

which the law has wrought cruel injustice on queer parents and their children, she also highlights the ability of advocates to take advantage of law's indeterminacy to advance the rights of these families. When coupled with explication of the mutually constitutive relationship between law and society, Richman leaves her readers with a clear vision of how both law and society can continue to evolve to protect the interests of queer parents and their children.

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HOW CAN I IGNORE THE GIRL NEXT DOOR?

Patricia White

Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments

Lee Wallace

New York: Routledge, 2009. xii + 202 pp.

The London flat where June Buckridge, a.k.a. "George" (Beryl Reid), displays her collection of horse brasses and her lover, Childie (Susannah York), her dolls; Petra von Kant (Margit Carstensen)'s work/living space with its immodest Poussin mural; the adjoining wall through which Violet (Jennifer Tilly) and Corky (Gina Gershon) plot theft and other nastiness in *Bound* (dir. Wachowski Brothers; 1996): apartments, Lee Wallace convincingly argues, are a key chronotope of the cinematic representation of lesbianism, post-Production Code era. "The Game of Flatts" was, it is revealed in a footnote whose wonderfully entertaining arcana are typical of this detail-dense book, eighteenth-century slang for lesbian sex (151n3); Wallace's argument is interested in how twentieth-century topographies of cinema and architecture put lesbianism on scene even as female homosexuality defies narrative coherence and the stability of the image. In her careful readings of a half-dozen well-exposed texts, it is the spatialization of cinematic technique that

brings out homosexuality, whether manifested in the psychotic vengefulness of the single white female in the film of that title or the recursive plotting and bungalows of *Mulholland Drive* (dir. David Lynch; 2001). These films, “when read spatially,” show “the continued dependence of lesbian representation on cinematic form and style rather than character and plot” (15).

While there’s a formalist frisson to this claim, it isn’t all that new, and Wallace must stake out a terrain different from that uncovered by D. A. Miller or Lee Edelman in their virtuosic readings of Hollywood homosexual enunciation. Fortunately, because those authors are unconcerned with lesbianism, there is considerable ground to explore. In the book’s compelling introduction on the lesbian chronotope, Wallace maps how the bar and the school, the college and the prison, have exerted a neat imaginative pull on lesbian fiction and film. These spaces give rise to new ones in the post-Code, post-Stonewall era, places suited to new articulations of public and private. Places with closets, like the one in which Corky is “bound” in the beginning of the film of that name. The porousness of apartment architecture, the imagination of the urban and the domestic, makes them apt loci for dramas of emergence and retreat, quarantine and queer world making. A complementary approach is explored in Pamela Robertson Wojcik’s forthcoming book on the apartment plot, which details discourses of urbanism and the cast of characters (and corresponding decor) who fill the films and magazines of post-war America: single girls, bachelors confirmed and closeted, young marrieds, and ghetto dwellers.¹ Read together, the books present an exciting spatial argument about the visualization of postwar sexualities, with Wallace bringing forward the lesbians—no matter that they are more imagined than actual.

For Wallace’s is not primarily a historical argument; indeed, a major point is that there is no clean break between pre- and post-Code regimes of representation, no before and after “new queer cinema,” no clear contrast between mainstream and independent films. Like Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 *Rope* (to which *Bound* owes a debt and to whose reading by Miller Wallace is herself bound), all of the works Wallace looks at show that it isn’t a simple lifting of the ban on visibility that is at stake: “Lesbianism, perhaps even more than male homosexuality, remains the ideal plot element through which to foreground the dubiousness of visual signs in cinema and the narrative connections frequently strung on them” (99), she argues. And her readings demonstrate this dubiousness in detail, through the editing in *Bound* or the mobile camera of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder; 1972), whose “causal linking of homosexuality and spaces marks it as the endgame of classical film style” (49). The texture

of the readings would seem to invite auteurism (and in the case of Fassbinder or Robert Aldrich I'd welcome more of it), but Wallace prudently keeps this variant of formalism at bay, especially in the chapters on the Wachowski and Lynch films, whose footnotes detail the many ways auteurist readings tend to metaphorize lesbian content.

Despite some challenging syntax, the book convinces that there remains room in lesbian film studies for detailed descriptive readings. The remarkably slim canon makes for an elegant book concept, with each film paired with a cinematic technique. Wallace writes with wit and an eye for domestic decor that does the tribe proud. However, the claim that "some of the most compelling lesbian-themed films of the post-Production Code era . . . establish . . . that the unreliability of the sexual image remains at the heart of both homosexual representation and cinema more generally" perhaps blocks some more obvious approaches (118). Both *The Killing of Sister George* (dir. Robert Aldrich; 1968) and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, like *The Children's Hour* (dir. William Wyler; 1961), the subject of an early chapter, are adaptations of plays, a provenance that likely determines their spatial confinement. Also overlooked is the apartment's privileged relationship to television, the historically dominant audiovisual apparatus, which is mentioned only briefly in relation to the origin of *Mulholland Drive* as a TV pilot. What about the sitcom's lesbian architecture, from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* to *Friends*?

Wallace's claim that in the films "the trope of lesbianism . . . acts as an incentive to interpretation in ways that heterosexuality does not" is equally applicable to her book's driven investigation into the antimimetic. What finally lets in some air is a return in the conclusion to the compelling claims of the opening chapter that queer theories of sexuality and space have been unduly focused on public sex and thus masculinity. Lesbianism gets mapped onto a demonized, asexual or sexually normative, domesticity. Wallace's theoretical intervention on behalf of the sexual life of apartments is amply borne out by the pleasures of revisiting what she calls the "homosexually house bound" George and her baroque sister-under-the-mink Petra, mistresses of their domains. The complement of chapters and frame makes this book, committed and occasionally raunchy, a map not only to the greatest hits of lesbian cinema but also to the movies' sexy ability to breach public and private space.

Note

1. Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Popular Culture, 1945–1975* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

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