

QUEERING IMAGINATION

Arts, Aesthetics, and Expression

In an oft-quoted comment made at a symposium held at the New Museum in New York City in 1984, titled “Is There a Gay Sensibility and Does It Have an Impact on Our Culture,” the journalist and art critic Jeff Weinstein, after the panel had gone on for some time, summed up the complexity and contradictions inherent in such a question by stating, “No, there is no such thing as a gay sensibility, and, yes, it has an enormous impact on our culture” (quoted in Sherry, 7). Perhaps what Weinstein was getting at in his ironic yet sincere statement was the simultaneity of multiple truths, truths that, on first glance, might seem to contradict each other. So, yes, in Weinstein’s phrase, gay sensibility, in its many forms and manifestations, did and does have “an enormous impact on our culture.” Given the time period in which Weinstein made his remark—after Stonewall but before *queer* had been reclaimed as a term or concept—we should probably assume he meant *gay* to refer primarily to gay men, though there certainly are examples of what could be called lesbian sensibility (though probably not, in any clear-cut way, bisexual sensibility) and the beginning of an emerging trans sensibility that often was associated with the work of drag queens (and, to a lesser extent, drag kings).

Today we might frame the topic or question by saying that, given the comparative openness in the ways in which queer artists are more willing to produce art that has explicitly queer content, it is also true that some of the common qualities of art produced by queer artists have had an effect on art produced by those who do not identify as queer in the sense of sexual identities. Further, audiences have begun to become much more receptive, and have begun to accept and consume art that is queer in style, form, and perspective. The perspective of the audience was captured by the late gay scholar and theorists Alexander Doty in his 1993 book, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. In this book Doty presents an over-

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

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