

2012 Flow Conference Position Paper: Queer Media Studies' Futures

The number of queer images in media has been on the steady rise in the last three decades coinciding with changing practices of production, distribution, marketing, and exhibition of media transnationally. Queer images and media are circulating globally and being produced in an increasing number of countries, cultures, and communities. Queer media studies must adapt to these changing practices and the ever evolving identities within the social and political category of "queer." As an academic discipline, queer media studies has roots in literary and film theory and cultural studies, but also has ties to the political activism of the gay and lesbian movements. For queer politics the issue of visibility has been at the forefront of activism and social awareness. Therefore, studies that analyze queer media representations and reception of queer images has and will continue to have political significance.

With growing political awareness and social tolerance of queer communities and LGBT people internationally, queer media has been blending into mainstream media. Yet for scholars it is important to distinguish among representations of gay, lesbian, bi-, and transgendered characters in traditional film and television forms of and media that challenges, transgresses, and subverts dominant heteronormative patriarchal ideologies. Like academic interventions that grew from reactions to the radical and experimental films and videos of the early 1990's New Queer Cinema, scholarship still has a political responsibility to engage in media that not only makes visible the lives and communities of queer peoples, but also the formal techniques, narrative structures, and practices of marketing, distribution, and exhibition that challenge the dominant forms and circuits of media.

Like all media, most queer media circulate through the channels of Western capitalism. Projects that gets green lit and are widely distributed target the subcategory of queer people that is classified as most likely to pay for the consumption of such products: namely American, urban, white gays. Those with the privilege of disposal income and living in safe spaces to be out are most often reflected back in the representation of stories and characters in film and television, and make up the majority of artists behind the scenes. Factors of institutional misogyny and racism in the entertainment industries also contribute to the disproportionate number of wealthy, white men as characters and artists with queer media.

Mainstream representations of gays and lesbians and the marketability of homonormative media are rapidly replacing radical queer filmmaking of New Queer Cinema that once challenged sexual norms as well as conventions of narrative, genre, and style. Today queer media studies needs to challenge the dominant ideologies by analyzing and promoting media production and circulation such as Gay Third Cinema and international film/video festivals that align with queer politics and aesthetics that challenge dominant ideologies of capitalism and hetero-patriarchy.

Film festivals that specialize in queer films and video still hold much of the space for showcasing diverse representations and modalities of queer stories and artists. Digital technology and other forms of new media not only allow for different modes of artist expression and access to more people to make art, but allow for such media to circulate much more freely. For example, many festivals use online submission programs that allow artists to submit their work electronically, without needing to ship copies to selection committees. This not only increased the ease and lessened the cost of submissions, but allows those artists to skirt issues of

ensorship that previously would not have been able to pass their work through certain customs checkpoints and cross certain borders.

Though spaces such as festivals have the ability to exhibit diverse selections of queer media, they still run up against financial concerns of marketing, selling tickets and courting sponsors. Economic concerns present challenges not only to production companies and artists making queer media, but also at the level of marketing, distribution and exhibition. New media and its cheaper forms of production and distribution are promising avenues not only for artists and audiences to experience, but worthwhile for queer scholarship to seriously examine and analyze. With the increase in international LGBT festivals, satellite channels, and digital communities the future for queer media looks bright for the increased potential for diversity. As scholars, the responsibilities and challenges naturally increase as we must be aware of and adapt to these changing structures of media production and distribution and the different communities and cultures making and represented in new queer media. As queer media diversifies, queer scholarship must intersect with fields of transnational studies, postcolonial and anti-colonial discourses, Third World, and feminist studies and render visible the structures of capitalism that dictates the flow of new queer media.