Unruly Women, Queer Objects: Analysing Object Conduct in Todd Haynes’ Carol (2015)

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Abstract

My thesis undertakes an analysis of object conduct - the way individuals socially and personally engage with matter - in Todd Haynes’ *Carol* (2015), a film about a clandestine lesbian relationship in 1950’s America. Through the use of a combination of material cultures theory and queer theory, my thesis performs a close reading of the social and personal interactions that emerge from gloves and cameras in the film. Furthermore, my argument traces how the homosexual and heterosexual relationships between the characters are created, maintained, made durable or tenuous through the objects in the film. Feminist film theory and queer feminist theory provide a secondary framework to consider the temporal nuances of a film made in the present but set in the past.

I locate the status of objects as more than just things, but rather multivalent transfer points, and seek to further Scott Herrings inquiry: what happens when everyday objects become deviant? This multi-disciplinary approach allows my thesis to consider the destabilizing effects of non-normative object usage has on normative categories of culture. Ultimately, my thesis shows the disruptive effect a lesbian relationship - made and maintained through gloves and a camera - can have on the patriarchal and heteronormative hegemonies of 1950’s America.

Keywords: Scott Herring, material cultures, queer theory, *Carol*, film, gloves, cameras.
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Chapter One

Carol steps out of her car and struts across the street. She is dressed in pale golden furs, crimson silk gloves and a matching scarf. She is a cold war femme and the big bad wolf: a historically and sartorially coded predatory lesbian. Every flounce and gesture, every luxurious accessory is artfully crafted and ever so slightly unruly. She is dangerous, rebellious and utterly defiant: a woman who refuses to play by the rules. Therese watches her through a window, waiting for her to arrive for the first meeting of their clandestine relationship. Todd Haynes’ Carol (2015) is set in 1950’s New York and tells the story of a forbidden romance between Therese, an aspiring young photographer, and Carol, a sophisticated but discontented older woman. Carol is going through an acrimonious divorce with her jealous ex-husband, Harge, and his escalating attempts to control his ex-wife repeatedly place the women’s covert relationship in jeopardy. Carol is a “‘nostalgia film’ … which sets out to recapture all the atmospheric and stylistic peculiarities of … [a] moment of the past.” The film is adapted from Patricia Highsmith’s novel The Price of Salt (1952), which was in turn informed by Highsmith’s own lived experience of loving women in 1950’s America.

As Jean-Luc Godard said of Hitchcock, what we remember of his films are not their plots but “a glass of milk, a handbag, a string of pearls.” Similarly, after watching Carol for the first time, the things that stood out most were the material objects in the film. Objects such as a camera, a hairbrush, a telephone and especially, a pair of gloves remained stuck in my head in a way not unlike Hitchcock’s films, where “simple, quotidian objects float free from their narrative and linger in collective memory.” Undoubtedly, the persistence of objects in my mind after the film was tied to the high level of attention to detail in the costume and set design of Carol, including the objects that populate the mise-en-scène of the film. In any case, something is clearly happening with objects in Carol.

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1 Patricia White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” Film Quarterly 69, no. 2 (2015), 10 &15.
As Foucault states of sexuality, it “appears to be an especially dense transfer point for the relations of power.”\(^5\) Furthermore, Foucault claims, it is “endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin for the most varied strategies.”\(^6\) This claim is the starting point for my argument. However, I am interested not only in the ways that sexuality and the multivalence of its manoeuvres can be used tactically, and its ability to function as a linchpin; I am also interested in how this thinking could extend to the model of object conduct that I use in my thesis. Could it be that an object could be a transfer point, not necessarily of power, but of social relations? Can objects be linchpins or instruments? Can objects be used tactically, or have multivalent uses? And—not to stray too far from Foucault—how might an object as a transfer point be tied up with sexuality as a transfer point, where both are mutually co-implicated in the making of relations?

In order to analyse the distinctive ways that objects operate in Carol, I required a framework of theories that performed several functions. Firstly, I needed something to help me theorise the social functions of objects, but I also required secondary frameworks that allowed me to address the queerness of these objects and the position of material objects in film rather than in real life. Finally, my argument required theory that considers the particular temporal aspects of Carol, where the objects are called upon to both locate the film in a distinctive past, but also to suture it to a very contemporary present.

**Material Cultures**

I began my research into material cultures with Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s *The World of Goods: Towards and Anthropology of Consumption* (1996), which combines anthropology and economics to examine the social dynamics of consumer goods. Douglas and Isherwood argue that “instead of supposing that goods are primarily needed for subsistence plus competitive display, let us assume they are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture.”\(^7\) Moreover, Douglas and Isherwood argue that “goods

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have another important use, they make and maintain social relationships.” They argue that goods play a role in building relationships due to “a system of reciprocal rituals” in the exchange of consumers goods; “in being offered, accepted or refused, [goods] either reinforce or undermine existing [social] boundaries.” A key point of consideration in my thesis is their assertion that “goods are neutral, their uses social: they can act as bridges or fences.” Furthermore, in Shopping, Place and Identity (1998), Daniel Miller et. al. argue that “objects are social relations made durable” and that consumer objects “both embody social relations and extend them in new directions.” My thesis examines the way that objects in Carol make and maintain relationships. Additionally, my thesis attempts to build on the way goods acts as bridges and fences between characters in the film by looking at the multivalence of objects: the way that one object can bridge one relationship, whilst building fences in another.

Two key texts in my theoretical framework are Scott Herring’s The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern America (2014) and “Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood” (2011). These two texts take an interdisciplinary approach to investigating queer objecthood by examining hoarding as an extreme site of non-normative material relations. My argument uses his concept of “object conduct: the manner by which individuals socially and personally engage with matter” as a key concept for investigating objects in Carol. Herring’s work explores “how everyday objects go strange and suspicious in the wake of modern materiality.” Moreover, it examines how the “atypical use of things” can incite unease about objects themselves, as well as the individuals who use them. By examining Therese and Carol’s queer object conduct, I locate the “perverse subject-object relations that disorient, destabilize, circumvent or reimagine what counts for polite material

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8 Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption, 60.
13 Miller, et. al. Shopping, Place and Identity, 17.
15 Scott Herring, The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern America, 4.
16 Herring, The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern America, 3.
usage.” My thesis seeks to further Herring’s inquiry: what happens when object relations become deviant? It poses the same question to a filmic representation of object conduct that is less extreme and less abject than hoarding, but nonetheless still unquestionably coded as deviant within its own historical context.

In my thesis, I consider the ways the objects not only make durable, but also make tenuous different relationships between characters in Carol. Considering the above literature, my argument locates the status of objects as more than just things. They become transfer points, bridges, fences, pivots or hinges, agents in their own right with multivalent potential. I seek to extend Douglas and Isherwood’s metaphor of “bridges or fences,” to consider the social functions that objects are capable of performing. I posit that objects can also work like fishing lines, or lures, as a method of beginning a seduction or a social relationship more generally. Additionally, I speculate that objects such as photographs or tape recorders can act to cage people, insofar as they can be used as a form of evidence. Objects working as evidence can function to subject individuals to interventions, whether they be legal, medical or social. By extending this metaphor, I seek to make a modest contribution to furthering ways of thinking about material cultures.

Queering Objects

Within Carol, the status of objects (and the way they are used by characters) cannot always be read in a straight or a straight forward manner. The meanings of the objects examined within this thesis frequently shift away from the meaning initially ascribed to them. To further my examination of the way objects can perform these multivalent and unexpected torques and pivots, I use Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (2006) to build upon Scott Herring’s approach to non-normative object use. Ahmed’s text assists my thesis to consider how the most normative of everyday objects become queer. I use the term queer in my argument not only to describe non-heteronormative sexuality, but also other non-normative behaviours, in particular characters’ relations with and orientations to material objects.

Ahmed states that “disorientation may begin with the strangeness of familiar objects.”\(^{19}\) When considering what makes an object queer, Ahmed argues that “things become queer precisely where bodies are touched by objects,”\(^{20}\) a helpful way to think about how objects such as gloves, which come into close contact with hands, can become queer. That is, a person’s object conduct with a glove becomes normative or non-normative depending upon how and when they come into contact with bodies.

Sara Ahmed also considers the ability of queerness and queer object conduct to “disturb the order of things,”\(^{21}\) that is on object or person’s ability to unsettle the perceived naturalness of the status-quo. As she states: “the disorientations of queer… can contest not only heteronormative assumptions, but also social conventions and orthodoxies in general.”\(^{22}\) In the filmic world of *Carol*, post-war America, the use of material objects to “make and maintain”\(^{23}\) a homosexual relationship profoundly queers the role of these material objects and destabilizes the cultures that they signify.

**Queer Film Theory**

In its analysis of object conduct in *Carol*, my thesis requires a theoretical network to investigate the status of objects, but also secondary frameworks to attend to their dual status: existing in past and present actuality, but also doubled within the filmic world of *Carol*. My thesis employs queer film theory as a secondary framework to perform the necessary task of bridging the gap between the function of material cultures in actuality, and the deployment of material goods in the mise-en-scène of the film to create and transmit narrative fantasy to the viewer.

Patricia White’s theory of retrospectatorship provides one such secondary framework, as it allows a method of reading queerness in film that can be extended to the status of objects in *Carol*. By combining spectatorship theory with the notion of looking backward (retrospection), White’s model of retrospectatorship uncovers the traces of past

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texts (visual and otherwise) in the films of the present. Thus, retrospectatorship provides a theoretical framework to examine a film made in our post-Stonewall present about lesbian relationships set in a past era, where lesbian representability was historically elusive or erased.\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Carol} is one such film, in the ways that it very deliberately and intricately pays homage to the films of Alfred Hitchcock (amongst others). “Classic Hollywood cinema belongs in the past but it is experienced in the present in a way that afford us a new way of seeing” because “it preserves a structuring role culturally.”\textsuperscript{25} The pacing of the film, attention to detail and vivified status of object within the mise-en-scène all directly reference the famous auteur. The viewer can see the “reworking of images, tropes, and generic strategies” of Classical Hollywood cinema within \textit{Carol}. However, the film also retroactively provides access to the lesbian representability and active female desire that was repressed\textsuperscript{26} in films made during the Production Code era.\textsuperscript{27}

Cinema is a space where the identification and meaning of a specific text are experienced “through a... particular sociohistorical, biographical and geographical conjuncture.”\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Carol} is “a love story suspended in time but located in history.”\textsuperscript{29} The film offers “figures of backwardness as allegories of queer historical experience”\textsuperscript{30} whilst at the same approaching the central love story from a twenty first century axiology regarding female homosexuality. It makes plain to a 21\textsuperscript{st} century viewer not only the historical “impossibility” of same sex desire;\textsuperscript{31} but also the socio-legal sanctions limiting female homosexuality, as well as the divide between public/private personas\textsuperscript{32} that a homosexual woman had to maintain in that era – the price of salt.

\textsuperscript{24} Patricia White, \textit{Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability} (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), xxvi.
\textsuperscript{25} White, \textit{Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability}, 197.
\textsuperscript{26} Sharon Willis, “The Lure of Retrospectatorship: Hitting the False Notes in Far from Heaven,” in \textit{The Poitier Effect: Racial Melodrama and Fantasies of Reconciliation} (Beaverton: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 120.
\textsuperscript{27} White, \textit{Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{29} White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 11.
Retrospectatorship allows viewers to access new angles on the films that fascinate us within past and present media: “All spectatorship, insofar as it mobilizes subjective fantasy, revises memory traces and experiences, some of which are memories of other movies.” Analysing *Carol* through the framework of retrospectatorship allows my thesis to explore how the film “rework[s] images, tropes, and generic strategies” of other cinematic texts.

By using retrospectatorship as an analytic framework to examine *Carol*, I engage in what Foucault refers to as “reverse discourse.” This allows my thesis to “undermine...expose” and ultimately “render...fragile” the repressions embedded in the fantasy structures of films from the past, and to assist in engaging in a queer (or non-normative) reading of the film. As such, it is possible to view *Carol* as an “analytic bricolage” of past texts such as *Madame Bovary* (1856), *Shopgirl* (2005) and *Peeping Tom* (1960) – as later chapters will demonstrate. Undertaking brief comparisons with these texts aids my investigation into the operation of objects within *Carol* and the way objects, and the characters that use them can be designated deviant, queer or unruly.

Additionally, my thesis uses gaze theory as an analytical tool for understanding the relationship between looking and cameras within *Carol*. As Patricia White states, “Cinema plays out it’s epistemologies of sexuality around new forms of visibility of the female body.” Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975) uses a psychoanalytic framework to produce a feminist reading of the patriarchal structures embedded in the active male gaze within Classical Hollywood cinema. This seminal text began an area of feminist film analysis generally referred to gaze theory. Although gaze theory has undoubtedly fallen out of vogue in recent academia, I believe that it is a useful tool to examine aspects of the relationship between Therese and Carol as it is channelled directionally through Therese’ camera. As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, gaze theory - focused as it is on the role of spectatorship in cinema – seems pertinent when discussing a film

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34 Willis, “The Lure of Retrospectatorship: Hitting the False Notes in Far from Heaven,” 120.
36 Willis, “The Lure of Retrospectatorship: Hitting the False Notes in Far from Heaven,” 120.
created for retrospectatorship - that is, a temporal twisting, torqueing and queering of existing fantasy structures.

Gaze theory locates “the appeal of cinema... in its visibility, its ‘there-to-be-looked-at’ quality”39 and interrogates “the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.”40 Mulvey argues that there is an ideological imbalance between male and female, which in cinema is constructed visually as looking/being-looked-at and narratively as active/passive. As she states, “[T]he pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure.”41 This creates visual pleasure by “the pleasure of using another person as an object through sight and subjecting their image to a curious and controlling gaze.”42 Using gaze theory provides a means of understanding Therese’ object conduct with her camera: her visual pleasures are created by imposing a voyeuristic gaze upon Carol’s objectified female body.

However, this brings me to the question of sexual difference within gaze theory, and how this applies to a film about female same-sex attraction. To assist in my queer reading of gaze theory in Carol, I bring in feminist and queer revisions of gaze theory, in particular those of Bette Gordon (1989) and Clifford T. Manlove (2007). “Feminists,” Gordon states, “have been suspicious of pleasure promoted in cinema, dependant as it is upon the objectification of female figure.”43 One of the predominant feminist, and indeed queer, criticism of gaze theory is the shortcomings of psychoanalytic readings, which do not allow for female agency within desire.44 Despite criticisms of gaze theory and psychoanalysis in general, Patricia White claims that: “too often claims for ‘subversive’ viewing practices ignore the insights of psychoanalytical accounts of spectatorial accounts of identification

and specific textual features” and urges that psychoanalytic reading “be retained.” Whilst Mulvey does not account for an active female gaze, she does state that narrative cinema “allow[s] a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bedrock of feminine neurosis,” which relegates the female spectatorial experience to that of repression and nostalgia. Queer interventions into gaze theory argue that gay male and lesbian cinematic representations pose a challenge to a Mulveyan framework due to their depiction of same-sex desire, which destabilizes the binary of active male/passive female. Clifford T. Manlove’s queer intervention in to gaze theory foregrounds the necessity of considering repetition alongside pleasure when using gaze theory, which allows me to locates an active desiring female gaze. Thus, a queer reading of the operation of gaze theory within Carol demonstrates an active desiring female gaze.

Queer Feminist Theory

The use of retrospectatorship and gaze theory in my thesis is finally complemented by the use of the queer feminist theory of Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings (2003) and Heather Love’s Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History (2009). These queer feminist theories allow my thesis to query the temporal nuances embedded in a relationship “made and maintained” through a camera. Furthermore, these queer feminist texts show how archives and other texts can act as beacons or repositories for figuring out our contemporary moment and its relationship to the past. Carol is “a love story suspended in time but located in history,” the film participates in what Heather Love describes as “the backwards turn.” It constructs the past from the post-feminist, post-gay present, turning backward to acknowledge the painful history that contemporary queerness inherits. Love resists affirmative genealogies of queerness in favour of “a politics forged in the image of exile, or refusal, or even failure.” Like Love’s work, my thesis resists the utopian impulse

47 Evans and Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing,” 33-38
50 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 11
53 Love, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History, 71
(of which there are, perhaps, glimpses in Carol), and rather honours the historic losses and “impossibility”\textsuperscript{54} of female homosexuality in the 1950’s.

Ann Cvetkovich states that photographs and other ephemera constitute a an archive of “cultural texts [which act as] repositories of feelings and emotions”\textsuperscript{55} that account for the lived emotional and corporeal price of homophobia. I locate Carol amongst these texts because the film archives the social and structural barriers to female homosexual relationships in the 1950’s. Moreover, it archives the “affects – associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy and trauma”\textsuperscript{56} created by those barriers. However, the film cannot be read as “a realistic picture of how hard it was to love your own sex ‘back then’”\textsuperscript{57} due to the diegetic and narrative requirements of the romantic melodrama genre. Of specific interest was Cvetkovich’s work on the affective qualities of photographs\textsuperscript{58}. Finally, I found particular personal interest in Cvetkovich’s consideration of public trauma as “socially situated political violence.”\textsuperscript{59} That is, public trauma being the link “between girls like me feeling bad and world historical events”\textsuperscript{60} as related to my own experiences during my Honours candidacy, which I touch upon in my conclusion.

There are several fascinating aspects of Carol that I have been unable to touch upon as they lie outside the scope of my thesis. Firstly, the nuances of the text to film adaptation that has taken place in adapting The Price of Salt into Carol. An analysis through close reading of the two texts, though undoubtedly fascinating, falls outside the scope of my analysis of object conduct. Secondly, my thesis only mentions briefly the friendship between Carol and Abby. Again, a lengthier discussion of forms of non-sexual female intimacy and/or female homosociality in Carol fall outside the scope of this thesis. Finally, I feel it necessary to acknowledge the operation of race in Carol: that is, the overwhelming whiteness of the film. The film is populated predominately by white characters. There are people of colour in the cast who have speaking roles, and even amongst the extras there are very few people of

\textsuperscript{54} Love, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History, 2.
\textsuperscript{55} Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures, 7.
\textsuperscript{57} White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 11.
\textsuperscript{59} Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures, 3.
\textsuperscript{60} Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures, 3.
colour; the rest of the cast is or reads as white. Even extras that play roles which would have historically been performed by people of colour, such as shop assistants, are played by readably white people, with the exception of one train guard. Although the role that whiteness plays in Carol is undoubtedly a line of investigation one could take, it falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Drawing on the frameworks and concepts elaborated above, then, thesis undertakes a detailed analysis of object conduct, in Carol by performing a detailed analysis of two objects: gloves and cameras. These objects were chosen due to their centrality to the narrative, and also because they demonstrate the multivalent ability of non-normative object usage to “extend [social relations] in new directions.”61 Chapter 2 addresses the function of gloves in the film, and their multivalent ability to build the relationship between Carol and Therese, whilst also breaking down Carol’s relationship with her ex-husband, Harge. They also exist as markers of class and belonging, at once indexing Carol’s position within the upper middle class, but also queering her from the women around her. Finally, Chapter 2 addresses the department store as a site of consumer exchange and the female subject positions this space creates. Chapter 3 focuses on Therese’ camera, investigating the different ways Carol, Therese and Harge all attempt to capture, possess or recreate moments between each other, which is channelled directionally through cameras and other recording devices. I bring in theory from Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings to examine the way photographs, the objects that cameras create, along with the film itself, act as an archive of the historic losses of homosexuality.

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61 Miller, D. et. al. Shopping, Place and Identity, 17.
Chapter Two

In Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), gloves are mentioned twice when characters stray from the acceptable standards of etiquette at the time. The gloves are key sites of object conduct, giving us important insight into the novel’s themes. In the first instance, at the ball at La Vaubyessard, Madame Bovary “noticed that several of the ladies had not placed their gloves in their wine glasses.”⁶² As Mark Overstall clarifies in the notes, social customs of the bourgeoisie dictated that a woman refuse wine by placing her gloves in her wineglass.⁶³ The second time occurs during the six-hour long carriage ride around Rouen. The passage describes only the route the cab driver takes, Leon shouting for him to continue, and the mention of Emma’s bare hand seen emerging from the curtains.⁶⁴ In the 19th century, a woman removing her gloves in public with a man was considered a gesture of intimacy between lovers.⁶⁵ Although the author provides no salacious details, the reader assumes that during this carriage ride Emma and Leon consummate their extra-marital affair. Emma’s gloveless hand symbolizes her adultery, a violation of the strict bourgeois moral ideology of the day.⁶⁶ Emma Bovary’s material deviance represents her attempts to free herself from the stifling monotony of her petit-bourgeoisie existence, as well as the threat of her extra-marital affair to the stability of heterosexual monogamy and bourgeois respectability.

Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* is, like Todd Haynes’ *Carol*, a text that investigates the complex intersection of consumer goods, gender roles, class status and sexual propriety. Both are examples of literary and visual texts where a character’s use of a material object (in this case, the wearing or removal of gloves) can be a signifier of that character’s propriety or impropriety. Like Emma Bovary, Carol transgresses the social norms of her period, post-war America. Despite Carol’s heterosexual marriage to Harge having already ended, a comparison of Emma Bovary and Carol’s use of gloves reveals the destabilizing effect Carol’s queer object conduct has upon the heteronormative values of post-war America.

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In this chapter of my thesis, I will thus explore the way Carol’s gloves operate in the film as a material object which mediates, maintains and makes durable the relationships between characters. An examination of object conduct — defined by Scott Herring as “the way individuals personally and socially engage with matter” — in relation to the film’s use of gloves, signposts to the viewer some of the themes of the film: class ambition, the power imbalance between Carol and Therese, and covert sexual exchange. Furthermore, I seek to explore the way that Carol’s object conduct in relation to gloves queers her from other upper-middle class women and signals the increasing tensions between Carol and Harge. Finally, this chapter will explore the department store, the primary site of commodity exchange in both 1950’s America and within the film. This examination will uncover how goods, and the relations they create and maintain, can go deviant.

A Brief History of Gloves

Within Western history, gloves have been objects particularly invested in various rituals, customs, practices and symbolism, and have functioned as a means by which humans conduct their affairs. That is, gloves have historically been a site of object conduct, the central concern of my thesis. S. William Beck wrote that it is necessary to acknowledge the “dignity of gloves, to show their long descent and value in costume, and to give them the position in the history of antiquity, to which their intimate relationship with the affairs of men fairly entitles them.” Yvette Mahe claims that individuals respond to objects (gloves) “on the basis of the meanings that these objects hold for them” which emerge from social interaction. Historically, aside from their practical and fashionable uses, gloves have functioned as an visible, outward sign of a person’s character: their “faith, loyalty, trust, amity, love, honor, hostility and defiance towards others.”

One of the first documented symbolic rituals using gloves was in feudal times (circa 1002 CE), whereby gloves were delivered to a monarch, church dignitary or knight to grant the recognition of power and authority. Delivering gloves usually occurred at a ceremony of

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70 Mahe, “The History of Gloves and Their Significance.”
71 Mahe, “The History of Gloves and Their Significance.”
inauguration, religious investiture or knighthood. According to Beck, gloves were often used as tokens of goodwill, friendship, and amity, sent to wish a friend well or congratulate them. Alternatively, they could be used to indicate hostility or aggression, for instance, the tradition of throwing down a gauntlet to challenge someone to a duel. In the 17th to 19th centuries, gloves became an object historically associated with the normative structures of etiquette and propriety, especially for women. Their purpose has been traditionally to keep hands, and in particular female hands, from becoming sun-damaged or roughened – something considered “unbecoming to a well-bred woman.” The constant wearing of gloves ended in the 1920’s, however by the 1950’s, the era in which Carol is set, gloves were still in use, particularly amongst the upper-middle class.

However, this history of gloves and their role in social relations is, in essence, a history of normative object conduct, and the social meanings that gloves hold is imbued with patriarchal and heteronormative meaning. This brings me to the question: what happens when people begin to use gloves in unruly ways? What happens when the social relations these goods foster become “material deviance”, whereby, as Herring suggests, they “question, problematize, or refute the shared sense of social realities that goods are thought to foster[?]” Taking this question as a cue, I turn to examine in more detail what happens in Carol when object conduct becomes non-normative, deviant, or queer. In other words, how do gloves participate in destabilizing or rendering fragile the compulsory categories of normative culture?

A Token of Affection

Carol strolls nonchalantly into the department store, slapping her leather gloves against her hand, as she makes eye contact with Therese. For Therese at least, it is love at first sight when she looks up to meet Carol’s gaze. Carol is dressed in luxurious pale furs,

72 Beck, Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History, 17, 28-30, 38.
74 Beck, Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History, 201-206.
77 Beaujot, Victorian Fashion Accessories, 24.
78 Herring, “Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood.”
and her makeup and accessories are a vibrant red, immediately distinguishing her from the women around her, who are dressed in woolen coats of plainer hues. She approaches Therese’ counter with the intention to buy a doll for her daughter Rindy, but upon talking to Therese, she purchases a trainset. During their financial transaction, Carol’s leather gloves lay across the counter that separates them, a bridge between these two very different women. After Carol declares their transaction “Done!” she walks away, leaving her gloves behind.

As this scene underscores, Carol’s gloves act as a link between Carol and Therese from the scene where the two women first meet. They first meet in a department store where Therese works, the moment is the *Coup de Foudre* of the film – or, one might say, the gloves orchestrate this moment. Carol’s forgetting her gloves at the department store demonstrates the way that objects function to “make and maintain [a] social relationship,” that is, objects have a social function. In this case, Carol’s gloves act as a “bridge” between Carol and Therese, providing them with an opportunity to come into contact again. The gloves also “ma[ke] durable” to the viewer the social interaction that has occurred between the two women during their department store transaction. “Making durable,” as Scott Herring explains, means that material objects provide a tangible physical presence to more ephemeral social and personal meanings.

Gloves have a history of being used as tokens of love and faith between lovers. In a more distant past, they served as a reminder of an absent fair maid; the glove was “the loadstone of love and hope that the knight would eventually win the lady’s hand.” Carol’s gloves indicate to both Therese and the viewer the beginning of a romantic relationship between the two women. Indeed, it is Therese’ possession of Carol’s forgotten gloves that

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80 *Coup de Foudre* translates literally from French to mean “bolt of lightning”, but is often used to describe “a sudden, unforeseen event, in particular an instance of love at first sight” Oxford English Dictionary, “Coup de Foudre,” *Oxford English Dictionary*.
82 “Goods are neutral, their uses are social: they can be used as fences and bridges” Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, 12.
85 Beck, *Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History*, xi, 252, 256-257.
allows the film’s meet-cute to develop into a romantic relationship. The gloves act to “make and maintain [a] social relationship” by giving the two women an opportunity to come into contact again. As such, Carol’s forgotten gloves not only act to provide physical evidence of the two women’s ephemeral sexual exchange; they also are agents themselves that set relations in motion.

Indeed, it is the gloves’ presence upon which the beginning of the relationship turns, insofar as they give Therese and Carol opportunity to see each other again, perhaps as Carol had intended. Therese mails the gloves to Carol, and Carol then rings Therese at the department store, inviting her out to lunch to thank her. Carol leaving behind her gloves is a historically necessitated tactic to bring the two women into contact again whilst maintaining an appearance of respectability. The film is set in a time where a courtship between two women had no normative script or technique, and furthermore, was at the time, invisible, refused or impossible. As such, tactics were required as covert seduction was necessary.

As Douglas and Isherwood state objects “are neutral, their uses are social: they can be used as fences and bridges.” To extend Douglas and Isherwood’s metaphor, I argue that in this scene, the forgotten gloves act as a fishing line; Carol drops them in front of Therese, hoping for a bite so she may reel her in. Therese, like the viewer, sees the lure for what it is and mails the gloves back to Carol, participating in her own seduction.

On the one hand, the object conduct surrounding the gloves thus far is relatively normative; they act as a token - an enduring symbol of potential love, or at the very least hopeful desire. On the other hand, though, as Sara Ahmed argues, we need to reread what we presume is straight for deviant “signs of queer desire.” Indeed, as Todd Haynes says, the queerness of Therese and Carol’s actions are “read... with intentionality” by the viewer. Gloves, we are reminded, “are imbued and embedded with the social: meanings are attributed and built in.” The viewer, upon watching this scene, assumes Carol has left the

90 Nick Davis, “The Object of Desire: Todd Haynes Discusses Carol and the Satisfaction of Telling Women’s Stories,” FilmComment, posted on 14/11/2015.
gloves on purpose. In our recognition of this act as not only intentional but also necessarily tactical, the gloves become a vessel in which we place meaning based on our knowledge of Carol as a queer film. Our attribution of intentionality to the two women’s exchange of Carol’s gloves provides agency to their (historically necessitated) codified and covert gestures. This intentionality is more queer than the token of affection that gloves have traditionally symbolised. In other words, the gloves also become a vehicle for the queerness of the film. Through the exchange and use of consumer products, the viewer sees the intentionality—again “made durable” by the gloves - behind the coded seduction between the two women.

However, the department store is not the last time that the viewer see’s Carol’s forgotten gloves. The film demonstrates the role of Carol’s gloves in providing a foundation for the women’s relationship when Therese goes to visit Carol at her suburban New Jersey home. Carol picks Therese up from the city and their drive back to New Jersey is dreamy and sensuous. The sounds and lights from outside the car coalesce and blur, as do the sounds of their conversation. Over the radio plays Helen Foster and the Rovers “You Belong to Me” (although the song is distorted. There are a series of close up intimate shots of the two women’s faces, the corner of Carol’s eye crinkling in a smile, the curve of Therese’ lips in return, interspersed with Carol’s hands on the steering wheel and radio. The scene’s saturated colours, close up slow-motion shots and hushed sound create for the viewer a mise-en-scène of desire, evoking the swoony, vertiginous experience of hopeful desire.

Carol is wearing the very gloves that Therese returned to her, the material object that began their covert seduction. The presence of the very same gloves that facilitated their ongoing contact demonstrates Douglas and Isherwood’s claim that objects not only make but also maintain social relationships. The gloves’ effect of “ma[king] durable” the social relationship between the two women and the promise of love and loyalty that the gloves connote. The gloves act as a visual reminder to the viewer of not only the queerness of their interactions, but their necessity in their covert seduction as well. One might even say that the gloves pull the queer into the realm of the normative. It is not until later in the

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92 Miller et. al. Shopping, Place and Identity, 18.
93 Patricia White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” Film Quarterly 69, no. 2 (2015), 11.
95 Miller et. al. Shopping, Place and Identity, 18.
film that we see the seemingly normative object conduct between the two women turn disruptive.

**Throwing Down the Gauntlet**

In *Carol*, gloves are the material objects around which social relations are “made durable;”\(^97\) not just Carol and Therese’ clandestine courtship, but also the bitter breakdown of relations between Carol and Harge following the end of their marriage. The breakdown of their relationship due to Carol’s homosexuality is foreshadowed in the first scene between Carol and Harge, where he has come to collect their daughter, Rindy. Carol is in her bedroom, brushing Rindy’s hair, and he walks in, bringing Carol’s mail with him. Unbeknownst to Harge, the mail he carries contains is the package with Carol’s forgotten gloves, posted to her by Therese. Although we do not see the gloves themselves, their presence in the package is highlighted when the camera cuts away from the two characters and lingers on the package lying on the bed between them. The presence of the gloves represents the specter of Carol’s homosexuality coming between the two characters. This is emphasized in the next scene, where the two characters tensely discuss Carol’s close friend and ex-lover Abby. Carol’s gloves were previously a seemingly innocent physical manifestation of the budding romance between Therese and Carol. It is at this point that we can see the destabilizing effect of queer object conduct; the gloves now become a looming specter, the threat of Carol’s homosexuality to the heterosexual family unit made manifest. Just as the gloves indicated the beginnings of love and loyalty between Carol and Therese, their meaning is now reversed to demonstrate to the viewer the ending of Carol and Harge’s marriage.

Later, when Therese is visiting Carol at her home, Harge arrives unexpectedly at Carol’s house to pick up Rindy. He barks at Therese in frustration “How do you know my wife?” Carol replies “I ordered a gift from her... I forgot my gloves, she returned them and I thanked her.” He turns to her and incredulously replies “Oh, that’s bold.”\(^98\) Harge, like the viewer, reads the intentionality behind the two women’s behaviour. Their inchoate transgressions - and the perceived threat of homosexuality to bourgeois respectability, the

\(^97\) Miller et. al. *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 18.
\(^98\) Haynes, *Carol*. 
idealized notion of domestic home life and the nuclear family—the nuclear family—is made joltingly clear to the viewer, through their queering of normative object conduct. In this instance the exchange of gloves between Carol and Therese, earlier figured as a hopeful, even romantic social relation, is re-read by the viewer through Harge’s perception as deviant. As Sara Ahmed states: "to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things." As such, Carol and Therese’ non-normative object conduct, using gloves as a love token, is revealed as a threat to the stability of the heteronormative order of things. Before Harge’s unannounced visit to Carol’s home, there is an upwards trajectory of hopeful desire between the two women, which is at its peak when Therese visits Carol’s home. However, Harge’s entry into Carol’s home and recognition the women’s queer object conduct with Carol’s gloves acts as a tangible reminder of the heteronormative boundaries the two women are crossing. His physical presence in the home brings with it a suggested threat of the socio-legal ramifications that could be placed upon their same-sex desire. This has, for a brief time, the effect he hoped; Carol quickly sends Therese away, telling her “There’s a train at eight thirty, I’ll drive you to the station.” The following car ride is awkward and silent, in devastating contrast to the hopeful, romantic mood of the one earlier that day. This contrast is highlighted visually, the brief shot is uncomfortably naturalistic and has none of the dreamy editing of the former. The camera angles are objective and the camera does not linger, the lighting is dark except when the women’s faces are harshly lit by passing headlights. The hopeful trajectory of their courtship has been brought crashing back down to earth, and Therese’ disappointment is clear. Although Carol quickly brings them back together with a phone call, Harge’s ability to part Carol and Therese is clear. His interference, triggered by the specter of the gloves disruptive queerness, foreshadows the devastating socio-legal sanctions he will later place on Carol, as well as his ability to build his own fences between the two women.

100 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 161
102 Haynes, Carol.
103 “Goods are neutral, their uses are social: they can be used as fences and bridges.” Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption, 12.
Within *Carol*, the meaning of characters’ gloves is multivalent. Through examination it becomes clear that the Carol’s object conduct with gloves turns her toward Therese, and away from Harge. As Douglas and Isherwood state, objects “are neutral, their uses are social: they can be used as fences and bridges.”\(^{104}\) The more that gloves act as a bridge to bring together Carol and Therese, the more they also build fences between Carol and Harge (and indeed, between Therese and her young beau, Richard). Through the gloves “ma[king] durable”\(^ {105}\) the relationship between Carol and Therese, they also function to dismantle the relationships between Carol and Harge and Therese and Richard. The multivalence of object conduct around gloves in *Carol* mirrors the narrative tensions between hopeful lesbian romance and deteriorating heterosexual marriage in the film’s diegesis.

In Western history, gloves had a use signifying hostility or aggression and to incite rituals such as duals. As S. William Beck stated, in feudal times the presentation of bare hand symbolized “hostility or enmity.”\(^ {108}\) Furthermore, a knight casting down a gauntlet\(^ {109}\) symbolized a challenge to a duel to the death, a practice that originated in the sixth century.\(^ {110}\) The gloves thus demonstrate to the viewer the increasing hostilities between Carol and Harge, in particular in the socio-legal ramifications of their divorce. When Carol visits her lawyer’s office, he informs her that Harge is petitioning for full custody on the basis of a morality clause. Carol enters the scene wearing black leather gloves, then removes her gloves and then places them down on a chair. Although it is Harge who seems to be throwing down the gauntlet, Carol removing her gloves indicates that she is in a sense throwing down her own, too. This action marks the beginning of their custody battle over Rindy, the beginning of Harge’s increasing hostility towards and surveillance of Carol, but also Carol’s refusal to live by his rules.

The morality clause plotline can be read in the light of what Scott Herring terms material deviance, that is, “the critical negotiation of how object usage, object choice, and material conduct pathologises as well as normalises individuals as having proper and

\(^{105}\) Miller et. al. *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 18.
\(^{108}\) Beck, *Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History*, 56.
\(^{109}\) A gauntlet is a style of glove, historically worn by Knights. Mahe, “The History of Gloves and Their Significance.”
\(^{110}\) Beck, *Gloves, Their Annals and Associations: A Chapter of Trade and Social History*, 201-206.
improper social relations.” In Herring’s analysis, people using objects deviantly marks them as abnormal. In Carol, this deviance functions slightly differently, whereby the small deviant act of removing her gloves in the lawyer’s office signals moral deviance to come. Through the divorce proceedings, Harge attempts to relegate Carol into deviant and therefore dangerous subjecthood. As Carol and Therese’ non-normative object conduct becomes (rightly) “re-read” as queer desire, the two women’s queer object conduct quickly becomes associated with moral deviance; as a result their fledgling romance is repositioned by Harge as a threat, to the notions of family and children, as well as the social norms conjured by those two terms.

Gloves and Class

Gloves are also used in the film to signal to the viewer belonging or dissidence from the categories of class, gender and normative heterosexuality. Douglas and Isherwood claim that material objects “mak[e] visible and stable the categories of culture.” Furthermore, material objects not only make stable these cultural categories, but serve to "reproduce and sustain dominant cultural values." Within Carol, the dominant cultural values that objects produce and reproduce are heteronormative and patriarchal middle class values of bourgeois respectability, the nuclear family and the stable domestic home life. As stated above, drawing on Ahmed, "to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things." As such Carol’s lesbian desire and queer object conduct poses a perceived threat to these normative values.

Gloves have a history of being an item particularly invested in articulating class difference, in corollary with respectability and propriety. The importance of proper etiquette surrounding objects such as gloves became a particularly Victorian preoccupation, as it became the means to indicate moral character through outward appearance, made

111 Herring, “Material Deviance: Theorizing Queer Objecthood.”
112 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 23.
113 Herring, The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern America, 6 & 11.
117 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 161
achievable through consumption. A woman’s hands became a “manifestation of class and
gender written on the body.” Middle class women used gloves as props to perform
gender, class, and normative respectability. As I will demonstrate, in Carol, the wearing of
gloves of different materials is used to indicate class status and belonging to the viewer.

Douglas and Isherwood locate the role of luxury goods as a means of marking social ranks: “[t]here will always be luxuries, for rank must be marked.” In the department store scene at the beginning of the film, the upper-middle class men and women wear gloves, as does Carol. Carol’s placement within the department store amongst other bourgeois women has the effect of initially locating Carol’s class status, as well as highlighting the class difference between Carol and Therese. Carol is often seen wearing gloves of either fine leather or silk when she is out in public. Gloves of silk and fine leather were historically luxury goods worn only by the upper classes. We do not see Therese wearing gloves, and in the scene where Carol picks up Therese in her car, Carol’s fine leather gloves are in stark contrast to Richard’s rough, hand-knitted wool gloves. However, whilst Carol’s wearing of gloves denotes her upper middle class standing, her object conduct in relation to her gloves in later scenes demonstrates her dissidence from the normative strictures accompanying her class standing.

Sara Ahmed’s writing on queer phenomenology helps us understand the shift that while gloves function a symbol of respectability, they are also used in ways that shift away to resist that same status. Ahmed states: “to become straight means that we… turn towards objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must ‘turn away’ from objects that take us off this line.” We see Carol do the opposite: she turns away from normative object conduct dictated by the demands of both heterosexuality and her middle class standing. As such, we can see the disruptive effect that queer object relations and material dissidence can have upon normative cultural hegemonies. Carol’s clothing often separates her from the upper-middle class women surrounding her. Her fur coat and red accessories make her stand out from a sea of women in dark clothing. In this instance,

118 Beaujot, Victorian Fashion Accessories, 6.
119 Beaujot, Victorian Fashion Accessories, 39.
121 Mahe, “The History of Gloves and Their Significance.”
122 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 21.
Carol’s material choices draw the viewers’ eye, just as they draw Therese’s; clearly there is something different about this woman.

Later, we see Carol at a Christmas party with Harge, the other women wear silk cocktail gloves, and Carol wears none. Carol’s bare hands in this cocktail party scene is read once again by the viewer with intentionality, as we see her in an earlier scene on the same day wearing scarlet silk gloves. If, as Ahmed states, objects are “orientation devices,”¹²³ that is we are drawn toward some things and away from others, then a queer reading of Carol’s object conduct with gloves demonstrates Carol’s drawing away from the very middle class heteronormative values that her glove use initially locates her as belonging to. Carol’s non-normative material choices queer her from upper-middle class women around her, and the bourgeois respectability their normative object conduct connotes.

Carol’s material dissidence is particularly highlighted when she shares cigarette with Jeanette, the wife of one of Harge’s friends. Jeanette wears a highly ornamental beaded cocktail dress, a double string of pearls and long white silk gloves: the coterie of a proper middle class wife in the 1950’s. Her lavish wardrobe is in blatant contrast to Carol’s no-nonsense grey dress and coat, bare hands and vampish red nails. The dialogue exchanged between the women serves to further differentiate Carol from the women around her. When Jeanette tells her to keep an eye out for her husband in case she gets caught smoking, Carol mockingly asks her “What will he do? Dock you pocket money?” When Jeanette says that her husband “Doesn’t like [her] to smoke,” Carol pointedly replies “So? You do.”¹²⁴

The framing of this shot serves to further highlight the difference between the two women: it is shot looking in from a window, with the two women contained and separated by window panes. Jeanette’s small rebellions are still firmly ensconced within the boundaries of upper-middle class respectability, as is demonstrated to the viewer by her silk gloves. Carol’s bare hands are juxtaposed with Jeanette’s silk gloves show her to be defiant in her refusal to let Harge dictate terms, and moreover, her refusal to live by the heteronormative and patriarchal social norms of the period. As Ahmed states, “The queer

¹²⁴ Haynes, *Carol*. 
subject within straight culture... deviates and is made socially present as deviant.” That is, Carol’s material deviance indexes her attempts to liberate herself from the seemingly suffocating normative parameters of the upper middle class circles she moves in. Carol’s dissident use of material objects differentiates her from the normative orderliness and propriety of the middle class women around her and destabilizes the normative cultural values attached to them.

Department Stores

Thus far, my thesis has addressed objects - or commodity goods - at length. I now address consumer culture and the department store, the site of consumer exchange. Carol is set in New York, historically located on the cusp of the post war shift to consumer abundance, whereby commodity goods provided a means to possess the American Dream. The desire for, and accumulation of, consumer goods became both the means and measure of upward social mobility, self-transformation, and happiness. The emergence and subsequent rise of the department store in the late nineteenth and early twentieth was a manifestation of this new culture of consumption. Bon Marche opened in Paris in 1852 and Macy’s in New York in 1857, and by the late 1920’s many famous American department stores were trading, such as Marshall Fields and The Fair in Chicago, Feline’s in Boston, and Lord and Taylor’s and Stewarts, along with Macy’s in New York.

The rise of consumer culture and the department store had its greatest impact on women; firstly by the creation of new subject positions: the flâneuse and the shopgirl, and secondly as they became the target of consumer address. Women, as Victoria de Grazia states, “figure not only as the proverbial shoppers... the custodians of the bric-a-brac of daily life but also as objects of exchange and consumption.” As a result, women were figured both as consumer, but also as commodity goods to be obtained. We can see this

126 Patricia White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” *Film Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2015), 11.
128 Tajibaeva, “Consumer Culture, Material Desires and Images of Women in American Novels and Art at the Turn of the 20th Century,” 33-34.
doubling of woman as consumer and woman as commodity, in the scene of Carol and Therese’ first meeting, which takes place in Frankenburg’s department store; as well as the class based subject positions of the middle class woman as shopper and the working class woman as shopgirl.

Anna Friedberg argues that with the emergence of the Department store in the mid-nineteenth century, emerged a new figure in the public sphere – the flâneuse.

“In the social formations of modernity, the mobilized gaze was restricted to the public sphere... During the mid-nineteenth century, the coincident introduction of department-store shopping ... entertainment began to transform this gaze into a commodity, sold to a consumer-spectator.”130

With the rise of the department store as a fixture of the modern city shopping became a socially acceptable means for the bourgeois woman to navigate the public realm for “pleasure rather than necessity.”131 Carol’s character is the empowered flâneuse – her class position provides her with both the leisure time and the financial means to inhabit the space of the department store and appraise the goods available to her. As Douglas and Isherwood argue, luxury items function to mark social rank.132 Carol’s wearing gloves of luxurious fabrics such as silk and leather indexes her as belonging to this new empowered female subjectivity. Department stores, through the construction of fantasy worlds for itinerant female lookers, became a site for the empowered gaze of the flâneuse.133

The new target of consumer address - bourgeois women - became the subject of new desires born from consumer culture: “desires elaborated in a system of selling and consumption that depended on the relation between looking and buying, on the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye.”134 However, inextricable to the subject position of a flâneur (or a flâneuse as the case may be) is the sexualized gaze – women existing as carnal commodities for the consumption of the flâneur.135 In Carol this is made

obvious to the viewer: Carol’s gaze as she wanders around Frankenberg’s is not just appraising, it is acquisitive to a degree that borders on lecherous. Clearly, it is not just the material goods but also the girl behind counter that exist as objects for Carol’s consumption.

The Shopgirl

The flâneuse is not the only female subject position created by the emergence of the department store. When young women began working in department stores at the turn of the twentieth century, the figure of the shopgirl became the face of America’s emerging consumer culture. There are multiple identity, class and labor positions embedded in the term “shopgirl.” It articulates a gendered, aged and classed subject: typically young, white, heterosexual, working class femininity. As Frances Donovan wrote:

“in a department store every woman is a girl – girls of every type and age... They are, for the most part, well dressed, even stylish, with the similarity of costume, regardless of age... The general impression is one of youth and attractiveness.”

Around the 1920’s, as it became commonplace to see women working retail, the figure of the shopgirl emerged as a site of narrative fantasy in both film and literature alike: “the secret life of the girl behind the counter.” The shopgirl sub-genre provided viewers with “a thrill of novelty, titillation and romance” as well as a tabula rasa upon which to inscribe these fantasies. However, through Carol’s queering of flâneuse-shopgirl interaction, a murkier exchange is revealed.

Therese can inarguably be located as a shopgirl figure in Carol, the empty vessel with which not only the viewer, but Carol as well, fills with their own fantasies - she is as much the object of fantasy as she is a subject. Therese’s position as shopgirl, at least at the beginning of the film, is produced by more than just her working class position behind the counter of Frankenberg’s department store. The scenes in Frankenberg’s shows Therese

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amongst the other shopgirls she works with, positioning her amongst other girls of similar age, appearance, dress and class position. Her elfin face, dark bob hairdo, and her stylish yet undoubtedly mass-produced wardrobe all evoke the “youth and attractiveness” of the shopgirl that Donovan describes.  

Anand Tucker’s aptly named film Shopgirl (2005) explores the commodity chains of the romance narrative between a 21st century flâneur and a shopgirl, revealing the seamy underbelly of sexual and economic exchange within these narratives. A brief comparison of the two films, wherein Shopgirl is the heterosexual foil for Carol, demonstrates the effect of the film’s referencing the shopgirl subgenre and the commodifying effect it places on Therese. Mirabelle is a young twenty-something girl working in Saks 5th Avenue at the seemingly anachronistic, barely frequented couture glove counter. Like Therese, she is a young, working class woman with unrecognized creative talents. Like Therese, Mirabelle meets an older, more sophisticated lover - Ray the wealthy businessman - across a department store display case through an exchange of gloves. Like Carol and Therese, Ray and Mirabelle’s economic status is unequal, and the desire of both younger women is imbricated with the commodified desire for luxury goods and upward class mobility. Ray and Mirabelle’s object conduct is at once coded as normative in its familiar heterosexual narrative, and at the same time irrefutably deviant: Mirabelle trades her sexual availability for luxurious clothing and financial support. This arrangement begins with Ray gifting Mirabelle the expensive silk gloves he purchased from her in an earlier scene. The commodified sexual relationship between Ray and Mirabelle is obfuscated with a romance narrative, which has the effect of disguising the capitalist and patriarchal hegemonies embedded in their relationship. Although Therese is not selling the gloves that Carol leaves in her possession, an economic exchange still takes place, and like Ray, Carol is generous with her money and uses material goods as a means of wooing a younger, lower-class girl. A comparison of Shopgirl and Carol reveals the sexual commodification of the shopgirl subject, obscured in both films through a romance narrative.

141 Rebecca Ciezarek, “Dreams on Credit: Searching for Connections in Shopgirl,” Screen Education 66 (2012), 121
The shopgirl hovers in the interstitial space between “production and consumption, subject and object, fantasy and reality.”\textsuperscript{143} In addition to conjuring notions of gender, youth, and class, the figure of the shopgirl implies a sexually available subject. Walter Benjamin claimed that within public spaces, these women were objects of the sexual market, both “seller and commodity in one.”\textsuperscript{144} In the department store scene, Carol is shopping for a doll for her daughter, but after consultation with Therese she buys a train set instead. With little convincing, she announces the sale “Done,”\textsuperscript{145} having acquired the gift she came for, and the shopgirl who sold it to her as well. As Friedberg notes, “If shopping activates the power of the consumer gaze, then purchasing asserts power over the objects beheld.”\textsuperscript{146} Therese exists in this scene as both vendeuse and goods.\textsuperscript{147}

Carol’s gloves left behind on the counter exist as a lingering artifact of the furtive sexual exchange between the two women; however, the scene explicitly conflates the lover’s gaze with the shopper’s gaze and problematises romantic desire with economic exchange. Thus Therese, an undoubtedly desiring subject, becomes positioned as a carnal commodity – an object to be consumed. Ultimately, a closer examination of the history of the department store and the subject positions its emergence created further queers the relationship between Therese and Carol. In particular, it diminishes the idealistic possibility of independence from normative cultural hierarchies their material dissidence and queer object conduct implied. Rather, their relations cannot be extricated from the commodity chains associated with the material objects that enabled their romance.

Conclusion

The second chapter of my thesis is a close examination of the way that objects are “social relations made durable,”\textsuperscript{148} through a close reading of the way that gloves are used in \textit{Carol}. Gloves are an object that throughout history has been particularly involved in social customs and ritual. Carol and Therese’ queer object conduct demonstrates their threat to disrupt bourgeois respectability, and offers a glimpse of utopian possibility in this

\textsuperscript{143} Bernstein, “From Little Black Dress to Little Blue Vest: Film, Fashion and the American Shopgirl,” 11.
\textsuperscript{145} Haynes, Carol.
\textsuperscript{147} White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 14.
\textsuperscript{148} Miller et. al. \textit{Shopping, Place and Identity}, 18.
disruption. However, upon an examination of the department store as a location of commodity exchange, and the female subject positions it created, it is possible to see that the two women’s relationship, made and maintained through the exchange of consumer goods, cannot escape the very commodity chains that brought it into being.
Chapter Three

Watching Carol, the lighting, mise-en-scène and use of colour create a specific sense of place and presence – that of 1950’s New York. Todd Haynes was influenced by photography and photojournalism from the 1950’s as well as the black and white docudramas of the time.¹⁴⁹ The photography of Saul Leiter also had an influence on Haynes - for instance, Leiter’s techniques of “refracting the frame, interrupting the frame, and abstracting the frame.”¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Haynes notes,

“In looking at historical material from the period, what I found was a lot of photo-journalism and art photography... and a lot of it by women. I’m thinking of Ruth Orkin’s color photography of New York City, and Helen Levitt’s black-and-white stuff around that time... Esther Bubley’s color images inspired us, and then of course the recent discovery of Vivian Maier. All of it became a continuing language: the muted palette, the almost indecipherable temperatures...”¹⁵¹

Additionally, cinematographer Ed Lachmann shot Carol using Super-16 film stock, lending to the images a “slight graininess,” appropriate for a film set in the 1950’s.¹⁵² Haynes’ interest in photography of the time, in addition to Lachmann’s stylistic choices in this regard, brought me to consider the camera and its ability to capture and recreate a moment of the past in the present. The camera - as well as photographs, the objects cameras create – act relationally in the film, not just between characters, but also between the past and the present. This works in two ways: they bridge the past of the beginning of the film to the present of later scenes, but they also bridge the recreated past of 1950’s America and the 21st century viewer.

Chapter 3 of this thesis therefore considers how cameras, as well as photographs - the objects cameras create - operate in the film as a material objects that mediate, maintain, and make durable or tenuous the relationships between characters. In this chapter I use theory from Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings (2003) to examine the

¹⁵⁰ Davis, “The Object of Desire: Todd Haynes Discusses Carol and the Satisfaction of Telling Women’s Stories.”
¹⁵¹ Davis, “The Object of Desire: Todd Haynes Discusses Carol and the Satisfaction of Telling Women’s Stories.”
way photographs and the film itself, act as an archive of the historic losses of homosexuality. Alongside these experiences of loss, I am interested in the multivalent ways that Carol, Therese and Harge all attempt to capture, possess or recreate moments between each other. The relationship between Carol and Therese is channelled directionally through the camera, thus also showing the camera’s ability to capture as a reciprocal tactic. Building upon the investigation of commodity chains in the women’s relationship, I examine Carol’s attempts to possess Therese through commodity exchange by purchasing her an expensive Canon camera. Additionally, the desire to possess and capture also comes into play through the inclusion of an outlaw narrative, created by Harge’s increasing attempts to repossess Carol. However, this desire to possess once more pivots away from its initial meaning later in the film. The camera is the key to Therese’ upward class mobility when it helps her secure a job at the New York Times, thus functioning in parallel to the gloves’ agency in the previous chapter. Moreover, it also becomes Therese’ means to possess Carol in her own right. Finally, I bring in gaze theory to understand the use of the camera to construct Therese as a desiring subject, as well as Therese’ attempts to capture Carol. Whilst gaze theory has fallen out of vogue of late, perhaps a retro theory is a good way to think about retrospectatorship - a film from the present set in the past.

The word capture (as we currently know it) emerged as a noun in Middle French (1540’s) meaning “a taking,” in the sense of hunting animals. This has its origins in the Latin captus, the past participle of capere, meaning “to take hold, to grasp,” which in turn comes from the PIE root *kap- “to grasp.” 153 The verb capture emerged in 1795, in reference to checkers and chess, meaning “to take or seize by force or stratagem,” coming from the earlier verb “captive” (15th century).154 Captive (meaning “imprisoned, enslaved”) emerged in the late 14th century, comes from the Latin captivus, meaning “caught, taken prisoner.”155 Capture now has a range of meanings, including: “to grasp the essence of something,” “an act of capturing: to take or seize by force or stratagem,” “the securing of an object of strife or desire: to capture a lovers heart,” “something that has been captured: a captive,” and “the recording or storage of something for later playback.”156 From the word captive

emerged the word “captivate” (1520s), meaning: “to enthral with charm.” It came from the late Latin captivatus, past participle of captivare “to take, capture,” which transferred to mean “to entice, entrap, allure,” or “to influence or dominate by some special charm, art, or trait and with irresistible appeal.” This breadth of subtly different significances related to the word capture and its etymologically related terms mirror how cameras operate within Carol. Furthermore, it is a useful tool for thinking of the multivalence of character’s object conduct, and as such I use this etymology as a structuring tool for the rest of the chapter.

Capture: The Recording or Storage of Something for Later Playback

Queer feminist cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich has suggested the idea of an “archive of feelings,” to express the ways in which the lived emotional and corporeal price of homophobia can be accounted for. It is possible to locate Carol itself as an archive of feelings, in that it honours the lived history and traumatic losses of female homosexuality in the 1950’s. As such, it joins a group of “cultural texts [which act as] repositories of feelings and emotions.” In Carol we can see feelings such as “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, ressentiment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism and loneliness;” feelings which are inextricably linked to the burden of “bearing a disqualified identity” and “the historical ‘impossibility’ of same sex desire.” The film portrays for the viewer the love and intimacy, but also the sadness, loss, trauma and regret of historical lesbian relationships.

However, Carol not only archives a relationship between two women; it also makes deliberate efforts to show the spaces and environments that lesbians inhabit, the intimacies of domestic life, and the material objects that make up their world. The film shows the

viewer the inside of Therese’ apartment and her day-to-day rituals, such as getting ready for work in the morning. Lee Wallace states that in film, “[t]he spatiotemporal coordinates of the cinematic apartment bring into the field of representation female homosexuality – a sexual formation that has a notoriously difficult relation to visibility.”165 The film’s intimate and unembellished depiction of Therese’ sparse homelife in her apartment pays attention to both the architectural spaces and the objects that populate it. This demonstrates the way these architectural spaces and material objects act to make visible relationships or cultures that have historically been obscured, concealed or rendered invisible.166 Thus, the film shows not only the interactions, kinships and relationships of historical lesbian life. It also invests in presenting a range of scenes and images detailing the spaces, material objects and personal ephemera of Therese’ life, focusing on the way objects are bearers of social and affective meaning.167 As such, Carol archives a history of female homosexuality and its affective states through its attention to methods of documenting queer histories outside of traditional archives. The photographs and camera are objects that perform an active function in the establishment of these queer archives.

Therese’ photographs become part of this archive in their documentation of the women’s relationship. In these photographs, it is possible to map her vertiginous desire for Carol, as well as her grief resulting from their parting. Cvetkovich states that the photograph has a dual status: it is at once a material object and a document of something more ephemeral.

“Photographs often function like iconic or sacred objects when they hold memories and feelings – the materiality of the paper is as important as the indexicality of the image in providing a tangible connection to a lost place, person or object.”168

The viewer can see that Therese’ pictures of Carol are invested with her feelings of disappointed desire and hurt, after the two women are forced to part ways. We see her in

167 Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” 275.
168 Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” 300.
her dark room, gazing longingly as she develops a picture of Carol – the only things she has left to show for their tumultuous affair. In essence, Therese has captured Carol, or at least her memory of her, in the physical photographs she has developed.

In the scene where Dannie helps Therese paint her sparse apartment, he looks at her photos, telling her “Therese, you know these are seriously good. You really captured... whoever this is”. She responds by quickly bundling them up and shoving them in a drawer – an attempt to push away the specter of Carol and her own hurt – and dismissively mutters “they’re just practice.” When Dannie tries to draw her into conversation about Carol, asking her “You went away with her right? What happened?” Therese changes the subject abruptly.169 Therese’ photographs are, as Cvetkovich states: “meaningful as expressions of desire [as well as] mourning.”170 This scene archives the intimacy the two women shared, in the material objects of the photographs which have captured a moment in the past. These photographs are “a document of intimacy”171 in a time when such intimacy was erased and unspoken. Nevertheless, their presence also clearly evokes feelings of loss, grief and bitterness. However, although Therese hides them from sight, it is clear she cannot throw them away. We can see that “affects – associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy and trauma – make a document significant”172 through Therese’ ambivalent affective relationship to her photographs of Carol. In these ways, the photographs “make durable”173 not only the hopeful beginnings of the relationship between Therese and Carol, but also the negative emotions that follow the relationship’s breakdown. Moreover they reveal the multivalent quality of material objects in making, maintaining, but also breaking down relationships and the structural effects of longing and loss.

**Capture: To Entice, Entrap, Allure**

In the previous chapter, I examined how gloves are complicit in the commodification not only of consumer objects, but of the shopgirl – Therese – herself. In this section, I build upon the discussion of commodity chains embedded within Carol and Therese’ romantic

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170 Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” 275.
171 Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” 276.
relationship, resulting from their class positions and the exchange of consumer goods. When Carol visits Therese in her apartment, she brings her a Christmas gift, an expensive Canon camera. Whilst we do not precisely see Carol purchase the camera, we do see the moment Carol sees it in a shop window. She has just walked out of a meeting with her lawyer, in which she is told that Harge is seeking an injunction in their custody battle based on a morality clause. Carol walks on to the street visibly upset. As she shelters in an alcove to light a cigarette, she notices a camera in a shop window. When she arrives at Therese’ apartment she gives her the same camera seen in the window. As Douglas and Isherwood argue, goods play a role in building relationships due to “a system of reciprocal rituals” in the exchange of consumer goods. By giving Therese a camera as a Christmas gift (which Therese later reciprocates, giving Carol a vinyl record), Carol “maintains” the relationship that was initially “made” through the gloves.

Once again, Carol’s object conduct with this new camera is multivalent; it turns her at once towards Therese and away from Harge. As Douglas and Isherwood state, “in being offered, accepted or refused, [goods] either reinforce or undermine existing [social] boundaries.” Her object conduct - pursuing Therese romantically by buying her a camera - once again undermines the heteronormative social boundaries of the era, as Carol again turns away from the demands of heterosexual normativity. Again, we read her actions intentionally, but this time her decision seems driven as much by Harge’s custody injunction as it is by her desire for Therese, a rebellion against “the historical ‘impossibility’ of [her] same sex desire.”

In purchasing Therese a camera, and in particular one that she cannot afford herself, Carol once again attempts to “maintain [a] relationship” through the exchange of commodity goods. This is highlighted by the manner in which Carol gifts the camera to Therese: she pushes the gift across the threshold of Therese’ apartment before she enters.

175 Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption, 60.
We can read Carol’s object conduct as a means to buy her entrance into Therese’ life and home. Once again, Carol uses a material object to build a bridge between herself and Therese. This reveals “the tension between sentiment and commodification” in Carol’s object conduct. As Nishant Shahani has noted, contemporary historical films are “marked by an anti-utopian impulse; indeed, [they] impede[...] the very ability to map utopian possibilities” as they cannot be disentangled from the logics of commodity capitalism. This is evident in Carol’s object conduct: whilst her sentiment is no doubt romantic, attempting to capture Therese through giving her a gift exposes the inescapable commodity chains through which their relationship is not only made, but maintained.

Although Therese obviously desires Carol, her desire is in large part commodity driven; as much as she desires Carol romantically, she also desires what Carol is and what Carol has. This is first demonstrated when the two women have lunch, and when asked to order, Therese simply proclaims: “I’ll have what she’s having.” When the waiter clarifies her order, she replies “All of it.” We can see an extension of this later in the film in a hotel room: the two women’s first intimacy occurs when Carol and Therese play cosmetic counter and Carol gives Therese an upper-class femme makeover. Therese’ desire is clearly “class based, racialized and historically specific.” Firmly embedded within her romantic desire for Carol as a love object is a tension between Therese’ narcissistic identification with Carol or at the very least her class position and the luxuries that come along with it. This creates the effect of muddying the “distinction between identification and desire.”

This tension between identification and desire destabilizes the heteronormative fantasy structures of narrative cinema, as well as that of psychoanalytic understandings of

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183 Patricia White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” *Film Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2015), 14.
184 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 14.
As Carol and Therese both ascribe to the “sartorial codes of femininity,” Carol and Therese’ homosexuality complicates the corollary between “heterosexual or homosexual orientation [and]... masculine and feminine identification,” and thus between identification and desire based on sexual difference. It is also a trademark of lesbian spectatorship: as Jackie Stacey argues: “the rigid distinction between either desire or identification, so characteristic of psychoanalytic theory, fails to address the construction of desires which involve a specific interplay of both processes.” Thus, the difference that motivates Therese’ desire is class difference, as opposed to gender difference. However, Therese’ desire cannot be “collapsed into simple identification,” as difference, whether it be gender, class or age is irrefutably at play. Therese’ desire for Carol is therefore as much commodified identification with a feminine ideal as it is romantic desire.

Through the expensive Canon camera that Carol gifts her, Therese is able to achieve the upward class mobility she desires. The new camera (and the photographs she takes) land her a job in the photography section of the New York Times. With this new job comes a makeover for Therese; her high-femme styling becomes confidently expressed. Her upward class mobility is visually articulated to the viewer by Therese starting to wear luxury items such as pearl earrings; as Douglas and Isherwood state: “[t]here will always be luxuries, for rank must be marked.” Therese’ upward class mobility, enabled by the camera that Carol has gifted to her, reveals once again the way that objects have multivalent meanings and capacities, often shifting away from our initial reading of them. Building upon this thesis’s consideration the commodity chains deeply embedded in Carol and Therese’ relationship, one can see that the commodity item Carol gifts Therese – her camera – in an attempt to possess her ultimately becomes the very object that enables Therese’ shedding of her shopgirl subjectivity for upward class mobility and her ensuing independence. She is no longer the goods to be consumed, but a consumer in her own right.

193 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 14.
Capture: An Act of Capturing, or to Take or Seize by Force or Stratagem

Carol is set in the 1950’s, a time period when sexualities outside the bounds of the dominant Western norms of sexuality were harshly censured and extremely “denigrated form[s] of intimacy.” Same-sex desire was subjected to moral condemnation and various modes of systematic oppression – be that legal, medical, psychiatric, economic or social. In the film, the force working against Carol and Therese’ romantic relationship is Harge, Carol’s jealous ex-husband and the morality clause he takes up against Carol. His efforts are motivated by a desire to recapture Carol and bring her back within his control. as Carol herself says “If he can’t have me, I can’t have Rindy.” In this sense, Harge and the legal sanctions he places against Carol become the “figures of backwardness as allegories of queer historical experience,” created by retrospectatorship in the film. That is, he embodies the oppressive patriarchal and heteronormative hegemonies of the era, in a film that revisits this period from our current moment.

However, these legal sanctions are only the beginning of Harge’s attempts to recapture Carol. Unbeknownst to Carol and Therese, Harge hires a private investigator to follow his wife and collect evidence of her homosexuality. Although the detectives evidence consists of a sound recording, rather than a camera, I include it in this chapter about cameras due to the tape recorder device’s ability to capture; the tape is a “recording or storage of something [to] later playback.” Moreover, I include the discussion of the recorder in this section in order to emphasize its ability to capture Carol by “seizing, or taking by force or stratagem.” Harge, by capturing a recording of Carol and Therese’ sexual encounter, comes to possess the evidence he requires to recapture Carol within his control.

196 Love, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History, 8
198 Haynes, Carol.
199 Love, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History, 8
Upon the discovery of the morality clause, Carol decides to go on a road trip, inviting Therese to come with her, an attempt to escape both the impossibility of their desire and Harge’s scrutiny. The couples flight is shaped by the lived historical experiences of homosexual individuals under the McCarthy era politics and witch hunts. The outlaw element of their flight is demonstrated when Therese finds a gun hidden in Carol’s suitcase. The two women go on the run before their crime has been committed, whilst Harge further stages the outlaw fantasy by hiring a private investigator to surveil his ex-wife.

Once again, I wish to consider spaces, and the kind of narratives and subjectivities conjured by these cinematic spaces, and the object that inhabit them. As Lee Wallace states: “narrative theory has long recognized that the place in which a story occurs is never a neutral backdrop but has an instrumental relation to the story it ostensibly foregrounds,” which determines “the possibilities of narrative development and causally linking character and action.”

The setting of the women’s road adventure consists of public, disreputable spaces. As Vivian Sobchack wrote about Film Noir, and heterosexual relations outside of matrimony:

“[t]he... world of bars, diners and seedy hotels, of clandestine yet public meetings in which domesticity and kinship relations are subverted, denied, and undone... this world realizes a frightening reversal and perversion of home and the coherent, stable, idealized, and idyllic past of pre-war American patriarchy.”

This can be seen to apply just as aptly to female homosexual relations within Carol. Carol and Therese meet engage in similarly “clandestine yet public meetings” in restaurants and bars, and visit diners and motels whilst on the road. This has the effect of creating outlaws of Carol and Therese through the eyes of Harge and the private eye, and more broadly, the perceptions of society of the time. The viewer mirrors the detective figure in the film; we watch the film waiting in hope for the two women to consummate their desire,

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202 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 15
203 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 15.
or as Patricia White describes, “to be lesbians.” As a result, the viewer is implicated just as much as Carol and Therese in the outlaw fantasy – our hopeful desires are fulfilled along with Carol and Therese’.

The consequences for Carol come swiftly: the next morning she receives a telegram from her lawyer. Harge, having received the evidence he requires, can now legally be granted full custody of Rindy, as per the morality clause. Once again, he manages to separate the two women and bring the trajectory of their hopeful, now consummated desire crashing back to earth, mirroring the multivalent effect of the gloves in Chapter 2. We now see the devastating sanctions earlier foreshadowed come down upon Carol in full force. Harge’s object conduct with the tape recorder not only mirrors the trajectory of hopeful desire followed by bitter disappointment from the previous chapter, it also “makes durable” Harge’s ability to breakdown Carol and Therese’ homosexual romance.

Examining the use of the private eye and, by extension, his tape recorder, we see Harge’s particularly controlling and possessive object conduct: the recording is used as an attempt to repossess Carol. Integrating Harge’s object conduct with the tape recorder into this chapter about cameras serves two purposes: it demonstrates the multivalent ability of objects to “make and maintain” but also breakdown relationships as well as mirroring Harge’s ability to turn the trajectory of the women’s relationship from hopeful romance to disappointed desire. As previously mentioned, objects “can act as fences and bridges;” Harge is attempting to build a fence (of legal sanctions) between Carol and Therese. Furthermore, to build upon Douglas and Isherwood’s metaphor, this tape becomes a cage in which Harge holds Carol captive.

Capture: The Securing of an Object of Desire, to Capture a Lover’s Heart

Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975) uses a psychoanalytic framework to produce a feminist reading of the patriarchal structures of the active male

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206 White, ”Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 14.
207 Miller et. al. *Shopping, Place and Identity*, 18.
gaze within Classical Hollywood cinema. This seminal text began an area of feminist film analysis generally referred to gaze theory.  

210 Although gaze theory has undoubtedly fallen out of vogue in recent academia, I believe that it is a useful tool to examine aspects of the relationship between Therese and Carol as it comes to be “ma[de] and maintain[ed]”211 through Therese’ camera. Gaze theory - focused as it is on the role of spectatorship in cinema – seems pertinent when discussing a film created for retrospectatorship - that is, a temporal twisting, torqueing and queering of existing fantasy structures. Carol is a film that queers the fantasy structures of films from the past, making it an apt object to analyse by queering gaze theory. Furthermore, using gaze theory in my thesis delivers a small contribution to queer and feminist interventions into an area in which discussion has been predominately focused on male looking.

Mulvey’s gaze theory provides a framework to understand the role of Therese’ camera in shaping the viewers understanding of Therese as a character. Rooney Mara’s performance of Therese is (for the majority of the film at least) still, flat, and guileless,212 and Therese is scripted to be so quiet as to border on muteness. As she describes herself, “I barely even know what to order for lunch!”213 Aside from her status as an aspiring photographer and her desire for Carol, there is very little we know about Therese; she is a tabula rasa, the blank subjectivity through which the story is told. By positioning Therese (who was a set designer in Highsmith’s novel) as an aspiring photographer allows the film to construct Therese as a desiring subject. This occurs through the production of active female desire through the scopic drive, channelled through her camera.214 This allows us to see another aspect of Herring’s object conduct: the personal rather than social engagements people have with objects.215 Therese’ object conduct, capturing a picture of Carol, shows

212 White, “Sketchy Lesbians: Carol as History and Fantasy,” 14.
213 Haynes, Carol.
the way she personally interacts with the camera, alongside her social interactions. Having chosen an object of desire, her camera becomes a stand in for the lover’s desiring eye.

The first time Therese takes a picture of Carol demonstrates how gaze theory can be illuminating to my thesis. Carol has picked up Therese from the city to visit her home in New Jersey, and the two women stop to buy a Christmas tree for Carol’s house. As Carol is making her selection, Therese steps out of the car to take a photograph of the unknowing Carol. In a shot-reverse-shot sequence, we see highlighted the three mechanisms of gaze theory (and of cinema): the spectator, the camera and the female figure - more specifically, Therese’ eye, the organ of looking, its mechanical substitute, the camera, and Carol, the object of Therese’ inchoate desire. We see Therese subjecting Carol to what Bette Gordon describes as a “curious and controlling gaze.”216 Her capturing of Carol’s image is particularly noteworthy, considering Therese’ statement in an earlier scene that photographing people feels like “an invasion of privacy.”217

This scene is a clear case of retrospectatorship, in that it revises “memory traces of... other movies.”218 It references Michael Powell’s Peeping Tom (1960), a film about a deviant male photographer, Mark Lewis, who violently murders women with a knife attached to his camera. In a scene depicting Mark’s murder of a prostitute, and the first sequence lasts 31 seconds and contains three shots, firstly a male eye, then a streetscape of a woman looking in a shop window, and finally a camera. This sequence highlights the three mechanisms of gaze theory, the eye, the camera and the female figure. This scene provides a clear example of gaze theory: “[T]he pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure.”219 Carol engages in a “reworking of images, tropes, and generic strategies”220 from Peeping Tom, whilst also remaining “attentive to fantasy structures attending the symptoms of their repressions.”221 That is, Carol reworks this scene by queering the desiring gaze of the

217 Haynes, Carol.
221 Willis, “The Lure of Retrospectatorship: Hitting the False Notes in Far from Heaven,” 120.
spectator, shifting the gender of the spectator from male to female, creating a desiring lesbian subject and an active female gaze.

Therese’ relationship to Carol, as it is mediated by her camera, leaves the realm of scopophilic (defined by Laura Mulvey as “looking itself [as] a source of pleasure”\(^ {222} \)) and becomes voyeuristic, a more violent form of watching where “sexual satisfaction [comes] from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other.”\(^ {223} \) Later, in the film, when the two women have been parted, we see Therese develop a picture of Carol asleep, mirroring an earlier scene where Therese gazed intently, devouringly, at Carol’s sleeping form. In this earlier scene, Therese’ desiring gaze is so intensely hungry, so invasively possessive that it “substitutes a look for a touch,”\(^ {224} \) mirroring the titillating experience of the movie-goer. Later, Therese can touch the photograph she has taken of Carol, however it is only a substitute for the object of her desiring gaze. As Dannie later says to Therese of a picture of Carol: “Therese, you know these are seriously good. You really captured... whoever this is.”\(^ {225} \) The repetition of Therese’ possessive gaze highlights the “moral ambiguity of looking,”\(^ {226} \) and capturing the female form in photographs.

Furthermore, these two scenes presents the possibility of the voyeuristic gaze to be used by characters other than the active male. As such, these two scenes demonstrate the way that “[p]leasure and repetition work together, making the visual drive a dynamic, transgressive power”\(^ {227} \) by queering the ‘active’ male gaze. A consideration of female desire in Carol problematizes Mulvey’s gaze theory – or should I say, like gloves and cameras, Carol shifts away from both a straight and a straight-forward application of gaze theory. It stages a double reversal: firstly, the assumption of a male as voyeur, woman as object by positioning Therese as the voyeur. Secondly it queers the heterosexual assumption embedded in gaze theory: in Carol there is a woman as voyeur, the object of her desiring gaze another woman. The viewer of Carol is presumed to be female (although not necessarily presumed lesbian), unlike that of Classical Hollywood cinema, which assumes a

\(^ {222} \) Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 8.
\(^ {225} \) Haynes, Carol.
male viewer. Moreover, Mulvey argues that in narrative Hollywood cinema, the figure of woman is the “bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.” Carol queers this convention by positioning Therese as the “captor of images;” as such, one woman becomes bearer, and the other the maker of meaning. Once again, we see the final turn of multivalent objects within the film. For all the utopian possibility that Carol and Therese’ relationship hints at creating, a final reading of object conduct combined with gaze theory reveals that while Carol and Therese’ relationship queers the conventions of the gendered gaze, it is nonetheless caught up in the controlling effects of the subject/object divide embedded in the desiring gaze.

Conclusion

My third chapter undertakes an investigation into the way Therese’ camera makes, maintains but also breaks down relationships within Carol. By using Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings, it is possible to understand Therese’ photographs, as well as the film itself, as an archive of the historical losses of homosexuality. Building upon the discussion of commodity chains within my second chapter, it also investigates Carol’s attempts to possess Therese by purchasing her an expensive camera. However, this very same camera becomes the means to Therese’ upwards class mobility and subsequent independence. Harge’s hiring of private eye stages an outlaw narrative within the film, and his use of a tape recorder to capture the evidence of their homosexuality results in his recapturing power over Carol. Finally, reading Therese’ queer object conduct through the framework of gaze theory reveals that Carol and Therese’ implication in the controlling effects of the subject/object divide embedded in the desiring gaze, mirroring the moral ambiguity of the commodity chains embedded in their relationship, as it is made and maintained through material objects.

Conclusion

Vinyl Nostalgia

After visiting Carol at her New Jersey home, Therese goes to a record store and buys Carol a 12” phonograph record as a Christmas gift, a recording of Billie Holiday’s “Easy Living” (1937). Therese later gives the record to Carol on their road trip, and Carol correctly recalls it is a recording of the song Therese played for her on the piano. This record - a relatively insignificant object compared with the gloves and the camera - shows another function of objects: their ability to act as a temporal suture between time and place. The record, like the camera, brings together two moments in the film, and likewise acts as a suture between the 1950’s and our contemporary moment. 12” records (also referred to as vinyl records) were the main form of music reproduction for much of the 20th century, including the 1950’s, until the emergence of compact discs in the late 1980’s. However, there has been a resurgence in vinyl records, driven as much by audiophiles’ wish for the “warmth and clarity inherent in analogue sound” as by nostalgia. Between 2012 and 2014, vinyl record sales in the United States increased by 260%, with 9.2 million records sold in 2014.

This return to an older form of music reproduction and listening is part of a present pop-culture trend of vintage-inspired consumer goods. This “fascination [with] fashion, fads, sounds and stars that occurred within living memory” is a contemporary condition dubbed retromania by music commentator Simon Reynolds. Even the current Hollywood interest with frock-films such as Carol plays into this trend. This nostalgia boom allows individuals in our contemporary moment access to past eras within living memory and to older generations. Thus, our object conduct with these vintage-inspired goods brings human interaction to the experience of nostalgia. A consideration of vinyl records in relation to the nostalgia boom seems apt, for “[n]ostalgia is, after all,” as Reynolds states, “one of

234 Lee Baron, “Back on Record: The Reasons Behind Vinyl’s Unlikely Comeback.” The Conversation. First posted 17/04/2015.
236 Baron, “Back on Record: The Reasons Behind Vinyl’s Unlikely Comeback.”
the great pop emotions.”237 As such, the vinyl record’s resurgence in popular use, and in particular their nostalgic appeal, sutures a moment in the past as depicted in Carol and our present moment.

Queer Sutures and the Marriage Equality Campaign

I began my Honours candidacy in August 2016, around which time the push for (and push against) the marriage equality campaign in Australia was reaching critical mass. A year earlier, a plebiscite had been proposed as a potential solution to marriage equality, or as some politicians liked to call it, “the Oxford Street issue.”238 Being an LGBTI+ advocate, I was aware this would influence my life during the time of my Honours, although at the time I could not have known how much of an impact it would have.

Looking back, three semesters later, Obama’s Presidency and the forward march of civil rights progress seems like a simpler time that I, like many who surrounded me, thought would continue. I thought it would only be a matter of time before marriage equality was legalised in Australia. Around this time began significant grumblings of an international repressive swing. The Pulse Nightclub mass shooting had just taken place in Orlando, Florida, and trans-exclusionary bathrooms bills were cropping up in the United States. Trump was running for President, although at the time I and those around me considered it a publicity stunt. We said to one another: “There is no way Trump is going to get in!” We all thought that come November, the United States would have its first female President. How wrong we were.

As these events were unfolding, I was also reading Gayle Rubin’s Thinking Sex: Notes for A Radical Theory for the Politics of Sexuality (1989). She looked at three periods in recent Western history, the 1890’s, the 1950’s and her contemporaneous period in the 1980’s, wherein the boundaries around dominant Western norms of sexuality became more explicitly politicised, stridently disputed and harshly censured. During these periods of sex panic, “the state, the institutions of medicine and the popular media… mobili[sed] to attack

237 Reynolds, Retromania: Pop Cultures Addiction to its Own Past, 8.
and oppress all whose sexual tastes differ[ed] from the currently dominant model of sexual correctness.” In such times, the boundaries and practices of the erotic domain are renegotiated. However, these sex panics have long-lasting consequences which are inscribed in our collective attitudes towards sex. It occurred to me as I read Rubin’s article that perhaps I was living through another such time. It certainly seemed so, as debate around marriage equality raged, seemingly giving permission to the very worst of homophobes to voice their opinion, even if it was just from the anonymous comfort of a Facebook comments section.

In August, 2016, the Liberal-National Party announced a bill proposing a plebiscite to decide the issue of marriage equality in Australia. There was considerable concern from advocates from the LGBTI+ community, citing potential harm to community as a justifiable reason for the plebiscite not to go ahead. On the 7th of November, the plebiscite bill failed to pass through the Senate. We thought that a public survey on our rights was dead. It quickly became clear that this would not be resolved quickly, or easily. On August 8th 2017, a second bill proposing a plebiscite failed once again to make it through the Senate. The next day, Malcolm Turnbull announced that instead of a plebiscite, the government would hold a non-binding postal vote, run by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The government, it appeared, wanted a nation divided not united.

What was to follow was a hateful and divisive No campaign. There were posters saying STOP THE FAGS, people equating homosexuality with bestiality and paedophilia, flyers handed out and an upswing in vitriol in Facebook comment sections. A skywriter was commissioned to write VOTE NO in several locations over Sydney, there were television ads saying “It’s OK to Vote NO” and protests and counter protests on campus. My social media feed was filled with personal accounts of the homophobic and transphobic micro-aggressions my friends were experiencing. The day I received my survey in the mail was my lowest point.

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A major component of the campaign against a plebiscite - and indeed against the postal vote – was harm to the LGBTI+ community, who are statistically five times more likely to be diagnosed with Major Depression and fourteen time more likely to attempt suicide compared to the national average.\textsuperscript{240} Going into the campaign, I knew it was going to be damaging to people in my community, I just didn’t think that I was going to be one of those people. I yo-yoed between anger and sadness and there were days that it was hard to get out of bed. These sentiments were echoed by my friends. We thought that being in our late twenties or early thirties, surrounded by supportive community and being, for the most part, relatively well adjusted adult queers, that we would be spared the brunt of the emotional impact. Once again, we were wrong.

A Broken Record?

How are these present queer experiences also sutured to a lesbian past depicted in Todd Haynes’ film? When I began writing my thesis about Carol, I had a doubt that niggled in the back of my mind. In writing about Carol, I was writing about an historical struggle and trauma that was not my own. Whilst Heather Love argues that the painful histories of “the social, psychic and corporeal effects of homophobia”\textsuperscript{241} are the inheritance of contemporary queerness, I often wondered why I felt I could do justice to the story of female homosexuality in the 1950’s. However, as time passed I began to realise that not only I, but my whole queer community was experiencing my generation’s public trauma, our own experience of “socially situated political violence”\textsuperscript{242} that made “girls like me feel... bad.”\textsuperscript{243}

I finish my thesis on one final thought, which brings together the perhaps disparate threads of my conclusion. The broken record is a common metaphor, the understood meaning of which is something that comes back to repeat over and over.\textsuperscript{244} Reflecting upon my own experiences in the marriage equality debate in corollary with Rubin’s account of

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\item \textsuperscript{240} ACON, “Mental Health Basics”, Aids Council of New South Wales. Last accessed 15/10/2017.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Heather Love, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Definition: “a constant and annoying repetition of a particular statement or opinion”. Origin: “1940’s: with reference to a scratched gramophone record that sticks at a particular point when played and repeats over and over”. Oxford English Dictionary, “Broken Record”, Oxford English Dictionary Online.
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periods of sex panic, it would appear that, like a broken record, the politics of sexuality had once more come full circle. Undoubtedly, one cannot equate present queer experiences of public trauma with the history of violence, tragedy, and structural oppression that made up queer lived experience in the 1950’s. Nonetheless, society is turning back once more to a period of sex panic; just as the nostalgia boom in consumer culture has turned back to styles from the past, or indeed, as Carol turns backward to acknowledge the painful history of homophobia. Broken records, gloves and cameras, are imbued with the social insofar as they provide a bridge between contemporary queer women who feel backward and the unruliness of same-sex desire in the 1950’s.
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