

Uncommon Sensuality: New Queer Feminist Film/Theory

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Is the Lesbian Still Apparitional?

We discovered who we were as we stepped into the void, the invisible, the blank screen, and named ourselves lesbian. That was the first step. There could be no semiotics if there were no sign. – Barbara Hammer.¹

Writing about her film practice in the 1960s, Barbara Hammer describes “the void, the invisible, the blank screen” that preceded her work as an American queer female filmmaker. In this, Hammer intuitively prefigures Terry Castle’s 1993 literary and social history *The Apparitional Lesbian*, in which she captured, as if on film, the “ghost” of sexual loves between women that had been lost to visibility in history.² Between these two moments, the work of Chantal Akerman and Ulrike Ottinger, although already exhibited in Europe, entered circuits of festival distribution in the USA; and, as Dorothy Arzner’s back catalog was recognized and reassembled, the portrait of the sound era’s first American female feature filmmaker as a butch dyke had emerged. Yet (or thus) by 1996, Cheryl Dunye could create Martha Page, a loving yet critical homage to Arzner, in her historiographic meta-fiction *THE WATERMELON WOMAN*. The character is a double in-joke both assuming and celebrating a knowing lesbian audience that would recognize, on the one hand, Arzner’s butch self-presentation and numerous rumored affairs with her stars; on the other, the queer anti-racist community documentary work and scholarship of Alexandra Juhasz, who plays Page.

Far from being apparitional, diverse lesbians are highly visible in the contemporary pop culture and *mise-en-scène* of Dunye’s Philadelphia. Video clerk Cheryl (played by Dunye) is cruised at work by wealthy white femme Diana, played – in another in-joke – by *GO FISH* (1994) screenwriter and star Guinevere Turner. And lesbians also inhabit the contrastive but interconnected historical worlds of black Philly and white Hollywood cinema that Cheryl researches. In her book *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich notes that *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* not only makes the lesbian archive joyously visible, along with homoerotic “star gazing” (to borrow Jackie Stacey’s term³), but also includes feminist film scholarship as a contributive formation of sexuality and identity.⁴ The screen is blank no more.

Page and her lover Fae Richards (Lisa Marie Bronson) in *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* are examples of Castle’s apparitional lesbians: they are both visible and invisible, depending on perspective. As Cheryl discovers through her interviews with Richards’ friends, lovers and fans, both of them were legible as lesbian within their historical moment, but their sexuality was obscured by sanitizing forces of dominant history. It is this liminal state between visibility and invisibility that becomes the motor of Dunye’s film, the plot that drives Cheryl forward and that acts as a metonym for the work of queer feminist film scholarship. We are, the film suggests, engaged beyond the binary of visible/invisible inscribed by dominant culture: to do lesbian film theory is to work, in many ways, with the apparitional.

Cvetkovich's definitional book demonstrates the diffusion of queer feminist film theory through cultural theory; yet, as Theresa L. Geller notes, this means that lesbian film theory may be apparitional.

Today film and media serve as a privileged archive in queer theoretical inquiry [...] I am frequently persuaded by the current interpretations of the popular culture archive forwarded by contemporary queer theorists, but I find myself troubled by the ends to which film and popular culture are put in the name of theoretical insights made apart from film criticism proper.⁵

Cvetkovich's wonderful reading is a case in point of the shift from a medium-specific reading of gazes, bodies, desires and framing to a more diffuse cultural history. She privileges *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* as an item of queer ephemera and a document of such ephemera, particularly its gently parodic depiction of the real-life Lesbian Herstory Archives as the Center for Lesbian Information and Technology (CLIT). Film and video, in Cvetkovich's reading, are like the archive, accessible but still chaotic documents that generate affective cultures, constituting lesbian counter-publics. Yet the elision that Geller notes, in which the contextualization of queer feminist film has shifted from an advocacy-based film criticism and film theory to a trans-medial cultural studies, is meaningful. In 2009, the editors of online film magazine *Reverse Shot's* Proposition 24 issue on LGBTQ film note, parenthetically, that an article on *THE WIRE* (David Simon, 2002-08) "(feature[s], as it turns out, the only lesbians discussed in depth in our symposium – a bias in the [predominantly male] writing staff or indicative of the marginalization of gay women in popular culture outside of television commentating and hosting? A topic for another time perhaps)."⁶

Reverse Shot's editors both frame and elide the issue that Geller raises, one that does indeed relate to "another time" and the relation of temporality to apparitionality, as seen in *THE WATERMELON WOMAN*. As B. Ruby Rich observed in the article where she coined the identifier New Queer Cinema, the moment queer cinema gained a Sundance audience, it was returned to a "bleak gender imbalance."⁷ While lesbian filmmakers, including Lizzie Borden and Sheila McLaughlin, had been present in the genesis of the movement, the approach of and to the market focused attention on white male filmmakers such as Gus Van Sant and Todd Haynes. On the one hand, post-structuralist theories of the author's death privileged the text over its maker, as can be seen in Nick Davies' superbly-argued *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema*, in which queerness recedes from lived experience through character and/or narrative politics to an aesthetics and/or affect.⁸ On the other, the market and popular/arthouse magazines continue to privilege the auteur. Lacking a challenge from an attendant and attentive queer/feminist theory, due to the turn to critical theory and then cultural history, this remains the generic white, straight, male filmmaker.

This academic/journalistic pincer matters because industry patterns (which mean that Arzner, with 13 features, is still the most productive American female feature filmmaker ever) and media coverage create a feedback cycle: lack of coverage leads to lack of opportunity. Patricia White observes that, as female filmmakers have been sidelined in queer film theory, and queer filmmakers within feminist film theory, apparitionalization particularly afflicts lesbian auteurs:

If major is to minor as film is to video, feature to short, cinema to television, fiction to documentary, women – and thus lesbians and often transpeople – tend to labour in the latter category of each of these pairs[...] there are also lesbian works that deploy a certain “poverty” – in terms of means of production or aesthetic approach – in order to deflect audience demand for familiar stories, happy endings, repeatable pleasures, identity assurances.⁹

Due to its perceived difficulty of access, both in terms of distribution and legibility, minor queer feminist cinema contributes to erasure by omission within academic and critical cultures.

Yet this aesthetic choice – to be minor and/or apparitional – remains elective and political. As queer videomaker Hito Steyerl suggests:

The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, *For an Imperfect Cinema* [which] argues for an imperfect cinema because, in [its] words, “perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema.” The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society.¹⁰

White and Steyerl both suggest that minor/poor cinema simultaneously circulates globally via both the Internet and the festival circuit, whose glocal dimensions Rich has charted, and also that this deterritorialization further contributes to its invisibility, reinforcing ghostliness, and apparitionality. Monika Treut’s choice of title for her German-Taiwanese co-production *GHOSTED* (2009) points to the apparitionality both of the glocal and, within it, of queerness. It can be read as at once critical and political, particularly with regard to asymmetric human rights legislation and the homogenization of LGBTQI identities through and towards what Jasbir K. Puar calls “homonationalism.”¹¹

Rachel Lewis observes that the lesbian minor cinema described by White is frequently involved, particularly in Europe, but also within US diaspora communities, with transnational mobility and solidarity, rejecting neo-liberal models of identity. Lewis concludes that a minor cinema, in which apparitionality, illegibility, and instability are tropes of experimental narrative, still retains an urgent political charge when:

articulating a political economy of rights – a politics that not only encompasses legal and cultural recognition but also economic redistribution – is essential amidst neoliberal attempts to privatize subordination. It is precisely the above objective that a transnational lesbian cinematic consciousness must strive to accomplish if it is to become a progressive force for social, cultural and political change.¹²

In more recent essays, Rich has suggested that while surviving New Queer Cinema filmmakers (predominantly white and cismale) have shifted towards the narrative mainstream, the new New Queer Cinema has shifted geographically towards new margin/centers in the Global South. Rich cites as an example Lucrecia Martel, whose films feature both apparitional and vividly apparent lesbians, but are rarely read or screened as queer.¹³

Amy Villarejo’s *LESBIAN RULE* (2003) prefigures White in rejecting mainstream visibility as the privileged definition of a lesbian cinema, identifying apparitionality as a political and

aesthetic strategy. She argues that visibility conflates representation and legibility, presenting as an achievement what is actually a reified conformity that benefits capitalism, a ruse that undermines the possibilities of a lesbian visual culture for deconstructing dominant optics. In Villarejo's analysis, Ottinger in *EXILE SHANGHAI* (1997) prefigures the mobile lesbian subject of Lewis' transnational cinema.¹⁴ Her configuration of the queer female subject disappearing into and through a politicized landscape as she traverses it is knowingly manifest in recent queer feminist documentary. In *FUTURE MY LOVE* (2012), Maja Borg searches for the lost potential future of a finished relationship by travelling to utopian architectural thinker Jacque Fresco's Venus Project in Florida; the film shifts from reflective video diary to expansive futurological study in which Borg becomes the interlocutor rather than the central subject. Sarah Turner's *PERESTROIKA* (2009) sees the protagonist (who both is and is not coterminous with the filmmaker) falling out of love with her partner as she travels both towards Lake Baikal on the Trans-Siberian Express, and back in time to memories and archive footage of a previous trip with her friend Sian Thomas, who died shortly afterwards. Ever-present as a voice-over, the protagonist is only ever visible as a reflection in the night-darkened windows of the fast-moving train – and, of course, in the movement of the camera and framing of the image.

What Queer Feminists Do Onscreen

Against this multifarious backdrop of Vigo, Cocteau, Dreyer, Pabst, “women's weepies,” and the formal strategies of the avant-garde [Deren, Warhol and Frampton], I intuited [on starting filmmaking in 1972] that I was venturing into a mother lode of possibility. – Yvonne Rainer.¹⁵

Turner's film, read through Villarejo's study, suggests that Hammer's practice was and is not simply to appear onscreen indexically, or to film other lesbians engaged in lesbian activities, but to use formal strategies to turn the “blank screen” into a lesbian screen, “a mother lode of possibility.” As Villarejo notes, making the lesbian appear on-screen as a stable, legible category has drawn attention away from the formal strategies mobilized by second-wave filmmakers, and particularly the significance of the theory film for lesbian minor cinema. Theoretically-informed, and simultaneously theory-critical, films such as *THRILLER* (Sally Potter, 1978) and *RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX* (Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977) were the “mother lode” for the initial generation of feminist film theory, and only a few lesbian filmmakers, such as Turner and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and are still actively engaging with theory onscreen and off. Filmmaker Lisa Gornick testifies to the radical potential of queer women thinking onscreen, as both a representational and formal challenge, when describing her film *DO I LOVE YOU?* (2002):

In this film, I wanted to be like those men who go into cafés and talk and philosophise, but I wanted it to be women doing it. We don't see enough women doing that, we don't see enough women actively philosophizing[...] this film is not complete, it's about allowing the uncompleted though, allowing the lack of answers. It's about allowing the doubt to be the philosophy.¹⁶

What queer feminists do onscreen – and to the screen – is theory.

Gornick powerfully asserts legibility as an alternative to representation, for reading onscreen embodiment and/as performance. Rainer, like Potter and Mulvey and Wollen, envisioned performance – particularly alternative performance such as modern dance, performance art, and body art – as a formal strategy for doing theory (differently) on film. Jamie Stuart notes that, after Riot Grrrl absorbed the influences of these films and meshed them with punk to inform a queer feminist performance culture, even narrative lesbian cinema has been persistently attracted to the all-girl band as a trope of lesbian visibility. As Alison Piepmeier notes, citing Carolyn Dever’s concept of a “skeptical feminism,” feminist, queer and trans theory are often done in demotic off-spaces such as zines, songs, blogs, community websites, teach-ins, and films, a shift that is often cited by demotic theoreticians as life-sustaining.¹⁷ In the words of filmmaker and novelist Virginie Despentes, “If I didn’t come from the world of punk rock, I would be ashamed of what I am. But I do come from the world of punk rock, and I am proud of not fitting in.”¹⁸

At the same time, Stuart notes that visibility is mobile in lesbian-authored films, shifting from the performer to the audience through desire:

scenes that show female characters performing for audiences that are largely female, and the use of close-ups shows how particular women in these audiences react to the performance. In many cases, it is an appreciative, desiring response [and] the performer is knowingly and often deliberately performing specifically to the female members of the audience.¹⁹

The potential for this consensual, cyclical gaze for doing theory is made evident in Sini Anderson’s documentary *THE PUNK SINGER* (2012), which focuses on riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna, and numbers critical theorists as well as musicians among its talking heads. More theoretically-oriented documentaries retain an emphasis on the performative, and dialogic, generation of new theory. Astra Taylor’s *EXAMINED LIFE* (2008) includes a number of contemporary philosophers performing monologues – hypnotically so, in the case of Cornel West. Only Judith Butler chooses to engage in a dialogue with a fellow Bay Area dweller, artist and disability activist Sunaura Taylor, who is also the filmmaker’s sister. Butler and Taylor do queer, disability and coalitional theory out on the street, both in the movement of their bodies and in their discussion of that movement. *Beginning* – like Rainer in her reinvention of dance – from the idea of walking as an everyday action, Butler and Taylor consider what walking while queer or disabled makes visible, and how bodies in motion are read into narrow identity categories, sometimes with violent consequences, due to stereotypical assumptions about that visibility.

The Mission district that Butler and Taylor think through with their bodies is also the site of Treut’s 1999 documentary *GENDERNAUTS*, which documents the transmasculine and genderqueer community in San Francisco in the late 1990s through on-the-street “tour guide” narration by trans-media theorist Sandy Stone, including a performative scene in which she walks as “male” and as “female.” Everyday walking thus simultaneously emerges from, and is contextualized by, the drag king cabaret where many of the subjects perform. Since *PARIS IS BURNING* (Jennie Livingston, 1990), performative drag cultures – which bridge community and public spaces – have been a major locus for lesbian minor cinema’s ability to think through intersectional theories and lived politics of gender, sexuality, race, class and ability, and an occasionally fraught coalitional space in which lesbian, trans and intersex identities and theories have shaped each other.²⁰ As scholar and filmmaker Ingrid Ryberg

notes, referring to Cvetkovich's work on intimacy, such locations "may act as both a *counter public* and an *intimate public* space for queer, feminist, and lesbian subjects, and that it is in the tensions and dynamic transactions between these notions of publicness that the potential for a safe space can be both located and undermined."²¹

Intersecting, performance and film think through each other particularly productively for queer and trans-feminist cinema. As Judith "Jack" Halberstam notes, "artists and activists are far more confident than academics about the meaning and potential of gender flexibility, and it is has been in art and film, generally speaking, that we have seen a widespread celebration of new levels of gender 'fluidity.'"²² Halberstam is introducing Rebecca Swan's photobook *ASSUME NOTHING*, which accompanies Kirsty MacDonald's 2009 documentary of the same name. Swan collaborates with trans performers and artists, whose work centers around a number of public installations and performances, as well as with Māori and Pasifika subjects whose embodiments and identities critique the Euro-Western idea of gender fluidity.

Wu Tsang's documentary *WILDNESS* (2012) re-visions both the documentary politics of *PARIS IS BURNING* and the late 1970s theory films' use of performance for a post-millennial trans cinema, one that is engaged with the trans-generational and transnational as well as transgender. In a manner reminiscent of calls to rescind the historical erasure of transwomen of color such as Stormé DeLarverie, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, rendered apparitional in histories of the Stonewall confrontation, *WILDNESS* documents the interface between a group of twenty-something queer/non-binary artists of color and the mostly older Latina transwomen in whose habitual bar, the Silver Platter, they hold a performance party called Wildness. Crucial theorizations of intersectionality and intervulnerability by Puar, Butler and Ahmed are brought, implicitly but knowingly, to life onscreen through the differing performative embodiments across the generations. The Silver Platter her/itself is given voice through a voice-over delivered and co-written by Guatemalan-American transgender actress Mariana Marroquin.

The Many Body Eyes

[Consider] Assia Djebar's writings on women of Algiers, in which she spoke of the many body eyes – the breast, navel, sex organ, for example. The eye of the dominated is a site of multiplicity. And each site offers a sight, as well as a way of seeing or gazing back of its own. – Trinh T. Minh-Ha.²³

Intersecting with lesbian apparitionality, the visibility and audibility of ethnicity and/or migration necessitates readings that see closely, in the classic academic sense of "close reading," and see differently. Attentive to this, Kara Keeling's *THE WITCH'S FLIGHT* creates the most startling and useful formations in twenty-first century queer feminist film theory through her consideration of the black femme. Arguing for the use of femme in contrast to female or feminine, Piepmeier quotes zinester Hazel Pine on femme's strategic apparitionality: "the implied queerness of femme. The subversive nature of femme – the double whammy to heteronorms by not only being queer, but a hidden queer," as explored by stud filmmaker Campbell X in *FEM* (2007), a love letter to femmes voiced by butch performer Peggy Shaw.²⁴ For Keeling, African-American ethnicity is commonly held in contrast to femme-ininity, even as it redoubles hiddenness; thus the black femme offers a particularly potent site for queer feminist film theory. "Because she is often invisible (but

nonetheless present), when she becomes visible, her appearance stops us, offers us time in which we can work to perceive something different, or differently."²⁵

The visible, argues Keeling, is produced and affirmed by what she calls "common sense." Deriving the term from Antonio Gramsci, Keeling argues for "common sense" as an apprehension licensed by, and maintaining, the status quo.²⁶ It is these common senses that render the black femme invisible; an uncommon sense – which is both imbricated with critical theory and evades and exceeds it – allows her to appear as apparitional, always-already present. Keeling's uncommon sense would perceive in Martel's films, for example, the urgent presence of young indigenous women in desiring relationships with bourgeois white teenage girls, and would also read the complex tensions between boys and femmes in Dee Rees' *PARIAH* (2011). Keeling writes of her own work, in a manner that resonates particularly with the use of sound in both films, that:

both the words on these pages and the music on the soundtrack might propel one into a "lyricism of the surplus" that, while evading currently accessible common senses, still can be felt – like an intuition or premonition, something unseen but nonetheless present(ly) (im)possible. The end of the world.²⁷

Ending the commonsensical world, Keeling begins it anew, as in Sara Ahmed's formulation of "killing joy as a world making project."²⁸

In a recent interview, Trinh suggests that, although its actions are palpable, such an uncommon sense remains defined by its lack of definition and its contingency on meeting new cultural conditions: "For me, being part of the feminist struggle is to continue, almost blindly and each time anew, to indicate the possibility of a different path of resistance, or simply being-with – one engaged in the perpetual task of 'gendering' and 'queering' dominant forms of thinking and practices, including one's own."²⁹ This follows closely on her uncanny but pragmatic suggestion, via Djebbar, for how these ways of seeing might take shape via "many body eyes." Like Keeling, Trinh resituates the non-white queer female body with respect to the cyclical gaze described by Stuart, whereby to-be-looked-at-ness generates a powerful looking. Trinh's citation of Djebbar's formulation recalls the pre-eminent work of 1990s queer feminist film theory, Chris Straayer's *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* (1996), which, beginning with the suggestion of the "hypothetical lesbian," complicates representational visibility by considering characters as rhetorical figures and/or strategies for negotiating subjectivity.³⁰

The suggestion that multiple body eyes may generate a new erotic is borne out by *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, whose editors and contributors represent a spectrum of feminist art, academia and activism.³¹ Intersectional feminist porn, which includes lesbian, trans, disabled and POC producers and performers reflexively negotiating specific modes of fetishization and exoticization, is Trinh's "site of multiplicity," codifying new ways in which "the many body eyes ... [are] gazing back." *The Feminist Porn Book* suggests that it is exactly through the reflexivity generated by this excess, as well as by control of the means of production, that the lesbian rule can be broken: at once hyper-visible and intentionally apparitional, the bodies in intersectional feminist porn use the performative strategies of theory film to solicit an uncommon sense located in desire.

Ryberg sums up both the political and theoretical generativity of intersectional feminist porn in the title of her essay: "'Every Time We Fuck We Win.'"³² Essays by filmmaker and activist Tobi Hill-Meyer, performer Buck Angel and academic Bobby Noble

demonstrate that trans visibility is greater in feminist porn than in non-porn cinema, with an embodied frankness that refuses apparitionality, ambiguity, erasure or mainstreaming. Noble notes that:

trans-formed masculine pleasures and their dissemination across the incoherence of trans bodies have crystallised a new feminist porn sexual grammar that reconfigures masculine sexuality[...] How is it that feminist porn – some thirty years after the infamous feminist porn wars – has become not only a means of depicting transmasculine sexuality in productive ways, but a potent interlocutor and champion?³³

Noble does not answer his question in the essay, and yet the collection as a whole suggests that such a turn has been accomplished, not only for transmasculine sexuality but for engagements in queer feminist film/theory.

In a Queer Time and Place

A film rests in a can until it's screened but a book can be opened at any time by anyone in any country. It doesn't require a darkened room, a special location or equipment. I thought a book could be a portal to my films. Perhaps my films, a life's work, could reach a new audience through the words and stories of my life.
– Barbara Hammer.³⁴

One potential answer to Noble is that a number of queer feminist filmmakers who were excluded and challenged during the 1980s sex wars not only continued to make films that explored the desiring eyes of the body, but also – of necessity – to theorize their own work and the work of their peers and influences. Hammer, Rainer, Abigail Child (who was identified with the Bad Girls art movement), and Michelle Citron, as well as Desportes, were criticized for their representations of the sexual body, particularly the female body, from and for a queer female gaze. All have gone on to publish influential books about their practice, as “a portal to [their] films,” or what might be called auteurepoetics, a mode of practice in which filmmaking, film theory, and life writing enmesh in a complex assertion of *lived* authorship.³⁵ Although their work runs counter to post-structuralist theory, it is not anti-theoretical. Moreover, for these filmmakers, the author is inscribed not as intention, but as performative labor; rendered, one could say, apparitional, as in the magic trick that is a dominant trope in Child's early filmmaking. Auteurepoetics is an apparitional strategy, in which the author appears as and through her work, and in desiring relation to her audience.

Like Trinh, Hammer, Child, and Citron have all taught within the US academy, which has fostered a fragile but generative network of queer and/or feminist theory film-making since Maya Deren's establishment of an academic circuit for experimental film screenings and publications.³⁶ As Child writes, “Among lesbians the story is a form of sex talk – a joint whereby the community and the couple are of the same body. Proximity is difficult but brings us tongue to tongue.”³⁷ The book acts as a contingent “queer time and place,” to borrow Halberstam's title, resonating with the marginal and precarious locations in which queer feminist film and film theory continue to be done.³⁸ Hammer's void may be, finally, not ideologically but economically re-activated. Or rather, ideology expressed via economics. Austerity policies have targeted marginal communities, in a vicious circle that not only closes

down spaces of exhibition and publication, but narrows access to education.

Non-diegetic queerscapes are aligned with, and as important as, the diegetic queerscapes that Helen Hok-Sze Leung defines as “contingent and tangential uses of public space by sexual minorities and to public acts and expressions of desire, eroticism, and sexuality that momentarily disrupt what heterocentric ideology assumes to be an immutable, coherent relation between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire.”³⁹ Keeling notes, crucially, that “[b]ecause she marks a highly contested and contingent mode of existence[...] the black femme sets us to work on questions of survival, including considerations of affective labor, excess, and the (re)production of value,” the urgent questions that, in relating to migration, Lewis suggests face the queer feminist filmmaker.⁴⁰

Steyerl’s *The Wretched of the Screen* considers the “affective labor, excess, and [...] (re)production of value” of digital film and video as a way to re-embodiment concepts of digital art/queerscapes. *52 TUESDAYS* (Sophie Hyde, 2014) once again demonstrates feature cinema’s elasticity as a theoretical location, offering, in its simultaneously linear and fragmentary narrative of a family in transition documenting themselves with digital media, a new model of queer time and place that accounts for both digitality and economic precarity.⁴¹ Steyerl offers a definition that brilliantly captures what Hyde’s film dares to theorize, and how:

A kiss is a wager, a territory of risk, a mess. The idea of reproduction condensed into a fleeting moment. Let’s think of reproduction as this kiss, which moves across cuts, from shot to shot, from frame to frame: linking and juxtaposing. Across lips and digital devices. It moves by way of editing, exquisitely flipping around the idea of the cut, redistributing affects and desire, creating bodies joined by movement, love, pain.⁴²

Queer feminist film/theory is a Moebius reel of *NITRATE KISSES* (Hammer, 1992) and digital cuts. No longer a blank screen, it is still a site kept fresh by contestation, in which one can assume nothing. Therein, a kiss is a theory, articulated “tongue to tongue” through performative embodiment. Rather than facing the absence of semiotics, these film/theorists produce uncommonly sensual figurations that exceed, and thus cancel, semiotics, entering – as apparitionality enables – territories of risk.

¹ Barbara Hammer, “The Invisible Screen: Lesbian Cinema,” in *Hammer! Making Movies out of Sex and Life* (New York: Feminist Press, 2010), 180.

² Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

³ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 239-271.

⁵ Theresa L. Geller, “Is Film Theory Queer Theory? Or, Everything I Know about Queerness I Learned at the Movies,” *Camera Obscura* 84 28, no. 3 (2013): 161.

⁶ Michael Koresky and Jeff Reichert, “Defining a New Queer Cinema,” *Reverse Shot* 24, accessed September 5, 2014, http://www.reverseshot.com/article/rs_prop_24_defining_new_queer_cinema.

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- ⁷ B. Ruby Rich, "The New Queer Cinema: Director's Cut," in *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013), n5, 31.
- ⁸ Nick Davies, *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ⁹ Patricia White, "Lesbian Minor Cinema," *Screen* 49, no. 4 (2008): 410-411.
- ¹⁰ Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 39.
- ¹¹ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- ¹² Rachel Lewis, "Towards a Transnational Lesbian Cinema," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16, no. 3 (2012): 286.
- ¹³ Rich, "Queering the Social Landscape," *New Queer Cinema*, 179-180.
- ¹⁴ Amy Villarejo, "Archiving the Diaspora: A Lesbian Impression," in *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 83-121.
- ¹⁵ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 383.
- ¹⁶ Lisa Gornick in Ani Ritchie, "An Interview with Lisa Gornick: Reflections on a 'First Draft' Film and Love and Its Labels," in *British Queer Cinema*, ed. Robin Griffiths (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 210.
- ¹⁷ Alison Piepmeier, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 10.
- ¹⁸ Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, trans. Stéphanie Benson (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009), 118.
- ¹⁹ Jamie Stuart, *Performing Queer Female Identity on Screen: A Critical Analysis of Five Recent Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2008), 19-20.
- ²⁰ For an important critique of *Paris is Burning's* non-intersectional representation, see bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press), 145-156.
- ²¹ Ingrid Ryberg, "'Every Time We Fuck We Win': The Public Sphere of Queer, Feminist, and Lesbian Porn as a (Safe) Space for Sexual Empowerment," in *The Feminist Porn Book*, ed. Tristan Taormino et al (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 144.
- ²² Judith "Jack" Halberstam, "Gender Flex," in *Assume Nothing*, ed. Rebecca Swan (Berkeley: Soft Skull, 2010), 24.
- ²³ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "What's Eons New?," in *D-Passage: The Digital Way* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 136.
- ²⁴ Piepmeier, *Girl Zines*, 111, quoting Hazel Pine, *Grit and Glitter* (March 2007): n.p.
- ²⁵ Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, The Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ²⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Feminist Killjoys*, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://feministkilljoys.com/>.
- ²⁹ Trinh, "What's Eons New?," 137.
- ³⁰ Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- ³¹ Tristan Taormino et al, eds. *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
- ³² Published in Taormino et al, eds, *The Feminist Porn Book*, 140-154.
- ³³ Bobby Noble, "Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn's Trans Men,"

in *The Feminist Porn Book*, 304.

³⁴ Hammer, "Aging is Interesting," in *Hammer!*, 233.

³⁵ Hammer, *Hammer!*; Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*; Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Abigail Child, *This is Called Moving: A Critical Poetics of Film* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Despentes, *King Kong Theory*.

³⁶ Theresa L. Geller, "'Each Film Was Built as a Chamber and Became a Corridor': Maya Deren's Film Aesthetics as Feminist Praxis," in *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond*, ed. Corinn Columpar and Sophie Mayer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 79-92.

³⁷ Abigail Child, "Sex Talk (with Camille Roy)," *This is Called Moving*, 35.

³⁸ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema," *Positions* 9, no. 2 (2001): 426.

⁴⁰ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 2.

⁴¹ Sophie Mayer, "The Art of (Feminist Film) Work in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *cléo journal* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2014), accessed September 5, 2014, <http://cleojournal.com/2014/08/21/the-art-of-feminist-film-work-in-the-age-of-digital-reproduction-2/>.

⁴² Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 188.