Queer theory shares with feminism an interest in non-normative expressions of gender and with lesbian, gay, and bisexual studies a concern with non-straight expressions of sexuality and gender. However, queer film and popular culture theory and criticism has developed as much as a reaction to feminism and to lesbian and gay work as it has been an expansion of this work.

The questioning of essentialist identity politics, the rise of AIDS activism, and the debates surrounding 'political correctness' laid the groundwork for reappropriating the term 'queer' inside and outside the academy beginning in the mid-1980s. However, in the decade that followed, 'queer' and 'queerness' has been used and understood a number of ways in film and popular culture theory, criticism, and practice. Some use 'queer' as a hipper synonym for 'gay male', or, less frequently, 'lesbian', or as a new umbrella term for gay and lesbian (and bisexual sometimes). In relation to film and popular culture theory and criticism, perhaps this use of 'queer' can be connected to the beginning of what has been called 'New Queer Cinema' or the 'Queer New Wave'. As a result of certain high-profile screenings and awards at the Sundance and Toronto film festivals of 1991 and 1992, critics and distributors heralded a new film movement that included such works as Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingstone, 1990), Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, 1990), Poison (Todd Haynes, 1991), My Own Private Idaho (Gus van Sant, 1991), Young Soul Rebels (Isaac Julien, 1991), Edward II (Derek Jarman, 1991), The Hour and the Times (Christopher Munch, 1992), The Living End (Gregg Araki, 1992), and Swoon (Tom Kalin, 1992). For many critics, what tied these films and videos together and set them apart from others, aside from their independent production status, was how they directly addressed a non-straight audience, as well as how they presented material that was sexually explicit, unconcerned with 'positive images', and more generally 'politically incorrect'. Some saw these characteristics, in part, as responses to the AIDS crisis, pornography, and anti-censorship debates, and in-your-face AIDS and gay and lesbian activism (ACT UP!, Outrage, Queer Nation).

However, a number of commentators at the time, including B. Ruby Rich (1993), Cherry Smyth (1992), and Pratibha Parmar (Gever et al. 1993), noted that 'New Queer Cinema' was used most often to describe and market independent films and videos by or about gay men, and largely white middle-class gay men at that. But adding work by women to the roll-call of New Queer Cinema—Pratibha Parmar (Kush, 1991), Sadie Benning (It wasn't Love, 1992), Su Friedrich, (First Comes Love, 1991), Cecilia Dougherty (Coal-Miner's Granddaughter, 1991, Flaming Ears 1991) still wasn't enough to justify the use of 'queer' for some. Smyth (1992) was among those who felt that most of what was called New Queer Cinema (and video) in the early 1990s was really only repackaged lesbian, gay, or 'les-

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bian and gay' work, because these films and videos do not seriously challenge or transgress established straight or gay and lesbian understandings of gender and sexuality. Beyond this, some commentators and film- and videomakers feel that expressing and representing queerness—as opposed to gayness, lesbianism, and bisexuality—is most (or only) possible within non-mainstream production and formal contexts, that is within avant-garde, documentary, and other independently produced alternative-to-traditional narrative forms.

Much of the queer film and popular culture theory and criticism developed in the 1990s was fuelled by the examples of New Queer Cinema, its critics, and the work of cultural critics like Judith Butler (Gender Trouble, 1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Between Men, 1985; Epistemology of the Closet, 1991), Michael Warner (Fear of a Queer Planet, 1993), Diana Fuss (Essentially Speaking, 1989), Teresa de Lauretis ('Queer Theory' issue of differences, 1991), Sue-Ellen Case ('Tracking the Vampire', 1991), and Smyth (Lesbians Talk Queer Notions, 1992). Of course, as suggested earlier, queer film and popular culture theory and criticism has also developed in relation or in response to earlier lesbian and gay film and popular culture theory and criticism, represented by the work of Richard Dyer, Robin Wood, B. Ruby Rich, Teresa de Lauretis, Jack Babuscio, and special sections in Jump Cut (1977, 1981) (see also Smiluck, Part 1, Chapter 14). But just how, or even if, queer theory and criticism is connected to lesbian and gay approaches is an issue that is still being negotiated and debated.

Aside from its uses as a synonym for gay or lesbian or bisexual, certain uses of 'queer' and 'queerness' as new umbrella terms have most strongly suggested how it might work within established lesbian, gay, and bisexual film and popular culture theory and criticism. In these uses, 'queer' might be used to describe the intersection or combination of more than one established 'non-straight' sexuality or gender position in a spectator, a text, or a personality. For example, when a text like Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953) or All
about Eve (1950) accumulates lesbian, gay, and bisexual cultural readings, it could be deemed a queer text, rather than, say, only a gay or a lesbian or a bisexual text. In a similar way, Marlene Dietrich and Bette Davis could be said to have queer star images as they have inspired lesbian, gay, and bisexual cultural appreciations. By this meaning, the text or the performer's star image does not have to have obvious (so-called 'denotive') non-straight elements to be termed 'queer'; it just needs to have gathered about it a number of non-straight cultural readings. Indeed, some queer critics contend that many popular culture texts that do contain visible gay, lesbian, bisexual, or otherwise non-straight characters and content—like Silence of the Lambs (1991)—aren't necessarily queer texts as they work to oppress and eliminate queerness rather than to express it. The uses of 'queer' outlined above are generally careful not to replace specifically lesbian, gay, and bisexual critical positions, readings, and pleasures. The goal here is to collect and juxtapose these positions, readings, and pleasures in order to construct a range of 'non-straight' (that is, queer) approaches to film and popular culture.

A slight variation on the approaches described above would be using queer to describe the non-straight work, positions, pleasures, and readings of people who don't share the same 'sexual orientation' as that articulated in the text they are producing or responding to. A gay man would take queer pleasure in a lesbian film, for example. Or a lesbian or straight women might be said to do queer work when she directs a film with gay content, or writes an essay discussing the erotics of, say, Kenneth Anger's films. Certain feminist critics and theorists have also begun using the term 'queer' to describe any non-normative expressions of gender by or about straight women (and, sometimes, straight men) in film and popular culture production and representation. But whether connected to feminism or not, this understanding of 'queer' can describe any work by straight-identifying film and popular culture theorists, critics, or producers that is concerned with non-normative straightness.

As with many of the films and videos of the New Queer Cinema movement, the critical and theoretical uses of 'queer' outlined above largely maintain gender difference and the orthodoxies about sexuality developed within liberal feminist theories and gay and lesbian 'identity politics' approaches. However, another variety of queer film theory and criticism has followed the more radical programmes outlined by Smyth, Case, and others as it concentrates upon those aspects of spectatorship, cultural readership, and textual codes that suggest or establish spaces that are not quite contained within established gender and sexuality categories. By this definition, 'queer' would be reserved for those films and popular culture texts, spectator positions, pleasures, and readings that articulate spaces outside gender binaries and sexuality categories, whether these are outside normative straight understandings of gender and sexuality or outside orthodox lesbian and gay understandings of these things. This type of queer film and popular culture theory and criticism is concerned with that which does not seem to fall within either current definitions of straightness, nor within those of lesbianism or gayness—and perhaps even those of bisexuality, although this area has been given precious little attention thus far in film and popular culture theory and criticism (but see below).

- Ultimately, the theories, criticism, and film and popular culture texts produced within this definition of 'queer' would seek to examine, challenge, and confuse sexual and gender categories.

Ultimately, the theories, criticism, and film and popular culture texts produced within this definition of 'queer' would seek to examine, challenge, and confuse sexual and gender categories. Some film and popular culture work in this area seeks to bring established sexuality and gender categories to a crisis point by exposing their limitations as accurate descriptive terms for what happens in a lot of film and popular culture production and consumption and reading practices. For example, together or separately, 'masculine', 'feminine', 'straight', 'lesbian', and 'gay' (or, to use a term more in keeping with the period, 'homosexual') don't quite describe the image of, or the spectator responses to, Katharine Hepburn dressed as a young man within the narrative of Sylvia Scarlett (1936). I have deliberately left the terms 'bisexual' and 'androgy nous' off the list above, as some theorists and critics working with queer-queerness feel that among established gender and sexuality concepts bisexuality and androgyny offer two of the best starting-points from which to develop theoretical and critical positions that
will move film and popular culture criticism and theory beyond gender difference and orthodox sexual categories. Perhaps this is because bisexuality and androgyny are often understood as being positioned both 'between' and outside gender and sexuality binaries. In a similar manner, some writers are examining transvestism and transsexuality-transgenderism as potential sites for developing queer theoretical and critical approaches to film and popular culture that are founded upon potentially more radical transgressions of gender and sexuality orthodoxies.

Given the existing range of understandings, uses, and approaches to queerness in film and popular culture theory and criticism, it is not possible to establish one 'politics' of queerness. While some would like to reserve the term 'queer' only for those films, videos, articles, and books that take up progressive or radical political positions on gender and sexuality, the fact remains that at present 'queer' and 'queerness' have been, and are being, used in film and popular culture theory and criticism in relation to a wide range of political and ideological positions, from conservative to radical.

But in one or another of their many definitional and political forms, there are signs that established theoretical and critical areas in film and popular culture are being queered. Take, for example, textual coding and spectatorship. Certain queer film and popular culture theorists have already profoundly challenged what has come before by asserting that the concepts of subtexting and connotation are most often used as hetero-centric paradigms to undermine, subordinate, or deny a range of non-(normative) straight readings that are as 'denotative' as any others. So queer readings (decodings) of texts are not 'alternative readings' or 'subcultural readings', but readings to stand alongside normatively straight ones. Taking up certain feminist work with spectatorship and gender, queer work with spectatorship has suggested that viewers, no matter what their stated gender and sexuality identities, often position themselves 'queerly'—that is, position themselves within gender and sexuality spaces other than those with which they publicly identify. Most radically, this ever-shifting gender and sexuality positioning in relation to film and popular culture would obliterate for the spectator the sense of functioning within any particular gender and sexuality categories.

Historical studies, semiotics and structuralism, Marxist and ideological criticism, auteurism, genre studies, reception theory, and psychoanalytic, feminist, gay, lesbian, and bisexual approaches have all begun to be scrutinized, critiqued, supplemented, revised, or, in certain cases, rejected by queer film and popular culture theorists and critics. They are either seeking...
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ways to form ‘coalitions’ between non- (normative) straight approaches, or wanting to examine more accurately and complexity those spaces and places in film and popular culture that fall outside existing gender and sexuality categories.

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