

Leanne Dawson, ed. *Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space*. Routledge, 2018.

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In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed considers the spatial aspects of the term sexual *orientation*, adding onto the idea that queer identity has as much to do with space as with sexuality (2008). When looking at queer film, a spatial approach translates to an attention to time and space in representations of queerness, which can then be geographically traced. Such interventions to spatially orientate sexualities return sexual identities their geographical specificity, as well as counter assumptions that queerness must always emerge from the same places in the same ways (Ula 2019). *Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space* arrives at a time when, as the editor Leanne Dawson argues in the introduction, “a queering of Europe” is urgently necessary (196).¹ The five articles by different scholars focus on German (in comparison with American); Croatian; Italian; Swedish; and French-language contexts, and always on moments where European identity is in tension. In some cases, queerness presents a threat to “constructions of nationhood [which] usually involve specific notions of both ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’” (209). In others, queer identities are perceived as a disruption to “nation-building processes” and their narratives around the heterosexual family (231). And in others, these border-crossing identities—which

cross actual borders as much as dichotomies in the European road movie—present new ways of relating to the nation and forms of queer citizenship (275). Each article offers a different direction towards queer European cinema: from approaches based on queer theory or national discourses, to a focus on genres of pornography or the road movie. The result is a queering of the notion of Europeanness, as well as developments in the understanding of queerness itself. The different methods proposed for the study of queer European film and the information offered in these articles are sure to be useful to those studying queer European cinema.

The introduction, starting from American queer film, offers an impressive guide to queer European film when it moves from German, Turkish,² French, Belgian, Swiss, Italian, Spanish, to Swedish queer film. This chapter is an excellent source for those wishing to diversify their queer European film syllabi. It also sets the focus of the book on time and space in queer film, justifying the following articles’ spatial and temporal approaches to queer identity.

The first article, written by Dawson, “Passing and policing: Controlling Compassion, Bodies and Boundaries in *Boys Don’t Cry* and *Unveiled/Fremde Haut*” analyses the use of trans tropes

in two films with different origins and similar plots. *Boys Don't Cry*, American director Kimberly Peirce's depiction of the real-life murder of Brandon Teena in a small town in Nebraska, is a staple of New Queer Cinema (205). *Unveiled* is German director Angelina Maccarone's fiction film about an Iranian woman, Fariba, who seeks asylum in Germany for their lesbian identity and assumes the identity of another male refugee, Siamak, while working in a small German town (208). Using Butler, Foucault, and Halberstam, Dawson carries out a queer theoretical reading of the two films. Making the link between a highly popular American film that has been extensively studied in American queer studies, and a German film with a similar plot, serves to connect American queer studies to European, inviting scholars of American queer studies to incorporate European cinema. However, such transnational linking does so much more than that; in fact, it is in the act of connecting films with similar plots in different places, that the crucial importance of space in queer films becomes clear. The comparison allows Dawson to acknowledge the role of space in the construction of gender and sexuality (208), by noting that the gender norms Brandon and Fariba/Siamak must perform in each film—to pass in their respective towns—are geographically and culturally distinct (219). Fariba/Siamak's gender expression is highly connected to ethnic and cultural significance, not only because they assume the trans identity in order to pass as a refugee in Germany, but also because their passing becomes possible as they are assumed to be “performing Iranian masculinity” (219). And when

they face violence for their gender identity, it is an intersection of “misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia” (208). However, it is not only Fariba/Siamak whose gender intersects with space; Brandon in *Boys Don't Cry* must display a certain geographically specific masculinity, characterized as “poor, rural, Midwestern masculinity,” in order “to be accepted by [the] local men” (209). Dawson, using Butler, makes the case for acknowledging space in understandings of gender, as well as in analyses of film, as it is through an attention to space that gender's intersection “with class, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity” is revealed (209). In such comparisons of narratively similar but geographically different films, I believe we can see the one that is more familiar to us anew through the lens of the other—which is exactly the kind of revelation that spatial approaches to queer cinema has to offer.

In “Concealing, Revealing, and Coming Out: Lesbian Visibility in Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Dead Girls* and Dana Budisavljević's *Family Meals*,” Sanja Laćan focuses on two Croatian films and how the representation within and the discourses surrounding them display the nation's treatment of homosexuality. Laćan begins with a mention of the Croatian marriage referendum in 2013, an event whose aftermath displayed the tendencies to conflate homosexuality with national anxieties (230). She notes, citing Moss and Simić (2011), that the same tendency surfaces in post-socialist films with the use of the lesbian subject as a “metaphor” for other socio-political issues (231). Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Dead Girls* is one film where the lesbian subject becomes an “empty sig-

nifier” standing in for other national concerns (242), resulting in discursive, as well as actual, violence against the lesbian character (236). However, Laćan makes sure to show, not every Croatian queer film displays this tendency to cast lesbian characters as “metaphors for nationality” (233). Dana Budisavljević’s *Family Meals*, which has been titled the most watched documentary in the history of Croatian cinema (239), presents a different relation between national and sexual identities. The filmmaker shows her family discussing her coming out during mealtimes—a time when national and cultural values are taught to children (241)—and reveals the fluidity of social constructions (239). Instead of lesbian becoming a metaphor for national anxieties, here the meals serve as metaphor for something both firmly constructed but also fluid, like European identity itself. As the filmmaker’s lesbian identity “uncovers her family’s queerness,” what sits at the table is a lesbian subject whose identity “reflects not only her own sexuality, but also the values of her community” (240, 242). Laćan’s national reading locates how tendencies to conflate LGBTQ+ issues with socio-political concerns translates to Croatian queer film, before extracting a new way of synthesizing queerness and nationality through Budisavljević’s film.

“Loose Cannons Unloaded. Popular Music, Space, and Queer Identities in the Films of Ferzan Özpetek” by Elena Boschi makes a strong case for considering aural representations, alongside visual ones, when studying queer European cinema. Boschi argues for what she terms “conditions of the audible,” adding onto “conditions of the

visible” theorized by Teresa de Lauretis (248), to describe the audibility of queerness in film and the construction of queer spaces through sound (247). She listens to Turkish-Italian director Ferzan Özpetek’s films, analysing the interactions between Italian and non-Italian songs in the soundtrack, which culminate in a “revision of Italy” as she argues (248). In Özpetek’s *Hamam*, she notes an aural Othering of queerness through Orientalist music during the kissing scene, which she argues complicates the visibility of queerness (248). She notes, however, such a reading is only possible “if we consider *Hamam* an Italian film,” before quickly touching upon Turkish perspectives cited in Barış Kılıçbay’s “Queer As Turk” (2008) (249). Her own treatment of Özpetek as mostly Italian in this article speaks to the tendency of “audiences and academics” to claim Özpetek as “predominantly Turkish or Italian” that she mentions (247). While bringing up fantastic arguments for the study of sound in queer cinema, the article also brings up questions about the Italian and Turkishness of Özpetek, exemplifying the kind of disruptions that the field of queer European cinema must also consider in its queering of Europe.

Ingrid Ryberg in “The Ethics of Shared Embodiment in Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography” considers the Swedish short film collection *Dirty Diaries: Twelve Shorts of feminist Porn* (2009) which includes her own film, alongside the history of pornography and the feminist movement in Sweden. *Dirty Diaries* began when filmmaker Mia Engberg, after participating in the Stockholm International Film Festival sponsored by Nokia,

where each director made a short using a mobile phone camera, offered the same camera to activists and artists (261). The pornographic short film collection that resulted was partly funded by the Swedish Film Institute, a decision which has received some criticism (261). Ryberg notes that such criticism evokes the historical debates over feminism and pornography, most notably exemplified in the “Sex Wars” of the US, which has been “formative also of the women’s movement in Sweden and other European countries” (262, 263). Often, the image that results from the historical accounts following the Sex Wars is a “linear progression of the feminist movement,” which as Clare Hemmings (2005) argues, obscures the often more “cyclical” nature of feminist debates (263). What Ryberg does excellently here is to use the disagreements over feminist pornography, and feminist porn as an indeterminate process (264), to theorize an ethics that can allow feminists to come together in “shared embodiment” (266). Ryberg focuses on the use of mobile phone camera to film the shorts and their public screening as inviting a certain “embodied spectatorship,” using Vivian Sobchack’s term (265). The participants of the collection do not arrive at a fixed definition for feminist pornography, choosing instead to employ different strategies in each short (264). This points to the field of feminist porn as a site of “disagreements and heterogeneity, rather than consensus” which Ryberg argues, translates to the “ethical space...capable of accommodating difference and disagreements” (263, 264).

The final chapter, “Crossing Borders and Queering Identities in

French-Language European Road Cinema” is Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt’s treatment of the European road movie through three French-language films. The films considered are the French film *Plein sud/Going South* (Lifshitz 2009), Maghrebi-French *Origine contrôlée/Made in France* (Bouchaala and Tahri 2001), and Swiss *Comme des voleurs (à l’est)/Stealth* (Baier 2006)—all characterized as being queer, “border-crossing” road movies (275). The authors characterize French language road film as “a genre that actively reformulates the limits of French identity,” and it is in these films’ journeys to Spain, Algeria/Switzerland, and Poland, respectively, that “fluid” forms of identity are constructed (275). Besides their subject matter concerning travel, escape, and the nation, the authors note that the genre’s formal elements are especially suited to a “queering of borders,” an example being the “travel montages” that depict “shifting” belongings and “intermediate spaces that encompass multiple transnational and queer affiliations” (276, 277). Importantly, “citizenship in European road films is reframed as inherently linked to mobility”—exemplified poignantly in *Origine contrôlée*’s final shot of the three characters on a “borrowed scooter” where, as argued, their freedom is an illusion of the act of their “movement,” as geographical freedom ultimately seems out of reach for them (276, 283). In fact, European road movies depict both the “rigidity” and “malleability” of borders, as in *Comme des voleurs*’ Swiss protagonist’s “effortless gliding” across the borders of Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland being contrasted with the undocumented Polish worker he met

back in Switzerland who inspired him to take his journey (286). This film where a Swiss gay man adopts a Polish identity which for most of the film appears “invented” (284) could be seen as taking a “queer’ approach to national and cultural identity,” where “national affiliation can be chosen rather than simply inherited” (284). The author’s fascinating explorations of the road movie effectively prove the usefulness of the genre in the study of queer European cinema.

Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space is an exciting book. The conclusions and the different approaches offered in each individual article equip the reader with knowledge and methodologies of approaching queer European cinema, as well as an excitement for the possibilities the field has to offer. By situating sexuality geographically, and locating moments where European identity is in tension in queer films, the authors demonstrate the use of queerness to formulate new notions of citizenship and belonging. Among the different ways of seeing, hearing, and imagining European identity in queer films, what comes into view is a Europe re-framed through the lens of queerness.

Notes

1. The articles, as noted in the book, have originally been published in *Studies in European Cinema*, volume 12, issue 3 (2015).
2. Though Turkey is not considered a part of Europe, a summary of queer Turkish cinema is included in the introduction, in a move that both matches the book’s aim to question what constructs European identity, and evokes the country’s complex relation to Europe. The issue is further exemplified in the third chapter where Ferzan Özpetek is claimed as more of an Italian director than a Turkish one.

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