexual actor:

The newest thing now is André Gonçalves playing the role of Sandrinho on the soap opera. He plays the first normal gay character on Brazilian television. His positive attitude is more revolutionary than his relationship with troubled Jefferson. If the audience lets him, Sandrinho will end up becoming the Brigitte Bardot of the gay and lesbian cause. He has the power to be a symbol for the masses. And television has the power to show Brazilians the story of a gay guy who is out, proud, a good person, has a family and is dating. This is much better than any other image that has been shown on our TV [...] And it's time that the Brazilian public learns from his story, in the name of many gay and lesbian Brazilians who are forced to live in secret (Feitosa, 1995c, p. 7)

The report, in consonance with the editorial's discourse, starts by contrasting separate forms of how gay subjects are represented in television dramas: considering "after 21 years of age" gays and lesbians were "portrayed as the bad guys, as being crazy, humorous, or insane", the soap opera successfully introduced a normal gay couple to the public (Souza, 1995, p. 32).

The discourses selected from the report include an actor, a soap opera writer, a TV director, and a marketing consultant who specializes in opinion polls. Their discourses legitimize homosexuality in terms of being **normal** and **natural**, and as we saw in the discourses defending *outing*, in the **truth**. Actor André Gonçalves stated ("I have read some books, heard opinions and ideas from some gay friends. The definition they gave was always simple: being gay is being **normal**" [emphasis added]). Director Sílvio de Abreu said ("I think all of this needs to be handled carefully. Whatever television can do so that society accepts this fact should be done. But you can't make a scandal out of it or you'll scare the viewers. The more you talk about the topic in a **natural** way, the better" [emphasis added]). One of the broadcaster directors, Guel Arraes said ("The gays on television almost never look like the gays we know in real life. We made a point to show things **as they really are**" [emphasis added]).

I would like to make two points here. One is the actual naturalization of the terms *gay* and *lesbian* as identity references. If a paper like *Lampião da Esquina*, published 15 years before, had many discourses showing the reluctance to assume the meaning *gay* because it was old, then in *Sui Generis* its recurrent use is directly associated to a vision that the "gay culture" was internationally well-established, something that the journalist considered as proof "that it is impossible to be indifferent towards gays in the world". The

gay identity reference that defines both subjects and the collective, its “presence” or social and political demands (“cause”), becomes inserted in a dynamic where recognizing and searching for integration is linked to a more general idea of “society as a whole”.

When verbal discourses in reports emphasize gay as being “natural” and celebrate the change to a representational model which is similar to heterosexuals, then that same report needs to show that there are other possibilities of representation. The photos used for the edition’s main text and front page invest in a dynamic of exploring the boundaries of masculine and feminine representation.

**Figure 2-** *Sui Generis*, year 1, n.6



On the cover you can see a contrast between his hair style, his clothes and his gestures. One hand is placed on his waist and she has a serious expression on her face. Her name is added to the subtitle “Gay vengeance in prime-time Globo”. The use of the expression “gay vengeance” can be seen as trying to include gays and lesbians on another level within the public scene which traditionally reduces them to “secondary roles/characters/positions, outside of “normality” (instead of “ridiculous”). Being represented by a person who highlights a “gay normality” would mean a symbolic and collective (re)appropriation of a space of great visibility, the “prime-time” of soap operas on Rede Globo.

Adopting the term supporter in the magazine and its newsroom could be seen as a double movement. There is a certain consensus that the term appeared and gained representivity at the beginning of the 1990s (Trevisan, 2000; Simões & França, 2005; Trindade, 2004) around a cultural movement culminating in the 1993 Cinema Mix Brazil Festival led by economist and businessman André Fischer. But he extrapolated it to the newsletter through a network of information and consumption including nightclubs, bars, cinema festivals, internet channels and a small segment of the media where *Sui Generis* was the most prestigious editorial from that specialized journalism.

Trindade (2004, p. 89) sees the initials GLS as a strategy for both “its market power – which reaches more than just the specific consuming public – and the gaps that opened up in society for homosexuality”, as well as being “convenient” for “those who were afraid of being recognized in society as homosexuals”.

At the same time that these gaps opened up for homosexuality, approaching the “supporters” helped legitimize the magazine to a broader public (the editorial from the first edition highlighted that the magazine was addressed to “gay men and women, unexclusively” (Feitosa, 1995a, p.4). Facilitating access to personalities who did not have an “openly” gay or lesbian identity or who did not want to go public but recognized the importance of the publication was another negotiation strategy; they were willing to do interviews or even appear in the periodical. It also led to increased access for collaborators who were looking for the magazine because they considered it “stylish”. On this note, I highlight the statements from editors Roni Filgueiras and Heloiza Gomes.

Filgueiras says, “When I started working at the magazine it was known as GLS and I was a supporter of the acronym”, highlighting that “everyone wanted to be in the magazine. Not just to be interviewed, but journalists wanted to work for it as well. There were many collaborators from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo who suggested topics” (R. Filgueiras, author interview on Nov. 21, 2011). Heloiza Gomes said:

When I arrived at *Sui Generis* it had already established itself, it was a great magazine. People were happy to speak with *Sui Generis*. Evidently, there were cases where people didn't want to speak, “oh, I'd prefer not to say anything”, but they always did so respectfully. The magazine was quite influential, that's a fact (H. Gomes, author interview on Nov. 21, 2011)

You can see here how *Sui Generis* had discourses that defended gay “culture” and “identity” and recognized a certain part of the public

(sources, readers, other journalists) as “supporters”. If it was forced to portray gay as “happy”, “normal” and “having a positive attitude”, it was also crossed by contradictions that involved developing an identity category like *gay* and modes of doing journalism in the segment.

One of the points of tension was the fact that the magazine was a publication “for gays and lesbians”, but its editorial line mainly focused on a masculine homosexual public. This was a recurring question in reader letters sent to the newsroom who were asking for the reports to have a larger female voice. In the sixth edition, one female reader wrote about getting more space for “homosexual women”:

Congratulations on the magazine but... don't you think that it's too masculine? How about remembering that others also exist? I want to subscribe to Sui but I'm a woman and I want to read articles about homosexual women (something we have never had a lot of) (LAURA, Déborah de Souza. Chega de homem! Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 1, n. 6, 1995, p. 6)

A similar criticism came from a reader in the thirteenth edition who identifies herself as “female and bisexual”, questioning the lack of content for “the girls”, highlighting that “as a reader and fan of this great magazine, I feel the need to say [that] *Sui Generis* is more and more directed towards a masculine gay public” (Rafael, Rosely. Gay demais. Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 2, n. 13, 1996, p. 6). In the interviews conducted with the two editors mentioned earlier in this text, this editorial unbalance<sup>5</sup> was basically attributed to two aspects: the first was commercial, where female readers, even if sending letters in regularly, were not the magazine's main buying public; and the second was the profile of the owner and most of the team at *Sui Generis*, a group formed of middle and upper class men who lived in a cultural universe of consumption where homosexual men were more visible. Heloiza Gomes writes in regards to the first aspect:

\_I'm going to tell you a story. It was a “gay and lesbian” magazine but the only part for the girls was the column Vange Leonel [a one-page column in every edition called *grrrls* which had opinion articles written by the singer and activist]. It was like this up until the magazine ended, when I arrived it was already like this.

\_Was this a peaceful topic in the newsroom?

\_It was the only change I proposed because I used to receive the letters...Letters or an email once in a while from gay women wanting more coverage. The intern, who was a lesbian, was hired because of her orientation. So I said: “Nelson, let's do a piece like this...” He would say: “Heloiza, the women won't go for it, they don't want it”. I would say: “they do want it, I receive letters, and there is a demand here. Let's write some pieces for them”. Nelson would say: “Ah, I don't know how they think”. And the reporters would say: “ah, I have no idea what they want...”

\_Do you think this is reflected in the magazine?

\_In a certain way, it is because the magazine wasn't written with them in mind. So, when two vacancies for interns opened up, we hired two lesbians. One of them stayed with us til the end. I made some suggestions at the first agenda meeting: "girls, I need an idea for a piece on lesbian girls that the lesbian public can enjoy, they are complaining about us so I'd like to give them more space..." Neither one of them had any ideas. One of them suggested having Cássia Eller [Brazilian rock singer] on the front page. I said, "Great, I like it", and I went to speak with Nelson. He said: Sure, that's ok". I don't need to tell you that I heard, up until my last day at *Sui Generis*, that the worst selling copy in five years was the one with Cássia Eller on the cover. The worst in five years! (H. Gomes, author interview on Nov. 21, 2011)

Apart from the magazine focusing more on the gay male public; the owner, reporters and main columnists were men. This had already been suggested in Heloiza's statement, but can also be identified when Editor Roni Filgueiras reflects on the reading public:

\_It had everything, it was a humongous universe...and mostly masculine. So, the public was young, urban – there were many people from the interior who read the magazine, I'm not sure how since distribution had always been a problem, but that's what it was...middle class. Even though the consumer profile was not how we imagined it would be, they wanted it. Imagining what it would be like to be in cities like New York, London, Paris, buying certain things, going to certain restaurants, having a middle-class and upper middle-class lifestyle, this is what the public was. Refined with high purchasing power, we produced a magazine for this type of public. Connected to the world of fashion, gastronomy, living the good life, always at night [...] I saw that Nelson was this public. He was young, a little over 30, and a globetrotter, because he was always travelling the world and mainly going to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (R. Filgueiras, author interview on Nov. 21, 2011)

I also highlight a conversation with Beto Pêgo where he reflects on his own sociocultural universe when reflecting on his time at the magazine:

\_Who did you imagine your reading public to be when you were writing your texts?

\_I tried to think of my readers as the readers I already knew, friends...Honestly, I didn't have a really specific view of who this public was...I don't remember having done any kind of research that really identified who was buying the magazine, who was subscribing to it. Or I didn't have access to this information.

\_The places you used to go to...

\_Yeah, I thought of the reading public as a public interested in culture. I never saw, but I imagined a class A and B public, interested in culture, with a certain purchasing power for culture and entertainment. It was a universe I lived in and identified with. I identified with the magazine after starting to work there, I was interested in working there because I used to read it. I saw myself as the magazine's public. In this way, my reference was what you could say a little self-reference; I would search until the time to propose agendas... (B. Pêgo, author interview on Apr. 15, 2011)

Building a positive gay policy crosses over into the editorial policy from references shared between journalists and collaborators in the newsroom, and from the idea that the audience was considered to be similar or close to the sociocultural world of the team at *Sui Generis*; they privileged readers who they imagined to be urban (gay) men, middle or upper class, fashion, music, literature and cinema consumers, going to restaurants, parties and gay, “GLS” or “alternative” places.

### Final Considerations

The analysis of *Sui Generis* focused on emphasizing how the publication, in a specific context of realigning “activist” practices with new practices of gay consumption, leisure and sociability that got reorganized in Brazil in the mid-1990s, became an important vehicle for developing a policy of visibility marked by the valorization of *outing*, from “coming out of the closet”, connected to the desire to affirm a gay “identity” and a “successful” gay culture. This meant outlining a dialogue that was based on the “closet”, but equally reflected on the limits that *outing*, the assimilationist “identity” and the apparent “similarity” of “gay” subjects also created.

This issue is of huge importance to the gay press in Brazil since the magazine emerged and mainly represented the resurgence of a “journalism of reference” within this editorial segment. If, as demonstrated, doing this journalism meant following trends and editorial models from successful gay magazines from the United States and Europe, whether because of the lack of competition with similar editorial proposals and positions or the trajectory and lifestyle of its professionals, its realization should not be seen as a simple copy or transposition of “gay journalism” from the northern hemisphere.

Firstly, you have to pay attention to the differences between social and market realities for both the journalistic and gay/LGBT universe. It is true, as many social scientists who have investigated homosexuals in Brazil over the last few decades have pointed out, that the 1990s, as Parker highlights (2002, p. 128), marked the emergence of “a growing range of cultural and commercial understandings built around concepts of homoeroticism, homosexuality and, increasingly, gay identity” which results “in the news and gay circles in the middle of the 90s talking about the ‘gay market’” (*Ibid.*). However, it is important to state the limitations and difficulties that mark the trajectory of this “market”, particularly within this segment of specialized press.

As one of the magazine's journalists stated, *Sui Generis* hit newsstands with the goal of making each edition financially viable. This difficulty was in contrast to an initial optimism from its editorial team that this new "gay market" would be guided by advertisements for this specific public initiated by both segmented companies and big advertisers of traditional media. As Gilberto Scofield Jr. said, "We thought the gay market would want to advertise in the magazine. And we thought, deep down, that Coca-Cola, airline companies, tourism agencies, and fashion brands didn't advertise in gay magazines because there weren't any!" However, he thought that "it would be a good idea to advertise in a magazine that dealt with this public", but in reality "this was not what happened" (G. Scofield Jr, author interview, May 10, 2011).

Secondly, the forms in which sexual and gender experiences and identities in Brazil are organized are also structured differently. Even though a good part of the educated and well-travelled segments, represented by both journalists from *Sui Generis* and its ideal or preferred public, valued at the time actions and policies articulated around "gay identities" from a settled "community" or that had as its life and policy project its existence as "open" homosexuals, the magazine's journalism was continually traversed by negotiations between journalists, sources, advertisers, and a reading public about what and how questions of gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, etc. would be addressed. It marked a strategic editorial opening to convey its agenda and broaden its position in the press market. I tried to demonstrate this and other aspects by showing how the publication welcomed "supporters", but actually traversed many instances, both personal, editorial and from the market.

Since the limits of this article do not allow us to explore these negotiations in detail, it is important to emphasize that we have an important phenomenon to explore in other studies, most notably in journalism studies. In any event, I believe it is important to state that *Sui Generis* should be seen as a unique publication in the history of the gay press in Brazil.

Looking through its pages, and listening and adding to what its journalists reconstitute as personal and professional experiences allows us to think not only about the demand they made to have regimes of specific homosexual references (particularly gay males) but also the need to understand the challenges of the editorial market and "gay" consumption and this important segment of our press in recent decades.

Journalism at *Sui Generis* was constantly marked by the

accomplishment of doing “gay journalism” recognized for its quality of reports, texts and influence on debates in gay and LGBT circles and in Brazilian society in general. At the same time, its actors were faced with the challenge of how to address, make public, and broaden “homosexuality” (within the editorial values of the magazine) and demonstrations, basically the news they deemed to be important from emerging sociocultural circuit and the homosexual/GLS/LGBT market.

The main challenge when reading *Sui Generis* was recognizing both the importance of the valorization of discourses that opened up new perspectives for a “gay community” or “identity”, broadening the dispute by less stigmatized journalistic, media and social representations for homosexual Brazilians, without forgetting to interrogate how these same discourses were implied in a policy that advocated for more collateral modes, more “honest”, “natural” or “true” of being “gay”.

Almost twenty years after its last issue was released, the history of the magazine shows that it serves as a privileged place to not only analyze the professional practices and discourses that it communicated, or its role in bringing important issues of how homosexuality was and how it is portrayed to the public, but also that these were given life through journalism, considering the active role it had and that media had as reproducers and as agents of gender and sexuality relationships.

Differences, asymmetries, styles, subjectivities and specific lifestyles intersected with one another when the magazine was still around and they tensioned *in* and *beyond* the identities and identifications articulated in acronyms like “GLS” and “LGBT”, which has started to gain more momentum in media and society in Brazil over the last two or three decades. These tensions are quintessentially the object of investigation for social scientists, journalists, historians, and all those who take an interest in the history of (homo) sexuality in contemporary Brazil, continuing to challenge our existence also as *sui generis* lives.

\*Translated by Lee Sharp

## NOTES

- 1 I follow the criticism of Butler (2010, p. 335) when she states that it is “unacceptable to radically separate the forms of sexuality from the effects of gender standards”, claiming “to conceive two terms in

- a dynamic and reciprocal relationship”, to avoid an approach in which the two terms are situated in a “structurally determined relationship”.
- 2 Gays, Lesbians and Supporters. An acronym designating a consumer market, leisure, sociability and services directed at or frequented by gays, lesbians and others interested in the homosexual universe. Cf. Parker (2002); Simões and Facchini (2009); France (2010).
  - 3 Editions 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 23, 24, 30, 31, 34, 40, 41, 43, 44, 47, 48, 52, 54 and 55.
  - 4 Fontcuberta states (1993, p. 57), “as soon as a medium selects an event to offer as news (which implies others were rejected) it has to value them. Firstly, it should be done out of necessity: the information that goes on the first page is what the reader sees first and deems to be more important (...) But it also has to be done to show the public its valorization of its journalism and, therefore, define its own personality within the media”. Traquina (2008) defines “newsworthy” as selecting and transforming events into news by meeting a series of criteria (among which are simplifying and personifying facts, dramatizing events, etc). They are not necessarily fixed because one aspect or another of newsworthiness might be privileged according to each publication’s profile (“hot” or “cold” news, whether it is sensationalist or not, etc).
  - 5 The *bisexual* category is not covered very much in the the analyzed magazine discourses. In the ninth edition, a reader questions a “segregation of bisexuals” in the gay universe: “And some gays want all gays to be just gay? Us bisexuals are a little worried about coming out” (@Jorge Reyes Jr. Bi também é gay. Reader letters, *Sui Generis*, year 2, n. 9, Feb 1996, p. 9). Transsexuality was on the agenda in the eleventh edition, there was an extensive profile of Roberta Close who was referred to as a woman. She was on the cover of that edition (“E Deus recriou a mulher”, *Sui Generis*, year 2, n. 11, 1996).

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