Two-Spirits, Nádleeh, and LGBTQ2 Navajo Gaze [Abstract]

Gabriel Estrada

This article compares four Navajo lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit (LGBTQ2) films. It emphasizes cinematic gaze, anti-LGBTQ2 violence, Navajo transgender women, Navajo cosmology, Native lesbian feminism, and two-spirit community activism. Directed by Euro-American Lydia Nibley, the Two Spirits (2009) documentary recounts Fred Martinez’s queer hate-crime murder and affirms Martinez’s Navajo sense of being a two-spirit effeminate male, or nádleeh, especially as related by Martinez’s mother, Pauline Mitchell, and the nádleeh scholar Wesley Thomas. Through interviews with the author, nádleehs Elton Naswood and Michelle Enfield praise Nibley’s film, featured by the Public Broadcast System’s Independent Lens nationally in June of 2011. They also voice a need for greater two-spirit and Navajo transgender women activist representations. In contrast to Two Spirits, the Miss Indian Transgender Arizona short overtly affirms a Native transgender identity. It is one of many short films that the activist NativeOut.com makes available online. Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie’s (Navajo/Muskogee/Seminole) art installation film, An Aboriginal View with Aboriginal Dreams (2002), visually interrogates Navajo gender, sexuality, and sovereignty within a context of contemporary US/Navajo nationalism, the Iraq War, and gender suppression. A Native feminist perspective lends Tsinhnahjinnie’s film a foreboding sense that US militarism in the Middle East increases heterosexism on the Navajo Nation, a dynamic that culminates in the 2005 Diné Marriage Act, which restricts marriage to heterosexual couples. Finally, Carrie House’s (Navajo/Oneida) I Am short centers on diverse two-spirit activism that Two Spirits mutes. Through a comparative analysis of the Native LG BTQ2 representations in Two Spirits, Miss Indian Transgender Arizona, An Aboriginal View with Aboriginal Dreams, and I Am, the essay foregrounds Navajo LG BTQ2 gazes that are culturally grounded, activist, and critical of US, Navajo, and Native American national heterosexisms.

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