IN FOCUS: Queer Approaches to Film, Television, and Digital Media

Introduction

by Patty Ahn, Julia Himberg, and Damon R. Young, editors

It is a tragic coincidence that the Queer Caucus of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) was asked to curate a special "In Focus" on current approaches in queer media studies at the same time that we were devastated by the news of Alexander Doty's untimely passing. Doty was a cofounder of the caucus and—both by the example of his scholarship and through his career-long commitment to mentoring—he helped make queer media studies what it is today. At a memorial event at the 2013 annual meeting for the SCMS, members from the community reflected on Doty's immense intellectual and personal legacy. Corey Creekmur's poignant tribute, adapted here, reflects on the distinctive qualities that made Doty such a formative figure in the field. Foremost among those qualities is courage—the courage, as Creekmur puts it, of the Lion in *The Wizard of Oz* (a film on which Doty has offered perhaps the definitive queer analysis), not the courage of patriarchs but that of "sissies." Doty's courage was at once intellectual, personal, and pedagogical; it was the courage to forge a queer way of being in a world whose norms remain defensively, and sometimes violently, straight. It was also the courage to allow personal "investment" to register at the surface of his scholarly work. We open this "In Focus" with Creekmur's contribution in dedication to Alex and his irreverent, generous, and brilliant "queer approach" to life and work.

In the spirit of Doty's insistence that we acknowledge, thematize, and challenge our intellectual investments, the six feature essays presented here map idiosyncratic and personal trajectories rather than offering comprehensive overviews. The accounts of queer approaches to television, film, and digital media converge and diverge in focus as well as style, but they all invite us to reflect on the important developments that took place in queer studies, LGBT activism, and

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the media industries in the 1990s.[1] It is often said (or thought but not said) that queer studies is a nineties kind of affair, and it is true that its rise in that decade was fueled by a sense of political urgency and fortified by its intersections with the media-driven activist movements that were also coming into their own. It was indeed in 1990 that Doty, Chris Holmlund, and a small group of friends and colleagues met together in Washington, DC, and proclaimed the birth of the Lesbian and Gay Caucus (soon to be renamed the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Caucus, then eventually the Queer Caucus). In its early years, the caucus sponsored landmark panels on HIV/AIDS, pedagogy, pornography, film theory, and, of course, questions of representation—all topics it continues to champion even as it has expanded its membership base along with its range of geographical focuses and methodological frameworks.

That same year, Teresa de Lauretis—a key film theorist—coined the term *queer theory*; the year 1990 also saw the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, and—demonstrating the immense importance of cinema to queer theory's foundational analyses—D. A. Miller's essay "Anal Rope."[2] And if something queer was in the air, it was not just in the academy: this was also the moment at which the directors comprising a movement B. Ruby Rich would soon hail as the new queer cinema were busy making their first works.[3] That movement formed—contemporaneously with the rise of queer theory—partly in response to the Reagan administration's murderous nonresponse to an epidemic that was disproportionately devastating gay, black, and immigrant communities across the United States.

The term "queer theory" also emerged just as LGBT representations and media production and distribution channels began to dramatically shift and diversify. The comprehensive privatization of the US media industries throughout the 1980s created a focus on minority marketing, which by the 1990s had become a common practice among corporations seeking to cultivate new markets. The increase of gay and lesbian representation in mainstream media worked in tandem with the emergence of a new queer market value in the film, television, and music industries. The year 1990, then, is also the year of the sensational release of Madonna's music video for "Vogue" (directed by David Fincher), featuring black and Latino and Latina dancers from the Harlem "house ball" community, which brought both praise for the singer's boldness and criticism for her exploitation of gay black and Latino subcultures. That same year, *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990) turned those dancers into ethnographic

1 Of course, queer film and media studies did not begin in the 1990s: the rapid developments in that decade built on the earlier, foundational efforts of writers, including Parker Tyler, Richard Dyer (whose *Gays and Film* came out, so to speak, in 1978), Robin Wood, and Thomas Waugh, as well as Karla Jay, Esther Newton, Dennis Altman, and John D'Emilio, among others.

2 De Lauretis organized the conference "Queer Theory" at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in February 1990, thus effectively coining the term. See de Lauretis, ed., "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," special issue, D*ifferences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3 (1991); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); D. A. Miller, "Anal Rope," *Representations* (1990): 114–133.

3 B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound*, September 2, 1992, 32.

subjects.[4] Of course, Doty was among the many media scholars who remained suspicious of too-pat bifurcations between the "mainstream" and the "subcultural"; Madonna was one of his many beloved divas, and he proclaimed that his avid consumption of network television as a child profoundly shaped the feminist analytic he would take up in his scholarship. Perhaps queer media studies arose alongside the multiplication of media platforms precisely because it allowed for an expansive methodological approach to thinking about the vexed, often contradictory range of representations that were emerging at dizzying speeds both in underground film scenes and across mass culture.

In television, unprecedented deregulation produced fundamental shifts throughout the industry, including ownership concentration, channel proliferation, and branding. What Ron Becker calls "gay TV" of the 1990s emerged in this industrial context; landmark moments like Ellen DeGeneres's coming out on national television, the success and popularity of *Will & Grace* (NBC, 1998–2006), and the premiere of Showtime's *Queer as Folk* (2000–2005) reflected some of the changes in regulatory and financial structures within this historically domestic and heteronormative medium.[5] The launch of LGBT-dedicated cable channels in the United States and Canada simultaneously exploited the segmenting potential of narrowcasting, thus reinforcing hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation, and marked a new era of visibility and political recognition.

These same deregulatory shifts also forced queer studies to reckon with the globalization and digitization of many national and regional economies outside the United States. The dense multidirectional flow of capital, intellectual property, media content, and labor made it increasingly difficult to think about media and sexuality as tethered to a single national culture, domestic infrastructure, or even technological platform. With the rapid globalization of regional media industries in the 1990s, scholars institutionally based in the United States and beyond tracked a growing body of queer transnational media that challenged normative ideas about kinship, family, intimacy, and empire in ways that did not legibly cohere with the global market or with a US-based politics of "coming out" and visibility. A queer approach to media theory and practice has suggested possibilities for challenging—through critical analysis—overlapping structures of patriarchy, nationhood, citizenship, heteronormativity, and the machinations of neoliberal capitalism. At the same time, the intersection of queer theory and digital media studies has produced a range of new critical approaches to thinking, beyond the text, about academic publishing, the classroom, creative practice, social

4 Debates about the politics of race, appropriation, and subversion in *Paris Is Burning* were famously taken up by Judith Butler and bell hooks contemporaneously with the film's release: bell hooks, *Z Magazine* (June 1991) and *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1992); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Ann Cvetkovich also engaged with the differing modes of feminine subversion and performance in "The Powers of Seeing and Being Seen: *Truth or Dare* and *Paris Is Burning*," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hillary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 155–169. For a current revisitation of some of the complex issues raised by Livingston's film that situates it in relation to the history of drag balls and the emergence of queer theory and critical race studies, see Lucas Hildebrand, *Paris Is Burning* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013).

5 Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

networks, and media environments and infrastructures, sometimes under the umbrella term *digital humanities* (we like to think of this as a queer appropriation of that term).

As the issues, approaches, and investments that inspired the formation of the Queer Caucus find themselves repeated, refracted, displaced, assimilated, critiqued, and reanimated in new generations of scholarship, this "In Focus" tracks some of the enduring connections between the challenges and questions we face now and those that have come before us. In the post-millennium, what new questions confront queer studies of film, television, and new media? Many of the essays emphasize the ways industrial and technological contexts shape the intersection of media and sexuality. They remind us that media belongs to and is a product of "the market," even as media texts and media forms themselves suggest modes of being that escape the market's inexorable determination. In some ways, this is a bit like academic research itself, which is both dependent on and somehow ideally transcendent of the institutional contexts that sustain it. The essays grapple with this imbrication of text and context, institution and extra- or anti-institutional imagination, sexuality and its mediating forms. The term *approaches*, with its emphatically plural declension, lends itself (we hope) to an anti-teleological sense of where queer media studies has been and where it is going. In keeping with this pluralism, and given the different ways the term *queer* has come to be used, we have left definitions of *queer* open to each author to explain and contextualize with respect to her or his own specialized interests.

Thomas Waugh and Matthew Hays take up some of these questions via a reflection on the challenges they faced in creating their Queer Film Classics series at Arsenal Pulp Press—a queer alternative to the BFI Film Classics—under whose umbrella eleven titles have been published since 2008. The series performs a "salvage operation" not only on overlooked works of queer cinema but also on a practice of close reading that, within film and media studies, has fallen out of fashion. Foremost among the "crises" they enumerate is the eclipse of modes of cinematic production that sustained both an earlier queer film culture and its critical (and scholarly) reception. How does this heritage translate, they ask, to the post–social media generation? Moreover, if queer studies—queer film and media studies in particular—was shaped around the critique of mass culture, it now faces the task of reorienting itself to a landscape in which neither "mass" nor "mainstream" cohere as categories. Thus, even as their own series pays heed to a queer art-film tradition and the modes of textual analysis fitted to it, Waugh and Hays celebrate new methods and critical formats to come.

With that goal of developing new critical formats in mind, the essays here by Lynne Joyrich and Quinn Miller explore the productive relationship that comes from bringing together queer theory with television studies. As Joyrich notes, queer theory and television studies may seem like an odd couple; there are indeed real tensions between television's status as a—or perhaps the most—mainstream medium and queer theory's defining goal of destabilizing all norms. Yet Joyrich argues that television's anti-teleological temporality makes it an inherently, or at least potentially, queer medium. Her reading of *The New Normal* (NBC, 2012–2013) suggests that television's ordinariness is perhaps also a site of its queerness and that the paradoxes of queer television studies both "frame and displace" televisual logic in potentially productive ways. Miller's essay emphasizes the "oppositional" possibilities of what he calls "television

camp" and excavations of minor subtexts and background characters across media platforms. Through a reassessment of the queer potentiality of popular forms like the sitcom, and an examination of minor or marginal characters and actors who are often overlooked in standard forms of textual analysis, Miller calls for a rethinking of the formal and generic hierarchies that structure the fields of film, television, and media studies.

The last two essays examine some of the ways that queer theory has intersected with transnational media and transmedia studies. Audrey Yue's contribution sketches out two major research models that scholars of queer Asian media have adopted. The first, more textually focused approach developed in response to the queer Asian cinema and media boom of the 1990s and examines the ways cinema and media texts decenter Western sexualities and cinematic norms. The second mode takes up questions of globalization and "queer hybridity" in the face of institutional and industrial transformations wrought by the denationalizing (though also reterritorializing) forces of global capital.

In her contribution, Kara Keeling observes that while a new generation of scholars is poised to grapple with the potential resonances between queer theory and new media, this is a convergence whose queer potentiality remains to be fully articulated. Thus, Keeling offers a speculative rubric that she playfully calls "Queer OS" to spotlight the emergence of a queer "common sense" for thinking about new media's relationship to race, sexuality, the body, and material environments. In a way, we find ourselves returning to Doty's claims that every text—though we might now want to say every medium—is always already (potentially) queer, or at least awaits a queer reading. Could we doubt that he was indeed on to something?

In closing, we want to note that many of the scholars who crowd into our annual caucus meetings were still in elementary school in 1990. Their projects also demonstrate an impressively diverse range of approaches. Some of them—like Nick Davis's monumental work of queer film theory, reviewed in this issue—buck current academic trends by unashamedly engaging with high theory. Others, like Laura Horak's work on cross-dressing in early silent cinema and Greg Youmans's work on 1970s documentary, bring new rigor to queer historiography; still others, like Stephanie Hsu's study of transnational audiences of serialized Korean melodrama, explore convergence culture in provocative ways.[6] We are sure Doty would be thrilled to see that the newest contributions to the field demonstrate the same qualities of imagination, courage, and ingenuity that shaped his own work, even as he would applaud the diverse historical and theoretical frameworks that, in 1990, were still on the horizon of what was only beginning to cohere as a field. *

6 Laura Horak, "Landscape, Vitality, and Desire: Cross-Dressed Frontier Girls in Transitional-Era American Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 4 (2013): 74–98; Greg Youmans, *Word Is Out* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011); Youmans, "Performing Essentialism: Reassessing Barbara Hammer's Films of the 1970s," *Camera Obscura* 27, no. 3 81 (2012): 101–135. Hsu's research on this topic is still in the works. See also Kyle Stevens, "Dying to Love: Gay Identity, Suicide, and Aesthetics in *A Single Man*," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 4 (2013): 99–120.

The Sissy's Courage: In Memoriam Alexander Doty

by Corey K. Creekmur

It's simply impossible for me to evaluate the late Alexander Doty's contributions to queer film and television studies without—as they say—getting personal. I knew Alex for more than thirty years, from the time we met in graduate school at the University of Illinois until his untimely death, and so whatever sense I have of Alex as a scholar remains overwhelmed by my loss of a dear friend. Our friendship became a professional affiliation when we decided to coedit the volume *Out in Culture*, which we designed as one of the first anthologies devoted to, as our subtitle claimed, "gay, lesbian, and queer essays in popular culture."[1]

That collection was, at a basic level, generated by our attempt to bring together many of the stray essays we had located in very diverse sources and exchanged as photocopies. Our aim was to create a shared space for a rapidly growing body of what then seemed isolated criticism, although some of it was coming together around the recently rescued term *queer*. I was also privileged to witness the intellectual and creative process that resulted in Alex's two groundbreaking books, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* and *Flaming Classics*: *Queering the Film Canon*.[2] I'm especially proud to have casually suggested that Alex consider writing something about the comedian Jack Benny, whose popular yet effeminate persona struck me as curiously unremarked. Alex ran with the idea, and while I can't take any credit for the brilliance with which he pursued my remark, I'm still glad I nudged him. In any case, I just can't pretend to view Alex from the distance that might ensure a more neutral assessment of his important contributions to queer media criticism. Others can and will make those claims, and have already begun to do so, and I'm warmly reassured that they are confirming my own sense of Alex's originality and irreplaceability as a film and television scholar. It's been especially rewarding, if bittersweet, to hear from many of his former students how inspiring Alex was as a teacher and mentor. The mentorship program he helped launch through the Queer Caucus of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies is now

1 Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, eds., *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

2 Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Doty, *Flaming Classics*: *Queering the Film Canon* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

rightly named in his honor. I learned a great deal from Alex, too, but not, alas, in what must have been his incredibly invigorating and empowering classrooms.

However, if my friendship with Alex and now my mourning this still-unacceptable loss cannot allow me an impersonal perspective on his career, I'm keenly aware that the work defining that career in fact demands and authorizes my personal tone, or what Alex often emphasized as the critic's "investment." In addition to the emphatic argument driving much of his work—his insistence that queerness is located at the heart of rather than on the margins of popular culture—perhaps Alex's other important contributions to queer criticism were discursive and performative. Trained in rather conventional modes of academic writing and literary analysis, among his notable achievements was learning not just how to write insightfully about queer popular culture, or, more precisely, the queerness of popular culture, but also how to write (and lecture, and teach) queerly. His ambitious introduction to *Flaming Classics* begins with the blunt, "unprofessional" question "What's my investment?" and proceeds to interrogate the assumptions that position the very text we are reading: "Why shouldn't readers know something about a critic's personal and cultural background and training? Why is hiding or suppressing information like this still considered more professional and scholarly by most people?"[3] Simply raising such questions, moreover, does not itself authorize narcissistic self-indulgence or excuse bold defiance of academic conventions: these methodological inquiries intertwine with personal details that the author admits he is "still not fully comfortable" with and that he worries may be "cringe-inducingly autobiographical in the context of a 'serious' film book." He recognizes that, perhaps given the relatively recent legitimation of film and media studies, "it's as if showing too much interest in what we are writing about somehow undermines our credibility as intellectuals."[4] Once Alex came out as gay in his life and in print there was no turning back, but he acknowledged that self-doubt and fear of public embarrassment remained persistent risks in the kind of queer criticism Alex chose to advance and perform publicly for the rest of his career.

Still, Alex's approach to confronting these nagging concerns was remarkable. If he was going to—despite lingering hesitation—conduct his scholarship with his personal investments and enthusiasms out in the open, he was determined to balance this self-exposure with unimpeachable professional rigor. His "queer readings" always depended upon his locating convincing and mounting evidence of queer elements in (usually mainstream) texts, excavated through close analysis and abundant textual and contextual research in order to counter the anticipated charges that these were willfully imposed, self-interested acts of "reading into" innocent (implicitly straight) texts. Although Alex celebrated the gay camp tradition of "reading against the grain," he knew those seeking to protect beloved films and television shows from queer contamination could easily resist such claims. His persistent goal, so often stunningly achieved, was to make it impossible for anyone to be able to ever again view the objects of his analysis as they once had, following his readings. At the same time, despite their basis in deep research, Alex's essays insist that there's no reason to pretend they are disinterested or

3 Doty, *Flaming Classics*, 11.

4 Ibid.

objective scholarly exercises. Alex wrote about films and television programs and stars he loved, or those that annoyed him: the time and energy that research and writing required meant that the objects of analysis should matter, both to the unapologetically engaged critic and to his or her anticipated audience.[5]

While queer theory and activism obviously and directly emboldened and inspired Alex's criticism and teaching, I think his sense that scholarship must also be an engagement in cultural politics had important, earlier roots. Alex identified himself as gay and found the expansive category of "queer" tremendously liberating and productive, but even before he assumed those self-designations he was a committed feminist (who remained nonetheless wary of the presumption of men, gay or straight, claiming that status for themselves). Alex believed fervently in the 1970s women's movement mantra that "the personal is political," and it was very important for him that, once he determined that his own coming out as gay would direct his professional career, he remained in regular dialogue with the many feminist scholars who had influenced him as deeply as the inspirational first generation of openly gay film scholars (especially Robin Wood, Richard Dyer, and Thomas Waugh) whose work and examples he deeply admired. (Like Robin Wood, Alex's early work—his dissertation—included an ostensibly straight study of Alfred Hitchcock. For both, Hitchcock remained a career-long touchstone, notably allowing each to redefine his own queer approaches to cinema.) In his critical practice, it mattered to Alex that his innovative "lesbian" readings of female-centered sitcoms like *Laverne and Shirley* (ABC, 1976–1983) and *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985–1992), or of the otherwise gay camp classic *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), should demonstrate that "queerness" offered an interpretive range extending beyond the expected claims of a gay male critic. Perhaps most generously, Alex even allowed for the possibility of straight queers as long as heteronormativity was their critical target.

To summarize the rich intertwining of Alex's life and his work, or the inextricability of the personal and the political in his criticism, I want to emphasize a quality that encapsulates this skillful balance: Alex's courage. Again, for Alex, the ritual of coming out was necessarily social, cultural, and communal, extending far beyond the circle of his family, close friends, and employers. As a writer with the good fortune to be widely read, Alex came out to people he never met and never would meet. Again, this ostensibly personal decision established his professional persona: his queerness was performed in print, in public presentations, and perhaps most riskily in the classroom. Soon (one hopes), it may become difficult to re-create for many younger scholars how terrifying and daring this act was not so very long ago. That's of course a remarkable, welcome testament to progress that, however, should never lose sight of the dangers that coming out still entails. The transformation of Alex's earlier comfortably auteurist and historical work into an elaborated gay film and cultural criticism, and the development of an even broader queer media criticism, were developments that

5 For examples in addition to the texts already cited, see Alexander Doty, "Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo: The Sexy Hausfrau versus the Swedish Sphinx," in *Glamour in a Golden Age: Movie Stars of the 1930s*, ed. Adrienne L. McLean (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 108–128; Doty, "The Homosexual and the Single Girl," in *Mad Men, Mad World*, ed. Lauren M. E. Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert A. Rushing (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 279–299.

he understood would include professional risks, uncomfortable self-exposure, awkward self-critique, and even self-celebration that might appear embarrassingly narcissistic. That took courage.

It's perhaps unsurprising that Alex loved (among a wide range of cinema not always reflected in his writing) *The Wizard of Oz*, which was of course already a key film in the history of pre-Stonewall gay male culture before Alex so dazzlingly explored it as a lesbian fantasy in an essay that seems to me among his most elegant and self-reflexive weavings of the personal and the political. In our introduction to *Out in Culture*, we had briefly used the film in a general and rather obvious example of what a gay or queer reading of a mainstream text might look like, but Alex's later return to the film was an ambitious attempt to reposition the film within queer culture through an essay that is part autobiography, part manifesto, and all stunningly original research and interpretation. Alex begins his essay (first published in the anthology *Hop on Pop*, and later included in *Flaming Classics*) with an intensely personal account of his childhood response to the film, which included his being deeply embarrassed by the sissy Cowardly Lion with whom he admits, as a sissy himself, he too fully, uncomfortably identified.[6] As Alex says, long before *he* had come out, the Lion seemed "too out" until Alex's own much later acquisition of camp as a critical tool allowed him to "make peace" with the Lion and finally appreciate his "outrageous" drag-queen fabulousness. Rather quietly, to conclude this dramatic narrative of his own transition from loathing to loving the Cowardly Lion, Alex notes that he came to see how, through his over-the-top performance, the Lion "seemed to have a bravery the narrative insisted he lacked."[7] I hope Alex would excuse my vulgar psychoanalysis, but I think that brief aside speaks volumes: it's not of course the narrative that insists the Lion lacks bravery—or what the Lion more often calls "courage"—but the Lion himself who declares this embarrassing lack. Alex tellingly doesn't use the word *courage* that the film repeatedly provides, for a reason I assume is touchingly obvious: while he let himself admit to his deeply uncomfortable identification with the Lion's sissiness, he couldn't bring himself to declare his own association with the Lion's courage. There's a wonderfully contrary moment in the 1995 documentary (directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman) based on Vito Russo's groundbreaking book *The Celluloid Closet* in which a series of clips of effeminate sissies from 1930s Hollywood movies is followed by contemporary commentators denouncing the pernicious stereotype, until actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein slyly admits he always liked the sissies.[8] So did Alex, and it's this wise embrace of the sissy and his particular form of courage—the courage to openly be a sissy in an often oppressively macho culture—that seems to me as brave as any act I know. Courage and bravery are most often attached to popular images of hypermasculine figures, but is there anything braver than a gay man in a homophobic culture announcing to his family, friends, employers, professional colleagues,

6 Alexander Doty, "'My Beautiful Wickedness': *The Wizard of Oz* as Lesbian Fantasy," in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasure of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 138–158.

7 Doty, *Flaming Classics*, 50.

8 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, rev. ed. (1981; New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

and—perhaps most risky of all—his students, that his own sissiness will not only be unrepressed but also indulged, displayed, and fully performed?

The Wizard of Oz's great trick—a scam, of course—toward the end of the film is to simply bestow superficial symbols for the possession of a brain, a heart, and courage upon Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion. We are meant to understand from key moments in the narrative that only they believe they lack these qualities, which they have in fact possessed all along. Alex does not otherwise discuss this major element of the story (except insofar as their particular rewards link to Dorothy's more complex desire for her lost "home"), and, again, despite admitting his early, ambivalent identification with the sissy Lion, Alex was not bold (or arrogant) enough to assert about himself what I want to emphatically affirm: like the figure who he first thought was a shameful role model but only later a figure in whom he could take pride (and what better figure for "gay pride" than a lion with a perm?), Alex *always* possessed great courage, even if he could not recognize this in himself or admit that this, too, could have been a source of his close identification with the (anything but) Cowardly Lion. (Alex of course had a brain and heart as well: I think he could have admitted to those, even if he demurred acknowledging his own bravery.) Alex was in fact and in deed that most compelling of seeming contradictions: a fierce, fearless sissy. His courage awed and continues to awe me, as I anticipate it will others who inherit and continue his brave queer legacy. ✻

Six Crises

by Matthew Hays and Thomas Waugh

What were we thinking of back in 2008 when the two of us pitched the series Queer Film Classics (QFC) to our beloved community-based Canadian publisher Arsenal Pulp Press? Did we really think a pop-and-pop enterprise known among much else for vegan recipe books and trans fiction—as well as queer collections by both Waugh and Hays and translated scholarly works on late Genet and homophobia—could compete with the British Film Institute's heterosexual film classics series (*Queen Christina*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Brief Encounter*, *The Servant*, *Victim*, *Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Far from Heaven*—out of seventy-eight titles, that's it?).[1] We saw our project as a salvage operation on our forgotten queer film heritage—including the "minor" Canadian one: transformative canon surgery, if you like, a kick in the archive. It was also a return to textual criticism, a refusal to fit that year's fashion for grandiloquent abstraction and wordplay.

1 Marcia Landy and Amy Villarejo, *Queen Christina* (1996); Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (2012); Richard Dyer, *Brief Encounter* (1993); Amy Sergeant, *The Servant* (2011); John Coldstream, *Victim* (2011); Laura Cottingham, *Fear Eats the Soul* (2005); and John Gill, *Far from Heaven* (2011)—all published in London by the British Film Institute Film Classics.

It seemed like a grand idea at the time: to take a diverse group of academics and/or critics and let them micro-riff on a single queer film for the length of a book, thereby anchoring the burgeoning and rapidly evolving universe of queer film and cultural studies in the text. This is just the book series our peers and students needed, and one we'd subscribe to ourselves—if we hadn't thought of it first.

Whatever we were thinking, we're not sure we realized the series would be a litmus test of the peregrinations of queer film and media studies in the twenty-first century, and we're sure our brave publishers did not. Still, in 2013, with eleven books under our belts and a now-attritioned list of eight still to go taking us through to 2017, representing the voices of a transcultural and transgenerational spectrum of authors and filmmakers, we're getting a pretty good idea of certain crises that face us in the valley of queer film and media studies.[2]

Although it may just be a catchy and fortuitous echo that led us to choose Richard Nixon's 1962 format and title for this informal reflection, perhaps we have more in common with the self-justifying petulance of the US president who obliviously presided over Stonewall than we'd like to admit.

The Crisis of the Market. The toughest crisis we've had to deal with is in the marketplace. If the queer theory boom of the 1990s was fueled not only by endowed university publishers but also by baby boomers hitting their stride in the academy, then the perceived bust of the twenty-first century reflected at the same time certain hard realities of the digital age and the vagaries of the neoliberal academic-industrial publication complex. Trying to publish work outside of that complex, despite our idealism around crossover audiences and lay readership, has been an uphill struggle. The continuing surge of LGBTQ film festivals does not translate into an eager market even for inexpensive single-title monographs, and the temptation to sell out to the anti-intellectual populism of the *Out* and/or *Advocate* brand and even of aspirant highbrow *Gay and Lesbian Review* is easier said than done. Our fantasy that our books would be adopted en masse as textbooks in the proliferating queer film courses evaporated at dawn—except in our own courses, naturally. Yet the publication beginning in 2010 of a very different series, three interdisciplinary "Against Equality" anthologies, also published outside the above-mentioned complex, thanks to grad student and community activist credit cards, gives one hope for a continuing queer public sphere that includes book objects you can hold in your hand.[3]

2 Existing volumes in Queer Film Classics as of 2013 are Will Aitken, *Death in Venice* (2011); Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Farewell My Concubine* (2010); Shohini Ghosh, *Fire* (2010); Noah Tsika, *Gods and Monsters* (2009); Thomas Waugh and Jason Garrison, *Montreal Main* (2010); Lucas Hilderbrand, *Paris Is Burning* (2013); Jonathan Goldberg, *Strangers on a Train* (2012); Jon Davies, *Trash* (2009); Greg Youmans, *Word Is Out* (2011); and Wendy Gay Pearson and Susan Knabe, *Zero Patience* (2011). Still to come are *Arabian Nights*, *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Female Trouble*, *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Love*, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, *L.A. Plays Itself / Boys in the Sand*, *Manila by Night*, and *Scorpio Rising*—all published in Vancouver by Arsenal Pulp Press (http://www.arsenalpulp.com/seriesinfo.php?index=10).

3 Ryan Conrad, ed., *Against Equality: Queer Critiques of Marriage* (Lewiston, ME: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2010); Conrad, ed., *Against Equality: Don't Ask to Fight Their Wars* (Lewiston, ME: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2011); Conrad, ed., *Against Equality: Prisons Will Not Protect You* (Lewiston, ME: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2012).

The Crisis of Heritage. Another crisis that we face in the arena of queer film and media studies could be characterized as intergenerational. By this we do not mean that the queer film and media network has been remiss in interrogating the place of intergenerational sexuality in the cauldron of sexual politics and its screen representations, although that is true—along with much of what Gayle Rubin would characterize as "outer limit" sexualities, from sex work on out.[4] (We explored child sexual subjectivities and man-boy sexualities in our 2010 *Montreal Main*.) What we mean here is the crisis around the transmission of a heritage of lesbian and gay studies and cinema to the post–social media generation. Hardly anyone is carrying the torch of literate cinephile-humanists Parker Tyler and Richard Dyer these days, and they're too often squeezed off the comps lists by Brian Massumi and Slavoj Žižek (*The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* [Sophie Fiennes, 2009], indeed!). Some of Waugh's cohort of twentysomething queer grad students are frankly perturbed by a gap in mentorship due to the loss of a generation to AIDS, anxious about restoring their legacy from departed ancestors as diverse as Andrew Britton, Jack Babuscio, Stuart Byron, Stephen Harvey, Vito Russo, Craig Owens, Jay Scott, and John Rowberry. Yet few of them have seen *Buddies* (Arthur J. Bressan Jr., 1985), *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, 1986), *Longtime Companion* (Norman René, 1989), or *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993)—not to mention *Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919) or *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan, 1931) (all titles we would love to devote books to, except for *Zero Patience*, which Wendy Pearson and Susan Knabe covered in 2011). Positioned as undergraduate teachers in queer and sexuality film studies courses in a large, diverse metropolitan university, we (born the year of *Rope* and *My Hustler*, respectively) are even more alarmed by the historiographically and mnemonically challenged culture of our students. To many contemporary undergrads, ancient history is Britney Spears's first album. We are reassured, however, by their embrace of the four recent documentary features on the AIDS crisis of the 1980s—*United in Anger* (Jim Hubbard, 2012), *Vito* (Jeffrey Schwarz, 2011), *We Were Here* (David Weissman and Bill Weber, 2011), and *How to Survive a Plague* (David France, 2012)—so enthusiastic as to almost suggest a nostalgia for an era they did not know. All is not lost. We only wish they didn't believe everything they heard in *Gay Sex in the 70s* (Joseph F. Lovett, 2005).

Speaking of another distant decade, one of the fine contributions that Dyer has made, of course, is to keep his earlier and otherwise ephemeral publications in print, thus ensuring access to our lesbian and gay studies heritage. His marvelous 2012 collection *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film* contains four delectable reprints from that long-lost era (the 1990s!) that even we had never seen.[5]

The Crisis of Accessibility. Access is one thing, accessibility another. We are gratified that one reviewer opined, correctly we hope, that our cheerful series is "a parry against the nihilistic arguments of queer theorists such as Lee Edelman author of *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) and more in line with the hopeful opinions

4 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (1982; New York: Routledge, 1993), 3–44.

5 Richard Dyer, *In the Space of a Song: The Uses of Song in Film* (London: Routledge, 2011).

of those such as José Muñoz in his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009)."[6] Interestingly, three of our books cited Edelman (two positively), and only one cited Muñoz. For the record, four of our books cited Rich, Russo, or Sedgwick, and three cited Dyer, White, or Wood, while only one brought up Butler. Certain stalwarts, from Doty to Halberstam, were conspicuous by their total absence, and even more conspicuous, several of our books (notably and tellingly non-American ones) cited none of the above! Needless to say, one of the latter heretics was the favorite of the critics (Aitken on *Death in Venice* [Luchino Visconti, 1971]). Andrew Holleran, in his *Washington Post* review of our 2011 trio, called *Death in Venice* a "romp," lashing out as well against queer theory's "jargon" and "esoteric language," which made reading the lucid and elegant book on *Zero Patience* that was the brunt of his wrath "a bit like eating rocks."[7] Another reviewer praised our 2009 vintage for "mov[ing] us bracingly beyond the dark, tyrannous oppressiveness of Lacanian and Foucauldian queer theory, as exemplified by Lee Edelman's and D. A. Miller's work, respectively."[8] We recognize hostile caricature as a standard scenario faced by scholarly work being reviewed in nonacademic media, whether or not we secretly agree with the theory bashers (often yes, often no). Yet we cannot deny that the growing institutional pressure to eat rocks constitutes a major problem for our subfield. As Anne McClintock has said, we are facing a "crisis in language" in the academy, torn between our day jobs as peer-reviewed obscurantists and our vocation as public intellectuals and activists.[9] It's no coincidence that so few of us have spoken out in defense of queer experimental filmmaker Lawrence Brose, scapegoated by Homeland Security and the "incipient fascism" of our civilization—McClintock again.[10] We hope that the surfacing of the new *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ World Making* will provide more alternatives to the rock pile.[11]

The Crisis of Diversity. Our other key criterion in assembling the series, of course, was diversity. How can we plead for diversity while not striving to practice it ourselves—two white gay men with real estate? Subalterns are of course part of the QFC mosaic—in front of the camera, behind the camera, at the authorial keyboard. We also know we are fighting against the grain of a culture at large—at least in North America, and arguably in the West in general—where an ongoing march to an IKEA-furnished, Saturn-driving, Abercrombie & Fitch–wearing, same-sex-marriage-fixated consumerist mind-set leaves much of gay culture and identity stranded in Stepford

6 Glyn Davis, "Queer Film Classics Series," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 148–154. Davis is citing Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), and José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

7 Andrew Holleran, "News Volumes in Queer Film Classics," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2012.

8 David Greven, "Queer Film Classics," *Cineaste* 36, no. 1 (2010), http://www.cineaste.com/articles/queer-film-classics-web-exclusive.

9 Anne McClintock, "Invisible War: Militarized Masculinity, Rape Culture and Torture-Porn," *Rethinking Race and Sexuality: Feminist Conversations, Contestations, and Coalitions Conference* (keynote address, Concordia University, April 17, 2013).

10 Ibid.

11 From Michigan State University Press, "The End of Bullying," the inaugural issue of *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ World Making*, will appear in September 2013 (http://msupress.msu.edu/journals/qed/index.php?Page=home).

rather than our longed-for rainbow-hued becoming-utopia. We are now a community that congratulates Jodie Foster and Anderson Cooper for finally having come to the party—with the latter even accepting a GLAAD media award in the name of Vito Russo. The diversity of our series has made broad generalizations about its content extremely difficult. That's a good thing, and it's good to chafe the direction of too much of contemporary queer culture. For us diversity must be global, and two of our favorite QFC books are *Fire* and *Farewell My Concubine*, each bringing a wealth of local knowledges and feelings to texts that critics and audiences have all too often snubbed.

Crisis in Our Corpus. Perhaps our most difficult moment in developing the series was the brutal day in 2008 of poring over so many clever, invigorating, and screamingly fun book proposals. One of our criteria was to focus on films that may have been previously unfairly overlooked—we did not, for example, think that *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) needed to have its rose stemmed one more time, as much as we love that film. This also led to a discussion of what precisely constitutes a queer text or film. Since queer film and cultural studies have, since *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) at least, encompassed queer readings of texts not necessarily created as explicitly queer—do unwittingly queer films fit in? This led to a discussion:

> HAYS: What about *Grey Gardens* [Ellen Hovde, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Muffie Meyer, 1975], a film made by heterosexuals but claimed by queer audiences?
>
> WAUGH: No. With no Araki, Arzner, Caouette, Chéreau, Cocteau, Fassbinder, Genet, Jarman, Judy, Julien, Jutra, Murnau, Ottinger, Smith, or von Praunheim on our list, you want to include heterocentric and sexist diva-gossip doxploitation? What queer audiences? You, Rufus Wainwright, and your jaded friends? Vetoed.
>
> HAYS: Bitch.

Such conversations notwithstanding, with all this talk of festivals and their role, do we need a reminder of the crucial importance of festival studies as a growing subfield? Thanks to prophetic pieces in *Jump Cut*, two forums in *GLQ*, plus a proliferating raft of dissertations, we've already got a good lead here, but we must maintain our production levels as the landscape continues to evolve.[12]

12 Pioneering studies in *Jump Cut*—such as Marc Siegel, "Spilling Out onto Castro Street," *Jump Cut* 41 (May 1997): 131–136, and Kaucyla Brook, "Dividers and Doorways," *Jump Cut* 42 (December 1998): 50–57—led to historic symposia of scholars, critics, makers, and curators in *GLQ*. See Patricia White, ed., "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals—Essays by B. Ruby Rich, Eric O. Clarke, and Richard Fung," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5, no. 1 (1999): 73–94; Chris Straayer and Thomas Waugh, eds., "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take One: Curators Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11, no. 4 (2005): 579–604; Chris Straayer and Thomas Waugh, eds., "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Two: Critics Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 599–626; Chris Straayer and Thomas Waugh, eds., "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Three: Artists Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 121–138; as well as doctoral dissertations now too numerous to cite.

Crisis in Film Journalism and Criticism. We hold the far-from-unanimous view that queer film and media studies are inextricably caught up with queer media criticism, journalism, blogging masquerading as journalism, programming, spectatorship, and the fan cultures of both community festivals and commercial exhibition. In this respect, perhaps the most intriguing issue facing queer film studies scholars is the ongoing fragmentation of audiences. Indeed, these are changes facing all of those engaged with film studies—and all media for that matter—but the massive shifts in how spectators receive their films, or moving images, are of distinct significance for queer scholars.

It was arguably precursors of such shifts that led to the do-it-yourself practices of the group of filmmakers that B. Ruby Rich legendarily identified as the new queer cinema. This movement was made possible at least in part through the burgeoning LGBTQ film festival milieu of the 1980s and the increasingly fractured VHS market, then in its death throes. As the independent films flourished, queer filmmakers free of the constraints of Hollywood studios' stodgy gatekeepers could tell their own stories, through their own lenses. While this was precisely the independent outbreak Russo was calling for in *The Celluloid Closet*, these films had little to do with the positive images he was earnestly requesting.[13] Among its many outcomes has been our author Jonathan Goldberg's permission, two decades later, to torpedo the entire battleship of post-Stonewall "positive image" criticism of Hitchcock in his 2012 QFC volume *Strangers on a Train*.

But while new queer cinema films like *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992) and *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994) seemed to buck the very idea that queer filmmakers were trying to please anyone, queer filmmakers and scholars were often asking crucial questions: What impact were alternative, independent queer images having on the mainstream? Was Hollywood beginning to wake up to the fact that Miramax could make serious amounts of profit from small, no-budget films? The question was always hanging over *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991): How would Tinseltown react? Would it be willing to bankroll queer-themed films after all? What effect would all this have on popular culture? And did we invest all that energy in the new queer cinema phenomenon just so we could have *In and Out* (Frank Oz, 1997) and *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998–2006)?

But the huge shifts in technology with which we are all too familiar have now complicated those premature debates immeasurably. As the boutique studios that Miramax inspired have been shut down by their corporate owners, as so much of the vibrant queer talent from the 1980s and 1990s has migrated to television—including Todd Haynes, Laurie Lynd, Lizzie Borden, Jeremy Podeswa, Patricia Rozema, Rose Troche, and Mike White (three of those being Canadians—tellingly once more?—refugees from our state-funded "minor" cinema?)—the three-channel universe we knew in the 1970s has morphed into a fifty-thousand-channel landscape packed with seemingly endless, if not inanely repetitive, possibility. Print media that used to celebrate and champion queer artists are now vanishing, with papers folding—especially alternative weeklies, which held a crucial place in bolstering awareness of all things

13 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

queer, including cinema—replaced by a disparate combination of Facebook pages, the Twittersphere, and unpaid and uneven blog-style writing swamping us from all directions. Indeed, the relatively new platform of the Internet means an unprecedented splintering of the audience. Warhol's maxim of everyone being famous for fifteen minutes has been updated: everyone will now be famous, but only among fifteen people.[14] The very business models that created and sustained Hollywood and the film industry—as well as the music, porn, and magazine and newspaper industries—are collapsing, one by one, and what's left on the other end, what replaces them, if anything, is still entirely unclear. Profit drove the mainstream, and if there's no profit to be had, producers and studios will no longer be willing to fund it in the first place. Is crowd funding the answer that it seems to be?

So how do we fix a queer eye on a cinema and media culture that is splintered and marginalized, when what we once referred to as the mainstream, or popular culture, no longer exists in the tangible forms it once did? Movies are plentiful all over the Internet, and we are immersed in a cultural space where it could be argued that every audience is in fact marginalized. Even pornography studies, an absolutely essential endeavor for us, which only a decade ago seemed a cutting-edge subfield for queer film and media studies, now faces this challenge. The DVD market that allowed textual analysis is now drying up; the most interesting new queer work in this subfield is by a heterosexual Finnish woman focusing mostly on US e-mail porn spam and hetero gonzo websites.[15] Another Warholism seems pertinent: if there is one thing that joins us, it is huge tragedy or cataclysm, like 9/11 or a tsunami. But an increasingly fragmented news media apparatus splinters even collective experiences, something our friends in journalism and in journalism scholarship are also wringing their hands over.

Confronting this crisis is one among many intriguing paths that future film and media studies will have to follow: but especially queer studies, insofar as much of our subdiscipline emerged from sociological readings of culture and of mass audience reception, together with their hitherto axiomatic binaries of mainstream and margins, straight and gay, art and commerce. Our methods and theories must reflect this volatility of our objects and corpuses, and remain as eclectic, incoherent, and promiscuous as they are. But as we embrace the postcinema, postpaper, postbinary future, let's also keep our heritage DVDs and our slim monographs in our hairy, sweaty palms and join the bums in seats in the darkened archive screening room. Let copulation thrive! ✻

14 Momus, "pop stars? nein danke! In the future everyone shall be famous for fifteen people . . ." Grimsby Fishmarket, originally published 1991, archived from the original on September 27, 2008, http://web.archive.org/web/20080927023401/http://imomus.com/index499.html.

15 Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

Queer Television Studies: Currents, Flows, and (Main)streams

by Lynne Joyrich

At a recent workshop at the 2013 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, a number of scholars discussed "queer television studies today," focusing particularly on the intrinsic tensions in inhabiting a location, as the workshop title put it, "Between the Queer and the Mainstream." Elaborating the terms of this tension, Julia Himberg and I, as workshop co-organizers, stated:

> Despite pronouncements of the "death" of TV . . . television continues to be a crucial part of the media landscape. Indeed, television remains the most popular medium, with viewers—including, of course, queer and other "minoritarian" viewers—spending more hours watching television than they do engaging with any other form (even if they now do so on various kinds of screens in various locations). Yet for this reason, TV has maintained its place as the most "mainstream" of US media institutions, dominated by programming and advertising designed for mass audiences. It is also for this reason that TV has had an intensely political history; as a domestic medium, located in the home, it has long provoked concerns about its influence on politics, social dynamics, and cultural values as well as its impact on the more minute politics of everyday life, personal relations, and intimate relationships. For queer media scholars, television thus presents a unique object of study. As a "mainstream" medium, TV tends to reflect, refract, and produce dominant ideologies, which tend to be the focus of television studies. Queer studies, in contrast, are committed to challenging and troubling ideological norms, offering powerful sites of cultural and political resistance. Queer television studies then produce a tension between the articulation of the mainstream and the unsettling of the mainstream, both framing and displacing a televisual logic as it attempts to take queer viewers, texts, and issues into account even as it aims to undermine TV's usual accounting. [We] will focus on this tension and its implications for

> contemporary scholarship, generating a conversation about the current and future possibilities of this field of study.[1]

In other words, what motivated this conversation are the inherent paradoxes of queer television studies that emerge from the simultaneously constitutive but countermanding position of "the mainstream" in this nexus. Indeed, it is just such unavoidable—yet, I hope, enabling—contradictions that I would like to explore further here.

Television has, for decades, been taken as the very determinant of the mainstream, and it is still typically seen as the most ordinary, everyday, and commonplace of our media forms. Conversely, *queer* is defined precisely as the subversion of the ordinary, as the strange, the irregular, which would seem to necessitate some sort of disruption to "our regularly scheduled programming." Does this then make the very notion of queer television—and, perhaps by extension, queer television studies—impossible, or does it make this nexus particularly productive, since this combination is itself defined in and as contradiction, thus making it necessarily queer? Might that implicit queerness then help to explain some of the shifts in TV, including the shift toward incorporating more LGBT characters? Or is that the very opposite of "queer" because it indicates only assimilation (those LGBT folks framed for tolerance and inclusion)—only an acceptance of the status quo; only a logic of, precisely, "incorporation" that profits media corporations and brands, not those who historically have been branded for their corporeal acts? In summary, when LGBT folks "make it" on television, streamed into the dominant currents within televisual flow, are they no longer quite queer, that "mainstreaming" undoing the force of disruption and negativity that makes "queerness" to begin with?[2]

This argument about the fatal compromising of queer negativity as LGBT subjects become integrated into the televisual mainstream may seem (sadly) quite convincing. Yet before going too far with it, it is useful to remember that, for television, the label "mainstream" has been a source of aspersion, not approval. It is this that has marked TV as banal, lacking both the stature of cinema and the sexiness of new digital forms. According to well-worn images, we put the TV set on because it's there, even if we don't do it with much excitement: we tolerate what's on as much as ask for tolerance from it, slumping in front of the set as antisocial couch potatoes who simply go with the flow—the mainstream current—rather than gearing up for a night out socializing (like dinner and a movie) or even for the social networking we do online. Television's mainstream—or as it's often disparaged, "lamestream"—status has thus, in a curious

1 Julia Himberg and Lynne Joyrich, "Between the Queer and the Mainstream: Queer Television Studies Today" (workshop proposal for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Chicago, March 9, 2013). The workshop scholars included F. Hollis Griffin, Julia Himberg, Amy Villarejo, and Joseph Wlodarz. I would like to thank them for their provocative remarks and their very productive work in queer television studies. I would also like to thank all those who attended and participated in the workshop, thus allowing for a very stimulating discussion.

2 I use the phrase "make it" to TV with an eye toward *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970–1977), which assured us through its theme song that single gals like Mary could "make it after all." As that example suggests, the notion of making it to and on TV yields its own paradoxes, as it articulates the goal of individual advancement within the terms of neoliberal culture while also reminding us that such advancement is not quite individual, depending as it does on the affective bonds of what might be seen as some rather "queer" groupings.

reversal, worked as a badge of disdain and dismissal, yielding a kind of TV bashing that perhaps curiously aligns it with other bashed subjects.[3]

Of course, many would state that these are old, retrograde images, and it is no longer the case that TV can be so readily dismissed, rejected as a dull and disposable waste of (prime)time. Today, television is much more interesting (or, maybe more accurately, publicly acknowledged as interesting)—more intriguing in its concepts and politics, complex in its story structure and visuals, multiple in its address and mediations.[4] Thus, at the same time that more queers are making it to television, television itself is being remade, some might say, as more queer: more eccentric and playful, more connective and transformative, with more stand-out strangeness than just stand-up straightness. Yet those textualities and sexualities need not—in fact, often do not—go together in quite that way. That is, the point that some televisual forms may be becoming, in a sense, more queered doesn't necessarily mean that more queers appear in them—that *queering* as a verb (the process of playing, transforming, and making strange) lines up with *queer* as a noun (identifying people who are "recognizably" LGBT). Indeed, usually such recognizable characters are in the most ordinary of texts (a domestic sitcom, a sex-crime-filled police procedural, a fashion advice or competition show), whereas more unconventional, complex, and variously "fantastic" texts often have (and precisely because of that unconventionality, complexity, and fantasy) a dearth of characters who are "identifiable" through the terms and types that we commonly use as categories of recognition. Thus, we find ourselves back to the demand for more gay characters and plotlines and then back to the critique of the conformity of that goal, and on and on, in a sort of vicious circle (with the demand for "negativity" now being a positive requirement in queer theory and politics, and the demand for "positive" representation now being treated as a negative, until these poles—both oversimple, I'd say—recall, reverse, and repeat each other again and again).

Does this, then, just short-circuit the current of queer television studies? Or rather than a dead end, might this be seen as a matrix of generative productivity? Of course, the very notion of a generative productivity is one that must be treated carefully and with critique—a point that both queer theory and television theory have taught us. Much scholarship in television studies has discussed how TV's ongoing textuality is necessarily based on a kind of endless generative productivity (whether a text generates story lines via series' internal repetitions or serials' expanding reverberations)—a productivity designed to yield profit for networks even as it also yields pleasure for

3 The varied disparagements of television are too numerous to cite but intriguingly include right-wing talk radio and TV programs, which have popularized the term *lamestream media* and often aligned it with what they label "a homosexual agenda."

4 An example of a scholarly argument regarding the complexity of current TV is Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming), available in progress in a prepublication 2012–2013 edition from MediaCommons Press, at http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/mcpress/complextelevision/. For an analysis of television's status (and the changes therein), see Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (New York: Routledge, 2012). For an argument in the popular press, see Emily Nussbaum, "When TV Became Art," *New York Magazine*, December 4, 2009, http://nymag.com/arts/all/aughts/62513/index1.html.

viewers.[5] Queer (and, I'd add, feminist) theory has its own critique of this kind of "generation," interrogating not only how it ties pleasure to capital and domestic relations to exploitative exchanges but also, even more central in queer theory today, how it implies an entire logic of "reproductive futurism"—a logic of linearity that can only "breed" a heteronormative (or homonormative) vision centered on the privileged figure of the Child.[6] Given television's narrative and economic reliance on futurity and on "reproducing" itself—on spurring ever more textual production so as to incite ever more viewing and consuming, with television's endless worlds perpetuating television itself as a world without end—it is important to think about how this implicates TV (not to mention the TV viewer, also often figured as child, infantilized by television consumption).

Yet while television is certainly based institutionally on certain modes of both reproduction and futurity (in its production not only of plots and profits but also, importantly, of such new "offspring" as spin-offs, tie-in merchandising, digital media content, and so on), these come together in unique ways. Indeed, televisual temporality and narrativity hardly adhere to a linear model of simply positive progression. Rather, television operates via restarts and reversals, iterations and involutions, branchings and braidings. Its imaginary is thus one of futurity without direct forward thinking, involving propagation without necessarily measurable progress and generation without necessarily clear continuity. Thus, with both problems and potential, TV offers a model of proliferation—of multiplications, hybridizations, disseminations—beyond and besides teleological, Oedipal conceptions of a linear track from past to future. Just, then, as queer theory helps us to interrogate television (with its typically still-overly-simplistic binary categories of "gay-straight," "masculine-feminine," "normal-abnormal," "us-them," and so on), might television help us think outside the binaries of queer theory itself—binaries like those of being (or criticized as being) too straight-forward-looking or too stuck in the past, too focused on the positive or too mired in negativity, too mainstream or too oppositional, too socialized or too antisocial, too commonsensical or too dismissive of the commons? In other words, can the odd operations of televisual logic—even if this logic is harnessed to the mainstream—give us hints about a queer logic, thus letting us think through the collisions and contradictions of "queer TV" in new ways?

I hope that this strikes readers as a stimulating—if still rather vague—prospect. So, to make this a bit more concrete, let me turn to one TV text to consider: *The New Normal* (NBC, 2012–2013). This is a text located exactly at the crossing of the queer and the mainstream, the convergence of gay characters and straight-up television tradition, the connection (and clash) of reproductive futurism and the "no future" arguably inherent in old-school, repetitive sitcom form. Indeed, that generic TV form depends on a regular return to the defining situation, thus constituting an iterative practice that, with whatever hijinks, hilarities, and even relative changes to the character group

5 For foundational work that theorizes series' repetition and serial continuity, see Jane Feuer, "Narrative Form in American Network Television," in *High Theory / Low Culture*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 101–114; Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 138–160.

6 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

ensue in weekly episodes, impedes the possibility of straight-forward, linear futurity. Of course, one might argue that *The New Normal* breaks with the traditional reset-to-zero sitcom structure, given the change that distinguishes this narrative: the program's premise demanded that the characters prepare for a baby to be born, and then the series ended (the network canceled it, which some saw as untimely and others as only too perfectly timed) in the season finale with that birth. But should this necessarily be seen as a genre-shifting change? After all, this sitcom has always been about family (like, paradigmatically, all sitcoms, whether they focus on a biological family, an extended family, or a family of friends or colleagues), with, therefore, family enactment and/or expansion already characterizing the program through the familial relationship that the gay male couple establishes with their "surrogate mother," her child, and assorted other family members, friends, and coworkers.

It is this televisual repetition and/or revision of the meaning of family that, as stated earlier, puts this series right at the intersection of the queer and the mainstream—though, in many assessments, the program stands at these crossroads in the worst way. As Alex Doty wrote of the similarly "liberal" gay-inclusionary shows *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009–present) and *Glee* (Fox, 2009–present), such programs "put the normative back into their homo(s)," highlighting "'good' gays who keep their 'place at the table' by striving to be just like their straight middle class counterparts, living in a monogamous relationship and building up a (mildly dysfunctional) family."[7] This is one marked as "good" in *The New Normal* precisely by its spot-on mimicry of the standard heterosexual-sitcom-textual model with the proper class, race, and gender enactments that allow the family to present itself as "just like everyone else's"—by, of course, actually contrasting that family to less privileged others.[8] While Bryan (Andrew Rannells) and David (Justin Bartha) maintain a standard "girly" versus "boyish" gendered polarity (made evident not only in many of the series' jokes but even in its promotional image, in which David is pictured shaving while Bryan is doing his hair), they are marked as deserving parents precisely through their contrast to the heterosexual yet "hick" and "white trash" failed couple of Goldie (the "surrogate mother" for Bryan and David's baby, played by Georgia King) and her cheating husband Clay Clemmons (Jayson Blair). Rounding out *The New Normal* family is Goldie's daughter Shania (Bebe Wood), who is sophisticated beyond what her age—and, the program suggests, her class and region as well—would lead us to expect; Goldie's clichéd, bigoted, conservative grandmother Jane (Ellen Barkin); and Rocky Rhoades (NeNe Leakes), who works with Bryan on his diegetic (and reflexive in-joke *Glee* reference) TV show *Sing*. The function of the latter two characters, in terms of the program's positioning of the white, upper-middle-class, gay, "normal" couple is interesting: given her excessively

7 Alexander Doty, "*Modern Family*, *Glee*, and the Limits of Television Liberalism," *FlowTV* 12, no. 9 (September 24, 2010), http://flowtv.org/2010/09/modern-family-glee-and-limits-of-tv-liberalism. This is only one of the much-missed Alex Doty's pieces in queer TV studies, a field he helped formulate in such books as *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) and the collection he coedited with Cory Creekmur, *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

8 For one of many critiques of *The New Normal*'s homonormativity, see Russell Saunders, "'The New Normal'—Trying to Prove Rupert Everett Right," *The League of Ordinary Gentlemen* (blog), September 26, 2012, http://ordinary-gentlemen.com/russellsaunders/2012/09/the-new-normal-trying-to-prove-rupert-everett-right/.

offensive quips, Jane serves as a site for locating (and condemning) racism and homophobia, thus inoculating the program as a whole from the critique that it is racist and sexually normative. Meanwhile, as the "sassy friend," the African American Rocky is located in the place typically given to gay male characters on TV, thus again allowing the program both to maintain and yet disavow that sexist and racist trope as well.

Given these characters and characteristics, *The New Normal* may not seem like a very promising example of a text from which queer theory (or TV theory, for that matter) can learn anything, as it seems so banal, so assimilationist, so obsessed with familial reproduction, so positively "normal." But it's exactly that supreme—even extreme—normality, that obsession with normalness, that I find intriguing. In fact, I'm intrigued by all Ryan Murphy programs—or, more precisely, those that are discussed under the sign of his name, as perhaps today's most successful gay television screenwriter, director, and producer.[9] For if TV textuality generally rejects linearity for other kinds of narrative forms (repetitive, interruptive, cyclical, branching), what seems to me to be most interesting about Ryan Murphy productions is that they almost eschew narrative entirely. Thus, they are commonly critiqued for having no clear character consistency or development; for going all over the place, with no logical motivation; for being all shock and no story; and, in general, for making no sense in terms of narrative credibility.[10] I would not dispute such descriptions—but I also see them as being beside the point, since to me what these programs enact is precisely obsession, not narrative; obvious fantasy, not realist recounting; fetishistic fixations, not coherent plot movement (and, interestingly, a wide range of obsessions, fantasies, and fetishes). So, whether there is utopian fantasy (a kind of obsession with positivity, as in *Glee* and *The Glee Project* [Oxygen, 2011–2012]) or dystopian fantasy (obsessions with negativity, as in *Nip/Tuck* [F/X, 2003–2010] or, most of all, *American Horror Story* [F/X, 2011–], with its truly remarkable excesses and lacks), what we have is a different (dare I say "queer"?) model of "not nonnarrative but not properly narrative either" television programming.

However normative in name, *The New Normal* might be seen as adhering to this "not right–not quite" model as well. That is, like those other Ryan Murphy Productions texts, it is equally a performance of obsession—one that is revealed to be both utopian and dystopian as normality itself becomes a fetish, an excessive fantasy staging rather than a position of narrative coherency or viewer stability. Potentially (though, I'd stress, this is only a potentiality, dependent on viewer receptions as much as, if not more than, authorially performative productions), the mainstream itself might be thus realized, re-viewed, or remade as "queer." This does not mean simply that queers can enter that arena and be included (an entrance that then just yields its own no exit);

9 *The New Normal* was cocreated by Allison Adler and Ryan Murphy and coproduced through each of their production companies (along with 20th Century Fox Television), but discussions of it almost always refer to it as "Murphy's" program (with, certainly, gendered implications). Perhaps this is why Adler's production company is called Ali Adler Is Here Productions—to remind viewers and critics of this very fact.

10 Typical is a comment posted on EW.com: "The problem is Ryan Murphy. He's just not a good showrunner. He doesn't care about consistent characters, continuity, and storylines." Comment by "Crispy" in response to Tim Stack, "'Glee' scoop: Ryan Murphy reveals season 3 secrets, talks 'The Glee Project' winner," *Inside TV*, June 22, 2012, http://insidetv.ew.com/2011/06/22/glee-scoop-ryan-murphy/.

rather, it means that the whole thing is exposed precisely as an arena act—one that is both overly familiar and narratively estranged, social and antisocial in its narcissistic niche, exaggeratedly positive but with alienating negativity in the way it makes a fantastical fetish out of the boringly banal.

Does that really undo the terms of the system—or, to go back to the notion of the mainstream, reroute the current? No. Obviously, the program is troubling in a great many ways (not least of which, again, is its entire story premise of the desire for reproductive futurity). But that defines its plot, not its presentation, which, I'm suggesting, goes even beyond the usual sitcommish "no future," so as to dispense with narrative coherency for full obsessional fantasy. Further, that structural obsession then enables various other obsessions to surface within the diegesis—some alarming, some appealing. Most interesting to me is the actual child character, Shania, who—beyond any narrative justification—is steeped in queer cultural references, affect, and affiliation, performing this in ways that seem to emerge from nowhere, throw others for a loop, and afford her a certain transformational power (as in her amazing assumption of a "Little Edie" persona in one episode).[11] This might be only a "little" thing, but it does suggest that the televisual mainstream is less a "principal course" (as one definition of *mainstream* has it), a just-dominant current (like a river), and maybe more the kind of electrical current that can still give us a jolt. It's the ambivalence, though, of how queerness can be both the electrical spark and the grounding against any possible shock that remains the paradox and the problem—indeed, I'd argue, *the* problematic—for queer television studies today.[12] *

11 This, of course, is a reference to the queer cult classic *Grey Gardens*, the 1975 documentary by Albert Maysles and David Maysles (with Ellen Hovde and Muffie Meyer) focused on the reclusive mother-daughter team of "Big Edie," Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale, and "Little Edie," Edith Bouvier Beale, in their fabulously decaying mansion Grey Gardens. *The New Normal* includes its references to *Grey Gardens* in episode 2, "Sofa's Choice" (originally aired September 11, 2012), with that episode's play in its title on yet another film—*Sophie's Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, 1982)—revealing the other, deeply problematic side, of the program's cinematic references.

12 For an analysis of TV's "logic of creation/cancellation" in both producing and managing shock, see Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

Queer Recalibration

by Quinn Miller

Two songs come to mind when I think about queer methods. Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You" (on the album *Blue*, 1971) and Wilco's "Sunken Treasure" (on the album *Being There*, 1996) delve into the queer quality of the medium I think about most: television. In these songs, the iconic blue light of television emission represents everyday antinormativity, the basis of queer difference. In the Jeff Tweedy–penned "Sunken Treasure," the blue glow from the set "run[s] parallel" to the inner wavelength of a protagonist named and "tamed" by culture, in this case by rock and roll, perhaps instead of by parents or a spouse. In Mitchell's piece, also, television's blue light, an immersive and melancholy referent of televisual simultaneity, transmits the artist's empowered detachment from traditional family norms. Like Tweedy's refrain of being "so out of tune," Mitchell's contemplation of identity over a "cartoon coaster" in the semipublic, semiprivate space of a bar figures "blue TV screen light" as the quintessential backdrop for queer experiments with perception, and for movement—evident throughout *Blue* and *Being There*—from decorum to the counterpublic.[1]

In the context of my research, the "blue" character of television expresses the haze of institutionalized gender and sexual normativity. A prime site of hegemonic struggle, television often figures into artistic renderings of radical disaffection from bourgeois sensibilities. As a camp critic obsessed with questions of legitimacy, and one whose varying forms of LGBT experience have consistently been inflected by queer affects of and drives toward unintelligibility, I use queer methods to reveal noise, akin to the sonic dissonance in the Wilco and Mitchell songs, within a particular archive of industrially authored art. Through research into comedy of the early TV era, I've developed strategies for using obscure "meta" critique within television texts to access and redeploy anti-queerphobic interpretive contexts from the post–World War II US archive. These methods evolve out of my intersectional reworking of historical accounts by scholars like George Chauncey, Joanne Meyerwitz, Lynn Spigel, Bret L. Abrams, Daniel Hurewitz, Vincent Brook, Herman Gray, Sasha Torres, John Howard, Susan Stryker, Victoria Johnson, Jonathan Gray, Sean Griffin, Shaun Cole, and Susan Sontag. My methods show, among other things, that

1 As Michael Warner has argued, media circulation routinely facilitates oppositional forms of self-invention. *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

TV is much queerer than people generally recognize. Although television appears to epitomize the mainstream, it also aestheticizes antisocial agitation, circulating what Juan A. Suárez refers to, in *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*, as the profound static of camp textuality, a queer phenomenon whose contours—unlike various actions on the side of media reception—academics have yet to map.[2]

Television comedy history provides a distinct reference point for the small screen's "blue" atmosphere beyond the aura of betrayal many outsiders experience in relation to TV. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, commercial artists working in the television industry synthesized bold, "off-color" queer humor from radio, theater, print, and a range of ethnic performance traditions, repackaging it for a new medium as the major players in government and finance fought, as corruptly as ever, for power in the conventional sense. The intellectual history of camp proliferated as artists working first in New York City and then in Los Angeles began to experiment with the unfamiliar canvases, palettes, platforms, genres, modes, and production contexts that newly accessible TV technology presented. Material known as blue humor (and by other euphemisms) to censors, gatekeepers, and critics indicates an alternate history "running parallel," as Tweedy sings, to the "megatext" of misrepresentation that is television.[3] Over the course of the postwar period, the US television industry attempted to replace popular comedians loved for their sexually risqué, ethnically diverse, working-class, gender-variant, and vaudeville-inspired approaches to production with white, upper-middle-class nuclear families and normative gender roles. Camp thrived within this ongoing cultural conflict, preserving, post-standardization, traces of the rebellious erotic and intellectual energy that fueled TV comedy initially. Queer sensibilities inhered in popular representational systems as "the terms of the cultural field through which homosexuality is habitually lived and understood" changed.[4]

Attention to sitcom form and the content of sitcom programming demonstrates that camp and queer representation were central to the routine process of sitcom production in the 1950s and 1960s. As Paul Attallah has explained, sitcoms are founded on "the encounter of dissonant or incompatible discursive hierarchies," which collide and scramble together within the minutia of sitcom texts.[5] As producers established the genre discourse of sitcoms, they elaborated gender and sexual nonconformities in most characters. Seemingly conventional characters commonly emerged as an assemblage of idiosyncrasies. Any character could, at times, channel the reflexive insights of writers and crew. Within the general queerness of the sitcom diegesis, or what Horace Newcomb calls each sitcom's "particular way of ordering and defining the world" according to an "unreal," or "special," sense of reality, sitcoms generate characters that

2 Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 117.

3 Nick Browne defines the television "megatext" as the sum total of all TV content. "The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no. 3 (1984): 174–182.

4 Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 14–15.

5 Paul Attallah, "The Unworthy Discourse: Situation Comedy in Television," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 105.

reject the norms from which they spring. The people who crafted sitcoms as part of an industrially organized, assembly-line-style collective often used a range of unselfconsciously unconventional and exceedingly extreme characters to explore the experience of being out of sync, in a discursive sense, with social hierarchies and the very concept of social static in the abstract.

With these conventions, sitcoms hyperbolize miscommunication. The medium tends toward Dadaistic formal riffs combining tableau vivant with *mise en abyme*. Characters speak—as if to one another—but what they articulate are their abstract differences from one another and the conflicting planes of signification they inhabit. In an episode of Ellen DeGeneres's second sitcom vehicle *The Ellen Show* (CBS, 2001–2002) titled "Vanity Hair" (October 12, 2001), the producers cultivate a comic scenario in which DeGeneres's character can self-reflexively comment to her mother, Dot (Cloris Leachman), "It's almost like we're having two separate conversations." This line at once represents the sentiment of a fictional character and the repercussions of censorship. It not only resonates as a potential punch line for any number of other characters, conversations, and ongoing "situations" within and beyond this series text but also collapses distinctions between form and content in a way that represents both sitcoms as a whole and this specific sitcom moment. Satirizing feel-good directives to "be yourself," "Vanity Hair" makes copious references to the contextual specificity of queer craft (cameo: Herb Ritts) within various regimes of normativity operative in show business. To instigate the exchange in question, Dot directs Ellen to observe the "workmanship" of a plastic version of kung pao pork and other window-display Chinese-food items she purchased, through dialogue invoking camp relations to consumer culture and that blue history of queer irreverence to TV. "Vanity Hair" contains a highly displaced thread comparing television labor to sex work in addition to its implicit allegory for the disparaged field of sitcom production maintained by the series' premise: Ellen is demoted from a "hot-shot" LA dot-commer to the naive and at times much-maligned guidance counselor at a public school in middle America.

Countless sitcoms use the culture industries' vast repertoire of self-reflexive techniques to represent discursive conflict, particularly around taste and class, through mise-en-scène and performance as well as through the poetics of plot and dialogue. The standardized "eccentric" characterization, dictated by sitcom production manuals and industry norms, invariably demonstrates the pleasures, power, and artistic rewards that make queer life worth social disadvantage and discrimination. The appeal of queer life is embedded in most of the post–World War II era telefilm texts that I teach, many of which demonstrate an understanding of the Cold War assimilation discourses around gender, sexuality, race, nationality, ethnicity, and ability that precipitated their production as potentially profitable properties. Amid the conservative representation of "women drivers" in "Jane's Driving Lesson" (January 20, 1963), an episode of *The Jetsons* (ABC, 1962–1963), and "Driving Is the Only Way to Fly" (March 25, 1965), a 1965 episode of *Bewitched* (ABC, 1964–1972), producers contested the foundations of US patriarchal dominance. With their respective gender-queer driving instructor characters, Mr. Tweeter and Harold Harold (Paul Lynde), the carsick bank-robber character of "Jane's Driving Lesson" and Agnes Moorehead's diva Endora, a backseat driver in "Driving Is the Only Way to Fly," these episodes broadly ridiculed,

in a camp mode, what Sue-Ellen Case calls, in an article theorizing "butch-femme aesthetics," "the ruling powers of heterosexist realist modes."[6]

The aesthetics of queer characterization play out across oeuvres and across media, as well as within texts. I study sitcoms because, high or low, they excel in intertextual modes of queer production. In sitcoms, casts of characters, which are collectively executed by teams of producers, circulate queer culture in forms that elude assimilation, doing so in a satirical manner exemplified by Scott Thompson's Buddy Cole character in *The Kids in the Hall* (CBC, 1988–1994) and Damon Wayans and David Alan Grier's Blaine Edwards and Antoine Merriweather of *In Living Color*'s "Men on . . ." sketches (FOX, 1990–1994). Self-referential series, which channel the ways in which producers may feel out of sync with their line of work and with one another, present a fascinating archive for scholars interested in comparative work across the camp TV of fluff sitcoms and other forms of (queer) avant-garde television, ranging from *An American Family* (PBS, 1973) and talk-TV protests to Andy Warhol one-offs and Whitney Houston videos.

To recognize and preserve the queer and gender queer histories that emerge from within the media industries, we need expansive rubrics through which we can conceive of television camp as art within an oppositional framework. Media environments, with their publics and counterpublics, sustain queer culture at particularly complex planes of representation. To excavate what Anna McCarthy calls the ambivalent "homo heaven" of TV history and to recover, within the "encoding" stage of telecommunications, what Alexander Doty has theorized as "contra-straight" forms of textual engagement, we must counter classifications common in media studies.[7] Research across generic differences assumed to delineate cinema, television, print, music, design, and advertising complements research that cuts across those dichotomies that queer praxis seeks to trouble, including citizen-foreigner, cis-trans, white-racialized, male-female, straight-gay, able-disabled, and married-single. Primary texts serve as scaffolding for a broader array of intertexts, paratexts, extratexts, and auxiliary texts that, in drawing out cross-pollinations and meanings that exceed standardization, draw out the networks of meaning within which representation comes to life in its queerest manifestations.

In spite of TV's rich queer history, scholars routinely suggest that queer media studies hits a dead end with television. In the 2006 roundtable on queer film and media pedagogy in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Roy Grundmann calls TV "a leveler of identity, not a diversifier."[8] "Its putative queerness," he argues, "is always already the product of nonqueer interests." While Dana Heller's 2011 review essay for *GLQ*, "Visibility and Its Discontents: Queer Television Studies," helpfully critiques the ways in which queer research in television studies confines itself with assumptions about what queer TV studies entails, it also transfers blame from academics to TV

6 Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Harry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 298.

7 Anna McCarthy, "Ellen: Making Queer Television History," *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 615; Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 83.

8 Michael Bronski, Terri Ginsberg, Roy Grundmann, Kara Keeling, Liora Moriel, Yasmin Nair, and Kirsten Moana Thompson, "Queer Film and Media Pedagogy," *GLQ* 12, no. 1 (2006): 120.

itself, stating that "commercial television . . . does not hold up very well to nuance."[9] Grundmann's and Heller's criticisms may strike a chord with researchers interested only in protagonists, "quality" programming, explicit LGBT content, and respectable role models, but there is a lot more to TV.

Television is not merely a collection of programs within which characters appear as either straight or gay. Television presents its own strange representational system full of logics that defy dominant ideologies of identity and visibility, making it a prime site for what Michael Schiavi calls the "war over queer marginality," the fight to expel queer culture from dominant discourse or to expose its centrality.[10] Scholars have hardly begun to engage the queer qualities of TV texts and industry practices, no doubt because television operates through stylistics foreign to the scholarly repertoire. As Amy Villarejo writes, "Programming responds to imperatives other than those valued by academic taste."[11] In ways yet to be explored, queer culture inheres in programming while remaining impalpable outside of the specialized discursive configurations that proliferate its meanings. To cultivate discursive spaces in which it is possible to apprehend these meanings, we need new approaches to hierarchies of medium, genre, and form—methods of the kind that are currently refiguring the field of cinema and media studies. As part of loose-knit and constantly shifting production units, workers with complex relationships to diverse cultural vanguards have created queer histories within television. Queer methods develop analytic tools calibrated to this work and to the life-as-art work and coalition-based social justice campaigns of generations of marginalized queer producers. Combating one blue history with another, queer methods reconstitute and explore the marginalized queer histories that popular media commonly sustain amid ongoing processes of violence, erasure, and commodification. ✻

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9 Dana Heller, "Visibility and Its Discontents: Queer Television Studies," *GLQ* 17, no. 4 (2011): 675.

10 Michael Schiavi, "Looking for Vito," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 1 (2009): 59.

11 Amy Villarejo, "Ethereal Queer: Notes on Method," in *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, ed. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (New York: Routledge, 2009), 51.

Queer Asian Cinema and Media Studies: From Hybridity to Critical Regionality

by Audrey Yue

Between 2000 and 2008, I, together with Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, and Fran Martin, co-convened the AsiaPacifiQueer (APQ) Network, an Australasian-wide collective of scholars writing in the field of queer and Asian studies. The APQ Network was aimed at facilitating intraregional linkages that arose with the marginalization of Asia-focused queer studies in the academy. It was also related to persistent anxieties about the place of queer studies, geopolitically and academically. In particular, it was aimed at addressing the real academic consequences of the US-centric nature of North American queer studies. As our now-defunct website noted:

> When the world's most richly funded research institutions, the most influential university presses, and the biggest market for English-language publications in the humanities and social sciences are all located within a single nation, a certain skewing of perspectives is probably inevitable. . . . It is possible for North American queer studies scholars to build successful careers while remaining almost completely ignorant of the global diversity of non-Western (and also non-American Western) queer cultures and histories. North American sexual cultures—from subcultural scenes to media products; from gay and lesbian activism to everyday sexual and gendered practices—are presumed to be primary and general while non-American sexual cultures, both Western and non-Western, are framed as particular and secondary.[1]

The APQ Network brought together a growing group of scholars working on sexuality studies in the Asia-Pacific region to challenge this unequal distribution of scholarly and cultural capital by consolidating

1 Asia Pacific Queer Network Website, now defunct, http://apq.anu.edu.au (accessed February 15, 2007). An account of this movement can also be found in the introduction to the coedited collection by the co-convenors Fran Martin, Mark McLelland, Peter Jackson, and Audrey Yue, eds., *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 1–27.

a distinct intellectual movement. Its aim was to strategically confront these multiple exclusions in collective attempts to inscribe queer studies within Asian studies and to locate Asia, and the non-West, within cultural and media studies. We used a variety of approaches. To build networks among often-isolated queer Asian studies researchers, we organized dedicated APQ conferences and convened APQ streams of panels within Asian studies, cultural studies, and Western queer studies conferences. These were held in Brisbane (2001), Melbourne (2002), Singapore (2003), London (2004), Bangkok (2005), Sydney (2007), and Shanghai (2008). In 2008, these interventions resulted in and coincided with the inception of the Queer Asian series by Hong Kong University Press (with Jackson one its four editors). My essay here critically surveys the distinct intellectual traditions of this movement and considers their impacts on the emergent field of queer Asian cinema and media studies.

In the past decade, queer Asian cinema and media studies have emerged in and through the intersections of multiple social, cultural, and intellectual forces. The rise of social movements organized around emancipatory rights and queer film festivals, the new infrastructures of the creative industries that have inadvertently incubated queer media business and sexual cultures, and the arrival of a new generation of media scholars who are equally well versed in Western and non-Western queer theories have contributed to the development of this distinct field.

In this piece, I examine key scholars, paradigms, and sites of inquiry to draw out two overlapping (and not entirely exclusive) research traditions. The first is more textually oriented, focuses on queer hybridity, and aims to de-Westernize, historicize, and archive queer cinema and media cultures; the second takes on a critical regional focus, is more institutionally and empirically oriented, highlights critiques of transnationalism and governmentality, and concerns the tasks of exposing neoliberal complicity and new structures of assimilation. My aim is to critically survey exemplary methods that show the responses of the field to the past decade's development of queer Asian media cultures as they emerge and move from the margins to the mainstream.

With the exceptions of Japan, where homosexuality has been legal since 1880, Taiwan since 1896, and Thailand since 1956, the 1990s saw the spread of the decriminalization of homosexuality in East and South Asia. In 1991, homosexuality was legalized in Hong Kong; by 2001 it was removed as a mental illness in China, and in 2009, it was decriminalized in India. These sexual law reforms heralded new media and cinematic practices that present alternative models to the rights-and-recognition discourse of the West. As I show here, these alternative models are evident in the institutional form (e.g., a mixed economy of commercial and art-house films) and textual narratives (e.g., a hybrid model of both coming out of the closet and "staying in" the biological family). Where queer cinema in the West has its roots in the liberationist movement of emancipation—as well as leftist, avant-garde, and experimental traditions of independent filmmaking—queer Asian cinema rose to prominence in the 1990s with the Japanese gay film festival boom of *Okoge* (Takehiro Nakajima, 1992), the box-office success of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and the critical acclaim

of Wong Kar-wai's Palme d'Or–winning *Happy Together* (1997).[2] Featuring "the visibility of queer subjects," the popularity of these films among queer and mainstream straight audiences in the West and across Asia marks the "very suddenness of Asian film-making's about-face when it comes to homosexual positivity" and "has been arguably more startling than elsewhere in the world."[3] Not surprisingly, this period saw the rise of gay, lesbian, and women's film festivals in Japan (1992), Taiwan (1993), and Hong Kong (1989) and coincided with the arrival of HIV/AIDS nongovernmental organizations, which created a fertile arena for developing queer cultural productions, especially in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, where homosexuality remains illegal.

In 2000, the collection *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade* was published as one of the first attempts to capture this zeitgeist. Although editor Andrew Grossman does not attempt to define "Asia" and uses it as "a temporary term of convenience," he points to how the political economy of global distribution has enabled this group of films to be more successfully marketed as "Asian" rather than as "Indian" or "Japanese." He highlights the paradox of "cinematic orientalism" as a process that identifies these films as "foreign" so they can be exportable to the West.[4] Using examples such as Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) and Shu Kei's *A Queer Story* (1997), he is careful to differentiate between Eurocentric criticism and traditionalist interpretations, and he proposes that these films cannot be situated as either following the narratives of gay liberation or solely rooted in nativist traditions. His method of "bipolar reading" suggests how, despite the fact that plots and influences can be superficially Western or Eastern, these films invite resolutions that are not exclusive either to a universally Western or to a nativist Eastern imagination.[5] Bipolar reading, a critical reading practice that mobilizes the double consciousness of Western and Eastern perspectives, promotes an "internationality/intertextuality" that is key to the modern film medium and global cinema literacy.[6] Grossman's collection canvasses Japan (film censorship, mainstream gay television, 1960s pink films, and 1990s trans cinema), Hong Kong (homosexuality in popular gangster films and cross-dressing in 1940s Cantonese melodrama), China (film consumption of fifth-generation cinema), Korea (emergent queer films), and the Philippines (transvestism). Together the essays examine both the texts and the contexts of their production, as well as the intralocal and cross-cultural circuits of reception, and provide a template for an emergent critical framework and a cinematic archive. This collection not only problematizes the binary between the

2 Ruby B. Rich, "New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound*, September 2, 1992, 30–35; Rich, "Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Public," *GLQ* 5, no. 1 (1999): 79–84. There is no English-language title to the Japanese film *Okoge*. The Japanese title, おこげ, when translated, refers to "scorched." *Okoge* generally means "food," and the term is also slang for "fag hag."

3 Andrew Grossman, "'Beautiful Publicity': An Introduction to Queer Asian Film," in *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade*, ed. Andrew Grossman (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

4 Ibid., 4.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Ibid., 6.

"West" and the "rest"; the critical perspectives introduced here also seek to decenter sexualities by accounting for the "material and metaphorical geographies of sexualities" in nonmetropolitan spaces that are linked by complex and diverse relationships of differences, power structures, and histories.[7] Significant here is also the critique of dominant modes of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

The Wedding Banquet became a palimpsest text for what can be described as "the Wedding Banquet effect" to refer to a new theoretical framework for an alternative sexual identity model that does not follow the post-Stonewall narrative of coming out and leaving the blood family.[8] The film's plot of not initially fully disclosing one's homosexuality and then slowly negotiating it within the blood family provides a different trajectory for the articulation and recognition of same-sex identity. Chris Berry, in *A Bit on the Side*, discerns a practice in which "coming out" is also accompanied by the process of joining in the blood family.[9] Rather than a homosexual identity development model in which the speech act of coming out marks the transition of homosexual identity from confusion to clarity, this practice, characterized instead by reticence and constant negotiation, has come to distinguish one key tenet of queer Asian media studies in which narrative plots of homosexual identity disclosure are always accompanied by critical analyses that also evaluate transformations to the biological family.[10] Auteur studies demonstrating this approach include scholarship by Fran Martin, Song Hwee Lim, David Eng, Helen Leung, and myself, on the queer Taiwanese cinema of Tsai Ming-liang, popular Hong Kong films including the work of Wong Kar-wai and Stanley Kwan, and the independent and experimental queer films of Chinese sixth-generation filmmaker Cui Zi'en.[11]

The theoretical optic of rereading tropes of coming out and reconfiguring the family has also prompted queer Asian media scholars to coin the concept of "queerscape." Appropriating Appadurai's influential discussion of scapes to describe the cultural imaginary of disjunctive globalization, the Asian queerscape is an attempt to delineate a regional culture as well as outline a critical regionality framework. As a regional

7 Richard Philips and Diane Watt, introduction to *De-Centring Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond the Metropolis*, ed. Richard Philips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

8 The post-Stonewall identity-as-ethnicity model of coming out is discussed by Alan Sinfield in "Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and the Ethnicity Model," *Textual Practice* 10, no. 2 (1996): 271–293.

9 Chris Berry, *A Bit on the Side: East-West Topographies of Desire* (Sydney: Empress Publishing, 1994). On this alternative model of coming out, see also Chou Wah-Shan, "Homosexuality and the Cultural Politics of Tongzhi in Chinese Societies," *Journal of Homosexuality* 40, nos. 3–4 (2001): 27–46; Chou Wah-Shan, *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2000).

10 Jen-peng Liu and Ding Naifei, "Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 30–55.

11 Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003); Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Chris Berry, "The Sacred, the Profane, and the Domestic in Cui Zi'en's Cinema," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12, no. 1 (2004): 195–201; Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); Audrey Yue, "Mobile Intimacies in the Queer Sinophone Films of Cui Zi'en," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6, no. 1 (2012): 95–108; Yue, "What's So Queer about Happy Together? aka Queer (N)Asian: Interface, Mobility, Belonging," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (2000), 251–264.

culture, the Asian queerscape is a new spatial culture across Asia and its Asian diasporas that have emerged as a result of the multidirectional flows of queer globalization. As critical regionality, the Asian queerscape is a research practice that has emerged as a result of challenging the US-centrism of queer studies and the boundedness of "area" studies. Destabilizing dominant cinematic gender and sexual norms, it draws together two research approaches: (1) the new worlds of queer Asian media cultures created through the globalization of LGBT cultures and (2) the oblique spaces of non-heteronormativity reclaimed and reinvented on the margins of straight (mainstream, official, colonial) spaces.[12]

The former coalesces around a cluster of writings characterized by queer hybridity, a term used loosely to refer to how syncretic practices are produced as a result of the intermingling of nativist and global forces that have come to impact the production of local LGBT cultures. Most manifest here is the introduction of digital media technologies and their capacity to inform new self and group identities. *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, a coedited collection by Chris Berry, Fran Martin, and myself, explores how sites and practices such as the Internet, mobile phones, and the translation technology of dubbing have produced new convergences of local sexual identities.[13] Rather than follow the global queering thesis that suggests the homogenizing sameness of LGBT practices and extending the localization thesis of de-Westernizing media studies, queer hybridity recognizes the third space of incommensurability that has ensued as a result of the East-West cultural mix.[14]

The latter can be said to mobilize "disidentification" as a critical practice for undoing encoded meanings and recoding them for minority empowerment through exposing dominant constructions of heteronormativity, gender, and sexuality.[15] It is most notable in Chinese cultural critiques framed by the concepts of *tongzhi* and the Sinophone. Originally referring to "comrades" in communist China, the term *tongzhi* has been appropriated as a self-identity category to refer to LGBT communities in China and Hong Kong and has become a theoretical engine for generating a prolific body of scholarship on filmic representations of Chinese homosexualities, including the non-heteronormative publics of postcolonial Hong Kong cinema, the queering of Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong media histories, Internet-mediated lesbian communities

12 On the former, see Mark J. McLelland, "Japanese Queerscapes: Global/Local Intersections on the Internet," in *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, ed. Chris Berry, Fran Martin, and Audrey Yue (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 52–69; on the latter, see Helen Hok-sze Leung, "Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 9, no. 2 (2001): 423–447.

13 Berry, Martin, and Yue, *Mobile Cultures*.

14 On global queering, see Dennis Altman, "On Global Queering," *Australian Humanities Review* 2 (1996), http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html; on de-Westernizing media studies, see James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds., *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000); on more theorizations and examples of queer hybridity, see Martin et al., *AsiaPacifiQueer*.

15 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

in Shanghai, and the queer sociality of transnational Chinese popular culture.[16] More recently, the identity politics of *tongzhi* has given way to the critical traction of the Sinophone, a term to refer to a multiaccented visual culture created by geographic regions on the periphery of China.[17] Queer Sinophone cinemas are, as I have previously argued, "[l]ocated in the margins of Chinese heteronormativity . . . and [question] the ontology of kinship and new queer subjectivities that are produced by the global reordering of Chinese modernity."[18] A recent collection by Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich, *Queer Sinophone Cultures*, examines not only the queer cinema of Tsai Ming-liang but also the Sino-centric and heteronormative challenges of Malay, Cantonese, and Singaporean films.[19]

This scholarship covers a range of methods, beginning with formalist film theory, discourse analysis, and semiotic deconstruction, and combining these practices with the cultural materialism of area and queer race studies. It now traverses a multidisciplinary terrain, moving from the textual to the more empirical—including psychoanalysis, affect studies, historiography, audience reception studies, media sociology, and online ethnography. Key to the formation of Asian queerscapes is the force of "minor transnationalism." Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet coined the term *minor transnationalism* to differentiate it from the top-down, usually West-East and one-way centrifugal hegemony of major transnationalism; for them, minor transnationalism refers to the multidirectional, bottom-up forces that have created new spaces of global exchange and participation without the mediation of the center.[20] The regional homoerotic imaginary of inter-Asian Chinese lesbian films and the impact of homosexual media on diasporic and South Asian public cultures exemplify how minor transnationalism not only has destabilized colonial, neocolonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative forces but also has constituted alternative regions of desires.[21] The Queer Asia book series by Hong Kong University Press, established in 2008, demonstrates the emergent strength of this "intellectual traffic."[22] Not only has transnationalism opened up a new historically rigorous approach to imagine queer media cultures and politics that challenge the borders of the nation-states; it has also decentered the West as a geographical region as well as a dominant vantage point for legitimating cinematic practices and

16 Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*; Leung, *Undercurrents*; Yau Ching, ed., *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Lucetta Y. L. Kam, *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); Hongwei Bao, "'Queer Comrades': Transnational Popular Culture, Queer Sociality, and Socialist Legacy," *English Language Notes* 49, no. 1 (2011): 131–138.

17 Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

18 Yue, "Mobile Intimacies," 95.

19 Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich, eds., *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2014).

20 On minor transnationalism, see Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

21 Fran Martin, *Backward Glances: Contemporary Chinese Cultures and the Female Homoerotic Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

22 Travis Kong, cited in "The Queer Asia Book Series Press Release," June 25, 2008, http://www.hkupress.org/Common/Reader/News/ShowNews.jsp?Nid=71&Pid=4&Version=0&Cid=13&Charset=iso-8859-1.

ideologies.[23] Significant here is also a critique of the new structures of governance that have arisen as a result of the reterritorializing force of transnationalism.

For queer Asian cinema and media studies, new structures of cultural governance are evident not only in the supranational regional mediascapes of coproduction and consumption but also in capitalist imaginaries that have reconstituted media markets and sexual identities. While some caution against the neoliberal assimilation of East Asian queers into the global governance of nongovernmental organization affiliations, others attempt to map and unravel the complicity between gay media and commerce.[24] Peter Jackson's 2011 study on queer Bangkok shows how a vernacular queer culture has emerged alongside a rising urban middle class and the mainstreaming of gay and transsexual representations on popular television and in art-house cinema.[25] In Singapore, where homosexuality continues to be criminalized, the government has fetishized the cool industries of gay bohemia as part of the cultural liberalization of the creative economy. From state-funded pan-Asian gay films such as *Rice Rhapsody* (Kenneth Bi, 2004) and the regional success of gay Asian Internet portals such as Fridae to the rise of a subsidized queer art-house genre, an institutionalized queer media culture has arisen.[26] For queer Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore, transnational capitalism has also resulted in new governing structures of renationalization. Like the trend in recent queer theory, rather than celebrating the emancipatory impulse of queer politics, queer Asian media and cinema studies have also begun to interrogate new regimes of governance that are conditioning the shaping of media institutions and sexual futures.

Significant shifts, both academic and political, have taken place in the decade or so between the publication of *De-Centring Sexualities* (2000) and *De-Westernizing Film Studies* (2012), and these shifts have been reflected and enacted in key scholarly trends and critical practices.[27] While neither collection explicitly addresses "Asia," both point to conceptual distinctions reflected in the field of queer Asian media and cinema studies. From inscribing and archiving the subcultural media histories and place-based specificities of alternative sexual identities to engaging and exposing the globality and governmentality of transnational cinemas and sexualities, this interdisciplinary field has complicated local and national flows and has challenged essentialized and Eurocentric traditions in the study of media cultures as aesthetic forms and social practices. Its tools of queer hybridity and critical regionality, and their challenges to kinship structures and neoliberal capitalism, offer a platform for a media future that continues to confront the mainstream assimilation of LGBT cultures and the rise of Asia. ✻

23 These aims are also succinctly positioned in Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee, eds., *De-Westernizing Film Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012).

24 See, e.g., Josephine Ho, "Is Global Governance Bad for East Asian Queers?," *GLQ* 14, no. 4 (2008): 457–479.

25 Peter Jackson, ed., *Queer Bangkok: Twenty-First Century Markets, Media, and Rights* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

26 Audrey Yue, "Queer Singapore: A Critical Introduction," in *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures*, ed. Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 1–25. Fridae's website can be found at http://www.fridae.asia.

27 Philips, Watt, and Shuttleton, *De-Centring Sexualities*; Bâ and Higbee, *De-Westernizing Film Studies.*

Queer OS

by Kara Keeling

From new media's eccentric temporalities and reliance on reading codes to their relationships to ephemera, publics, viruses, music, and subcultures, new media intersect with queer theories in a variety of ways. Scholars working at the interfaces of new media, queer theory, and LGBT studies have produced valuable insights into the roles and usages of new media in creating and sustaining forms of LGBT sociality, experiences, and ways of knowing. Vital scholarship on LGBT and queer cybercultures from a variety of perspectives and compelling descriptions and explorations of the role of new media in LGBT, and queer people's lives, have helped scholars understand the centrality and significance of LGBT participation in new media. Important work on representations of LGBT people in, on, and through new media is ongoing.[1]

Within this scholarly milieu, less attention has been dedicated to the interfaces of new media as they have been theorized through conceptualizations of "the digital," "software," "computation," "manufacturing," "information," and "code," and what currently are perceptible as queer ontologies; theories of queer embodiment and materializations; and other issues, logics, and expressions that comprise queer theory, such as, for example, theories of queer temporality, critiques of homonationalism, and investigations into the relationships of queerness, forms of racialization, and contexts of settler colonialism, among others.

Yet as the opening lines of this brief contribution to an evaluation of contemporary intersections of LGBT studies, queer theory, and cinema and media studies suggest, the materiality, rhetorics, forms, and ontologies of new media readily lend themselves to a theoretical encounter with queer theory that might enliven and enrich both film and media studies and queer theory, thus deepening the capacity of each to attend to the sociopolitical registers of contemporary life.

Existing theoretical scholarship on race and new technologies illustrates that new media scholarship that attends to race also might

1 For a helpful, though not exhaustive, gloss on new media and communications scholarship produced at the intersection of queer and cyber, see Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips, eds., introduction to *Queer Online: Media Technology & Sexuality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). For a consideration of gay participation online, see Ken Hillis, *Online a Lot of the Time: Ritual, Fetish, Sign* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). For an ethnography of queer youth using the Internet in rural settings, see Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

engage with vital and still-generative scholarship happening in queer theory, but it rarely makes an explicitly queer new media studies or technology studies (or even queering new media and/or technology studies) part of its project. Similarly, compelling work on feminism and the cultural logics of new media technologies is suggestive of a direction amenable to a serious engagement with queer theory, but that work rarely substantively stages such an encounter. With this lacuna in mind, in what follows, I offer preliminary thoughts toward a scholarly political project that I call "Queer OS."[2] As I discuss here, scholarship that might be collected under a rubric of "Queer OS" already exists, and provocative and promising work is currently being produced that might contribute to a project at the interfaces of queer theory, new media studies, and technology studies, such as the one I sketch briefly here.

Queer OS would take historical, sociocultural, conceptual phenomena that currently shape our realities in deep and profound ways, such as race, gender, class, citizenship, and ability (to name those among the most active in the United States today), to be mutually constitutive with sexuality and with media and information technologies, thereby making it impossible to think any of them in isolation. It understands *queer* as naming an orientation toward various and shifting aspects of existing reality and the social norms they govern, such that it makes available pressing questions about, eccentric and/or unexpected relationships in, and possibly alternatives to those social norms.[3]

I have suggested elsewhere, following Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony, Marcia Landy's reading of Gramsci's work in the context of film studies, and Wahneema Lubiano's work on "common sense" in black nationalism, that common sense is a linchpin in the struggle for hegemony that conditions what is perceptible such that aspects of what is perceptible become generally recognizable only when they work in some way through "common senses." In this context, *queer* offers a way of making perceptible presently uncommon senses in the interest of producing a/new commons and/or of proliferating the senses of a commons already in the making.[4] Such a commons would be hospitable to, perhaps indeed crafted from, just and eccentric orientations within it. Queer OS makes this formulation of *queer* function as an operating system along the lines of what Tara McPherson describes as "operating systems of a larger order" than the operating systems that run on our computers.[5]

Queer OS would take seriously McPherson's suggestion that the cultural logics of the early operating system Unix embed some of the racial logics of the post–World War II era in which Unix (and the modern civil rights movements) were developed.[6]

2 During a Google search for existing formulations of Queer OS, I found a link to an intriguing workshop in Slovenia titled "Workshop Queer OS: Operating System for Fags, Radical Faeries, and Questioning Nerds." See Ljudmila, "Queer OS," http://wiki.ljudmila.org/Queer_OS (accessed June 25, 2013).

3 I develop this formulation of queer in greater detail in my book manuscript in progress, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming).

4 For my formulation of "the image of common sense" in the cinematic, see Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

5 Tara McPherson, "US Operating Systems at Mid-Century: The Intertwining of Race and UNIX," in *Race after the Internet*, ed. Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (New York: Routledge, 2011), 21–37.

6 Ibid., 21.

For McPherson, the logics of US racial formation infuse Unix not because the creators of Unix planned it that way, but because those who developed Unix were working within a sociocultural milieu held together by common senses already saturated by those logics.

Inspired by McPherson's analysis of Unix in the context of US racial formation, Queer OS seeks to make *queer* into the logic of "an operating system of a larger order" that unsettles the common senses that secure those presently hegemonic social relations that can be characterized by domination, exploitation, oppression, and other violences. While it is worth noting here that my references to "the commons" are in critical conversation with existing formulations of the "digital commons," an aim of Queer OS vis-à-vis conceptualizations of commons is to provide a society-level operating system (and perhaps an operating system that can run on computer hardware) to facilitate and support imaginative, unexpected, and ethical relations between and among living beings and the environment, even when they have little, and perhaps nothing, in common.

To begin with, it could be said that in its capacity as a social operating system, Queer OS connects existing distributed areas of scholarly inquiry and activism, thereby producing philosophies and cultures within each of those areas that might unsettle the logics that currently secure them. Here, Queer OS would not be simply interdisciplinary, though because it often evinces a studied promiscuity toward the ideas and methods it assembles, it carries many of interdisciplinarity's risks and promises. Nor is it only transdisciplinary, since it can be relatively indifferent to existing disciplines in an effort to include aspects of the world that have not yet entered the logics of disciplines.[7]

Queer OS names a way of thinking and acting with, about, through, among, and at times even in spite of new media technologies and other phenomena of mediation. It insists upon forging and facilitating uncommon, irrational, imaginative, and/or unpredictable relationships between and among what currently are perceptible as living beings and the environment in the interest of creating value(s) that facilitate just relations.[8] Because Queer OS ideally functions to transform material relations, it is at odds with the logics embedded in the operating systems McPherson discusses. Because it seeks to undermine the relationships secured through those logics, even as, like McPherson does when she points out that she is using a computer and word-processing software that shape her own intellectual work in specific ways, it acknowledges its own imbrication with and reliance on those logics while still striving to forge new relationships and connections.

7 In this regard, Queer OS has affinities with Katie King's formulation of "networked reenactments." See Katie King, *Networked Reenactments: Stories Transdisciplinary Knowledges Tell* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); King "A Naturalcultural Collection of Affections: Transdisciplinary Stories of Transmedia Ecologies Learning," *S&F Online*, http://sfonline.barnard.edu/feminist-media-theory/a-naturalcultural-collection-of-affections-transdisciplinary-stories-of-transmedia-ecologies-learning/.

8 It is worth noting here that, although they are of different orders, this description of Queer OS resonates with what I described as "the black femme function" within the cinematic in my book *The Witch's Flight*. See also Franco "BIFO" Berardi, "Precariousness, Catastrophe and Challenging the Blackmail of the Imagination," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4, no. 2 (November 23, 2010), http://www.affinitiesjournal.org/affinities/index.php/affinities/article/view/58.

From my own position, it is possible to detect exciting contributions that have already been made, as well as ones on the horizon. Among the early precedents for Queer OS are projects such as Allucquére Rosanne Stone's (Sandy Stone's) *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, a book in which Stone is "seeking social structures in circumstances in which the technological is the nature, in which social space is computer code."[9] Fifteen years after the publication of *The War of Desire and Technology*, Margaret Rhee and Amanda Philips introduced their 2010 Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC) forum "Gender, Sexuality, and Queerness" by announcing their "hope for dialogues that traverse disciplinary boundaries, borders, and fictive territories."[10] As they described it, the forum invited discussions of questions such as "How does queer theory intersect with technology [and/or] technologies?" "How do issues of gender, sexuality and identity play out in digital media, digital arts, and the Internet?" "How does the body function as a theme within theory and art, emerging from queer, ethnic, and feminist, studies and other related disciplines?" and "Is technology historically closely entangled with sexuality?"[11]

The questions that Rhee and Phillips invited their participants to discuss remain compelling ones to explore. Some of those who have been engaged in their exploration also have participated in the conversations about scholarly technology that have come to characterize the digital humanities. This year, Phillips coauthored an article with Alexis Lothian that seeks to make an intervention into the contested category of "the digital humanities." That article, "Can Digital Humanities Mean Transformative Critique?," builds on the premise that, "if humanities scholars in critical media and cultural studies, queer studies, ethnic studies, disability studies, and related areas are doing work in and with the digital, we should lay claim to our place within digital humanities."[12] In that spirit, Lothian and Phillips offer "a curated list of projects, people, and collaborations that suggest the possibilities of a transformative digital humanities: one where neither the digital nor the humanities will be terms taken for granted."[13]

Picking up on a trajectory of inquiry into technology, gender, and sexuality offered by Jack Halberstam's 1991 essay "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminisms in the Age of the Intelligent Machine," scholars also are working to queer the histories we tell about computing. Homay King's most recent project centers on pioneering computer

9 Allucquére Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 38. Jack Halberstam's 1991 essay also might be retrospectively understood as precedent for the later work I am collecting under the rubric of "Queer OS." See Judith Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 439–460.

10 "Queer & Feminist New Media Spaces—HASTAC," http://hastac.org/forums/hastac-scholars-discussions/queer-feminist-new-media-spaces.

11 The citations in Rhee and Phillips's introduction to the forum offer an archive of scholarship in new media studies, technology studies, and gender and sexuality studies on which they invite forum participants to draw. See "Queer & Feminist New Media Spaces—HASTAC," http://hastac.org/forums/hastac-scholars-discussions/queer-feminist-new-media-spaces.

12 Alexis Lothian and Amanda Phillips, "Can Digital Humanities Mean Transformative Critique?," *Journal of e-Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013), doi:10.1349/PS1.1938-6060.A.425.

13 See ibid.

scientist Alan Turing's homosexuality in an effort to, as she put it, "queer the computer just slightly."[14] In a similar vein, Jacob Gaboury is compiling "Queer History of Computing," which can be accessed online.[15]

What all of these efforts have in common is an interest in bringing the considerable insights of queer theory and LGBT studies to bear on discussions and studies of new media and their technologies and vice versa. They offer ways of thinking about new media that disrupt what we think we know about it, and they demonstrate what queer theory can gain from an interested consideration of media and technology. Along these lines, in their solo and collaborative performance art work, Zach Blas and Micha Cárdenas have made contributions to our ways of thinking about transgender embodiments, queer sexualities, new media technologies, and other aspects of mediation that might be considered under the rubric of "Queer OS." By innovating things such as "transcoder," which is "a queer programming anti-language," or instructing people on how to build a gay bomb, Blas's work prompts us to question our assumptions about what technology is and what it can do. Both Blas and Cardenas are producing work that strives to forge new relationships between living beings and the environment by working with, through, and at times in spite of technology.[16]

Blas, Cárdenas, and others working at the theory-practice nexus of queer theory, trans and gender studies, and technology can help nuance understandings of *queer*, *gender*, and *technology* because their work points to ways of embracing *queer* and *gender* as technologies. In this regard, a Queer OS project also could involve reading their oeuvres (which can be grasped as Queer OS), as well as those of other artists working to (re)forge queerness within new media and technology, alongside existing scholarship on "race and/as technology" and the artistic expressions and rhetorics that make that formulation perceptible.

A Queer OS project might notice, for example, that Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's essay "Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things to Race" becomes just a bit queerer through the revisions that accompanied its transformation from serving as the introduction to the special issue "Race and/as Technology" of *Camera Obscura* that Chun coedited with Lynne Joyrich in 2007 to a stand-alone essay in the 2012 collection *Race after the Internet*, coedited by Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White, and build upon that observation. It is only in the latter version of the essay that Chun turns to Greg Pak's 2003 feature film *Robot Stories* to rethink arguments she made in the past regarding "high tech Orientalism—the high tech abjection of the Asian/Asian American other."[17]

14 See, e.g., "Lecture: 'Keys to Turing' by Homay King Nov. 8, Visual Arts Center, Beam Classroom, English, Calendar (Bowdoin)," http://www.bowdoin.edu/calendar/event.jsp?bid=601095&rid=68848.

15 Jacob Gaboury, "A Queer History of Computing: Part Four," Rhizome.org, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/may/6/queer-history-computing-part-four/.

16 See "Queer Technologies—Automating Perverse Possibilities," http://www.queertechnologies.info; Micha Cárdenas, "Micha Cárdenas—Movement, Technology, Politics," http://transreal.org.

17 Wendy Hui Kong Chun, "Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things to Race," in *Race after the Internet*, ed. Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (New York: Routledge, 2011), 49; Chun, "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 70 (2009): 7–35.

Stating that her reevaluation of high-tech Orientalism is inspired by Beth Coleman's essay "Race as Technology," Chun presents Pak's film as an exploration of "the extent to which high tech Orientalism might be the ground from which some other future can be created; the ground from which dreams can be made to fly, flower, in freaky, queer unexpected ways."[18] Chun's discussion of *Robot Stories* attends to the meaningful ways that technology, race, gender, and sexuality work together in the film. She claims that "what is remarkable" by the end of *Robot Stories* is that "the invisibility and universality usually granted to whiteness has disappeared, not to be taken up seamlessly by Asian Americans and African Americans, but rather to be reworked to displace both what is considered to be technological and what is considered to be human."[19]

Though Chun does not pursue an evaluation of the work that "queer" does in *Robot Stories*, it is clear from her discussion (as it is in the film) that something queer persists (even after her brief discussions of the queer sexual acts in the film) in her reading of how *Robot Stories* makes race do things within high-tech Orientalism other than reproduce its logics. It could be argued that what Chun calls Pak's methodology is presented in the film as a Queer OS. Chun describes it in this way:

> The opening credits of *Robot Stories*, which begins with the now stereotypical stream of 1s and 0s, encapsulates Pak's methodology nicely. Rather than these 1s and 0s combining to produce the name of the actors, etc. (as in *Ghosts in the Shell* and *The Matrix*), the credits interrupt this diagonal stream. . . . As the sequence proceeds, little robots are revealed to be the source of the 1s and 0s. Shortly after they are revealed, one malfunctions, turning a different color, and produces a 2. . . . Soon, all the robots follow, turn various colors and produce all sorts of colorful base-10 numbers. Thus, robots turn out in the end to be colorful and operate in the same manner—and in the same numerical base—as humans. The soundtrack features a Country and Western song telling Mama to let herself go free. The 1s and 0s, rather than being readable, are made to soar, to color the robots that are ourselves.[20]

In Chun's description of Pak's methodology, Queer OS can be grasped as a malfunction within technologies that secure "robot" and "human," a malfunction with a capacity to reorder things that can, perhaps, "make race do different things," tell "Mama to let herself go free," and make what was legible soar into unpredictable relations. ✻

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18 Chun, "Race and/as Technology," 49. Chun refers to Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 70 (2009): 177–207.

19 Chun, "Race and/as Technology," 56.

20 Ibid., 56.

Contributors

Patty Ahn is a PhD candidate in critical studies at the University of Southern California. Her research interests include transnational media studies, with a focus on the transpacific region, gender and sexuality, and popular music. She has published essays in *Spectator*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Discourse*, and *Postmodern Culture*, and she coproduced a reality music-competition show in 2012 for Mnet America, a South Korean–based lifestyle and music cable network.

Corey K. Creekmur is associate professor of English and film studies at the University of Iowa, where he also directs the Institute for Cinema and Culture. He coedited *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Duke University Press, 1995) with Alexander Doty.

Matthew Hays is a Montreal-based journalist, author, film-festival programmer, and university instructor. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award. His articles have appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Daily Beast*, *Cineaction* and *VICE*. He is the recipient of the 2013 President's Award for Teaching Excellence at Concordia University, where he teaches courses in film studies, communication studies, and journalism.

Julia Himberg is assistant professor of film and media studies at Arizona State University. Her work has appeared in *Television and New Media*, *Flow*, and *In Media Res*. She is the editor of "Race, Sexuality, & Television," a special issue of *Spectator: The University of Southern California Journal of Film and Television Criticism*, and her work on television advertising has been published in *The Hummer: Myths and Consumer Culture* (Lexington Books, 2007).

Lynne Joyrich is professor of modern culture and media at Brown University. She is the author of *Re-viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* and of various articles and chapters (in such books as *Private Screenings*, *Modernity and Mass Culture*, *Logics of Television*, *New Media, Old Media*, *Inventing Film Studies*, and *Queer TV* and the journals *Critical Inquiry*, *Cinema Journal*, *differences*, *Discourse*, and others). She has been a *Camera Obscura* editorial collective member since 1996.

Kara Keeling is associate professor of critical studies in the School of Cinematic Arts and of black studies in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. She is author of *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Duke University Press, 2007) and coeditor (with Josh Kun) of *Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Quinn Miller is assistant professor of queer media studies in English and cinema studies at the University of Oregon. He has authored articles in *How to Watch Television*

(NYU Press, 2013), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies: Media Production* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), *Transgender Migrations* (Routledge, 2012), *Television and New Media, Flow, Spectator, Framework, Jump Cut*, and *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television* (McFarland, 2005).

Thomas Waugh is Concordia University Research Chair in Sexual Representation and Documentary at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema in Montreal, Quebec. With Matthew Hays he is coeditor of the Queer Film Classics series from Arsenal Pulp Press. Most recently he is coauthor of *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson* (with Brenda Longfellow and Scott MacKenzie; McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), is currently finishing a monograph on Joris Ivens, and is embarking on a project on confessionality.

Damon R. Young is assistant professor in the Department of Screen Arts and Cultures and Postdoctoral Scholar in the Society of Fellows at the University of Michigan. He is coeditor (with Joshua Weiner) of "Queer Bonds," a special double issue of *GLQ* (2011), and has written for *Film Quarterly*, *Senses of Cinema*, *Continuum*, and a number of anthologies, including, most recently, *Queer Love in Film and Television* (Palgrave, 2013).

Audrey Yue is associate professor in cultural studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her recent publications include *Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas* (Lexington Books, 2013) and *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012).