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Out: Exploring Space Through the Indefinability of Queerness

Jessica Halee

Honors College, Pace University

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Out: Exploring Space Through the Indefinability of Queerness

Jessica Halee

Film and Screen Studies & Women's and Gender Studies

Dr. Lauren Cramer

Film and Screen Studies

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Introduction

Heteronormativity acts as the default. It works to systemically make itself something that is unquestionable and assumed, and standard, thus romantic and sexual relationships between men and women are the norm (Faderman). As such, those who live on the “opposite” side of the spectrum from heterosexuality, LGBT/queer people, are often viewed as the obvious “other.” This creates an entrenched binary between those who are straight and those who are not. But this binary is much more complicated. There is not just heterosexuality and then the opposite of heterosexuality, which is presumed to be gayness, queerness, or anything that functions as non-heterosexual; thinking of sexuality and gender in terms of a binary is too simplistic to begin with (Sedgwick). Additionally, I would like to suggest that there is no “opposite” of heteronormativity, not just because that is quite clearly untrue, but because queerness functions as its own mode of being. Queerness does not sit simply on the opposite side of the assumed binary between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality, but holds its own unique politics and social implications.

Queerness sits in a sort of uprooted space, somewhere that is not part of the mainstream societal collection of politics, art, and culture. It subverts and deconstructs conventional modes of thinking, often relating to gender and sexuality. Bob Nowlan clearly states, “being/becoming/identifying as/and acting queerly means, above all else, transgressing, disrupting, and subverting straight norms and conventions” (Nowlan 8). As such, queerness works as an ideology, something that tweaks, turns around, and problematizes heteronormative ideals.

Film, a significant source of cultural exploration for a century, has been informed by notions of heteronormativity. For example, LGBT and queer characters have been

misrepresented for the better part of film history (*The Celluloid Closet*); these films have most often used queer characters as comic relief, treated them as villains, and/or had them killed off at the end of films (*The Celluloid Closet*). Even films that were made by (usually closeted) gay and lesbian filmmakers passed for mainstream heterosexual consumption (Rich). It was up to LGBT and queer spectators to make these films their own (Rich). Queer filmmaking eventually rose in the 1970's, and eventually led to the New Queer Cinema movement – a period in which films with queer content made by queer filmmakers dominated the film festival circuit (Rich). However, while these films offered new radical queer perspectives, stories, and forms (Nowlan), films by and about queer women were not as numerous as those by and about queer men, and remained largely absent from the conversation (Rich).

Using film as a medium for queer political resistance has been a challenge. Film form has almost always been constructed in ways that privilege the white, heterosexual male spectator through the use of, “the image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man” (Mulvey 67). Despite film’s avid construction of heterosexuality through its form, via the passive female and active male (Mulvey), many filmmakers have notably taken on the task to make queerness visible in film. Not only have they created stories about queer life, they have also altered film’s form and broken away from the form of conventional Hollywood cinema in various ways. Queerness holds a certain politics and ideology, while also employing certain aesthetics that have been used by queer artists, filmmakers, and theorists. I argue that within queer aesthetics and techniques, that have been established by artists and theorists, there exists a certain fluidity and movement, something that ascertains the indefinability of queerness. This indefinability operates within queer films to create new spaces that refuse to adhere to simplistic

and binary thinking about gender and sexuality, something I have aimed to create in my own film, with a particular focus on queer women.

Literature Review

People make and take meaning from images based on their technological, compositional, and social implications that then form what people view in images and how they view them (Rose). Thus, when studying and researching film, it is important to look at and understand how images function as representations and creations of people, places, and ideas. Concerning the topics of this paper specifically, I consider how issues of occularcentrism, visibility, and scopic regimes affect (queer) female characters and queer films and how the construction of queer films can render certain people and concepts invisible (in this case, queer women and queer films).

Gillian Rose explains the significance of images in Western societies in her book *Visual Methodologies*. She argues that Western societies value sight above all other senses; as such, we live in an occularcentric culture. Furthermore, “the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed” (Rose 6), so there is a difference between vision (what one is biologically capable of seeing through their eyes) and visibility (what one is allowed to see and how one is taught to see). She continues to stress that images, in and of themselves, *do* something and present to the world certain views of social categories including race, gender, sexuality, etc.

Representing queerness in film is, in part, about asserting new perspectives and ways of seeing. Martin Jay describes the implications of scopic regimes and how they influence ways of seeing. Tracing this idea through art history, he explains how different techniques, like Renaissance notions of perspective, led to specific ways in which spectators were able to and allowed to view art. Scopic regimes prescribe certain ways of seeing, but disavow their

construction, and that is where the danger lies. If a spectator is unable to question how he/she/they sees the world or how they are told to see the world, they get locked into a single perspective and are unable to see from any other way. This unchallenged and uninformed way of seeing can influence how various subjects and ideologies are viewed or unable to be viewed, such as queerness. Anat Pick addresses this when she states that representing lesbians and queer women in film, “is not simply a matter of making the invisible visible, but of negotiating different *regimes of visibility*” (Pick 115).

While theorists and academics use different concepts to illustrate what queerness is and what it is associated with, a common theme is that it is something that is backwards, facing the wrong or in a different way, and not successful in mainstream society. Sara Ahmed places queerness in relation to orientation. While analyzing queerness in relation to orientation may spur ideas of *sexual* orientation, as being queer is partly about one’s sexuality and gender identity, it is important to also consider it in non-sexual terms, but in theoretical and ideological ones. Queerness, as discussed earlier, is a concept with its own politics, ideology, and aesthetics and thus cannot be discussed only in sexual terms. Films also include their own politics, ideological implications, and aesthetics, of which queerness may or may not be a part of. Ahmed describes orientation as being directed in space towards certain objects and following certain paths; queering orientation is then to orientate oneself towards objects usually overlooked or to walk off the prescribed line or path. Judith Halberstam uses a somewhat similar mindset when explaining queerness in terms of inhabiting a sort of backwards space, but she analyzes it in relation to failure. She uses various examples to denote what failure means in contemporary society (not all of which are examples of queerness or queer failure), that is to not succeed in normative ways. Halberstam quotes Heather Love: “same-sex desire is marked by a long history

of association with failure, impossibility, and loss” (Halberstam 94) and also analyzes texts by Lee Edelman, who embraces the negativity associated with queerness in his work. While these reoccurring notions of failure, negativity, and loss might not seem like “positive” descriptions, Halberstam asserts that, “there is something powerful in being wrong, in losing, in failing, and that all our failures combined might just be enough...to bring down the winner” (120).

Queerness fails by a multitude of normative standards, and I would argue it fails most notably at being put into one box, specifically into a box opposite of heterosexuality. Thus, thinking of transgressive (sexual) behavior as “queer” and fluid provides a stronger groundwork for queer studies than simply thinking of it in binary heterosexual/homosexual terms (Sedgwick). In Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, she details concepts of the closet and coming out, and also criticizes binary thinking in terms of gender and sexuality. As mentioned earlier, it is too simplistic to think of gender and sexuality as binary because it has been created under, “gender oppression and heterosexist oppression” (Sedgwick 90). Considering this notion of thinking of queerness as critical of these binaries, in his chapter in *Coming Out to the Mainstream: New Queer Cinema in the 21st Century*, Bob Nowlan gives a detailed explanation of queerness and the importance of the “queer critical praxis,” which further deconstructs sexuality and gender binaries. The queer critical praxis, as Nowlan explains, “deliberately problematizes prevailing notions between” the concepts of, “normal versus abnormal, dominant versus subordinate, included versus excluded, and familiar versus strange” (5). It asserts that, “the former category is always...dependent upon the latter” (5). While this queer critical praxis works to show how the “superior” category is never really any more normal, dominant, or familiar than the other ones, I maintain that queerness is not just about asserting that important notion, but also about residing completely outside of it in the first place.

Furthermore, queerness, as something that not only disrupts the binary, but perhaps even resides outside of it, allows for its expression to be varied. Along with the importance of queerness' ways of deconstructing, subverting, and challenging (heteronormative) norms, (Nowlan), it also has a multitude of interpretations and meanings attached to it, including those of fluidity and obscurity (Faderman and Wilton). In *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, Tasmin Wilton quotes Ellis Hanson's definition of queer as meaning, "the odd, the uncanny, the undecidable" (Wilton 6). Lillian Faderman discusses the use of "queer" as meaning to be "inclusive of not only forward-thinking lesbians and gays but all manner of sexual outlaws" (Faderman 692). Furthermore, Nowlan writes that queerness is something that can be performed, an idea that Faderman reiterates: "Queers often play with gender, viewing it as no more than performance" (692). Queerness is not something that is inherent, but something that can be constructed and composed regrading one's identity and expression (Nowlan).

Films of the "New Queer Cinema," a term coined by B. Ruby Rich, "were doing something new, renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole genres, revising histories in their image" (Rich 31). Rich first wrote about these new films after a wave of queer independent films were featured and celebrated at numerous global film festivals in the early 1990's. In her later book, Rich writes of numerous pre-New Queer Cinema films and filmmakers that spurred the unofficial movement. She notes that queer films had been produced throughout the 1960's and 1970's, but were scattered, and that the 1980's saw numerous films that acted as precursors to the films of New Queer Cinema that would follow. These films developed from, as Nowlan describes, a "New Queer Emergence" and created a "new queer mode of subjectivity" (3). Nowlan cites Michele Aaron's description of these films in that they shared an, "'attitude' of 'defiance' - 'defiance directed' versus 'mainstream' heterosexist and homophobic

(or...heteronormative) society and...forms of conservative assimilationist and liberal reformist gay and lesbian politics and culture” (3). The emergence of these films, and a new radical queer politics, was largely driven by the AIDS epidemic of the 1980’s (Nowlan). LGBT people were not only facing the devastation of their communities by the disease, but also rising violence aimed towards them, “that far exceeded scapegoating them as responsible for AIDS” (3). This served as a pinnacle moment for the LGBT community in which “queerity” became the way through which they would push back against a heteronormative society that largely ignored, hurt, and victimized them.

The films from New Queer Cinema that featured, and continue to feature, queer perspectives and radical queer politics, employed a multitude of aesthetics that are as varied as queerness itself. The aesthetics are surely diverse, and I argue that while they operate across a wide range of techniques, they all hold a certain undefinable-ness amongst them; they operate between being many things, working to rest in a sort of indeterminate space, separate from anything else trying to determine them. Rich describes films from New Queer Cinema as sharing aesthetics of, “Homo Pomo: there are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind...these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they’re full of pleasure” (32). These films individually held various aesthetics, always taking one thing and transforming it into another, whether through pastiche or a reworking of history.

As mentioned, artists and filmmakers use a multitude of aesthetics and techniques to demonstrate, understand, and represent queerness. Halberstam explains that darkness is part of a queer aesthetic, while lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer uses touch, specifically, in her films and expresses that, “the form must be radical and innovative to be a lesbian film” (Wilton 4).

Rosalind Galt investigates the trouble of the pretty in film as well as the use of color in queer aesthetics. Galt states that, “aesthetic theories depend on constructions of gender, sexuality, and race to regulate what kinds of bodies and images can be beautiful and who has access to value itself” (Galt 5). In other words, she asks if queer bodies can be deemed beautiful and valuable (in a heteronormative society, the answer would be no). Galt also writes about Derek Jarman’s work and his utilization of color that creates a, “powerful queer alchemy that opens up utopian spaces for queer life” (76). Additionally, she states that Jarman’s work was often seen as too pretty to be political, while also failing at standards of conventional form; we can see that failure is a common association and even aesthetic of queerness and queer film, as Halberstam also described.

While understanding queer aesthetics and form is imperative to understanding queerness in film, it is also necessary to take narrative content into account. Broadly speaking, it is clear that LGBT and queer characters have been misrepresented in film and often fail to receive happy endings (*The Celluloid Closet*). *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, and based on the book by Vito Russo, gives a detailed history of queer characters and queer films. The film shows that queer characters have been used as comic relief, reduced to stereotypes, depicted as villains, killed off at the end of a film, and/or are not allowed a happy ending. In his article about *Brokeback Mountain*, Thomas Piontek explores the death of one of the main characters at the end of the film, especially in a film so heavily praised for its “humanizing” depiction of gay men. Not only does one of the main characters in that film die, but the film ends by showing the remaining main character as forlorn, as he knows he cannot live out his life with his partner (Piontek). Acknowledging the challenges that queer characters face is certainly important, however confining them to a world of hurt is not a productive representation.

It is perhaps problematic to show queer characters only as depressed and lonely, it can also be troubling to portray them as overly content and absent of any problems; only portraying “happy queers” can ignore the very real violence and discrimination that queers face, but showing queer characters as happy despite that danger is perhaps a more important representation to be produced (Ahmed). In her chapter “Unhappy Queers,” Sara Ahmed investigates the discourse of happy queers, unhappy queers, and those who are happily queer and relates it to film. She asserts that unhappy queers are unhappy simply because they are assumed to be or made to be unhappy by a heteronormative society. As such, she comes to the idea of existing as happily queer, a mindset that acknowledges the challenges and struggles that queer people face, but in which they can still push back and find happiness. While queerness, both as politics and aesthetics, operates in an undefined way often stuck on one side of a binary, it still must acknowledge the world from which it came. Only once the obstacles, challenges, and binaries it faces become clear can it break away from them.

An important aspect of the content of queer films to consider is the characters’ romance and/or sexuality that is (or is not) displayed. Tricia Jenkins details the use of lesbian sexuality and sex scenes in certain teen films to pander to a heterosexual male spectator. While these films include an instance of queer female sexuality, the form in which they are shown places it comfortably in heteronormative viewing terms: in the examples Jenkins uses, the lesbian sex scenes are shot in a Peeping Tom-esque way. So, while these films might show queer female sexuality, it can be argued that that does not make the film itself “queer” or “lesbian.” Barbara Hammer, as I quoted earlier, believes a film must be radical to be considered “lesbian.” Thus, “despite homosexual content...Hammer still denounces...[certain] films as lesbian because they offer ‘no lesbian to deconstruct, as the discourse of the gendered subject is within a heterosexist

authority system'” (Jenkins 501). Wilton further quotes Hammer’s opinion on what constitutes a lesbian film concerning conventional styles: “Even if the characters are lesbian, the script projects lesbian characters within a heterosexual world of role-playing, lovemaking, and domestic and professional life” (4). In other words, films that do include explicit queer romance or sex between women may not function as queer if the form of the film does not operate within a queer lens. However, Jenkins also references Jane Garrity’s claim in that viewers can still enjoy more conventional films that contain queer female content, as pleasure can derive from the practice of reading films for queer and/or lesbian subtext that might not be plain to other viewers (501); Wilton seems to agree with the idea that “lesbian form for lesbian cinema may be ideal,” but also states that for others, being included in conventional cinema is also necessary to break down heteronormative standards.

Queerness as a theoretical concept is something that is fluid, disruptive, and troublesome; it challenges heteronormative ideals and norms and seeks to uproot and transform them. As such, these notions make their way into the content of queer films. These ideas can also be represented through the form of queer films using the various aesthetic techniques and concepts I have summarized. Queer aesthetics remain varied and diverse, and there is not always an agreement between theorists and filmmakers as to what exactly constitutes queerness, and I claim that indefinability is a key component to these aesthetics. These techniques function to first acknowledge and then uplift the many binaries that queerness faces (heterosexual/queer, conventional/radical, legible/illegible). These binaries are broken by queerness’ refusal to be one thing, and whilst doing that, queerness creates new undefined spaces.

Out

I have sought to employ various techniques from queer film and queer aesthetics in my short film, *Out*, to show how a film about queer women can specifically make use of queerness' indefinability to create new spaces outside of heteronormative notions. My film seeks to fail in various ways, most notably at heteronormativity. As Halberstam has asserted, there is power at failure, and much of queerness is about failing at heterosexuality, heteronormativity, regularity, and normalcy. The film fails at featuring heteronormative content and at employing conventional film aesthetics. Disregarding conventional form, *Out* works to utilize various techniques to not only fail at standard form, but to also warp and bend the medium of film itself, something other queer films have done (like *Born in Flames* (Dir. Lizzie Borden, 1983), *Go Fish* (Dir. Rose Troche, 1994), and *The Watermelon Woman* (Dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996)). The medium-bending occurs mostly in the dream sequence, in which other queer film techniques and aesthetics are featured, such as touch, still photography, coding, the notion of the closet, prettiness, color, and disorientation.

The film opens with the women waking up in bed. They banter for a moment before one of them goes quiet. She tells the other that she received a message from someone, "Het," a symbol for an overwhelming heteronormative and/or homophobic society, the night before, giving her trouble about their relationship. The other woman tries to comfort her, assuring her that even when things are difficult, the best way to get past it is to be with each other. The woman agrees and they take a moment to get back under the covers and relax. After another short conversation, the dream sequence commences, taking their minds and bodies out of their room and into an undefined alternate space. The dream sequence takes them and places them outside in public space, and the film ends.

The content of my film focuses on two young women who have been in a relationship for an indefinite amount of time. Within the film, their relationship is not overly romantic or sexual; there is a tenderness between the women, they hold hands, and speak of the first time they met, but other than that there are not any grand romantic gestures between them. As Jenkins discussed, and Hammer argues as well, films that do feature more explicit romance or sex between women do not always offer any ways to deconstruct heteronormative models and simply reside within already prescribed film forms. So, while the relationship between the two female characters is not explicit, the form of the film itself functions as the way in which the film further operates within a queer lens and creates a new space for the women.

The majority of the film takes place during the dream sequence after the women lie back down and share a few lines of dialogue. Barbara Hammer has explained that a dream sequence is one way in which queer films may explore genre-bending; film as a genre of art can be bent and, furthermore, the actual medium of film can be bent as well. The dream sequence is one way through which films may bend mediums. For example, *Go Fish*, a film that very much bends the medium of video through several sequences that could be described as dream sequences (see figures 1 and 2). These sequences speak to the fluid nature of queerness and how it cannot and should not be defined as a single thing. The sequence in my film is meant to transport the characters into different spaces and times, away from the threats and troubles of a heteronormative society, which they had acknowledged by discussing the message from "Het." The sequence superimposes and blends images of the women with images of nature, architecture, water, and other textures. The lines between where certain images begin and others end is destabilized, creating entirely new images that rest on top of one another, flow in and out, and blend together.

Hammer emphasizes that touch is important in her queer and lesbian films – *Out* uses it as a way to play with the materiality and tangibility that touch holds. Images of hands and skin are featured in this sequence as they connect with not only each other, but also with the outside world through overlaying. Moments of touch are mixed with images from unknown places and times, uprooting and troubling the assumed solidity that a touch gives. The literal time and space of these images that are placed within the touches are undefined and unclear; the characters exist in a separate space from anything that is rooted in the “real” world and exist outside of it and between the superimposed images.

Still photography was also utilized in the dream sequence. Photography is viewed as being able to capture the truth and realness of a moment; something photographed is seen as the actual occurrence of a particular moment (Rose). Photography is employed in *The Watermelon Woman* to quite literally make Fae Richards into being (Zimmer), and in *High Art* (Dir. Lisa Cholodenko, 1998) as a way to capture the two women’s relationship in specific moments (see figures 3 and 4). I use photography in my own film in similar ways, that is to show their relationship at certain times and to make it “real” and tangible through the photos; however, these photographs, while representing “realness” and “truth” are also wrapped up in the dream sequence, troubling the supposed authenticity of the photographs through the warping of images, time, and space. In the photographs, the women are shown sleeping, reading, listening to music, and going about their life. A passage of time may be assumed since they are shown doing different activities and wearing different clothes, but within the sequence they are placed, the timeline is unclear and undetermined. Placing these photos in the dream sequence serves as a way to blend the different mediums of photography and video, furthering the idea that aspects of queer film can be merged, twisted, bent, and undefinable.

Within the photos, the idea of coding and subtext within the composition is used to challenge the binaries between the explicit and the implicit (Faderman and Rich). Coding can be used as a way for viewers to make and gather meaning from certain elements of the mise-en-scène or dialogue that some viewers may not notice (Jenkins). For example, this is used in *The Incredibly True Story of Two Girls in Love* (Dir. Maria Maggenti, 1995), when some characters briefly bring up the lesbian novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown, a book not every spectator may be familiar with. In my film, I have placed a few queer objects within the photographs specifically. First, in the photo in which the two women are reading, they are reading two famous lesbian books: Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel. The presence of these books might not be notable to those who are not familiar with them or are not in the LGBT community. Additionally, in the photograph in which they are shown listening to music, one woman is wearing a shirt that clearly states, "Girls Like Girls"; while this has an obvious queer meaning, the shirt is actually referencing a song by Hayley Kiyoko, a bisexual singer and songwriter who is relatively popular among today's young LGBT and queer population. I find coding to be a useful and also sort of playful technique; it allows for people to make deeper meanings about things that can be overlooked. Here is the sort of binary between the explicit and implied. The books and the shirt are clearly within the frame and are visible to the viewer. However, they hold meaning that is not obvious to a non-LGBT or queer spectator, thus taking the meaning of the item simply within the frame (as a book or a shirt) and also allowing a queer viewer to acknowledge it.

The stark contrast between the interior room shown in the beginning of the film and the photographs and the dream sequence and the literal outside at the end of the film sought to bring attention to the confines and inhospitableness of the closet. Sedgwick writes that, "The closet is

the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (71). It is not a place that the characters should reside in for eternity; inside the closet, they are not free from the pressures and judgement they face from a heteronormative society, as the message from “Het” shows. Thus, they work to create their own space within this world and take it outside. In the film’s spaces, I applied Galt’s theories of pretty and color as queer aesthetics. I used these theories specifically when thinking about how the interior of the women’s room would look versus the content of the dream sequence. As such, when the women are sitting in bed, the *mise-en-scène* is very bland: they sit against white walls, in a white bed with white sheets and pillows, and wear plain grey shirts. The photographs too feature them in unexciting clothing of white, grey, and black shirts and sweaters. The interior space, while not fully dark or claustrophobic like a literal closet might be, still works to function as the closet that the women reside in in the beginning through the simple and plain colors. I wished to contrast the bleak monochromatic interior and clothing choices to the dream sequence with its bursts of color, textures, and images, tied together into a hopefully pleasurable montage through editing. As Galt explains, the use of color and pretty has not always been associated with queer or political films, or films about difficult subject matter; this, as Galt argues, is untrue. For example, *But I’m a Cheerleader* (Dir. Jamie Babbit, 1999), a somewhat comedic film that is nonetheless about LGBT teens placed in conversion therapy, employs vibrant usage of color in much of its *mise-en-scène* (see figure 5). Films about queerness and queer life, which are inherently political, can also be pretty and colorful without losing any of their political punch or meaning. I wanted to make this clear within my film and hoped that none of the film’s seriousness about queer life is detracted from by the colors and prettiness used.

Ahmed’s theories of disorientation work within the film’s entire aesthetic, attempting to destabilize the spectator throughout the film. *Out* puts the spectator in the position of the women

during the first dialogue scene; this scene is shot using medium close-ups in which the women speak directly to the camera when addressing each other. Speaking directly to the camera (or breaking the fourth wall) is used in the film *The Watermelon Woman*, in which the main character Cheryl speaks directly to the viewer at various times throughout the film (see figure 6). In my film, I do this to place the viewer in the position of the woman being spoken to, working to queer the viewer themselves in their spectatorship. They are then put in the place of the other woman being spoken to, as the women make eye contact directly with the camera and address each other, or the spectator. This scene, in a way, disrupts the binary between spectator and character, the looker and the looked at, by distinctly taking away the spectator's ability to look and placing them in the women's literal position of being spoken to.

The dream sequence works to disorient the viewer further since what is being shown it may not always be clear, creating a destabilizing effect. The large amount of superimpositions, colors, and images creates a somewhat pleasing, but also confusing montage that seeks to pull the viewer into the minds of the women, queering their own orientation in space at the time. It points them towards certain people, actions, and objects that they might not otherwise point themselves towards. Again, this notion of disorientation plays into the indefinability of queerness. When one is disoriented, they do not necessarily know where they stand or where they face. They could be facing in any direction or moving towards any object. The very act of being disoriented makes one undefinable.

The last shot of the film shows the women outside in public space, their bodies and faces appear upside down in this shot, a somewhat disorienting effect, to demonstrate that them being outside in public space, quietly confident in their relationship, does not erase their own disorientation in a heteronormative world nor others' disoriented perception of them.

Additionally, this is meant to represent the way queer people do not have to ignore the difficulties of being queer (Ahmed), but can still be happily queer despite those challenges. (This notion is also brought up in the dialogue between the two women in which the one is feeling a bit disheartened from judgement she received from “Het.”) The women acknowledge the issues they face from a heteronormative society, and work to combat, break down, and exist outside of those issues. So, while they may not exist in the world in the way they “should,” they are still able to find their own happiness.

Conclusion

Film has, since its beginning, been dominated by heteronormative ideals, not just in its content, but in its conventional form. In *Out*, I have worked to create a queer film that features queer women, and a film that employs certain queer aesthetics to make queerness visible. These aesthetics have operated to explore the indefinability of queerness, and how within that indefinable space between certain binaries, space can be created for queerness, the queer characters, and queer people. Audre Lorde once wrote, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Using, but also troubling, the master’s tools prearranged within filmmaking has been a challenge. I hope though, that we as queer and LGBT filmmakers, will continue to critique and problematize not just heteronormative content in films, but also the form of film itself. Perhaps we may not dismantle the master’s house, but surely we can make space for ourselves, if not inside it, then outside of it, in a new house.

Appendix A



Figures 1 & 2. Stills from sequences in *Go Fish* (dir. Rose Troche) that situate themselves between scenes as a dream sequence.



Figure 3. A photograph of Fae Richards and her partner in *The Watermelon Woman* (dir. Cheryl Dunye).



Figure 4. One of the characters in *High Art* (dir. Lisa Cholodenko) photographs her lover.

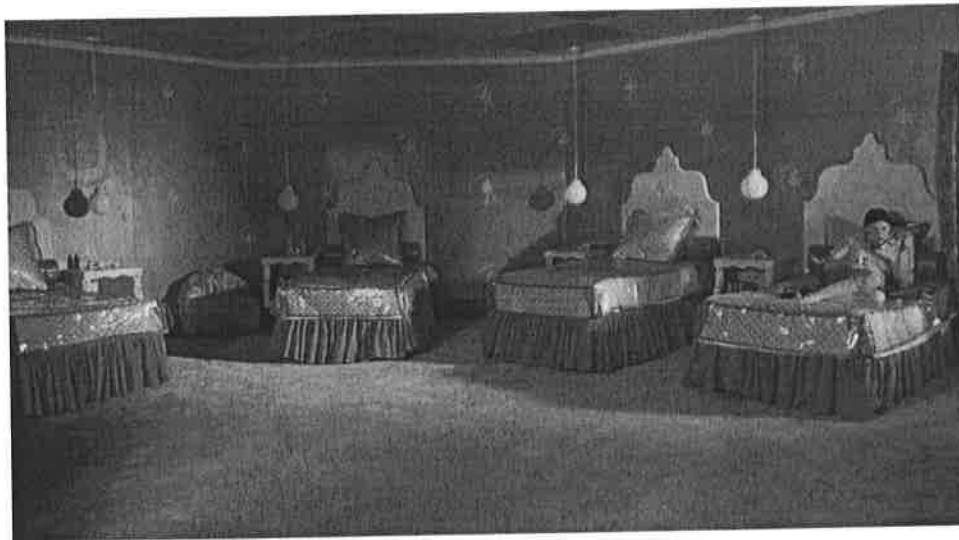


Figure 5. A bright pink interior in *But I'm a Cheerleader* (dir. Jamie Babbit).



Figure 6. Cheryl directly addresses the audience in numerous scenes in *The Watermelon Woman* (dir. Cheryl Dunye).

Appendix B

1

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

1.

Two women, who have been together for an indefinite amount of time, are waking up. We hear them laughing.

WOMAN 1

Well, good morning to you. You are like, the deepest sleeper I have ever met.

WOMAN 2

What?! It's still early!

WOMAN 1

Ummm...it's noon.

Both laugh lightly, but then Woman 2 goes quiet.

WOMAN 1

Hey, what's wrong?

WOMAN 2

It's nothing.

Woman 1 gives Woman 2 a look.

WOMAN 2

I got another message from Het last night before we went to bed.

WOMAN 1

And what did they have to say?

WOMAN 2

Nothing much, just, you know, being an asshole about (gestures between the two of them) this.

WOMAN 1

Hey, hey, hey it's okay. You can not let them get in your head.

WOMAN 2

(Sighs) I know. I know.

WOMAN 1

Look, I know it can be hard sometimes, and even a lot of times, but what better way to like, triumph over them than to be with each other?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

2.

WOMAN 2

(Pauses, then smiles) You're right.
We gotta just keep going.

WOMAN 1

Exactly.

They both gently smile at each other for a moment.

WOMAN 1

(Reaches for Woman 2) Come here.

Both lie down to relax and they're silent for a minute.
Woman 1 breaks the silence.

WOMAN 1

(Softly) If you could be anywhere
right now, where would you be?

WOMAN 2

Right here.

WOMAN 1

Aww (chuckles). Seriously though,
anywhere you want.

Woman 2 thinks for a moment.

WOMAN 2

(Whispers) Outer space. We can do
anything. Be anything. No one else
there.

WOMAN 1

Okay.

They look into each other's eyes.

CLOSE UP & SLOW PUSH WOMAN 1'S EYE

CROSSFADE TO GALAXY/SPACE/ETC.

Dream sequence commences; crossfades/overlays stars, trees,
water, hands, etc.

O.S. dialogue to use over montage sequence.

WOMAN 1

Are you happy? Despite everything?

WOMAN 2

Yes. Are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

3.

WOMAN 1
Yes.

...

WOMAN 2
Do you remember when we met?

WOMAN 1
Yes. You were wearing that cute
pink beanie.

WOMAN 2
(Laughs) I was. (Pauses). We spent
every day together.

WOMAN 1
We still do.

WOMAN 2
I'm glad.

WOMAN 1
Me too.

...

WOMAN 2
How do we keep...existing? With
everyone else?

WOMAN 1
We just do. We make our own space.

2 EXT. GRASSY LAWN - DAY

2

The women are lying down outside on the grass in a park,
hands clasped. All is well.

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