Sprinkle: A Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies

Vol 4 – December 2011

The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy

http://freireproject.org/sprinkle

Editor-in-Chief
Elizabeth J. Meyer

Guest Co-Editors
Andrew Anastasia
Mel Freitag

Associate Editors
Erin Connor
Sam Hsieh
Jeremy Kleinhans
Vince Tripi III

Reviewers
Lee Airton
Terence Cunningham
Zoe Engberg
Emma Gray
Samantha L. House
Cassandra Kuyvenhoven
Katie Mohr
Paul Sutton
Jacqueline White
Shaamani Yogaretnam

Table of Contents

4  Guest Editorial
   Andrew Anastasia and Mel Freitag

6  Growing Sprinkle: Notes on expanding an undergraduate student journal
   Elizabeth J. Meyer

I am, therefore I resist: Identity as activism
9  Identity Politics and/or Queer Theory
   Allison Brinkhorst

16  Femmeism: A Jersey Girl Manifesto
    Cyree Johnson

23  The Rule of the Role
    Kelly Kuerzi

And it all falls down: Queering schools and communities
29  Teachers as Mediators of Social Construction: Heteronormativity
    Emily Ritenberg

36  Impacts of Gay-Straight Alliances and Considerations for their Members
    Cory Dawson

47  The Dispersal of Queer Populations: Gentrification and Community Formation
    Kathryn Van Meyl

"Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore": Cultural studies
60  The Redux as Redefinition
When I signed on to assist in editing this volume of Sprinkle, I was expecting to engage in topics of queer sexualities and genders, but ended up engaging in queer editing in addition to reviewing papers. While in the process of editing and reviewing for this volume of Sprinkle, protests at Wisconsin’s capital building in our town, Madison, WI, monopolized my attention (as well as many of the Sprinkle team members’ attention) for some time. Social engagement by learning, doing and interacting seemed appropriate reasons to forestall the publication at the time, but perhaps a little too long. Thus, the process of assembling this volume worked unconventionally (though quite aptly so)—a process of which I am honored to have been a part. The people who contributed to the reviewing and editing process facilitated and enabled the publishing of this volume, and I thank them for their contributions. The papers I had the chance to review queered subjects and ideas I had not thought to think about queerly, so I also thank those who submitted pieces for their insights. I hope you find this volume of Sprinkle as valuable and engaging as I have. With that, I invite you to enjoy these pages with us.

Andrew Anastasia, Guest Co-Editor

Guest co-editing the Sprinkle Journal this year has been an adventure, particularly since it was my first time co-editing a work, and 2011 has been especially active and laborious on both a personal and academic level. My father passed away the same month that the protests started in Madison, Wisconsin in February. I can echo Drew’s sentiment about social engagement and its invaluable connection to learning – the experiences I have had this year, including my involvement with Sprinkle, have undoubtedly
informed and helped shape my professional and pedagogical values. My goal in co-editing the volume this year evolved as well, at first my expectation was to come into the editor experience already having a theme in mind, but then I quickly realized that the themes would bubble up from the student writers – many of them queering the very notion of what it means to be a social agent of change in the new millennium. This notion, although not pre-determined by our group of editors, fit nicely with my re-definition of what it means to engage, what it means to be involved, and what it means to queer. I want to thank all of the student writers for taking the time to provide a differently queered perspective, and to help create a volume that is rich, provocative, and grounded in queerness.

Mel Freitag, Guest Co-Editor

Editorial

Growing Sprinkle: Notes on expanding an undergraduate journal

Once again I am thrilled to be sharing with you another exciting collection of undergraduate student writing on issues related to sexual diversity studies. When I reflect on the humble beginnings of this journal: a PDF of selected essays from one semester of SDST 250: Introduction to Sexual Diversity Studies at McGill University, I am proud to have been a part of the growth and evolution of this journal. Now in its fourth year, the editorial board is no longer exclusively attached to McGill University, but has grown wings and taken flight. I was honored to have worked with the guest co-editors at the University of Wisconsin who took on the lion’s share of the work for this volume. Drew Anastasia and Mel Freitag were dedicated and enthusiastic guest co-editors who did a wonderful job recruiting and mentoring teams of undergraduate students to be a part of this process. I also want to recognize past members of the Sprinkle editorial team who pitched in when we fell behind schedule due to the political activism and strikes that took place in Wisconsin in the spring of 2011. Thank you for continued participation in the growth of Sprinkle!

This year we received over 30 submissions for consideration, and hope you will enjoy reading the nine articles selected for publication. The topics included in this year’s volume mirror some common themes from previous issues: identity, activism, community, and culture. The diverse voices and perspectives included here reflect the wide array of perspectives, disciplines, and texts relevant to the field of sexual diversity studies. Although this journal project continues to generate a lot of discussion and interest, I have decided to have Sprinkle...
Sprinkle

I am, therefore I resist: Identity as activism

Elizabeth J. Meyer
Editor-in-Chief
ejmeyer@calpoly.edu


Identity Politics And/Or Queer Theory

By Allison Brinkhorst

**ABSTRACT.** How does a queer activist desiring to improve our society navigate the space between the two often-contradictory strategies of identity politics and deconstructionalist queer theories which, despite all of their differences, claim similar goals of equality and justice? The author presents Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval’s Methodology of the Oppressed as a route to reconciling these differing approaches. Sandoval’s post-modern and theoretical strategy for coping with and combating oppression discusses five forms of oppositional consciousness: equal-rights, revolutionary, supracentric, separatist, and differential.

Contemporary media gives the illusion that all gay and lesbian individuals are united in fighting for the common cause of equal rights. Identity politics, which are based on claiming a label such as “gay” or “lesbian” for political reasons, appear to be uniformly embraced by “the GLBT community.” Rarely are the dissenting voices of deconstructionalist queer theorists heard in mainstream media. However, in academic discourses, their voices ring loud and clear (and convincingly). How does a queer activist desiring to improve our society navigate the space between these two often-contradictory strategies which, despite all of their differences, claim similar goals of equality and justice? This is the question my paper will seek to address.

So, first, let’s back up a little. In many ways, heterosexism functions like all other identity-based systems of oppression, creating a hierarchy of societal privilege based on arbitrary categories. Because our society values heterosexuality, straight individuals and opposite-sex relationships are granted privileges while individuals with non-normative sexualities experience legal and social oppression. Thus, in order to gain equality and justice, gay rights activists in favor of identity politics argue that we must fight to win legal rights for GLBT individuals who are currently oppressed, and then turn to social change only after these legal rights are in place. This perspective, called the “minoritizing view” (68) by theorist Eve Sedgwick, embraces the model created by other rights movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In order for these political strategies to be successful, a minority group must be defined.

Fighting for the rights of a minority, as identity politics call us to do, necessitates the illusion of a concrete, cohesive, and deserving group or category. In order for an identity-based group to appear concrete, they must argue that their identity is real and stable. The task of proving the ‘reality’ of homosexuality is taken up by scientists such as Dean Hamer who are searching for a gay gene that would support the ‘born this way’ argument. This gene would support Rictor Norton’s claim of “realness,” in which he argues that the “core of queer desire...is transcultural, transnational, and transhistorical, a queer essence that is innate, congenital, constitutional, stable or fixed” (149). Proving that homosexuality is a stable identity, the second half of the “concrete” criteria, is accomplished by gay and lesbian studies historians who argue that historic figures (from ancient Greeks to Eleanor Roosevelt) share a homosexual identity with individuals in the twenty-first century. For the second criterion, in order for gay and lesbian rights activists to prove their cohesiveness, they unite under singular sexual identity categories (most often ‘gay,’ occasionally ‘gay and lesbian’) and portray uniform support for a common goal (such as gay marriage). Finally, in order for the ‘gay’ minority group to prove that they are deserving of equal rights, they must look and act as normative as possible, because only those who conform to society’s demands receive social privileges. Mariana Valverde goes as far as to suggest the emergence of “a new sexual object/subject: the respectable same-sex couple” (156), which is defined by its “middle-class, middle-aged,
Sprinkle " and white" (158) consumerist traits, conforming to heterosexuality all the way down to their white wedding dresses. These are the ways in which GLBT rights organizations create a concrete, cohesive, and deserving minority group.

On the other side, queer theorists inarguably prove each of these three characteristics necessitated by identity politics to be problematic political illusions. As Leila Rupp explains in A Desired Past, although same-sex desire can be documented throughout history, the 'gay' identity is far from stable. Rather, all sexual identity categories (like all social categories in general) develop and change along with social norms. Discussing how what we might now call "casual" sex between older and younger men was viewed as normative in ancient Greece, David Halperin states, "cultural articulation of sexual desire in classical Athens calls into question the stability of the concept of 'sexuality' as a category" (660). If sexuality is not a stable category of identity, then the homosexual identity certainly is not stable. Secondly, queer theorists demonstrate that GLBT Americans are far from cohesive. There are many variations of sexual and romantic preference within 'the gay community,' as well as countless intersections with other identities such as race and class, but this diversity is not included in the mainstream portrayal of gay individuals. For instance, Amber Hollibaugh expresses anger that in the "current telling of our' queer tale... queerness can't be poor" (192). Similarly, theorist Sue George writes that "bisexuality is largely invisible, and... it must remain so in order to maintain the status quo" (25). In addition to diversity of sexual identity, there is distinct disagreement about sexual politics between GLBT Americans, and this demonstrates another point of our incohesiveness. While mainstream media only covers gay rights groups who fight for same-sex marriage, groups such as Beyond Marriage and queer theorists such as Michael Warner oppose this strategy, arguing that the right to civil marriage should not be the main concern of GLBT Americans at this time. For these reasons, it is clear that the category of 'gay and lesbian Americans' is neither concrete nor cohesive.

Thirdly and most importantly, the attempts of some gay rights activists to prove that they are deserving of equality and justice exclude many other individuals with non-conforming sexualities. In order to prove normativity, the minority group of gay Americans is forced to exclude individuals with less normative oppressed identities such as transgendered, transsexual, bisexual, and otherwise-queer. The political benefits of this exclusion are articulated by John Aravosis, a gay man who is angry about the "ever-expanding mushroom cloud of diversity" (196) within America's GLBTQ community: he states, "civil rights legislation... is a series of compromises... Someone is always left behind, at least temporarily. It stinks, but it's the way it's always worked, and it's the way you win" (197). Those involved in Aravosis' "practical politics" (197) must also exclude individuals who are not in monogamous relationships, which U.S. society and government value heavily. It is these exclusions that are most often criticized by queer theorists. By relying on identity politics to fight for justice and equality, one must work within the problematic, socially constructed framework of sexual preference as a discrete identity category. Queer theorists would rather deconstruct this framework entirely.

Queer theorists argue that equality and justice should be achieved not by adding people to the privileged (normative) circle, but rather by taking apart the entire system of privilege and oppression based on sexuality. For instance, the authors of Love the Sin, Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, advocate for a freedom of sexuality in the U.S. in which all sexual acts and relationships would be valued equally. In her groundbreaking essay "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory," Gayle Rubin similarly argues that even if homosexuality were to become normalized and accepted, S/M, non-married, non-procreative, cross-generational, public, and pornographic sex acts would still be viewed as "bad, abnormal, unnatural, and damned" (318). In other
words, these queer theorists argue that the minoritizing view of identity politics is inadequate, because in addition to giving the false illusion of a concrete identity and a cohesive group, it excludes the sexual freedoms of many others who engage in non-normative sex acts.

In my opinion, queer theory clearly trumps identity politics in theoretical discourse. But in the political arena, the arguments of queer theory seem to lack (dare I use Aravosis’ word) practicality. While the effort to deconstruct the system of sexual oppression is an exciting, radical, and honorable fight, it seems unlikely that it will find mainstream validation or results anytime soon, given America’s sexual morals and attachment to categorical hierarchies. And while to simply deconstruct the illusion of the unified minority group that identity politics has created is a fun activity (as evidenced by the number of pages I spent doing so), this criticism does nothing but eliminate the one source of political power that GLBT individuals have: the power of numbers. Thus, we are forced to reconcile these two contradictory camps.

This reconciliation came to me much more easily after reading Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval’s Methodology of the Oppressed. Sandoval’s post-modern and theoretical strategy for coping with and combating oppression discusses five forms of oppositional consciousness: equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist, and differential. While reading, I quickly saw GLBT identity politics as an equal-rights form and queer theory as revolutionary-seasoned-with-supremacist-and-separatist. Sandoval’s theory of the differential form has therefore been inspirational and instructional to me because it is a strategy for, and an acceptance of, the reconciliation I seek. Sandoval explains that the differential form of oppositional consciousness enables movement ‘between and among’ ideological positionings (the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them. In this sense, the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits drivers to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power. (58)

In other words, Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness gives us permission to move between identity politics and queer theory rather than choose just one strategy. In fact, she argues that this movement grants each strategy, and certainly the activists, a much stronger and more versatile base of power. She writes, “when enacted in dialectical relation to one another and not as separated ideologies, each oppositional mode of consciousness, each ideology-praxis, is transformed into tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power” (58). With this acceptance of differing strategies and the encouragement to shift between them, I believe that identity politics and queer theory become ‘tactical weapons’ that both have important roles in our current society. And so, with the blessing of Chela Sandoval, as the currents of power shift, I hope to shift as well between socially radical queer theory and politically powerful identity politics.

Allison Brinkhorst just graduated from Grinnell College with majors in Sociology and Gender, Women, & Sexuality Studies. This paper was originally inspired by the academic and personal difficulty she had choosing between identity politics and queer theory during her second year at Grinnell, and it was given a much better conclusion two years later thanks to her senior seminar on Chicana feminism.

References

Femmeism: A Feminist Fantasy

By Cyree Johnson

ABSTRACT. The following essay explores the idea of the 'femme' through the lenses of race, class and gender. This creative expression of self-study is situated in the context of local cultures, politics, and histories. The author proclaims that the "fem" in femme is not short for feminine, that old vestige of patriarchal power, but rather for feminist. With this proclamation comes the assertion that to be a femme is inherently a radical identity.

We Femme Sharks/Being an imaginative people/A collection of conjurers, freedom fighters, lovers, movers, does/have fallen in love/with the sounds of our own voices/and have become electrified by the scent of our own wet cunts/Because we are Wimin full of loving/on and under table loving/urgent, unlikely loving/in the cracks between late night and dawn/loving with hands, feet, arms, breasts, pussies, knuckles, knees, navels, ass cracks,/and our whole hearts/whether broken or half mended/a patchwork of nailglue, spirit-gum, and hope/pressed tight into it/I am here to let my feet pound deep into this fertile ground/and use my sacred voice as it rocks with ancient echos./my body vibrates with ancestral electric/duplicating itself endlessly/writing its name on the burnt crust of the world/as she wraps herself in the universe/like a ribbon on a gift./The universe, too, is Black and Womyn./We exist inside of her holy body/fragment does not exist/all the shards are glowing fractions of her brilliant wholeness/I try my best to mirror her visage./Do you remember? Do you remember the tectonic plates, fucking of their own accord./Forgetting laws as a matter of course./When they move, we must react./That is our revolution./A revolution of dirt and sweat and the blood of the universe./We Femme Sharks/Being an Intelligent people/are not merely the salt of the earth/we are the spice of someplace...
Sprinkle

much more promising./We are the saliva of a goddess with spears for fingers and a velvet heart./Being warriors is how we show our devotion/Do you remember?/She encourages self-preservation/so that we can dream of what it means to thrive/She is our anger that stabilizes our spines/even as our throats become soft-boiled/at the terror that ripped through the gate and stepped heavy into real life./Find that rage/she is our navel that reminds us of a cord that attaches us to our history/she is the ankle that attaches the feet to the permanence of planet earth/she is the white hot ribbon that inspires fucking, fighting, and flight itself./Our rage can be miraculous/when you take her into yourself/let her break the skin/let her between the fingers running cream down the forearm towards elbow/she is the impetus we have been waiting for.

I am a Jersey Grrl. Sometimes people fail to realize exactly why this is important for me to say. I also must say this because New Jersey is my ancestral home, the place where my important bones are buried, the land that holds the residue of my first magic, a state where no member of my 300 person family lives more than an hour and a half away. I tell you about New Jersey from the onset of this conversation because I believe that home is about place in the world, frame of mind, about comfort as much as it is about the first site of struggle. To imagine a New Jersey that I could return home to is one of my crazy dreams. What if I could manifest this place, work towards it? What if I could bring my home into me, build its roots and define its boundaries.

To be a Black dyke from New Jersey, as an assessment of our recent past will show, can be a difficult and dangerous position to navigate. After all, was New Jersey not also the home of Sakia Gunn? I was 14 years old when Sakia Gunn was brutally murdered in Newark, NJ. In the seven years that have followed this event, I have visited The Village countless times, taken The Path train on dozens of days, never once forgetting that there is absolutely no reason

that the body that bled out on that bus stop bench that day, witnessed by her best friend as she expired, could not have been my own. New Jersey holds a special place in my heart, full equal parts love and terror. Was it not the living place of the lesbians accused of bashing back, also known as the New Jersey 4? That year, the headlines in local papers read “I’m a Man!” Lesbian Growled During Fight” and “Lesbian Wolf Pack Guilty”. With dykes, no compassion is necessary. New Jersey’s war on Black Wimin is no secret, particularly in light of the iconic Assata Shakur case, executed by New Jersey State Troopers on the Turnpike in 1973. These crimes and injustices have forever complicated my relationship to the land my family has lived on for countless generations. The repression and persecution of my people and constant symbolic, state sponsored, spiritual, and psychological violence, have colored the way I must imagine my home. My femme identity emerged within a culture that simultaneously promoted gender exploration and stiff stricture to the gender roles it developed. What if I was say that being a femme was about “being feminine”? What if I was able to reduce my entire gender to an article of clothing, like dresses, skirts, or even worse, that enemy of all things comfortable, high heels? What if I told you that being a femme meant being mistaken for a straight girl, or that there was no difference between straight Wimin and femmes? Would creating this mirror image in negative relation be helpful in exposing what I could mean when I say to you that I am a femme?

Femme identity is too often defined in juxtaposition to female masculine gender identities, Femme is seen as a brand, not a valid gender, a not quite genderqueer enough identity, if anything, merely a facet of one’s sexuality. As Kara Keeling discusses in The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, The Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense, the black femme in particular, and the femme in general is depicted in popular visual culture as existing to act as a relational femininity that legitimizes Black female masculinity. Simply put, femmes are represented as the helpmates of female
masculine gendered people in a way heterosexual society is quick to identify with their own romantic relations. This process erases femme autonomy and creates the idea that there is a normalcy, perhaps even a sort of heteronormativity to butch/femme relationships. Yet, to construct the femme as being the same as any other Womyn (read: straight woman) both by the lesbian and Queer community and by heterosexuals fails to push back against the pressure for lesbians to assimilate into straight culture. It also assumes that the Black femme occupies the same gender role with a Black female masculine partner as a heterosexual Black Womyn in a relationship with a straight Black man. To do so is to imagine an undesirable bridge into patriarchal power relations for lesbians with genders that are perceived as “familiarly” masculine or feminine. Not only does this representation wrongly suggest that butch/femme is a harmless version of mimicking male/female sexual dynamics, depicting butch/femme in this way delegitimizes lesbian relationships as a parody of heterosexuality. To straight society, every lesbian regardless of her gender is a potential, former, or even current, heterosexual Womyn in disguise. To penalize femmes by normalizing the violence of heterosexual assumption on our bodies and by reproducing it in our communities is to ignore the role that heterosexual assumption and heterosexism in general feature in the lives of all lesbian and Queer people.

By primarily viewing femmes as the other side of the gender coin to masculinity, there becomes little space to assert the many genders that compose femme identity. My femme does not come from an absence of masculinity, but from an adoration of the toughness and glory that the feminist brings. My own conception of masculinity finds its femme teeth in the moments where as a strong, assertive person I am penalized for shouting or crying in the moments where I claim a little bit of what is erroneously called masculine for my high femme self. I experience gender policing when I choose to assert my body in ways that are thought of as “unfeminine”: when I open my legs wide in a skirt to let my pussy get some air, when I scream “FUCK YOU” at some dumbass who did some dumb thing. These are the times when I am thought to be usurping some element of the masculine. It is also when I am at the pinnacle of my femmness.

How can this be? Being a femme to me is not about masculine or feminine, it is about finding power in femininity, it is about creating disbelief about the limitations of femininity. Being a femme is not about what I wear, it’s about what I do: feminism. It is with this belief that I proclaim that the “fem” in femme is not short for feminine, that old vestige of patriarchal power, but rather for feminist. With this proclamation comes my assertion that to be a femme is inherently a radical identity. Femmes are radical because our gender is powerful and political, marginal and magical. While the way we look is alluring, it is a mistake to try and standardize any one particular image of the Femme. As my Great-Grandmother said on the day of my junior prom “A dyke in a dress is still a dyke in a dress” and a femme can be femme with or without one.

Here, I claim feminism as the preeminent movement for gender equity, not between “men” and “women” but between and across all genders. I claim feminism as a struggle against patriarchal consumer capitalism, which sexualizes and romanticizes the oppression of Womyn identified people around the world. I claim feminism as the way I met it: a pissed off riotgrrl stranded in central New Jersey. To be clear, I am not saying that the feminine cannot be feminist, as this would be an utterly nonsensical claim. Our concept of the feminine is inextricably linked with American gender oppression, heterosexual assumption, hypersexualization, racism, classism, and the other forms of cultural warfare that shapes all of our identities. To be a femme is to undertake the project of developing an independent feminineness, an innovative grrl style.

I believe that the feminist, more than the feminine, provides the room for expansion that is essential for imagining the wealth of genders that exist near and as one
another in our lives and in our revolutionary struggles. It repositions the birthplace of femmeness in resistance to heterosexist gender construction rather than conceptualizing it as springing out of those norms themselves. By removing the popular image of the femme away from the narrow focus on how she adorns her body, wears her hair, what lovers she chooses, we can see that it is the influence of capitalism, not the work of femmes or feminists at all that promote dividing genders based on visible cues. Femmeness sprouted out of the very movement that asserts that capitalism, mass consumption, rampant waste, and human devaluation walk hand in hand with patriarchal dominance.

Femmes exist between genders and sexes and sexualities, and find a way to still reconcile ourselves into wholeness. We find the courage and strength to challenge the implicit heteronormativity in our own when they tell us that we aren’t getting picked up in bars because other dykes can’t tell if we’re gay or not. Then we STILL find the fortitude somewhere inside ourselves to walk outside into throng of men who see our beautiful genders as a welcome sign, who shout “Hey, baby, wanna fuck. Oo Girl, you the one for me”. We don’t give a damn, we toss our heads back and laugh unpleasantly, we scream like harpies, we pick our noses at them, we assert our dominance, we retort with something those men could have never expected, along the lines of “Yeah, you bend over, I’ll run and get my cock, and I sure hope you like it big!” We realize that for much of our lives we will be negotiating a host of mistaken identities. But we are not fazed because we Femmes are committed to struggle. Struggle is in our history, it is in our blood, and it is in our tears.

Femme is my home. Femme was my companion when I met feminism and now we are in a three-way relationship, or a couple where one has a parasitic twin. I am a femme when I stand at a podium to debate, and when I buy a 10 ½ inch long strap-on dick because it’s slightly bigger than my lover’s. I am also a Femme when the same lover and
The Rule of the Role

By Kelli Kuerzi

ABSTRACT: This article explores the notions of heteronormativity and how it intersects with the tradition of the Quinceañera in Latin culture. Queering the Quinceañera is not about abandoning a cherished tradition, but rejecting the definition that has been imposed on young girls, and allowing them to decide what it means for themselves.

I am standing center stage; I have been given the role of a lifetime: the chance to be a woman, to fall in love with a man, to get married and have children... “Line?” The script they handed me has a plot, but no dialogue. I have been assigned a role that I don’t know how to play. I am not allowed to question how I ended up on stage; I can only be thankful that I have the chance to be here. If I deviate from the script I’ll be yanked off stage with a cane, hidden behind the curtains, and forced to watch everyone else enjoy the confines of the spotlight. This set is a social construction; it is the crafted reality of what our particular communities tell us is normal and natural. If we play along by disciplining our identities, we are rewarded; if we forget our place by deviating from the norm, we are punished. What they fail to tell us is that the scenery, made from the assumed facts and traditions within our communities, has been built not by wood or paint, but by cardboard and crayons.

This deceptive version of reality is heteronormativity, a cultural phenomenon of systematic norms and practices that position heterosexuality as normal and/or the only option. This is what Adrienne Rich describes as “the bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible.” It is a culture that privileges heterosexuality above any alternative (Rich 1). As a lesbian I am marginalized by this social structure. In order to support my queer community, I have to dismantle the illusion by refusing both my voiceless role and my spot behind the curtain. In a similar fashion, the Quinceañera ceremony celebrates femininity while it enforces strict gender roles for young Latina girls. In order to gain full equality, members of my community and the young girls in Latina communities, have to call into question the definitions that have been imposed on us: we need to queer up the Quinceañera.

While coming-of-age traditions represent departing from the innocence of childhood, the queer “coming-out” tradition represents departing from the naivety of the “American Dream”. Julia Alvarez explores how tradition affects women in her community in her book “Once Upon a Quinceañera”. In the “last doll” ritual of a girl’s Quinceañera, the girl throws a doll dressed as herself into a crowd of other young girls, displaying both “the ‘end of her childhood’ and ‘the child she herself will be having in the not too distant future,” (Alvarez 49). Though, if this girl then came out as a lesbian, this ritual would represent a terrible irony: saying good-bye to the dreams her community gave her as a child, and throwing away the child she will never be allowed to have. This concept is not explored, because as a heteronormative ceremony, it denies that queer identity exists. It is about celebrating her becoming what society defines as normal and productive: “The Quinceañera is like a rehearsal wedding without a groom, and it sends a clear message to the Latina girl: we expect you to get married, have children, [and] devote yourself to your family.” (Alvarez 38). Heterosexual norms are implicit, making female independence irrelevant, and the queer possibility nonexistent. The 15-year-old girl is dressed as a princess, the star of a crafted female fantasy, but this is only “a momentary illusion of power,” because “the ritual enacts an old paradigm of the patriarchy,” (Alvarez 38). The glamour is a reward for accepting the burdens of womanhood, or as Alvarez describes, “an opiate for an oppressed class” (39).
This is true in more ways than she recognizes, because it is not only the girl who is being drugged, but the community as well: by enjoying the celebration they can continue to deny queer existence, and any other “threat” to their prescribed lifestyle.

A Quinceañera is the performance of a young girl’s marriage to her community. The part of this love story we are never allowed to see is the number of girls who end up having a nasty divorce. Children are raised hearing the cliché “be true to yourself”, unaware that there is an exception: teens like myself who struggle to come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) risk expulsion from the community they have always been true to: “The same things that make us feel connected and protected are the things that make us feel obligated and trapped as individuals and/or cut off from other groups with different agendas;” in her essay “Community and Diversity” about student life on college campuses, Nathan does not realize that she is describing the inner-struggle many LGBT individuals face (233). In fact, her essay completely ignores the dynamics of sexual orientation on community and diversity. At one point Nathan watches “who sat at each [lunch] table by gender and...ethnicity” unaware that our minority status is not shown by our faces, but by a culture that promotes our invisibility (242). Talking about her Quinceañera, a young girl tells Alvarez “my whole community made it happen,” and she’s right, but they contributed more than just money and decoration ideas (50). They brought young boys to the party that are “pushed and prodded to pick up some girl” or “strut” their machismo (Alvarez 48). At my friend’s Quinceañera it was demanded that there only be male escorts, which is quite common, but as a straight ally my friend felt guilty for giving in to conformity. The whole community comes together to promote not only the patriarchal, but also the heterosexual coupling of the youth. This tradition has more than a literal “price-tag” (Alvarez 49). It is common for American Latina families to go into debt for their daughter’s Quinceañera because “these rites of passage are a way for a minority group to demonstrate that they have succeeded in America” (Alvarez 50). Though it seems they have unwittingly assimilated to the American pass-time of using money, power, and tradition to define who is valuable and who is expendable.

The stage has been set. Heteronormative culture demands that we queers either play along silently, or get behind the curtain. My community has been united not by our shared rituals, history, and traditions, but by our exclusion from them. Many of us would gladly play the part in our own queer way, such as working for same-sex marriage and adoption, but the strength of cultural norms is still pervasive. The Quinceañera represents both of these heterosexist norms and values; by celebrating a young girl’s future role as wife and mother, it begs her not to question its validity. We need to deconstruct this social construction. Being queer is about questioning the stability and naturalness of the categories we’re prescribed for sexuality and gender. It is about taking apart an idea we assume to be true: that we are either or, us and them, good or bad.

Queering the Quinceañera is not about abandoning a cherished tradition, but rejecting the definition that has been imposed on young girls, and allowing them to decide what it means for themselves. It is about walking onto the paper maché stage and proclaiming aloud to your community, “I am large, I contain multitudes,” (Whitman).

Kelly Kuerzi

References


And it all falls down: Queering schools and communities
Teachers as Mediators of Social Construction: Heteronormativity, Gender, and the Hidden Curriculum

By Emily Ritenburg

ABSTRACT. This article addresses the issue of heteronormativity and its presence in the hidden curriculum in schools. The author critiques the use of ‘brain-based’ research to explain gender differences and offers ways that teachers may begin to change this hidden curriculum in elementary and secondary schools.

Elementary and secondary school teachers have great influence over what students deem socially acceptable. They implicitly create gendered and heteronormative environments which influence children’s views of sex, gender, and sexuality. This unconscious, or implicit, act is commonly referred to as the “hidden curriculum” (Martin, 2008). The hidden curriculum is a by-product of teaching the overt, or required, curriculum in schools, and gender and sexuality are only a fractional aspect to this complex phenomenon. It is arguable that through the hidden curriculum, teachers implicitly, and often unknowingly, reinforce socially normalized ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality.

In her article “Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools,” Karin A. Martin (1998) describes the hidden school curriculum as covert lessons taught by schools that are often means of social control (p. 495). This implicit curriculum benefits the schools as an institution because it creates students that fit in to socially accepted norms, and more specifically, socially normalized ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality. Martin further suggests that “this hidden curriculum that controls children’s bodily practices serves also to turn kids who are similar in bodily comportment ... into boys and girls, children whose bodily practices are different” (p. 496).

When discussing gender norms as part of the hidden curriculum, it is important to clearly define the separateness of gender and sex. Gender can be described as a performance of social norms or expectations that fall on either side of the masculine or feminine binary. The conventional idea of gender is that humans are either male or female, masculine or feminine, rather than a continuum or spectrum that represents diversity in the definition of gender (Loutzenheiser, 2004). It is expected that one should perform within their gender construct as a masculine male or feminine female, or else be rendered socially unintelligible (Butler in Martin, 1998). A person’s sex is often described as biological rather than socially constructed. The presence of anatomical parts, such as the male’s penis and the female’s vagina, are biological sex indicators.

After defining gender and sex, some cliché and conventional gender influences can quickly come to mind. Commercials on television and in magazines that advertise men’s deodorant, such as Axe spray, or razors, such as Gillette, are hypermasculinized giving its viewers a clear conventional idea of what it means to be a masculine male. We also see many female models, such as Paris Hilton, and television and music personalities, such as Miley Cyrus, that represent a hyperfeminine ideal that many females believe represent who they should strive to be. The media and pop culture are commonly blamed for typical negative aspects of gender construction. As powerful as these influences are, the implicit or unconscious acts of gendering bodies can be just as detrimental.

The moment we are known to exist in the uterus, we become a gendered body. Through allowing medical professionals to disclose the baby’s sex, planning a nursery, picking names, or discussing the unborn child’s sex with
friends and family, gender norms are already being imposed upon the unborn. Upon the birth of a baby, the biological sex is noted through the presence and absence of particular external genitalia, which then further reinforces the continuous process of becoming gendered in the outside world. Martin (1998) suggests that the immediacy of this provides the illusion later in life that gender is something innate or natural, rather than socially constructed.

It is evident that by the time a child reaches pre-kindergarten that she or he is a gendered body. Martin (1998) explains that the process of becoming gendered begins early and that “the schools’ hidden curriculum further facilitates and encourages the construction of the bodily differences between the genders” (p. 496). Teachers are not responsible for gendering children, but rather reinforce what already exists and may further influence what it means to be male and female. Because the concept of gender construction, and its effect on a child’s development, is often foreign to teachers, gender ideas such as boys naturally being more rough and physically active, and girls naturally being more delicate and emotional are often norms that are accepted and encouraged in the classroom. It is arguable that preconceived ideas such as these cannot be biologically attributed, but are rather expected of young boys and girls beginning early in life. There are not necessarily inner or natural forces that cause gendered behaviour, but rather social influences that cause children to behave how they feel and know they are expected to (Martin, 1998).

Another aspect of the hidden curriculum is heteronormativity. Heteronormativity can be defined as the way heterosexual culture assumes and implies that it is the only model of inter-gender relations (Loutzenheiser, 2004). Many teachers not only practice heteronormativity when teaching about family and relationships, but also by simply asking questions or making comments to groups of students with the assumption that they are all heterosexual and are associated with those who are also heterosexual. This aspect of the hidden curriculum in schools further segregates and stigmatizes students who do not identify as heterosexual.

On November 15, 2010, a presentation call “Brain-Based Learning” was given in the Education Core Studies class at the University of Regina by Jamie Bresciani, a veteran teacher, principal, and “Brain-Based Learning” advocate from Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. This presentation provided excellent examples of aspects of the hidden curriculum in action. Biological factors were used to explain what could be argued as socially constructed norms, which further reinforced ideas of gender and heteronormativity that students may have had already. For example, when discussing biological differences in males and females, Bresciani referenced the difference in size of the “corpus callosum” which is the part of the brain that connects the left and right cerebral hemispheres (Bean, 1906). In summary, Bresciani stated that the larger size of the corpus callosum in the female brain explained personality and learning differences between males and females. He continued to explain more specifically that this biological factor proved why girls are supposedly more emotional, and why boys are supposedly more violent and do not understand girls emotions.

The research Bresciani was drawing from was originally conducted by Robert Bennett Bean, published in his notorious article “Some Racial Peculiarities of the Negro Brain” (1906). This same article argued differences in intelligence between Black and Caucasian humans because of apparent differences in size of particular parts of the brain, mainly the corpus callosum. Bean argued that, although still superior to Black males and females, Caucasian females were inferior intellectually to Caucasian males because of the difference in size of the corpus callosum (Bean, 1906). Seen by many as racist or race-based research, this article has been strongly criticized, debated, and since challenged through much more in-depth research. Research in the last century and more recently within the past five years has revealed that there is no difference in the size of
the corpus callosum between males and females in ratio of brain size (Luders, Narr, Zaidel, Thompson, & Toga, 2006). These findings support the argument that the ideas raised by Bresciani only further support socially constructed gender norms by promoting the idea that gendered behaviour is biological and not in control by the individual performing it.

Bresciani has unknowingly taught the hidden curriculum by presenting as fact the idea that humans have biological predispositions as females to be emotional and as males to be violent and not emotional and furthermore not understand emotion. This act simply reinforced gender stereotypes. This form of teaching the hidden curriculum may result in encouraging, or worse, requiring boys to suppress certain emotions. It encourages or allows them to believe that they are naturally or biologically supposed to not feel or understand certain emotions because that is what separates them from girls or from being feminine. This biological idea can also systemically or implicitly justify the violent behaviour of boys because it is assumed that these behaviours are natural for males.

Heteronormative examples were also used in the presentation to explain differences between males and females. Bresciani addressed specifically females and males in the audience when discussing typical behaviours of “boyfriends” and “girlfriends,” explaining that it is acceptable when a boyfriend does not understand his girlfriend’s emotions because males have an apparent biological predisposition to simply not understand women’s emotions. These statements were not only heteronormative because he addressed the group of students with the assumption that they were all heterosexual, but they also discredit males and their ability to feel and recognize emotion. It also, once again, reinforces stereotypes that discourage males from expressing or understanding certain emotions. These statements are evidence of how even the most experienced teachers can unknowingly practice the hidden curriculum.

Because a disproportionate number of teachers working within the school system have been socialized within the dominant heterosexual culture that confines and restricts people within their gender roles, many are not conscious of heteronormativity and gender construction within the hidden curriculum and its effect on students’ development. If teachers are to educate students in a way that is conscious of the limitations and challenges that stem from of gender construction, they must first be faced with and accept their own gender as a social construct. This is a challenge for anyone who has considered his or her sex and gender to be indistinguishable. Curricula and texts that reinforce gender norms and heteronormativity can provide opportunities for the conscious teacher to bring aspects of the hidden curriculum into overt curriculum. By provoking class discussions and providing opportunity for individual reflection, many of these issues can be challenged by both the teacher and the students.

It is evident that because of the influence teachers have, the practice of the hidden curriculum strongly affects young children and their understanding of what is socially right and wrong. More commonly with middle years or secondary aged students, the practice of heteronormativity and gendering through the hidden curriculum makes it difficult and unfair for students who do not identify as heterosexual, are transgender, or simply questioning their gender identity or sexuality. The practice of the hidden curriculum further contributes to creating a school environment that is not diverse or accepting. All teachers practice the hidden curriculum, but the power is in the knowledge and consciousness of the influence teachers have on students throughout elementary and secondary schooling.

Emily Ritenburg grew up in Regina, SK. Soon after her high school graduation she moved to Winnipeg, MB and attended the University of Winnipeg for two years studying Sociology and Women & Gender Studies. In the fall of 2010, Emily transferred to the University of Regina to join the Arts Education program majoring in Visual Arts and minoring in...
Dance. Since transferring into Education, Emily has developed an interest in pedagogy and the construction of gender in childhood.

References


Impacts of Gay-Straight Alliances and Considerations for their Members

By Cory Michael Dawson

**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this paper is to confirm the positive impact that GSAs can have on creating safe and inclusive learning environments, as well as underline how those involved in these students groups can improve their effectiveness. The chapter begins with a look at who starts a GSA and how these groups are able to provide support. The chapter concludes with a selection of critiques the literature presents of these student groups.

**Introduction**

Schools are simply not safe spaces for youth who perform gender in non-normative ways or who do not identify as explicitly heterosexual. These youth are continually victims of bullying from their peers, if not from educators and administrators. These experiences are a result of heterosexism, which privileges and naturalizes the individual development and socialization of heterosexual students, while at the same time inhibiting the ability of sexual minority and gender variant (SMGV) students to grow in individual and social contexts (Bernard, 1992; Grace & Wells, 2001, 2005, 2009; Rocco & Gallagher, 2006). In this context of overt marginalization, we cannot overlook the way subtle messages are sent to SMGV students and staff in

---

1 I choose to use the terms sexual minority and gender variant to encompass the entire spectrum of those who identity as non-heteronormative. This includes, but is not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited, transgender, transsexual, allied, queer, questioning, asexual, intersexual, and youth of non-heteronormative families. At times in this paper I may use the term queer or LGBT in order to insert some variety; however, those usages are not meant to be exclusionary.
schools, for example: bathrooms and change rooms that are segregated into only ‘boy’ and ‘girl,’ options; curriculum that is absent of queer content; and, the continued gender-imbalance between elementary and secondary educators. As a result, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are needed in schools. It is in the face of these difficult learning conditions that students and teachers (however they choose to self-identify) are forming coalitions to help bring awareness to issues facing SMGV youth and educators. Since the 1980s, when the first GSA was formed (Miceli, 2005), there has been a significant increase in the presence of GSAs in schools; however, the need for these groups is as strong today as it was thirty years ago. In light of these circumstances, the purpose of this paper is to confirm the positive impact that GSAs can have on creating safe and inclusive learning environments, as well as underline how those involved in these student groups can improve their effectiveness. In order to do this I will begin with a look at who starts a GSA and how these groups are able to provide support. Recognizing that GSAs are not always well-received and are subjected to annual changes in membership and efficacy, I will conclude with a selection of critiques the literature presents of these student groups.

Who Starts a Gay-Straight Alliance?

Generally speaking, mostly due to the heteronormative environments of schools, Blumenfeld (1995) credits “courageous people” (p. 218) with the creation of GSAs. However, in more concrete terms, students or faculty creates GSAs. Even though these are student groups, the literature (Griffin & Ouelett, 2002; Miceli, 2005; Valenti & Campbell, 2009) tends to focus on the motivations and reasons for faculty involvement. Miceli identifies three themes that emerge from the research that explains what enable teachers to become involved: having a personal connection with LGBT people, to help LGBT students, and the “heterosexual Teflon.”

Having a personal connection resonated most with teachers who identified as LGBT themselves. Some indicated the desire to “be a role model for kids going through the coming out process because [they] had passed through it successfully” (Valenti & Campbell, 2009, p. 237). On the other hand, for those who did not identify as LGBT, having a personal connection through knowing someone who did is what provided motivation to become involved.

Another motivating factor for working with LGBT students as they navigate heteronormative school environments, was a sense of responsibility as educators. This sense of responsibility tended to help faculty conquer their hesitancy in and reservation when involving themselves with this potentially controversial subject (Miceli, 2005). Additionally, there was a tendency to become inspired by the actions of the students themselves, engendered through sympathy and admiration. Included in this subsection is a willingness to be an advocate. Griffin and Ouelett (2002) describe willing adults as ones who “bridge communication between students and others in the school…and [were] entrusted by the principal to work on a potentially controversial topic” (p. 5).

The final factor, “heterosexual Teflon” (Miceli, 2005), refers to the known heterosexuality of an educator as an enabler for participating in GSAs. If an educator is married with children, he or she is “not subject to any suspicion of ulterior motives for their involvement with a gay-straight student club,” whether as being part of a larger “gay agenda,” or “of starting the group out of their own interests rather than the students’ interest” (p. 201). Miceli also discovered that many heterosexual educators (particularly women) were aware of their heterosexual privilege and felt a strong obligation to use their privilege to establish GSAs in their schools. Even though Miceli defines this situation as the “heterosexual Teflon,” Valenti and Campbell (2009) substantiate this protection, allowing that “being married
affords an advisor protection against harassment that a gay or lesbian may not enjoy” (p. 242).

I concede that “heterosexual Teflon” may seem problematic, however we must begin discussing such concepts so that we can also begin to work towards the educational transformation that will eliminate its existence. Moreover, with a stronger understanding as to why LGBT educators might be reluctant to get involved (the exposure and resulting examination of their sexuality and gender identity), we can work towards creating schools that allow for all educators to take up the struggle against heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homo/transphobia.

How do Gay-Straight Alliances Help?

Garcia-Alonso (2004) explains that membership in a GSA helps students develop their personal and communal identities; realise that schools can be places to engage in student activism in the face of heterosexism, rather than places to avoided; and, to have an impact beyond the walls of their schools. These alliances are also safe spaces where stronger personal connections between hetero- and non-heterosexual students/teachers can be nurtured (Macgillivray, 2005; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Lee (2002) emphasises the benefits to the heterossexual population, describing how “[GSAs] are important not only in offering support to LGBT students, but also in providing education for straight students” (p. 14). What follows is a summary of a study conducted by Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004), which looked specifically at the role GSAs play in schools.

Griffin et al. (2004) explored the roles GSAs play in schools, and concluded that there were four main purposes of notable significance: counselling and support; creating a safe space; being the primary vehicle for education and awareness in the school; and, being a part of broader efforts to educate and raise awareness in the school.

GSAs that were identified as providing only counselling and support endeavoured “to create a social gathering place where students could safely meet” (p. 13). This supports the contention of Ginsburg (1998) that there is power in one positive action: “the establishment of a support group in the school” (p. 9). Groups might not be able to move beyond providing only counselling and support for a number of reasons, such as an extremely hostile school or community, but they are working within the limitations of their lived realities to provide individual counselling that results in greater psychological safety for these students (Griffin et al., 2004, p. 12).

The second way GSAs exist to help create safe spaces, is when these groups focus on creating psychologically safe environments. The main difference between this category and the previous one is visibility and an extension to include friends and allies of LGBT students. A positive consequence of including friends and allies in the group is that these GSAs “provide the necessary safe space for LGBTQ students to develop trust relationships among fellow student allies” (Conway & Crawford-Fish, 2007, p. 128).

The third category includes GSAs that are primary vehicles for education and social awareness in schools. These GSAs are visible, moving beyond individual support to placing an emphasis on individual rights, while continuing to focus on LGBT students and their friends, and aspiring to create a tolerant school climate that promotes safety (Griffin et al., 2004, p. 12). Many of these GSAs are widely visible in their schools, with some visiting classes to “to talk to their peers about the state of student rights law that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation” (p. 14). Furthermore, due to an increased visibility within the school, SMGV students and their issues are harder to ignore. Being visible and drawing attention to themselves is one of the best ways members of a GSA can advocate for change in their school environment (Griffin & Ouelett, 2002; Macgillivray, 2005).

Lastly, when GSAs are part of broader efforts to educate and raise awareness in schools they are advocating for organizational change (Griffin et al., 2004, p. 12). As the
authors explain, “the key difference is that, unlike the previous category, these GSAs are not acting as the primary vehicle for addressing LGBT issues (emphasis added)” (p. 16).

It is evident that GSAs have the power to drastically impact the lives of students by creating more inclusive school environments, regardless of which of the four categories they represent; however, there are cautions and suggestions for GSA members.

**Recommendations for Gay-Straight Alliances**

This final section is meant to inform future practices of GSAs. It is not meant to trivialize the work being done in schools and the impact these student groups have had within the walls of their schools as well as in their communities. However, there are two recommendations I would like to make that I hope those involved with GSAs, or those considering starting their own GSAs, will consider. The first is becoming part of a larger organizational response. This concern refers back to the fourth category provided by Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004), who explain that GSAs in this category are “not acting as the primary vehicle for addressing LGBT issues (emphasis added)” (p. 16). One of the obstacles GSAs must overcome is inconsistent membership/participation from year to year (Macgillivray, 2007). In order to do this, Griffin and Ouelett (2002) discovered that is essential to have a supportive, involved administration, which recognizes GSAs as part of a larger institutional solution. It is absolutely essential to involve administration and work towards making the GSA part of a larger organizational response. In a final effort to entrench GSAs and the issues of SMGV students and teachers, schools need to provide professional development opportunities and expect that teachers will move conversations out of the student group and into the classroom and the curriculum (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007).

The second recommendation is that GSAs need to strive to be more inclusive. They must work on creating an environment that is more inclusive of race (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Hunter & Mallon, 2000; McCready, 2004), sexual orientation (Valenti & Campbell, 2009), and gender and gender identity (Perrotti & Westheimer, 2001). Even in racially diverse schools, Perrotti and Westheimer discovered that GSAs are “primarily made up of White students” (p. 46) and “when White GSA advisors and other adults do not have a clear picture of how racism affects gay and straight students, everyone loses” (p. 50). Perrotti and Westheimer also found that girls typically make up the majority of members in GSAs and that these student groups do not always include openly transgender students. In fact, “a number of leaders of GSAs have come out as transgender after they graduated” (p. 63). Lastly, Valenti and Campbell encourage GSAs to remember that these groups are intended to be alliances between SMGV and straight teachers and students. They do not wish to downplay the heterosexist nature of schools, they only caution that if “there is a tendency to focus on the gay part of the Gay-Straight Alliance while ignoring the straight element… it is important to consider what message that sends to the straight students as well as the gay students” (pp. 243-244). In the end these are appropriate questions for members of GSAs to ask themselves on an ongoing basis: what are the demographics of our school and our GSA? Does one mirror the other? Or, is there an obvious discrepancy in representation, and if so, how can we work to make our group more inclusive? We must not lose sight of the fact that GSAs were initially created to promote inclusivity and this original goal must drive our efforts to make schools safe spaces for all.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Recognizing the importance of gay-straight alliances and the need for their existence, I must reinforce my support for their inclusion in schools. Simply by being visible they force
issues regarding LGBT students and teachers to be considered and discussed. Engaging with those issues faced by SMGV students and teachers personalizes the topic and allows the existence of safe environments for heterosexual and non-heterosexual people to evaluate themselves as well as their surroundings. I included a small critique of what GSAs might be missing in their practices only to strengthen their potential impact. Working towards a stronger influence in a larger organizational response, as well more a membership that is more representative of the larger student population can only increase the positive effects of these collaborative student groups in their efforts to realise educational transformation.

Cory Michael Dawson has completed undergraduate degrees in Political Science, English, and Education, and is currently working on his Master’s Degree in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. In addition to his academic responsibilities Cory is also the Coordinator for Camp FYrefly (www.fyrefly.ualberta.ca), a leadership retreat for sexual minority and gender variant youth, and a Research Assistant at the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (www.ismss.ualberta.ca).

References


The Dispersal of Queer Populations: Gentrification and Community Formation

By Katherine Van Meyl

ABSTRACT. In this essay, the author argues that the commodification of queer spaces in urban centers serves the function of mainstreaming GLBTTQ culture(s) which, in turn, has the negative effect of encroaching upon queer resistance by creating social dispersals. The assimilationist rhetoric of ‘mainstreaming’ often serves the function of producing homonormative citizens who adhere, often unwittingly, to neoliberal market logic and create atmospheres in which queers can be further marginalized and disenfranchised. This article advocates resistance of gentrification through queer world-making to undermine neoliberal policies of privatization.

Glenn Crawford, a white, middle-class, gay male who runs his own graphic designing business, has become known as the initiator of the Facebook group “The Village – Creating a GLBT Village in Ottawa”. Geographically, this village would encompass most of Bank St. in the Centertown area from at least Nepean St. to James St., and preferably from Laurier Ave. to Gladstone Ave. Unbeknownst to him, the creation of a GLBT village in Ottawa will accelerate processes of gentrification, which has the effect of eradicating the existence of a visibly queer public. Some scholars and grassroots/community-based activists have commented on how queer spaces reduce isolation among people with GLBTTQ experiences and identities thereby reinforcing the necessity of having a ‘safe space’ (England, 1991; Rothenberg, 1995). I do not contest the necessity of having safe spaces for queer people; I argue these spaces are becoming less available due to processes of gentrification, of which some homonormative citizens are unwittingly complicit.

Concerning queer spaces, there is debate addressing the difference between when these spaces develop naturally or when there is an external (either municipal, provincial, or federal) spatial branding of the area (Hunt & Zacharias, 2008; Philo & Kearns, 1994; Warner, 1999). Glenn Crawford is advocating for an external spatial branding through the Business Improvement Area (BIA) which receives funding from the municipality of Ottawa. It is argued that when this external spatial branding occurs “the space is appropriated and packaged not for the local residents and gay population but for consumption by those outside the community” (Philo & Kearns, 1994, p. 3). There are contradictions in the creation of these externally branded queer spaces. As Hunt and Zacharias (2008) discuss, there is a disparity between “the federal government’s promotion of Canada as a gay haven and outdated laws that threaten the closure of federally-promoted gay establishments” (p. 51). When and why have these contradictions occurred? Who is viewed as the proper neoliberal subject and who is viewed as the ‘other’ within these gentrified queer spaces? How have people with GLBTTQ experiences and identities created an environment where this ‘exclusion’ is made possible? In response to these questions, I argue that the commodification of queer spaces in urban centers serves the function of mainstreaming GLBTTQ culture(s) which, in turn, has the negative effect of encroaching upon queer resistance by creating social dispersals.

2 According to Lisa Duggan, the new homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 50).

3 A commodity is a good or service produced for sale on the market. Commodification, on the other hand, involves the processes through which objects or services become market goods (Sears, 2005).

4 The gentrification of queer spaces diffuses resistance by creating ‘dispersals’ (Floyd, 2009) which is similar to what scholars in Urban
The rhetoric of ‘mainstreaming’ often serves the function of producing homonormative citizens who adhere, often unwittingly, to neoliberal market logic and create atmospheres in which queers can be further marginalized and disenfranchised. Through queer world-making we can resist the gentrification of these spaces and undermine neoliberal policies of privatization.

My research will be split into three parts. Part I will define neoliberalism and the benefits of encroaching upon collectivity given this definition. Part II will explore gentrification facilitated through homonormativity and made feasible through the commodification of queer spaces. Part III will explore the commodification of queer spaces as a method of creating ‘dispersals’ (Floyd, 2009), or what scholars in Urban Studies have called ‘social tectonics’. In my conclusion I will offer ways to resist the commodification of queer spaces, mainly through Berlant and Warner’s (1998) notion of ‘queer world making’.

**Part I - The Threat of Community**

Neoliberalism is a philosophy and governing rationality that affects all forms of social/political existence. During the great depression, there were no welfare policies to ensure the wellbeing of the nation; therefore, many people perished. In the 1940s, while recovering from the economic hardships of the great depression, and while enjoying the economic boom due to the war economy, Keynesian welfare policies began to be implemented. The Keynesian welfare state was categorized by decreased inequality between the rich and poor, social welfare, a fixed exchange rate, and a blend of private and state ownership of corporations/social institutions. Consequently, the 1960s had high rates of economic growth and close to full employment (Harvey, 2005).

The high rates of economic growth and the rates of employment from the 1960s did not extend into the 1970s. The 1970s were categorized by persistent inflation with high unemployment rates. The ‘solution’ to this problem was determined to be the deregulation of the economy. According to David Harvey (2005), this shift in the economy is categorized by a shift in ideology and a reinstatement of class power. Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy (2005) have shown that neoliberalism was/is a project to achieve the restoration of class power. Accordingly, notions of community diminished in favor of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values.

Freedom, under neoliberalism, is to choose what to consume based on a competitive consumer market; regulating the economy encroaches upon this ‘freedom’. Neoliberalism is often categorized by ‘choice’; however, it is often defined as a choice between certain options, and not necessarily ‘freedom to choose’. There is an assumption that “individual freedom [is] guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (p. 7). The shift from the welfare state to neoliberalism has put less focus on the broader socio-political context that fosters environments of social injustice, and more focus on individualized responsibility for social ills. This has had the effect of widening the gap between rich and poor, restructuring masculinities (Irving, 2009; McDowell, 2004; Connell & Wood, 2005), restructuring femininities (Skeggs, 2004; Bakker, 2003), and restructuring the family (Nast, 2002; McDowell, 2006) to the disadvantage of those who are marginalized and disenfranchised in society.

The commodification of queer spaces is a method of encroaching upon queer collectivities which have the potential of resisting the hyper-individualism necessary to sustain neoliberal ideologies. Floyd’s (2009) notion of ‘dispersal’, as well as urban scholars’ notion of ‘social
tectonics’ has been fundamental to my understanding of why collectives are threatening to neoliberal ideologies. A collectivity can effectively resist neoliberal strategies of privatization. Therefore, the only method to encroach upon this is to disperse various subversive populations whilst simultaneously mainstreaming them. For example, when Floyd (2009) discusses the mainstreaming of GLBTQ identities and experiences through the Disneyfication of Times Square, he states that what “lies behind this sheen of interchangeable identities and airbrushed bodies is a horizon of genuinely collective queer movement, as well as the distinctly neoliberal prospect of its disappearance” (p. 202). Accordingly, it is precisely this queer formation (in its most subversive form), this attempt at ‘community’, which the privatization of sex, gender, and sexuality has undermined.

Part II – Gentrification Facilitated through Homonormativity

There are two primary ways of viewing gentrification that can be applied to the formation of sexual geographies and the commodification of queer spaces. The first involves Damaris Rose’s concept of the ‘marginal gentrifier’. This perspective views the process of gentrification as emancipatory for marginalized groups in society who move into low-income areas in order to be closer to support services. These ‘marginal gentrifiers’ are often ‘marginal-earned professions, prominent among whom are] women, single parents, and people receiving moderate incomes’ (Rose, 1989, p. 125). The other way of viewing gentrification is as a policy-led endeavour, which is far from emancipatory and has the effect of further marginalizing and displacing citizens in the area (Slater, 2005). With a slight modification, it is this second way of viewing gentrification that will be applied to queer spaces throughout this essay. Slater (2005) does not always recognize that sometimes gentrification can be facilitated through zoning boards, governments, community organizers, and the police rather than being dependant solely on government policies. Urban sexual citizenship is predicated upon adherence to homonormativity. To be recognized as sexual citizen, consumption is necessary and this freedom to consume is expressed through the market (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1808). For example, gay villages are bounded communities that will not be accessible to everyone. These boundaries are necessary to keep the ‘unwanted’ and ‘undesirable’ out. Essentially, the “boundaries of ‘unwantedness’ gets redrawn, so that in opening up to (non-gay identified) consumers, the spaces push out what we might call the ‘queer unwanted’ (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1810). In the case of Ottawa, the sex workers in Centertown would be considered the ‘queer unwanted’. They are consequently evicted from the ‘safe space’ that currently constitutes this area – a space soon to be available only to those with the financial and human capital to access it. According to Bell and Binnie (2004), this process of evicting

5 A good example which demonstrates this second way of viewing gentrification is the case of South Parkdale in Toronto. This low-income area was viewed negatively because of the Queen Street Center for Addiction and Mental Health. Due to neoliberal practices of cutting back on state funding and increasing individualized responsibility for the ‘care of the self’, the state opted for deinstitutionalization which had the effect of increasing the amount of homeless and low-income people in the area. Due to the lower income housing available, and easy access to downtown via the Gardiner Expressway, there was a huge influx of the middle class in the area. This consequently had the effect of raising rent prices and consequently pushing low-income tenants out of the buildings and onto the streets. This was aided through various governmental policies, such as ‘Tenant Protection Act’, which eliminated rent control on vacant units (Slater, 2005).

6 Sometimes, gentrification can be facilitated through these avenues only to be furthered by a policy initiative. On the other hand, sometimes homonormative citizens work in tandem with these institutions (the courts, the police, the zoning boards) in order to encourage gentrification (although not labeled as such). This means it is hard to determine which came first, and how the gentrification of the area actually occurred. Determining this goes beyond the scope of this essay.
the ‘queer unwanted’ will have the effect of reducing the ‘gay public sphere’ to consumption spaces and gentrified neighborhoods (p. 1811).

As queer spaces become gentrified, they become “more desirable for wider gentrification and colonization by trendy (and less trendy) straights” (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1815). As argued by Philo and Kearns (1994), these spaces tend to be consumed not necessarily by people with GLBTTQ experiences and identities, but by those outside of the community. For example, Derek Rushbrook (2002) discusses how the cosmopolitan tourist will often visit commodified GLBT spaces in order to temporarily enjoy the ‘other’. She states “queers and queer space are consumed by a broader, non-queer-identified public in ways that shape the evolution of these spaces and affect the everyday lives of the gays who inhabit them” (p. 184). However, the boundaries of these segregated places also allow for the containment of people with GLBTTQ experiences and identities into one space. Consequently, with this wave of (re)gentrification comes further ‘cleaning up’ of “activities and establishments that overstep acceptable homonormative behaviours and identities” (Knopp, 1995, p. 152). Unknown to the tourists, the people who inhabit these areas are ‘different’, but not ‘too different’ from their own lived experiences due to their homonormative status. The idea that these people with GLBTTQ experiences and identities are not ‘too different’ from these privileged spectators will be further developed in the following part of this essay which addresses the dispersal of queers through the gentrification and commodification of these spaces.

Part III – The Dispersal of Queers

The local gay community, the government, and corporate entities often produce gay villages; however, the agendas of these groups may be incongruent with other local agendas in the area (Hunt and Zacharias, 2008, p. 30). The term ‘gay space’ or ‘queer space’ itself implies a homogeneity which
does not exist. According to Derek Rushbrook (2002) the appearance of “homogeneity conceals exclusionary practices predicated on other axes of difference, or even on sexual practices themselves, as well as the labor that produces these spaces” (p. 203). For example, in a study of Montréal’s gay village by Hunt and Zacharias (2008), they showed how the magazine Fugues geared its content towards tourists visiting Montréal rather than the local residents. They found that “imagery related to a certain genre of gay business [escorting, gay bars, etc.] declined through the sample” (p. 43) and increasingly they found imagery relating to real estate, home decoration, furniture, and appliances. This shows a mainstreaming of GLBTTQ cultures, which has the effect of eradicating a visible ‘queer public’. Warner (1999) has argued that this eradication of ‘sex’ from public view has eroded the accessibility to sexual knowledges necessary to engage in safer sex practices. He states that the “politics of privatization, in my view, destroys real privacy even as it erodes public activity” (p. 172).

According to Henri Lefebvre (2000), space is ‘conceived’ through various representations, one of which is the mass media. We live in a world dominated by images, and according to Skeggs et al. (2004) the thing (such as queer space), which is being presented, is granted power; it is authenticated and affirmed as ‘true’. This is the case regardless of how representative the image is of the community itself and it can change the fabric of the ‘imagined community’. For example, there are numerous studies which focus on how the television show Queer as Folk (1999) changed conceptualizations of the authentic ‘gay’ community in Manchester (Hughes, 2003; Skeggs et al., 2004). Consequently, these citizens have internalized homonormative projections of this gay space. This has detrimental effects on queer spaces because it has led to the dispersal of queers. Urban spaces and experiences have become cultural resources extremely susceptible to exploitation. Cities must market themselves as ‘gay’ friendly (often through Florida’s (2007) Bohemian-Gay Index) in
order to attract tourists into the area. Therefore, the gay body is commodified as an exotic object and the image projected of these communities is often homonormative in nature. As previously discussed, the ‘village’ in Ottawa has not yet been externally branded as ‘gay’; however, activist Glenn Crawford is advocating for this external spatial branding by the municipal government. This means there is still an avenue to resist the gentrification and the increasing homonormative image of the community here in Ottawa.

**Conclusion**

Many laws aim to “restrict any counterpublic sexual culture by regulating its economic conditions” (Warner & Berlant, 1998, p. 562). This structural environment has “meant that the institutions of queer culture have been dominated by those with capital: typically, middle-class white men” (Warner, 1993, xvi-xvii). The work of Miranda Joseph (2002) critiques the construction of ‘community’ as unity, presence, and communion. She states conceptualizations of ‘community’ “attempt to naturalize and mobilize such a collectivity; on both left and right, ‘community’ is deployed to lower consciousness of difference, hierarchy, and oppression within the invoked group” (p. xxiv). Therefore, these spaces are not dissent spaces, resistant/progressive spaces, or claimed spaces but rather, these spaces perpetuate divides. Moving beyond this critique of ‘community’, Warner and Berlant (1998) argue for what they have termed ‘queer counterpublics’. This differs from community or group because it “necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few references points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright” (p. 558). By definition, queer world making is unrecognizable because it includes more spaces, identities, peoples and places than can be imagined; therefore, Miranda Joseph’s critiques of discourses around ‘community’, although valid, are unrelated to queer aspirations to world making. It is this form of queer world making that I advocate for as a method of encroaching upon neoliberalism’s attempt to disperse queer populations.

Queer world-making will allow for this resistance to occur. This strategy goes beyond identity politics and puts back the fragments of our communities together and arguably, adds a fourth and a fifth dimension to the puzzle that we did not know existed. This may seem idyllic; however, to succumb to pessimism is to allow the hyper-individualized nature of today’s activism to encroach upon possibilities we cannot even fathom. I have often been disgruntled by how I perceive activism to be a fight for individual rights, rather than collective rights. However, the activism against the gentrification of the Downtown East Side in Vancouver has given me hope for this movement away from identity politics, towards queer world making. This essay is the first step towards queer world making, because to “aspire to totality is not merely to wish for social plentitude but to critique social fragmentation” (Floyd, 2009, p. 212, emphasis mine).

**Katherine Van Meyl** is a queer geographer and activist interested in studying the legal regulation of sex, gender, and sexuality. An advocate for the decriminalization of prostitution and a lover of quasi-public sex, she intends to pursue her graduate studies in September 2012. In the meantime, she can be found reading in a coffee shop, or practicing yoga. She can be contacted at katherine.van.meyl@gmail.com.

**References**


“Toto we’re not in Kansas anymore”: Cultural Studies

The Redux as Redefinition

By Justin Raphael Roykovich

“but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgettin while stealin
this is mine/ this aint yr stuff”

--Ntozake Shange

Nicolas Bourriard starts off his "AlterModern Manifesto" by saying that “a new modernity is emerging, understood in its economic, political and cultural aspects.” One can only hope that he is right; that on the edge of a social paradigm shift, we are going to start looking at one another from a universal perspective. Yet, Bourriard’s notion of the universal is slightly shortsighted: for within his manifesto there are these great attempts at bridging the gaps that separate us culturally. Admirable for sure. However, those bridges that Bourriard attempts to make unfortunately are not actually functional, but merely decorative - a simple gesture to usher us into the future, while we clutch desperately that which we stole from the past. (Namely of course, our western ideal, our European heritage of superiority and our notion that the privileged can pillage that which they see valuable.) The west has repeatedly built its identity on the backs of those who were used as the stones in the foundation of its mansion. Instead of allowing those stones to be reclaimed by those from whence they came, Bourriard suggests carrying them yet further into future discourse. I, however, propose a different solution.
Sprinkle

Origins of Colonized Histories

Another author, Douglass Haddo, wrote in a recent issue of AdBusters that “It’s hard to pinpoint exactly where and when it (Postmodernism) died, but I’d venture a guess that it choked on its own vomit somewhere between Kanye West’s gradual descent and Lady Gaga’s meteoric rise,” (AdBusters, March/April 2010). Finally! And I could not agree more that Ms. Gaga is indeed the harbinger of death (and perhaps equally the necromancer) to the Postmodern, with possibly Mr. West, Mylie Cyrus and Lindsay Lohan rounding out the mix of the four horsemen. For in a culture of recycled imagery, society, it seems, has finally found the itch (and the courage) to jump the track. Not to say that this is easy. We as a species are obviously scared of change to our ideals, morals and identity, especially so when we have been able to borrow it for so long from others before us. Yet, if it was anything that the beginning of the 21st Century taught us - between terrorism, failed wars, the decline of the American Empire and the meltdown of the global economy - it was that in order to survive, we must, what? Adapt? Absolutely! But more than that, we must understand, we must relate and we must respect that which is around us, which includes our physical environment, obviously, but more importantly it includes each other. Both Postmodernism as critique and Postmodernism as a movement are done.

This crossroads of interrelation is what I explore in my work as a visual artist, culminating recently on a project I have titled The Vogue Redux, 1990-2010. It is an exploration into how media and entertainment can shape identities, while at the same time provide a basis for colonized histories for the socially advantaged at the expense of minorities. For this specific project, I am working with Madonna’s “Vogue,” a song that helped solidify her stardom (along with her paycheck), at the expense of the young African-American/Latino/Gay who originated the dance of the same name.

For one, “Vogue” is the epitome of a Deboridian sense of spectacle: it is all image, no content, perpetuated by a disassociation with the culture in which the dance originated. Pushing on this notion, I must add that Madonna’s “Vogue” is very different than an African American’s version of a vogue (along with its origins); this is then combined with the fact that Madonna’s “Vogue” is a staple of white male, gay culture, forcing the very foundations of the dance to be almost completely forgotten. There then is the notion of power: Madonna is female, and she attributes to herself the traits found in “house mothers.” She is strong; she is tough; though unlike the real thing, she only gives the illusion of providing family. In this way, the issue of alienation comes into play with her leaving the subject behind, and once separated for capital gain, it allows her to run away with a culture now attributed to a racial majority.

This hits close to home for me personally: I grew up and came of age in an era that was at the tail end of the New York Club Scene, probably right outside the sphere of knowledge that I would have needed to differentiate Madonna’s “Vogue” from the real thing. Had I been born just a couple of years earlier, I would have known how and where and why this dance originated, how steeped it was in history and how much it did not belong to me as a Caucasian. Yet, for me and for the group of friends I had as a family in New York at the age of 18, Madonna was the focal point of white-gay identity. We followed her moves, we copied them, and we wanted to emulate them and her. It was the

1 Think of the term “house mother” like that of one for a sorority: a woman who acts like a role model to those who need guidance. Only in this case, it is more of a person who is more experienced on the streets, who takes on the responsibility of caring for a group that has very little, if any, parental influence due mostly to being rejected from their households.

2 Another interesting way to look at this is to know the history of “voguing” itself: where in African American youth were looking to the “golden age” of white Hollywood, displaying a longing for glamour and riches that came along with that lifestyle, emulating poses from that era of fashion. Madonna does the same in her video for her song, and whites...
Sprinkle

whitewashing of a culture and we perpetuated that continuation. The Marxist saying was definitely true, we did not know it, but we were doing it, both in economic and social capital (Marx, *The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secrets Thereof*).

This notion of meaningless and unknowing perpetuation of stolen ideas also leads to the Baudrillardian idea of the simulacrum: that the semiotics of the “Vogue” video are merely only visual signs of what the real thing is. As Baudrillard says, this idea perverts and masks a basic reality (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*).

What is that reality? It is an assimilation of a minority culture to fit within a commodity, then sold and branded to include the identity of a new generation. Meanwhile, the originators of the movement lie wasting away, watching what they started become this phenomenon that is really based purely on spectacle, on entertainment, void of the original meaning. DJ Sprinkles, who was a DJ for the gay African-American/Latino demographic in the early 1990’s, says:

“She (Madonna) had taken a very specifically queer, transgendered, Latino and African-American phenomenon and totally erased that context with her lyrics, 'it makes no difference if you’re black or white, if you’re a boy or a girl.' Madonna was taking in tons of money, while the Queen who actually taught her how to Vogue sat before me in the club, strung out, depressed and broke … And as long as I’m DJing you will not be allowed to Vogue to decontextualized, reified, corportalized, liberalized, neutralized, asexualized, re-genderized, pop reflection of this dancefloor’s reality? (Madonna-Free Zone; Malcolm did it first.)

Personal Accountability

So then, how do I fit in? I am white and did not grow up in New York in the late 80’s. Though I am gay, that does not give me ownership of all gay culture, as I once thought it did.

Nor does it give scores of other white gay males a free pass to ignore the history of that which they look to in order to find identity. I started exploring this notion of how entertainment helps identity in Gay American demographic through several video works, culminating in a cinematic essay I titled MCMLXXXIX/The Vogue Redux, Part 1. I centered the video around the year 1989, which played an important role in my own personal history; it was the year Robert Mapplethorpe was crucified in congress; it was the year the Berlin Wall came down; it was the year Madonna was on the rise and would release “Vogue” not so long after. It was a year in which emperor Hirohito of Japan died, relating back to a fascination my father had with World War 2. It was the year that the AIDS crisis was being compared to the holocaust. Through these experiences both macro and micro, I developed a hypothesis of how I began to look to popular culture, interweaving global and political events with personal milestones, to define who I was as I came of age. Though I absolutely do not think that my experience is unique - nor do I think that popular culture has lessened its grip any - for me the way I integrated media into the structure of my psyche left me forever changed.

So I did on screen what was happening in my mind: voguers from Madonna’s video melded with images of the atomic bombings, Jesse Helms became a new face for Degenerate Art and various clips and scenes from music and movies bled together to form a new narrative. This narrative was based on an age where we look out to see what is in, and we hold a mirror to entertainment to tell us about ourselves. Yet it was a narrative of a relationship to my own existence, told through a history claimed for capital, denatured from origin and sterilized for a mass market. The cinematic essay was a diving board for me to change that.

I started envisioning a media installation piece, where I could rewire the effects of this, and how I could validate my own history with the knowledge that a lot of it had been based on illusion. I needed to break that illusion down. I started deconstructing the video and the song.
reducing it to specific movements, suspending the dancers in mid-stride. I started abstracting Madonna’s face, aesthetically manipulating her beauty to create visual representations of the decay I felt happening inside of me to the knowledge of my own history. I started breaking down snippets of the music video, so that flashes of the movement could be looped to create this ever-lasting cycle of choreographed cultural imperialism.

Yet, the underlying problem with all of this is that I still feel as if I have a stake in that imperialism. I still identify with it; still remember how much of an influence it had in my youth. There is no escape from it. Even through the knowledge that I know have, Madonna’s whitewashed “Vogue,” does in some way belong to white people and belong to me. I very much do feel possessive of it. Yet it also brings with it the baggage of privilege. And it is luggage that we as the racial majority have to carry. But, at the same time, is there a positive aspect to the fact that many white gay youth find a voice in Madonna and her version of voguing? This is not at all to say that it is justifiable; but still, how do I, as a white gay male, a majority within a minority, reconcile the fact that a large part of my identity is based on things that are stolen, that are not mine to take? That perhaps were given to me with bloody hands, yet I was not able to see the stain? Do I abandon that which gave me a power in my youth, that which through naiveté I found a voice, a movement, a club to belong to? How do we then, as minorities find our way through media, with the very small anchors that we do have, find they are false, and still be able to construct who we are in a world in which opticality rules first and foremost and meaning almost never? Many questions, few answers.

The Beginning of the Post-Optical

However, what I am offering is a post-optical solution to how we view things, piggybacking off of a deconstructionist idea of breaking down visual culture to expose what the meaning really is. That by looking at things beyond the mere opticality, a choice can be made to make art does not have to look like a “thing,” but that can display the notions of how our mind views these problems. That through exposing flaws in the design, the true nature is found. That by eliminating the overindulgence of media, the underlying truth is revealed. (Even sometimes by creating an over-overindulgence.) Through this process, I have realized that while it is essential to understand how one’s identity is constructed, how we get those building blocks is not always in our control. Yet, it is our social responsibility to explore those constructs and navigate through the illusion to find what is really hidden in the message. This specific project was one instance of many in which I hope to explore how media, image and meaning all fit together to create dialog. Through that, it will continue to be dissected to discover how the meaning can be exposed through the removal of the obstacles in the way of personal truths.

And here lies the areas in which I hope Bourriaud is right. His notions of exploring an empathic and connected society are crucial to our understandings of each other and of our cultural origins, even if those cultures lie in “pop.” While his thoughts are noble, they must be carried forth to all ideals, not just the one of privilege. Using “Vogue” as an example, if we continue to rob from those who have no voice to scream for help, we not only pervert the culture, we also lose the origin of where our own identities come from. For if that is indeed the case, we then have no origin except that which has been given to us - or that which has been taken aloofly - and then we know not who we are or where we came from and instead we float in a sea of uncertainty. It is this lack of identity that then gets filled with the misrepresentations through media. And so the cycle continues. But when we question and investigate that which we think we know, the origins become clear and we can build our identity that is based on truth rather than illusion.
Justin Raphael Roykovich received his BFA in Art and Visual Technology in Spring 2011, cum laude and with departmental honors from the School of Art at George Mason University. His work focuses on the intersections between entertainment, media and identity construction within the modern American society, with particular emphasis on sexuality and masculinity. He works across media, using film and video, photography and printmaking for image building and his visual essays. He combines these media aspects to create new narratives within our popular culture, redefining meaning and reinterpreting the context to display a new way of seeing. His work has been shown across the Washington DC area and he was recently recognized by the Vimeo Film Festival + Awards for his cinematic essay, "MCMLXXXIX / The Vogue Redux, Part 1."

References


Sprinkle


Sprinkle


Flawed by Popular Design

By Kelli Kuerzi

My face is the neutral base coat of a house, my hair is the maroon shingles of the roof, and my eyes are the open windows with shutters that absolutely must be able to close. I am equal to the color-coded scheme of a housing development, rigidly regulated to conform to the aesthetic design of the culture that surrounds me. The restrictions on appropriate architecture and designs in a neighborhood mirror the obscenity laws that censor lesbian art and expression in America. Both are enforced to convey an image of comfort and success; an image that establishes a separation from the dangers of the outside or the “other.” We are subjects of what Michel Foucault calls “surveillance”, as communities watch and categorize their members in terms of objects, identity and value. Homes, lives, and artistic expression are invaded, demeaned, and repressed just as Adrienne Rich described with her theory of compulsory heterosexuality. It is a frame of mind as thick as the concrete in a foundation, set in a fear of the unfamiliar. Afraid of what change can create, restrictions on lesbian visibility claim to be a protection for the public, but by doing so jeopardize the strength of its diversity.

Everything is going as planned. There is nothing to fear, but the consequences that we are not allowed to see. In order to achieve pleasant uniformity, people design rigid laws about what colors a house can be painted, what toys a child can play with outside, and what kinds of shrubbery can be planted in a yard. This desire is typical of large home developments because the “standardized styles and prescriptive ‘pattern books’” for what is aesthetically acceptable reflect wealth and comfort (Postrel 298). High standards create exclusivity, and any deviations become unwelcome, because communities fear it lowers the value of their homes. This paradigm is strikingly similar to the regulation and control of lesbian visibility. The children’s television program “Postcards from Buster” had an episode banned across the country because it showed children with two mothers. The program was funded by a Ready-to-Learn government grant that stipulated: “Appeal to all of America’s children by providing them with content and/or characters with which they can identify. Diversity will be incorporated into the fabric of the series to help children understand and respect differences and learn to live in a multi-cultural society. The series will avoid stereotypical images of all kinds and show modern multi-ethnic/lingual/cultural families and children,” (de Moraes 2).

Despite these pro-diversity initiatives aimed at children, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings helped prove it is America’s adults, more than its children, who need help learning acceptance. She threatened to repeal the show’s funding if the episode was displayed, saying “many parents would not want their young children exposed to the life-styles in this episode,” (de Moraes 1). Her actions align specifically with what Adrienne Rich describes as the “silencing” of alternative sexualities in promotion of heteronormativity. This is similar to communities creating aesthetic boundaries in neighborhoods because “instead of tolerating sights they don’t like,” they are “demanding a world free of visual pollution”: a world where a show made to avoid stereotypes is banned by people using stereotypes (Postrel 297). Just as communities fear “ugly” home designs make the whole housing community ugly, people fear being polluted by the visibility of lesbians. This is not because any form of sexuality was discussed in the episode, but the mere presence of lesbians, even in the background, forces people to think about sexuality. Obsessed with the concept of sexual perversion, families pervert the lives and lifestyles of lesbian families. PBS, by obeying the demands of the Education Secretary, contradicted the entire purpose of its multicultural show, and by silencing lesbians, silenced the
acceptance of lesbians’ children. These laws are not just promoting a particular preference, but are eliminating the validity of variation.

This categorizing of aesthetic designs into an “acceptable” prescribed community pattern adheres to Queer theorist Michel Foucault’s theory of “surveillance”. Surveillance is itself part of the distribution of power Foucault calls “discourse”. Discourse, which “observes, describes and establishes the ‘facts,’” is the system by which communities define categories and labels for all of its members, and then distribute power to some of these categories as superior to others (Foucault 18). These categories include race, class, sex, and ethnicity, and have power based on their relationship with each other. People are then expected to conform to the categories they have been prescribed, or else they will switch from the category of “normal” to “unnatural”. Behaviors and appearances must match the categories for the good of the self and the society.

Foucault uses the metaphor of a prison tower to explain how surveillance reinforces the perceived truth of these roles. In the center, the tall prison tower full of “experts”, which represents science, religion, and medicine, monitor and measure the prisoners in their cells, to further define their roles and ensure they cannot escape. The prisoners, in response, internalize these roles, and begin to monitor their identity for the approval of the experts, society, and now themselves:

It does not matter what motive animates him: the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed (Foucault 4).

These interferences deform and distort people’s behavior and identities by turning something different and beautiful, into the grotesque and dangerous (Foucault 4). Design review boards are to innovative art, what science, religion, and medicine are to the queer community: they distort and diminish the personal liberties and diversity that America always claims to value. While painting a mural, artist Mike McNeilly was stopped by the police halfway through, and all that was left was a “a jaggedly incomplete Statue of Liberty, her face vanishing below her eyes…a graphic symbol of the intensifying conflicts between aesthetic expression and aesthetic control,” (Postrel 297). Our homes and communities are the prison cells Foucault describes.

Obscenity laws further promote surveillance by targeting lesbian art and literature. Anything defined as obscene can be banned legally, because it is not a protected form of speech or expression in the U.S. The Supreme Court describes obscenity as “[a]n appeal to prurient interest as judged by an average person applying contemporary community standards… describin[ing], in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct…and when taken as a whole, lack[s] serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value,” (Lankford, Pankratz 5). The terms “average person” and “community standards” are particularly revealing, because it implies that people outside the average cannot meet the same standards, or understand how to apply them. These standards call into question who qualifies as an average, normal citizen, and who we are protecting from this “patently offensive” material. Holly Hughes, a lesbian performance artist stripped of funding by the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), explores this dilemma in her show “Preaching to the Perverted”. The Decency Clause prohibits artwork funded by the NEA to defy “general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public,” (Meyer 549). Hughes asks “how does the government decide someone is decent?” and is answered by the lawyers who defend the clause, stating “by asking people who are certified to be decent to sit on the panels. Decent people can only make decent decisions,” (Meyer 551). Experts at being normal are employed to
watch and regulate what can be funded and witnessed by the general population. Art is an expression of the self as much as it is an expression of social experience, so when artwork undergoes surveillance and discipline via censorship, we witness the negative "truth effects" it has on actual human experience. In order to function in a society that has labeled a segment of its population offensive, people not only discipline what they create, they discipline their identities. Holly Hughes proves how disturbing this behavior is by playing in her performance an actual audiotape of a call to the ACLU of what she believes are the "decent" American beliefs and values being maintained, "I'm outraged at your representing Holly Hughes, the woman needs to be shot for her lewdness... Didn't she die already? She's dead, she died of AIDS." (Meyer 548). In this case, the government clearly has backwards and biased views about who is decent, and who should be defended.

The identities and lifestyles of lesbians are deformed to fit into the degrading categories "acceptable" community members create for them. "Heather Has Two Mommies" is a short story for children about a little girl named Heather that learns even though her family is different than most, hers is just as valuable as everyone else's because it contains love. Across the country this book has been banned and challenged at schools and libraries so often, that the American Library Association ranked it #11 on the list of "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books" (ALA). The meaning of this book has been distorted to meet the guidelines of American obscenity laws. The two mothers are not nude or engaged in sexual acts, but are somehow appealing to the lustful "prurient" interests of "average" citizens just by being visible. That said, according to community behavior, a simple, happy, lesbian family is more than twice as offensive as #28 on the challenged book list: "The New Joy of Gay Sex" (ALA). People have transformed the concept of sexuality from behavior to identity, in order to outlaw the uncomfortable. The public has categorized sexuality in a way that makes books about gay sex unacceptable, but expected. Far more threatening shockwaves are created by books that depict lesbians as normal because they change the standard people use to measure their own worth. People do not want the discourse to change, they want the patriarchal power structure to remain the same because it is something they understand and are therefore comforted by, and will compel the invisibility of an entire population in order to retain the status quo. Lesbian marginalization is thinly veiled by its claims to "protect" the sanctity of the public's approved citizens, families, and sexual lifestyles. Human rights are deformed into the indecent, keeping homes safe from human compassion.

People are not being put into boxes, they are being put into 10 by 10 square foot garages that must not face the road. Categorizing people by sexualities standardizes behaviors into appropriate and inappropriate, accepted and rejected. Female sexuality has been objectified to the extent that any woman who deviates, in any situation, is defined entirely by the object of her deviant sexuality. It is all that is seen of her face, of her family, of her life story, and is used to hide and demoralize the entirety of her actions and being. Communities ban children's books and television programs that are more about diversity than lesbians because by censoring a lifestyle, the community's lifestyle remains unquestioned as the accepted standard. Human beings are tantamount to the "visual pollution" of lawn decorations, regulated for the sake of the comfort and values of some Americans above others.

References

It was Sunday, April 23, 1961. After nearly two decades of heavily publicized struggles with obesity, alcoholism, drug addictions and failed marriages, thirty-nine year old Hollywood legend Judy Garland made her grand entrance at New York City’s famed Carnegie Hall, looking relatively svelte and spirited. As she belted out the first lines of “When You’re Smiling,” the audience was immediately caught in “a transport of ecstasy” that would last the rest of the evening. By the time her remarkable performance came to an end, it seemed as if Garland had proven once and for all her vast wells of talent and grace. Critics later referred to the concert as “the greatest night in show business history,” and despite these claims bordering on hyperbole, they obviously demonstrate Garland’s success at re-structuring her public image. It was as grand a comeback as any entertainer could have hoped for (Paglia).

Forty-five years later, in June 2006, thirty-two-year-old Rufus Wainwright, “the first postliberation era gay pop star,” set out on an ambitious task: to re-stage song-by-song Garland’s mythic 1961 concert at Carnegie Hall (Trebay). To ask why this contemporary male pop musician would be interested in delving into the classic American songbook to channel one of the most celebrated female concert performers of the 20th century – and indeed why his project would result in two sold-out performances with a “heavily gay, male, over-30 audience” (Holden) – seems beside the point. Considering Wainwright’s and his audience members’ apparent sexualities, the answer appears to be a foregone conclusion: it’s because all gay men love Judy Garland, right?
This response is affirmed by The New York Times' review of the concert, wherein critic Stephen Holden describes it as "a tour de force of politically empowering performance art in which a proudly gay male performer paid homage to the original and longest-running gay icon in the crowded pantheon of pop divas." So if it is a universally-acknowledged truth that Garland holds a sacred place in gay culture, then the more interesting question would be: why the adoration? What separated her from any number of other fabulous stars of the stage and screen and set her up for mass idolatry within the gay community? And what, in turn, does the worship of this particular celebrity imply about the men who participate in it? These are questions that fans, journalists and scholars have been asking for decades and it is their often-provocative responses that I will be exploring in the following pages.

It may first be important, however, to examine the ways in which different writers have attempted to identify a distinctively gay way of responding to media – a gay way of "viewing." As several scholars have pointed out, it is particularly crucial to question the political and intellectual implications of studying any sort of "gay sensibility." For instance, cultural theorists Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman speculate that "it seems far too simplistic to argue that who you sleep with may determine how you identify with cinematic images" (35). More usefully, British film theorist Richard Dyer (who has become something like the pre-eminent Judy Garland scholar following the publication of his 1986 study Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society) emphasises that "gay readings" of Garland are "a product of the way homosexuality is socially constructed, without and within the gay subculture itself. [They] do not tell us what gay men are inevitably and naturally drawn to from some in-built disposition granted by their sexuality" (191). This is an especially compelling assertion because it avoids the troubling idea that gay men, by virtue of their being gay, are inherently inclined to be obsessed with over-the-top tragic female figures like Garland, while also avoiding a claim that her status as a gay icon is arbitrary or trivial. Rather, Dyer thoughtfully argues that both external social factors and distinct aspects within socially-constructed gay sensibilities have made the connection between Garland and gays coherent and valuable. With these considerations in mind, it is possible to examine how certain writers have understood gay diva worship and the specific allure of Ms. Garland for gay men.

In a 1975 exposé from The Village Voice exploring homosexual cult figures, writer David Timpore remarks that people believed gays worshipped certain divas for reasons which were "Freudian (["You know, dear, they're all in love with their mothers")], Camp ("You know, dear, they love anything to do with Tiffany lamps and androgyny") ... and some sort of Insider's Track on Pathos ("You know, dear, they understand.") Although these reasons are overly simplistic and somewhat in jest, they do provide an effective framework for discussing how people have tried to interpret Judy Garland's connection to gay men over the past sixty-odd years. As reductive, far-fetched or offensive as they may seem, each explanation has in fact been used by certain theorists to make sense of the phenomenon of Garland as Gay Icon.

The first reason for Garland's enduring status as a gay icon is that she is "camp." Camp has been understood in various ways for decades, and entire books have been written about its complex relationship to the experience of gay men. Basically, it is a "sensibility, a taste, [or] an aesthetic" and is "a means through which spectators can queer the 'serious' artefacts of dominant culture, ironically critiquing various aspects of mainstream taste, especially those related to issues of gender and sexuality" (Benhoff and Griffin 119). Richard Dyer points out that unlike many other so-called "campy" actresses, Garland was acutely aware of the camp possibilities of her image, that she was "not a star turned into camp, but a star who expressed camp attitudes" (177). Critically analysing several of her films, including the Vincente Minnelli musical The Pirate and...
her 1963 star vehicle I Could Go on Singing, as well as first-person accounts of her live concerts, Dyer finds abundant evidence of Garland’s wilful playing with the concept of camp (176-190). During her life-time, she was apparently aware of her gay following – in fact, her daughter Liza Minnelli once quoted her as having said, "When I die I have visions of fags singing ‘Over the Rainbow’ and the flag at Fire Island being flown at half mast" (qtd. in Dyer 177) – and was “inward with... the procedures and cadences [of gay culture]” (178). Dyer also remarks that Garland’s most memorable role, as young Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz (1939), could be read as knowingly camp.

When Dorothy emerges from the house into Oz for the first time, she says to her dog, ‘Toto, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.’ It’s obviously a funny line, given the shimmering Oz sets, but is it said in a knowing, camp way? Are we laughing directly at Dorothy’s charming naivety, or with Garland at the over-the-top sets and Dorothy’s artful gingham frock? Impossible to determine, of course, though Christopher Finch does point out that, at 17, Garland in The Wizard of Oz is “an adolescent with a grown-up’s singing voice acting the part of the child” – the possibility of ambivalence, play, fun with the part and plot is at least there (179).

This is a powerful and provocative analysis of the film, which is typically seen as imparting straightforward, wholesome American values. Although Garland probably wasn’t aware of her gay following as early as 1939 and wouldn’t have been playing the part with their reception of her films in mind, it seems wholly possible that she could be performing “Dorothy” at least somewhat ironically, giving perceptive audiences – not just queer ones – the opportunity to read playfully anti-normative subtext in the film.

Several writers have also tried to explain Garland’s gay appeal through psychoanalysis, positing her as a maternal figure with whom gay men can form an emotional attachment. In a June 1998 article in The New York Times, critic Camille Paglia, like so many others, ponders why gay men identify with Garland, asking “was it that Garland boiled with the voracious, eternally suffering feminality of a martyred mother goddess wronged by the absent, distant or negligent father figure?”, adding that “this was the family dynamic then controversially predicated as a common pattern in gay men’s lives.” Brett Farmer, Freudian cultural theorist and author of Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy and Gay Male Spectatorships, indirectly answers this question in the affirmative, acknowledging that “maternal identification is... a central scenario of homosexual fantasmatic organization” (191). Analysing the musical number “Mack the Black” from 1948’s The Pirate, Farmer remarks that “full, strong, and authoritative, the voice of Manuela/Garland commands the libidinal economy of the whole number”, and that “memories of prelinguistic mother-infant communication are evoked in the libidinal jouissance of the climax as Manuela vocalizes several prolonged syllables: ‘Mac-Mac-Mac-Mac-co-co’” (106). Farmer admits that this “may be stretching interpretation to its absolute limits” (106), but it does prove useful as a conjecture for how one could justify a Freudian analysis of the gay connection to Garland.

The third and final explanation highlighted by Tipmore, that gay men have “some sort of Insider’s Track on Pathos,” is particularly relevant when discussing Judy Garland, her life having been filled with a series of sensationalized physical and emotional traumas. In a Letter to the Editor responding to a 1994 New York Times article about the evolution of the Gay Icon, a self-identified gay man named Thomas Nobles declared that “Judy Garland was about keeping style and fun in one’s life while under fire, something we gays in the 1960’s understood. She was about pulling yourself together and having a hell of a time when everything looked bleak, as it often did.” In fact, the emphasis on Garland’s ability to keep her chin up in times of emotional dures and external criticism is central to many gay readings of Garland. Richard Dyer stresses that “gay writing returns repeatedly to this emotional quality as in some way representing the situation and experience of being
Sprinkle gay in a homophobic society,” citing several letters he received from gay men describing their own ideas of why Garland is so appealing (149). Although the reading of Garland as a tragic figure who was able to successfully stage comeback after comeback and never fall prey to her detractors doesn’t fully account for her fascinating nature, it is important to recognize the potential validity of this theory, especially as it is often favoured by the subjects of analysis themselves, the gay men who proudly profess their Judy love.

Although the aforementioned parameters are useful in exploring the ways in which gay men have appropriated Judy Garland’s star-image and have read it in a particular way, each of them could theoretically be used to explain part of the allure of other (lesser) gay icons: Barbra Streisand, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, among others. Consequently, two crucial aspects of Garland’s image and biography have been identified which set her apart from these (and other) women and which have cemented her status as the most enduring female gay icon: the ability to read her as “queer” herself and her unique relationship with the 1969 Stonewall riots.

In Heavenly Bodies, Richard Dyer reads closely into several of the films that Garland made while employed at MGM in the 1930’s and 1940’s and explains how they epitomized traditional, small-town American values and forcefully promoted idealized heterosexual pairings (151-160). Although these films do not initially appear to lend themselves well to a specifically gay reading, Dyer argues that they indirectly created the possibility of her star-image being read as queer itself, especially after she was fired from the studio and the news of the first of her suicide attempts was brought to light in 1950. The fact that she was not the ordinary girl she was supposed to be “suggested a relationship to ordinariness homologous with that of gay identity. To turn out not-ordinary after being saturated with the values of ordinariness structures Garland’s career and the standard gay biography alike (153).” This argument is particularly convincing because it pinpoints an aspect of Garland’s image that could not well be attributed to any of her contemporaries. At no point in their careers were divas like Bette Davis, Mae West, or Katharine Hepburn, for example, portrayed as “ordinary” and this may in fact be the key feature that elevated Garland above these (and other) women in the canon of gay icons.

Another feature of the Garland biography that demonstrates her remarkable connection to queer history, and which could also be used to explain why her status as the ultimate gay icon has hardly dissipated since her death, is the fact that her funeral (which took place on 27 June 1969) occurred the same night as the infamous riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Historians seem hesitant to propose a causal relationship between grief for Garland’s death and the uprising of the queer patrons at the Stonewall – a revolt that is commonly attributed to having given birth to the Gay Liberation Movement – but emphasizing the relationship between the events can be a useful tool to highlight the powerful cultural autonomy of gay communities. In Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters, Stephen Maddison describes a 1996 British film aptly-titled Stonewall that focuses on a group of queer people on the night of the riots, most of whom have been strongly affected by Garland’s death (2-5). Maddison argues that the emotional context that the film offers for the riots, “refracted through the idea of Judy, remains quintessentially queer: it is a device which substantiates queer culture and eludes any crude reductionism to mandarin discursiveness (5).” Maddison makes a vital point here, one which potentially illuminates the continued canonization of Garland by gay men, essentially arguing that to admire Judy unabashedly and to acknowledge her importance to queer history is to promulgate her political and cultural worth. In its own small way, it allows queer culture to resist assimilation into the mainstream and encourages an understanding of the importance of having distinct subcultures in the first place.
In the discourse concerning “Judy queens” or “friends of Dorothy”, it has become clear that scholars, journalists and fans have all used many of the same reasons to explain her unique appeal to gay men, often referencing her camp attitudes, her queerness and her harrowing personal struggles (echoed in the stock gay biography.) Cultural theorists like Richard Dyer, Stephen Maddison and Brett Farmer have expounded some of the most interesting theories of how Garland’s star-image has been interpreted and appropriated by certain gay men, even pointing towards the largely positive political implications that arise from such a connection. Still, no matter how well you justify her appeal, Judy Garland’s distinctive place in gay subcultures will likely continue to be discussed for as long as young queer people like myself have access to The Wizard of Oz and the 1961 Judy at Carnegie Hall live album, or indeed any number of her films and recordings, all of which demonstrate the cultural worth of a one-of-a-kind star.

Scott Leydon is a first-year student at McGill University majoring in English Literature with a double-minor in Sexual Diversity Studies and Theatre. A minor celebrity from MTV Canada once told him that listening to Judy Garland: Live at Carnegie Hall for the first time is a “beyond-religious experience.” As you might expect, the author was inclined to agree.

References
Walter Benjamin, in his work *The Arcades Project*, expresses and communicates the experience of the city, while tangibly recreating 19th century Paris within the pages of this book. *The Arcades Project*, an unfinished manuscript published as a book, in and of itself questions the parameters of the book. *The Arcades Project* draws upon various ephemera and Benjamin’s own musings on 19th century Paris to create a phantasmagorical depiction of what constituted life in this particular time and place. The use of ephemera and personal reflection to create within this book an archive unto itself is comparable to Ann Cvetkovich’s attempt to create an archive of trauma in her book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*. The two books queer the conventional concept of the archive as a collection of historical documents or records existing in a fixed place and accessible to few.

When reading *The Arcades Project*, the reader must also take the approach of the *flâneur*; Benjamin describes the “[d]ialectic of flânerie [as being]: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect, on the other side, a man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man” (Arcades 420). The act of flânerie is an essentially queer act; to participate outside of conventionality and to critically observe from this position. The importance of the city in the queer experience is unquestionable. The queer trope of “escaping to the city” and the queer attraction to the city, described by the term metronormativity, coined by queer theorist Judith Halberstam, is one that permeates queer literature.
Benjamin’s Paris of the 19th century is one that attracts the eager city-wanderer with its magnificent Arcades and freedom to be like Poe’s “Man of the Crowd”. The city’s attraction, as a place in which one can disappear into the crowd, is expressed in both Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* as well as throughout queer theory and literature; from Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* to Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet*, the trope of the city and the freedom in newness and anonymity is exhibited. *The Arcades Project* is an essentially queer document, not only in its construction but also by virtue of the fact that it explores *flânerie*, an essentially queer activity, as well as the attraction of the city and its crowds, a trope reflected throughout queer theory and literature.

In Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin’s foreword to *The Arcades Project* Benjamin’s method of collection is described as an attempt to grasp such diverse material under the general category of *Urgeschichte*, signifying the ‘ primal history’ of the nineteenth century. This was something that could be realized only indirectly, through ‘ cunning’: it was not the great men and celebrated events of traditional historiography but rather the ‘ refuse’ and ’ detritus’ of history, the half-concealed and variegated traces of the daily life of the ‘ collective,’ that was to be the object of study, and with the aid of methods more akin – above all, in their dependence on chance – to the methods of the nineteenth century collector of antiquities and curiosities, or indeed the methods of the nineteenth-century ragpicker, than to those of the modern historian.”

(Benjamin IX)

This use of invisible and eschewed aspects of culture to create a comprehensive portrait of an epoch and a city sets *The Arcades Project* in a different category of historical representation than conventional urban history. In using ephemera and personal reflection Benjamin creates in his book an archive; an archive that queers the conventional concept of the archive as static. Ann Cvetkovich suggests that “the individual chapters of [her] book should be understood as working as much to produce an archive as to analyze one” (Cvetkovich 8). Cvetkovich uses the lens of trauma through which to analyze her subject in view of the fact that “trauma resembles gay and lesbian cultures, which have had to struggle to preserve their histories” (Cvetkovich 8). It is the use of underground, ignored culture and cultural artifacts that binds Cvetkovich and Benjamin’s attempts to create works which seek to allow “the transcendence of the conventional book form [which goes] together, in this case, with the blasting apart of pragmatic historicism-grounded, as this always is, on the premise of a continuous and homogeneous temporality” (Benjamin, XI) Benjamin attempts to create a phantasmagoric experience of a particular epoch while Cvetkovich endeavors to explore how “[c]ultural artifacts become the archive of something more ephemeral: culture as a ‘ way of life’” (Cvetkovich 9). For both, their books seek to exceed the conventional notion of the book and become dynamic, unorthodox archives unto themselves.

Integral to the writings of Walter Benjamin is the *flâneur*. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* and the act of *flânerie* are particular to nineteenth-century Paris, and originated there for a reason:

[It is]...the Parisians that have made Paris the promised land of the *flâneur*– the ‘ landscape built of sheer life,’ as Hoffmannstahl once put it. Landscape– that in fact is what Paris becomes for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room (Benjamin 417).

The overlap of interiority and exteriority is essential to the *flâneur*; the *flâneur* must not be at home when in his room, but when wandering the streets, and among the crowd. In Edgar Alan Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” a man sitting in a café is intrigued by a “countenance which at once arrested and absorbed [his] whole attention” (Poe 135). He leaves the café to follow the man through the night so that he might understand this fascinating character. As the second evening of observing the man approaches the narrator
abandons the chase, concluding that “[t]his old man...is the type of genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd” (Poe 139). The man of the crowd has no refuge save the streets, and wanders them aimlessly as does the true flâneur. Benjamin, in his essay “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” describes “[t]he appearance of the street as an intérieur in which the phantasmagoria of the flâneur is concentrated is hard to separate from the gas lighting” (Writer 81). The landscape of the city has truly come to be defined by its presence as an interiority of exteriority. If the exterior of the city has become a surface on which questions regularly dealt with in the context of the interior can be played out, then how does this change the landscape of the street and the people who walk the streets?

The flâneur as an idea essential to the act of queering the city is explored in Dianne Chisholm’s book Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City. Benjamin, in constructing The Arcades Project, was particularly interested in “the unsettling effects of unsettling high capitalism on the most intimate areas of life and work,...[he sought to bring]...to life an uncanny sense of crisis and of security, and of crisis in security” (Benjamin XII). In her book, Chisholm seeks to explore how queer writers and cultural producers attempt “with renewed inventiveness to contest the distraction of today’s mass media. What, above all, they share with Benjamin is a way of seeing antitheses of history that are catastrophically obscured by myths of progress. With reactivated insight, they interrogate capitalism’s (re)production and domination of the metropolitan era in revealing constellations of space, and they do not shy from exposing the dissembling phantasmagorias of gay mecca” (Chisholm 1-2). The flâneur is the wandering critic of the city, who revels in city existence as much as he critiques it, much as the gay streetwalkers of Chisholm’s Queer Constellations critique what has become the idea of the gay mecca while basking in its existence.

The city has always attracted the queer; the sexually atypical attracted to the possibility of anonymity but also community in the urban setting. In Graham Robb’s book Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century, the phenomenon of the attraction of the city, and its seemingly boundless anonymity, in the queer experience is explored: “some form of homosexual community seems to have existed in any city large enough to provide anonymity” (Robb 30). The queer community, as explored by Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst in their book Space, Place and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities describes the creation of community as being “about being on the inside, which means they are also ultimately about being on the outside. They are about belonging, which means they are also ultimately about being excluded” (Johnston and Longhurst 61). The queer comes to the city to find inclusivity in exclusivity. For queer theorist Judith Halberstam, this term summarizes this trope of queer literature and life:

The metronormative narrative maps a story of migration onto the coming-out narrative. While the story of coming-out tends to function as a temporal trajectory within which a period of disclosure follows a long period of repression, the metronormative story of migration from ‘country’ to ‘town’ is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy (Halberstam 36).

Migrating to the city does not so much ensure a position free from suspicion, persecution, and secrecy for the rural queer, but rather a venue in which individuals can find community within a world which excludes them and anonymity on the stretching urban landscapes. Benjamin’s flâneur is not a man free of suspicion, but rather one allowed to exist in the “[d]ialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly indiscernible, the hidden man” (Benjamin 420). The flâneur exists in his suspicious countenance, but can escape it in the city, into the
crowd, much as the queer is still persecuted for his or her sexuality, but can escape into the masses of the city.

The urban landscape has provided an important arena for many narratives from its emergence. With his work The Arcades Project, Walter Benjamin attempts to create a perceptible experience of nineteenth-century Paris through "the transcendence of the conventional book form [which goes] together, in this case, with the blasting apart of pragmatic historicism" (Benjamin XI). By creating in his book a collection of ephemera and personal reflection Benjamin creates an archive, which, like Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings queers the conventional notion of the archive. The position of the flâneur, and the method of viewing the world through the lens of the queer outsider - opens us to a new understanding of the world’s machinations, and to an understanding of non-normative interpretations and experiences of space and identity. The overlapping of interiority and exteriority, and its underlying necessity in the queer experience of the city, emphasizes the flâneur as an essentially queer figure.

By engaging in the act of flânerie, one is able to take in everything and nothing at once, and to be an alone and one of the crowd at the same time. This duality lends the enactor a singular capacity for understanding alternative discourses. Fundamental to Benjamin’s nineteenth-century Paris, the flâneur expresses the queer need to experience the city while being at once among the crowds of the city and the urban landscape while at the same to exist apart from and subversively within the crowd. The importance of the realm of the city in queer culture and history is unquestionable, and Benjamin’s flâneur embodies the queer need to find the outsider’s solace in the crowd.

Ariel Leutheusser is in her second year at the University of Toronto, where she is pursuing concentrations in literary studies, semiotics and sexual diversity studies. Her primary areas of focus include: queer theory, narrative analysis and cultural studies.

References


Acknowledgements

This volume came together based on the energy and enthusiasm of a committed group of graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. I want to thank both dedicated guest co-editors, and their editorial teams, who helped review manuscripts and provided important feedback for the authors. It is important to also acknowledge the efforts of several Sprinkle alumni who pitched in this spring when the editorial board needed additional reviewers to complete their decisions. The names of those who contributed are included in the front matter of this volume. I also want to thank all of the authors who submitted their work for consideration. It is a challenge to put one’s ideas out there for others to read and critique and I hope the authors found it to be a valuable learning and growth process.

We also must acknowledge all of the professors and instructors who are teaching about sexual diversity issues and Queer Theory in their courses and encouraging their students to submit their work for inclusion. Without this work by courageous and creative educators in universities around the world, students wouldn’t have an opportunity to develop their ideas to contribute to the broader public discourse on sexual diversity studies.

I am especially grateful to Shirley Steinberg at the The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy for providing space to publish this journal online in a forum that will appreciate and nurture the voices and perspectives of these developing scholars.

Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D.