Pinning Down the Past: Lesbian Politics and Queer Ecologies in *The Duke of Burgundy*

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ABSTRACT

Peter Strickland's film *The Duke of Burgundy* (2014) presents an all-female world of lepidopterists whose non-monetary economic exchanges consist of mounted butterfly specimens and whose interpersonal exchanges consist of BDSM roleplay. This essay explores how the film represents a thought experiment in reimagining lesbian-feminist history by reconciling divergent strands of feminist and lesbian politics that occupied opposing camps during the period of the film's early-1970s setting. The film's "soft" eroticism and depiction of a non-capitalist economy posits a seductive fantasy of what an all-female separatist world might have looked like, had the various clashes within second-wave feminism found a utopian middle ground over major issues like the shifting place of lesbians within the women's movement, the acceptability of sadomasochism and pornography as expressions of women's sexuality, and the ecological implications of queerness.

The sodomite had been a temporary *aberration*; the homosexual was now a species. So, too, were all those minor perverts whom nineteenth-century psychiatrists *entomologized* by giving them strange baptismal names. . . .

—Michel Foucault[1]

Variations that are rare and unusual are generally not called forms or morphs, but *aberrations*, even if these variations are genetically determined. Actually, if one desired, every butterfly could be an aberration of some hypothetically pure form, since no two butterflies are exactly alike. Variation, in fact, is universal among all living organisms—a hallmark of life.

—Matthew M. Douglas[2]

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Writer-director Peter Strickland's lesbian BDSM drama *The Duke of Burgundy* (2014) became a minor arthouse success, acclaimed for its luxuriant cinematography and score, its 1970s retro stylization, and most important, its sensitively erotic depiction of a long-term sadomasochistic romance between sexual bottom Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna) and her top, Cynthia (Sidse Babett Knudsen).[3] Inspired by the decadent softcore stylings of early-1970s "Euro-sleaze" films, *Duke* depicts a vaguely pan-European world (filmed in Hungary) solely populated by female entomologists whose economic exchanges consist of mounted butterfly specimens and whose interpersonal exchanges consist of BDSM roleplay. In this regard, we can usefully position *The Duke of Burgundy* within the long tradition of utopian fiction—a politicized cultural form that "creates a space, previously non-existent and still 'unreal,' in which radically different speculation can take place, and in which totally new ways of being can be envisaged."[4] The film gradually reveals how Evelyn, a character initially introduced as a subservient maid, is actually the dominant in a contractual but emotionally mismatched relationship that begins breaking down once she neglects the stress that Cynthia is under in constantly performing the part of the idealized, icy mistress. The domestic drama unfolds across a series of roleplay scenes in which the women's scripted interactions increasingly display missed cues and emotional strain, and by the film's ambiguous ending, it is unclear whether Cynthia will continue submitting to Evelyn's narcissistic demands upon yet another repetition of the erotic scenario that opened the film.

Duke became a surprise hit with many lesbian viewers, and a highbrow counterpoint to the heterocentric BDSM romance concurrently occupying worldwide multiplexes, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015). Although using the predominantly heterosexual tradition of early-1970s sexploitation cinema as a basic platform for its allusive style, Strickland constructs a fantastical milieu that occupies no distinct time and place, but which nevertheless speaks to far less heteronormative interests. In so doing, the film displays what Elizabeth Freeman terms *temporal drag*, or a postironic donning of past historical-political signifiers that evokes "the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not yet past and yet are not entirely present either." These moments represent less "the psychic time of the individual than . . . the movement time of collective political fantasy," which "suggests a bind for lesbians committed to feminism: the gravitational pull that 'lesbian,' and even more so 'lesbian feminist,' sometimes seems to exert on 'queer.'"[5]

Lesbian theorists highlight how, by eliding the deconstructive analysis of gender inequalities developed by 1970s radical feminists, many male "queer theorists have thrown out also the need or desire for many attributes associated with women's worlds," including the distinctive cultures developed around women's

same-sex desires.[6] In this article, however, I argue that *Duke*'s utopia gains political weight as a thought experiment in reimagining lesbian-feminist history, creating a story world that imaginatively (if only partially) reconciles divergent strands of second-wave feminist and lesbian politics that occupied opposing camps during the period of the film's vaguely 1970s setting.[7] In revisiting the so-called "sex wars," I suggest that *Duke* imagines a fantastical world where 1970s-era radical feminists, lesbian separatists, and lesbian SM practitioners found a utopian middle ground over controversial issues like the evolving place of lesbians within a largely heterocentric women's movement, and the acceptability of sadomasochism and pornography as politically acceptable expressions of (queer) women's sexuality.

In one of his best-known passages, Michel Foucault explains how early sexologists exerted disciplinary power by "entomologizing" a seemingly endless variety of nonnormative sexual behaviors into discrete sexual-identity categories, like so many species of insects. Thus, it might seem deeply ironic that *Duke* depicts a world that revolves around entomology, where lesbians collect and study beautiful-but-fragile creatures like moths and butterflies (including the film's namesake, the Duke of Burgundy Fritillary). Yet, I find that the very intersection of lesbianism and BDSM helps queer the concept of *lesbian* as a "species" of sexual identity by instead emphasizing the diversity that "minor perverts" like BDSM practitioners represent within and between such identity categories, not unlike the countless "aberrations" that naturally exist within animal species. As I will elaborate, *Duke* may imagine a symbiotic world between butterflies and their lesbian scholars, but such links neither "dehumanize" queers (in a traditional sense) nor merely assert the scientist's anthropocentric authority over the nonhuman. Rather, revisiting second-wave feminist/lesbian history also finds the roots of an ecofeminist ethos that has since mutated into the study of queer ecology, shedding light on how *Duke* decenters the human by opening productive spaces where queerness and animality find shared ground as challenges to dominant cultural ideologies.

))) *The Duke*'s Dominion: Euro-sleaze, Art Cinema, and "Lezsploitation"

For Clare Whatling, the lesbian community's contemporary political gains have allowed heteromale-created representations from the "bad old days" of the cinematic lesbian-as-taboo to exert a seductiveness lacking in today's more "liberated" (but commercialized/sanitized) images. Hence, "a nostalgia for abjection works against the inevitable failure of the lesbian utopian project," as this

temporal-cum-political distance creates more space for revaluing "a veritable textual and sexual dreamscape" of the film-historical past.[8] For *The Duke of Burgundy*, Peter Strickland had been approached by Rook Films to remake Spanish director Jess Franco's erotic horror film *Lorna the Exorcist* (1974). Rook Films cofounder Pete Tombs is the author of the book *Immoral Tales* and founder of cult DVD label Mondo Macabro, both devoted to promoting the so-called "Euro-sleaze" films of Franco, Jean Rollin, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and other continental filmmakers working at the intersection of exploitative sensationalism and arthouse pretension. These filmmakers' low-budget coproductions—often set in indistinctly cosmopolitan places and typically redubbed into multiple languages for export—combine the *fantastique* subject matter of genre films with the sexual provocations and structural ambiguity of art cinema, thereby producing a dreamlike atmosphere of sex and violence suffused with stylistic self-consciousness.[9]

Thus, it is no surprise that Strickland's use of such films as a creative point of departure resulted in a film with a quasi-1970s, pan-European setting, featuring actors from different European nations (including a cameo by frequent Franco actor Monica Swinn as the grumpy neighbor, Lorna) whose voices he even originally planned to overdub.[10] The film's opening credits feature grainy still frames bathed in primary colors and a title card featuring a small-print copyright notice—a retro signifier that recalls the credits of 1970s exploitation films and is often used by latter-day filmmakers to establish an overall ambience of retro pastiche.[11] *Duke*'s haunting score by Cat's Eyes also recalls Broadcast's score for Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012), both of which evoke the sonic textures of 1970s European cult film soundtracks.[12] Most striking is Nic Knowland's lush cinematography, which not only highlights the tactility of human-made textiles (especially lingerie) and organic forms like skin and butterfly wings, but also achieves a textural quality of its own through the extensive use of optical refraction and slow zooms. These traits recall what David Andrews terms the "soft style" of 1960s–70s European softcore films, in which gauzy lighting and soft-focus cinematography suggest feminine eroticism and middlebrow sophistication while visually obscuring sexual explicitness (see Figure 1).[13] Chris Holmlund notes that this style has also been found in crossover films about femme lesbians, with soft visuals and a focus on feminine fashion creating a nonexplicit sexual suggestiveness that may appeal to both heterosexual and lesbian viewers.[14]

Moreover, many Euro-sleaze filmmakers deliberately combined sexploitation imagery with SM themes and horror tropes. Ian Olney argues that, despite the heterocentrist appeal of so many skin-baring films, they also create a "queer zone" where the privileging of lesbian eroticism opens spaces for queer viewership.[15]

Figure 1. The "soft" visual style created by *The Duke of Burgundy*'s mise-en-scène and cinematography evokes feminine eroticism and middlebrow sophistication over sexual explicitness. (Source: Blu-ray.)

This is best confirmed by Michelle Johnson's compilation documentary *Triple X Selects: The Best of Lezsploitation* (2007), which (per its opening credits) offers to "fast-forward through the MAYHEM, TORTURE, GORE and HETERO FORNICATION" by highlighting lesbian eroticism in clips from various Euro-sleaze films by Franco and others. Thus, whether in its "feminized" visual style or the queer potential of its film-historical referents, *The Duke of Burgundy* finds space within traditionally heteromale genre cinema from which to develop far more sensitive depictions of lesbianism.

Among more highbrow inspirations for *Duke*, Strickland has also cited the erotic ritualism of Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967), the Gothic decadence of Juraj Herz's *Morgiana* (1972), and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's masochistic melodramas.[16] Indeed, *Duke* adheres far closer to the tradition of European art cinema than to European exploitation films—whether in its episodic structure, motivated around the repetition of sexual rituals, or the nuanced characterization of its domestic drama unfolding within and between those rituals. As Strickland explains, "The starting point was, like, the first 15 minutes of one of those [Euro-sleaze] films. And then the rest of the film is sort of post-orgasm and exploring what happens once that fantasy's over."[17] This figurative "post-orgasm" condition, then, suggests the film's postironic approach to its Euro-sleaze

predecessors: taking hints from the primarily heterosexualized genre tropes in 1970s sex-horror movies, but expanding beyond those tropes in a vein more akin to the rarified chamber dramas of Fassbinder or Ingmar Bergman.

Maria San Filippo argues that both art cinema and erotic cinema provide privileged spaces for understanding characters as queer, because these oft-intertwined forms not only push representational boundaries on sexual content, but also feature striking ambiguities in both character and narrative motivation (including a frequent eschewal of the heterocentrist drive toward narrative closure).[18] This underlying argument about art cinema's generative queerness clearly extends to Strickland's allusive engagement with his high-cultural referents—although *Duke*'s unambiguously lesbian population shifts sexual ambiguity away from the hetero/homo binary, and instead toward the dominant/submissive register suffusing this single-sex milieu. That Strickland was influenced by the experimental films of Cleo Übelmann, Monika Treut, and Maria Beatty is also no surprise here, given their highly aestheticized portraits of lesbian BDSM rituals.[19]

Even from the film's first scenes, lesbian looking relations are visually privileged—whether in an early POV shot as Evelyn "spies" on Cynthia through a keyhole while the latter dons her lingerie; or in Strickland's smooth intercutting between a shot of Evelyn peering into a microscope, Cynthia returning the camera's gaze as it zooms into her steely face, and the luxuriant images of their first love scene. Moreover, the concept of an erotic film set in a women-only world was already too close to a lascivious heteromale fantasy, hence his decision to cast older actors (largely in their thirties and above) than the women typically cast in sexploitation films.[20] Strickland notes, "It would've been incredibly arrogant to pretend I could adopt a female gaze. All I could do was be aware of the pitfalls of having a male gaze in this context, and to not make the camera so directional or mechanical, with a few exceptions."[21] Strickland does, however, refuse to publicly discuss his own sexual identity, thus extending the potential for the male filmmaker's gaze to still be a *nonstraight* gaze—as figured through his refusal to pornographically maximize the visibility of partially unclothed female bodies, instead conveying eroticism through dense, fetishistic interplays of shadows, reflections, and washes of refracted light.

It is ironic, though, that Strickland's use of such aestheticization became fodder for criticism by some lesbian reviewers who felt the characters sealed off from real-world relevance, artfully arranged by the cinematic apparatus like butterfly specimens under glass. As *Curve*'s Merryn Johns suggests, for example, "it's a well-made movie with lesbian characters who are not crazy and (spoiler alert) do not die in the end," but ultimately, "this is a film written and directed by a male filmmaker who knows more about cinema (and Strickland knows a lot) than he does about lesbians. These lesbians are creatures of celluloid. Which is

not to say that glamorous and professional lesbian SM couples don't exist. But Cynthia and Evelyn exist to be looked at by the camera; they exist to be symbols that raise questions about what we like to watch."[22] Thus, for this reviewer the male filmmaker's high-art stylistics and film-historical allusions rendered the film's characterizations suspect—though I suspect such reservations are partly fueled by the film's exclusive population by femme lesbians. Chris Holmlund and Clare Whatling both argue that the cinematic femme's closer adherence to heterosexual beauty standards, especially when combined with the lack of an unambiguously butch character, can generate complaints by lesbian commentators that a film's depictions of lesbianism are either "inauthentic" or simply framed as heterosexual spectacle—thus doubly negating the femme "first as lesbian, then as feminine object of [lesbian] desire."[23] Other lesbian reviewers, however, were less skeptical about *Duke*'s provenance, asserting that the film is "most definitely not made for the male gaze," praising its character study as both erotic and heartfelt, and positioning it within Sidse Babett Knudsen's existing lesbian fandom.[24]

))) Second-Wave Feminism, Separatism, and the Lesbian Question

Although Strickland's first draft of *The Duke of Burgundy* was set in the real world ("There were males. The characters had jobs"), he decided to instead craft a fantastical world, stripping away the more "sociological" register of sex–gender and class relations in lieu of focusing on a romantic/sexual relationship untainted by such outside forces.[25] In other words, creating a hermetically sealed world where lesbianism and BDSM are the naturalized norms instead of sociosexual outliers was deliberately intended to resist the dominant cinematic tendency toward depth psychologizing or pathologizing such practices due to their difference.[26] Because eschewing such literal, real-world explanations for their characterization, it is safe to presume that Strickland did not have historical lesbian-feminist rhetoric in mind while making the film, but his fantastical diegesis nonetheless bears striking resonances with the ideal futures envisioned by 1970s lesbian feminists.

By the turn of the 1970s, lesbians found that many (heterosexual) feminists rejected lesbianism as a viable basis for political consciousness, dismissing it as a question of sexual preference instead of political identity.[27] In 1969, for example, second-wave feminist organizers like the National Organization for Women (NOW) deemed lesbians a not-woman "lavender menace" that would negatively color public perceptions of the women's movement. Responding over the

following decade to the sexism and homophobia perpetuated by these ostensibly progressive groups, lesbians not only attempted to redefine feminism as a commitment to women loving fellow women, but also developed separatist strategies for opting out of traditional gender roles.[28] Shane Phelan summarizes this rhetorical move: "The lesbian feminist is in a privileged position; over heterosexual feminists, she has the advantage of consistency between theory and practice; over nonpolitical lesbians, she can claim the superior awareness of the revolutionary nature of her sexuality."[29] As a result, lesbian-feminism moved to the forefront of the women's movement by the mid-1970s, alienating some straight feminists along the way—yet this homo/hetero rift was partly resolved by the emergence of cultural feminism as "a countercultural movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female" by promoting the creation of an "authentic" (essentialist) culture made *by* and *for* women.[30]

As early as 1971, activist groups like Revolutionary Lesbians and The Furies advocated lesbian-only lifeways as a radical break from both male supremacy and the "straight women's movement."[31] Marilyn Frye suggested that "[m]ost feminists, probably all, practice some separation from males and male-dominated institutions. A separatist practices separation consciously, systematically, and probably more generally than the others."[32] Inspired by a nascent ecofeminism, many lesbian separatists practiced a return to the land, purchasing rural plots for women-only agricultural collectives and only interacting with men out of occasional necessity.[33] Mary Daly's call to rediscover a gynocentric sense of divine nature that had been oppressed by patriarchal religions proved especially influential among separatists.[34]

And yet, despite the fact that cultural feminists and lesbian separatists shared an essentialist belief in women's natural superiority over the supposedly destructive nature of men, this analysis could not properly account for women's oppression of other women within the aspirational "counterreality" of separatist life. Separatist women who treated other women poorly or worked against a collective's success were either accused of not being "real" women or were deemed agents of patriarchal false consciousness. According to Dana Shugar, late-1970s separatists attempting to "reestablish the importance of revolutionary practice within the framework of radical thought" began responding to such ideological contradictions by producing separatist utopian fictions "fantastical enough not to be limited by the disheartening experiences of [real-world] collective endeavors."[35]

Sally Miller Gearheart's 1978 novel *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* is the most famous example of this tradition, as its near-futuristic story depicts women leaving the heteromale violence of dystopian cities to form lesbian-only communes in the surrounding hills. There, they develop supernatural powers and

psychic connections with each other and the natural world around them—all of which are threatened by the coming intrusion of men, including gay male allies called "gentles."[36] As Greta Rensenbrink observes, many real-world lesbian separatists had believed bodily purity and gynocentric living could unlock the secrets of asexual reproductive practices that supposedly existed prior to the rise of male supremacy and the violence-causing "mutation" that was the Y chromosome. This goddess-based faith in parthenogenesis (i.e., reproduction without fertilization) as a means of allowing women to become a "separate species" from men "increasingly collapsed the space between science and science fiction."[37]

With this historical context in mind, we can return to *The Duke of Burgundy* as an (inadvertent) inheritor of this speculative utopian tradition. Its creation of a single-sex world recalls how lesbian feminists argued that the very categories of "woman" and "lesbian" were only made possible by the patriarchal logic of binary sex–gender roles, and those stigmatized social identities would be radically redefined if such binaries were eliminated.[38] Jill Johnston claimed, for example, "Feminism will no longer need itself when women cease to think of themselves as the 'other' in relation to the 'other' and unite with *their own species*."[39] Likewise, Margaret Small argued that dismantling the hetero/homo binary would make the political question of whether all women should "become" lesbians moot, "because the way a woman would understand what it would mean to be heterosexual would be totally different."[40] Thus, *Duke*'s single-sex utopia imagines what a world without (hetero)sexual difference and bisexual reproduction could look like—where, if everyone is both *female* and *homosexual*, then those real-world signifiers of social difference become irrelevant. In Strickland's words, "I'm not interested in Cynthia and Evelyn being gay—I mean in counterpoint to heterosexuals. It's all women, so there *is* no counterpoint, which means you're just focusing on the relationship, hopefully."[41] Although this comment may open Strickland to charges of deliberately depoliticizing a real-world minority for the sake of aestheticization, the true *queerness* of his creative choice lies less in the proliferation of lesbian representations onscreen than in the paradoxical erasure of "lesbian" as a legible identity category rooted in binary sexual difference. If the second-wave feminist movement was once riven by the question of lesbianism as a political position, then *Duke*'s single-sex world suggests a fantastical realm where the debates over lesbianism versus feminism could never properly exist.

Even if *Duke*'s single-sex diegesis might not present a *literally* separatist utopia (in the sense of *separation from* another, male-dominated society), its pastoral setting and noncapitalist economy nevertheless resonate with other aspects of lesbian-separatist practice, including an embrace of nature and communalism. Due to their position outside heterosexual/capitalist reproduction, 1970s-era

lesbian separatists largely eschewed the Marxist materialism practiced by (heterosexual) radical feminists "because we believed that too much focus on things like workers and owners would suck us into the muck of patriarchy."[42] In *Duke*, the characters live in a rural village dotted with grand villas, where bicycles and manually operated machines take the place of cars and modern automation. The nearby forests and meadows are where the women collect their insect specimens, and the village itself is dominated by an Institute with a large library and lecture hall for their entomological studies. Characters are never shown using traditional currency, but rather trade insect mounts based on their exchange value within the community. Evelyn and Cynthia, for example, attempt to gain faster delivery of a bondage bed by offering the Carpenter (Fatma Mohamed) "a mount of extremely rare Satyrids . . . worth far more than Nymphalids or Burnets." Unlike the bohemian or impoverished conditions of many real-world lesbian communes, then, *Duke* presents a fantasy of lesbians living in opulent but technologically simple environs, their lives inseparable from nature, with a barter economy rooted in the relative comforts of academic labor instead of subsistence agriculture. As Strickland notes, one of the film's deleted scenes depicts Evelyn inviting Cynthia to "move in to the house that we clearly thought was [Cynthia's] all along"—thus further revealing Evelyn's dominance in their relationship—but this scene was excised to remove class connotations from the picture.[43]

And yet, even in the utopian absence of sexual difference and capitalist competition, *The Duke of Burgundy* is a still a world that playfully acknowledges the existence of power inequalities via the consensual forms of BDSM roleplay that are naturalized here. As Patrick Califia explains, "many theoretical utopias are dreamed up by people who are afraid of diversity and deeply conservative about sex," but eroticism demands a certain degree of (perceived) difference for its charge, not complete equality.[44] Indeed, in actual practice, BDSM roles like top and bottom take primacy over traditional gender roles, especially within queer BDSM communities.[45] Thus, the performed inequalities within BDSM serve as the erotic engine between characters that *Duke*'s utopia otherwise grants gender and economic parity, even as this focus on BDSM over lesbianism marks a significant departure from most 1970s feminist speculative fiction.

))) Showing Restraint: Power Play and the "Sex Wars"

Tensions between lesbianism and feminism flared anew with the rhetorical "sex wars" that erupted during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These debates chiefly circled around three potentially overlapping points of conflict—butch-femme

lesbianism, female sadomasochism, and the consumption of pornography—each of which, when practiced by women, were deemed capitulations to patriarchal power and betrayals of feminist principles. For my purposes, all three of these threads must be discussed for their relevance (in differing proportions) to *The Duke of Burgundy*'s construction of its quasi-1970s milieu, because the film's utopian setting also represents a utopian compromise within such debates.

The feminist objection to lesbian butch-femme roles rested on the belief that the gender presentation and sexual practices of butches and femmes merely internalized and replicated heteronormative gender roles. Overall, many younger lesbian feminists accused the older, prefeminist generation of lesbians of backwardness for their embrace of butch-femme roles.[46] This rhetoric indicted the butch for supposedly perpetuating masculine dominance, whereas the "femme is often seen as a lesbian acting like a straight woman who is not a feminist—a terrible misreading of self-presentation that turns a language of liberated desire into the silence of collaboration."[47] But if such rhetoric had existed since the early 1970s, the sex wars' flames were fanned by the early-1980s resurgence of butch-femme identities as a reaction to "the 'proprieties' of lesbian-feminists, cultural feminism, and conservative middle-class lesbians."[48] Butch-femme writers accordingly countered that such roles denaturalized and ironically resignified traditional masculine/feminine norms,[49] while also asserting that not all such sexual relationships follow a simple butch/top versus femme/bottom dichotomy in practice.[50]

Duke's sole population by femme lesbians would seemingly render this controversy irrelevant to our understanding of the film. Following Elizabeth Freeman, however, we can regard the film's overall retro style as a form of temporal drag, because "[f]or many committed to, say, both butch-femme and feminism, this kind of play on the flesh with 'tired' models of gender performs just the kind of temporal crossing that registers a certain queerness irreducible to simple cross-dressing. And crucially, dressing circa some other decade, flaunting outdated feminine norms, has been one important way to signal femme identity."[51] Clare Whatling and Chris Holmlund both note that different gradations of femmeness exist among femme lesbians, with cinematic depictions of femme couples often figuring the older woman as more active, experienced, and comparatively more "butch."[52] This observation adheres in *Duke*'s depiction of Cynthia as a sexual top who, behind her more matronly veneer, is growing increasingly insecure about her age and her attractiveness to the younger and less experienced Evelyn.

In one sense, *Duke*'s soft style and butch-free world would therefore seem to more closely align it with cultural feminism's essentializing valorization of "authentic" femininity, and thus mollify the feminist critique of butch-femme

roles as mirrors of traditional gender roles. Yet, it is precisely the film's narrative prioritizing of *dominance–submission* over sex–gender identity—albeit the consensually performed inequalities of BDSM roles, as expressed here via gradations of femmeness—that complicates any facile essentialism, violating the overwhelmingly "vanilla" vision of female sexuality promoted by most cultural feminists and lesbian feminists. In its combination of traits from both camps, this is a utopia that may not fully satisfy the 1970s–80s political stances of either sex-negative cultural feminists or sex-positive butches and femmes, but it nevertheless offers something to each school of thought. In other words, *Duke*'s femme use of temporal drag would not fully *resolve* the historical debates over butch-femme dynamics so much as indefinitely *suspend* them, evoking BDSM's own eroticization of suspense and deferral of chrononormative forward momentum.[53]

If some feminists criticized butch-femme lesbians for supposedly internalizing conventional gender roles, they were especially dismayed by the purported embrace of misogynistic violence represented by sadomasochism among women: "Just as feminists have critiqued the butch-femme roles played by some lesbians as sexist and modeled after the heterosexual male–female roles, so feminists have and must continue to critique the bedroom equivalent that sadomasochistic practices between women also represent."[54] For Lynda Hart, the early-1970s rhetorical shift from lesbians as "not women" to lesbians as ideal feminists encouraged a push toward sexual and romantic purity, in part as a defensive reaction to sexology's longstanding figuration of lesbians as violence-prone inverts. At a time, however, when second-wave feminism ascribed the very existence of violence to maleness, lesbian SM's play with power and pain inevitably raised the uncomfortable specter of "violence" within womanhood.[55] Hence, Alex Warner explains that, much like butch-femme sexualities, lesbian SM became a central controversy within second-wave feminism between approximately 1978 and 1982, because radical feminists held that any social relations involving power inequalities were de facto abusive and contrafeminist.[56] These critics routinely conflated consensual SM with nonconsensual violence: "Lesbian-battering, through which lesbians take out their internalized anti-lesbianism and self-hatred on each other, is a serious problem for the lesbian community to deal with, not a game."[57] Nearly a decade after it had denounced lesbians as the "lavender menace," NOW passed a 1980 resolution declaring SM a violent, anti-feminist practice to be isolated from other lesbian rights issues.

Defying this desexualized party line within the women's movement, lesbian SM practitioners increasingly "came out" by reclaiming their queer desires, not despite, but precisely *as*, a feminist practice. For lesbian SM practitioners, safely bounded scene play "offered greater revolutionary potential because it

encouraged participants to investigate, problematize, and theorize the nature of power, an experience typically denied women under patriarchy."[58] Reframing the debate around questions of safety, fantasy, and consent instead of "violence," pro-SM women began organizing into groups claiming feminist principles, such as San Francisco's Samois (founded in 1978). As Samois cofounder Patrick Califia recalls, the group held a majority vote not to be a separatist group, but rather to remain "open to any woman who did S/M with other women"—not just self-identified lesbians—which resulted in disillusionment among some of the group's separatist members.[59] Although conceived as a feminist group, such decisions demonstrate how SM as a distinct sexual identity might supersede other political identities (such as *feminist* or *lesbian*), and therefore pose an implicit threat to second-wave solidarity.

Although the lesbian SM controversy would continue to simmer as sex-negative and sex-positive feminists clashed throughout the 1980s, this historical context helps elucidate the larger issues at *The Duke of Burgundy*'s heart. The upfront quality of consensual BDSM arrangements is theoretically intended to prevent people from emotionally or physically abusing others, yet this film demonstrates how trust/love relationships can still be violated in actual practice, because long-term relationships built around BDSM are no less susceptible to the negative emotions (e.g., boredom, jealousy, anger, resentment) that can seep into any long-term bonds. BDSM operates via cycles of risk and trust, creating strong feelings of intimacy, but violations of trust in a given scene can destroy relationships by creating emotional distress and disconnection.[60]

As the film unfolds, for example, we often see Cynthia drinking water and studying Evelyn's scripted directions as "backstage" preparation for their role-play scenes, but it becomes increasingly clear that Cynthia is the one truly serving Evelyn's contractual demands (and receiving diminishing returns on that emotional investment). After Cynthia injures her back carrying the heavy trunk that will serve as Evelyn's nocturnal bondage bed, Evelyn refuses to give her a back rub, only wanting to serve her when Cynthia is dressed in the sexy-but-uncomfortable outfits that Evelyn has purchased for her, not the loose and dowdy pajamas that a sore back prefers. Evelyn's passive-aggressive criticism of Cynthia's performance grows over the course of the film, as exemplified by a sex scene in which Cynthia struggles to improvise dirty talk while manually bringing Evelyn to climax; afterward, Evelyn tells her to "try to have more conviction in your voice next time." Each woman eventually betrays the other's trust: Evelyn secretly sneaks off to polish another woman's leather boots, later explaining that she wasn't getting the sexual satisfaction she needed at home; Cynthia's cruel comeuppance for this infidelity has her command Evelyn to bake a cake for Evelyn's own birthday, and Cynthia then proceeds to eat the cake in

Figure 2. Cynthia punishes the supine Evelyn for her infidelity, while simultaneously ignoring Evelyn's safe word. (Source: Blu-ray.)

her pajamas while ignoring Evelyn's safe word ("pinastri," taken from the *Sphinx pinastri* moth) to end the scene (see Figure 2).

The film's reviewers often cite the gradual revelation of Evelyn's dominance over Cynthia as a "twist," but this observation largely reflects critics' unfamiliarity with the distinctions between top/bottom and dominant/submissive BDSM roles. In subcultural terms, "top/bottom" generally refers to actions ("giving/receiving") performed within a specific scene, whereas "dominant/submissive" refers to broader and deeper commitments to a particular power exchange beyond individual scenes.[61] Because top/dominant and bottom/submissive constitute the most conventional alignment of such roles (and the ones that, when mapped onto masculinity and femininity, most closely echo normative social relations), it is no surprise that the less familiar roles of *dominant bottom* (Evelyn) and *submissive top* (Cynthia) provoked misunderstanding. As Chris Straayer notes, BDSM's elaborate "mise-en-scéne is produced to accommodate sexual scripts," but "to see someone's script enacted is not to witness its meaning," because this internal meaning is not available to nonparticipant observers.[62]

And yet, the emotional dysfunction in Evelyn and Cynthia's sadomasochistic relationship provides a further wrinkle here. Although it is established practice for bottoms to have a base level of control by establishing the bounds of consent (e.g., safe words, "hard" and "soft" limits) for any scene, the film's drama rests

upon the women's failure to renegotiate the boundaries of their contractually established roles. Staci Newmahr observes that "bottoms deliberately and consciously guide action in a scene" through subtle cues,[63] such as Evelyn's "bratty" behavior to provoke punishment by Cynthia—but Evelyn's inability to recognize how her narcissistic behavior is hurting the emotionally undercompensated Cynthia veers closer to what BDSM practitioners disparagingly dub "topping from the bottom." Within the BDSM community, topping from the bottom refers to a bottom whose demands drastically overstep the top's previously agreed-upon control within a scene, thereby encroaching too much on the top's role. Thus, rather than a consensual renegotiation of power, the bottom abuses the trust relationship established with his/her top, which is also why the term is often ascribed to younger, less experienced players like Evelyn.

On the flip side, Cynthia resembles a "service top": a top motivated by "an ultimate desire to please the bottom, or the awareness on the part of the bottom (or sometimes of onlookers) that the top's actions in scene are being determined by the bottom."[64] Because "topping from the bottom" and "service topping" suggest impure and misaligned top/bottom roles, the line where more stable roles tip over into these "inverse power exchanges" remains hotly debated; both terms are often used as pejoratives within the BDSM community, due to the lack of mutuality that *Duke* dramatizes.[65] Cynthia, for instance, is clearly suffering "burnout" as a service top, because Evelyn's dominant desires for masochistic gratification (such as demanding to be locked in the trunk at night, and scornfully shushing Cynthia when she checks on Evelyn's well-being) are overwhelming their previously matched roles.

Duke thus pushes back against anti-SM feminists by presenting a women-only utopia where BDSM itself is both consensual and naturalized as the social norm, not a further ostracized minority. Still, the film's lack of transparently butch–femme dyads might nevertheless soften these feminists' suspicions about such gendered roles' frequent correspondences with dominant/submissive roles. On one hand, the film's decoupling of top/dominant and bottom/submissive from each other complicates the radical feminist argument that such roles merely reproduce the larger structural inequalities of heterosexism. On the other hand, in depicting spaces of overlap and confusion between these more conventional power roles, the film also refuses to offer the unambiguously "affirmative" and "healthy" image of BDSM (to the chagrin of some viewers from the kink community) that pro-SM lesbians advocated. Rather, the film acknowledges the possibility that even women positioned as (largely) social equals can still mistreat one another within the context of consensual sexual relationships—an uncomfortable fact previously learned by real-world lesbian separatists.[66] Thus, the film insists on the inevitability of power inequalities even in the absence

of patriarchy, while also destigmatizing BDSM by neither psychoanalyzing these characters nor depicting this particular couple's romantic dysfunction as endemic to BDSM in general.

The Duke of Burgundy's sympathetic depiction of BDSM may therefore seem an affront to the anti-SM stance of radical feminists and lesbian feminists, but its historical resonance with the final thread of the sex wars—pornography—finds the film's most notable concession to such forces. Many anti-SM feminists were also vehemently opposed to pornography, treating them as synonymous incarnations of patriarchal "violence" against women. Groups like Women Against Pornography and Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media picketed not only adults-only businesses but also feminist and LGBT bookstores carrying suspect literature, and eventually mounted the much-publicized anti-porn/SM protest at the Barnard Conference on Sexuality in April 1982. Hence, lesbian SM groups often found themselves defending both SM and pornography as expressions of sexual fantasy.[67]

Because second-wave consciousness-raising efforts promoted the self-discovery of an "authentic" (i.e., nonviolent and vanilla) female sexuality, anti-porn feminists made convoluted and largely subjective distinctions between "a soft, tender, nonexplicit women's erotica and a hard, cruel, graphic phallic pornography."[68] David Andrews explains how such distinctions, despite their anti-sexist aims, actually reinforced traditional gender norms: "The erotica concept, whose gender intonation had been secondary, gained a gender-specific rationale: erotica was safe and 'classy' *because* it was feminine. Antiporn endorsements of 'erotica' thus tended toward the sexist and ahistorical, reflecting fantasies of reform rather than realities of form."[69] Even when pornography made by and for lesbians began to be produced in the mid-1980s, these early works hewed closer to the connotations of "erotica" (a soft and romantic visual aesthetic, conventionally feminine performers, nonpenetrative sex, male-free pastoral settings) than to the later explicitness of dyke porn (a documentary-style realist aesthetic, butch–femme performers, penetrative sex, urban settings).[70]

It is not difficult to see on which side of the erotica versus pornography debate *The Duke of Burgundy* stands. As noted earlier, Strickland deliberately attempted to avoid turning *Duke*'s women-only world into a "porny," heteromale fantasy, opting instead for the soft, "classy," feminized aesthetic of erotica. Much as the film's opening credits humorously include a "Perfume by" credit, the overall film aims to produce a deeply sensual experience—but one more attuned to the "higher" senses than lower bodily ones. It is notable that *Duke* stays so determinedly in the realm of the soft by avoiding explicit nudity altogether; even the film's most notorious scene—when Cynthia urinates in Evelyn's mouth as

punishment for not properly washing her underwear—occurs behind closed doors, only audible to the viewer.

Thus, despite the film's sympathetic depictions of BDSM, anti-porn feminists would likely laud its visual restraint and overall aesthetic as a prime example of erotica (even if they would still likely be suspicious of a male director at the helm). However, even Strickland notes that several of the sexual acts the film depicts (such as face sitting, urolagnia, and physical restraint) could be penalized as "extreme pornography" under the UK's Audiovisual Media Services Regulations of 2014, coincidentally enacted shortly after the film's release.[71] These regulations inspired widespread protest for moralistically targeting not only BDSM representations but also sexual activities that prioritize female pleasure over phallic completion.[72] Hence, Strickland's feminized work of erotica may avoid the negative connotations of "pornography," but it remains haunted by the continuing legacy of anti-porn efforts aimed at demonizing nonvanilla sexualities.

))) Queer Ecology and the "Dehumanized" Lesbian

Among these resonances with second-wave politics, the prominent role of Lepidoptera also opens up *The Duke of Burgundy*'s call back to ecofeminism—and, on this point, we can note the film's relevance to the growing field of queer ecology. Ecofeminism emerged during the 1970s–80s as an analysis of patriarchal capitalism's domination of woman/nature as similarly "feminine" (fertile) entities in need of subordination. Although women are not inherently "closer to nature," they have been socially constructed as such since the rise of ancient patriarchal civilizations, thereby allowing men to justify their power by aligning themselves on the side of culture/industry. Thus, for ecofeminists, challenging patriarchy means revaluing the female side of the women/nature versus men/culture binary, and calling for an ecologically sustainable society with no gendered division of labor. Many radical feminists were more hesitant to adopt an ecofeminist perspective than cultural feminists willing to embrace essentialist beliefs in women's closeness to nature—as demonstrated, for example, by ecofeminism's aforementioned influence on "back-to-the-land" lesbian separatism. However, women's separatist withdrawal would not solve the larger problem of ecological destruction as long as natural resources remained under patriarchal control.[73]

The names of *Duke*'s protagonists already suggest "Eve" and "sin," ironically evoking the biblical blame assigned to woman in man's banishment from Eden and his subsequent push toward male-dominated civilization. Although this fictional world's focus on biological science would seemingly contradict ecofeminism's analysis of science as a patriarchal knowledge system developed to equate

masculinity with rationality (and thus the right to command women/nature),[74] I maintain that nature instead retains its prelapsarian quality in this single-sex utopia and no strictly gendered division of labor or knowledge exists.

Yet, like many other threads of the second-wave feminist movement, ecofeminism's focus on the conjunction of woman/nature was, and still is, largely heterocentrist. When Chaia Heller, for example, calls for "Mother Nature" to no longer be posited as a feminized entity in need of chauvinistic rescue, she argues that "master and slave" is one of the more problematic ways that the human/earth relationship has often been envisioned.[75] But what of sexualities like BDSM that valorize "master" and "slave" as performative roles, and might therefore usefully disrupt ideas of "the natural" in other ways?[76] How might nonnormative sexualities complicate ecofeminism's traditionally gendered analysis? Queer ecology unites ecofeminism's insights about the shared oppression of women/nature with "insight from queer cultures to form alternative, even transformative, cultures of nature."[77] Greta Gaard argues that the unruliness of the erotic is what heteropatriarchy actually devalues, and not just in women and nature: "queers are feminized, animalized, eroticized, and naturalized in a culture that devalues women, animals, nature, and sexuality."[78]

The Duke of Burgundy makes one of its most fascinating interventions on this latter point, by strongly linking its all-lesbian denizens to the nonhuman animals whose study makes their utopian world possible. As Nicole Seymour observes, the theoretical "dehumanization" of queers is not reprehensible per se, so long as it means using queers as useful figures for unthinking anthropocentrism and thereby revaluing nonhuman species.[79] Although not explicitly stated, the only major source of unequal status in this all-female, all-BDSM society is conferred via academic standing, because Evelyn (who seeks professional approval via a paper on Tussock moths) aspires to become one of the expert entomologists like Cynthia. Evelyn may ultimately hold the power in their sexual relationship, but the power differential in their professional status provides a major source of sadomasochistic eroticism. (Teacher/student or master/apprentice roleplay is the closest analogue to real-world BDSM here.) As if taking a page from Foucault, the eroticization of power/knowledge links these women's sexuality to the lives of the insects they study: in an early lecture-hall scene, we see Evelyn's rapt and adoring attention as she watches Cynthia give a lecture on mole crickets, while Evelyn's attention to Dr. Schuller's (Zita Kraszkó) leather boots during another lecture prefigures her infidelity. Evelyn's attempt to ask a challenging (but embarrassingly off-topic) question about skippers to a more experienced lecturer also results in Cynthia punishing Evelyn with a face-sitting session.

Moreover, Cynthia's lecture about the mole cricket's burrowing for winter hibernation recalls Evelyn's nocturnal "burrowing" into the bondage trunk

to escape the growing coolness of their disintegrating relationship. As we see, *Duke*'s academia-based society is so closely tied to insect lifecycles that the Institute itself even closes during the winter hibernation months. "[N]either zoophilic bestiality nor anthropomorphic romancing" adheres in these connections between the repetition of human sexual rituals and the natural cycles of insect life. We are instead closer to an interspecies eroticism that defies the lines separating human from nonhuman animals.[80] Following Scott MacDonald, if the fundamental job of ecocinema is not to provide prescriptive proenvironmental narratives shot in a conventional style, but rather formally innovative films that offer new and progressive experiences of what it means to coexist with natural environments, then *The Duke of Burgundy* clearly veers toward the latter.[81]

In her first lecture on the sonic differentiation between *Gryllotalpa* calls, Cynthia remarks, "Since these species are all so visually indistinguishable from each other, the sound they produce should differentiate the two." Meanwhile, the camera slowly tracks laterally across the still tableaux of women listening to these archival field recordings, linking the relative similarity of these many femme lesbians to the very subtle gradations between different cricket species. Consider, for example, how the biological metaphor of mimicry as "a sign that retains the power of resemblance but menaces the authoritative discourse of colonialism by disclosing its ambivalence," has been adapted to describe the gender performativity of lesbian butch-femme and SM sexualities.[82] Strickland even includes several female mannequins "listening" from the back rows (an allusion to Jess Franco's films), as though emphasizing the fine line between human and nonhuman. The film's final credits concretize this leveling of human and nonhuman animals by listing both the "Cast in Order of Appearance" and "Featured Insects in Order of Appearance," with the insects' scientific names and common names respectively arranged like the actors' names and their character names.

Many ecofeminists promote a shared recognition of both women and nonhuman animals whose less than fully "human" status mark them as subject to patriarchal abuse—hence the close ties between ecofeminism and animal liberation.[83] According to a strictly ecofeminist analysis, this fact would render *Duke*'s parade of pinned *Lepidoptera* mounts as politically suspect (see Figure 3). The use of butterfly specimens in this society's noncapitalist barter system, however, complicates the patriarchal-industrial use of nonhuman animals because not only does *Lepidoptera* collecting rarely affect butterfly populations (given the small number of specimens destructively sampled, a practice already on the decline since the 1970s), but the market for rare specimens can actually improve overall species health by providing an incentive for habitat conservation.[84] Even if Evelyn's attempt to "pin down" and "preserve" Cynthia as her idealized mistress

is ultimately destructive to their relationship, it is due more to this particular couple's emotional dysfunction than reflective of larger cultural attitudes of male supremacy over women and animals.[85] Meanwhile, the film's invocation of "soft" erotica addressing a *female* gaze complicates ecofeminist arguments that would posit women (especially sex workers) and animals alike as "pornographically" rendered into "meat" in patriarchal society, such as Carol J. Adams's dubious, sex-negative comparison between the BDSM accoutrements in bondage pornography and the industrial equipment used in factory farming.[86]

))) Conclusion

This 2014 film demonstrates that feminist utopian fictions cannot be simply reduced to a bygone product of failed 1970s politics, but rather signals the continuing relevance of second-wave feminism's "failures" as fodder for ongoing feminist action today.[87] That is, *The Duke of Burgundy*'s creation of a utopian middle ground to the historical debates that eventually derailed second-wave feminism brings to mind Heather Love's argument that "[m]aking connections with historical losses or with images of ruined or spoiled identity in the past can set into motion a gutting 'play of recognitions,' another form of effective

Figure 3. Rare Lepidoptera mounts as major elements of mise-en-scène and potential objects of economic exchange. (Source: Blu-ray.)

history."[88] The value of a film like *Duke* lies in its willingness to think a "concrete utopia"—that is, one "relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential,"[89] such as second-wave feminist/lesbian politics—in which the intertwined lives and desires of lesbians and nonhuman nature occupy a centrality that would sit uneasily with some strands of contemporary queer theory.

To wit, one of the most important recent debates in queer studies concerns the "antisocial thesis," which asks whether queerness should be seen as a profoundly antirelational impulse that voids identity-based politics, hence negating the reproductive logic of social/personal futurity; or whether queerness implies a nonnaïve utopian impulse toward imagining better worlds that remain perpetually yet to come.[90] Nicole Seymour, however, argues that the antisocial thesis's embrace of queer ephemerality over reproductive futurity is fundamentally incompatible with a queer environmental ethos, because it displays a "lack of concern for the future [which] more accurately characterizes regimes such as heteronormativity and global capitalism."[91] It is perhaps no coincidence that "the antirelational in queer studies was the gay white man's last stand,"[92] because these men have less to lose from turning away from the forms of fixed identity and exclusionary world-making that many lesbians continue to find nostalgically appealing.[93] José Esteban Muñoz argues that privileging the here-and-now is merely another symptom of "straight time," so queerness must always be figured on the historical and conceptual horizon, as a different time and place that has not yet arrived, and thus holds critical utopian value in its ever-deferred futurity. Although utopianism is often dismissed as naïve romanticism, Muñoz instead embraces the inevitable failure of utopian ambitions as mirroring the queer's inevitable failure to perform heteronormativity; both failures point toward an ethical demand for imagining more perfect collective futures.[94]

Indeed, the common tendency to ascribe a generational model to feminist history "always reinscribe[s] the hegemony of the family and its heterosexist regime of reproduction."[95] Jack Halberstam, however, has challenged this logic by arguing for a "shadow feminism" whose masochistic embrace of failure refuses "the essential bond of mother and daughter that ensures that the daughter inhabits the legacy of the mothers and in doing so reproduces her relationship to patriarchal forms of power."[96] *Duke*'s naturalization of BDSM as norm instead of outlier would therefore complicate the historiographic and psychoanalytic logic of reproductive inheritance, even as the film's 1970s-era setting cannot help remaining haunted by such interfeminist splits. It is notable that the film's ending, with Cynthia staring at herself in the mirror as she contemplates answering Evelyn's call and restarting the cycle of sexual ritual anew, avoids closure altogether, and thus avoids the heteronormative narrative drive

toward reproduction, resolution, and so forth—so all we are left with is BDSM's nonreproductive desires folding in upon themselves, much like the film's own approach to its historical referents, both intended (Euro-sleaze) and unintended (second-wave feminism). We are left, rather, with BDSM's aesthetic of time, described by Elizabeth Freeman as suspended "between the will to speed up and annihilate and the will to slow down and dilate"—a "clash of temporalities [that] ignites historical possibilities other than the ones frozen into the 'fate' of official histories."[97] Hence, *The Duke of Burgundy* offers a queer thought experiment in reimagining the intertwined history of lesbianism and feminism as a utopia where second-wave feminisms formed a stable ecosystem in their own right, rather than becoming imbalanced by the sex wars and so easily cleared away by the subsequent rise of male-dominated threads in queer theory. In so doing, the film may evoke the pathos of revisiting past political failures, but it also recalls a history of lesbian politics that could have unfolded differently—a brave new there-and-then whose nostalgic pull for many lesbians stands in marked contrast to our homonormative here-and-now.

NOTES

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1. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43. Emphasis added.
2. Matthew M. Douglas, *The Lives of Butterflies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), 165. Emphasis in original.
3. For a concise overview of BDSM terms, see Margot Weiss, "A Note on Terminology," in *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), vii–xii. I will also use the historically specific term "SM" in reference to pre-1990s practices that have since been more broadly retermed "BDSM" to include bondage/discipline and dominance/submission, not merely sadism/masochism. "BDSM" will be retained for discussing contemporary examples of such sexual practices and cultures, including Strickland's film.
4. Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 63.
5. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 62, 65, 84.
6. Kathy Rudy, "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 218–19.
7. Readers may criticize my interpretation of this British/Hungarian coproduction through the specific lens of U.S. sexual history, because the 1970s feminist and

lesbian movements unfolded unevenly in different global contexts. Yet, I find that the film's refusal to be set in a concrete time and place opens it to such broader interpretations, and this reading complements how 1970s American lesbians and feminists often looked abroad for cinematic texts that might better speak to their political ideals.

8. Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasizing Lesbians in Film* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 80–82, 87, 92, 111.
9. Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Immoral Tales: European Sex and Horror Movies, 1956–1984* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995).
10. David Ehrlich, "Director Peter Strickland Reveals How Making Movies is Like Having an S&M Relationship," *Time Out New York*, February 6, 2015, https://www.timeout.com/newyork/movies/director-peter-strickland-reveals-how-making-movies-is-like-having-an-s-m-relationship.
11. David Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video, and Exploitation Film Fandom* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 131.
12. Jamie Sexton, "Creeping Decay: Cult Soundtracks, Residual Media, and Digital Technologies," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 11–14.
13. David Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 37–44.
14. Chris Holmlund, "When is a Lesbian Not a Lesbian? The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film," *Camera Obscura* 9, nos. 1–2 (1991): 151, 153, 160.
15. Ian Olney, *Euro Horror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), Ch. 7, esp. 168–80.
16. Peter Strickland, "Six Films That Fed into *The Duke of Burgundy*," British Film Institute, May 7, 2015, http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/peter-strickland-six-films-fed-duke-burgundy. *Morgiana*'s titular Siamese cat, for example, is not only echoed in an unnamed cat that lives in Cynthia's villa, but the prominent cat's-eye POV shots in *Morgiana* also deprioritize human perception, thus echoing in *Duke*'s dehierarchization of human and nonhuman animals.
17. Adrian Mack, "*The Duke of Burgundy* Director Punctures Eroticism," *The Georgia Straight*, February 11, 2015, http://www.straight.com/movies/389626/duke-burgundy-director-punctures-eroticism.
18. Maria San Filippo, *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), Ch. 1.
19. Strickland, "Six Films." Übelmann's *Mano Destra* (1986), for example, consists of monochromatic tableaux of a female submissive, variously posed in restraints, while her Domme partner wordlessly moves around her; much as Beatty's early monochromatic shorts, *The Elegant Spanking* (1995) and *The Black Glove* (1997), render lesbian BDSM scenes through silent-film and noir aesthetics.
20. Peter Strickland, director commentary track, *The Duke of Burgundy*. (Los Angeles, CA: Shout! Factory, 2015). Blu-ray.
21. Graham Fuller, "Interview: Peter Strickland," *Film Comment*, January 16, 2015, https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-peter-strickland/.

22. Merryn Johns, "*The Duke of Burgundy*: An Erotic Thriller Has Mixed Appeal for Lesbians," *Curve*, January 21, 2015, http://www.curvemag.com/Reviews/The-Duke-of-Burgundy-315/.
23. Holmlund, "When is a Lesbian," 158, 164; Whatling, *Screen Dreams*, 60 (quoted), 66, 68, 69.
24. Fikri and Rushaa, "'The Duke of Burgundy' is the Lesbian BDSM Film You've Been Waiting For," *Autostraddle*, February 27, 2015, https://www.autostraddle.com/the-duke-of-burgundy-is-the-lesbian-bdsm-film-youve-been-waiting-for-278921/.
25. Jose Teodoro, "Of Human Bondage: Peter Strickland on *The Duke of Burgundy*," *Cinema Scope* 61 (2015): http://cinema-scope.com/features/human-bondage-peter-strickland-duke-burgundy/.
26. Strickland, director commentary track. This naturalization of BDSM means, for instance, that the Carpenter does not "out" one of Cynthia and Evelyn's neighbors when telling them about a recent bondage-bed order, because there is no "closet" around BDSM in the film's world.
27. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 211.
28. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 316–18, 339–40; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 210–12, 246–47.
29. Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 47.
30. Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 6 (quote), 240, 244.
31. Julie R. Enszer, "'How to Stop Choking to Death': Rethinking Lesbian Separatism as a Vibrant Political Theory and Feminist Practice," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 182.
32. Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (Summer 1978): 32.
33. Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 238.
34. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).
35. Shugar, *Separatism*, 44, 121–22 (quote), 181.
36. Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1979). On *The Wanderground*'s inspiration to lesbian separatists, see Catriona Sandilands, "Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature," *Organization and Environment* 15, no. 2 (2002): 132.
37. Greta Rensenbrink, "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism: Regenerating Women's Community through Virgin Birth in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 2 (2010): 289 (quote), 298 (quote), 300, 302, 313.
38. Frye, "Some Reflections," 38; Rudy, "Radical Feminism," 209.

39. Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1973), 172. Emphasis added.
40. Margaret Small, "Lesbianism and the Class Position of Women," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore, MD: Diana Press, 1975), 60.
41. Teodoro, "Of Human Bondage." Emphasis in original.
42. Rudy, "Radical Feminism," 198.
43. "The house was reclaimed from Evelyn in the final cut, and we assume they're co-owners or even squatters." Strickland, Deleted Scenes featurette, *The Duke of Burgundy*.
44. Patrick Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000), 151–52.
45. Staci Newmahr, *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 117.
46. Sue-Ellen Case, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," *Discourse* 11, no. 1 (1988): 59; Phelan, *Identity Politics*, 57; Califia, *Public Sex*, 187; Rudy, "Radical Feminism," 195.
47. Joan Nestle, "The Femme Question," in *The Persistent Desire: A Butch-Femme Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 142.
48. Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 264.
49. Case, "Towards," 56–57, 59, 60, 65; Nestle, "The Femme Question," 141; Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 21–23.
50. Califia, *Public Sex*, 188; Gayle Rubin, "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries," in *The Persistent Desire*, 471–72; Butler, "Imitation," 25; Ann Cvetkovich, "Recasting Receptivity: Femme Sexualities," in *Lesbian Erotics*, ed. Karla Jay (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 131, 134.
51. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 70.
52. Whatling, *Screen Dreams*, 73; Holmlund, "When is a Lesbian," 151.
53. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 153.
54. Diana E. H. Russell, "Sadomasochism: A Contra-Feminist Activity," in *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*, ed. Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E. H. Russell, and Susan Leigh Star (East Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Well, 1982), 179.
55. Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 37, 48–52.
56. Alex Warner, "Feminism Meets Fisting: Antipornography, Sadomasochism, and the Politics of Sex," in *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s*, ed. Carolyn Bronstein and Whitney Strub (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 251–55.
57. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1993), 188.
58. Warner, "Feminism Meets Fisting," 251 (quote), 255, 258–59.

59. Patrick Califia, "A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian S/M Community and Movement in San Francisco," in *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, 2nd ed., ed. Samois (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1982), 264.
60. Newmahr, *Playing*, 179–80.
61. Rev, "Am I a Top, a Dominant, or a Master?" *Dominant Guide*, January 7, 2013, http://dominantguide.com/272/am-i-a-top-a-dominant-or-a-master/. Also see Newmahr, *Playing*, 78–80.
62. Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 191.
63. Newmahr, *Playing*, 77.
64. Ibid., 112.
65. Ken Melvoin-Berg, "What EXACTLY is a 'Service Top' in the BDSM Kink Community?" *Your Tango*, November 4, 2016, http://www.yourtango.com/2016296278/what-it-means-to-be-kinky-bdsm-service-top; Rev, "What is Service Topping?" *Dominant Guide*, January 21, 2013, http://dominantguide.com/126/what-is-service-topping/; lunaKM, "Why You Should Know the Truth About Topping from the Bottom," *Submissive Guide*, April 12, 2013, http://www.submissiveguide.com/2013/04/why-you-should-know-the-truth-about-topping-from-the-bottom/; Rev, "'Topping from the Bottom'—A Phrase to Use with Care," *Dominant Guide*, September 22, 2014, http://dominantguide.com/2564/topping-from-the-bottom-a-phrase-to-use-with-care/.
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