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Queer STS Forum #3: “Queering Diversity” – In Search of the Queer and the Class in Academia and Research

In the third edition of our Queer-Feminist Science and Technology Studies Forum, we aimed at ‘queering diversity’ and searched for the queer and the class in academia and research. Our idea behind this issue was to take a closer look at the – supposed – gap between diversity policies and actual practices.

Within the Bologna Process “making our [European higher education] systems more inclusive” is one of the latest main goals, as it was formulated by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Yerevan Communiqué of 2015. Despite efforts to create universities as more open by diversifying students and faculty, academia is still a place of “homosocial reproduction” (Kanter 1977; Möller 2014), not only in Europe. The commercial space of technology and engineering also promises remarkable social mobility opportunities for “diverse” individuals (i.e. working class, rural, ethnically diverse, queer, etc.), yet these are not kept when examining actual workforce composition. Vivianne Castello put this reality bluntly in her article “Why Most Conversations in Tech About Diversity Are Bullshit—and What to Do About It”(2017).

Intersectionality theory became a great tool to theoretically dissect mono-dimensional shortcomings of diversity efforts, yet Bilge (2013) analyses how a specific form of academic feminism in tune with the neoliberal knowledge economy works to “depoliticize intersectionality,” neutralizing the critical potential of intersectionality and stripping it from its important power-reflexive analytical potential. Same applies to “diversity studies” which is being translated into managerial voice and then becomes a means to increase profit by and to work more effectively on multinational and multicultural projects, rather than to critically reflect biases and work environments. Class is often completely left out of these conversations. For academia, Warnock (2016) describes stereotypes and micro-aggressions working class academics encounter and how their struggling to pass in a middle-class culture leads more and more to increased precarious job situations.

Thus, in this issue of Queer STS Forum we want to highlight various practices and unmask potentially shallow applications of diversity in academia, research, art, and innovation and detach the concept itself from the ‘wellness-marketing-corner’ of tech corporations by bringing the question of power into focus: Where specifically is class and queerness in queer and intersectional Science and Technology Studies?

We were looking for work that centres power issues and dares to speak about working class identities and advanced discrimination (Dressel et al. 1994) lying within production systems of knowledge. The four contributions of our third issue of the Queer STS Forum are very diverse in their topics and formats. As we are an online open access journal, we wanted to encourage various forms of contributions besides the classic academic paper, and we are happy that in this issue we feature two interviews with image material and hyperlinks to mark our own transition. The Forum is developing, and we are learning with each contribution we receive.

The first paper was written by Claudia Chiang-Lopez from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who critically discusses the various hegemonic interpretations of students leaving/being pushed out of secondary and tertiary education. By arguing that opting-out of school can also be seen as students' resistance to a harmful system she points at the need to queer our conversation around students who leave school.

The second contribution is an interview which Daniela Zanini-Freitag, member of our Queer STS working group, held with Jay Pongruengphant, the current UNDP national officer on Governance, Human Rights and LGBTI of the Being LGBTI in Asia programme. The interview catches a glimpse of the living situation and experiences of members of the LGBTI community in Thailand, which is widely perceived as tolerant, quite progressive and open towards LGBTI persons. Daniela tried to unfold living realities of LGBTI people in Thailand and came up with very interesting up-to-date information as well as insights on coming-out in privacy and obstacles still present on the workplace level.

The third paper about sexbots by Tessa Leach is also a teaser for next year's fourth issue of our Queer STS Forum which will be discussing "Queer-feminist perspectives on sex robots" (see: <http://queersts.com>). Tessa Leach critically examines the sexbot inherent conflict of neoliberal commodification of women's bodies and the fear of objectification and violence of some feminist discourses. The author states that: „Sex robots are not born a part of human politics, but are motivated non-neutrally by the influence of humans and nonhumans. Who or what will be the agents that control sex robots? ... We are, this very moment, missing the opportunity to embrace and guide sexbot-induced social change.“

The fourth and final contribution is a conversational interview between Daniela Jauk, co-editor and member of our Queer STS working group and Reni Hofmüller who is a multidimensional queer-feminist artist, art organizer, media maker, DIY tech activist, educator, and so much more. Reni discusses diversity in feminist art, highlighting the queer and the class in art (production) and posing the power question.

We hope you will enjoy this issue and give heartfelt thanks to Susanne Kink-Hampersberger, Thomas Menzel-Berger, and Jenny Schlager who took time to review the articles in addition to us. Happy Holidays!

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