

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 25
Queer Representation in OTT Platforms


Welcome dear participants. In the last two modules, we have looked at Queer Representation in the world of cinema and we have seen how the power of visual media has influenced the perception of sexuality and queerness. There has been significant progress and shift at the intersection of queer identity and digital communication technologies from the 1980s to the early 21st century.

The last few decades witnessed a new trend of increased digital consumption worldwide and also there has been a major progression in the way multimedia contents are now being consumed by the people and this transformation is shaped by the network dimension of digital media. The modern OTT platforms of the 21st century have continuities with the evolved perceptions of mainstream LGBTQI and digital culture.


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What is OTT?

- OTT is a means of providing media service, primarily television and film content, over the internet at the request and to suit the requirements of an individual consumer.
 - The term OTT stands for “over-the-top”, which implies that a content provider is going over the top of existing internet services.
 - OTT content delivered via the internet bypasses traditional channels, like cable, broadcast television companies, and live TV broadcasting.
- The trend initially started in 2007 but accelerated in 2012 when premium platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, HBO Now, and Amazon Prime Video began delivering their content directly to consumers. (Enfroy, 2021)



Source: Asiana Times



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OTT is a means of providing media service, primarily television and film content, over the internet at the request and to suit the requirements of an individual customer. The term OTT stands for “over-the-top”, which implies that a content provider is going over

the top of existing internet services. OTT content delivered via the internet bypasses traditional channels, like cable broadcast television companies and live TV broadcasting.

This trend had initially started in 2007 but accelerated in 2012 when premium platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Disney Plus, HBO and Amazon Prime Video etcetera began delivering their content directly to consumers. OTT technology was able to outdo the old-fashioned media channels owing to its easy accessibility.

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- Since the mid-1990s, television content delivery via satellite or cable has been the common way for TV service providers to distribute content to its customers.
- Reception typically requires a TV subscription, a contract, a set-top box, and a technician to connect the array of hardware services in each customer's home or office.
- This locks the consumers to one service provider (restricted to whichever is available in the area) and the content offered is limited to channels available in that particular area.
- With OTT video delivery technology, people now have a multitude of options at their fingertips and they also have the ability to view content on a variety of devices.


Since the mid-1990s, television content delivery via satellite or cable has been the common way for TV service providers to distribute content to its customers. Reception typically requires several things: a TV subscription, a contract, a set top box, the technician to connect the array of hardware etcetera.

This locks the consumers to a particular service provider and the content offered is also limited to channels available in that particular area. With OTT video delivery technology, people now have a multitude of options at their fingertips and they also have the ability to view content on a variety of devices.


OTT platforms bypass companies which traditionally acted as controllers or distributors of television content, they make the digital content available through an app or a website which are so easily accessible in today's world.

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- OTT is one of the fundamental advances to the distribution landscape of multimedia content.
- It provides commercial-free viewing, on-demand content, and unrestricted access to the channel.
- Apart from the power of decision making, OTT is also free from ratings' pressure and censorship, and therefore can explore the possibilities of serial narration while simultaneously naturalizing viewing practices such as "binge-watching" (Tyron, 2015).
- Narrative complexity of shows transcends the merely episodic model of prime-time network TV series.



Source: thestreamable.com



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OTT is one of the fundamental advances to the distribution landscape of multimedia content. It provides commercial-free viewing, on-demand content and unrestricted access to the channel. Apart from the power of decision making, OTT is also free from the pressures of ratings and also of censorship and therefore, can explore the possibilities of serial narration while simultaneously naturalizing viewing practices such as “binge-watching”. Narrative complexity of shows transcends the merely episodic model of primetime network TV series.

This transformation of television content also gave a new life to TV shows such as the ‘L Word’ and ‘Glee’, which embraced the representation of homosexuality in the visual media.

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Queer Sexuality and the Twentieth Century

- Twentieth century was preceded by significant transformations like the rise of industrialism, decline of imperialism and initiation of discussions around sexual politics and feminism. The masculine dominance and authority were being strongly challenged at the turn of the century.
- Despite a clear presence of homophobia, sexologists were inventing new terms to describe varied forms of behavior and identification by people.
- Representation of LGBT characters in popular culture and media gathered momentum only in the 1990s.
- Movies like *Philadelphia* (1993) entered mainstream Hollywood to acknowledge HIV/AIDS, and helped to broaden the understanding of non-heterosexual individuals.



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Movies like 'Philadelphia', which was released in 1993, entered mainstream Hollywood to acknowledge HIV-AIDS and helped to broaden the understanding of and about non-heterosexual individuals. Homosexual individuals in the second half of the twentieth century mostly led closeted lives. The 90s also saw the emergence of internet as an everyday commodity that people can afford and this deeply influenced the popular culture of the 21st century.

Online platforms where people could express their gender identification without inhibition increased cultural awareness about such issues. It was reflected in a greater acceptance of non heterosexuals in the TV shows and films produced in the 21st century. In the last two modules, we had focused on select films from the last decade which highlighted the mid twentieth century perceptions in terms of queer expression and awareness.


The lives of Edgar Hoover and Alan Turing, recreated through the 21st century cinema stimulated discussions on male homosexual identity. It showed how in the twentieth century being queer could pose a threat to even influential individuals and their high-profile careers. The movie 'Carol' demonstrated that female homosexuality was despised and condemned in post war America. Carols capability as a mother becomes questionable, if she cannot conform to the heterosexual binary.

Similar questions of historical gender conformism and orthodoxy are also picked up by today's OTT platforms. One such major production is the recreation of early twentieth century Britain around the time of First World War and its take on homosexuality through the famous TV show 'Downton Abbey'.


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Homophobic Tropes and Class Structure in *Downton Abbey*

- Set in the early 20th century, *Downton Abbey* is a British historical drama TV series created by Julian Fellowes.
 - It was first aired on ITV and PBS Television networks, and later the streaming rights were purchased by the OTT platform Netflix.
- The show chronicles the events in the lives of the Crawley family and their servants in an era when aristocratic traditions and the class system had begun to fade -- the First World War has brought uncertainty and undercurrents of tragedy that touched everyone's lives.



Source: imdb.com




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Set in the early 20th century, *Downton Abbey* is a British historical drama TV series created by Julian Fellowes. It was first aired on ITV and PBS television networks and later the streaming rights were purchased by the OTT platform Netflix. The show chronicles the events in the lives of the Crawley family and their servants in an era when aristocratic traditions and the class system had begun to fade. The First World War has brought uncertainty and undercurrents of tragedy that touched everyone's life.


The series explores the themes of morality and homosexuality during this period of transition through one of its major characters.

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- Thomas Barrow, played dexterously by Rob James-Collier, is a footman at the Downton estate when the serial begins. The show portrays Barrow undergoing a series of changes. He is finally able to realize his dream of becoming the head butler.
- Initially he is shown as ambitious, crafty and devious; someone who is trying, but failing, to ascend the 'downstairs' hierarchy.
- The series depicts that beneath his conniving exterior lay a far more complicated portrait of a melancholy and isolated man struggling with the issue of his own acceptance and equally hurtful societal rejection. (Ellard, 2021).



Thomas Barrow from *Downton Abbey*
Source: imdb.com



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Thomas Barrow, played dexterously by Rob James-Collier, is a footman at the Downton estate when the serial begins. The show portrays him undergoing a series of changes. He is finally able to realize his dream of becoming the head butler. Initially he is shown as ambitious, crafty and devious; someone who is trying repeatedly but also failing repeatedly, to ascend the 'downstairs' hierarchy that is hierarchy among the people who were working at the Downton Abbey.


The series depicts that beneath his conniving exterior lay a far more complicated portrait of a melancholic and isolated man struggling with the issue of his own acceptance and equally hurtful societal rejection. Barrow's villainous exterior is a product of defensive insecurity. He longed to feel loved and accepted; however, he had little success over the course of his life owing to his homosexuality.

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- As a gay man, his feelings of isolation were only compounded in the early 20th century British culture of bigotry, in addition to illegality of being gay at that time.
- He was physically assaulted for his sexuality, and was even thrown in jail. In season 5 of *Downton Abbey*, Barrow attempts to 'medically cure himself' of his gayness through drug aversion therapy. This reflects an internalized homophobia or self-hatred, primarily arising from society's mistreatment.
- The show's exploration of closeted homosexuality does not take a linear path. It first portrays Barrow as a scheming antagonist and then deconstructs the homophobic tropes and discourses surrounding him. (Young, 2017).



Thomas Barrow with a fellow footman.
Source: British Period Dramas




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The show's exploration of closeted homosexuality does not take a linear path. It first portrays Barrow as a scheming antagonist and then deconstructs the homophobic tropes and discourses surrounding him. Barrow's mistreatment for being different can be found in the following video.

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"No Man is an Island"

- In this montage of scenes from *Downton Abbey*, the suspicious treatment of Barrow for being a homosexual is revealed.
- His sexuality is only alluded to, never mentioned explicitly; reflecting contemporary social attitudes.

Source: Carnival Films - Downton Abbey (YouTube)

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In this montage of scenes from 'Downton Abbey', the suspicious treatment of Barrow for being a homosexual is revealed. His sexuality is only alluded to, never mentioned explicitly, reflecting contemporary societal attitudes.

"I hope you know planning to hit me with that.

I know, but I will not beat about the bush either Mr. Barrow, someone has reported that you seem to have a private understanding with Andrew.

Stop this again.

Am I not have given it much mind, but I was upstairs last night quite late and I saw him leave your room.

Mr. Carson, how long do I have to work in this house before I am given any credit?

That is all very well, but we are talking about a vulnerable young man and I must look to his welfare.


Yes, and if I were to give you my word of honor that nothing took place of which you would disapprove.

If I could just be sure.

So, my word is still not good enough Mr. Carson after so many years.

I only wish it were.

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Source: Carnival Films - Downton Abbey [YouTube]

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May we come in?

Hello Mr. Barrow, here to make you feel better.

Thank you very much, Master George.

We want you to get better Barrow truly and no one more than Master George.

At least I have got one friend day.

Have you been lonely?

If I, have I have only myself to blame after an such things I do not know why cannot stop myself, now I am paying the price.

Strange, I could say the same.

Mr. Carson's talking that you have got.

Flu, I know.

Beg your pardon, my lady.

We are going Barrow and I hope things improve for you. I really do you.

I would say the same if you are going to impertinent, my lady.

Goodbye, Mr. Barrow.

Goodbye, Master George.

Yeah, my lord, I wonder if I might have a word.

What is it?

With your permission, I would like to tell Mr. Barrow if he can stay for the time being at any rate it would take a week off his mind.

That is relief. I was going to suggest the same thing.

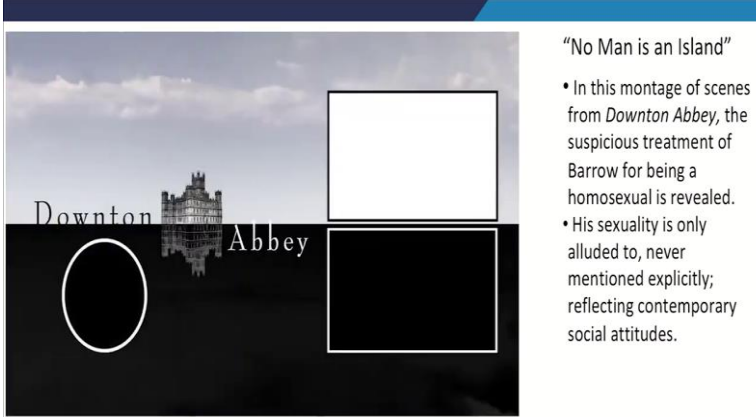
Will you, my lord?

Yes, you see I feel quite as guilty as you do Carson.

Actually, what I blame myself for I did not credit him with any feelings I thought he was a man without a heart, but I was wrong.

“No man is in Island” Carson not even Thomas Barrow.

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The slide features a background image of Downton Abbey with the title "Downton Abbey" overlaid. A white circle highlights a portion of the image, and two white rectangles are positioned to the right. A text box on the right contains the following information:

“No Man is an Island”

- In this montage of scenes from *Downton Abbey*, the suspicious treatment of Barrow for being a homosexual is revealed.
- His sexuality is only alluded to, never mentioned explicitly; reflecting contemporary social attitudes.

Source: Carnival Films – Downton Abbey YouTube

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The first scene in this clip shows Barrow's encounter with the head Butler, Mr. Carson who wants him about being too close with other young male working staff. Following a series of hurtful incidents Barrow attempts suicide, but he saved by a fellow worker. The second scene shows how he was visited by an aristocratic family member Mary along with her son George and his suicide attempt was concealed from most of the people in the house.


So, the series at first exposes the historical homophobic stereotypes where gay men are seen as manipulative and untrustworthy seducers of young men. As they are closeted in their sexuality and must live double lives, homosexual individuals are perceived as masters of deception. However, 'Downton Abbey' also shows a more humane and sympathetic angle to Barrow. As the series progresses, Barrow eventually learns to be content with his sexuality rather than trying to run away from it or to artificially cure it. His promotion his head butler also shows that he is ultimately socially accepted even though everyone knows about his sexuality.

'Downton Abbey' takes us back to a specific period in the past and traces the struggles LGBT characters had to face while unraveling their own gender identity. Apart from reinventing the past views on gender, creative representation of sexuality can be imagined and portrayed through futuristic settings. One such OTT production which dwells into areas of transhumanism and genetic mutation is the TV show called 'Sense8.'


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Sense8

- *Sense8* is an American science fiction drama television series which began streaming on Netflix in 2015.
 - The title of the TV show is a play on the word "sensate" which means "perceived by senses". The number 8 in the title refers to the eight main characters in the story.
- The tagline for the show is "Ordinary people reborn as Sensates."
 - It tells the story of how a group of people around the world are mentally and emotionally linked (as sensates), and must find a way to survive being hunted by those who see them as a 'threat' to the world's order.



Source: imdb.com



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‘Sense8’ is an American science fiction drama television show a series which began streaming on Netflix in 2015. The title of the TV show is a play on the word “sensitive” which means “perceived by senses”. The number 8 in the title refers to the eight main characters in this story. The tagline for the show is “Ordinary people reborn as Sensates.” And it tells the story of how a group of people around the world are mentally and emotionally linked as sensates, and must find a way to survive being hunted by those who see them as a threat to the world’s order.

It explores issues related to identity, sexuality, gender in politics that its creators felt had been really addressed on television especially in the genre of science fiction.

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- *Sense8* marks a number of unprecedented moments in televisual media
 - First media product to feature a lead trans character (Nomi Marks) played by a trans actor (Jamie Clayton), written and directed by trans creators (Lana and Lilly Wachowski).
- The sisters Lana and Lilly rose to fame for their writing and direction of the Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster *The Matrix* (1999), which depicts a dystopian future in which humanity is unknowingly trapped inside a simulated reality.


Lana and Lilly Wachowski
Source: LGBT Info Wiki

Sense8 marks a number of unprecedented moments in televisual media. It is the first media product to feature a lead trans character in Nomi Marks played by a trans actor Jamie Clayton written and directed by trans creators Lana and Lilly Wachowski. The sisters Lana and Lilly rose to fame for their writing and direction of the Hollywood science fiction blockbuster ‘The Matrix’ in 1999, which depicts a dystopian future in which humanity is unknowingly trapped inside a simulated reality.

‘Sense8’ was praised for representation of LGBTQ characters and themes it also won the GLAAD media award that is ‘GLAAD’ media award for outstanding drama series. This award is an accolade bestowed on various branches of the media for their outstanding representations of the LGBT community and the issues that affect their lives.

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- More culturally mainstream transgender identity narratives (*Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black*) aim to “teach” transgender to liberal cisgender audiences through universalist metaphors or through pedagogical forms of affect.
- *Sense8* uses queer as an aesthetic practice or as a set of narrative strategies for simultaneously representing and imitating hypermodern globality.
- Seeks to aesthetically translate transgender and queer as a form of consciousness—a way of perceiving or knowing that occurs between and across bodies, cultures, and geographies.




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Normally, more culturally mainstream transgender identity narratives like ‘Transparent’ and ‘Orange is the New Black’ aim to “teach” transgender to liberal cisgender audiences through universalist metaphors or through pedagogical forms of affect. ‘Sense8’ uses queer as an aesthetic practice or as a set of narrative strategies for simultaneously representing and imitating hypermodern globality. It seeks to aesthetically translate transgender and queer as a form of consciousness a way of perceiving or knowing that occurs between and across bodies, culture, and also geographies.

‘Sense8’ is a text that resides in a trans universe it is trans gender trans genre trans subjective and also trans physical.

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- *Sense8* is also a transmedia text. It engages profoundly in what Jenkins et al. describe as “world building,” meaning the creation of augmented narratives with complex, “immersive story worlds” that transcend the boundaries of the show itself (133).
- Transmedia—focused on storytelling in the digital age—goes beyond the conventional definitions of transmedia as mediations of content across different platforms.
- It is linked to processes of media convergence.
- Theories of transmedia stress the high levels of audience immersion.
- Satisfies demand for complex and immersive worlds that in earlier media history could be satisfied only by soap operas.



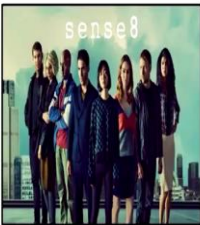
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‘Sense8’ is also a transmedia text. It engages profoundly in what Jenkins etcetera describe as “world building,” meaning the creation of augmented narratives with complex “immersive story worlds” that transcend the boundaries of the show itself. Transmedia focused on a storytelling in the digital age goes beyond the conventional definitions of transmedia as mediations of content across different platforms.


It is linked to processes of media convergence. Theories of transmedia stress the high levels of audience immersion and it also satisfy demand for complex and immersive worlds that in earlier media history could be satisfied only by soap operas.

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- The story of *Sense8* begins when the psychic connection of eight strangers from a variety of walks of life from different parts of the world is "birthed" by a woman called Angelica.
- Angelica kills herself to avoid capture by a man called "Whispers".
- The eight characters join together as "sensates": human beings who are mentally and emotionally linked, can sense and communicate with one another, and can share their knowledge, language and skills.



Source: otakukart.com



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The story of ‘Sense8’ begins when the psychic connection of eight strangers from a variety of walks of life from different parts of the world is “birthed” by a woman called Angelica. Angelica kills herself to avoid capture by a man called “Whispers”. The eight characters joined together as “Sensates”: human beings who are mentally and emotionally linked, who can sense and communicate with one another and can share their language, knowledge and skills.

The major characters include both homosexual and heterosexual individuals. The series takes a fresh approach to portray them with unique style, narratives and conception. ‘Sense8’ advances the stories of queerness and tries to reestablish the norms of sexuality and gender and also blurs the boundaries between them.


The eight characters were first strangers to each other and the connection between them began is an aftermath of a tragic death, they all experience through what they perceive either as dreams or visions. Each episode also reflects the views of the characters interacting with each other while delving deeper into their backgrounds and what sets them apart and also brings them together with the others.

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- In the second season, the eight characters have grown accustomed to their telepathic connection and help each other on a daily basis.
- They learn more about Homo sensorium (the scientific name of sensates), the history and goals of the BPO – the multinational research group Biologic Preservation Organization, which studies genetic mutations in humans and carries out projects like DNA surveys in order to hunt down potential sensates.




Biologic Preservation Organization
from Sense8
Source: Sense8 Wiki



- The character of Milton Brandt or Whispers is a high ranking officer in the BPO and is the main antagonist of the story.

The character of Whispers
from Sense8
Source: imdb.com



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In the second season, the eight characters have grown accustomed to their telepathic connection and help each other on a daily basis. They learn more about Homo sensorium, that is the scientific name of sensates, the history and goals of the BPO- that is the multinational research group Biologic Preservation Organization which studies genetic mutations in humans and carries out projects like DNA surveys in order to hunt down potential sensates.

The character of Milton Brandt or Whispers is a high-ranking officer in the BPO and is also the main antagonist of the story. In terms of style, the show traverses various genres science fiction dramas, conspiracy thrillers, Bollywood musicals, police procedurals and European films noir, co exist in the show.

The result is multiple worlds visually haunting yet revealed through collection of montage sequences which represents the complex phantasmagoria of human experiences bridgeable only through unconditional love, solidarity and empathy. The following video shows the Netflix promo for the TV series ‘Sense8’.

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"Who am I?"

- The trailer begins with a discussion of the Dutch artist Rembrandt and his painting "The Night Watch" from 1642.
- The promo also shows that the central theme of perception revolves around the questions: "who am I?" and "how am I related to others?"

Source: [Netflix | YouTube](#)

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NETFLIX

The trailer begins with a discussion of the Dutch artist Rembrandt and his painting "The Night Watch" from 1642. The promo also shows that the central theme of perception revolves around the questions: "who am I?" and "how am I related to others?"

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"Who am I?"

- The trailer begins with a discussion of the Dutch artist Rembrandt and his painting "The Night Watch" from 1642.
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Source: [Netflix | YouTube](#)

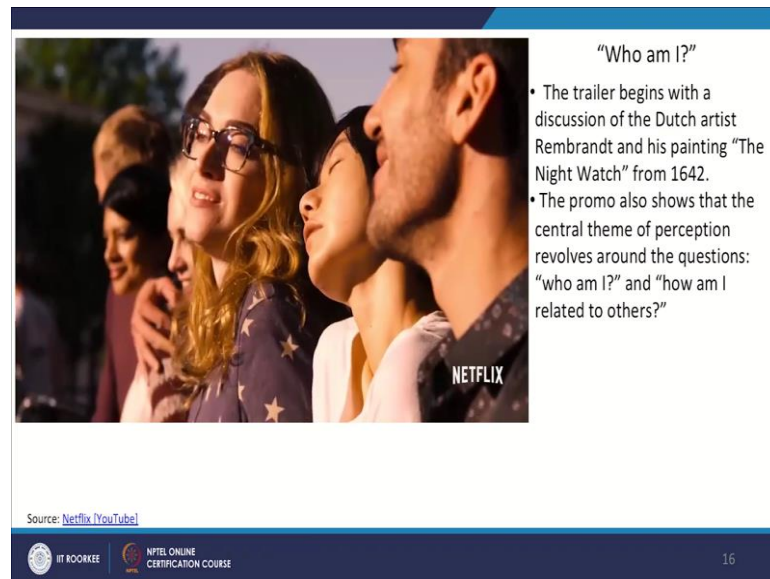
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NETFLIX

Rembrandt, his name is synonymous with masterpiece and this arguably one of his greatest paintings. An iconic work of individuals setting aside their differences for common good.

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Source: [Netflix | YouTube](#)

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But what we see is not what people saw hundreds of years ago because our senses are evolving.

Sensates by their nature are a threat to secrecy.

I am looking for a better future.

What's happening?

You have to stop it.


Do not trust any of them.

This is not a game; this is a war.

Your life is either defined by the system or by the way you defy the system.

As long as we are together and I know that there is nothing we cannot do.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:54)



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- The trailer begins with a discussion of the Dutch artist Rembrandt and his painting "The Night Watch" from 1642.
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Source: [Netflix YouTube](#)

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Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

When these ontological questions are at the heart of the series, it bases its ideas on science and philosophy. This is done to show that human connectedness is a real and tangible force. What we see in 'Sense8' is the creation of alternative form of familial relationships through the development of community ties outside of normal modes.


In 'Sense8' the trans sisters, the Wachowski sisters create a template for global translational unity, a Utopian community which is a combination of autonomy and heteronomy. Embracing this connectedness is vital to the well being of humanity at large and to imagine a better world. And therefore, questions of human perception through the senses receive increased attention during the course of the two seasons of this show.

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“To be is to be perceived”

- The famous statement “to be is to be perceived” belongs to the English philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753).
- This is a recurrent theme adopted by the Wachowski sisters in their different projects, including *Senese8*.
- Berkeley’s philosophy, called ‘subjective idealism’, claims that the only reality we experience is the reality that we perceive through our senses.*
- This also poses the question of how can we establish real connections or relations when we are limited to our own perceptions, which is a question that the series explores.

* Fogelin, R. J. (2001). *Berkeley and the principles of human knowledge*. Routledge.



George Berkeley
Source: John Simbert




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The famous statement “To be is to be perceived” belongs to the English philosopher George Berkeley. This is the recurring theme adopted by the Wachowski sisters in their different projects, including ‘Sense8’. Berkeley’s philosophy called ‘subjective idealism’, claims that the only reality we experience is the reality that we perceive through our senses. This also poses the question of how can we establish real connections or relations when we are limited to our own perceptions which is a question that the series explores.


In Sense8, the connectedness arises from the central presence of our emotions, a driving force which can be limiting and also liberating in our relations with others.

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- Rembrandt's highly regarded work of art "The Night Watch" shows how the guardsmen on civic duty set aside their differences for a common good - of defending the cities and values of the people.
- Yet in its day, the painting was ridiculed and deemed as the work of an amateur. The painting was so unappreciated that it was slashed from its sides to fit on the walls, arguing that "it was too big".
- However, the perception of the painting changed over the years, and it is considered as a masterpiece today.
- The character in *Sense8* describing the painting points out the rationale beneath such changes, saying, "... because our senses, including our common sense, are [constantly] evolving."



Rembrandt's painting "The Night Watch".
Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



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Rembrandt's highly regarded work of art "The Night Watch" shows how the guardsmen on civic duty set aside their differences for a common good - of defending the cities and values of the people. Yet in its day, the painting was ridiculed and deemed as the work of an amateur. The painting was so badly unappreciated that it was slashed from its sides to fit on the walls, arguing that "it was far too big".


However, the perceptions of the painting changed over the years and it is considered as a masterpiece today. The character in 'Sense8', who describes the painting points out the rationale beneath such changes in social attitudes and says that because of our senses, including our common senses are constantly evolving such changes take place.

In a similar manner, the series calls for a greater acceptance of change and uniqueness as we are capable of perceiving differently at different moments. The science fiction thriller shows characters with genetic mutation is struggling for acceptance. Therefore, sense eights can also be seen as a metaphor for non heterosexual individuals calling for equality and empathy in society.

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Who Am I

- 'Who Am I' is the title of the second episode of Season 2, and also the name of a famous speech from the series:
 - Who am I? Do you mean where I'm from? What I one day might become? What I do? What I've done? What I dream? ... I guess who I am is exactly the same as who you are. Not better than, not less than. Because there is no one who has been or will ever be exactly the same as either you or me.
- To be a sensate means to be 'transhuman' and different. Sensates, therefore, can also be analyzed from a queer perspective.
- The plot of *Sense8* focuses on the fundamental struggles of each of the characters as they try to figure out who they are and what their place is in this world, which is filled with labels and presumptions.



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'Who am I' is the title of the second episode of Season 2 and it is also the name of a famous speech from the series and I quote it:

“Who am I? Do you mean where I am from? What I one day might become? What I do? What I have done? What I dream? I guess who I am is exactly the same as who you are. Not better than, not less than. Because there is no one who has been or will ever be exactly the same as either you or me.” Unquote.


To be a sensate means to be 'transhuman' and different. Sensates, therefore, can also be analyzed from a queer perspective. The plot of the show 'Sense8' focuses on the fundamental struggles of each of the characters as they try to figure out who they are and what their place is in this world, which is filled with labels and presumptions.

It shows how Sensates struggle with the limitation of labels that others place on them which are mostly based on exclusion, exclusivity and the fear of those who are different. There is also a potential of violence in marginalizing certain groups, the plot highlights that the biggest violence can be on the self when we become too afraid to express who we want to be.

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Sense8 and Visions of Queer Utopia

- In *Sense8*, the philosophy of deep psychic connection between people is taken to the extreme by fully merging the selves of a group of people, allowing them to experience each other's 'being'.
- It provides a glimpse of what it would be like to be truly 'seen' by other people; to be vulnerable, connected and empathetic. (Linden, 2017)
- *Sense8* can also be understood as a text that depicts the dreams, desires, and utopias of community and time – a colossal attempt at imagining alternative temporalities.
- A sensate cluster is "born" when another sensate from a different cluster activates their connection. Until then sensates are ordinary humans, and after that they are "reborn".



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In 'Sense8', the philosophy of deep psychic connection between people is taken to the extreme by fully merging the selves of a group of people, allowing them to experience each other's being. It provides a glimpse of what it would be like to be truly seen by other people to be vulnerable connected and empathetic.

'Sense8' can also be understood as a text that depicts the dreams, desires and utopias of community and time - a colossal attempt at imagining alternative temporalities. A sensate cluster is born when another sensate from a different cluster activates their connection. Until then, sensates are ordinary humans, and after that they are reborn. This futuristic rebirth and genetic mutation associated with transhumanism, allows the writers to imagine unprecedented gender autonomy and expression.


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- Nomi Marks is one of the characters who can be considered queer in the traditional terms. She is a proud lesbian and a transgender woman.
- From the very first episode Nomi is living a happy life with her girlfriend and their life is portrayed as totally normal.
- Her homosexual relationship is not shown as troublesome or worrying. She is not in fear of bullying or repression. She is open to the world and the world completely accepts her as she is.
- With narratives like this, the showrunners are carrying the idea of normalizing queerness into the real world.

* Khlistunov, V. (2020). "We're here, we're queer!": Exploring queer narratives in the series Sense8. Thesis. University of Jyväskylä.



Nomi from Sense8
Source: glaad.org



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Nomi Marks is one of the characters who can be considered queer in the traditional terms also. She is a proud lesbian and a transgender woman. From the very first episode, Nomi is living a happy life with her girlfriend and their life is portrayed as totally normal. Her homosexual relationship is not shown as troublesome or worrying. She is not in fear of either bullying or repression. She is open to the world and the world completely accepts her as she is.

With narratives like this, the showrunners are carrying the idea of normalizing queerness in the real world. It also shows that Nomi's childhood was difficult with insecurity and bullying arising from transphobia. With Nomi's present identity as a sensate, the series is mirroring how sexuality and gender will be perceived in a hopeful future in the real world.

Nomi's queer narrative is one of queer normalization thereby bringing acceptance to homosexuality as well as to transgenderism.

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- The open homosexual nature of Nomi in *Sense8* is contrasted with the character of Lito, who is a gay actor living with his boyfriend in Mexico.
- His homosexual identity is 'closeted' and he believes that he will not get good roles for acting if he makes his sexuality public.
- Lito's narrative in the first season is that of denial and rejection. But later on he 'comes out' publicly to save his relationship and career.
- Apart from homosexuality, *Sense8* also explores the concepts of gender-fluidity and pansexuality.



Lito from Sense8
Source: glad.org




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The open homosexual nature of Nomi in 'Sense8' is contrasted with the character of Lito, who is a gay actor living with his boyfriend in Mexico. His homosexual identity is closeted and he fears that he may not be able to get good roles if he makes his sexuality public. Lito's narrative in the first season is that of denial and rejection. But later on, he comes out publicly to save his relationship and also his career. Apart from homosexuality, 'Sense8' also explore the concepts of gender-fluidity and pansexuality.

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- *Sense8* aesthetically represents "trans" as a form of perception that occurs across the limits of race, gender, body, and culture.
- In the introduction to the 2015 "Tranimalities" issue of TSQ (Transgender Studies Quarterly), Hayward and Weinstein note that "trans is not a thing or being, it is rather the processes through which thingness and beingness are constituted."
- *Sense8* is interested in translating transgender through both aesthetic and linguistic encounters.
- For Hayward and Weinstein, trans is always "more than and equal to one" (196), a phrase that *Sense8* echoes in its tagline, "I am a we."

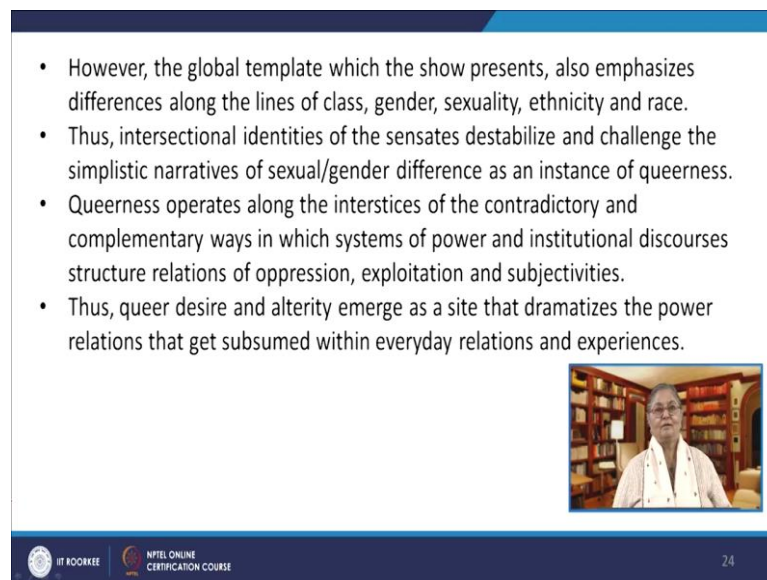


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Sense8 aesthetically represents “trans” as a form of perception that occurs across the limits of race, gender, body and culture. In the introduction to the 2015 “Tranimalities” issue of TSQ, that is the Transgender Studies Quarterly, Hayward and Weinstein note that “trans is not a thing or being, it is rather the processes through which thingness and beingness are constituted.”.

‘Sense8’ is interested in translating transgender through both aesthetic and linguistic encounters. For Hayward and Weinstein, trans is always “more than and equal to one” a phrase that ‘Sense8’ echoes in its tagline, “I am a we.” This ‘we-ness’ evokes the plural cells of gender transition which is not an arrival at a real gender, but a constant negotiation of multiple gendered selves across the spectrum of gendered embodiments which are traversed temporarily and carried internally as ghosts in the shell.

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- However, the global template which the show presents, also emphasizes differences along the lines of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race.
- Thus, intersectional identities of the sensates destabilize and challenge the simplistic narratives of sexual/gender difference as an instance of queerness.
- Queerness operates along the interstices of the contradictory and complementary ways in which systems of power and institutional discourses structure relations of oppression, exploitation and subjectivities.
- Thus, queer desire and alterity emerge as a site that dramatizes the power relations that get subsumed within everyday relations and experiences.

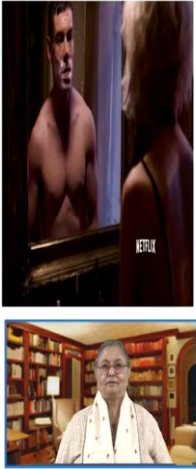
However, the global template which the show presents, also emphasizes differences along the lines of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race. Thus, intersectional identities of the sensates destabilize and challenge the simplistic narratives of sexual gender differences as an instance of queerness.

Queerness operates along the interstices of the contradictory and complementary ways in which systems of power and institutional discourses structure relations of oppression, exploitation, and subjectivities. Thus, queer desire and alterity emerge as a site that

dramatizes the power relations that get subsumed within everyday relations and experiences.

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- The mingling of the bodies and the minds in *Sense8* becomes a trope through which a new kind of global community and solidarity emerges as the radical site of reconfiguration of traditional identity categories.
- As the sensates “become” into shared consciousness across both race, class and gender, the camera and music work in inventive ways to decenter our notions of embodiment, linearity, spatio-temporality— attempting to challenge our perception of how a narrative or self can take place.




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The mingling of the bodies and the minds in ‘Sense8’ becomes a trope through which a new kind of global community and solidarity emerges as the radical site of reconfiguration of traditional identity categories. As sensates “become” into shared consciousness across both race, class and gender, the camera and music work in inventive ways to decenter our notions of embodiment, linearity, spatio-temporality, attempting to challenge our perception how a narrative or self can take place.

For the sensates, the sexual boundaries are blurred they are no longer limited by the ideals of society. Therefore, ‘Sense8’ destabilizes the predominance of heterosexuality and engenders the fluid nature of new found identities. ‘Sense8’ depicts gender fluidity and queerness and places it alongside a future setting with transhuman sensates having genetic mutation.

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- OTT Streaming services offer a new and more complex way of storytelling, challenging the traditional format of network and cable television.
- Somewhat independent mode of content creation (even as it is tied to market viability) engenders an era of television content that is increasingly resisting the demands of network broadcasting and with it, the norms and conventions which defined the narrative of TV-series.
- Cultural texts associated with gender depictions can reproduce the unequal representation and stereotypes of the past and the present.
- This apparent freedom of content generation must be analysed within the larger transnational economy and culture that facilitates the proliferation of alternative forms of desire, identities, and familial/kinship models.



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OTT streaming services offer a new and more complex way of storytelling, challenging the traditional format of network and cable television. Somewhat independent mode of content creation engenders an era of television content that is increasingly resisting the demands of network broadcasting and with it, the norms and conventions which defined the narratives of TV-series.

Cultural texts associated with gender depictions can reproduce the unequal representation and stereotypes of the past and the present. This apparent freedom of content generation must be analyzed within the larger transnational economy and culture that facilitates the proliferation of alternative forms of desires, identities and familial or kinship models.

There is also an urgent need for scholars to critically engage with the influx of OTT programming content owing to its diverse and alternative means to distinguish itself in terms of representation. Its effective platform can form a formidable space for rethinking the issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and similar other cultural divisions.

This marks the end of week 5, after a dedicated introduction to queer theory and exploration of various forms of queer texts. We shall move forward to one of the most influential gender theorists of our time in the next week.

Judith Butler, not only deconstructed the limitations of existing approaches to gender, but also shaped the very modern understanding of gender and what it means to embody and live a gender alongside cultural discourse. In the coming week, we will analyze Judith Butler's contribution to contemporary Gender Studies with a special focus to a philosophy of Gender Performativity. Thank you.

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