Queer Space and Cultural Memory in the Films of Barbara Hammer, Katrina Del Mar, and Fadia Abboud

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Theorists of modernity and postmodernity—Henri Bergson and Frederic Jameson are two emblematic examples—have often derided the tendency to translate time into space, that is, to conceptualize durational flow through isomorphic geometric increments—time as a succession of identical units on an imaginary line—or to freeze complex histories into static vignettes. This is a tendency that Bergson detected in discussions of temporality from Immanuel Kant onward and that Jameson, for his part, regarded a pervasive trait of postmodern culture (Bergson 90-104; Jameson 25-31). Informed by vastly different agendas, and separated by a considerable historical gap, both agreed that the spatialization of time simplified the dynamism of duration, memory, and becoming. These are experiences, Bergson maintained, in which time advances at an apparently uneven pace, due to the vagaries of psychological time, and folds upon itself, mixing reminiscence and anticipation; their transposition into a grid or a series of marks on a line radically falsifies them. Jameson, for his part, took Bergson's fascination with the complexities of the *durée* as a trait of high modernism, to which he juxtaposed a postmodern tendency to reduce history into decontextualized tableaus (20-22). Such "crisis of historicity" revealed, in his view, the inability of contemporary societies to deal with dialectic evolution and to envision change. Set into space, history and experience become thing-like: easy to apprehend, label, and exchange, and they may be immediately turned into commodifiable units.

These ideas unquestioningly align space with fixity, simplification, and inertness. Because of this, both Bergson and Jameson are examples of a spatial prejudice that Henri Lefebvre identified in the early pages of *The Production of Space*: a disdain by which space is transformed into a repository of all evils. A reason for this—he speculated in a new preface to his book written in the mid-1980s—is its "externality" and apparent detachment from subjectivity, interiority and psychology, which are the locations of intellection, fantasy and desire—in sum, of everything regarded inalienably human. (Lefebvre 2013: 53)

Besides berating space as a reductive perceptual "a priori", Bergson's and Jameson's influential critiques granted it a fixity that, in fact, it may not have. While it is undeniable that space is more tangible, and may be more easily apportioned, than time, it is less certain that it may be regarded as mere extension and lifeless materiality. As Lefebvre elaborated in *The Production of Space* and some of his followers—such as Michel de Certeau or Iain Borden—have further substantiated, space is not a static given but a product, the result of social practice. It arises from uses, modes of production, and regimes of knowledge that divide and regiment it, endow it with meaning, and make it amenable to some purposes while proscribing others. For Lefebvre, space is seldom static, and has a time proper to it—"a history" (2013: 57) that he tried to outline through his distinction between the absolute spaces of the pre-capitalist world, the abstract, or homogeneous, spaces of rationalism and industrial capitalism, and the contradictory spaces of late capitalism. And if space has a history, so do its uses, modes of occupation, and styles of representation. Not only do these change in time; more crucial to the argument developed in these pages, they are also guided by cultural memory—by past images, knowledges, and experiences that suggest new ways of being and acting in place. In De Certeau's lapidary formulation, "memory mediates spatial transformations." (85)

The interplay between time and space; history and territory is the subject of this chapter, which will study the convergence of queer spatial practice and cultural memory in the work of a number of recent experimental filmmakers: Barbara Hammer, Fadia Abboud, and Katrina Del Mar. They are a diverse group spanning several generations and continents. Hammer and Del Mar are American and Abboud is an Australian of Lebanese descent. Hammer is, in a way, a dean of queer filmmakers; born in the late 1930s, her filmic practice started in the late 1960s and continues today in a variety of genres—from essay and diary films to documentaries, abstract works, and performances. Abboud and Del Mar were born between the late 1960s (Abboud) and the early 1970s (Del Mar). Unlike Hammer—an uncompromising experimentalist—they straddle the worlds of commercial and non-commercial art and film. All of them share the concern with the imbrication of memory, spatial occupation, and queer—specifically lesbian—iconography and experience.

Despite its recurrence in these and many other filmmakers, the convergence of queer spatial use and cultural memory has seldom been examined either by the few studies of queer film that take spatial rhetoric explicitly into account *or* by the numerous urban geographies that have tried to articulate the specificities of queer spatial practice. Among the studies that have explored the spatiality of queer film, and without trying to be exhaustive, we could recall that R. Bruce Brasell, Jane Walton, D. A. Miller, Lee Edelman, and others, have invoked such tropes as the closet, liminality, borderlines, in-between-ness, and cruising as characteristic of the queer spatial imaginary. These critics have shown that queer spatial use complicates the legibility and univocalness of cinematic space in different ways. Because of its clandestine occurrence in classical film, where it is hinted at rather than clearly represented, queerness obscures vision and thwarts the dominance of the heterosexist gaze, and occupies marginal, often unclassifiable locations, whether real (the derelict inner city) or fantasized (the imaginary spaces of the musical or the illusory spaces of animation). (Farmer; Griffin) When explicitly shown, queerness (homo)sexualizes filmic address, carving in it a niche for heterodox, seldom acknowledged desires, just as cruising does in "real" social space. Insightful as these inquiries are, they have regarded film-bound queer styles of dwelling and transit from an exclusively synchronic perspective—as action on the horizontal axis of territory that has little to do with temporal or memory layers.

At the same time, queer urban theorists such as David Bell, John Binnie, Gill Valentine, Henning Bech (104-118, 158), Samuel Delaney, or Aaron Betsky, among others, have gone a long way towards explaining how sexual minorities appropriate city spaces for the purposes of affirmation, visibility, pleasure, and community. Their suggestions run parallel to those of film critics and theorists: queer spatial practice is, in their view, marginal; corporeal, that is, fully mediated by the body and its pleasures; and "gestural"—Betsky's term for designating its ephemerality. Betsky has also proposed that it works as a sort of unconscious of modern architecture and urban planning. Repressed by modernist rationalism and spareness, the body and its unruly demands return in moments when the surveillance of wayward sexuality slackens, and in loosely supervised locations—urban ruins, degraded or peripheral areas. Similarly missing from these provocative inquiries is the work of memory—the fact that sexually-driven spatial appropriation involves at times a backward glance that brings the past to bear on present action.

Barbara Hammer's work is an exemplary site to start exploring the way in which spatial use brings by the hand the invocation of collective memory, not only because of the generative quality of her work, a pioneering attempt to produce lesbian cinema in the wake of 1970s feminism and sexual liberation, but also, and more crucially, because spatiality and temporality are two central concerns for her. But once more, the two have yet to be placed in dialogue with each other.

Chuck Kleinhans, for example, has thoroughly examined Hammer's historical poetics, particularly explicit in what she herself has called her historical trilogy—*Nitrate Kisses* (1992), *Tender Fictions* (1995), and *History Lessons* (2000)—and also in other films, such as *Love Other* (2005). *History Lessons* rescues a suppressed lesbian past from the rubble of popular culture—recorded music, photography, and commercial film—and *Nitrate Kisses* inquires into the marginalia of cultural history in search of forgotten lesbian ancestors—writer Willa Cather is postulated as one of them. Other works connect the collective past to her own personal trajectory. The autobiographical *Tender Fictions* places her childhood and youth in the context of the decades that run from the Depression to post-war suburban-based conformity to the late 1960s, a time of expansion when her own sexual liberation took place; *My Babushka* (2001) explores the geography of her Ukrainian ancestry; and *Resisting Paradise* (2003) contrasts her position as a relatively privileged resident artist in France in the early 1990s with the remembrance of the anti-Nazi resistance during World War II and allusions to the contemporary Balkan wars, raging at the time before the inaction of the rest of the European nations. Examining these titles, Kleinhans produces a careful reading of Hammer's essayistic, personal style of recovering the past, but he has not related the filmmaker's investment in history to her spatial interests, even if both are subtly interspersed in these works.

And neither has Hammer herself: she has frequently expressed her preoccupation with both temporality and memory, on the one hand, and spatiality, on the other, but has never really tried to think through the convergence of the two. In numerous writings and interviews, she has stressed the importance of the past for minorities—a repository of identity, strength, and inspiration; and in her recent reader-cum-memoir *Hammer! Making Movies out of Sex and Life* (2010), she repeatedly points out that one of her overriding interests in the 1970s was the exploration of lesbian space, both private and public, as a stage for interpersonal relationality and group empowerment. She divides her output between, on the one hand, films that investigate the past and the processes by which it is read and actualized and, on the other, works that deal with place and location: *Pools* (1991) portrays, in her words, "an experimental female way of understanding space perception"; *Our Trip* (1980) allegorizes the creative process by means of a narrated journey through Peru; *Bent Time* (1983) is a peculiar travel film that uses a wide-angle lens and stop-motion to communicate the vibrancy of energetically charged locations across the United States—from particle accelerators in California to ancient religious sites in New Mexico; the visually astonishing, split-screen *Still Point* (1989) places in uneasy juxtaposition different forms of being "inside"—intimacy, national belonging—and "outside"—enjoyment of nature, migration, urban homelessness; and *Available Space* (1979) was conceived as a performance for which Hammer mounted the projector on a moving cart with a swiveling platform and cast the frame across the auditorium, breaking with the one-directionality of the ordinary screening situation and promoting a more kinetic and embodied film reception.

However, space and time interact subtly in many of these works, some of which directly connect spatial intervention and memory. Movement figures prominently in *Tender Fictions* and in her memoir writings as a technology of individuation and self-awareness, and as a memory organizer. And the temporal searches of *Babushka* and *Resisting Paradise* are predicated on geographical displacement and border crossing. In order to keep my discussion of this considerable body of work within manageable bounds, I will focus here on *Superdyke* and *Nitrate Kisses*, from which one could easily extrapolate to titles.

Made in 1974, in the early years of gay and lesbian liberation, *Superdyke* shows several groups of self-identified lesbians invading various parts of San Francisco: they parade in mock military formation carrying cardboard spears, lybris, and Amazon shields through a non-descript street of what might be the Mission neighborhood; they take over a city bus; romp around civic center, with

City Hall prominently in the background, pushing passers-by out of the way and disturbing an open air concert; they climb on the "liberty bell" monument in Dolores Park; visit the museum of erotic art and act out erotic poses seen in the paintings; shop for vibrators at Macy's department store; and ride their motorcycles. One of the final sequences takes place in the countryside: naked women in a tepee rub bones on their skin, cover each other with sand, and walk ritualistically in line, their hands on each other's shoulders. A coda recaps the entire film collating brief shots from each of the preceding sequences. The superdyke antics are punctuated throughout by a piano soundtrack that ironically comments on the action and whose simplicity matches the home-made quality of the images and recalls silent cinema accompaniment.

Superdyke is one more example of the feminist re-codings of public space that took place in the 1970s. In many ways, the "superdykes" that take over "the institutions of the city"—as Hammer put it—bring to mind other contemporaneous actions of visibility and resistance: gay pride parades, collective bra-burnings, and picketing of beauty contests, among others. And, in addition, the cavorting of Hammer's Amazons recalls a number of artistic performances of similar political intent: Adrian Piper's *Catalysis* series, in which she traveled on the New York City subways and buses covered in wet painted or foul smelling clothes; Jackie Apple and Martha Wilson's polemical "Claudia" performances, in which Apple, Wilson, and others dressed and acted as upper class socialites exploiting their glamour and beauty and playing to absurd excess the stereotypes of well-heeled femininity; VALIE EXPORT's *Tast und Tapp Kino* actions; and even Lynda Benglis's polemical 1974 self-advertisement on the pages of *Artforum*, naked with sunglasses and wielding a two-headed dildo—a subversion of a different kind of public space. Barring notable differences between these performances and actions, I think it is safe to say that their overall goal was to refold public space around women's agency, corporeality, and desire.

Like all of these artists' performances, *Superdyke* is premised on a seditious invasion of public space. In this process, the film recycles pop culture stereotypes from the recent past: the superheroes popular in Hammer's childhood and adolescence, and the figure of the biker. The Superdyke tank tops worn by most of the women in the film recast the name and logo of one of the most famous of superheroes, Superman, whose actions are parodied in the film. In an early sequence, a woman in crutches falls in front of a bus, risking being run over. Immediately, two keen superdykes scamper to the nearest telephone booth to strip down to their superheroine uniforms and rush to the rescue of the potential victim in pure Clark Kent style. But the phone booth is labeled "Closet" and they can't fit in; still, half-in, half-out, they manage to shed their outer garments, speed to the site of the mishap, and stop the bus. The whole scene is played for parody. The bus is perfectly motionless, so there was no need for such rush and the woman in crutches is visibly in stitches when she ought to be in agony; as a result, the last-minute rescue is anything but dramatic or suspenseful. All this is pure pop play, infused with the hilarity of, for example, the Kuchar brothers' films of the time, but without these films's torrid melodrama.

But why is the dykes' right to the city is conveyed through the figure of the superhero? Recent critical work on the genre, along with contemporary reworkings of superhero icons, in literature and comic book format as well as in abundant fan fiction, have highlighted the queer aspects of this figure. Outside the norm because of their odd, excessive corporeality, and bearers of secretive identities and hidden lives—think Superman—the superheroes are closeted, if powerful figures that may easily supply points of identification and compensatory fantasies for queer readers. Some of their marks of difference may have stemmed from the fact that many prominent creators in the genre were Jewish artists, themselves a minority in a predominantly Anglo mainstream as, for example, Michael Chabon's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) explores.

The superheroes are not the only pop icons that the film mobilizes in its bid for lesbian visibility. A later sequence shows superdykes riding their motorcycles on the streets of San Francisco and on nearby Ocean highway. The images recall the dykes-on-bykes popular in gay day parades, particularly in the Bay Area, where they have been especially numerous. But the dyke bikers also reinvent an eminently masculine icon planted in the popular imaginary more than two decades earlier by Laslo Benedek's *The Wilde One* (1949) and still current when Hammer made her film. The women often ride in pairs, rewriting the bike, a sign of independence, as a nexus of connection and sociability. The slightly solemn quality and the aura of danger that enveloped the biker in B-films such as *Motorcycle Gang* (dir. Edward L. Cahn 1957), Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) or Hunter Thompson's book *Hell's Angels* (1966) turns here into humor and parody. In a moment that seems copied from the end of *Scorpio Rising*, two riders lose control of the machine and wipe out on the beach; but this is not treated as an index of the subculture's death drive, but as sheer play: promptly, other riders come to the rescue and help the women get back on their feet among laughs while the piano tinkles away the Radetzky March.

Nitrate Kisses is less about spatial occupation than about temporal recovery; it is a reflection on the erased lesbian past and, more generally, on the fragile history of minority groups, always at the mercy of an oppressive mainstream intent on eradicating their traces. Hammer's voice-over commentary, ponders the possibility of historical recovery and the need to keep referents from the past as aids to living in the present. Interspersed with her voice are oral testimonies of aged lesbians who lived through the Depression, war, and post-war decades, as well as some testimonies by writers and academics. (Writer Joan Nestle is one of them).

The voiced-over concern for effaced history is often edited to ruins, demolished buildings, and empty lots—sites of erasure and loss. And the careful sifting for remnants of the past is matched, at one point, to shots of a woman with a metal detector combing a stretch of beach under a boardwalk. The striated shadows that fall on her suggest the difficulty of retrieving what has been forgotten. A similar effect has the low-fi, high-contract black-and-white image, grainy and full of scratches—the result of filming in 8mm and blowing up the footage to 16mm for distribution; the film often looks like a collection of found fragments damaged by the passage of time, precarious, and incomplete. (Similarly, numerous sequences in the subsequent *History Lessons* are treated to look worn and aged, as if the emulsion on the celluloid was decaying and the film was an artifact from the past). Loss, however, is not absolute in *Nitrate Kisses*; off-screen commentary on the possibilities of retrieval and recovery is cut to images of present-day empowerment, occupation, and dwelling: intimate home spaces where couples of different ages make love; shots of open streets, where demonstrators fight for their rights; and scenes in bars and clubs, where lesbians dance and socialize.

The overall conceit of the film is that the occupation of present territories must be supported on an awareness of the past, on the salvage of images that—as an intertitle puts it, citing Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"—threaten to disappear irretrievably unless they are rescued as one of the concerns of the present. (255) And doubtlessly, an embattled present needs as many pointers from an equally embattled past as it may muster. The present in which *Nitrate Kisses* was made was indeed embattled, as the film was produced in the shadow of the AIDS crisis, within recent memory of catastrophe. This is why in *Nitrate* the pursuit of the past is not an antiquarian enterprise, but a fully pragmatic and political one; and one of its immediate effects is that it prompts a reoccupation of a present, and of spaces, from which queers are too often in danger of eviction.

This conceit is not exclusive to Hammer. I walked chronologically backwards into my topic, which first emerged for me as I watched the work of some recent queer filmmakers who also combine retrospection and spatial occupation in the present.

One of these filmmakers is New York-based Katrina del Mar, a commercial photographer by trade, who, by her own account, became a filmmaker almost by chance, when Julie Tolentino, a performer, queer activist, and founder of the lesbian Clit Club, invited her to show her work during an edition of Leather Pride Week in the early 2000s (Dowling). She decided to make a film whose warm reception encouraged her to continue experimenting in the medium. By then Del Mar had been active for nearly a decade as editor of several short-lived fanzines and visual chronicler of a women-centered musical and club underground. Her non-commercial photographs, in a manner reminiscent of Nan Goldin, Mark Morrisroe, or Wolfgang Tillmans, portray herself and her unconventional world: friends, acquaintances, and scenesters in their domestic environments, at parties, having sex, at queer demonstrations and events, in rock shows, usually of relatively unknown punk bands. As Del Mar sees it, these photographs revolve around "memory, sex, love, damage, and loss", and a recent reviewer regards "nostalgia, romanticism and non-linear memory" as main recurring affects

(Malamet). In gallery shows memory and the present coexist in the way recent images are closely juxtaposed with prints culled from 1950s and 1960s films.

Such double orientation toward chronicling the present and bringing up the past is also a feature of her films. Shot in mini-DV and super-8, they combine crisp digital textures and vintage graininess. Overall, however, a retro feel predominates, as digital footage is processed to look aged and the clatter of the super-8 camera is often retained in the soundtrack as a sonic gesture to an outdated technology. While Del Mar's work is quite personal, it is influenced by the 1960s underground and by 1950s and 1960s B-films, and contains numerous echoes of Kenneth Anger, the Kuchar brothers, and Russ Meyer; with them Del Mar shares stylish excess, iconography, cut-rate production values, and some formal gestures. She has in common with Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) the fascination with the image of the biker and with the mixture of ritual, bonding, and violence that characterizes gang life. Her volatile switchblade-wielding gamines bring to mind the protagonists of Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965) And her narrative flair and her taste for parodying genre film recall the work of the Kuchar brothers. In addition, the generic molds of her films—the juvenile delinquent picture, surfer and vampire films—and their lurid voice-over commentary—often a hard-boiled testimony—are directly drawn from the B-movie cycles of the post-war decades.

Del Mar infuses these referents with a contemporary feminist awareness and a post-punk queer touch. Her films offer worlds—as she puts it—"where women are not an afterthought." (Miner) The fights, poses, and soft-core sex of her beautiful inner-city gang girls are not packaged for a heterosexist male eye—as are Meyer's supervixens—but open assertions of lesbian corporeality and desire. In turn, her wild youths both homage and parody Anger's own; in *Hell On Wheels, Gang Girls Forever*, they move on custom bicycles, skates, and skateboards, without losing any of their abrasiveness. And the voice-over in *Sufer Girls*—a fist-person account of one of the protagonists—warns that the film "is not a Beach Boys song". It turns out to be a harrowing Dickensian story of childhood abandonment, parental drunkenness, and hardship, and announces ominously that violence always ends up claiming its dues. Indeed, the beach world in this film is female, violent, and wistful, rather than male, romantic, and cheerful—the usual traits of surfer mythology. Yet there is no pretense of realism; the rawness and violence are as contrived and stylized as the relentless joyfulness of a Beach Boys' song.

In many ways, Del Mar's films occupy symbolic spaces where women have traditionally been relegated to the margins and portrayed as appendixes of the male characters. Her reworking of B-movie iconography is akin to Hammer's recovery of the superhero and the biker for lesbian expressiveness. In addition, Del Mar's brash heroines update an underrated staple in popular culture: the female baddie, which roams the pop wastelands, from the nineteenth century sensationalistic novel to the mid-twentieth century queer pulps to the contemporary monstrous feminine. (Hughes 106-136, Stryker 49-70, Creed) It is a figure that recent scholarship has reinterpreted, from emblem of immorality to sexual rebel at odds with dominant gender arrangements. The centrality of the bad girl in her films allows Del Mar to make formerly male-centered B-plots pliable to lesbian desire and impervious to gender orthodoxy.

Such takeover of the cultural imaginary runs parallel to the actual takeover of concrete urban spaces: the Brooklyn neighborhoods and Rockaway beaches on which the films are shot. These locations, which have often been settings, in both literature and film, for stories of working-class male dejection, are imagined in her work as lesbian compounds. It is men who are now an afterthought in these places—and so are "women", in fact, if we honor Monique Wittig's claim that lesbians are *not* women, since they are alien to the "heterosexual contract" that polarizes gender into its two usual morphological types. Del Mar's films lack the exhilaration and the sense of urgency of Hammer's, since they do not arise from moments of similar political conflict. They are witnesses to a time when the sexual militancy that fueled queer communities from the 1970 to the 1990s—from the rise of sexual liberation fronts to AIDS-related protest—had become fragmented into more local issues and its energies had migrated into a plurality of sexual subcultures and into the stylization of everyday life. This is not to say that style has no political import—on the contrary. Del Mar's films skillfully rework the cultural imaginary and, in the process, they occupy, at least in fantasy, the inner city, imagining in it a possibility that is still far from real: a utopian dyke-land where tough lesbians form their own self-enclosed universe, which they rule without fear or apology.

Similarly playful in intent and execution to Del Mar's work is Fadia Abboud's short *In the Ladies Lounge* (2007). A filmmaker, community activist, and co-director of Sidney's International Arab Film Festival, Abboud's work probes into her Arab—more specifically Lebanese—history and heritage. She has made the TV documentary *I Remember 1948* (2008), on the foundation of the state of Israel as remembered by Palestinians, and the drama short *Big Trouble, Little Fish* (2009), but is best known for her comedic probes into the particularities of being a queer Arab in the diaspora. The successful web series *I Love You But* (2012 and 2013), which she has written and directed, portrays a Lebanese-Australian couple living their queer lives as a gay man and a lesbian while coexisting cordially in a marriage of convenience under the close scrutiny of their relatives. (The family's concern about their marital life and their inquiries about forthcoming offspring is a frequent source of comedy).

In the Ladies's Lounge features a lesbian couple of Lebanese descent—butch Layla and femme Joumana—doing their daily rounds on a Saturday morning as they prepare for a party later on that day. They go grocery shopping, drive around town, dish out against prissy Anglo ladies, and hold fractious conversations on their cellphones with merchants who refuse to speak English and bark at them in Arabic. In search for their favorite bread, which is only sold, absurdly, at a Lebanese-run second-hand bookstore profusely decorated with pictures of Cosima, a star of *Australian Idol*, they accidentally find a poster of two Arab women in fezzes and Western suits and ties. A closing credit identifies it as a real artifact from the past, archived by the Arab Image Foundation, and taken in Zgharta, Lebanon, in 1927 by amateur photographer Marie el Khazen, who "died still single at the age of 80, leaving behind thousands of negatives that she never thought worthy to classify or publish."

The photograph's anonymous subjects lounge amicably in armchairs side by side, leaning slightly towards each other in a way that strongly suggests shared intimacy. The picture's discovery arrests the harried transit of the couple through the city and prompts a shift from public to private space, and from comedy—in the couple's brash social manners—to reminiscence and eroticism. They hang the poster at home and stand in front of it, fondly speculating about the women: "What did they think they were doing dressed up like that? . . . I'd be too scared to wear a suit like that now. My mom would know for sure." The two women are surely their queer ancestors from 1920s Beirut: "hard-core butches" that actually resemble them and remind them of their own lives, their friends, their parties with other Arab lesbians, and even of the sharp split between their openness among their queer friends and their obligatory discretion around their families. Stimulated by the image—"they are hot"; "I would have loved to have been at that party"—they end up undressing and making love passionately in front of the poster.

The film ends with the party that Layla and Joumana have been preparing earlier in the day—their first party together, we are told. Friends sit, gossip, joke, and tease each other about the incongruities of their closeted lives. "The girls" want to see pictures of the very butch Mysha as a bridesmaid in a peach dress at her sister's wedding. "That's one picture you are not going to see, habib," she retorts. They end up dancing joyously under the impassive stare of the besuited women, witnesses from another time frozen in a snapshot. A brief sequence inserted in the middle of the party scene imagines their story. In order to accompany the journey back, the music shifts form contemporary dance music with ethnic accents to folk, and the story is told by irising in on their faces, juxtaposed, at times, to Layla's and Joumana's, and by brief titles that seemingly recapitulate their mishaps: "There were rumours everywhere. It wasn't until they saw the picture . . . they knew the rumours were true. They tore us apart. But I would always remember those times. Morning and night, it was unforgettable."

The insert closes with an iris in to black followed by a fade in to the friends dancing. The dance offers a happy counterpoint to the sad—but plausible—fantasy imagined by the film and a moment of collective affirmation against the probable isolation of the older couple. But the present is not only an improvement over a damaged past that may only be regarded with pity as an overcome stage in history. This particular trace of the past retains considerable agency. For one, the vintage look of the image suffuses the style of Abboud's film: shot in black and white and framed through a black oval—an effect called "vignetting" in the 1910s and 1920s—with art-nouveau-like ornamentation on the corners, it looks like an artifact from the women's time rather than a film from ours.

Furthermore, the photograph is an image rescued—to cite Walter Benjamin—"as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (255), or rather in a confluence of dangers: the danger that a memory of the past might vanish irremediably and the danger that queer life could be suppressed again in the present. As a signal from the past that suggests utopian possibilities now, the photograph is what Benjamin famously called a dialectical image. It stands at the crossroads of historical time—the mere succession of events, often catastrophic for disenfranchised minorities—and the Messianic "now-time" of revolutionary change, when what seemed, at first sight, like a defeat, is redeemed. (Buck-Morss 240-44) In this regard, the appropriation of the 1920s photograph by contemporary lesbians shows that the story of the women from an earlier generation is not over and done with; their imagined suffering and enforced separation is redeemed by the sense of community, humor, and strength of the modern-day characters, who bring to completion—or try to; there are still those intractable families—what the women in suits left unfinished in their time. The image in fact stimulates Layla and Joumana to have sex and to celebrate their relationship and their friendships, and it presides over the dance.

The photograph also brings to light a subterranean history of gender and sexual insubordination in Arab modernity that might legitimize the aspirations of queer Arabs now and that could offset the Western (particularly the Anglo-American) near monopoly on the queer imaginary. With the support of that history, paradoxically handed to them by a man in a bookstore covered with pictures of a heterosexual teen heartthrob, the film's characters may more assertively occupy their present and its spaces, starting with their home and radiating outward to the world beyond its walls.

For their influence and acuity, Benjamin's ideas on the revolutionary potential of seemingly trivial remnants from the past are an obligatory reference, but it is Michel de Certeau who best fleshed out the spatial plot implicit in transformative recollection. In a seldom cited section of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he proposes that in daily experience remembrance takes the form of storytelling, and, at their most basic, stories resort to, and keep alive, a vast, casual encyclopedia of practical knowledge that takes the form of "an unending summation of particular fragments" (82). This virtual encyclopedia is made up of everything read, heard, seen, and fantasized; its contents are lodged in anecdote, gossip, personal testimony, household memories, and images. Without authorities or custodians who might police its access or use, this lore is universally open but also extremely elusive and unevenly actualized, since it changes across communities and even from one individual to the next. And lacking a proper place, this knowledge operates in time. But its functioning is still directly rooted in space.

Stories—"the zoo of everyday practices" (78)—make available the experience accumulated in this placeless body of knowledge. They are forms of fencing against, and fending off, adversity, which invariably precipitates as "a hostile composition of place"—as eviction, confinement, suppression. The invocation of experience—of a story—at timely moment stages a *coup* against the dominant order of things; past experience has the potential to disrupt a power imbalance, correct inequality and create a new spatial order. The photograph of butch lesbians from the 1920s in Abboud's *The Ladies' Lounge*, the B-movie bad-girl iconography in Del Mar's films, or the bikers, superheroes, bohemians, and anonymous lesbians in Hammer's work all have these functions. The refashioning of these tokens from the past helps to break the invisibility and marginalization of lesbians in public space in these films' present—a movable temporal horizon comprising the time when they were first made and shown but also all the subsequent presents in which these films might be actualized. This roving "now" may become, thanks to these films and to their way of using the past, more amenable to the experience of formerly suppressed collectives. The practice by which summoning the past helps correct current power imbalances is for De Certeau akin to the virtue that the ancient Greeks called *metîs*—or opportunity. At the beginning and end of the process there are two different spatial organizations. In between them, "time is the intermediary" in the form of a memory flash: "an oddity proceeding from the outside and producing the transition from one state of the places to the next." (84) The process starts with a hostile distribution of space; continues with a rummaging of the collective imaginary; and brings up from this repertoire a memory image whose talismanic invocation at the opportune moment issues into a new, fairer spatial arrangement. (84-85) De Certeau's system, just like the films of Hammer, Del Mar, and Abboud, combines two heterogeneous series (temporal and spatial) in a transformative movement.

What, in the end, is the point of rethinking space through time in this manner? One point is complicating what are too often regarded homogeneous processes that run in parallel without converging. Yet as this essay has tried to show, the two refer to each other in constant oscillation. There is more than space in spatial use, and more than time in the archeological excavation of memory. In addition, detouring queer corporeality through temporality and spatial activism also recalls that there is much more than subjective self-fashioning at stake in queer practice. Associated, in its moment of emergence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to the revolutionary (re)articulation of subjectivity, due, to a great extent, to the popularity of Judith Butler's formulations about the mimetic character of gender and "the psychic life of power," queer practice is also a centrifugal force engaged in the transposition and recoding of entire collective imaginaries and worlds, rather than in the articulation of mere individual selves. In fact this is the expanded field where the films discussed in this chapter place it; their queer cultural activism is a radical rethinking of sexuality, sensation, and affect, whose ultimate object is not just subjective re-tooling but, more broadly, a remaking of the world, along with its temporalities and spaces.

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