Managing Media Production in the Age of Convergence
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Convergence Crisis: Adult Entertainment and New Media

My interest in this roundtable stems from my research in adult film history. Analyzing the long-term implications and consequences of technological transformations from the past requires an interest in ongoing industrial developments. Adult content producers have, as a general rule, seized new technologies as soon as they are available; the subsequent legal and censorship struggles have, in part, defined the industry from its inception. Yet, much like earlier periods in adult entertainment history, very little academic work is being done to catalogue and analyze the production, distribution, and exhibition of hard-core media. The bulk of the scholarship that does take place focuses on textual analysis and theorization of spectatorial relationships, as well as within the ongoing feminist debates on sexual representation.

I call the current situation a "crisis" for two reasons: first, academia, even within pornography studies, avoids industrial analysis, which has critical long-term implications for adequate histories. Second, within the industry itself a convergence crisis has developed, due to the rapid evolution of technology and shifting of content production and delivery. My interest in this panel, then, arises from my desire to see the first situation change, with hopes that more contemporary gathering and analysis will occur, much as it does with the rapidly growing (and essential) field of mainstream industry studies. This roundtable asks, "How do we facilitate collaboration between scholars who study different creative industry sectors," which, to me, represents both the challenge and the solution to the problem of the lack of contemporary work on the adult industry. It is out of such dialogues (like that occurring on this roundtable), as well as what I hope will be discursive integration between scholars and approaches, that future historians will be able to reap potential research benefits.

CHALLENGES

The adult film industry faces the same convergence challenges and difficulties as Hollywood, albeit in a few different ways. Unlike Hollywood, adult film has not had a profitable distribution base in theatrical exhibition since the mid-1980s, relying now upon home video and digital distribution. As such, peer-to-peer online file sharing has critically impacted the industry. Online distributors, who frequently depend upon subscriptions to access their content, have seen entire websites uploaded to torrent sites, and nearly every adult video can be found online within hours of its release for immediate illegal download.

Furthermore, the proliferation of adult "tube" websites (modeled on YouTube) have further decimated the industry. Given that these sites depend upon user uploads of material, many thousands of clips are now available for free instant streaming, nearly all of them violating copyright. Performers such as Vicky Vette have pursued legal action against those who have uploaded torrents and tube clips, but they face a daunting challenge. Sites such as Pornhub.com now rank among the most-visited internet destinations, and their purveyors do little (if anything) to monitor copyright violations. While Hollywood also faces the file sharing and clip streaming invasion of its business model, the adult industry seems particularly prone to a lack of public interest about its economic losses given the social stigma attached its content.

Innovative solutions have been created to find new revenues as tube sites and torrents tear into profits. Sites such as LiveJasmin.com and MyFreeCams.com, which feature live performers interacting with users, have become extraordinarily popular, using webcam technology to create

profitable business models that move away from pre-produced content. Sites such as ChatRoulette, and alternate reality online worlds such as Second Life and Utherverse, have become havens of sexual activity between users, following the historical trend in which new technologies lead immediately to sexual uses.

Regulation, too, has had a strong impact on the industry. Perhaps most well-known is Apple's decision to block pornography as much as possible on its devices, signaling a trend followed by other manufactures. Cell phones, tablet devices, video game platforms, and traditional computers will continue to be exhibition sites for pornography whether Apple (or any other company) likes it or not; it is merely a matter of time and ingenuity. Producers and distributors will find ways to profit from these technologies, and users will develop means to skirt regulation and restriction.

QUESTIONS

These examples raise a bigger question: who is following them? Many industry blogs exist, but none are operated by academics. Numerous industry conventions are held each other on a variety of topics, but none are attended and critiqued in the same way as, for example, NATPE or ShoWest. Publications such as *AVN* have long followed the industry, but they are rarely foregrounded as discursive industrial analyses. In fact, adult industry studies barely exist, despite its massive cultural presence and profitability. Pornography has been a lightning rod in academia since the 1970s, resulting in an institutional reluctance to incorporate the discourse alongside mainstream studies or to include it at all in undergraduate curricula. As Eric Schaefer and others have pointed out, devoting time and attention to pornography does not necessarily mean ideological support and alignment, only the recognition of the critical importance of study. Inclusion of the adult industry alongside mainstream studies, in both method and conversation, rather than further isolation or avoidance, remains the best hope for overcoming what I perceive as an ongoing crisis for future historians.