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Queer women at home: Spatial orientations in the price of salt and carol

Mekânsal yönelimler: Edebiyat ve sinemada, evde kuir kadınlar

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ABSTRACT

*This article examines how queer women's orientations toward objects, routes, and others transform a range of interiors, such as home, car, restaurant, shop, and hotel room, into safe spaces, in other words, homes. It uses literary and cinematic spaces as primary evidence for the emotional and embodied dimensions of interior experience. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's concept of queer phenomenology and orientation, it argues that home is not a limited site of residence but an experience that emerges as queer women orient in the interiors. Objects, from a letter opener to a map, function as active points of orientation, sustaining queer intimacy or becoming conduits of heteronormative surveillance. These transformation processes are always open to disruption. Heteronormative straightening devices –such as surveillance, spatial intrusion, and demands for legitimacy– can cut across queer lines, turning the same interior from a safe haven into an exposure and oppression space; reorientation, in turn, reopens the possibility of refuge. These dynamics are explored through a structured close reading and media analysis of *The Price of Salt* (1952) by Patricia Highsmith and its film adaptation *Carol* (2015), directed by Todd Haynes. The analysis shows that, in both works, straightening devices operate through heterosexual authority, pointing to a heteronormative spatial governance form that shapes how queer women experience interior space.*

Keywords: *Queer phenomenology, Home, orientation, The price of salt, carol*

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ÖZET

*Bu makale, kuir kadınların nesnelere, güzergahlara ve başkalarına yönelimlerinin ev, araba, restoran, mağaza ve otel odası gibi farklı iç mekanları birer güvenli sığınağa, diğer bir deyişle eve, dönüştürdüğünü inceler. Edebi ve sinematik mekanları, iç mekan deneyiminin duygusal ve bedensel boyutları için birincil kanıt olarak kullanır. Sara Ahmed'in kuir fenomenolojisine ve yönelim kavramına dayanarak, evin etrafı çevrili bir ikamet alanı değil, kuir kadınların iç mekanların anlamını yeniden kurmasıyla beliren bir deneyim olduğunu tartışır. Bir mektup açacağından haritaya kadar nesneler, kuir yakınlığı sürdüren ya da heteronormatif gözetimin kanallarına dönüşen etkin yönelim noktaları olarak işlev görür. Bu dönüşüm süreçleri müdahaleye her zaman açıktır. Gözetim, mekansal müdahale ve meşruiyet talepleri gibi heteronormatif düzleştirme aygıtları kuir çizgileri keserek aynı iç mekânı, güvenli bir alandan ifşa ve baskı alanına dönüştürebilir; yeniden yönelim ise güvenli sığınak olasılığını açar. Bu dinamikler, Patricia Highsmith'in *The Price of Salt* (1952) romanı ve Todd Haynes'in *Carol* (2015) film uyarlaması üzerinden yapılandırılmış bir yakın okuma ve medya analiziyle ele alınır. Analiz, düzleştirme aygıtlarının her iki eserde de heteroseksüel otorite aracılığıyla işletildiğini göstererek, kuir kadınların iç mekanları deneyimleme biçimini belirleyen heteronormatif bir mekansal yönetim boyutuna işaret eder.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: : Kuir fenomenoloji, Ev, Yönelim, *The price of salt*, *Carol*.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines how queer women's orientations toward objects, routes, and others can provisionally transform a wide range of interior spaces into sanctuaries of safety and belonging and how this process is repeatedly disrupted by heteronormative straightening devices that demand legibility and correction. Rather than considering home as a fixed domestic category, the article proposes that the process through which queer women make interiors feel home-like is relational and directional, one through which interiors acquire meaning and feeling. Importantly, this goes beyond houses and apartments; cars, diners, restaurants, stores, and hotel and motel rooms can all become temporary homes when queer orientation takes shape within them. Objects, including the letter opener, carpet's turned corner, the dictaphone, the camera, the record, the map, and single beds in the hotel room, are not passive features of interior space but active points of orientation. At times, they sustain attachment and belonging, and at other times become the means through which heteronormative pressure enters and reorganizes the interior. This article aims to answer these questions: How do queer orientations and objects produce home-like interiors through a sense of belonging and safety? How do heteronormative structures destabilize these formations? How do literary and cinematic spaces contribute to analyzing queer spatial behaviors—orientations - and objects?

This article's argument is developed through a close reading of Patricia Highsmith's 1952 novel *The Price of Salt* and Todd Haynes's 2015 film adaptation *Carol*.

Both trace the emerging intimacy between Therese Belivet, a young woman finding her way in 1950s New York, and Carol Aird, an older woman balancing marriage, motherhood, and desire in a strict postwar climate, together showing how queer women move through many different interiors. Together, they stage queer women's orientations across a wide variety of interior types, making them particularly productive for analyzing how interiors become home-like and how that feeling can be undone. Based on Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, orientations, straightening devices, and objects function as a coding framework. Simultaneously analyzing Highsmith's novel and Haynes's film adaptation opens space to understand how different mediums affect queer spatial dynamics. The novel and the film are read together as two distinct spatial evidence for the same queer phenomenological dynamics in order to have a wider perspective on how queer orientations make interiors feel like home and how heteronormative forces interrupt the queer spatial processes in ways that neither medium could provide alone.

These two works have been read together before, though from a different angle, as James offers a comparative analysis of the novel and the film in order to address the overlooked history of pre-Stonewall queer parenthood (James, 2018). That reading organizes itself around kinship and motherhood, and it establishes that a comparative treatment of these two works is productive. Another study close to the method of this article is provided by Meadows, by analyzing literary space through a Black queer phenomenological lens, as it demonstrates that the walls, lines, and in-between spaces of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* generate an inside and an outside through which its queer characters reclaim their subjectivity (Meadows, 2023). That study establishes that a literary interior is open to being read phenomenologically and that architectural detail carries queer meaning rather than functioning as description, which is the premise this article shares. It works on a single literary text, however, while the present analysis places a novel and its screen adaptation side by side and organizes both around the Ahmedian vocabulary of orientation.

To position this article within the existing literature, three related areas of study are important. The first is phenomenological research on space, place, dwelling, and embodied spatial experience. These studies provide an important basis for understanding how interiors are inhabited and gain meaning. However, the subject who experiences these spaces is generally left unmarked, and queer experience, orientation, and disorientation are not central to these discussions. The second area is queer scholarship on architecture and domestic space. This literature demonstrates how built and domestic environments can be shaped by heteronormative assumptions, but phenomenology is not generally used as its main analytical method, and Ahmedian concepts such as orientation and the role of objects are not usually at the center of the analysis. Therefore, phenomenological discussions of lived space and queer discussions of spatial normativity remain only partly connected.

More recent studies have started to bring these areas closer together. Vallerand brings interiors, home, queer studies, and queer phenomenology together through Ahmadian terminology while also engaging with cinematic space (Vallerand, 2020), and a similar direction is taken by Vuorinen, who applies queer phenomenology to cinematic space, although home and domestic interiors do not stand at the center of that analysis (Vuorinen, 2019). These studies are important precedents for this article, but they do not specifically examine literary space together with its cinematic adaptation as two different forms of spatial evidence. Studies on *The Price of Salt* and *Carol* have also addressed queer representation, desire, historical context, adaptation, visibility, and, in some cases, space and interiors. However, these discussions do not bring these issues together through Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology. In this regard, the gap addressed in this article concerns the relationship between queer women's orientations, interior space, objects, and the experience of home across both literary and cinematic representations.

Two claims from phenomenology organize the spatial analysis that follows. The first is that space is known directionally rather than as a container, since perception is always grounded in a bodily situation and proceeds from a here toward a there, which means that any account of an interior has to begin with the position from which it is being lived (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.). Merleau-Ponty gives this claim its strongest form by arguing that the body grasps the world through movement and habit rather than through abstract cognition, so that bodily movement is itself intentional and always directed toward things (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Seamon carries the same claim into ordinary life by showing that habitual movements and spatial routines weave together into what he calls a web of intentionality between persons and their environments, and that this web becomes visible precisely when a routine is disrupted (Seamon, 2007). What this article takes from these accounts is a method rather than a vocabulary, since if space is known through direction and habit, then a queer woman's route through a room, her pauses at its edges, and the objects she turns toward are not descriptive detail but the evidence itself.

The second claim concerns interiors in particular and holds that an interior becomes meaningful through being dwelled in rather than through its architectural form. Bachelard develops this through the house, arguing that it gathers the images through which memory and imagination are organized and that a person without one would be a dispersed being, which places the house inside the subject rather than around it (Bachelard, 1994). Heidegger reaches a comparable position from the other direction by contending that it is dwelling that makes a building meaningful (Heidegger, 1971), and Norberg-Schulz gives the claim an architectural formulation through *genius loci* by arguing that built environments concretize the meanings of space for human life (Norberg-Schulz, 1983).

Pallasmaa draws the consequence for practice by insisting that architects produce images and feelings for the people who inhabit their buildings rather than objects alone (Pallasmaa, 1996). Read together, these accounts license the central move of this article, which is to treat a car, a diner, and a hotel room as candidates for home on the same terms as a house, since if meaning is produced through dwelling rather than through form, then the architectural category of an interior cannot decide in advance what that interior is able to become.

What none of these accounts asks is whose body is doing the dwelling. The subject who moves with ease through Bachelard's house and Heidegger's dwelling is left unmarked, and the comfort of that movement is treated as a property of space rather than as something distributed unevenly across bodies. Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology supplies the missing question by showing that orientation is always open to interference, that bodies aligned with dominant norms extend into space without friction while those turned toward non-normative objects and others meet it constantly, and that this difference is produced and maintained rather than given (Ahmed, 2006). This article therefore reads interiors through the phenomenological vocabulary set out above while taking its analytical categories from Ahmed, and those categories, which are orientation, disorientation, reorientation, and the straightening devices that interrupt them, are set out in the following section. This article approaches literary and cinematic works as methodological tools for analyzing queer spatial experience. As emphasized by Grafe, Havik, and Maaskant, literary works often capture the intricate bond between individuals and their environments in ways that traditional spatial discussions can overlook (Grafe, Havik, and Maaskant, 2006). With storytelling, spaces function as effective sources evoking strong feelings. Tuna Ultav asserts that the literary perspectives should be used in spatial thinking, such as architectural studies, which is another emphasis on the value of the intersection of literature and space (2008). Cinema offers similar potential; for example, Tschumi argues that architecture, like cinema, operates through sequences, framing, and the choreography of bodies in motion, meaning that a building is experienced as a series of spatial edits that guide perception and generate meaning (Tschumi, 1994, as cited in Kaçmaz, 1996). Another similar perspective is provided by Lamster, by observing that architecture is crucial to creating a film's spirit, yet it is often overlooked in discussions of film, positioning it as a critical mirror through which architectural conditions are reflected and reinterpreted (Lamster, 2000). Therefore, cinematic spaces are never the ornament, but rather active components of the spatial artwork.

The boundaries of what people define as architecture expand when cinematic and fictional environments are recognized as influential spatial references, and acknowledging these fictional environments broadens the general understanding of architecture (Sewell, 2011).

Aparício similarly argues that “every cinematic space is a possible world,” sometimes real and other times a mental or spiritual representation, and that regardless of its ontological status, it can be described as a true-to-life scenario (Aparício, 2018). Cinematic space, moreover, is never neutral. As Lefebvre reminds us, “space is never empty and always embodies a meaning” (Lefebvre, 1991). In this sense, when a film stages queer women orienting towards thresholds, pausing at doorways, or spatially behaving in cars, the spatial meaning becomes visible and informs about interior experiences. Reading literary and cinematic space together, as this article does, therefore enables a fuller account of how interiors are lived, inhabited, and contested than either medium could provide alone.

This article therefore contributes to architectural and interior architectural research by demonstrating that spatial meaning is not determined by formal configurations or functional typologies alone, but by the orientations that take shape within an interior. By demonstrating how the emotional and embodied sense of home is negotiated through orientation, the article repositions the interior as a dynamic, relational event rather than a static container, offering new perspectives for inclusive spatial design and research.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article applies a qualitative and interpretive methodology that combines close reading with queer phenomenological analysis, and it treats literary and cinematic productions as spatial evidence rather than as illustrations of an argument made elsewhere. Two considerations make this material appropriate for the question at stake. The spatial experience examined here had to remain concealed in the period the works depict, and a concealed experience leaves few traces in the documents through which interiors are conventionally studied, such as plans, photographs, or records of use. Furthermore, what is analyzed is not the physical configuration of an interior but where a body turns its attention, what it anticipates, and when it hesitates, and these are precisely the movements that narration and framing register while measured documentation does not.

The selection of the material proceeded in stages rather than beginning from the pairing itself. *The Price of Salt* emerged as an unusually productive text because its interiors are constructed almost entirely through where its characters turn their attention, what they reach toward, and what interrupts them, which makes it readable through the Ahmedian vocabulary of orientation without that vocabulary being imposed from the outside.

Once the novel was selected, setting its film adaptation aside would have been an arbitrary limitation, since *Carol* renders the same interiors and the same orientations through an entirely different set of means, which makes it possible to attribute the differences that emerge between them to the medium rather than to the story, the characters, or the interiors in which they take place. Both works were also suitable because the narrative unfolds almost entirely within interiors, so that the spaces in which orientation is at stake are also the spaces in which the narrative itself takes place.

This approach has a recent precedent within interior architecture. Durukan and Erdem Yılmaz analyze the domestic thresholds of two animated films through a phenomenological and post-phenomenological framework, treating the works as representational spatial structures rather than as narrative texts, and arguing that representation is one of the domains of architectural production of meaning, not an addition to architectural experience (Durukan and Erdem Yılmaz, 2026). Their procedure runs parallel to the one followed here, as they select scenes purposively rather than by sampling, treat the scene as the unit of analysis, and apply a coding framework derived from theory before the analysis rather than generated from the material. Their finding also bears on the argument of this article, since they demonstrate that the same threshold elements produce belonging and recognition in one interior and disorientation and alienation in another, which locates the difference in the configuration rather than in the elements themselves.

The units of analysis are passages and scenes rather than chapters or sequences, and they were selected purposively rather than by sampling. A passage or a scene was included when it satisfied three conditions, which are the presence of a significant interior space, a queer orientation toward an object, a route, or another person, and a moment of interruption, exposure, surveillance, or reorientation. Objects entered the analysis on the same basis, which means that the letter opener, the turned corner of the carpet, the dictaphone, the camera, the record, the map, and the single beds of the hotel room were not selected because they recur as motifs but because each of them is the point at which an orientation is established or redirected within an interior.

The Ahmedian categories were applied deductively, as they were derived from the theoretical framework before the analysis rather than generated from the material, but they are not used as a classification scheme that sorts scenes into separate types, since they name what a body is doing in relation to the lines of a space rather than what kind of scene is being observed. Consistency across the two media was maintained by holding these categories constant while allowing their indicators to differ.

In the novel, orientation is read through interior narration that registers sustained attention and through the routes and thresholds to which a character returns, disorientation through interrupted attention and through a familiar interior described as though it had become unfamiliar, and straightening devices through the entrance of a heteronormative figure, through demands for legitimacy, and through objects that convert intimacy into evidence. In the film, the same relations become legible through the direction of the gaze and the framing that holds bodies together, through withheld looks and sound that announces a presence before it becomes visible, and through spatial intrusion and the reorganization of a frame around a heteronormative presence. Each interior appearing in both works was read twice, once in each medium, so that a difference is attributed to the medium only when the same interior and the same orientation are rendered differently within it. The analysis does not extend to the color palette, the costume design, or the musical score of the film, nor to exterior and urban spaces, since these belong to a different form of analysis than the one conducted here.

3. QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY AND ORIENTATION

The relation between queer phenomenology and the tradition it revises is one of continuity as much as departure. Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* does not discard that tradition; it works from within it, as Ahmed's account of orientation begins with the Merleau-Pontian insistence that “our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space” (Ahmed, 2006). The body, in this formulation, is not an object with a coordinate but a point of view through which space itself is constituted, and Ahmed extends this by asking which bodies the world was organized to receive. The continuity is therefore methodological, since orientation, intentionality, and the lived body are inherited directly from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, while the rupture is political, since Ahmed demonstrates that the ease with which a body extends into space is unequally distributed. In this regard, queer phenomenology is not an alternative to the phenomenology of space but its correction, and this article uses it as such by reading interiors through the same embodied vocabulary while keeping the question of whose body is at stake in view.

Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* explains that to be oriented is to know where one is when turning this way or another way (Ahmed, 2006). In this regard, orientation is never limited to physical direction, but it concerns how a body comes to feel at home in the world. Ahmed's phenomenological account insists that the process of finding a way is not neutral (Ahmed, 2006). Some bodies are turned toward objects and futures that align with dominant social norms, and as a result, they move through the world with ease and comfort.

Other bodies turn toward objects and others that fall outside those norms, and they encounter friction, interruption, and the persistent experience of being out of place.

Ahmed's queer phenomenological perspective also focuses on straight lines that some orientations follow. They represent social norms and the broader expectation that bodies will proceed toward certain approved futures without deviation. Bodies that conform to this line inhabit the world as though it were made for them, but by contrast, queer orientations produce misalignment. When a body is misaligned and deviated from a straight line through an orientation, it experiences the world as tilted, oblique, and difficult to navigate. These two kinds of line do not stand in a hierarchical relation to one another, as each remains open to becoming the other. A straight line is deviated the moment a queer orientation takes shape along it, and a deviated line is straightened the moment a heteronormative force interrupts it. Sara Ahmed illustrates this through an anecdote in which a neighbor, upon seeing Ahmed and her partner together, asks whether her companion is her sister or her husband (Ahmed, 2006). In this example, each option functions as a straightening device. One desexualizes the relationship through kinship; the other reinscribes it within a heteronormative pairing. In either case, as Ahmed observes, "the lesbian couple in effect disappears" (Ahmed, 2006). In this regard, straightening devices do not necessitate dramatic forces; even an everyday question, an assumption, or a glance can erase what does not fit within heteronormativity.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed extends what can be a straightening device by showing that happiness itself can function as one. As Ahmed argues, the family home functions as a happiness object, a space where happiness is expected to reside (Ahmed, 2010), which means that a heteronormative space has obligations around the definition of happiness and controls its residents through forcing straight lines to follow. In this regard, queer women are both spatially and emotionally out of place, which are correlated and intermingled. Thus, the promise of domestic happiness, which is expected to be experienced at home, is conditional on heterosexual alignment from society's perspective and obligatory heterosexual forces.

The Ahmedian framework is not adopted here without qualification. Mulaj's critique of queer phenomenology is instructive in this respect, as it observes that queer phenomenology understands space as the history of what is possible and impossible, in an effort to explore what disappears in the name of heterosexual exposure and how compulsory sexuality makes some things possible at the cost of possible non-heterosexual orientations (Mulaj, 2019). Read in this way, orientation is a vocabulary for tracing reachability and disappearance rather than a complete account of desire or gender, and the analysis below treats it accordingly, as one instrument among the spatial and queer theoretical positions outlined in this section rather than as a total explanatory system.

The activity attributed to objects in this article should be understood in the same terms, since objects become active only insofar as they are turned toward or away from particular bodies, which keeps their force a function of orientation rather than a claim about matter's own agency.

The Ahmedian queer phenomenological perspectives on space resonate with queer space scholarship. For instance, Michael Warner argues that heterosexuality organizes the spaces through which belonging is defined, presenting itself as the universal ground of social life while labeling queer experiences as peripheral and invisible (1993). Additionally, Cottrill highlights that the architectural profession has largely sustained the heteronormative assumptions as critical layers as sexuality, class, and race are mostly kept outside of the professional concerns. Cottrill defines queer space as a practice against exclusion, noting that while these spaces are primarily domestic, the home remains undertheorized. (Cottrill, 2006). Another perspective on queer space is provided by Cook, by arguing that the relationship between spaces and sexuality “is dynamic and changing, and that spaces are not merely the stage or background for sexual activity, identity, and communities but are active agents in their very constitution” (Cook, 2014).

Queer scholarship on architecture and interiors develops this position further by treating space as something produced rather than only as something constraining. Colomina's edited volume on sexuality and space helped establish the terms of this discussion within architectural discourse by arguing that “the politics of space are always sexual,” even where space participates in the erasure of sexuality, and by locating the relations between sexuality and space within everyday practices that appear to concern neither (Colomina, 1992). Betsky shifts this discussion from purpose-built design toward the appropriation and production of queer space within existing environments, arguing that queer space is often “not built, only implied,” and tracing how gay men and women have reclaimed hostile environments and reworked the norms of the interior (Betsky, 1997). The present analysis proceeds from that premise while departing from its scope: Betsky's account is weighted toward spaces and spatial practices associated with gay men, whereas the focus here is the production of interior sanctuary by queer women within ordinary rooms that carry no explicit queer designation. Halberstam contends that queer temporalities and spatialities are constructed in opposition to the institutions of heterosexuality, family, and reproduction. Queer space is thus defined by him as the place-making practices queer people use to make place (Halberstam, 2005). Within architectural theory, Bonnevier approaches architecture as “a concrete material practice always entangled with subject positions” (Bonnevier, 2007) and demonstrates that domestic interiors are built and inhabited according to heteronormative assumptions that can be exposed and reworked from inside the interior itself.

Vallerand extends this to the scale of the interior by suggesting that domestic objects and their spatial representations should be understood as fluid events actively participating in shaping their social and political contexts, which means that a queer interior cannot be defined by a fixed layout, as the same room is open to being lived, perceived, and experienced in multiple ways (Vallerand, 2020). Gutterman, Manalansan, and Vider provide the most recent formulation of this field by framing queer domesticity around the different ways the home can be queered and the various meanings domestic space has held for LGBTQ+ people (Gutterman, Manalansan, and Vider, 2024). This article proceeds from the same premise as these accounts while differing in method, as it approaches the interior through orientation rather than through performativity, enactment, or design.

Belury's recent survey of this field identifies four recurring themes within it, which are the obfuscation of the public and the private, the importance of spectacle, the facilitation of desire through design, and the transformation of existing structures through reuse, and observes that the scholarship producing them has remained bound to fixed, commercial, and geographically privileged spaces built or commissioned by wealthy, Anglo, urban, and predominantly male subjects (Belury, 2025). Betsky concedes this limit in his own account, noting that its terms derive from the experience of homosexual men in the Western world of the twentieth century (Betsky, 1997, as cited in Belury, 2025). Drawing on Giesecking, Belury observes that the spaces of queer women and gender nonconforming people are by contrast more informal, dispersed, and fleeting, and are for that reason less often treated as architecture at all (Belury, 2025). The interiors examined in this article belong to that less examined register, since they were neither designed nor commissioned for queer occupancy and hold it only provisionally. It is also relevant that Belury locates Ahmed within queer architectural theory rather than outside it, describing queer space as produced through actions that tilt the straight planes of heteronormative existence (Belury, 2025), which indicates that the vocabulary of orientation is already operative in this field.

Recent work in interior architecture has reached a comparable position from the direction of gender. Amoroso and Amann Alcocer demonstrate that the room became a typological control device through which the lifestyles of inhabitants were regulated (Amoroso and Amann Alcocer, 2025), and that the equation of the house with a single nuclear family established the home as a protective sanctuary reserved for that family form (Amoroso and Amann Alcocer, 2025). They also observe that inhabitants continue to occupy such standardized interiors in dissident ways regardless of what the typology prescribes (Amoroso and Amann Alcocer, 2025). This supports the premise from which the present analysis proceeds, which is that the capacity of an interior to be lived as home is not settled by its type, and it locates the sanctuary examined here against the family form for which the domestic interior was historically organized.

Adrienne Rich's account of compulsory heterosexuality provides a further theoretical anchor in relation to the straightening devices Sara Ahmed mentions. Rich argues that heterosexual desire is a social compulsion sustained through repetition and correction, as Ahmed also highlights that everyday behaviors nurture heteronormativity by functioning as straightening devices (Rich, 1993 as cited in Ahmed, 2006). These straightening devices are structural, not exceptional; they control queer lines of orientation by insisting, repeatedly and from multiple directions, that desire follow a straight line. Berlant and Freeman extend this by showing that queer visibility in public space is itself a political act, one that challenges the heteronormative assumption that queerness belongs only in private (Berlant and Freeman, 1993). Patton further argues that coming out is a reorientation that redefines how one inhabits space, because a gay person has to come out to be able to assert the right to privacy (Patton, 1993). Together, these accounts establish that these devices operate specifically through interior spaces and how queer women in the novel and the film negotiate and resist them.

4. QUEER ORIENTATIONS AND INTERIOR SPACE IN THE NOVEL, *THE PRICE OF SALT*

The novel (Figure 1) opens in a department store during the Christmas rush, and from its opening pages, it establishes orientation as a bodily event rather than a deliberate choice. When Therese first notices Carol across the shop floor, her attention is seized so completely that the routine of her work collapses entirely:

She heard the customer in front of her repeat a question, and Therese stood there, mute. The woman was looking at Therese, too, with a preoccupied expression, as if half her mind were on whatever it was she meant to buy here, and though there were a number of salesgirls between them, Therese felt sure the woman would come to her. (Highsmith, 2004)

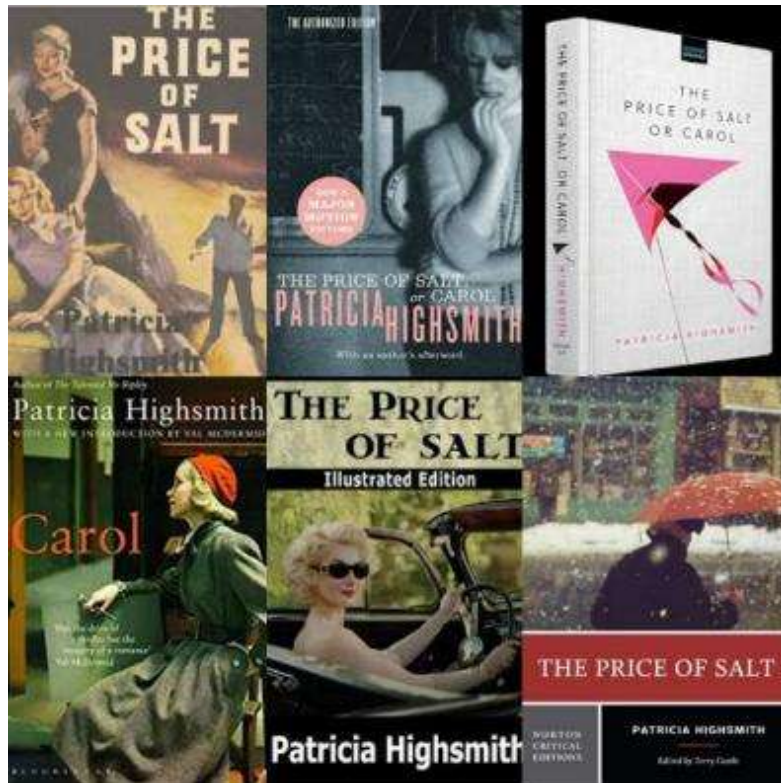


Figure 1. Six different editions of Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, originally published in 1952 (Collage created by the author(s)).

Therese stands in silence as she experiences disorientation when she sees Carol, even without knowing that she is Carol. This silence occurs because she does not know which route to follow and is unsure of how to orient herself anymore. A different yet equally directional force replaces Therese's routine as her certainty that Carol would approach her demonstrates that orientation involves both current attention and a line projected toward a future path. Ultimately, the department store, a space usually organized around predictable roles and normalized transactions, transforms and becomes a space where a queer orientation begins to take shape within and against the spatial order it is embedded in.

Therese and Carol meet, and they spend a lot of time at Carol's house until a straightening device interrupts. It is available most of the time as Carol and her husband, Harge, are in the process of a divorce. When they are at Carol's house, Therese follows Carol up the staircase, a briefly visible garden with an "S-shaped path appears for an instant and then vanishes" (Highsmith, 2004), and this fleeting image already introduces a spatial figure that resists straightness, suggesting a movement that curves and detours rather than proceeding directly toward an expected destination. Inside the house, Carol's glance while lighting a cigarette also quietly reorganizes the room around Therese's presence, shifting her from a visitor into a center of attention.

The uncertainty Therese feels, captured in Highsmith's phrase "Therese didn't know what to do or say," is disorientation in the phenomenological sense (Highsmith, 2004). The home intensifies further through music and touch. For example, while Therese plays the piano, she becomes acutely aware that it is Carol's whole house around her, and this awareness creates a feeling she describes as "being made defenseless" (Highsmith, 2004). Therefore, the interior, Carol's house, is a space that focuses her attention and makes their closeness feel both possible and vulnerable. When Carol says, "Come and play something," she creates a new way for them to connect within the home. The touch that follows, as "Carol came up behind her and set her hands on Therese's shoulders", physically redirects Therese's body and thickens the line of intimacy through repeated movement and proximity (Highsmith, 2004). In this regard, their sense of safety comes from how they interact within the room, rather than from the room itself.

However, Carol and Therese's sense of safety in following oblique, queer lines remains structurally vulnerable. When "...the doorbell chimed twice downstairs, and the latch clicked at the same time," (Highsmith, 2004) it is understood that someone with keys perfunctorily rings the doorbell but intrudes into the house without waiting for approval. The door functions not only as a barrier but also becomes a tool that decides who has the right to enter, and when it opens unexpectedly, the privacy of the room is suddenly exposed to the outside world. The intrusion arrives when Harge demands, "Did I interrupt anything important? Who is she?" insisting on legibility and attempting to restore Therese's attention to its expected object (Highsmith, 2004). At this moment, orientations are challenged and changed through Harge's existence functioning as a straightening device, an extension of heteronormativity, causing the pressure to account for a straight direction.

Therese's posture throughout the novel registers precarity in spatial terms: "Therese stood by the door of her room, listening" (Highsmith, 2004); "Carol had stopped by the door" (Highsmith, 2004); "... stood by the corner of the dressing table looking at Carol" (Highsmith, 2004). These positions, doorways, corners, and edges are micro-architectures of precaution, and they allow queer attention to persist while keeping the body tactically out of the way, suggesting that queer orientation often involves inhabiting an interior's margins rather than its center. Longing, too, acquires a spatial form. In a letter to Carol, Therese writes:

I walk and walk around the town, but I wish I could keep walking in one direction—east—and finally come to you. When can you come, Carol? Or shall I come to you? I really cannot stand being away from you so long. (Highsmith, 2004)

The desire for an uninterrupted route and stable direction reframes straightness by detaching it from heteronormativity and reattaching it to the fantasy of arrival toward the beloved. As Highsmith writes, "... and suddenly she thought of her room in New York, with the dress still on the studio couch, and the corner of the carpet turned back. If she could only reach out now and pull the carpet flat, she thought" (Highsmith, 2004). The inability to fix this small household detail captures a broader sense of being out of alignment with one's own interior world. Also, the corner of the carpet functions as an orienting object, a queer one, taking oneself from the heteronormative world and its realities and reminding them of a queer possibility, again.

Two other objects illuminate how they can both lead to queer orientations and be a straightening device. The letter opener, noticed during a period of separation, holds an absent body present through material proximity. As Highsmith writes, "Carol's letter opener on the bed table, and now it meant Carol, the person of flesh and blood, the Carol with freckles and the corner nicked off one tooth" (Highsmith, 2004). As an orienting device, the object collapses distance and keeps queer orientation alive within the interior horizon even when the person is gone, so that instead of functioning as neutral decor it preserves a sense of closeness within the room. The dictaphone, however, operates as a straightening device controlled by the person Harge hired and, in essence, by Harge himself. It reorganizes Carol and Therese's intimacy as an item of surveillance. When it becomes clear that the conversations between Carol and Therese have been recorded, the interior is reorganized not only by the device's physical presence but also by the knowledge of what it can produce. "Then there's the Dictaphone trick," said the investigator, walking away, framing surveillance as a covert technique rather than open confrontation (Highsmith, 2004). Carol's search for the dictaphone turns the interior into a potential site of evidence, making every gesture and word vulnerable to capture. By using his authority and resources to install this device, Harge demonstrates how heterosexual power operates through the technological mediation of domestic space rather than through physical presence alone, and the interior becomes an entirely different kind of space in experiential terms while remaining physically unchanged.

The analysis of *The Price of Salt* demonstrates that queer orientation is an embodied process that transforms interiors into sanctuaries through oblique lines and shared intimacy. These formations remain structurally precarious because straightening devices such as the dictaphone and the intrusion of heterosexual authority reorganize the home into a site of surveillance. Ultimately, the novel shows that home is not a permanent container but a lived achievement maintained through micro-architectures of precaution and persistent orientations toward the beloved.

5. QUEER ORIENTATIONS AND INTERIOR SPACE IN THE FILM, *CAROL*

In the film, queer orientations become visible first in the department store scene. It is the very first moment that Therese notices Carol's existence and her focus shifts away from her routine routes, behaviors, and tasks; however, Therese's disorientation and misalignment from the heteronormative world is immediately corrected through a social demand: "Miss, miss, where's the ladies' room, honey?" (Haynes, 2015). The correction is casual and unremarkable, which is precisely what makes it effective; it does not confront queer attention but redirects the body back into its expected role. In this scene, the audience encounters the queer possibility of that space through Therese's spatial behaviors, orientations (Figure 2). When Carol says "I like the hat," the response on Therese's face, which is an excited smile mixed with what reads as shame, makes the sense of misalignment visible on the surface of the body (00:12:46). Through sustained looking, Therese extends the moment into a specific duration as she and Carol become oriented to one another, creating a mutual connection that persists despite the heteronormative outer world's frequent interruptions intended to force individuals back onto straight lines (00:12:54).



Figure 2. Therese's sustained orientation toward Carol in the department store sequence, interrupted by a social demand (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

Carol's home sequence shows how queer orientation can spread through a domestic interior via bodily circulation (Figure 3). As Carol and Therese move together through the kitchen, near the piano, and across the staircase, their ease, visible in relaxed faces, unhurried movement, and fuller occupation of space, signals a provisional alignment in which the interior supports rather than corrects their shared line (Haynes, 2015). Carol's house, without any intruder from the heteronormative system, functions as a sacred space to feel safe, which includes being freely disoriented from the normativity and oriented toward each other.



Figure 3. Carol and Therese's shared ease and unhurried movement through the domestic interior, signaling a provisional alignment between queer orientation and space (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

However, the moment Carol's husband, Harge, intrudes into the house, the shift arrives. The moment a key is heard in the lock, Carol freezes barefoot, then quickly grabs her shoes before Harge enters, and the urgency in her movement shows what words cannot fully explain (Figure 4). Thus, disorientation is observed in the body before it is processed in thought and speech (Haynes, 2015). Then, Harge's rigid questions and aggressive comments such as "Good, damn it," "How do you know my wife," and "Oh, that's bold," confirm the spatial logic of intrusion and convert the home into a site of demanded explanation (00:38:26). Therese's partial concealment at the edge of the doorway, her face unclear as she watches from cover, makes the spatial consequences of his authority legible (00:38:01-00:38:04).



Figure 4. Harge's intrusion converting the domestic interior from a sanctuary into a site of oppression (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

The road scenes turn the car into a temporary safe space (Haynes, 2015). Inside, the couple can be intimate away from social expectations, and the winding roads mirror the indirect, off-path movement Ahmed links to queer orientation. Mutual turning and looking within the car reinforce this sense of a shared directional field (01:06:03; 01:06:14). Even this mobile shelter, however, is not exempt from straightening pressure as the person Harge paid to track Carol and collect proofs of misalignment with heteronormativity intercepts Carol and Therese and dictates which route they should take (01:10:27). In short, the film shows that mobile interiors offer a different kind of shelter from fixed ones, but not an escape from heteronormative surveillance; the intrusion travels with them (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The car as a temporary sanctuary for queer orientation, and its vulnerability to straightening pressure as the investigator redirects the couple's route (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

The final scene takes place in a restaurant, a semi-public interior that has recurred throughout the film as a space where queer orientation is both possible and socially exposed. Carol and Therese turn toward each other across a crowded room, and the film closes on this act of mutual reorientation rather than on a secured domestic sanctuary (Haynes, 2015). Straightening forces do not disappear, as the crowd, social visibility, and Carol's legal situation all remain present, yet attention is gathered through their sustained turning toward each other. The audience sees Carol from Therese's point of view, making everything except this orientation insignificant (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Carol and Therese turning toward each other across a crowded restaurant, the film's closing act of mutual reorientation (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

In addition to orientations, objects play a role in the alignment and misalignment processes of queer characters in *Carol* as they cause characters to orient and disorient toward queerness. They contribute to the agenda of the heteronormative system's straightening devices but also deviate the characters into nonnormative routes. For example, in the diner scene, the camera Carol gives Therese and the record Therese gives Carol function as orienting anchors that stabilize a provisional intimacy within a semi-public interior (Haynes, 2015). The exchange does not signal affection as it materializes orientation by giving the couple something to turn toward together in a space where their relationship remains socially visible. The camera and record create a small zone of shared attention within visibility (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The exchange of the camera and the record in the diner scene, materializing queer orientation as shared attention (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

The map, which appears later in the road sequence, materializes direction in a different register, making the route itself visible as an object through which orientation can be supported, contested, and redirected (Figure 8). When the investigator interrupts the couple and tells them which route to take, the object passes from a tool of queer navigation to an instrument of external governance (Haynes, 2015). Control over the route becomes, in this sense, control over the future line of intimacy itself, making visible how straightening pressure can operate through spatial tools that appear neutral even as they reorganize the couple's possible directions. Additionally, the map disorients Therese and Carol from each other when the intruder, the hired person by Harge, gets involved with their work on the map to decide their route. Thus, the map functions as a straightening device.



Figure 8. The map shifting from a tool of queer navigation to an instrument of external governance as the investigator redirects the couple's route (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

Hotel room interiors make the normative assumptions embedded in spatial design directly observable, particularly at the Drake Hotel, where the room's two single beds frame occupancy in terms that presuppose separation and nonsexual legibility (Haynes, 2015). The design does not announce itself as normative; it arranges space in a way that treats heterosexual or non-intimate occupancy as the default. By contrast, the anonymous roadside motel room, with its relative enclosure and absence of social markers, allows a different way of being, which is less shaped by visible expectations (Haynes, 2015). The single-bed arrangement operates as a reminder that the couple has deviated from what the room was designed to accommodate (Figure 9). In contrast, the motel room fosters a sense of relaxation and domesticity, enabling Carol and Therese to feel content and at ease with both their journey and their relationship (Figure 9).



Figure 9. The Drake Hotel and the roadside motel room (Screenshots from *Carol* captured by the author(s)).

Ultimately, the cinematic analysis of *Carol* demonstrates that a queer sense of home is a provisional achievement rather than a fixed and physical spatial quality. Through the characters' orientations and bodily circulation, various interiors are transformed into homes, temporary sanctuaries that allow for alignment and ease. Yet, these spaces remain structurally precarious as straightening devices constantly attempt to redirect queer lives back onto straight lines. Consequently, the film shows that sanctuary is an ongoing spatial practice of reorientation where interiors are repeatedly made, unmade, and reclaimed in the face of persistent heteronormative pressure.

6. LITERARY AND CINEMATIC SPACE AS EVIDENCE

Reading *The Price of Salt* and *Carol* together is methodologically productive because each medium constructs a different kind of spatial evidence for the same queer phenomenological dynamics. In the department store, the novel frames queer orientation as an interior event: "Therese could not look away, falls mute, and anticipates a trajectory before it is walked" (Highsmith, 2004). Thus, interruption is felt inwardly as suspended action. On the other hand, the film makes corrections register as an external social demand, where a question redirects Therese back into the service script (Haynes, 2015).

Both the novel and the film show that queer intimacy begins as an orientation that must survive interruption, but they make this survival legible through different registers. The novel provides more inward evidence; the film provides observable, performative evidence.

The home sequences show a similar divergence in tempo and depth. The novel builds toward saturation through repetition and object density. The S-shaped path, the glance, the music, the touch, all accumulate until Carol's whole house surrounds Therese and produces a feeling of defenselessness. The film condenses this dynamic into visible spatial circulation across rooms and then makes the collapse of the sanctuary immediate through sound (Haynes, 2015). What takes many pages in the novel takes seconds on screen, and the different tempos produce qualitatively different kinds of evidence. The novel discloses how an interior becomes home-like through accumulated inner attention, while the film shows how the same shift and its disruption arrive as a sensory event.

Objects show these medium-specific differences most clearly. For instance, the letter opener makes an absent body present through associative density and accumulates meaning across many pages. The camera and record are legible through the visual economy of the film, where exchange and placement in a semi-public space communicate what no internal monologue is available to supply.

7. CONCLUSION

This article argues that what makes an interior feel like home for queer women is not the domestic status of the space itself, nor any stable architectural quality that belongs naturally to houses and apartments, but the lived and relational process through which bodies turn toward particular objects, routes, and others, and in doing so provisionally transform a wide range of interiors into sanctuaries of safety and belonging. Thus, queer home, is never a fixed interior, but it is an experience that emerges when queer orientation takes shape within space, when attention, intimacy, and shared direction and deviation from heteronormativity gather meaning inside an interior and allow it to be inhabited as shelter. For this reason, the analysis shows that cars, diners, restaurants, department stores, and hotel and motel rooms, no less than houses, can become temporary homes, as the significant point in this is not the type of interior but the experiences it opens space for.

These formations are never fully secure because queer women's home-like interiors face repeated disruption from heteronormative straightening devices like surveillance and spatial intrusion that shift sanctuary into exposure. This vulnerability highlights a broader power structure where heteronormativity intrudes into and challenges how queer women inhabit space and defines the conditions under which their intimacy is permissible.

However, reorientation remains possible even when these deviated lines are straightened, ensuring that compelling act is never the final word. As demonstrated in the final scene of *Carol*, the turning toward one another in a crowded restaurant recreates the oblique line and prevents straightening devices from achieving a permanent reorganization of queer interior life.

The analysis demonstrates that queer spatial behaviors and interior objects are open to producing a sense of safety and turning any interior into a home, a sanctuary to escape from heteronormativity. However, this change is not a fixed one; it is rather in flux, as it is also open to change through the interruption of intruding straightening devices of heteronormative society, which can be a letter opener, a camera, or a husband in the process of a divorce. Objects are neither inherently enabling nor oppressive; their function depends on orientation and authority. The same object can sustain intimacy or enable surveillance, so interiors become home-like through relations between bodies and objects rather than design. Queer spatial behaviors, such as inhabiting edges or moving indirectly, show that orientation is a lived, bodily experience that produces a provisional sense of belonging.

At the level of method, literary and cinematic spaces contribute in distinct yet complementary ways to the analysis of queer spatial behaviors, orientations, and objects. *The Price of Salt* gives access to the inward and accumulative dimensions of orientation, while *Carol* makes these dynamics visible through framing, gesture, and body choreography. The novel discloses the unseen, such as how Carol's house reorganizes around Therese, a letter opener gains intimate significance, or a dictaphone brings anticipatory dread –while the film shows what cannot be narrated– Carol freezing at a key, Therese hiding in a doorway, or sustained glances across a store. Each makes legible a dimension of queer spatial experience that the other can only gesture toward, and analyzing both together yields a more complete account of how orientation, straightening devices, and reorientation operate as embodied, material, and spatial realities.

The findings of this study also relate to previous discussions of queer and domestic space. Cook argues that space actively contributes to the constitution of sexual identity, while Bonnevier shows that domestic interiors can reproduce heteronormative assumptions and can also be reworked through queer inhabitation. Cottrill similarly points to the limited attention given to home within queer spatial scholarship. The findings of this article support these arguments but also show that the transformation of an interior is not permanent. The same space can become a place of queer intimacy and safety and can later become a space of surveillance, exposure, or heteronormative control without any physical change to the interior itself. This process is also not limited to domestic space. Cars, diners, restaurants, hotels, and motels can experience similar changes according to how they are inhabited and how orientations are interrupted.

In relation to Ahmed's concepts, the analysis shows how straightening devices operate within particular interiors and how their effects are connected to the people who have authority to enter, observe, or reorganize these spaces.

If an interior becomes home-like through the orientations that take shape within it rather than through its program or its plan, then the categories through which interiors are conventionally distinguished, that is, domestic and commercial, private and public, permanent and temporary, do not determine what an interior is able to hold. Home is analyzed here as a direction rather than as a building type, which is why the findings hold for interiors that were never intended to be homes, and it is in this sense that queer phenomenology contributes to architectural theory rather than only to cultural interpretation, as it treats belonging, intimacy, exposure, and interruption as spatial conditions that can be traced within a single room.

Beyond cultural and narrative theory, these insights carry direct implications for interior design practice and architectural education. As Norberg-Schulz (1983) cautions against reducing space to functional pragmatism, and Cottrill (2006) critiques the profession's reluctance to engage with sexuality, this analysis shifts spatial inquiry from what an interior is designed for to whose body is anticipated to inhabit it with ease. Fixed domestic typologies, predetermined furniture layouts, and binary hospitality designs, such as the twin beds of the Drake Hotel, frequently embed heteronormative alignment directly into the material fabric of space. However, the strategic occupation of spatial margins, such as doorways, corners, and thresholds, demonstrates how marginalized bodies produce micro-architectures of precaution in order to survive and to dwell askew. Home is therefore a directional, fragile, and ongoing achievement rather than a permanent architectural guarantee, and this understanding is open to functioning as a critical lens for contemporary practice, as it requires interior architects to design beyond rigid programmatic scripts and to acknowledge the lived orientations of non-normative bodies.

The findings suggest that queer home is an experience. It comes into being when queer women orient themselves toward each other, spaces, and objects in ways that allow an interior to shift into a home, and it becomes fragile whenever straightening devices interrupt. Home is not a finished destination but an ongoing spatial practice through which interiors are repeatedly made, unmade, and made again. The ouroboros-like shift from oblique to straight lines, from safe to unsafe, and from home-like to interrupted space and vice versa is continuous. Within this cycle, the queer experience will always persist and will always find a way to be here and queer.

Disclosure of AI Use

Limited AI assistance was used in this text, solely for proofreading purposes.

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