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Unfolding and Understanding Communities

Moderator: Joshua Green (MIT)

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“Being and Becoming” Communities

In the spirit of Unboxing Television’s gathering call, there are several sets of convergences that I’d like to identify. First, the questions of “what is television today” and what, therefore, are Television and Media Studies, reveal that second, we as scholars are inevitably engaged with being (object/present) and becoming (change/future). And third, as an ephemeral and expanding ‘medium’ – practice, experience – in the context of this panel, television is its communities.

It seems that there is almost immediately a questioning of the very concept of communities ~ imagined, imagined by whom (those who feel they belong to one, those marketing them), constructed, constructed from within and without. In our pre-panel exchanges, Joshua asked about the re-invigoration of the viewer, while I'm curious to what degree Aswin finds fan communities hold influence? Lee has looked at issues of global television distribution, a business practice that is, of course, contingent on notions of community (or different communities of viewers); but while communities are imagined aren't they somehow made real or material through marketing categories?

Like Tim, I am interested in discourses of race and how they propel, delimit, and shape a notion of 'American.' While Tim's work focuses on how discourses of blackness and whiteness affect the syndication of U.S. programs abroad (in Europe), I focus on Asian American media discourses. My specific case study is of angryasianman.com which is a powerful resource, more than simply a blog in that the site attracts thousands of hits a month (an impressive 200,000 at recent report), rallying individuals to see and support a particular independent film, to catch an Asian American character in a television appearance, or to protest a racist ad campaign or political candidate. Here is a description of [angryasianman](http://angryasianman.com) (the man) by a user:

"... He's real connected to the Asian American community and is involved in a lot of media organizations and events. What I appreciate about angry asian man is that he not only posts almost everything having to do with Asian Americans in the media (I mean everything) but he includes a lot of current issues in the community as well. Its a really easy way of keeping up with what's going on in Asian America."

This description gives a sense of how [angryasianman\(.com\)](http://angryasianman.com) a) provides a sense of community, b) actually creates community, and c) gives a way for people to define and map out a community called, "Asian America" -- which is imagined as well constructed, real and yet ephemeral, unified but also diverse.

While on one hand, the binary between margin and mainstream is mythical (e.g., that those in the margins, particularly in film and television production, are in a position of non-influence seeking only to become part of the all-powerful center), on the other hand, Asian American media discourses forge an alternative counter-'space' for those who are not part of the majority in media and information industries.

A "site" like angryasianman.com is a community, one that is affirmed and self-defined, taking up (or taking issue with) current television discourses and infusing them with a specific Asian American critical cultural lens. I like how Shanti Kumar describes in his position piece that, "cultural studies scholars have focused on the creative ways in which viewers in specific local contexts use ... the power/knowledge of television and popular culture to assert their own sense of identity, difference, nationality and transnationality." I would say that Shanti proposes (and provokes) a fourth convergence, of the global and local. In close, 'the' heterogenous community addressed by [angryasianman](http://angryasianman.com) seems to be an Asian America that can also gesture towards Asian countries; for example, the discussion/blog about the two Korean characters on *Lost* relays how Korean viewers complained about Daniel Dae Kim's accent when speaking Korean in his role as Jin and reveals that the Korean film actress who plays Sun was raised in Queens. I would like to extend Julian Stringer's term, "Asian American screen cultures" (which he uses in reference to how and why Hong Kong action films can hold importance for Asian Americans) here, to describe how television culture becomes Asian American media discourses.