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How to Cite: Vidal, B 2019 From Europe with Pride: Heritage, Community and Queer Moves. *Open Library of Humanities*, 5(1): 20, pp.1–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.386>

Published: 11 March 2019

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

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PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

From Europe with Pride: Heritage, Community and Queer Moves

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This paper takes *Pride* (2014) as a focal point for a discussion of a popular European cinema that looks back on key moments in the twentieth-century political past(s) through the re-enactment of queer scenarios of activism and resistance. My contention is that, as significant as identity politics is the notion of movement itself. *Pride's* intersectional retro-politics injects queer moves into heritage cinema, literally including musical moments of (camp) dance and song that dislodge characters from constraining social spaces and sedimented subjectivities. I look at *Pride* alongside other examples of new heritage filmmaking through their use of the movement-image (Deleuze) to retrieve the memory of political moments in history through queer moves. Encounters set to music underscore the road trip of a Swiss feminist journalist and her team of radio broadcasters adrift in the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in *Les Grandes Ondes (à l'ouest)/Longwave* (2013); out-of-step punk musical performances punctuate a queer coming-of-age girl narrative set in the 1980s in *El Calentito* (2005); dance scenes of queer female eroticism derail heteronormative trajectories of marriage and family in *Anni felici/Those Happy Years* (2013) and *La Belle saison/Summertime* (2015), two stories that intersect with the international women's liberation movement in the 1970s. These films suggest a European heritage cinema as interzone (Randall Halle, 2014). I explore the ways in which these films eschew nostalgia via the stress on movement, queer performativity and the possibility of (not yet formed) communities. By retrieving *Pride* in (and for) a broader European cinematic context, this paper makes a move towards a reading of the film's intersectional politics as a timely response to the incompleteness of the European social project of integration.

If orientations point us to the future, to what we are moving toward, then they also keep open the possibility of changing directions, of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can find hope in what goes astray. Looking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray.

—Sara Ahmed, 'Orientations. Toward a Queer Phenomenology' (*GLQ*, 2006)

The warm critical reception and instant cultural resonance garnered by the film *Pride* (Warchus, 2014) upon its opening in UK cinemas in September 2014¹ mark a shift in the way British cinema looks back at the past to engage with political histories. If the 1990s debates had read the British period film largely through the aesthetic and political vacuum of nostalgia, *Pride* actively places the political past within lived memory at the heart of its thematic concerns and in the centre of the frame. Not only this, but the story of solidarity between the London based 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' group and a Welsh rural mining community threatened by pit closures is enlivened through ample doses of comedy and popular music; *Pride* thus transformed a little-known episode in the archives of the mining strikes of 1984–5 into what Ben Walters, writing in *Sight and Sound*, called a 'feelgood treatise on intersectionality' (2014b). And yet, the kind of intersectionality this period's comedy celebrates is less obviously concerned with the complexity of queer social experience than with the figuration of such experience into spaces of encounter which, while not immediately demarcated as queer, prove ripe for potential occupation and remapping.

¹ A cursory look at the reviewers covering the film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2014 and in previews in advance of the UK release on 12 September 2014 gives a sense of critics' embrace of the film's narrative nimbleness and emotional authenticity, and its value as a popular film about history addressed to the present. Peter Bradshaw calls it 'an impassioned and lovable film'; Mark Kermode enthusiastically describes being won by its 'spine-tingling charm by the bucket-load'; David Calhoun calls the film 'truly lovely' and writes that while the film is 'defiantly mainstream' it is 'unashamed of shouting about the powers of solidarity, friendship and empathy [and] unafraid to admit that with sticking out your neck comes struggle and sorrow'. Nick Roddick notes the standing ovation at Cannes and argues that the film 'shows a real flair for wrapping character comedy, social history and repeated tugs at the heartstrings'; Robbie Collin notes that in the political climate at the time of the film 'Pride doesn't just feel worthwhile, but essential. It's essential because it's hopeful' (Bradshaw, 2014, Kermode, 2014, Calhoun, 2014, Roddick, 2014, Collin, 2014).

Key to *Pride's* difference is that identity politics are figured through *movement* itself. *Pride* opens and closes with scenes of demonstration. In the opening sequence, 20-year-old Joe (George McKay) struggles to join in his first pride march as a decisive step in his route to *becoming* a gay adult. Joe's first attempt at stepping into the flow of marchers sees him entangled in an awkward dance. Handed over one side of a placard, he nervously protests ('I do not want to be too visible'); when the placard is removed from him, he is left rooted to the ground, motionless against the flow of marchers. Cowed and disoriented, Joe steps out, looking for the safety of the sidewalk, but once there he is thrown off by a homophobic remark by a female passer-by, with which he mechanically agrees—a betrayal of habit. Both on the occupied pavement and on the retreat offered by the sidewalk, Joe feels out of step. Yet it is the improvised chant in support of the miners' strikes that prompts him to step back in, joining the brisk-paced marchers Mark (Ben Schnetzer) and Mike (Joseph Gilgun). In the opening credits, Mark has already been introduced as the opposite of Joe. Out and proud, Mark takes abuse in his stride, talks back, walks tall and leads the march fearlessly. Mark is unafraid of taking sudden changes in direction—out-of-the-blue he suggests that they rally behind the miners, much to the initial resistance of his comrade in arms. This forward-moving attitude will, little by little, rub off on Joe, up to the festive ending. In the joyous unity march that closes the film, Joe responds to Mike's good-humoured teasing with a 'shut up and march' while confidently lifting his side of the banner up, walking proof of how far he has come.

These two complementary scenes bookend a film in which the historical difficulty of social progress is trumped by irresistible figures of movement. The miners' strike that provides the backstory was sealed with political defeat, whereas the advancement of equal rights for LGBTQ individuals became substantially stunted in the 1980s. Undermined by both neoconservative policy (notably the infamous Section 28 of the *Local Government Act* passed under Margaret Thatcher in 1988, which prohibited councils from supporting LGBTQ citizens and fostering inclusive education programmes) and the social panic surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis, by the end of the 1980s the gay community in Britain was doubly vulnerable as a key victim of the epidemic and as target of social hate (Kollman and Waites, 2011).

However, immobilising defeat and loss get pushed to the margins of the narrative in *Pride*. Instead, figures of embodied visibility and physical movement (marching, dancing) retrieve the past as a space where progressive alliances may happen, often in unexpected places.

In what follows, I trace tropes of movement across fiction films in which, as it (quite literally) happens in *Pride's* opening scene, political consciousness follows from performative gestures in unlikely directions. By looking at *Pride* as part of a broader canvas of period films committed to a queer reading of late 20th-century political histories in Western Europe, I want to explore the implications of the words by Sara Ahmed invoked at the start of this article: looking back potentially means going astray—i.e. engaging in forms of deviation that can be seen as both politically meaningful and historically consequential. Writing from a phenomenological perspective, Ahmed explores sexual orientation as it manifests in the body's situatedness in larger spatial structures; bodies are shaped by sedimented histories, 'which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures' (2006: 552). Ahmed sees orientation as a matter of tendencies nurtured through the repetition of gestures; the continuous re-arranging the body in space, of following directions or being directed. The present holds nevertheless the potential of *changing* directions, which may affect the future: 'going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer' (2006: 554). This 'becoming queer' (as opposed to the event of 'coming out', conventionally addressed to a heterosexual audience and made meaningful in relation to heterosexual spaces) expresses a different relation to spatial and temporal coordinates, suggesting everyday deviations from tendencies sedimented through time, and from pre-determined postures and lines of movement given by the objects that surround us.

Such deviations are at odds with the narrative habits of a middlebrow heritage cinema in which, as I have claimed elsewhere (Vidal, 2016) contested histories return within consensual structures of memory. Robin Griffiths (2016) tellingly titles his study of British queer cinema after Derek Jarman 'a journey without direction'. Griffiths pessimistically reflects on the dissolution of 1980s queer cinema's deviant gestures

of political and aesthetic dissent in the face of a retrenchment into homonormative identity politics in newer British queer films such as *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011) or *Pride*. It is my contention, however, that through its tropes of movement *Pride* re-orientates the British heritage film—but this is not an isolated move. In two separate pieces published in *The Guardian* in 2014, one before and one after the general release of *Pride*, Ben Walters records a positive ‘backward turn’ in LGBTQ filmmaking populating the festival circuit. Walters reports gay histories further gaining visibility via three overlapping types of film: fictions with period settings (whether fact-based or not); documentaries on lost or obscured queer subjects; and on-screen depictions of older LGBTQ subjects, their personal stories and the persistence of those histories in the present tense (2014a, 2014c). This multi-layered temporal turn opens up an expanding archive of local histories and renewed possibilities for queer storytelling.

My analysis puts *Pride* in dialogue with other films that turn to the political past as a scenario ripe with (queer) possibilities. Though culturally apart, *Anni felici/Those Happy Years* (Luchetti, 2013), *La Belle saison/Summertime* (Corsini, 2015), *El Calentito* (Gutiérrez, 2003) and *Les Grandes Ondes (à l’ouest)/Longwave* (Baier, 2013) are invested in queer moves that alter the way we remember, as well as the usability of political memories in the present tense. Although this sample can be hardly considered representative of the diversity of LGBTQ period filmmaking at the popular end, as a group these films suggest a move towards a queer historical-spatial imaginary that requires interrogation outside the vertical histories of nation. In the sections that follow, I connect this ‘becoming queer’ with a move towards *becoming European*. Through figures of movement and encounter, I look for cinematic moments in which non-normative communities become visible through bodily re-alignments that queer the past.

Figures of Movement and Queer Encounters in *Pride*

More reformist than revolutionary, the heritage film has often evoked, through the topographical frames and structures of feeling of historical melodrama, the slowness in the political advancement of minority subjects (Pidduck, 2004: 16). For example, the narratives in *Belle* (Assante, 2013) and *Suffragette* (Gavron, 2015) remain

contained within national politics and the strictly normative frameworks of the law as a form of underscoring the struggle towards racial inclusivity and first-wave (white) feminism in British society. The ending of *Pride* follows the same path: the main characters from both groups triumphantly march over Westminster Bridge; a digital matte shot of the Palace of Westminster completes the view. These landmarks work as the pre-determined end point in the trajectory of the two collectives, the miners and the gay support group, towards full citizenship and recognition within the democratic institutions. Characters are captured in medium close-ups shot in slow motion and captioned with the real stories of the subjects they embody. This optimistic progression is coded along the lines of a familiar cinematic route marked for these dissident subjects to join in; a route towards the political centre of the nation already traced by the steps of the miners and brass band members in *Brassed Off* (Herman, 1996), or the female factory workers in *Made in Dagenham* (Cole, 2010), two working-class-oriented comedy dramas with which *Pride* bears comparison (Griffiths, 2016: 604). By virtue of its affiliation to a longer genre narrative and a well-defined British iconography and tone, *Pride* performs as a heritage film, containing any political dissonance within consensual memory.

In this regard, *Pride* suggests a return of the heritage film to the mode of the movement-image. My retrieving of Gilles Deleuze's concept in this context needs some qualification: after all, the action-oriented cinema with which the movement-image is associated would seem at odds with the potential of (micro-)movements that inform Ahmed's phenomenological approach to orientation, for orientations 'take time' (2006: 554). Contemporary approaches to the queer moving image have instead delved into the temporal interstices where queer experience is located to redefine notions of history and becoming outside and against a heteronormative episteme.² And yet, the relationship between these popular films and the archive of queer histories that inspires them can be most productively envisaged in the spatial

² Notable examples are Elizabeth Freeman (2010: 156) and Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt (2016: 259–304).

terms of the movement-image—albeit in variations that bend to the unpredictability of bodies in motion and unforeseen encounters.

While the intertwining of history and film after World War II is prompted by the crises of the time-image and the figuration of the cinematic subject as a disembodied seer, the films I discuss here invite spatial thinking in terms of actions with the potential to re-orient bodies (as we see in the opening scene of *Pride*). Marching and chanting, communal singing and dancing are expressive figures that re-enact past moments in history in the present tense. These figures of movement belong with what Deleuze calls the action-image *in its small form*: images where an action alters a situation, disrupting a mode of behaviour or *habitus* (1986: 160). The stress on *habit*, i.e. both in the sense of 'learnt mode of behaviour' and 'costume' explains the suitability of the small action-image to the minor historical film genres: the costume film and the period comedy of manners (1986: 163). These (often called) 'feminine genres' operate within restricted fields of action and intense affect concentrated in the small form of the action-image, as explored by Julianne Pidduck (2004: 17).³ Actions and situations are pre-determined by *habitus*, which new gestures have the potential to destabilise or subvert, creating what Marcia Landy calls, in her analysis of historical comedies, forms of counter-history (2015: 70–122). Thinking with the movement-image beyond its historically confined limits, in short, enables us to read the queer into heritage cinema via gestures and trajectories that may trouble, if not fully disown, prescribed orientations.

In one of several music-driven sequences in the film, Jonathan (Dominic West), the most veteran member of the London gay collective claims the space of the Union lodge in the mining town of Onllwyn as an inclusive dance floor, leading a diegetic musical number orchestrated to the sounds of classic disco track 'Shame, Shame, Shame' (Shirley and Company, 1975). Jonathan's energetic moves summon Onllwyn women of all ages to the dance floor, but his gregarious showmanship also proves irresistible to the dance-shy men from the mining community. The inclusive space

³ For an extensive consideration of the movement-image in relation to the contemporary period film, see Pidduck (2004).

created by the editing of the number, with a stress on reactions shots, shows this audience responding in different ways. Dislodged from their sedimented subjectivities the men finally, albeit timidly, partake in the musical moment by standing up and clapping to Jonathan (see **Figures 1–3**).

Likewise, another musical moment staged in the same space—a spontaneous women-led, join-in sing-along of the classic anthem *Bread and Roses*—makes for a



Figures 1–3: Men react to Jonathan's disco dancing. *Pride*, directed by Matthew Warchus, 2014. Frame enlargements from DVD, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015.

parallel, emotional demonstration of community pride that moves the visitors to tears. Summoning Richard Dyer's classic argument in 'Entertainment and Utopia', both these moments convey the expressive longing that underwrites entertainment as a celebration of utopia (2002a: 28), in contrast with narrative themes of group-based prejudice and class struggle. The staging of the numbers mostly stays at eye-level with the characters, never abstracting the human figure in the shot nor stylising spatial relations but focusing on the physicality of the performance and on its emotional impact on its diegetic audience. These musical moments carve a space separate from but still connected to the historical world recreated in the narrative, in which the differences between the two distinct communities can be momentarily transcended, even reconciled into a single historical trajectory. Unlike the ironic (yet plain straight) use of disco in the masculinity-in-crisis comedy drama *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) (Tincknell, 2006: 136), Jonathan's irrepressible dancing draws the viewer (both diegetic and extra-diegetic) into a suspended moment of sheer collective enjoyment, fulfilling the musical's utopian promise of emotional authenticity and togetherness.

The historicity of disco makes the sequence both sincere and clichéd, spontaneous and heavily connoted. In 1979, Dyer's idiosyncratic text 'In Defence of Disco' argued that disco had been dismissed by leftist cultural critics on the grounds of its mass-produced quality, its artificiality and inauthenticity (2002a: 151–4). Echoing Dyer, Gregory Woods and Tim Franks note the anachronistic use of disco in breakthrough queer-themed comedy dramas such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Elliott, 1994) and *In & Out* (Oz, 1997) to signify 'gayness' (2006: 160) while conspicuously replacing the unfilmable sex that disco stands for with the 'frenetic athleticism' of the dancing itself (2006: 163). In *Pride*, the anachronistic retake of disco jogs Jonathan's body memory beyond its 'natural' place and time ('God, I miss disco!' exclaims an out-of-breath Jonathan at the end of the number). This move is not exempt from contradictions. As Jaap Kooijman notes, after being an emblem of the short window between post-Stonewall gay liberation and the coming of AIDS, and a musical form whose political potential materialised after the AIDS pandemic, disco has evolved into a memory token of the appropriation of gay subcultures by the depoliticised and dequeered mainstream (2005: 264–25).

This change in the political uses of disco goes hand in hand with the contemporary emphasis on positive images in commercial film (I will return to this point later), visible in *Pride's* conversion of former radicalism into consensual memory. Jonathan embodies the memory of both queer activism and the catastrophe of AIDS (as a long-term surviving HIV-positive subject, 'patient #2', he is walking history), but he is also a disillusioned activist who has 'forgotten', as his partner Gethin gently reproaches him, the gay liberation movement. His dancing energises the straight community in Onllwyn and he inspires Siân (Jessica Gunning), a young housewife, to find a political voice of her own; in return, he himself is politically re-awakened by the plight of the Welsh miners. In the 1970s, disco needed to be defended against the Marxist critique of its capitalist pleasures (its full-bodied eroticism and romanticism as well as its excess materialism) in opposition to the political power of 'authentic people's music' (Dyer, 2002a: 152), such as workers' songs. In 2014, the unlikely coupling of both the working women's song *and* disco—both acting as shorthand for community—boldly re-activates the utopian qualities (and glaring contradictions, of which more later) of the musical number at the service of reparative cultural work undertaken by *Pride*.

Pride multiplies the motifs of movement in order to visualise emerging forms of kinship. Scenes of travelling and entering each other's spaces, conveyed through the physical back and forth between the Wales and London settings, and scenes of stepping onto the stage to address a community that is not yours place political agency in affective moments of displacement, encounter and mutual recognition. Gethin's (Andrew Scott) sub-plot sets in motion a form of dual homecoming/coming out as gay *and* Welsh, which demands he perform the inverse journey undertaken by Joe. Joe leaves behind a sheltered suburban existence and blood relations for his family of choice; his coming-of-age narrative (turning 21) is also a search for queer kinship. In contrast, Gethin needs to leave the safe space of the LGBTQ London bookshop 'Gay's the Word' (a key *lieu de mémoire* in the film's historical imagination) and venture down the road to his native small-town Wales. Once there, he is eased back in by newly found parental figures—both Cliff (Bill Nighy), a retired miner and closeted homosexual, and his long-term friend and neighbour Hefina (Imelda Staunton) spontaneously address Gethin as 'son' at different points—before

he can confront his estranged biological mother. The movement-image enables the imagining of class solidarity and queer kinship as part of the same continuum. Despite the use of biopic and docudrama elements (the final intertitles allude to the real histories of characters Mark Ashton, Jonathan Blake and Siân James) *Pride* goes against the grain of mainstream storytelling habits (the prioritising of exceptional individuals over social identities), operating rather as an inclusive social assemblage bigger than the sum of its individual journeys.

Disorientation and the Queer Interzone

This takes me to my second claim in this article: the queering of the past enables *Pride* to enter a broader configuration of communities and localities that we can call 'European'. Horizontal and decentred, *Pride's* queer moves open up lines of flight that spill over demarcated borders, towards cinema as *interzone*. With this term, Randall Halle addresses cinema as a social apparatus that can be grasped topographically, both the product of geopolitical fault lines and spatial forms of imagination that do not necessarily correspond with the historical boundaries of the nation-state; Halle defines the interzone as 'an ideational space, a sense of being somewhere that unites two places, if even only transitionally or temporally' (2014: 4–5). If Europe is never experienced as a totality, but as moments of transit between places—a network of roads, of bridges, of air paths—Europeanization may thus still contain the nation-state and yet, as Halle notes, 'unleash the potential of other forms of social organization ... the local, regional, global, but also subcultural, minoritarian, ethnic, migrant, diasporic, exiled, displaced, relocated, nongovernmental' (2014: 22). Such alternative social forms become visible through acts of storytelling.

In an atypical moment for pause in the middle of a film suffused with energy, the Onllwyn locals and the London activists share a pint as they listen to Cliff reminisce about the 'great Atlantic fault'. Drawing a line on the table with his finger, Cliff describes a rich coal seam that starts in Spain, comes to the surface in South Wales and continues for miles under the Atlantic Ocean to resurface again in Pennsylvania, as 'a seam so distinctive that any miner anywhere would recognise it', he adds. Cliff's story generates a low-key moment of political pedagogy nevertheless infused with class pride. This invisible thread of commonality and pride is also retrospectively

queer, since Cliff will disclose his true sexual orientation to Hefina in the final act. This disclosure does not fundamentally alter their relationship (movingly, she had known all along) but reveals to the spectator another invisible fault joining both communities. Both a material reality and a topographical index, the Atlantic fault in Cliff's story is simultaneously a transparent metaphor for class unity across national borders and a synecdoche for the film as a queer interzone (see **Figure 4**).

The flip side to the interzone's representational vividness is its more intangible institutional workings. Contemporary queer cinema made in Europe is produced and circulated through what Halle refers to as an evolving institutional apparatus geared towards the production of social imaginaries; thus, supranational aids to production, distribution and exhibition contribute to create a discourse of community that is both smaller and bigger than the nation (2014: 35–43). Developed as a French/British financial co-production, *Pride* was the winner of the 2014 Queer Palm at the Director's Fortnight sidebar of the Cannes Film Festival over stylistically bolder yet more divisive art-cinema candidates such as Xavier Dolan's *Mommy* or Bertrand Bonello's *Saint Laurent*. *Pride* was subsequently granted close to one million Euros in distribution aids via the newly set up 2014–2020 Creative Europe credit scheme, in order to help it reach screens across a wide number of European territories (Clugston, 2017).⁴ Such



Figure 4: 'The Great Atlantic Fault'. *Pride*. Frame enlargement, DVD, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015.

⁴ These included Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and Slovakia (Creative Europe, 2015) and MEDIA Films Database (2015).

broad circulation is in line with the continuous support by the European MEDIA programme, of which Creative Europe is the newest reconfiguration, to a cinema with a focus on themes of history and memory with the potential to cross over borders. As Mariana Liz remarks with regard to the creation of a Europe-oriented heritage cinema, popular films approach alternative political narratives through both self-questioning and a desire for universality, while rescaling national histories to the personal, to the transnational and to the modes of quality cinema favoured by these supranational institutions—the political comedy *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Becker, 2003) being but one example of the success of this model (2016: 102–3), a canny combination of political nostalgia with a critique of territorial borders as artificial dividers within larger communities. In this light, *Pride's* circulation similarly shows the political economy of European film at work, backed as it is by the cosmopolitan festival network and supranational funders that favour the retreat of queer subject matter into the quality pleasures and consensual structures of memory that are part and parcel of the heritage film. Conversely, when queer heritage fictions such as *Pride* dramatise the archive, they effectively spatialise it as a series of queer interzones—a performative contact space that is visualised as benign and open-ended. In this respect, this is a cinema that works towards Europeanization, in which none of the historical individual trajectories towards full citizenship rights for women, for workers, or for queers, can complete itself on its own, but can aspire to do so in the spaces created by encounters that undo vertical (national) forms of organization.

This entanglement becomes even more visible when we trace any one of these trajectories across several films. While *Pride* relishes the presentation of the Welsh mining village as a distinctively matriarchal society, it gives short shrift to its mobile lesbian characters. Conversely, other movement-suffused comedies align the spectator with queer derailments from straight feminine trajectories. *Those Happy Years*, *Summertime* and the retro punk comedy *El Calentito* return to the recent past through the staging of encounters that interrupt heterosexual *habitus*—going back to Deleuze's small action image, the bodies shaped by the costumes and dominant modes of behaviour that are indices of the historical past (1986: 163). In these films, women are pushed into motion, momentarily losing their bearings; these moments

are vividly and ephemerally set to music, or created in the space of a song. In *Those Happy Years*, put-upon housewife Serena (Micaela Ramazzotti), the wife of self-centred artist Guido (Kim Rossi Stuart) leaves her philandering husband behind and heads for a feminist summer camp in the French region of Camargue with their two children. There she starts an affair with sophisticated German gallerist Helke (Martina Gedeck); as the women circle around each other in swims and walks on the beach, or bounce in an all-women dancing party to the female rock sounds of Suzi Quatro's 'Devil Gate Drive' (1974), their blooming romance is naively captured by Serena's son Dario on his Super 8 camera (see **Figures 5–6**).



Figures 5–6: Helke and Serena, as seen/remembered by Dario. *Those Happy Years*, directed by Daniele Luchetti, 2013. Frame enlargements from DVD *Anni felici*, 01 Distribution Rai Cinema, 2014.

Framed in the heterosexist couple's crisis plot, the encounter between Serena and Helke becomes a trigger for predictable marital drama in 1970s Italian society; while Guido feels entitled to multiple sexual trysts with female models, the discovery of Serena's feelings for Helke throws him into disarray. However, the poignancy of Helke and Serena's dalliance lies not in its relative ability to challenge the film's normative views on family life, nor in its chance for durability, but in its very contingency. Ahmed states:

If the sexual involves the contingency of bodies coming into contact with other bodies, then sexual disorientation slides quickly into social disorientation, as a disorientation of how things are arranged. The effects are indeed uncanny; what is familiar ... becomes rather strange (2006: 565).

Guido teaches his sculpture students about the imaginary line that balances the human figure from head to heel; 'the foothold that gives balance to the figure shifts a few millimetres, and the history of art changes', he tells his class while his eyes well up with tears. The film's embodied metaphors point at such tiny but momentous shifts; the images haphazardly captured by Dario on his holiday film show female bodies in the feminist camp mingling in tight, canted and deframed compositions while they swim, walk or dance together. Serena's attachment to Helke will pass, but her momentary disorientation throws domestic life as she knew it off balance. The queer encounter is an exercise in rebalancing biased social structures; the heterosexual couple carries on, but their marriage dynamics will now be tinted with strangeness.

In *Summertime*, Parisian feminist activist Carole (Cécile de France) takes a southwest-bound train from Paris following her lover Delphine (Izïa Higelin) who's been summoned home to resume her closeted existence at her parents' farm after her father becomes paralysed by a stroke. While at the farm, Carole restrains from overly showing her desire for Delphine and tries to adapt to the punishing work rhythms in order to remain close to her lover. However, her presence also queers this rural space. In an evening break from labour, Carole brings out her turntable and invites Delphine's mother Monique (Noémie Lvovsky) to dance to the lively sounds of Joe Dassin's comic song 'Fais-moi de l'électricité' (1973). A visibly delighted Delphine

looks on her mother and her lover enjoying their relaxed interaction. The spicy comic lyrics of the song implicitly allude to Delphine and Carole's sexual liaison, yet this musical interlude draws Monique into the bond between the two young women, in a brief moment of leisure and coming together. Finally, *El Calentito* recycles (and feminises) punk through nostalgia, using musical moments to re-orient female bodies, sometimes in a comically blatant way. In *El Calentito*, middle-class, well-behaved teen Sara (Verónica Sánchez) becomes entangled with the all-girl punk band Las Siux. The opening sequence uses a jerky zoom shot to propel Sara inwards into a world of queer sensations that hits her as soon as she enters the underground bar *El Calentito* ('The Hot Zone'), where she goes on a tentative heterosexual first date. Disorientation is visually conveyed by figuring the past as a threshold experienced through motion; initially jolted by its strangeness, the sensual friction of the encounter re-orient the female body in the most literal sense.

The memory of the transnational 1970s women's liberation movement and of the spreading of the punk scene outside Britain in the early 1980s (in this case, to the post-dictatorship Madrid *movida*) belong to two different political histories that lend themselves to spatial remapping. They act as interzones where sensuous encounters enable lines of flight from heterosexual narratives. Ahmed's consideration of lesbian desire not in static identitarian terms, but as a 'space for action, a way to extend differently into space through tending toward "other women"' (2006: 564) allows us to see the movement-image in action. Lesbian desires, according to Ahmed, 'create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them' (2006: 564). Such 'comings and goings', through embodied practices and modes of being, open themselves up to the visual slippage between gazes and subjective positions. These films run the gamut of feminine/feminist/queer, oscillating between the objectification of women, their empowerment through the regaining of spatial control and their becoming queer through the experience of unexpected encounters. *Those Happy Years*, *Summertime* and *El Calentito* have in common the potential to trouble the legibility of identities they ostensibly memorialise.

Is Heritage Still Hospitable to Queers?

In an essay entitled 'Homosexuality and Heritage', Dyer plunges into the vast archive of the European heritage film comparatively, noting the many queer visual attractions (particularly sartorial ones) afforded by a genre 'notably hospitable to homosexual subject matter' (2002b: 205). The heritage film, especially of the costume melodrama variety, allows us to immerse ourselves in the sensuous pleasures of period detail in stories that put gay subjects back in history, if oftentimes via traumatic dramas of political repression and personal loss. This contradiction defines a genre that, Dyer claims, ultimately produces 'the utopian pleasure of a vision of integration even in homophobic societies of the past' (2002b: 224). The post-millennial queer heritage film largely fits this axiom still, if the success of *Call Me by Your Name* (Guadagnino, 2017) is anything to go by. However, the turn to comedy in a historical cinema dominated by the small forms of the action image (as per the figures of movement examined so far) coincides with the shift in the conversation towards the ubiquity of positive images of gays and lesbians in mainstream cinema since the mid-1990s (e.g. Woods, 2006; Jennings, 2006). Scholars concerned with LGBTQ cinema and the politics of the popular show caution in the face of the assimilationist logic of post-AIDS hypervisibility (e.g. Pidduck, 2003, 2011). In the last two decades popular culture has met the desire for representation, but the newly gained visibility of queers in film and media may have come at the cost of relinquishing the public spaces of same-sex desire by enfolding them back into the private. This retreat into homonormativity is uninterested in challenging dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, and instead seeks to create apolitical gay constituencies within cultures that integrates the gay subject through consumption (cf. Duggan, 2002). Thus, the celebration of dissident sexual cultures in film products regulated by neoliberal visual economies has manifold implications, including the dissolution of radical histories of queer cinema at a national level (Griffiths, 2016), or the co-optation of histories of queer activism by the same neoliberal global systems responsible for the oppression of queers—something highlighted by the highly critical reception granted to the hyper-mainstream *Stonewall* (Emmerich, 2015) by commentators engaged with LGBTQ rights (see Kies and West III, 2017). As Pidduck argues, non-

normative genders and sexualities have increasingly become a convenient plot device to reanimate tired genres—such as the family melodrama—while difference is safely contained in films that aim at being enjoyed by all audiences (2011: 22). *Those Happy Years* cannily reflects on the consumption of images of the past—including images with political and dissident value—as nostalgia by having young Dario earn money from the sale of his Super 8 footage of the feminist camp to Kodak, for recycling into TV advertisement of their photographic products. The memory images of women and children living together in the camp thus become depoliticised, and reduced to mere holiday home movies; these are images recalled by the adult Dario, but there is a knowing disjunction between what the film shows (the nascent attachment between Serena and Helke during their stay at the camp) and what the film tells (the adult narrator's voiceover glosses over this attachment). This plot twist encloses *Those Happy Years* into a neat but problematic loop: from the personal-as-political, to the political-as-capital; the images of same-sex solidarity and desire gleaned by the young Dario at the camp thus become readily appropriable as commercial (closeted) nostalgia—a charge that could be extended to *Those Happy Years* itself.

Are we then in the domain of what Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover have identified as the queer middlebrow? Symptomatic of the new widespread reach of queer film production, queer middlebrow films promise accessible images and (often) identitarian narratives, facilitating 'apparently increased visibility and cultural capital for LGBT people [while narrowing] the frame of who is represented and what can be seen' (2016: 206). Such films simultaneously mobilise both conservative and liberal politics in their focus on serious social issues, effecting a shift from a radical ethics to what the authors call 'a liberal and cosmopolitan vision of queer worldliness' (2016: 207). Unsurprisingly, this critique somewhat returns to the longstanding tension between progressive histories and regressive form noted by Dyer, which continues to persist, particularly around the political issue of the representability of queer sex. *Summertime* makes a point of showing Carole and Delphine enjoying sex in the breaks and in-between spaces of women's rights activism at first, and then of life at the farm. The visual presentation of their intimacy is tasteful and contained and it was easily adopted as a commercial image: both the French and UK posters feature

the main leads, star De France and emerging talent Higelin, in close-up, naked, locked in a sensuous embrace in natural settings. These publicity materials allude to the universality of the love story while maximising the appeal of the white femme couple as an erotic draw for a broad audience, freezing the characters into a static and ultimately consumable picture of young lesbian love (see **Figure 7**).

The selection of *Summertime* as the closing film of the 2013 British Film Institute Flare (i.e. LGBTQ) festival is thus, symptomatic: paraphrasing Antoine Damiens, it attests to the ways in which increasingly queer festivals affiliated to cinephile institutions attempt to serve a broader constituency than their primary LGBTQ audiences (Damiens, 2018: 2). By its very nature as a space for the negotiation between competing representations of history towards consensual images and narratives, the queer heritage film operates, as much queer cinema does, at the intersection of various circuits of consumption and diverse regimes of cultural valuation (Damiens, 2018: 6).

It is this in-between position that makes queer cinema operate as an interzone, allowing for deviant performances of community, family and the couple to become



Figure 7: UK poster for *Summertime*, directed by Catherine Corsini, 2015. Curzon Artificial Eye, <https://www.curzonartificialeye.com/summertime/>.

visible, even if only as flashes of historical possibility. *Summertime* curtails the narrative's utopian potential with an ending that reiterates the difficulty of queer kinship: Delphine will need to leave both Monique (that is, her rural family life) and Carole (her politicised lifestyle and urban freedom) behind, each of them unable to accept that Delphine also needs the world that the other one brings with her. Whereas the visual celebration of lesbian love (and the depiction of queer sex onscreen) in alignment with 1970s women's activism shows the extent to which LGBTQ stories are enriching and advancing the political heritage film in Europe, it is the earlier sequence that isolates the three characters in a moment of dancing that may be the more significant queer move. The spontaneous dance sequence aims towards the utopia of being together; three women aligning their bodies and imagining a design for living not yet visible or possible across class, age and family divides (see **Figure 8**). Evoking once more the story about the Atlantic fault narrated by Cliff in *Pride*, the queer interzone may be identified as a mode of kinship in the subjunctive, a 'tentative communication that can double space and shift time, bind distant places, and give separated individuals a sense of possible community' (Halle, 2014: 13).

Going Astray and Reading Queerly

If the consideration of film as a queer interzone opens up spaces for encounters across diverse localities, it also requires that we think beyond the limitations of a politics of visibility, and into the possibility of reading the past *queerly*, in order to expand the political frame. Sudeep Dasgupta and Mireille Rosello have argued



Figure 8: Happy Together: Carole and Monique entangled in dance, watched by Delphine. *Summertime*. Frame enlargement from DVD Curzon Artificial Eye, 2016.

in relation to the possibility of thinking about Europe in queer terms that 'all normativity ... involves some structural framing of the threat posed by encounters ... Encounters, whether personal, world-historical, intellectual, aesthetic, or mundane and accidental threaten some notion of stability of those doing the encountering' (2014: 8). The encounter, like the interzone, is a performative spatial figure, not a stable location, which opens up to the possibility of reorienting bodies and their histories. The originality of *Pride* lies not in simply combining imaginaries of political struggle that happen to intersect at a particular point in time: it uses this encounter to expand the frame for participatory politics from the front line to the home front. Marching and dancing together redefine alliances and energise bodies politically; significantly, these gestures stand for the picketing that we barely glimpse in the film.

'Reading queerly' means reading for the oblique and the deviant detail, reading for ways in which our relation to the histories portrayed onscreen can be redefined outside narrative gestures predetermined by *habitus*. Returning to Ahmed, objects and bodies give away the unfinished quality of the past re-enacted in film, and retro-feed our notions of the future. I would like to unpack this idea through one last example, *Les Grandes Ondes (à l'ouest)* or, *Longwave*, as it was retitled for international distribution. This French, Swiss and Portuguese co-production deals with the comic adventures of a team of Swiss radio journalists from the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SSR, Société Suisse de Radiodiffusion) sent to Portugal under the pretence of doing a report on the public works enabled by Swiss investment in the Southern European country. This fictional narrative deploys familiar figures of movement to dislodge characters from spatial certainties. The West-ward van trip, also deployed in *Pride*, is one such figure (see **Figures 9–12**); it knowingly draws on overfamiliar coordinates of the modern versus the non-modern and, playing on the disparity of shot scales and viewpoints, it draws comic mileage from the juxtaposition of the false mastery of cartography with the experience of physical displacement on the road.

For the metropolitan queer activists, the road trip to Wales works as a frontier, an act of crossing into another, and implicitly less civilised, country. In *Longwave*,



Figures 9–10: On the Road. *Pride*, Frame enlargements from DVD, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015.

the Swiss radio journalists and their sidekick, the impassive sound engineer, take to the road across Portugal, a country they perceive as exotic (a public service announcement by the +SSR calls it a 'less developed people than us, but nevertheless charming, *'sympathique'*). Political engagement, as imagined by these comedies, is never straight, but rather enabled by accident and chance: in *Pride*, in order to extend their solidarity to another oppressed group bypassing the union's channels of communication, the London activists randomly choose a place on the map. In *Longwave*, Julie (Valérie Donzelli) and Cauvin (Michel Vuillermoz) alongside Bob, the sound engineer (Patrick Lapp) descend on Portugal with the mission to gather evidence of social progress resulting from the wealthier country's generous sponsorship. They find none. It is however April 1974, and the Swiss reporters land in the middle of a revolution whose early signs, big and small (e.g. briefcases being passed on under the table in local eating places, a tank in the middle of the road), they comically miss.



Figures 11–12: On the Road. *Longwave*, directed by Lionel Baier, 2013. Frame enlargements from DVD *Les Grandes Ondes (à l'ouest)*, Blaq Out, 2014.

Swiss filmmaker Lionel Baier describes *Longwave* as the second instalment of a projected tetralogy set on the four cardinal points of Europe, following his earlier feature *Comme des voleurs (à l'est)* (*Stealth*, 2006), which featured gay identity themes (not present in *Longwave*) in a plot involving a road trip across Poland. Baier⁵ notes that the tetralogy is planned as a 'sort of affective cartography of the relations between Europeans' (Baier, 2013a; translation mine), which he expects to continue with features set in the North (Scotland) and in the South (Italy) which, depending on the political situation, 'will be made as comedies, drama or documentaries' (Baier, 2013a). The ongoing nature of this project instantly shifts the national frame of reference: *Longwave's* use of an event belonging to the political past—more specifically, the Carnation Revolution, amply memorialised

⁵ Baier's previous work includes including the gay pride documentary *La Parade (notre histoire)* (2002), and the fiction features *Garçon stupide* (2004) and *Stealth*, all of which have been programmed in LGBTQ film festivals and received coverage by LGBTQ outlets.

in Portuguese culture, but nearly forgotten elsewhere in Europe—discards the possibility of authenticity, focusing instead on the potential of objects, images and sounds to forge an idea of community across borders. The opening shot slowly zooms in on a faded photograph of the trio formed by Julie, Cauvin and Bob, alongside their young Portuguese interpreter Pelé (Francisco Belard), posing in front of their Volkswagen Kombi van. A voiceover states that souvenirs are like stars in the night, and each of them tells a story, as each picture tells a legend. Whereas the photograph and the voiceover work as conventional time markers to transport the spectator into the past, the past has accrued the sheen of folktales and unfolds in the realm of myth (see **Figure 13**).

Not only does the photographic evidence ask to be read as ‘legend’ (cf. Portmann, 2014); the plot engages in a number of ostensible diversions and dislocations. Cauvin is a veteran reporter who suffers from memory loss; he keeps mangling places and times when recalling his exploits and baffling the locals with his comic misuse of the Portuguese language in speeches rife with malapropisms; Pelé, on his part, is a native informant with a Marseilles accent, but this is due to his love for the films of Marcel Pagnol rather than first-hand knowledge of Southern France. Key to the comedy tone is the extensive use of George Gershwin’s music in the soundtrack. In particular, extracts from his opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935) incongruously provide the score for a final dance number in which Julie accidentally leads a band of ebullient revolutionaries (male and female, white and non-white, dressed in colourful 1970s fashions) against the Salazar



Figure 13: ‘Each photograph tells a legend’. Opening shot. *Longwave*. Frame enlargement from DVD *Les Grandes Ondes (à l’ouest)*, Blaq Out, 2014.

regime's clad-in-black security forces, in an extended musical sequence featuring a dance confrontation between the two groups (see **Figure 14**).

In *Longwave* the revolution comes into being in a third act in which the 'characters come together and look in the same direction—it is then that, suddenly, they see the revolution' (Baier, 2013b; translation mine); this staging of the Carnation Revolution is as naïve in style as it is awry in intention. Disengaged from national alignments, the revolution unfolds as an act of imagination and erotic liberation consummated through a night of group sex involving Julie, the older Bob, the younger Pelé and a set of assorted Portuguese revolutionaries. The comic rendering of local political history once more functions as an interzone, through a revolutionary imagination that is inclusive and distinctively queer (see **Figure 15**). The film's playfulness is not



Figure 14: Dancing through the revolution. *Longwave*. Frame enlargement from DVD *Les Grandes Ondes (à l'ouest)*, Blaq Out, 2014.



Figure 15: A queer revolutionary imagination. *Longwave*. Frame enlargement from DVD *Les Grandes Ondes (à l'ouest)*, Blaq Out, 2014.

directed to the pedagogic fixation of the past but to the imagination of yet unformed communities. In its own, modest way, *Longwave's* detour through the past wants to reorient its spectators to the future.

Taking *Pride* as a springboard, I have looked at the ways in which a heritage cinema of the small action-image is invested in both the retrieval of queer histories, and a queer imagination of the past in which 'becoming queer' can be aligned with 'becoming European'. These and other films inject a sense of movement into the heritage film, providing an alternative to what Rob Stone and Paul Cooke have identified as a 'slow heritage cinema' in which spectatorial feelings of melancholy and nostalgia accrue distinctively uncanny contours, preventing the spectator from 'coming home' to the past (Stone and Cooke, 2015). While driven by a critique of the nation-building project often associated with the historical film, in slow heritage films the nation still operates as main frame of reference. Conversely, the return to the movement-image can be productively traced in other films with an investment in uniting different geopolitical coordinates through lines of action and orientation, visible and invisible. Despite its contradictions and limitations of this mode of cinema (notably manifest in the ambivalence with which *Those Happy Years* and *Summertime* envision queer interzones) there is urgency to this impulse to visualise the political past as a site of encounter and emergence of possible communities at a moment in which Europe becomes once more a contested terrain between competing images. The stress on borders over roads, markets over communities, and detention over mobility prompted by the crackdown on movement (of migrants, of women, of ethnic minorities and of sexual dissidents, as the ban on Pride celebrations in Turkey at the time of writing attests) are a reminder of the incompleteness of Europe as a utopian political and social project.

By placing *Pride* in a European perspective, I have tried to identify and problematise the return of queer histories as consensual memory. This critical move is nonetheless prompted by the desire to look at the ways queer popular cinema speaks of creative and institutional gestures towards a Europeanised imagination, binding spectators in different localities. If the interzone emerges, as proposed by Halle, as a topographical designator for an evolving European cinematic apparatus, that is, a set

of production, social and textual relations geared towards the performative process of community formation (2014: 9), the queer moves of the heritage film may be one of the most dynamic steps yet towards the revitalization of the very idea of European cinema.

Acknowledgements

This article has been written in the context of the research project CSO2017-85290-P, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Vidal, B 2019 From Europe with Pride: Heritage, Community and Queer Moves. *Open Library of Humanities*, 5(1): 20, pp.1–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.386>

Published: 11 March 2019

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