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6

Reinventing Lesbian Youth in Su Friedrich's Cinematic Autoqueerography *Hide and Seek*

"My name is not Lucille! It's Lu!" cries a 12-year-old small-town 1960s girl in Su Friedrich's black-and-white film *Hide and Seek*. Lu's struggle for self-definition, out of her straight and narrow classmate's heteronormativity, is a quest for reevaluation of lesbian adolescence *and* their influence on adult women's life. This film's critical cinematic investigation of queer girlhood; same-sex friendship and bonding between straight girls, 'baby-dykes,' and tomboys; heterocentric popular media; and implicit and explicit homophobia is a mosaic or assemblage of interviews with adult lesbians who recount their adolescent same-sex attractions, fictional youth queer melodrama, and diverse excerpts from sex educational films of the 1960s, nature films, and Brian Desmond Hurst's adventure film *Simba* about rebellious Africans in Kenya. The personal stories and the fictional narrative are interwoven in *Hide and Seek* into a bittersweet reconsideration of nostalgic lesbian stories and microhistories as a source of evolvement and empowerment.

The assemblage aesthetics of *Hide and Seek*, oscillating between the fictional and the real, the straight and the narrow, footage of conservative educational films and dissident queer melodrama, nostalgic pleasures and perilous confrontations, is typical of much of the experimental lesbian cinema made by Friedrich, Sadie Benning, Jan Oxenberg, Barbara Hammer, Lizzie Borden, Sheila McLaughlin, Lynne Fernie, and Aerlyn Weissman, and their experiment with the possibilities of film form designed "to represent lesbian-feminist concerns, often while simultaneously questioning the very nature of representation itself" (Benshoff and Griffin, 167). Whereas gay male films are individualistic, using psychoanalytic and mythic imagery, the lesbian films are no less person-oriented, but much less individualistic. "The personal becomes the intimacy," Richard Dyer notes, "and inwardness shared by women,

to which the spiritual and archetypal give access" ("Lesbian/Woman" 170–1).

In the film *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*, for example, ten Canadian women talk about being lesbian in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s and their complicated relationship with pulp fiction that depicted "forbidden" lesbian romance. The interviewees talk about their own infatuations, painful breaking, their coming to terms with their sexual identity. They discuss the significance of butch and femme roles, and the emergence of countercultural identification in a hostile, conservative, patriarchal, and often aggressive society. Interspersed among the interviews (including explanation of the particularities of these pulp-fiction novels given by the pulp-fiction writer Ann Bannon) and archival excerpts, are four fictional chapters from a pulp novel *Forbidden Love* in which Laura leaves her small town and moves to a big city, where she falls in love with Mitch in a bar.

Although one might expect the juxtaposition of documentary footage of real dykes with mass-market stereotypes to result in the privileging of the former over the latter, as "true" over "false" images, or positive over negative or stereotypical images, Ann Cvetkovich suggests that the montage of oral testimony, fantasy sequences, stock footage (from both film and photographic sources), and shots of pulp-novel covers, along with the musical soundtrack, challenges simple distinctions between "real" lesbians and their pulp-fiction counterparts: "The narrators' accounts of their consumption of the paperbacks reveal that these artifacts form a vital part of the history of lesbian culture, as does the film's visual engagement with the covers," she says, and "posits the centrality of fantasy and fiction to the construction of lesbian identity and community" (119).

Fantasy, however, is used in this film not only as a constructive technique but also as an ironic, comic criticism of the stigmatization of lesbians in previous and contemporary societies. Catherine Russell stresses that in her use of the *Simba* footage and instructional documentaries, Friedrich adopts a series of different gazes to evoke the experience of an ethnographic subject (149). Early in the film, several interviewees discuss the "nature-nurture" question, or the "gene theory" of homosexuality. Although most of the female interviewees note that it makes little difference to them, and that they no longer need an explanation for their sexual orientation, it is significant to the film's negotiation of "scientific" and experiential modes of representation. Friedrich inserts a few shots of monkeys and chimps, along with shots of young girls, into this discussion, indicating the way that the nature-nurture discussion places lesbians in the role of monkeys to be studied. "Instead of a scientific explanation," Russell suggests, "Friedrich inscribes a discourse of desire as a representation of lesbian identity, the causes of which remain a mystery" (149).

Hide and Seek not only ridiculizes homophobic theories, however, but also explores real-life stories presented by lesbian interviewees who recall their youth in the 1960s. Their stories are interwoven with dramatization of some of the memories, focusing on Lu, a fictional 12-year-old girl who comes to terms with her sexuality. The evidential and the dramatic, the real and the fictional are interwoven into an intricate spectacle of reconstructed and deconstructed lesbian youth and memories. For example, one of the interviewees recalls her friendship with another girl and their joyful imitation of a straight boy-and-girl couple. When the female friend said that it's time to go to bed, they just left rub at each other, sometimes taking off their clothes. Apparently, the straight romance enabled them to practice straight sex roles. Practically, however, it gave them a chance to realize and enjoy their mutual attraction, stimulated by the fear of being exposed by their conservative families.

The teacher, her girlfriend, and compulsory heterosexuality

Another interviewee recounts her romantic feelings, as a girl, for a 23-year-old teacher. Her memory is visualized by an archival scene of girls in school uniforms entering the schoolyard *and* a fictional, melodramatic scene in which Lu and her friends see their teacher Miss Callahan brought to school by a car driven by another woman. A malicious girl speculates, or rather fantasizes, that the driver was Miss Callahan's girlfriend. Other girls suggest that maybe the teacher simply doesn't care, or that the two women are merely roommates, "Yah," the malicious girl replies, "but they're lezies." After another girl defends their teacher, noting that Miss Callahan is the nicest teacher in the whole school, her malicious counterpart insists: "Callahan is a homo!" This fictional gossip scene, based on the lesbian interviewees' school memories, clearly criticizes homophobic discrimination by the state – then and now – through the subordinated legal status of homosexual relationships in comparison to heterosexual relationships, combined with people's general ignorance, fear, and misunderstanding of homosexual lifestyles, making teaching a difficult career for lesbians and gay men even nowadays, as schools reflect the dominant social structures of heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity (Robinson). Further, homophobic ignorance and harassment experienced in schools is "a perpetuation and reinforcement of this dominant discourse" (Perfolja, 402).

Although females more than males favor gay equity, they sometimes participate in harassment, as shown in this scene. Tania Perfolja explains

that the discourse and social construction of femininity presents and perpetuates images of women and girls as nurturing, more compliant and understanding than dominant masculine gender constructions, resulting in only limited contextual power. However, participating in homophobic harassment, as Perfolja suggests, "enables the attainment of some of that power relegated to males in the patriarchal discourse, inadvertently maintaining the oppression of difference resultant of patriarchal power" (404). Notably, the scene of gossiping about Miss Callahan's sexuality is not portrayed as nostalgic but, rather, as an intimidating experience for closeted lesbian girls. Hence, the nostalgic tone of this film does not undermine the interviewees' personal painful histories but, rather, emphasizes the power of homophobic attitudes which brutally intrude in the interviewees' and Lu's queer childhood.

Vicious and painful homophobic scenes, however, are archived in many male gays' and lesbians' childhood memories. Nostalgizing such experiences does not imply a willingness to reexamine one's lesbian childhood, thrilling and devastating as it is, and to evolve a deeper understanding of the implications of early homophobic encounters on one's adult identity. In other words, this scene embodies Lu's first realization of the power of compulsive heterosexuality and its discontents. Adrienne Rich explains:

> The assumption that "most women are innately heterosexual" stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism. It remains a tenable assumption partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogues under disease, partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic, partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a "preference" at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and "innately" heterosexual [...] To take a step of questioning heterosexuality as a "preference" or "choice" for women – and to do the intellectual and emotional work that follows – will call for a special quality of courage in heterosexually identified feminists, but I think the rewards will be great: a freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships. (238–9)

Fears, anxieties, agonies, and sordid experiences result from compulsive heterosexuality and its ruthless agents. Queers' daily hardship often includes their schoolmates' vicious gossiping and verbal and physical

abuse. Such harassments have significant effect on queers' personal and communal identifications, no less than their moments of revelation, aspiration, realization, acceptance, and erotic delight. Interweaving difficult situations into one's queer nostalgia enables a politicization of early sexual hostility and realization of its role in the construction of self and social perceptions of queer subjects' lives. Notably, while other pupils make jokes at the expense of Miss Callahan, whose partner is another woman in this scene, Lu is moved to defend her, becomes ridiculed as a result by several homophobic girls – a situation which is familiar to many queer children *and* adults. The verbal abuse experienced by Lu is meant to enforce heterosexuality by marginalizing the sexual Other.

This enforcement is clearly orchestrated by the homophobic queen of the class and her female worshippers. Lu's victimization is managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force. In a later scene, a paternalistic film shown in class refers to the "transitional stage" when girls are closer to other girls than to boys. By its omission of an alternative option, the school film does not recognize lesbian identity or presume that there is something wrong with it. The annoying girl comments about the girl who is shown on film "she is really weird," then she sarcastically refers to Lu: "Lucille, are you going to Mary's house?" and the latter yells at her abuser: "My name is not Lucille! It's Lu!" By her statement, Lu demands her right to be self-defined, to disobey the hegemonic codes of subordinated girlhood and womanhood implied by the name Lucille, and to create her own female identification by adopting the name Lu. Her cry for appropriate naming is a refusal to be colonized and gendered by the patriarchal hegemony and its young female agents.

Moreover, Friedrich adopts the conventional code of melodrama, often condemned by feminist scholarship as patriarchal weepie dramas directed at female spectators in a most conservative manner. In feminist terms, the pathetic treatment of female characters becomes doubly problematic, "since it has prevented the presentation of women as capable of taking action within the narrative, and it has encouraged their presentation as passive, victimized and masochistic throughout film history" (Seiter, 576). Barbara Klinger, however, suggests that mainstream Hollywood melodramas are typically characterized by psychic destructiveness of the social institutions, often centering on the (heterosexual) couple, resulting in a rampageous representation of ambition and a romantic love disquieted through expressions of nymphomania, impotence, suicidal tendencies, obsessions with paternity, etc. (36). Further, melodramas usually concentrate on the point of view of the victim, and sometimes even manage to present all the characters convincingly as victims.

In queering this successful genre, in particular, the suffering straight woman is substituted by different sexual Others: the young gay man, the young lesbian, the young transgender person. The queer protagonists are considered by their straight environment as a sham – and thus as a social and sexual threat – that real young women, in this case, would do well to turn their backs on. Hereby, queer melodramas like *Hide and Seek* criticize the mainstream codes of womanhood in the significant phase of puberty, adolescence, and maturation.

The anguished adolescent in this lesbian adolescent film, however, is not exactly a feminine version of what Richard Dyer defines in "Seen to Be Believed" as the Sad Young Man. Lu is not a typical Sad Young Woman because she does play with the signs of gender (e.g., naming herself Lu instead of Lucille and wearing boys' clothes and acting as a tomboy). Her relationship to femininity, however, is not difficult. Rather, she problematizes the bourgeoisie straight codes of subordinated womanhood. She is a young woman who quests for alternative self-fulfillment. Throughout most of the film, she is assertive and determined to go her own way, playing with her best female friend and the boys (see Figure 6.1). Nevertheless, she *is* represented as a martyr figure when she is humiliated by some homophobic classmates. Her joy and

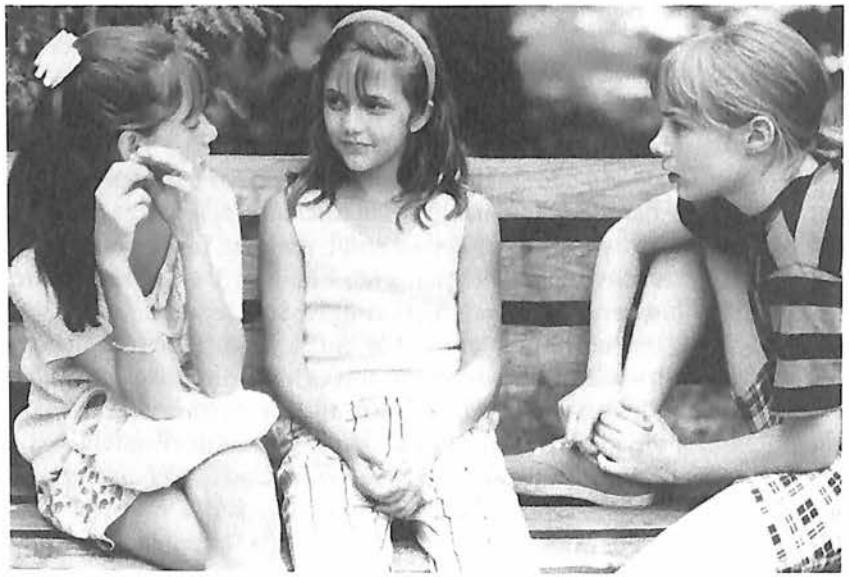

Figure 6.1 Negotiating Womanhood. Lu (in striped T shirt) talks to her friends in *Hide and Seek*. Courtesy of Su Friedrich

hardship are both visualized empathetically and compassionately, as this film is not only aiming to nostalgize lesbian adults' adolescence but also to encourage and fortify the oppressed queer adolescents in the audience, particularly lesbian girls who experience their *via dolorosa* in their school and neighborhood.

Autobiography, autogynography, and autoqueerography

Lu (a character presumably inspired by the youth memories of filmmaker Su), whose fictional character is based on many lesbian adolescence stories, is determined to tell *and* create her own history, or, rather, her story. The dramatic footage centered on Lu illustrates many of the experiences remembered by the female interviewees: dreaming about desired gym teachers, dealing with the complexities of same-sex relationships, adopting a tomboy style and (mis)conduct, learning about sex, coming to terms with one's own body. Catherine Russell notes that although Lu is the "main character" of the narrative, her psychological profile is developed within what might be described as "girl's culture": "Slumber parties and party games, little fortune-telling games, pop songs, tree houses, and jealousies constitute a set of ritualistic behaviors that characterize this culture" (152).

Such depiction of a "girl's culture" from a "girl's perspective" is an essential to this women's cinematic autobiography that integrates a fictional narrative about Lu who struggles with her lesbian identity in the context of her female schoolmates, interviews with adult lesbians about their childhood recollections, and a variety of excerpts from sex educational films of the 1960s, the feature *Simba*, and still photographs of girls and young women. These different modes of representation are woven into a one-hour black-and-white female autobiography. Anthony Giddens contends that autobiography, as the core of self-identity in modern social life, is *a corrective intervention into the past*, not merely a chronicle of elapsed events (249 – emphasis added). Self-identity, as a coherent phenomenon, presumes a narrative: the narrative of the self is made explicit. "Like any other formalized narrative, it is something that had to be worked at, and calls for creative input as a matter of course" (253). Moreover, identities, according to Stuart Hall, are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions (4). Yet, women's autobiographies, or *autogynographies*, as stories about the female self, created and narrated under pressures of subordination,

underestimation, exclusion, and marginalization, are particularly intricate. Brenda Webster analyzes the tensions between a male tradition of autobiographical narrative that actively constructs subjectivity in the public sphere of history vis-à-vis the tradition of women's autogynographic narrative, where, as Domna C. Stanton notes, the act of writing becomes a "self-assertion that is essential to the denial and reversal of the status assigned to women under the patriarchy" (43).

Hegemonic men's autobiographies are situated in the public sphere of governance, cultural dominance, politics, history, and hegemonic chronology, and characterized by traditional order, linear plotline, and harmonic organization and coherent formation of the writer's experiences. In contrast, the fragmented, disjoined, and repetitive women's personal stories are characterized by incoherency, disruptive inconsistency, and disorderly chronology. The writing of the female self, according to Germaine Brée, has been considered for a long time as an abstract, unconsolidated writing because of the female writers' use of alternative expressions, including diaries and correspondence. Estelle Jelinek stresses that fragmented, discontinuing textual patterns are essential for women in reflecting their rather fragmented and amorphous lives.

As a cinematic self-portrayal of lesbian women, however, *Hide and Seek* can be defined not only as dissident autogynography, but also as what I initially define here as *autoqueerography*, i.e. queering of traditional conceptualizations of life-writing's constitutive elements – *bios, graphe* – creatively and counterculturally refiguring both elements, out of the straight and narrow. Like the destiny of women in patriarchal climate, the lives of queer subjectivities are portrayed in this kind of autobiographical writing as disrupted, fragmented lives that quest for transgression from oppressive traditional meaning. Autoqueerography does not merely contradict the patriarchal establishment and its powerful extensions and cultural embodiments, but also objects to the dictated heterocentric patterns of self-perception and diverse homophobic realizations. It also necessitates the need to expose and constitute an intimate queer realm that most authentically manifests the lesbian subjectivity or auto*lesbio*graphy, as explored in Friedrich's *Hide and Seek*.

This autoqueerography reconsiders both traditional *and* alternative systems of values and conventionalities. The cinematic *les-bio*-graphic construction of *Hide and Seek*, in particular, integrates several realms, spaces, and times. What emerges in queer autobiographies, according to Margaretta Jolly, is "the need for a language of belonging that will answer to a sense of fragmentation that is social as much as sexual in the late-modern urban context" (476). Brian Loftus contends that the

term "queer autobiography" expresses both the problem of the homosexual's entry into representation and the (im)possibilities of the claim to an "I" that autobiography demands: "Both concerns are fraught by virtue of the symbolic order's bar of, or refusal to represent, homosexuality" (28). Forced into the margins of a symbolic system that refuses it, "the homosexual can only impinge upon the heterosexualized center not as a coherent 'I', but only negatively as a figure of excess or absence. Current queer theory," Loftus adds, "even recognizes these options in politicizing definitions of the queer subject" (29).

The act of exclusion, in particular, is the very point of boundary, the definition of the symbolic center against the homosexual cipher. Hence, "By virtue of this constitutive definition against that which it refuses, heterosexuality and the symbolic order it sustains and is sustained by are radically dependent upon the homosexual outside" (29). Loftus argues that as a consequence of this symbolic dependence, *no text, trope, or even single term can be read in one way, but rather must be read multiply in the contexts of its exclusions; even the unitary symbol of the self, the "I" demands double reading*. He explains that the literal 'I' becomes a literal figure, symbolizing not merely its intended referent, as he explains, "but troping the fields of negativity that structure it. According to this figurative function," he adds, "the etymological 'turning' by which figuration is described by 'trope', disallows a 'straight' reading" (29–30).

In regard to lesbian autobiography, as a particular kind of queer autobiography, Biddy Martin notes:

> The *lesbian* in front of *autobiography* reinforces conventional assumptions of the transparency of autobiographical writing. And the *autobiography* that follows *lesbian* suggests that sexual identity not only modifies but essentially defines a life, providing it with predictable content and an identity possessing continuity and universality [...] It is to suggest that there is something coherently different about lesbians' lives vis-à-vis other lives and [...] something coherently the same about all lesbians. (78)

The experience of exclusion of the lesbian girl from both the heteronormative "girl culture" and from the "boys' culture" is discussed at length in *Hide and Seek*, showing that there is something coherently different indeed about lesbians' lives vis-à-vis other lives, not only in their personal stories (whether they are told by the adult interviewees or featured as youth melodrama) but also on a communal level, something coherently the same about all lesbians.

The tomboy's first menses and her initial erotic arousal

In a significant sequence, nostalgic pictures of girls in cowboy costumes are shifted by a scene in which Lu plays with the boys. She throws a stone at a window of a deserted house. Then she agrees to enter the building and wave to the boys from the top floor. This scene illustrates the marginalized status of the tomboy who prefers the company of boys and their adventurous games and practiced courage and toughness, rather than joining any typical girls' games. Suddenly, Lu leaves the boys. It turns out that she got her first period.

Menarche, or first menstrual period, as Janet Lee points out, is a culturally scripted physiological event that has important implications for a girl's sense of herself and her world: "It shapes gender identity, triggers the politics associated with being an adult female in a society that devalues women," she explains, "and provides an opportunity for the negotiation of new configurations of family relationships" ("A Kotex and a Smile," 1325). Natalie Angier claims that menarche is the most central rite of passage: "What a woman really remembers is her first period; now there's a memory seared into the brain with the blowtorch of emotion" (105).

Getting a first period was considered at that time (and even in today's society) not only as an expression of the female's sexual maturation but also as an inescapable entrance into the world of womanhood and its patriarchal obligations (being courted by men, being proposed to, getting married, raising children and being primarily devoted to the domestic sphere). Lee notes that menarche represents the entrance into womanhood in a society that devalues women through cultural scripts associated with the body. Further, within patriarchal and heterosexist societies menarche simultaneously signifies both emerging sexual availability and reproductive potential ("Menarche and the (Hetero)sexualization" 344). In current Western society, sexualization implies heterosexualization, meaning that women are taught to live and discipline their bodies in accordance with the prescriptions of heterosexuality, experiencing themselves as sexual objects for heterosexual male viewing, pleasure, and also as mothers of men's children (344). "When women remember their first menses," Lee adds, "their memories are framed by many competing discourses, having become subjects through the sifting and making meaning out of their experiences" (345).

Lu's first menses, however, undoubtedly contradicts Lu's hopes and dreams. As a tomboy, she feels like menarche is something that seems

to appear from the outside, invading the self. She is surprised and disappointed by her apparently alienated body. Also in Janet Lee's study of women's memories about their first menses, many of the women interviewed experienced menarche as something that was happing *to* them, as something outside of themselves and frequently referred to as "it," giving an illusion of a self that was fragmented. "Overwhelmingly," Lee notes, "women used the passive voice to describe menarche. Examples include: 'I couldn't believe it was happening to me', 'we called it 'the visitor' [...] 'this monthly event' and (my favorite) 'when it came I was at home'" ("Menarche and the (Hetero)sexualization" 349). In Lu's case, however, the pubescent protagonist's dissatisfaction with her first menses is even more complicated. Her first period collides with her tomboyhood, a countercultural praxis that challenges the traditional heteronormative girlhood. Tomboys often report that because of their first menses, they were distressed that their camaraderie with boys dissipated: "They felt they could no longer be 'one of the boys' or their friendships became infused with the sexual tensions of early adolescence and it buddying compulsory heterosexuality" (353).

Lu, however, embarrassed *and* refusing to become "girlie," returns home and locks herself in the bathroom, washing the blood out of her cloth. Her older sister realizes her sibling's situation, gives her a bandage, and clarifies that from now on, Lu should wear a skirt. The required change in her clothing is detested by Lu, who considers this demand as a sort of Taming of the Shrew. Lu refuses to be subordinated by the patriarchal symbolic order and struggles to maintain her liminal gender identity, whether or not the tomboy is (mis)perceived by the hegemony as embodying preceded lesbianism.

In the following scene, the female classmates watch together a sex-educational movie that warns against developing an intimate emotional connection between youths of the same sex. The educational movie features two girls, Mary and Lucille, who enjoy spending time in each other's company. A deep male voice-over explains to the young viewers that "They were inseparable" and "To Mary's mother it seemed unnatural, this concentration of affection in one not unusual girl." When the mother in the educational film tries to separate her daughter from Lucille, the homophobic queen of the class turns to Lu and utters sarcastically: "Hi Lucille!" Here, Lu is identified by the vicious queen of the class as transgressive as the protagonist in the educational film. This scene criticizes the conservative educational films of the early 1960s that oppressed and stigmatized, rather than liberated, sexual minorities among the young audience. The narrator in the educational film

apparently empathizes with Mary and suggests that "Mother forgot the devotion she had for her own girlfriend years ago," but then Mary is shown collecting photos of admired female Hollywood stars, and the male announcer explains why mothers and girls should not be worried about same-sex youth friendships: "It was a transition stage from the antagonism towards boys, just before puberty," he assures the viewers, "to the next stage of falling in love with a boy."

In *Hide and Seek*'s cinematic framework, these scenes not only reflect the spirit of the conservative educational system of that period, but also stimulate the interviewees' personal and communal autogynography and autoqueerography. From the filmmaker Su Friedrich's perspective, the erotic is political and the political is often erotic. This is particularly significant in her use of popular sexual imageries produced by the hegemonic culture industry. Lu's first realization of her sexual attraction to women is denoted by her interest in a *Playboy* magazine that the girls find under a bed. Their glimpse at naked women in the porn journal is shifted by excerpts from old burlesque films showing naked women dancing. These erotic images are accompanied by a story told by an Afro-American interviewee who recalls how embarrassing it was when her mother found a bunch of porn journals in her room and scolded her.

Unlike typical youth memories about adolescent boys whose porn collection was discovered by their anxious parents, a lesbian version of such experience illustrates one's courage in transgressing the heterocentric imperatives to celebrate one's alternative sexual identification *and* the confrontation with conservative families who reject same-sex attraction. Notwithstanding, *Hide and Seek* reconsiders this embarrassing experience as nostalgic, rather than traumatic. From a nostalgic perspective, the strong, intense, erotic feelings and sexual stimulus are reconstructed with a sense of perilous pleasure. Moreover, the heterosexist porn imagery is queered, as it is consumed by an unexpected audience. Instead of arousing eager boys, the porn magazine was secretly consumed by passionate girls who fantasize about other women (not by men who objectify women), thus violating the hegemonic gender hierarchy.

Is it a requiem for a lost lesbian child or a redemptive journey?

Reconstructing childhood, particularly queer childhood, often seems to be an impossible mission. In a contemporary consumerist, voracious world of instant satisfactions, uses, and gratifications, which is indulged

with momentary pleasures, it is extremely difficult to go back to childhood memories, particularly when the subject's early memories are often involved with painful misunderstandings and even traumas caused by intolerant straight children and adults. Kathryn Bond Stockton notes: "The child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back," and she asks: "It is a ghostly, unreachable fancy, making us wonder: Given that we cannot know the contours of children, who they are to themselves, should we stop talking of children altogether? Should all talk of the child subside, beyond our critique of the bad effects of looking back nostalgically in fantasy?"

Further, Stockton suggests that the very moves to free the child from density – to make it distant from adulthood – have only made it stranger, more fundamentally foreign, to adults. "Innocence is queerer than we ever thought it could be," she claims, "and then there are bodies (of children) that must live inside the figure of the child. Given that children don't know this child, surely not as we do, though they move inside it, life inside this membrane is largely available to adults as memory – what can I remember of what I thought I was? – and so takes us back in circles to our fantasies (of our memories). But even fantasy-tinged ghostly memories can spawn complex concepts of the child [...] The notion of a gay child spotlights the drama of children's darkness: the motion of their bodies around troubled words; also their propensity for growing astray inside the delay that defines who they "are." Children grow sideways as well as up – or so I will say – in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it's time" (5–6). Stockton also suggests that the gay child's "backward birth" has precisely postmortem features, i.e. the protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection and after a death: "In one's teens or twenties", she explains, "whenever (parental) plans for one's straight destination have died, the designation 'homosexual child', or even 'gay kid', may finally, retrospectively be applied" (6–7).

I find Stockton's critical framework useful in realizing the creative, vital force of autoqueerography, and particularly autolesbiography that revives lesbian youth in *Hide and Seek*. The interwoven flashbacks in this film mirror a non-linear, rather distractive storyline, reflecting fragmented and multidimensional negotiations of past and present in adult lesbians' lives. This conciliation with yesterday's anxieties and delights is mediated both by the interviewees who expose their childhood experiences as girls who felt different from the others, and by the fictional protagonist Lu who reenacts some of the filmmaker Su's youth friendships and hardships. Indeed, the documentation of

their memories, as much as featuring Lu's/Su's youth memories became possible only in a retrospective manner, only after the plans for their straight destination have died.

The very identification of particular childhood memories, e.g. the perilous pleasure of initial erotic arousal, coming to terms with the gendered meaning of first menses, and realizing conflicts with bigoted parents and alienated classmates as primarily *lesbian* memories is based on death and revival. Such death, however, is strongly and queerly associated, in this respect, with revival. The death of the forced affiliation to the straight majority enables the lesbian subjectivity to decolonize and thus revive her lost childhood and youth. Autoqueerography, as self-narrated queer life, demands the abundance of compulsory heterosexuality in order to be emancipated and reborn as autonomous queer subjectivity (see Figure 6.2).

Cinematically, this sort of autobiography transgresses the straight and narrow boundaries between reality and fantasy, oral, visual, and dramatized evidences, documentation, and docudramatization. In its relation to varied realms and mediators, this film celebrates pluralism, multiplicity, and heterogeneity, reflecting the multilayered, disruptive (rather

Figure 6.2 Girls wanna have fun. Dance as emancipating nostalgic pleasure in *Hide and Seek*. Courtesy of Su Friedrich

than affirmative) nature of queer selfhood. Loftus explains that instead of a monolithic signifier of identity, "queer selfhood is dissociated from the being it purports to describe and disperses itself over and among plural, competing and even antagonistic categories" (36). Shooting the whole film in black and white (including the educational film excerpts, the current interviews and the fictional lesbian youth melodrama) highlights the blurred boundaries between genres, times, and spaces.

In a queer, multidirectional way, Lu's fictional coming of age illustrates and is illustrated by the interviewees' memories, and their stories are interwoven with the fictional dramas. The documented and the featured scenes both interact with the filmmaker's criticism of prevalent homophobic myths about the origins of homosexuality, for example, by ironic combination of images of monkeys and girls, animals and human beings. Such sophisticated cinematic construction enables us to deconstruct heterosexual conventionality and to celebrate lesbian emancipation. Such liberation, however, cannot be commenced before the lesbian child is reborn as *lesbian child* in the adult lesbian's mind. *Hide and Seek* proves that the lesbian child can only be recognized as such through an act of retrospection. The logic of this cinematic queer autobiography then becomes the logic of modification and modularity, reversal and dispersion, as the filmmaker and her personal and communal dramatized past breaches the division between the textual inside and outside and produces a multilayered cinematic texture. The film *Hide and Seek* proves that abandoning the concealment of one's sexual authenticity should certainly be embraced, but it is not the end of the story, only the beginning; it is an invitation to a personal and communal journey of seeking for one's lesbian childhood – hellish and heavenly as it might be.

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7

Uses of Nostalgia in Musical Politicization of Homo/Phobic Myths in *Were the World Mine*, *The Big Gay Musical*, and *Zero Patience*

Why are gay men so fascinated with musicals?

For many gay men, the admiration of classic musicals in cinema and theater *is* queer nostalgia. Classical Broadway, West End, and Hollywood musicals, e.g. *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Gang's All Here* (including Carmen Miranda's unforgettable song 'The Lady with the Tuti-Fruti Hat' accompanied by female dancers holding giant phallic bananas), *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *American in Paris*, *Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, and more recent musical films like *Cabaret* about the promiscuous and highly queer atmosphere in a sassy Berlin cabaret during the Weimar Republic, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (a cult film adapted into a stage musical in London in 2009), the ABBA musical *Mamma Mia* (premiered as a stage musical in London in 2009 and adapted to cinema in 2008), *Billy Elliot* (a 2000 British drama film about a working-class boy who becomes a ballet dancer; adapted for the theater in London in 2005), and *We Will Rock You* (a West End musical since 2002 based on Queen's hit songs and the life of the late gay megastar Freddie Mercury) have all been appropriated and queered by vast gay audiences, celebrated and worshipped as essential part of modern gay counterculture.

In a heteronormative world, masculinity is typically associated with interest in cars, motorcycles, football, sex with women, and violent sports, including boxing and rugby, and the iconic liquids are gasoline, semen, sweat, and blood. In contrast, an explicit male interest in musicals – colorful, flamboyant, stylized, and fabulous as they are – is often perceived by most straight men as transgressive, possibly indicating the musical admirer's effeminacy *and* gayness. Under this pressure, a man's refusal to be ashamed of his attraction to musicals