

Nora Koller

The Calculating Gaze: Beyoncé, Transsexuality, and Queer Theory

This presentation looks at the transgendered context of a recent music video to examine the relationship between feminism, queer theory and transsexuality. “Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)” is a 2008 pop song by the American singer Beyoncé. Its video features the singer and two dancers, with all three dressed and made up identically. Shortly after the video’s release, it was revealed in the gossip press that one of the dancers is a male-to-female transsexual. Here, I would like to think through this “revelation” by asking the following questions: What exactly is revealed by one’s transsexual status? What subject positions are reinforced so that the work of revealing can take place? I will argue that such technologies of gender prescribe a way of looking so that transgender is perceived in a calculating way, whereby presumably stably gendered viewers are asked to weigh its proximity to and distance from a gendered ideal. While the fe/male gaze so prompted is *revealing* regarding the hierarchy of femininities, it also shows what the stakes are in maintaining the bimodal notion of embodiment. The extent to which such a model informs queer theory has been successfully problematized by Susan Stryker (2004) who has called trans studies queer theory’s “evil twin”. In film narratives, such as in the cross-dressing classic *Dressed to Kill* (dir. Brian De Palma, 1980), the evil twin is a schizophrenic category of a discrete persona or a malignant tumor that ultimately cannot be repressed or ignored. The evil twin emerges from within: it holds a mirror to its “good” counterpart while battling the confines of the latter’s mind and body. I would like to attend to this notion that transsexuality is already “in” queer but is at the same time kept at bay. This dynamic of presence-absence informs the notion of queerness made “good” and has implications for what counts as a body in feminist theory.

Nora Koller has an MA in English Literature. She is currently working on her PhD project on transfeminism at the Gender Initiativkolleg of the University of Vienna, Austria. Her review of “*You’ve Changed*”: *Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity* (ed. Laurie J. Shrage) has recently appeared in the *Graduate Journal of Social Science*.