



Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space In The Wake Of The City

Dianne Chisholm

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Queer Constellations investigates the dreams and catastrophes of recent urban history viewed through new queer narratives of inner-city life. The "gay village," "gay mecca," "gai Paris," the "lesbian flaneur," the "lesbian bohème"—these and other urban phantasmagoria feature paradoxically in this volume as figures of revolutionary utopia and commodity spectacle, as fossilized archetypes of social transformation and ruins of haunting cultural potential.

Dianne Chisholm introduces readers to new practices of walking, seeing, citing, and remembering the city in works by Neil Bartlett, Samuel R. Delany, Robert Glück, Alan Hollinghurst, Gary Indiana, Eileen Myles, Sarah Schulman, Gail Scott, Edmund White, and David Wojnarowicz. Reading these authors with reference to the history, sociology, geography, and philosophy of space, particularly to the everyday avant-garde production and practice of urban space, Chisholm reveals how—and how effectively—queer narrative documentary resembles and reassembles Walter Benjamin's constellations of Paris, "capital of the nineteenth century." Considering experimental queer writing in critical conjunction with Benjamin's city writing, the book shows how a queer perspective on inner-city reality exposes contradictions otherwise obscured by mythic narratives of progress.

If Benjamin regards the Paris arcade as a microcosm of high capitalism, wherein the (un)making of industrial society is perceived retrospectively, in contemporary queer narrative we see the sexually charged and commodity-entranced space of the gay bathhouse as a microcosm of late capitalism and as an exemplary site for excavating the contradictions of mass sex. In Chisholm's book we discover how, looking back on the ruins of queer mecca, queer authors return to Benjamin to advance his "dialectics of seeing"; how they cruise the paradoxes of market capital, blasting a queer era out of the homogeneous course of history.

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