Queer Cinema in Europe

Edited by Robin Griffiths

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Comparative Readings in Screen Studies (Wallflower Press) and *British Queer Cinema* (Routledge); and film adaptations of *The Talented Mr Ripley* in the *Journal of Romance Studies*.

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Introduction: Contesting Borders – Mapping a European Queer Cinema

Robin Griffiths

So what exactly is *European Queer Cinema*? Can its borders be marked, and if so, in what ways contested? What particularities and ideological inflections set it apart from other so-called *queer* cinemas? What is included and, inevitably, excluded by such a category? Or, for that matter, is it even really possible in the first place to map that shifting and often quite dangerous ground upon which to locate – albeit problematically – the queer cinemas of Europe?

These are the unique challenges faced by this rather timely contribution to that increasingly slippery 'canon' known as Queer Cinema Studies. Because as a number of writers have observed in recent years,[1] attempting to define and fix a notion of *Europe*, or a distinctively *European* cinematic form, is in itself a relatively impossible task – making any discernibly queer attempt to negotiate such rocky terrain, therefore, both "elusive" and "unreliable". The 'identity' of Europe and its cinemas is, as Wendy Everett rightly observes, "multiple, unstable, and perpetually changing" (2005: 6); and so the obvious dilemma that emerges in such an endeavour as this is how to go about conceptualising a cinematic practice that, to all intents and purposes, eschews conceptualisation? With so many seemingly fluid territories and boundaries to consider, in what way can we truly speak of its specificities, its subjectivities, or its desires? However, it is perhaps this innately amorphous quality to contemporary ideas of Europe, and its many complex interactions with, and/or subversions of, a number of ethnocentric systems of representation that in the end lends itself quite readily to queer contemplation. For European cinema – like Europe itself – is, as Timothy Bergfelder points out (2005), situated at a queerly productive site of "indeterminacy" and "in-between-ness" that underscores the need to relocate debates around identity and representation within much more diverse and divergent contexts.

Indeed, explorations of sexuality and cinema in Europe are imbued, possibly more than any other, with an almost unrelenting determination to venture into those unknown and uncharted realms at the edges of celluloid subjectivity, embodiment and desire. With queer work in particular, influenced as it is in any case by the formative post-structuralist discourses of continental Europe, emerging as some of the most controversial yet incontrovertibly effective sites wherein to interrogate "the boundary lines as well as the content of the territories they mark" (Phelan, 1997: 3). The term 'queer' in this context – though always somewhat problematic – in effect functions as a banner under which to unite a group of very different filmmakers whose works have, in varying ways, carved out a space wherein to address a number of quite provocative new questions about both the limits and unimagined possibilities of sexuality, nationhood and belonging that have long been waiting to be explored. Because cinema, as always, emerges as "the mode of communication, expression and entertainment – the 'signifying practice' – *par excellence*" (Dyer, 1980: 1) through which to challenge, rather than reconfirm, the geographic, linguistic and ontological parameters of identity and desire in the new millennium.

The past fifteen years or so have, in truth, witnessed a noticeable resurgence of academic interest concerning issues of European cinema, in all their manifest complexity; with queer studies, more specifically, taking a belatedly global turn. But while most of these critical 'interventions' have been largely concerned with the politics of sexual identity in its Anglo-American and Western European contexts, recent changes to the geo-political, socio-economic and ethno-cultural make up of this purportedly unified continent have had a profound effect upon cinematic modes of production, distribution and spectatorship that spill across a number of national boundaries and binarisms. The borders of identity and representation in contemporary Europe – whether territorial, political or sexual – are thus, as this volume suggests, at a pivotal moment of transformation that demands far more sophisticated engagement than previously afforded its traditionally 'hetero-normative' considerations. Since as Sandra Barriales-Bouche and Marjorie Attignol Salvodon attest, these "times of transition" are crucial now more than at any other for heralding "innovative ideas, new practices, and alternative systems of thought" (2007: 3). Yet while recent debates around 'National Cinemas' have expressed the need for a "re-framing" of critical positions on identity and film (in an attempt to encompass the multiplicity of such an undertaking), the one position that still remains largely unmarked in cinematic discourses of Europe is, predictably, the *sexual* position (pardon the pun!) – especially when it is to be found beyond the constraints of the 'normal'.

As I have previously argued (2006), academic criticism on European Film has, with very few exceptions,[2] remained determinedly heterosexist in terms of the types of film texts and/or readings that have come to comprise such a 'genre'; with lesbian, gay and now queer forms of production, reception and scholarship remaining quite conspicuously absent in spite of their long and interdependent involvement in the evolutionary history of international cinema. By encouraging a much wider and inclusive array of textual and methodological approaches – that combine, complicate and/or rework the strategies through which gender, sexual identity and 'queerness' can be identified – the contributors to this collection hence set out to redress this imbalance. And, in the process, encounter those perversely productive moments of

nonconformity and slippage that can reveal the many queer autonomies, identities and desires that actually comprise this allegedly 'new' Europe.

This book is poised, then, at a moment that demands the reconsideration of sexuality in light of all sorts of transformations. Because to attempt to imagine a queer cinema in Europe, is to imagine an invariably unique, yet contingent, repository of the social, political and cultural fantasies of a region caught up in a seemingly endless process of rebirth and reconstruction. The films, filmmakers and performers discussed here, therefore, are crucial not only because they seek to address notions of national identity and sexuality that transgress (or at least contest) a number of more established borders and investments, but they also – more importantly – attempt to move beyond typically universal (and generally Anglo-American-centric) models of same-sex desire in order to discover those alternative, more localised fantasies and realities that, as Duncan Petrie has observed, are "never static or given [but] constantly subject to development, transformation and change" (1992: 2).

The variously labelled Queer Cinemas discussed here have in fact emerged out of quite specific national contexts of production and consumption, in which aggressive political and representational agency dovetails with the radical innovations of European 'Avant-garde' and 'Art-house' filmmaking to synthesise a common cause. The apparent aims of which are, as José Arroyo describes:

> [to raise] challenging questions about representations of the liminal; about hybrid forms of textuality, address and reception; about notions of multiple spectatorship, social authorship; and about how intra-generic approaches to a particular thematic could themselves constitute a new genre. (1997: 79)

The essays contained herein thus frame the decidedly 'work-in-progress' nature of contemporary European queer cinema in ways that raise as many questions as they answer. Because in a similar vein to its other non-European counterparts, there are, in fact, no discernible manifestos to the queer cinemas of Europe: no singular aesthetic, language or intent. They are films that can, more accurately, be seen to embody a complex register of the sexual and national-cultural imaginary of an era in which 'identity', 'representation' and 'desire' – both onscreen and off – can no longer hold the same functions or meanings as they did in the past.

Although collectively structured around four distinct, yet overlapping themes, the essays in this anthology do not in any way hope to provide an exhaustive history of all queer film production in Europe to date. Nor, for that matter, a definitive discussion of the many issues and anxieties that may arise when attempting to navigate that tense interface between queerness, nationhood and more localised permutations of identity and sexual orientation. They instead seek to mark a point of entry wherein to at least begin to debate the subversive potential of more *deviant* engagements with the specificities and contradictions of regional, local and global experiences and appropriations.

Part One, 'Queer Identities', sets the scene for this book's initial investigation by pointing to the role of French queer filmmaking in re-imagining a new social order. The contributors explore how recent examples from the region can, in actual fact, appeal to a multiplicity of interpretations; since they reveal how the disruption of identity and gender/sexual 'norms' that is typical of these films appears to be part of a much larger project of socio-political, cultural and familial reconstruction. In projecting a way of life and a personal politics that renders 'unfamiliar' the representational traditions and heteronormativities of French cinema, the essays explore how the works of such acclaimed *enfant terribles* as François Ozon, Sébastien Lifshitz, Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau – to name but a few – present a radical vision that challenges notions of nationhood and desire in bold, yet incontrovertibly innovative new ways. And are, in effect, representative of a noticeable new trend in contemporary French film to suggest notions of community, politics and subjectivity that refuse to conform to the neatly delineated boundaries of the Euro-mainstream, and also, more importantly, take their audiences on quite distinctively queer journeys.

The essays that comprise Part Two, 'Queer Aesthetics', on the other hand, move away from such questions of identity in order to illuminate the epistemological and iconographical tensions invoked by the avant-garde experimentalism of filmmakers Bavo Defurne, Matthias Müller and Barry Purves. As Belgian, German and British queer nationals respectively, their disparately charged works question the boundaries of sexuality and gender through formal experimentation with the languages of film, and not only reveal the apparent limits of European narrative cinema, but challenge their spectators to occupy multiple viewing positions. In surprisingly similar, but divergent ways, their enigmatic and recognizably 'camp' sensibilities have produced a series of rather provocative yet densely layered cine-poems that are both technically sophisticated and unexpectedly moving. Defurne and Müller in particular, as Michael Williams and Robert L. Cagle effectively illustrate, construct quite visually rich landscapes upon which to explore questions of memory, the historical body, and adolescent sexual awakening that are tinged with a noticeable yearning for acceptance and belonging. Whereas Purves, on the other hand, as Aylish Wood discovers, pushes the boundaries of animation into quite radical new territory by inscribing an uncompromising homoeroticism into a medium that has, for far too long, been associated quite exclusively with the heteronormative. In actual fact, all three filmmakers present a number of compellingly unconventional and personal films that are far more successful than most in "renew[ing] the way homosexuality has been presented so far".[3]

In Part Three, 'Queer Spaces', the contributors go on to discuss the increasingly central role that social space and/or location plays in the construction and maintenance of queer communities, cultures and identities. From the oppressive urban sprawl and typically 'seedy' underground haunts of such films as *Coming Out* (1989), *Les fauves nuit* (1992) and *Mandragora* (1997), to the furtive, erotically-charged cruising grounds of rural England, exotic Istanbul or post-communist Prague, they are places of appropriation, exploitation and a renewed visibility that have come to represent both a means of, and a barrier to, understandings of queer sexuality and identity in the postmodern era. Because by seemingly reclaiming the traditional public/private spaces associated with heterosexual identity-formation as a means through which to re-stage the struggle for queer identity and emergence, the previously demarcated territories of the gay/straight divide have since become increasingly blurred; thereby creating

a context of incoherence that has proved to be a uniquely productive site for exploring trans-national sexualities.

The concluding section of this anthology, 'Queer Performances', however, exposes how particular strategies of performance can in fact combine to produce decidedly queer moments through which to rework the tenets of gender, sexuality and national identity in quite radical new ways. In his discussion of the 'trans-European' stardom of British cinema icon Dirk Bogarde, for example, Glyn Davis describes how the star's rather indeterminate or 'slippery' sexuality has long been deployed as the model for a uniquely international form of queer stardom that can seemingly transgress the boundaries of a number of national cinemas. His films with 'decadent' Italian director Luchino Visconti, in particular, can not only be read as commentaries on his seemingly 'displaced' status, but their "frequently impenetrable textures" enable them to refuse easy categorization. And while Andrea Reimann explores the similarly transgressive importance of German filmmaker Monika Treut in queerly 're-imagining' the past, both Andrew Webber and Louise Wallenberg alternately offer more developed readings of gender and sexual performance in such films as *Run Lola Run* (1998), *Lola und bilidikid* (1998) and *Dragkingdom of Sweden* (2002), that not only destabilise the transcultural regulatory frameworks of national hetero-normativites, but also envision a political space wherein "gender is open to more mobile forms of reconstruction" than ever before. And even though 'queer', like all other categories of identity, is not without its internal differences and inequities, the contributors to *Queer Cinema in Europe* hope to not only identify those at times transient, yet uniquely fascinating moments of queerness that can be mapped across a number of local, national and transnational borders – both real and imagined – but to also, in the end, demonstrate the continually subversive potential that exists for seeing things 'differently'.

Notes

1. In particular, Aitken (2001), Dyer and Vincendeau (1992), Everett (2005), Ezra (2004), Fowler (2002), Imre (2005),Iordanova (2003), Petrie (1992), Konstantarakos (2000), et al.
2. Such as, for example, my previous anthology *British Queer Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Alice A. Kuzniar's *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); or Gary P. Cestaro's *Queer Italia: Same-sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
3. From Yann Beauvais' article "Un cinéma mineur, de moeurs, d'humeur – Un second siècle pour le cinema", in *Art Press*, No. 14, Paris, 1993, pp. 148–152.

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Part One: Queer Identities

1

Queering the Family in François Ozon's *Sitcom*

Michelle Chilcoat

... Oedipus begins in the mind of the father.[1]

François Ozon's *Sitcom* (1997) was part of an international fin-de-millénaire wave of "arty family shocker" films, as one critic dubbed them,'[2] that put the spotlight on bad fathers, particularly on their psycho-sexual crimes. Along with Ozon's work, there appeared, for example, the Danish *Festen* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1999), the American *Happiness* (Todd Solonz, 1998) and the British *The War Zone* (Tim Roth, 1999), all culminating in the arrest, banishment or murder of the abusive patriarch. A number of important distinctions, however, set Ozon's *Sitcom* apart. One is its treatment of transgression, particularly in the form of incest, as a liberating rather than traumatizing act. Another lies in *Sitcom*'s portrayal of proactive women: whereas in *Festen*, *Happiness*, and *The War Zone*, women are represented as passive enablers and/or victims of the father's tyranny; in *Sitcom*, they take an active role in the film's happy, healthy resolution of conflict. Still another distinguishing feature is the film's outcome in which a new family order is represented, organized around queer relationships that are realized upon the elimination of the father. These distinctions can be attributed to Ozon's restaging or queering of Freud's Oedipal drama, which turns on the recognition of a multiplicity of sexual desires, as opposed to masculine desire alone, the only one Freud would legitimate in his theories of human sexuality.

Sitcom opens with the parting of a red curtain, signaling to the viewer that what is being represented is indeed a "scene," a drama that has been staged. In this scene, a father, briefcase in hand, is returning from work to his bourgeois home where he finds his family members regaling their "papa" with a hearty round of "Happy Birthday." The camera lingers on the home's elegant façade as the family inside celebrates the birth of the patriarch. Their joyful

Figure 1. Ozon's "arty family shocker": *Sitcom* (1997). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

singing is cut short, however, by the cocking of a gun. After a female voice is heard asking, "Jean, why?"[3] a round of shots and screams are heard and, then, silence.

The film flashes back to "several months earlier," ostensibly so the viewer can learn what has led to the father's violent act. This time, a woman is approaching the house. A comfortably yet elegantly dressed "lady of the house," Hélène, greets the woman at the door. This latter is Maria, the new maid, and her accent indicates that she is "foreign;" she tends to look at Hélène mysteriously when Hélène's attention is focused elsewhere, but no clue is given yet as to what this mystery might be. Next we see Nicolas, the nerdy introverted son, reading a science magazine. Then a handsome young man, David, arrives and locks into a lusty embrace with the daughter, Sophie, who has just bounded down the stairs to greet him. Finally, Jean, the father, returns from work to round out this picture of the perfect bourgeois family. Only today, dad has brought home "a gift." To the horror of his wife and delight of his children, he unveils a cage containing a white lab rat.

In the next scene, Maria arrives again at the door, this time to attend a dinner party; since a guest has fallen ill, Hélène has invited Maria to take her place. Maria is arrayed in a revealing evening gown, and compared to Hélène, she is clearly overdressed for the occasion. But this detail does not faze Hélène – to the contrary, she seems delighted. However, the appearance of Maria's Cameroonian husband, Abdu, who arrives at the door shortly after Maria, does distract her. At the very least, Hélène seems "surprised" by his appearance, but then regains

her composure in order to welcome the guests (who are clearly marked as "foreigners") into her home.

As Maria and Abdu share before-dinner drinks with Hélène, Jean, Sophie, and David, Nicolas, the introverted son, sits alone in his bedroom where he is drawn to stroke the rodent (Hélène has insisted that Nicolas keep the creature in his room), and from here on out, each person who comes in contact with the rat will express heretofore hidden sexual desires. At dinner, Nicolas interrupts Abdu's explanation of French colonial history (of which Jean and Hélène appear woefully ignorant) to announce that he is homosexual, and then runs back to his room. The mother is beside herself with grief, while the father remains calm: "It's nothing serious," he reassures, "just adolescence, a passing thing." Maria convinces Abdu, a high school gym teacher presumably familiar with the woes of teenage boys, to have a talk with Nicolas. But once in Nicolas's bedroom, Abdu proceeds to seduce Nicolas – that is, after the rat bites Abdu. In a scene that follows, daughter Sophie allows the rat to crawl all over her supine body. She then commands David not to touch her and tells him she will "talk to him like a dog." A little later, she is aroused from sleep, clutching her crotch as if writhing in the experience of an orgasm. But then, seemingly inexplicably, she makes her way to a window, opens it and jumps out. The camera focuses on her crumpled body below.

The film now jumps forward to show that Nicolas is nothing less than radiant – coming out has clearly agreed with him. Sophie, on the other hand, has transformed into a frustrated dominatrix, confined to a wheelchair and open in her suicide attempts that go unnoticed by the rest of the family. Nicolas is apparently actively enjoying his newly expressed sexuality as streams of beautiful men answering his personal ad for the "group plan" file joyously into his bedroom. This excess is a contrast to Sophie's lack: paralyzed from the waist down, she can no longer be brought to orgasm despite David's efforts to stimulate her orally, even with the added enticement of his being clad in nothing but a dog collar and skimpy underpants.

Though Nicolas and Sophie have both come in contact with the rat, their reactions could not be any more dissimilar – or any more Freudian. The application of Freudian theory to *Sitcom* is in fact appropriate, given Ozon's acknowledged predilection for the reading of clinical case histories,[4] along with his suggestion that *Sitcom* could have been titled "'the rat family' after the famous case study of Sigmund Freud."[5] This study is recorded in Freud's 1909 essay, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," otherwise known as the "Rat Man" case. In this essay, Freud addresses the "nuclear complex" (which he renames the "Oedipus Complex" one year later[6]) and he also makes reference to "the penis significance of rats."[7] In *Sitcom*, then, the rat signifies or substitutes for the penis, which is itself, according to Freud, the "prototype of fetishes."[8]

The concept of the penis as the prototypical fetish – the "original fake" – is key for decoding the mystery of desire in Freudian thinking.[9] For Freud, fetishism "is, as is well known, based on the patient (who is almost always male) not recognizing the fact that females have no penis,"[10] and "on the other hand ... recognizing the fact that females have no penis" (203). To allay the fear of castration that the sight of the woman's (lacking) genitalia inspire in him, the male

"takes hold of something else instead – a part of the body or some other object – and assigns it the role of the penis which he cannot do without" (203). This "way of dealing with reality," Freud adds, "which almost deserves to be described as artful,"[11] is encapsulated by Freud in the phrase "I know, but still." This acknowledgement/disavowal formula, entailing in its very articulation the work of the mind, is the foundation of sexual fantasy, that which makes desire possible. The word "fetish" derives from the Portuguese "feitiço" and the Latin "factitius," both rendered as "factitious" in English, meaning "made by or resulting from art; artificial." To claim, as Freud does, that women do not fetishize because they do not have a penis to protect is curious, since the penis even for the male is connected to desire only insofar as it is a made-up thing, a fantasy. According to Freud's own logic, it would make more sense to say that if women do not fetishize, it is not because they do not have a penis, but because they do not fantasize or, in other words, because they do not use their minds.

Interestingly, Freud himself writes in "'Civilized' Sexual Morality" that it is woman's "civilized education" (176) rather than any anatomical difference that inhibits the expression of her desire. He states explicitly that he does not believe that "women's 'physiological feeble-mindedness' is to be explained by a biological opposition between intellectual work and sexual activity." Rather, women's "upbringing forbids their concerning themselves intellectually with sexual problems though they nevertheless feel extremely curious about them, and frightens them by condemning such curiosity as unwomanly." "In this way," Freud continues, "they are scared away from *any* form of thinking, and knowledge loses its value for them" (177, Freud's emphasis). Freud's notion of the dominance of male desire here rests on a rather thin assumption that the fear of being deemed "unwomanly" is enough to prevent women from ever getting "curious" about their sexuality, and more, from thinking at all. But in *Sitcom*, as we shall see, when women do get curious – when they touch the rat, fetishize, fantasize, *think* – the whole Oedipal scheme takes a queer turn.

Once the rat is understood as the fetish signifying the penis, Nicolas's and Sophie's drastically differing reactions to contact with the rat can be decoded, in Freudian terms at any rate. For Freud, Nicolas's homosexuality would be a perfectly understandable, even felicitous condition, given that females are castrated and, thus, repulsive, as he writes in "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality," in the section referring specifically to homosexuality: "Depreciation of women, and aversion to them, even horror of them, are generally derived from the early discovery that women have no penis."[12] If males turn to homosexuality or fetishism – which for Freud both operate according to the desire for keeping the (fantasy of the) penis – it is to ease castration fears so as to enjoy more effectively what they already have. As a female, however, Sophie can only have her sexuality figured as (the) lack (of a penis). When she awakens clutching her crotch, in Freudian terms she would be awakening to the sense of her castration.[13] Further, jumping out of a window signifies for Freud the wish to have a baby, which is also the wish to have a penis.[14]

Freud makes the connection between jumping (or falling, more precisely) and having a baby in "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,"[15] where he interprets a female patient's suicide attempt by jumping off a bridge as her wish to have her father's child (162).

It is important to note that the woman in this case attempts suicide when she is rejected by a female lover. But, as Sarah Kofman pointed out, Freud's "symbolic equivalence ... between penis and child" means that "[e]ven when femininity seems to be the most firmly established [i. e., in motherhood], it is still the masculine desire to possess the penis that imposes its law."[16] "Homosexuality," therefore, is just another way to say "masculine desire," the only kind of desire there is for Freud. Thus, the real problem in this case is precisely that of a woman's desire ("homosexuality *in a woman*"), which Freud cannot or refuses to recognize. As he sees it, the woman's suicide attempt cannot come as a consequence of being rejected by the woman she loved, but only by "the very wish which ... had driven her into homosexuality – namely, the wish to have a child by her father" (162). This wish to have the child/penis, which is moreover simply the wish to desire, is precisely what women are not supposed to do. The woman in Freud's case, however, "remained homosexual out of defiance against her father" (159), suggesting that she continued to pursue her desire, but on her own terms, that is, as desire for another woman. Unable to account for desire in any other terms than male-centred, Freud's only option is to stop the analysis: "As soon ... as I recognized the girl's attitude to her father [which, Freud notes, extended to a "sweeping repudiation of men" in general], I broke off treatment ..." (164).

Whereas Freud breaks off treatment when faced with the idea of woman's desire, *Sitcom* imagines another scenario: the woman as fetishist (i.e., as one who desires, both sexually and intellectually). When Sophie touches the rat, her sexual desire is expressed in terms of sadomasochism, specifically where she is the dominatrix (indicated in her announcement to David that she will "talk to him like a dog"). But if this desire (in fact, desire of any kind) is not deemed "proper" to a woman, might not Sophie's attempted suicide be interpreted as a desperate appeal to have her desire recognized? After all, Sophie is explicitly forgotten by or left out of familial accounting on numerous occasions throughout the film, both before and after her suicide, most notably by her own mother.[17] For example, after Nicolas announces his homosexuality, one of Hélène's concerns is that Jean will never have grandchildren. "But what about us?" Sophie interjects, referring to her and David. After a peremptory apology to Sophie, Hélène shifts her attention to David: "Oh, David, you know I never doubted you." In another instance, Hélène overlooks Sophie when expressing concern for her son's "illness" (i.e., his homosexuality), even though her daughter is the one engaged in open suicide attempts and self-mutilation. This time, Sophie explodes: "Nicolas! Nicolas! Don't you ever worry about me?" "I've never distinguished between the two of you," Hélène cajoles, "I love you as much as Nicolas, your father does too." But Sophie's rage will not be quieted as she retorts, "My father's nothing but a homo!" "You know your father's not homosexual," Hélène tries to reason, "you're the living proof!" "Just because he touched you twice in his life?" Sophie cruelly taunts. When Hélène charges that Sophie is "full of poison," Sophie concurs, but with a qualification: "That's right! The poison of truth!"

The "truth" Sophie reveals concerning her father's "homosexuality" is more aptly what Luce Irigaray calls "ho(m)mo-sexuality,"[18] defined as "the exclusive valorization of men's desires/needs, of exchanges among men" (171): "Reigning everywhere, although prohibited in practice, ho(m)mo-sexuality is played out through the bodies of women, ... and heterosexuality has been up to now just an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations

among men" (172).[19] Jean's two children are the meager "proof" of his heterosexuality, his "heterosexual alibi" that covers his distain for women who, not bearing the penis, have nothing to desire.[20] If Jean has had sex with Hélène, it was only to meet what Freud deems to be the ideal demands of civilized sexual morality," that is, reproduction. [21] For Freud, "reproductive" (i.e., civilized) activity and "good" (i.e., natural) sex have nothing to do with each other, since "good" sex can only be had with the "phallic" woman (who is really a fantasized male) – if it must be had with a woman at all.

This "lifting of the veil" that Sophie has initiated by identifying her father's "ho(m)mo-sexuality" pushes Hélène to engage in a series of actions, the first of which is to confront Jean with the concerns she has for both her children. As usual Jean dismisses her with his detached, irrelevant comments that stand in the place of any real communication with his wife: "Tomorrow is another day," he tells her, "Sleep brings counsel." But Hélène will not accept his patronizing attitude any longer, as she launches into a cavalcade of complaints and accusations: "Stop talking to me that way, I'm not sick!"; "I've had it with your asinine proverbs!"; "You're nothing but a ... a rat!" In the scene that immediately follows, Hélène confronts her repulsion (namely, the repulsion for the idea of her own desire) and takes the rat in hand. Holding the rodent close to her body, she repeats over and over again, "love, tenderness, dialogue," clearly in a state of ecstasy. Next, she enters her son's bedroom, announcing as she removes her robe that she has "decided to act," that she has come to "cure" his homosexuality. Though Nicolas insists he is not sick, she carries on with her seduction: "If we started here," she ventures, "maybe none of this would have happened." She climbs into bed with him and they kiss. In the next scene Hélène is in her psychotherapist's office, relating the fantasy of having sex with her son. "Is this bad?" she tentatively inquires. "It's just a dream," her therapist tells her, explaining that only the real act could signal a problem. "It's not a dream," defies Hélène as the scene abruptly ends.

The mother's open transgression of the incest taboo in *Sitcom* is as pivotal a notion as the "woman-as-fetishist" is for the queering of the Oedipal drama. This is because, for Freud, the incest taboo, key to the establishment of male power as he writes in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,"[22] really has no applicability with regard to women. The "incest barrier," he maintains, is created as a means to "loosen their [adolescent boys'] connection with their family" (141) but, more precisely, to diminish boys' affection for their mothers, allowing for the "detachment from parental authority" without which "the progress of civilization" is threatened. "Girls," on the other hand, "who have never got over their parents' authority" (142), are always "incested" so to speak, because there is never a need for them to rise up against (parental) authority, given that their only role "for the progress of civilization" is reproductive (i.e., passive) as opposed to productive (i.e., active). Of further significance is the male's tendency to transgress the incest taboo. Freud remarks, "how frequently the barrier is transgressed in phantasies and even in reality" (141), demonstrating his ability to break the very law he himself has imposed, to be both creator of the law and above the law, the ultimate power broker.[23]

Rather than indicate a usurpation of this power position, however, Hélène's "transgression" represents more accurately, as Ozon himself has pointed out, a "de-dramatization" of the incest taboo,[24] a deflating or disabling of the Oedipal drama that served to regulate a family order

resting primarily on the non-recognition of woman's desire. Freud's supposed "decoding" of the Oedipal drama is really about what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called "overcoding" (209) or controlling sexuality, about subjecting sexuality to law, the law of male desire. The Oedipal myth, as they articulated it in their provocatively titled *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,[25] does not describe the human condition of desire, but constructs and regulates this desire. From this myth "one takes as something already constituted what is in fact the emergence of an order that the myth narrates and explains. In other words, one reasons as if the myth placed on the stage persons defined as father, mother, brother, and sister, whereas these roles belong to the order constituted by the [incest] prohibition." In the final account, however, "the law proves nothing about an original reality of desire because it essentially disfigures the desired" (161), most egregiously by making it exclusively male, particularly insofar as it is constructed as a relation to castration, to having or not having the penis.

At first glance, a world where only penises count would seem to bode well for male homosexual desire, again as noted by Deleuze and Guattari: "We know how Freudianism is permeated by the bizarre notion that there is finally only one sex, the masculine, in relation to which the woman, the feminine, is defined as a lack, an absence. It could be thought at first that such a hypothesis founds the omnipotence of a male homosexuality" (294). In Freudian theory, however, male (homo)sexuality is also founded on a lack, because it too is founded in relation to castration. Liberated sexuality would be the one that "knows nothing of castration" (295). But this liberation cannot be realized "as long as homosexuality is caught up in a relation of exclusive disjunction with heterosexuality, a relation that ascribes them both to a common Oedipal and castrating stock, charged with ensuring only their differentiation into two noncommunicating series, instead of bringing to light their reciprocal inclusion and their transverse communication in the decoded flows of desire" (350). Hélène's incantation, "love, tenderness, dialogue," could be interpreted as a call for just such communication, and her desire to "cure" Nicolas of his "ho(m)mo-sexuality," as the desire to cure (homo)sexuality of its relation to castration.[26]

This realization, however, can only come about when the "subjugated group," i.e., the family,[27] which operates solely according to "the mechanisms for the repression of desire," is replaced by a "subject-group," which "is productive of desire and a desire that produces" (348). In *Sitcom*, Hélène's "transgression" of the incest taboo in order to "de-dramatize" it is followed by her invitation to her family to participate in group therapy. Taking place in a tranquil swimming pool, this group therapy stands in contradistinction to the psychotherapy sessions in which the mother alone participates, but which do little or nothing to relieve her frustration, particularly regarding her husband who remains a distant and hyper-rational pedant throughout the film, speaking only in proverbs, which, like laws, are handed down from generation to generation without ever being questioned as to their validity or relevance. The watery union of mother, daughter and son signifies a rebirth that takes place this time without any participation of the father who, however unwittingly, has remarked that his presence is not necessary in the family's healing process. His arrogant and disdainful opting out at this crucial moment in the formation of a new group consciousness will turn out to be his undoing. Through group therapy mother, daughter, and son come to realize that the rat is the root of their dystopia (insofar as the rat symbolizes for the father/Freud the all-powerful phallus and not a fetish for all to enjoy). Consequently,

Hélène phones Jean to share what they have learned and to ask him to get rid of the offensive creature before they come home.

The ringing phone rouses Jean out of the very dream of family massacre that initiated *Sitcom*'s intrigue. Jean's idea of dealing with the rat, however, is to consume it rather than eliminate it. Savoring the tail especially (a vision of Freudian overcoding), he cannibalizes the rat to supplement his force, to keep all the power of the penis/fetish for himself. When the family returns home, Jean does not answer their greetings. Hélène is the first to mount the stairs and discovers in the darkness of their bedroom a monster rat that immediately dives between her legs as if to devour her genitals, the site of female desire.[28] Nicolas runs up after her, followed by David who has also just arrived at the house, and all three of them struggle to subdue the giant rat. In the meantime, Sophie drags her lifeless legs up the stairs, a butcher knife clenched between her teeth, and manages to slay the beast. In this final step in the undoing of the Oedipal drama, it is the daughter who kills the rat/father. But it must also be noted that this has been, as Hélène announces, a group effort: "We did it. We've managed to kill him." With the father eliminated, the attraction that Hélène and Maria feel for each other can be expressed outright, as can the interracial/homosexual partnering of Nicolas and Abdu, and Sophie recovers her mobility and choice of partner on her own terms (i.e., as dominatrix).

As Ozon has summed it up, *Sitcom* is a "utopic film that reconstructs a new social order" in which "the bourgeois family is replaced by homosexual, lesbian and S&M couples."[29] This order, "born out of a murder,"[30] is represented in the film's final scene which takes place at a cemetery, an unexpected, though in this case thoroughly appropriate, site for the couples' joyful (re)union. While viewers might have thought at the beginning of the film that, to quote Ozon again, "there are foreign bodies [i.e., Maria and Abdu] who come and are going to be the cause of all the trouble," [31] in the end, "in contrast to a reactionary film," what must be eliminated is not the foreigner, but the "character who incarnates the 'law,' familial morality, that is, the father."[32] In *Sitcom*, it is the reckoning of female desire that ultimately undermines this law, opening the way for recognizing many differences (i.e., not just sexual, but also racial). Even more crucial than eliminating the father, then, is "[m]anaging to respect the other of sexual difference, without reducing the two to the one, to the same, to the similar," as Irigaray instructs in "Mixing: A Principle for Refounding Community."[33] Of course, there is the ambiguity of the last image of the film, as a white rat scurries over the father's tomb, a potentially ominous reminder that it may be hard to keep the penis/killer down. Or perhaps this image returns us to the fetish, which Freud did, after all, associate with "artfulness." Full of openings and ambiguities that appeal to a multiplicity of interpretations, fantasies, and desires, Ozon's cinema art is a fetish – a queer thing for all to play with.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 178.
2. Alice Potter, Rev. of *The War Zone*. *Boston Phoenix* 16 Sept. 1999 <http: //www.bostonphoenix.com/archive/movies/99/09/16/THE_WAR_ZONE.html>.
3. All translations from the original French of *Sitcom* are my own.

4. "I love reading case studies. I also read books on psychoanalytic theory, but I don't understand much. Until some sentence comes across as very clear, and then it remains engraved in my memory" (<http: //www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Makeup/ 6977/sitcomentretriens.html >, my translation from the French). Throughout this essay, all quotations from Ozon interviews have been translated from the original French by me unless otherwise indicated.
5. See Ozon's interview with Elisabeth Lebovici, *Libération* 20 May 1998 <http: //www.geocities.com/chm20.geo/sitcompresse.html >.
6. reud first used the term "Oedipus Complex" in his 1910 essay "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love, I)."
7. In "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" a.k.a. "The Rat Man Case," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey , 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 10: 153–320 (1962), p. 214. All quotations from this edition will be cited hereafter only with the title of the essay, volume number, year of publication, and page number(s).
8. "Fetishism," 21: 147–158 (1964), p. 157.
9. By shooting actor Stéphane Rideau's erect penis in one scene (a first in non-porno film), and then by suggesting that the member is actually a prosthesis, Ozon deliberately plays with the (non)distinction between the fetish and the "real" thing. The prosthesis, he goes on to say, would highlight the "theatrical nature" of the film. In his interview with Elisabeth Lebovici (cited above), Ozon explains: Stéphane was completely willing to do it [i.e., show his erect penis]. We decided to use a prosthesis, which fits in with the theatrical nature of a sitcom." But in another interview with Claude Duran, when asked about this specific scene, Ozon responded: "If the dick in question is beautiful, why not show it?" (in *Têtu* n. 24 mai 1998 <http: //www.francois-ozon.com/ozon.int.sitcom.htm> .
10. "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," 23: 141–207 (1964), p. 202.
11. "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense," 23: 275–278 (1964), p. 277.
12. 18: 221–232 (1962), p. 231. In a similar vein, in "Female Sexuality" Freud maintains that "One thing that is left over in men from the influence of the Oedipus complex is a certain amount of disparagement in their attitudes towards women, whom they regard as being castrated." In *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. ElisabethYoung-Bruehl (W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp. 321–341 (p. 326).
13. In Freud's account, fetishism is a way to minimize or neutralize the power of the castrating mother, so as to relieve castration anxiety. This relies on using the intellect to create narratives, the "I know, but still" of which women are supposedly incapable since their knowledge is only of the immediate sort. In other words, the girl's *immediate* realization when she beholds the male genitals for the first time of the *fact* that she is castrated is less a knowing than a sensing, and is therefore non-narratable, that is, unrepresentable. As Freud states in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, cited above, pp. 89–145), "[l]ittle girls do not resort to denial of this kind [i.e., to fetishism] when they see that boys' genitals are formed differently from their own. They are ready to recognize them *immediately* and are overcome by envy for the penis..." (p. 122, my emphasis).
14. Freud equates penis and baby in numerous essays. For just one example, see "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism" (in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, cited above, pp. 196–203), where he writes that "in the products of the unconscious ... *baby* and *penis* are interchangeable" (p. 198).
15. 18: 145–172 (1962).

16. Kofman notes this in *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 193.
17. For Freud (see "Femininity" in *Freud on Women*, cited above, pp. 342–362), the fact that "the little boy ... brings the longed for penis with him" (p. 356) naturally explains why mothers take more interest in sons than daughters. For Luce Irigaray, mother-daughter discord is the fallout of the rise of patriarchy. In "The Universal as Mediation"(in *Sex and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 125–149), she writes that in the "eras of gynocratic rule" (p. 129), the "mother-daughter couple" was "divine" (p. 132). But with patriarchy, the daughter must be "exiled from her land in order to become a wife, and the wife becomes a mother in the genealogy of her husband. This duty of hers, this right of his, cuts woman off from her roots and reroots her in the family of her husband" (p. 131). In *Sitcom*, Hélène makes reference to her own "rerooting" when she points out to Maria at the beginning of the film that she lives in the house where her "husband has always lived and was, in fact, born." Accordingly, if Sophie gets overlooked by her family, it is because she does not really belong with them.
18. See "Women on the Market" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cornell University Press, 1985) pp. 170–191.
19. If "ho(m)mo-sexual" relations are "prohibited in practice," it is because, as Irigaray clarifies in "Commodities among Themselves" (in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, cited above, pp. 192–197), "*they openly interpret the law according to which society operates*" and thus "threaten to shift the horizon of that law" (p. 193, Irigaray's emphasis). Open homosexual relations, in other words, make a mockery of the homosocial order that relies on the exchange of women to maintain its dominance.
20. Jean's double standard with regard to his two children is reflected in two consecutive scenes, one where he tells Nicolas, "I love you as you are with all your differences" and the following where he tells Sophie, "Better one truth than two lies: I don't find you attractive at all."
21. See "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (p. 177) in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, cited above, pp. 166–181.
22. In *Freud on Women: A Reader*, cited above.
23. In "'Civilized' Sexual Morality" (cited above), the exceptional status of the male alone with regard to the incest taboo is made explicit: "The 'double' sexual morality which is valid for men in our society is the plainest admission that society itself does not believe in the possibility of enforcing precepts which it itself has laid down" (p. 172).
24. Ozon explained: "... I wanted to de-dramatize the incest sequence, to film it like a Hollywood love scene" (<http: //www.geocities.com/Hollywood>).
25. Cited above.
26. Ozon's remark that his films are "less about homosexuality than bisexuality" points to his awareness that "homosexuality" is too restrictive of a term to apply to his project. See his interview (in English) with Liz Hoggard, "Vampire of the Senses," *The Observer* 10 Aug. 2003 <http: //film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,1015545,00.html>.
27. In an interview with Isabelle Giordano, Ozon explains: "For me, the family is constraint, it's authority, it's the law. You have to know how to get out of it" (in *Le journal du cinema* C+ May 1998 <http: //www.francois-ozon.com/ozon.int.sitcom.htm>). This sentiment resonates with Frederick Engels who traced the etymology of the word "family" to its roots in slavery: The "essential features [of the patriarchal family] are the incorporation of unfree persons and paternal power.... *Famulus* means

domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man" (in *The Origin of the Family, Property and the State*, trans. Alec West (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 121).

28. This scene can be compared to one in the Rat Man case (cited above), where the Rat Man recounts a fantasy in which it is not a rat but Freud devouring his own mother's genitals (p. 282).
29. See <http: //www.geocities.com/Hollywood>.
30. Interview with Isabelle Giordano (cited above).
31. Interview in *Kinorama* May 1998 <http: //www.francois-ozon.com>.
32. See <http: //www.geocities.com/Hollywood>.
33. In Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, pp. 131–145, trans. Stephen Pluhácek (Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 137.

2

Representing Gay Male Domesticity in French Film of the Late 1990s

Todd W. Reeser

In his study of same-sex marriage, Eric Fassin points out a shift that took place in French public debates around same-sex partnerships and their legality in the wake of the AIDS crisis. Because the epidemic had made discrimination against gay couples painfully clear, the gay individual was no longer the only issue in political dialogue, but "the shift was from individuals to couples" (Fassin 225; see also Martel 335–40). In addition, "the issue was not merely 'toleration' any longer; it now became 'recognition'" (Fassin 225). One of the lessons of AIDS in France had been that the lack of legal recognition of same-sex couples made dealing with the disease more difficult than it already was, and as a result gay activist groups made their dissatisfaction known (see Borrillo and Lascoumes, chapter 1). In addition, the European Parliament issued the Roth Report in 1994, which recommended that equality between homo- and heterosexual couples be considered by members of the EU (Fassin 225).[1] Integral to this French and European context in which gay couples were at the centre of cultural debates was the legalization of same-sex partnerships. Although what eventually became known as the PACS (*Pacte civil de solidarité*) was not actually adopted until late 1999, the debate around the legalization of same-sex partnerships had begun in the 1980s (Martel 337) and was very much taking place in the mid-90s, especially after 1997 (Mécary and Leroy-Forgeot 46–55).[2]

The issue of equality focused not simply on the rights of gay couples, but also on the legalization of their "stability." The text of the PACS itself is addressed in the second-person plural to couples defined largely by a vague notion of domestic stability:

> Vous vivez avec une autre personne et vous ne souhaitez pas ou vous ne pouvez pas vous marier. Vous souhaitez organiser les modalités de votre vie commune dans un cadre juridique stable. (*Ministère de la justice*)

> You live with another person, and you do not wish to marry or you are unable to do so. You wish to organize the civil aspects of your life together within a stable, legal framework.

These "modalités" are largely financial, but also include certain rights related to visas, health care, government jobs, and paid vacation (see, for example, Mécary and Leroy-Forgeot 62–74). With the word "stable" at the centre of the definition of the PACS, then, French law legalized literal and symbolic stability for gay couples as well as for heterosexual couples not wanting to marry. The creation of these previously unrecognized categories was also considered by some as an attempt to stabilize relationships that had been legally precarious and by extension, to stabilize the Republic (McCaffrey 28, 30).[3]

As part of an increasing cultural recognition of same-sex couples, a number of French films from the 1990s render homosexuality more visible on the screen in various ways. Sherzer points out that certain directors of the "New New Wave" in the 90s "capture the evolution of mentalities in France, where sociologists have registered an increased visibility and normalization of homosexuality and a concomitant tolerance of it" (237). Such films treating gay male issues often focus on aspects of the gay self or French configurations of "coming out," a process often described in French using the verb "assumer" (to accept, to come to terms with).[4] Cyril Collard's well-known film *Les Nuits fauves/Savage Nights* [1992] treats AIDS and its effects more than homosexuality *per se*, such that the stability of gay male coupledom is far from the central issue for the bisexual main character.[5] In André Téchiné's *Les Roseaux sauvages/Wild Reeds* [1994], the central aspects of François' character development are his coming out and his role in his peer group as a developing gay adolescent, not his relationship with other gay adolescents.[6]

More specifically, a crop of films from the late 90s mirror as well as interrogate the cultural shift of focus from the gay male individual to the couple. Jean-Jacques Zilbermann's *L'Homme est une femme comme les autres/Man is a Woman* [1998], for instance, could be considered as a film that questions why it is not possible for gay male characters to marry other men. In Zilbermann's film, an out Jewish man named Simon feels obliged to marry a woman in order to inherit his uncle's estate, and in this cultural context implicitly questions the reason why a gay man has to marry a woman instead of a man. In Ilan Cohen's *La Confusion des genres/The Confusion of Genders* [2000], the bisexual main character, Alain, considers various possibilities for partners, but marrying his younger male lover never seems to be an option in his mind, despite the fact that the lover announces that he wants to marry. In their cultural context, films such as these implicitly allude to the possibility of legal and stable unions even as (or because) they depict their absence or impossibility.

Interrogating why male couples cannot marry also takes place through child, adolescent, or young adult characters. In Alain Berliner's *Ma Vie en rose / My Life in Pink* [1997], the seven-year-old main character, Ludovic, a boy who wants to be a girl, stages a mock marriage with the boy next door (Jérôme), complete with stuffed animals as witnesses and teddy bear as vicar. After he is punished for dressing as a girl and orchestrating the symbolic marriage, his angry mother tells him that two men do not marry, but she then hesitates and adds "enfin, parfois"

["well, occasionally (they do)"]. The mother's negative reaction to her son's marriage punishes him for breaking gender norms and for appearing as a gay child in the neighbourhood, but with her "enfin, parfois," she deconstructs the heteronormativity she embodies when she evokes a cultural context in which legal gay union is in the process of becoming possible. In another scene, Ludovic imagines about a festive marriage ceremony with Jérôme, a wish-fulfillment fantasy terminated by the heteronormative community in which he lives.[7] Ludovic, then, is indicative of a cinematic phenomenon in which a cultural revisioning of homosexuality as "stable" necessitates the inclusion of gay youth and the invisible gay child in a new symbolic order.[8] The assumed naturalness of a seven-year-old boy in the representation of a gay union codes such unions as not unnatural and depicts homophobic reactions as unnatural attempts to create artificial sexual norms. In this sense, Ludovic is a representational tool, a technique to revision adult gay unions, even as he also symbolizes children that do not correspond to gender and/or sexual norms.

In the same way that Ludovic helps reconfigure adult homosexuality, a number of gay adolescents in French film of the late 90s begin to both question and naturalize configurations of stability for adult homosexual masculinity. These films sometimes take some form of domesticity so seriously that it appears closely entwined with what could be called the coming-out process. In my view, these works are grappling with the new symbolic order in various ways, employing gay or queer adolescents as projections of gay adulthood back onto a younger generation and forward onto an imagined world in which coupledom will be of prime importance as much culturally as legally. As much representations of adolescence as of adults, these cinematic adolescents also suggest the potential for adult domesticity in the minds of gay young people. Indeed, various manifestations of domesticity are increasingly presented to adolescents in French culture so that when they grow older, they might seem natural. In *L'Homosexualité à l'adolescence* [*Homosexuality and Adolescence*] [2002], a guide and self-help book for male and female gay youth, the final chapter is entitled "Devenir adulte et homo" ["Becoming a Gay Adult"], and explains various possibilities of gay domesticity: cohabitation, fidelity, relations with family, adoption, procreation, and especially the PACS (Vaisman 100–7). As the focus of the final chapter in this handbook, domesticity is presented as the culmination of the gay maturation process discussed in the earlier portions of the book. But if adolescents in film simultaneously represent gay adults and youth, it is in part because gay male adolescence is often linked with adult gay male culture. Because some strains of gay male culture are represented as (or represent themselves as) adolescent (non-committal, sexualized, sexually desiring adolescents), the adolescent easily comes to symbolize male homosexuality as a whole.[9] To transform an image of gay culture often linked with the non-committal aspects of sexuality is thus to strike at the heart of the non-domestic aspects of gay representation.

Films and shorts from this period in which youth engage with the issue of gay domesticity in some way include: Gaël Morel's *A Toute Vitesse/Full Speed* [1996]; Patrice Chéreau's *Ceux qui m'aiment prendront le train/Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* [1998]; Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau's *Drôle de Félix/The Adventures of Felix* [2000]; Ilan Cohen's *La Confusion des genres/Confusion of Genders* [2000]; Sébastien Lifshitz's short *Les Corps ouverts/Open Bodies* [1998] and his film *Presque Rien/Come Undone* [2000]. A portion of the oeuvre of

Figure 2. Ozon's deviant fairy tale *Les Amants criminels/Criminal Lovers* (1999). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

François Ozon also falls in this category: his short *Une Robe d'été/Summer Dress* [1996], *Sitcom/Sitcom* [1998], *Les Amants criminels/Criminal Lovers* [1999], and *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes/Drops of Water on Burning Rocks* [2000]. Though I could examine almost any of these works in this context, I will focus the following discussion on two very different films in which a domestic element is central to the representation of homosexuality: Ozon's *Les Amants criminels/Criminal Lovers* and Lifshitz's *Presque rien/Come Undone*. In Ozon's film, a kind of fantasmatic domesticity puts the coming-out process in motion, appearing inseparable from it, whereas in Lifshitz's film, the absence of a certain kind of domesticity propels the main character forward as he comes out and moves toward adulthood. These two films thus represent two approaches to the cinematic representation of domesticity, the first based on its presence and the second on its absence.

The fairy-tale atmosphere of *Les Amants criminels* creates a transitional space in which a new type of imagined homosexuality emerges within the domestic context of a cottage in the woods. The film as a whole could be read as a coming out for the seventeen-year-old Luc. Though he spends much of the film with his girlfriend, Alice, it is clear from the opening scene that his erotic attraction for her is very minimal. The opening scene, a mock erotic fantasy in which Alice has blindfolded her boyfriend, leaves him sexually cold and flaccid, and establishes her as the dominant member of the couple. The viewer learns that Luc has never had sex with Alice, and that he has never orgasmed. Luc's blindfolding is also a metaphor for his hidden erotic desire in a larger sense: unable to "see" gay desire or male sexual objects, he cannot feel sexual

pleasure. Instead, the erotic gaze is possessed by Alice, who watches Luc and at one point pulls down his pants and pretends to photograph his flaccid penis.

Mocking the Bonnie and Clyde myth, the film traces the results of a criminal act orchestrated largely by Alice as the two adolescents kill Saïd, a fellow student and handsome object of erotic attraction for both members of the couple. The murder itself is partially an attempt by Alice to remove an object of homoerotic attraction from their relationship and to stabilize her boyfriend's heterosexuality (and masculinity) in the face of its obvious instability. A second source of homoeroticism takes the place of Saïd as Luc and Alice are attempting to hide in the woods after burying the dead body. They are captured by an unnamed man who takes them back to his isolated cottage, and through their homoerotic and homosexual interactions, the man eventually succeeds in destroying Luc's sexual inhibitions first by bringing him to orgasm and later by having sex with him. By the end of the film, Luc's sexuality is transformed from what it had been in the opening scene. Alice has been shot by the police who are chasing the two of them for their crime, and Luc has been caught in a rabbit trap (rabbits being recurring symbols of sexuality) as his own newly discovered sexuality has now ensnared him. Alice's death parallels the near end of Luc's heterosexuality, for as he is taken off to justice, he has forgotten her as he sees the man in the woods who is also being taken off by the police. Luc begins to scream that the man has not done anything and should be released, i.e. that he is not a "criminal lover" like himself and Alice. In so doing, Luc affirms the "criminality" of his relationship with Alice and, thus, of faked heterosexuality and of unexpressed homosexuality. The last shot of the film leaves Luc staring at the camera in angry defiance, a shot in direct juxtaposition with the blindfolding of the opening scene. No longer blinded by sexual constraints, Luc is physically and metaphorically able to "see" his homosexual desire and feelings for what they are.

The earnestness of Luc's reaction to the arrest of the man in the woods stands in marked contrast to the sexual act between him and Alice that takes place just before the arrival of the police. Newly escaped from captivity, the two adolescents have sex surrounded by nature, but a deep, comic irony disrupts the happiness of such a stereotypical scene. What should be the naturalness of their sex in such a cliché scene is transformed, for example, by various unexpected animals around them, emphasizing the naturalness of their sexual act to such an extent that it becomes coded as artificial and non-natural. Though the two adolescents have escaped from the cabin where they were held, Luc is still held captive by the bonds of heterosexuality and his homoerotic feelings for the man appear as the only natural feelings he has. A key moment in Luc's assumption of his sexuality, the final shots of the film also put a quick end to the ironic tone and fairy-tale ambiance of the film. The constraints of a direct and non-ironic representation of gay sentiment on film have also been temporarily lifted: as Luc's gaze meets the camera's and the film displays its status as a created work, it is the film-maker's adult gaze that also concludes the film. Luc's realization about himself is thus located somewhere between the thirty-something director and the main character or between gay adulthood and adolescence, a limbo status indicative of Luc's symbolic import for gay adulthood.

Although the only male/male relationship in the film seems to be one of master and slave as the man keeps Luc on a leash in the cabin, the physical bondage also allegorizes a kind of forced apprenticeship of gay domesticity and a concomitant release from the bondage of feigned heterosexuality. Upon the man's insistence, he and Luc carry out various domestic tasks together (hunting for food, eating, bathing each other) before the actual sex act takes place. Showing Luc a rabbit caught in his trap, the man asks Luc whether he likes rabbit, a question to which he responds in the negative. "Tu vas apprendre à aimer" ["You will learn to like it"], the man tells him, referring to the homosexuality he is being forced to develop. By the time the two have sex, Luc has been prepared for the act by a developed domesticity, a necessary prerequisite for his *jouissance*. The feelings Luc has developed for the man in the domestic context become especially clear right after the sexual act as Luc manages to break free from his rope and release Alice. When she attempts to kill the sleeping man with a knife, again desiring to destroy her boyfriend's object of eroticism, Luc stops her from doing so. As the two escape from the cottage, the man opens his eyes, revealing that he has let the adolescents escape because he knows that he has taught Luc what he needs to know and that the combination of domesticity and homosexuality is one that cannot and will not be forgotten. Luc has learned that discovering one's homosexuality does not have to be an isolating experience and that it can take place within the context of a couple.

This domesticated homosexuality emerges in opposition to two other types of sexuality: heterosexuality, represented by Alice, as well as pure homoerotic desire, represented by the heterosexual Saïd, both of whom are literally kept in the basement of the cottage during Luc's sexual apprenticeship. Though Luc's desire for Saïd is obvious, the Beur adolescent represents an exoticized homoeroticism defined solely by desire that cannot be fulfilled. When asked why he dug up Saïd's body and brought it to the cottage after they had buried it, the man responds that he wanted to "help" Luc. By placing the body in the basement, he forces Luc to confront his desire and thus move beyond a sexuality predicated on simple homoeroticism. In addition, the man feeds him a stew assumed to be rabbit, which Luc later learns is made out of Saïd's leg. When he discovers he has eaten part of the object of his desire, Luc literally throws up this human stew in the cellar, for he cannot be "nourished" by this type of desire that is not sufficient for his happiness. The man watches his reaction with contentment, knowing that repulsion to this type of sexuality is necessary for Luc's sexual progress.

Although Luc's coming out is moved forward by domesticity, the deep irony of *Les Amants criminels* only suggests a move in a certain direction and in the end does not propose an explicit model for gay male relationships. Although the man in the woods liberates Luc, the relationship between the two nonetheless has pederastic and fantastic undertones. Like Ozon's slightly later *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes*, at the end of which the young Franz commits suicide to escape from the impossibility of gay domesticity, Luc cannot yet achieve this domesticity within the rubric of the film, and at the conclusion is being taken off for the murder he helped to commit and for the trouble his desire for heterosexuality lured him into. But Luc's angry gaze in the final scene also suggests that because the impossibility of domesticity is realized by the film, understanding its absence is a significant and necessary element in the personal and cultural move toward its possibility.

Whereas in Ozon's film domesticity fosters the coming-out process, Lifshitz's *Presque rien* focuses on how with the absence of stable domesticity the gay maturation process cannot be complete. While on summer vacation with his family at their beach home, Mathieu becomes involved with Cédric in an adolescent relationship based largely on sexuality, with a notable absence of domesticity. From the beginning, the two boys' families are considered as separate from their relationship. A home/beach distinction functions as an exclusive binary opposition, as a number of scenes in the film alternate between the beach as the locus of (homo)sexuality and the vacation home of Mathieu's family as the space of domestic problems. In one scene, Mathieu complains about his family – especially his sister with whom he does not get along and his mother who has recently lost a baby and suffers from severe depression – a scene immediately juxtaposed with a Hollywoodesque sex scene on the beach. Cédric, too, has harsh words for his absent mother and keeps Mathieu separate from his father, whose nearby home is never seen.

As the film focuses on the boys' separation of familial domesticity and their developing relationship, it makes being seen as a couple a central issue in the first part of what could be considered Mathieu's coming-out process.[10] It is Cédric that watches and seduces Mathieu, whose anxiety of being seen as gay provokes a refusal to be in public with Cédric, particularly near his family. Mathieu later apologizes for his homophobic behaviour, and the two again have sex on the beach, after which they spend much time in public as a couple. One of the final steps in the process of becoming a visible couple takes place when Mathieu tells his mother that he loves Cédric and that he plans to move with him to Nantes where he will begin university instead of to Paris as planned. Significantly, Mathieu frames the issue with his mother as one of "loving" Cédric, not of telling her that he "is gay." This conversation is indicative of the fact that the process he is going through is not so much about definition or essence (with visibility as one of its defining aspects), but is transforming into the issue of his relationship to relationships.

As a result of this psychological shift, Mathieu begins to focus on his amorous relationship and, more specifically, on an absence within it that he cannot yet define. After Cédric has an accident and ends up in the hospital, Mathieu accidentally meets his father, who very congenially expresses a sincere interest in getting to know him as his son's boyfriend. When Mathieu recounts this familial encounter over dinner, Cédric raises his glass in jest and toasts "A notre mariage alors" ["Well, then, to our marriage"]. Similar to Ludovic's fantasy marriages in *Ma Vie en rose*, the ironic nature of the comment suggests the possibility of union in a context in which it is becoming legal at the same time as it emphasizes the impossibility that Cédric the individual have an interest in a stable partnership.[11] Not understanding the force of the irony nor the lack of commitment it could imply, Mathieu experiences first-hand the type of domestic arrangement he cannot accept and begins to understand that the processes of coming out and coming of age he is going through are not yet complete. His suicide attempt, which is never shown, provokes an intense depression, but it also effects a rupture with his boyhood. Various parallels are thus established between his mother who is depressed because she lost a child to cancer and Mathieu who has given birth to a metaphorical sick child, his relationship with Cédric. His depression is indicative of a mourning process in which the lost object is not his heterosexuality, as is often the case in coming out, but rather the impossibility of being with

Figure. 3. Mathieu (Jérémie Elkaïme) and Cédric (Stéphane Rideau) in *Presque rien/Come Undone* (2000).

the kind of insufficiently stable lifestyle that Cédric represents. Mathieu's attempt at suicide thus allegorizes a larger cultural breakaway from a less stable, perhaps non-monogamous, partnership toward one of more solidity, even as the loss of the former relationship mode is mourned.

The psychological absence Mathieu feels is mirrored in the narrative technique of the film in which key elements of the time in Nantes are literally missing. Although the periods before and after their cohabitation are recounted in detail, the entire period of time Mathieu lived with Cédric (presumably a year and a half) remains outside the telling of the story, and the actual reasons for the rupture are only vaguely alluded to. Instead, most of the film is structured around a recurring alternation between the summer the two boys met and Mathieu's release from the hospital in the winter. When the film opens with his transition out of the hospital and the trip to his family's beach house, it is unclear what has happened, and only gradually do the long flashbacks to the summer he met Cédric come together with the winter narrative in present time. The absence of the domestic relationship as temporal centre of the chronology disappears only when Mathieu decides to move away from his psychological emptiness toward the idea of the type of relationship he needs.

Mathieu's transition to a new physical and psychological space, represented by the beach in winter, is one where he can begin to locate stable domesticity. As he begins to understand the failure of his relationship with Cédric, Mathieu moves by himself into the family's vacation home, representative of a domestic space in transition. Not having the keys to the house, he

must break in and in effect create a new space for himself, without familial or societal "keys" as models in how to do so. Without stable, happy couples around him, he lacks models of domesticity in his life, be they heterosexual or homosexual. At the same time as he begins to reconstruct an identity for himself related to coupledom, he bars Cédric from entering the new space. Though his former partner follows him to the house and demands to be let in, Mathieu will literally not let him enter as he attempts to build a psychological sphere based on a more firm domestic element that cannot include what Cédric has come to represent.

In the final sequence of the film, Mathieu locates the home of Cédric's former lover Pierre, whom he has already met. First watching him and his mother through their dining room window as they clean up after dinner, Mathieu is led by this scene to return the next afternoon to visit Pierre. His mother answers the door, explaining that her son is at work but that he is welcome to wait for him in the house. Mathieu accepts and sits at the dining room table with the coffee that Pierre's mother offers him as she continues her ironing. This invitation into the domestic space, first represented by the warm interaction with the mother in opposition to the cold outside, is followed by Pierre's return home and his invitation to go for a walk on the beach.

This preliminary integration of homosexuality and familial life transitions into the boys' walk on the beach, the final scene of the film, which encapsulates the possibility of a gay male identity based on solidity. Pierre's name ("rock" in French) is particularly appropriate in this context, suggesting the distinct possibility of stability. Mathieu tells Pierre's mother that he is studying architecture in university, and the viewer also learns that Pierre is a mason. Mathieu incarnates a theoretical domestic "architecture" seeking its missing practical half while Pierre embodies the reality of the construction of a domesticity symbolized by building. These "hard" references also refer back to an earlier scene in which Mathieu and Cédric break into a ruined château. As Mathieu reads from a guidebook, Cédric shows no interest in the architecture, preferring to have sex in the isolated locale, but when Mathieu refuses and tells him to take an interest in the architecture, he responds that they are nothing but "a bunch of rocks," setting up a marked contrast between his ex-boyfriend, Pierre, and himself as symbol of a relationship based on affection and eroticism. The contrast also suggests a difference in the role of symbolism as part of a relationship: whereas Cédric does not serve as symbol in the film, Pierre's potential as partner is suggested by his very ability to symbolize beyond the actual relationship, to function both as himself and as metaphor. The incorporation of a semiotic "outside" into the relationship helps inscribe it as something beyond homosexuality *per se*, thus as more able to operate within the larger symbolic order in which homosexual relationships require symbolic capital in order to function in any stable way.

Playing a role similar to the space of the cottage in *Les Amants criminels*, the beach in winter incarnates a hybrid space where Mathieu's homosexuality can be simultaneously visible and invisible.[12] The beach had already come to symbolize the public forum for exploration of Mathieu's visible sexuality, in opposition to the domestic sphere. This public/private opposition is destabilized here, however, as the winter walk on the beach is not sexual, but discursive in nature as the two boys explore each other's lives interactively and hint at the potential for an intimate and reciprocal relationship. While walking along, they notice a young boy with a

dog, and Pierre wonders where the boy's father is. Although they think they locate the father in the distance, the child's father is never seen on screen; instead, Pierre takes on the symbolic role of the father, playing soccer with the boy. While possibilities of domesticity for the two characters and, by extension, for gay couples are central at the end of the film, this final scene also gestures to contemporaneous debates relating to gay parenting ("homoparentalité") that took place around the PACS, which stopped short of providing adoption and medically assisted procreation for gay couples.[13] As the temporal scrambling no longer operates as an organizational framework in this final section of the film, the temporal focus shifts from the relation between past and present to the simple future, that of the two adolescents as well as of gay couples and families.[14]

On one level, Mathieu's transition in the film from gay individual to a possible member of a certain kind of couple is a projection of the adult film-maker and of adult gay culture onto the idealized adolescent, a transfer that is itself represented in the film. Under the advice of his therapist, Mathieu tape-records his feelings and actions as he returns to the beach. His therapist first asks him to keep a journal, but he responds that he does not like to write, insisting on the recording of a vision of homosexuality beyond its written inscription. This recording of a gay self attempting to understand itself, what it wants and where it is moving, is also the self mourning for something that it has lost. Like Luc's angry gaze that meets the camera in *Les Amants criminels*, Mathieu's oral record is a metaphor for the late 90s film-maker, attempting to record and thereby (re)construct one model of a developing gay male self in the context of gay stability.[15]

It is, thus, a question of a kind of "coming of age" for both Mathieu and gay male culture. As Cédric is attempting to seduce Mathieu at the beginning of the film, he remarks that Mathieu looks more grown up than he had the summer before. The ensuing scenes reveal that this physical "coming of age" turns out to be in conjunction with his sexual "coming out." But during the final scene of the film, Pierre also remarks that Mathieu has changed since he last saw him, that he is less boyish ["moins gamin"] than before. In his realization about himself, Mathieu has "come of age" a second time, but this second step in his double initiatory rite requires the gay adolescent to "come out" and then to "come in." The final scenes suggest that in a new French cultural context, sexuality no longer has to be the central element of the coming-out process: rather, an assumption of domesticity can be its culminating point.

Notes

I would like to thank Thomas McWhorter for his invaluable help on this essay.

1. See Mécary and Leroy-Forgeot, chapter I ("Le PACS dans la dynamique européenne et internationale"). The International Lesbian and Gay Association writes: "The most significant events of 1994 were a report prepared for the European Parliament by German MEP Claudia Roth, together with the debate on the report. The latter culminated in a Resolution of the Parliament which called on the European Commission to bring forward proposals to require member states to end all forms of legal discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, including the barring of lesbians and gay male couples from marriage or from an equivalent legal framework, and any restriction on

adoption or fostering rights. Although a Resolution of the European Parliament such as this amounts to no more than a recommendation, it sends a clear message to national governments and to the European Commission that discrimination is not acceptable." See: http: //www.ilga.org/About%20ILGA/A_Past%20projects.htm#The%20European%20Union.

2. In 1996, for instance, the gay theorist Didier Eribon published a "Manifeste pour la reconnaissance du couple homosexuel" ["Manifesto for the Recognition of Homosexual Couples"] in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, in which he argued that the French government should "respecter la recommendation votée par le Parlement européen exhortant les États membres à accorder aux couples homosexuels les mêmes droits qu'aux couples hétérosexuels" ["follow the recommendation voted on by the European Parliament urging its Member States to accord homosexual couples the same rights as heterosexual couples"] (*Papiers* 23). All English translations in this paper are mine, with the exception of US titles of films.
3. This construction of homosexuality stands in marked contrast to a sexual tradition in French culture, in which male homosexuality subverts the dominant heterosexual order, a phenomenon often linked with Jean Genet. See, for example, Provencher, "The Next Gene(t)ration"; chapter four in Bersani. Unlike my approach here, Provencher views "'subversive' homosexual citizenship" as "part of the range of acceptable French models as seen in *union libres* [sic] or in the PACS" (344).
4. Cross-cultural differences in the coming-out process are beyond the scope of this study, but Eribon's remarks on "le coming out," rooted in a Sartrian existentialism, are interesting in this light. See chapters XIV-XVII in Eribon, *Réflexions*. On the issue of gay identity in France, see Provencher "Vague English Creole."
5. On gender and sexuality in Collard's film, see Tarr, who discusses the ambiguity of sexual categories in the film.
6. On this film as a "crossroads" film of the late twentieth century, see Everett. On François' homosexuality, see especially 54–5.
7. On this film as being about heteronormativity, see Cairns.
8. On the issue of gay children, see Sedgwick's well-known essay. On "the gay child's strange retroactive existence," see Stockton (discussing Sedgwick), who writes "[l]inguistic markers for [the gay child's] queerness arrive only later in life as a recognition of a road not taken" (185). *Ma Vie en rose* attempts to represent the gay child, but it too is a kind of "retroactive existence" as the adult film-maker inscribes the possibility of gay childhood for adults onto the screen.
9. One example would be the image of homosexual sex as childlike. For sex as "an extension of infantile and adolescent sexuality" in the sexologist Gérard Zwang, see Nye 92. See also Segwick; Stockton.
10. It is difficult to see the film as a simple coming-out narrative since it positions itself as beyond homosexuality *per se*. Lifshitz, himself, states that he did not approach the film as a gay film. See his interview with Vassé.
11. In Lifshitz's short "Les Corps ouverts," the main character Rémi makes a similar comment about marriage at breakfast after he has spent the night with his lover ("On n'est pas mariés" ["We're not married"], he states.).
12. The cultural issue around domesticity and legal rights could also be framed as one of incorporating both visibility and invisibility into a gay framework. See Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of gay culture's need for "le droit à la visibilité invisible" ["the right to invisible visibility"] in his appendix to *La*

Domination masculine (132). The work has been translated under the title *Masculine Domination* (see pp. 121–2). See also Bourdieu's essay "Quelques questions sur la question gay et lesbienne."

13. Because of its noted absence in the PACS, "homoparentalité" is considered by many the next major gay political issue and the major remaining issue. The cover story of *L'Evevement du jeudi* in June 1998, for instance, is entitled "Familles Homo: le dernier tabou" ["Gay Families: The Final Taboo"]. On the PACS and its (non-)relation to parenting, see Nye.
14. In the same way that the film ends with a gesture toward the future of gay families, the final pages of *L'Homosexualité à l'adolescence* are devoted to the future of gay parenting: "On peut imaginer que, dans les années à venir, quand vous serez adulte, la France assouplira sa position et accordera aux homos le droit d'adopter des enfants...L'avenir tranchera..." (106–7). ["Perhaps in the years to come, when you are an adult, France will adopt a more accommodating position and homosexuals will be accorded the right to adopt children...The future will decide..."]. The implication of the book is that gay adolescents will become the gay parents of tomorrow.
15. Lifshitz, himself, discusses the film as the inscription of the director's self, which he considers a first step in order to move on to depicting something beyond the filming self. See Claire Vassé's interview with Lifshitz at http: //www.chez.com/filmolifshitz/99PresqueClaire.htm.

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3

The Films of Ducastel and Martineau: Gay Identity, the Family, and the Autobiographical Self

Christopher Pullen

Introduction

Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau are groundbreaking directors involved in film-making together. They contribute to discourses surrounding AIDS, homosexuality, race, youth identity, the fabric of contemporary family and politics in society. At the same time they present themselves as agents of gay social identity. They tell us:

> The more we do gay movies, the more people get used to our way of life. This is also a political matter and a political attitude. But, we think the best we did for the moment is that we are an openly gay couple, working together; and people seem to accept that (Halden 2004)

Ducastel and Martineau reveal a relationship between themselves and their texts which may be considered as reflexive: they produce work which reflects their way of life, their personal politics and their identity ideals. This is both autobiographical and socially progressive: whilst possessing agency (as film-makers), they stimulate and reflect their own identity ideals in the service of producing change.

Consequently, this essay examines the work of Ducastel and Martineau not only in the context of French 'queer cinema' (and histories which may inform this), but also in connection with the social potential of gay identity. This reveals the connection not only between Ducastel and Martineau as directors, and the evident representations in their texts (which may be considered

autobiographical), but at the same time it also examines their potential in experimenting with identity forms. Evidence of this may be seen in their examination of the wider personal repercussions of AIDS in the musical *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable* (1997); in questioning and reconstructing ideas of family in *Drôle de Felix* (1999); and the recorded personal experience of the male homosexual youth in *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* (2001).[1] These textual representations focus on the ability to contextualize identity forms from both a homosexual and an 'AIDS aware' perspective: issues which are close to the directors from their standing as gay men and AIDS activists.[2]

The work of Ducastel and Martineau focuses on their close relationship as gay partners, directors, and political agents. This represents a progression in the development of what Owen Heathcote et al. (1998) describe as the 'gay signature' in literature and cinema, which had mostly been associated with 'the individual, albeit in complex and challenging ways' (p. 12) (such as the work of Cyril Collard *in Les Nuits Fauves* – discussed below). The work of Ducastel and Martineau represents a move away from the perception of the gay male as isolated and operating as an individual agent, and a progression towards collaboration/unity. Their work also contextualizes the collective and familial aspirations of an emerging gay community within cinema.

Figure 4. Olivier Ducastel (left) and Jacques Martineau (right) on the set of their new film *Crustacés et coquillages* (2005). Photograph by Ève Petermann (supplied with the kind permission of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau).

Consequently, this essay employs a sociological approach, examining the theories of Anthony Giddens (1992, 1995), Michel Foucault (1998), Jeffrey Weeks et al. (2001) and others, rather than a traditional film or drama studies approach. Similarly, whilst it discusses gay identity it does so with relation to 'identity potential' that might be considered 'assimilist' with regard to the relationship between gay people and the heterosexual majority, and does not focus on 'queer theory' (Seidman 1996; Warner 1993; Doty 1993) which might adopt an 'identity deconstruction' approach. In this way I argue that the work of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau is not only autobiographical and personally reflexive, but also at the same time it is progressive in terms of reflecting the potential of homosexual social identity.[3] In order to discuss this further it is important to initially examine the idea of the 'autobiographical self', its connection to capillary, or 'modern', power, and the significance of French queer cinema within this.[4]

The Autobiographical Self, Modern Power and French Queer Cinema

Anthony Giddens (1995) describes 'autobiographical thinking' as a central element of self-therapy, and a possible action which may engender change:

> For developing a coherent sense of one's life history is a prime means of escaping the thrall of the past and opening oneself out to the future. The author of the autobiography is enjoined to go back as far as possible into early childhood and set up lines of potential development to encompass the future. (p. 72)

This is evident in the work of homosexuals who present themselves as openly gay within the media (see Pullen 2004, 2005). Here it may be felt that there is a personal need to discuss their lives and their histories (in the way that coming out might not only be useful in terms of educating your peers, but also it may be personally rewarding in connecting to, and expressing, your gay identity). This may be both autobiographical and self-therapeutic (Pullen 2005): the personal narrative is foregrounded, and identity is strengthened.

The work of Ducastel and Martineau particularly addresses this idea, and is most evident in *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen*, where we are presented with a young male homosexual coming to terms with his sexual feelings (possibly reflecting the adolescent experiences of the authors). Consequently, their work may connect to Anthony Giddens' (1995) concept of the autobiographical and self-therapy in attempting to re-inscribe and re-convey fragments of their personal lives which might stimulate the acceptance of homosexuals. Through this discursive power, their work may engender change within society.

Such actions may be possible in contextualizing the potential of capillary or modern power. Michel Foucault (1998) has suggested that '[capillary] power is everywhere' (p. 93), and that we all have access to this to some degree. Similarly, Nancy Fraser (1989), in interpreting Foucault's hypothesis, suggests that modern power is 'productive rather than prohibitive' (p. 18). This may be particularly relevant to the power of discourse produced by individuals within the film industry. Whilst the subjective positioning of homosexuals within society suggests that Marxist models of power are more relevant (where heterosexual males hold the predominant

power), modern power contextualizes the possibility for disparate individuals to engage with complex matrices of power connections (possibly available within contemporary media). This potential might facilitate the broadcast of homosexual discourses which could engender change. Anthony Giddens (1995) is helpful in contextualizing this idea, by suggesting that modern power might connect to the idea of 'institutional reflexivity' (p. 28). Here discourses produced by 'outsider' individuals like Ducastel and Martineau might influence institutional ideas such as the positioning of homosexuals within society: the institution of the film industry speaks not only to the public and to other media, but also to the institutions of law, education, and religion (which may be influenced). A particular avenue of discursive power is not only the context of the film industry itself, but also the personal stories of producers and directors which may be autobiographical.

Ducastel and Martineau connect to the idea of modern power, reflecting aspects of their own personal lives, aiming to display social changes in gay identity. This may be seen in *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable* where a central character of (an AIDS activist) may be a reflection of Jacques Martineau's personal life in this role (Grandena 2005). In *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* this conveys personal feelings of coming to terms with one's homosexuality as a youth (briefly discussed above) are explored, and in *Drôle de Félix* we are presented with an examination of the romance between a devoted male homosexual couple and the idea of connecting this to the notion of family. Consequently, whilst their work does not attempt to record true events from their lives (in terms of actuality), within their films we are presented with fragments of their own personal stories and experiences.[5]

This impetus towards the 'autobiographical' may be seen in earlier works of contemporary French 'queer cinema'. Cyril Collard's *Les Nuits Fauves* (1992) (based on his book published in 1989) became a controversial autobiographical text in its representation of a bisexual HIV positive man and his reckless attitude to sex (Rollet and Williams, 1998; Tarr, 1999). Later, André Téchiné's *Les Roseaux Sauvages* (1994) became a highly iconic autobiographical 'heritage' text connecting to Téchiné's experiences in 1962 as a young teenager hoping to find love.[6] Although the texts are disparate (*Les Nuits Fauves* was contemporary, controversial and deconstructed the idea of romantic love, and *Les Roseaux Sauvages* was nostalgic, endearing and attempted to construct a prototype for male homosexual romantic love), both may be connected to the work of Ducastel and Martineau as antecedent discursive texts. This may be seen not only from an autobiographical perspective, but also in the attempts of these texts to discuss AIDS, and homosexuality, respectively.

However, in order to discuss the autobiographical in connection with the idea of male homosexuality, and particularly the potential of the gay couple, I would like to further contextualize Téchiné's film.

Les Roseaux Sauvages may be considered as connected to the work of Ducastel and Martineau, in presenting the possible acceptance (by society) of devoted male homosexual partners. Wendy Everett (1999) describes *Les Roseaux Sauvages* as a 'subjective exploration of the nature of memory and personal identity, articulated through its reconstruction or visualisation

of the director's own past' (p. 47). In the early 1990s Andre Téchiné had been commissioned to produce 'a personal statement located in a personal history' (Powrie 1999: 9), contributing to a series of nine films (for IMA Productions and the television station La Sept) entitled *Tous les Garçons et les Filles de Leur Âge* (Austin 1996: 171). It is significant that this work not only reflects a rekindling of the concept of the 'auteur' (Powrie 1999: 8) and foregrounds the potential of the homosexual as a valued autobiographer, but, also, it reveals a new intimacy hitherto unseen in the representation of gay men.

In *Les Roseaux Sauvages* the character of François (the young Téchiné, as a homosexual teenager) speaks to the audience as if enquiring why the 'meaningful' representation of homosexuals had not been present before in French cinema. François asks advice of an elder homosexual man (the shoe seller):

> I am a homosexual like you, but I haven't found my soul mate yet. ... I met somebody who doesn't want me. I should give up. ... We made love just once. ... Since then I am like a thief. I steal brief moments. ... Once I held him tight on my bike, another time I slept close to him. You have experience, only you can help me. At my age did this happen to you?[7]

François' request for information not only represents Téchiné's autobiographical self (as a homosexual teenager in 1962), it reconstructs the isolation felt by young gay people unable to find suitable partners or positive role models. Significantly, it poses the idea that other representations should be available to provide positive messages for gay males attempting to find their way in the affairs of the heart. Whilst the character of François does not find his soul mate, *Les Roseaux Sauvages* may represent a turning point in French cinema, which begins to connect gay male identity with the 'possibility' of serious romance. As Anthony Giddens (1995) tells us: romantic love 'provides for a long term life trajectory, orientated to an anticipated yet malleable future; and it creates a 'shared history'' (p. 45). In this way, romance provides the context and setting for stability and continuance, and connects to the idea of the 'reproductive' family.

Consequently, Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau extend the potential of *Les Roseaux Sauvages* (and *Les Nuits Fauves*)[8] in contemporary French Cinema, by connecting gay identity not only to normality and romance, but also by locating it within the context of the family. Whilst other French 'queer film-makers' have experimented with gay male youth identity as connected to (and accepted within) the family, for example, François Ozon with *Sitcom* (1998) and Sébastien Lifshitz with *Presque Rien* (2000), this has focused more on the drama of gay identity than its everyday normality. Evidence of this may be seen in *Sitcom* where a gay youth comes out to his family in a film which may be considered as a formulaic farce, and in *Presque Rien* which, whilst it displays the sensitivity of male homosexual love, defers its ultimate satisfaction in favour of sustained melancholy. In this way, the former is connected with the stereotypes of the hyper-real and drama, and the latter may be related to Richard Dyer's (2000) discussion of the stereotype of the homosexual 'sad young man' (p. 73). Both locate the homosexual male as extraordinary, if somewhat desirable and enigmatic, yet not regular or fulfilled. In contrast

to this, Ducastel and Martineau, in *Drôle de Félix* and *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable*, locate the homosexual male as a component and an active mechanism, within the construction of a contemporary meaning of family.

AIDS, Family and Partnership in *Drôle de Félix* and *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable*

The context of family is a powerful discursive device, which presupposes heterosexual coupling as its central foundation (Pullen 2005). Through challenging its formation as a solely heterosexual arena, Ducastel and Martineau connect to Anthony Giddens' (1995) idea that homosexuals are the 'prime everyday experimenters' (p. 135) in constructing new family forms. This is evident not only in the increasing number of homosexuals not only engaging in adoption (Mallon 2004) and child surrogacy (Pullen 2005: 207), but also in the fact that, more frequently, gay people are now forming partnerships/families outside heterosexual hierarchies. Evidence of this may be seen in the work of Kath Weston (1991) and Jeffrey Weeks et al. (2001) who have noted the impetus in gay people to form, amongst themselves, family-like units and friendship networks. As Ducastel and Martineau tell us, discussing *Drôle de Félix*:

> We do think that the idea of a chosen family is a very gay experience, because a lot of gay people have trouble with their biological families and consequently have to find a new one. (Halden 2004)

Through presenting a family outside heterosexual hierarchy, they challenge the meaning of family. This is particularly evident in *Drôle de Félix* and *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable*.

Whilst *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable* does not centrally focus on a homosexual relationship (it mainly concerns the love expressed by Jeanne for a young man, Olivier, who is dying from an AIDS-related illness), it does locate a male homosexual and AIDS activist (François) as a central protagonist, who laments the loss of a partner. Here we find evidence of what Heathcote et al. (1998) discuss concerning film-makers and novelists who 'have used AIDS to demonstrate the loyalty and devotion of gay couples' (p. 15). Evidence of this is seen at a point where François breaks into song (accompanied by the music of an accordion, in the tradition of the French tragic ballad) discussing his sadness at losing his partner to AIDS. Also, later in the film, we experience the connection between couples and family, where François with his new partner attends a funeral, just as a devoted couple would naturally pay respects to a lost member of the family (it is a ceremony for the now departed Olivier). Consequently, the idea of family is foregrounded by locating the representation of the ACT UP department (AIDS responsive group) as a family-like unit. Furthermore, we are presented with the idea that the character of François is a representation (in subliminal autobiographical terms) of Jacques Martineau, working at the centre of this new family form.[9] As I argue elsewhere (Pullen 2005) responses to the catastrophe of AIDS have stimulated the formation of family-like networks, and *Jeanne et le Garcon Formidable* reveals this mobilization and coalescence.

AIDS is also a textual theme in *Drôle de Félix*. While the politics of AIDS is not discussed, the daily rigours of life with HIV are foregrounded. This is evident in the recurring representation of

Figure 5. On the set of Ducastel and Martineau's *Drôle de Félix* (1999), with Félix (right, played by Sami Bouajila) and Daniel (left, played by Pierre-Loup Rajat) in embrace at the close of the film. Photograph by Moune Jamet (supplied with the kind permission of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau).

the central character Félix taking his AIDS medication. This was a ritual deemed necessary for inclusion in the film by Ducastel and Martineau, to mediate the reality of daily living with HIV and to show how treatment has changed (Ducastel and Martineau 2001). Similarly, early in the film we are presented with a sequence where the benefits of different types of AIDS medication are discussed by Félix with minor male and female characters at a medical department. This is treated both with humour and eccentricity, where the woman casually discusses her medication as a customer might deliberate the benefits of different types of washing powder. These aspects within the film not only humanize the idea of living with AIDS (and undoubtedly were motivated by Ducastel and Martineau's interest in AIDS activism), but also they may reflect the circumstances of the film's production: permission had been withdrawn to film in the port authority of Dieppe after an official read their script.[10] Consequently, Ducastel and Martineau focus on AIDS as an everyday occurrence, at the same time contextualizing this within the idea of family.

While the idea of family in *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable* is linked to the role of those who connect to AIDS politics (the ACT UP organization), family is more centrally located around the central character, Félix (of Arabic descent), in *Drôle de Félix*. This is apparent not only in the representation of Félix and his partner, Daniel, as a contented couple with their own

household, and in the expression of their domestic routines together, it is vividly present in the film's diegetic segmentation into sequences titled 'my little brother', 'my grandmother', 'my cousin', 'my sister', and 'my father'. *Drôle de Félix* concerns a personal journey for Félix travelling from Dieppe, where he lives with Daniel, southwards across France to Marseilles to meet his father (who separated from his mother before Félix was born) for the first time. The family discursive context is initially contextualized with the death of Félix's mother (understood as a recent event occurring before we encounter Félix) and is a catalyst for his journey. Hence, the diegetic construction centres its gravity towards Félix on a journey not only to discover his father, but also to come to terms with the loss of his mother. Therefore, father and mother are central forces which stimulate Félix's motives to embark on this journey. However, it is significant that we never encounter Félix's actual mother or father or any blood relative within the text. The focus is placed on those who form his new family.

Consequently, the segmentation of the film into sequences where he encounters new family members (each sequence relates to Félix connecting with someone who has empathy and advice for him) displaces the notion of a traditional heterosexual family and constructs a 'family of choice' (Weston 1991; Weeks et al. 2001). However, it is not Félix who chooses the new family members: they choose him. This is particularly notable in his encounter with the grandmother, who wakes Félix whilst he is asleep outdoors on a bench and demands that he help her take her shopping home. It becomes evident that this is a ruse for her to bring Félix into her life. He helps her about her house doing odd jobs, she shares with him the story of how she was never in love with her recently departed husband. He stays overnight in her house, and they eat breakfast together enjoying the television soap opera 'Lap of Luxury'.[11] These events contextualize the homosexual within the heart of family, and the 'everyday', and at the same time it deconstructs the idea that families are exclusively blood related: they may be chosen. This suggests that family membership need not be exclusively tied to heterosexual procreation: it can be achieved through personal identification. Consequently, Félix becomes the centre of a new family which is socially constructed around him. This is consolidated in the final stages of the film in Marseilles where Félix abandons his search for his natural father, in a scene where he identifies with an alternative elder male as his 'surrogate' father. Similarly at this point Félix and Daniel are reunited (embarking on an impromptu holiday to Corsica). On the ferry deck, they are sensitively framed in an embrace, as often occurs in the final scene in Hollywood romantic cinema. Félix also sends postcards to the new family members he has found on his journey. This indicates the potential lasting quality of his homosexual relationship and the possible enduring connectivity of his new found family.

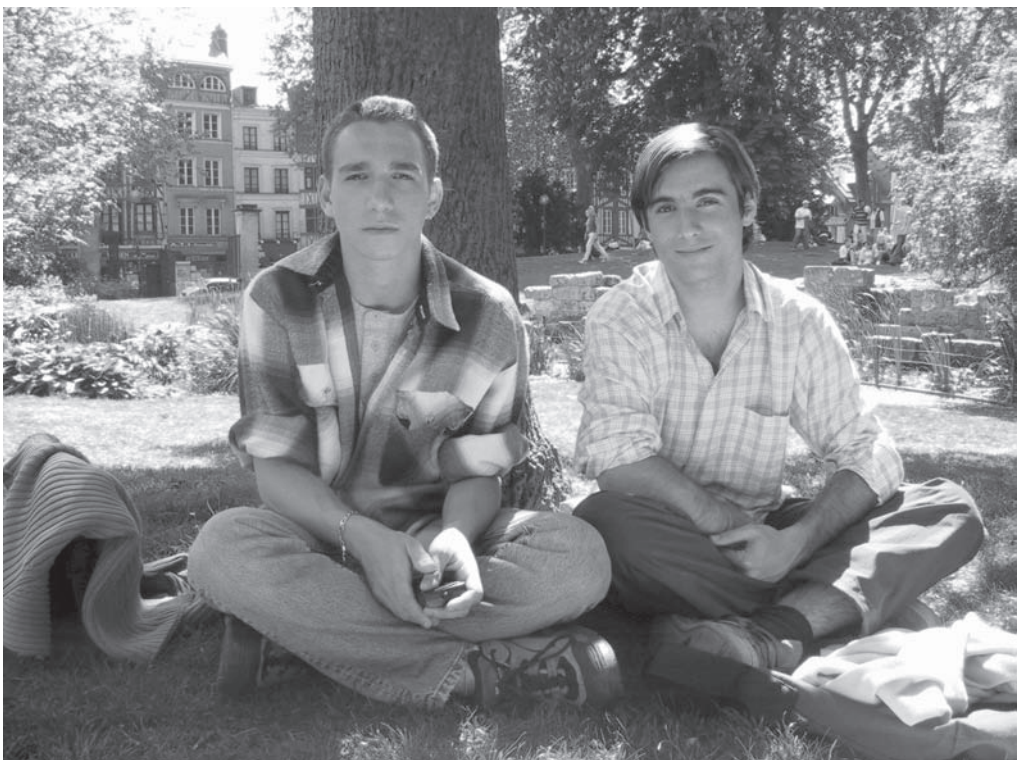
Teenage Experience, Therapy, and Camera Character in *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen*

Whilst *Drôle de Félix* and *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable* present us with representations suggesting the fulfilment of male homosexual coupling within the context of a 'chosen' family, *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* offers discursive space towards this goal within the arena of the 'blood-related' family: it explores the feelings of a young homosexual coming to terms with his sexuality, whilst living at home with his mother.

Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen is able to reveal such intimacy by providing images expressed mostly from the point of view of the central character, teenager Etienne (a semi-professional ice skater), and the construction of his persona, within the diegetic, as the film-maker. The opening sequence of the film reveals Etienne receiving a digital camera for his sixteenth birthday, and all subsequent images are presented as recorded on this camera (by Etienne or those around him).

However, the story is neither told like a journal may be constructed (with a voice-over) nor via direct-to-camera dialogue (suggesting storytelling). Rather, the character of Etienne 'uses his camera, as many of us do in our everyday lives, to preserve memories, to have fun, to experiment with, or, simply to film things' (Wellspring 2003). Therefore, we are presented not with a 'structured' visual diary authored by Etienne, but a postmodern collage of diverse images (of varying relevance, just as amateur film-makers collect images) which we must interpret to construct our own evaluation of Etienne. This type of 'required interrogation for understanding' can be related to the idea of confession and therapy.

Figure 6. On the set of Ducastel and Martineau's *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* (2001). Etienne (left, played by Jimmy Tavares) films himself (remote control in hand) with Ludo (right, played by Lucas Bonnifait) in a moment of contemplation. Photograph by Frédéric Biamonti (supplied with the kind permission of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau).



Michel Foucault (1998) suggests that a powerful binary relationship occurs between those who confess and their audience. He tells us that confession is 'a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession' (p. 61). We, as the audience, require Etienne's oral confession that he is homosexual, as this is intimated, but not stated (until the end of the film). We must make sense of his recorded images to organize them, and try to comprehend his emerging emotions. This intensifies the relationship between us: the audience (the interrogators) and Etienne (the subject of examination).

In this way our interest in Etienne's recorded life is similar to the relationship between the confessor and the therapist. As Mimi White (1992) tells us, therapy can be 'a means of generating narrative by setting in place a sequence of symbolic interpersonal exchanges' (p. 12). Consequently, the potential interpersonal exchange between the images provided by Etienne's camera and the audience may be considered as therapeutic, both for Etienne in recording the personal images, and the audience in attempting to organize his images to comprehend his life. In discursive terms this powerfully elaborates Etienne's complex feelings, by presenting fragmented visual components of his identity for us to organize and from which we can construct meaning.

This is particularly evident in sequences where Etienne films his geography teacher, Laurent. Here we are brought nearer to Etienne's inner self without diegetic orchestration. Etienne discreetly records Laurent for fleeting moments; following him unobserved in various locations, just incidentally focusing the camera on him as he comes into view whilst he is filming something else, and aiming the camera at him in the classroom from under the desk (an awkward 'low to high' angle).[12] This provides the audience with various 'snapshots' and un-staged images, which reveal a hidden inner self (Etienne's unannounced sexual feelings for his geography teacher). This intensifies the power relationship between the character of Etienne and the audience making efforts to organize his images. In discursive terms this powerfully stimulates the audience to connect to Etienne's feelings and emotions and his desire for love.

The character of the camera becomes an active agent which stimulates the interrogation of Etienne's desire: not only does the camera create a liminal frame to contextualize and vivify his desires (he can see his potential, and we can construct his likely desire), but the very presence of the camera also stimulates performance (it enables possibility for him). This is evident in the early stages of the film with best friend Ludo (to whom we imagine Etienne is attracted). He continually films Ludo, and at one point (helping him to rehearse dialogue for a play) records Ludo delivering an amorous oratory, with Etienne assisting by playing the role of the respondent female (Ducastel and Martineau 2003). Etienne uses the camera to place him in the role of the 'imagined' emotional partner to Ludo. Consequently, the camera becomes an active agent, stimulating potential.

This is also evident later in the film (in two separate scenes) where Etienne films Laurent (now his mother's boyfriend) and Ludo, while he is alone with them respectively. Here, Etienne examines Laurent as a potential sexual object (focusing on him in silence when they are alone), and in

the scene with Ludo Etienne opens up a debate about the possibility of love between boys (recording himself with Ludo in conversation). Whilst Laurent teases Etienne's sexual desire by performing in front of him (he pretends to undress while he is drunk) then challenges him, saying he 'should be ashamed', and Ludo becomes uncomfortable when confronted with the idea that his friend may be homosexual saying that he 'doesn't want to hear it', both these incidences progress the narrative to closure, in a scene which reveals Etienne contemplating suicide. This reflects Ritch C Savin-Williams' (1998) findings concerning young gay males when confronted with the impetus to announce your sexuality in school that '[i]f they were to accept or even articulate their same sex attractions, they feared they would be committing social or emotional suicide' (p. 52). The character of Etienne is now vulnerable as he has articulated his homosexuality to those who have rejected him. He contemplates suicide, with the camera left on the ground at a distance and focused on him, as he stands at the edge of a cliff.

However, the camera again becomes an agent, this time leading to Etienne's fulfilment. The camera discarded becomes a pretext for a young man passing by to engage in conversation with Etienne, which leads to them making a connection, and eventually to sexual intimacy. Significantly, the film culminates with the camera focused on Etienne, revealing a scene of tenderness between the two males, as Etienne's first sexual partner states it is important to record his appearance on camera because "We look so different after making love" (i.e. for the first time).[13] The camera not only recorded Etienne's awkward attempts at finding his way, but also stimulated his journey to self-discovery and, ultimately, to fulfilment.

This philosophical closing of the film directly connects to the agency of Ducastel and Martineau as gay men involved in film-making, commenting on the difficulties of gay teenagers who are attempting to find their identity: hoping to progress from marginalized and unfulfilled, to enriched and alive. This, for Ducastel and Martineau, is both possibly autobiographical and at the same time discursively powerful. Through employing the device of the camera as character, they intensify the audience's engagement. This stimulates the audience with a desire to unravel Etienne's complex feelings (by providing images they have to organize and comprehend). The camera is not only presented as a device which encourages action and change within the narrative, but also the camera 'as personal to the audience' encourages a therapeutic understanding for them.

Conclusion

Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau possess a unique talent in examining 'possibilities' for gay identity. In their work discussed above, and the recent *Crustacés et coquillages* (Ducastel and Martineau 2005), the issue of gay social existence is foregrounded to the extent that it may be considered as a political precursor to production. While it is not unusual for film-makers to experiment with the idea of inclusivity and gay identity (such as the texts by Ozon and Lifshitz discussed above), what makes the work of Ducastel and Martineau exceptional is their commitment to progressing identity potential, using their personal and political experience within this area. Consequently, whilst there are many film-makers who have contributed to discourse surrounding gay identity, often including it as fully accepted in family, such as Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie Macdonald 1996) (in what might be termed as British 'queer

cinema'), these are often singular texts which, whilst significant, are not necessarily building blocks which the producers later progress with the same sentiments.[14] Therefore, Ducastel and Martineau are political agents working to express aspects of their own experience through their films in a highly personal, political, and autobiographical manner.

Through their examination of AIDS, the significance of homosexual partnerships, the idea of the chosen family, and the experience of the young homosexual male in *Jeanne et le Garcon Formidable*, *Drôle de Félix* and *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen*, respectively (as discussed above), Ducastel and Martineau reveal their political selves. This is enabled not just from the aspect of presenting themselves as an openly gay couple making films together as political bodies: they also have inventive and progressive strategies which help to get their messages across. The format of the musical in *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable*, the recontextualization of the road movie in *Drôle de Félix*, and the fragmented visual iconography of *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* all present a certain originality and stimulation which transcend their status as progressive discursive texts. What Ducastel and Martineau possess is the ability to connect to the personal selves, and intimate sensibilities, of their audience. This is achieved not just by their potential as gay film-makers talking in autobiographical terms, but also by their unique ability to construct inventive forms of storytelling which engages audiences.

Their work stimulates the possible connectivity of the audience to the text. This is particularly powerful in Foucaultian terms of discursive engagement, where potential is possible and power flows in and out between binary and multifarious connections. Consequently, the task required of the audience (which is particularly evident in *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen*) requires an intensified relationship with the text in order to interpret the images, form, and debate. This is not only an inventive strategy which stimulates interest in discursive ideas, it is emblematic of their work as a whole: they place the fragments, or contexts, outside an hierarchical order and ask you to engage and interpret. This reveals them as 'prime experimenters' (Giddens 1995) reinscribing the context of gay social identity. This is connected both to their autobiographical selves as a personal representation of a partnership, or family of choice, and equally to their work which stands out as presenting, for French queer cinema, unimagined possibilities to be explored.

Notes

1. For distribution in the UK, Ducastel and Martineau's films have been re-titled as *Jeanne and the Perfect Guy*, *Adventures of Felix* and *My Life on Ice*. The latter two have been changed, rather than translated: literal translations of the original titles would equate to 'Funny Felix' and 'My Real Life in Rouen'.
2. Jacques Martineau became involved with 'ACT UP' in the 1990s as an AIDS activist (Grandena 2005).
3. I have discussed this idea elsewhere in connection with documentary and reality television (Pullen 2005).
4. Consequently, relating my theoretical model, the term French 'queer cinema' is employed here not so much to reflect the potential of queer (possibly identity deconstruction), but more for a collective term to apply to films produced by homosexual auteurs which may focus on gay identity.

5. The directors' commentaries on *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* and *Drôle de Felix* include dialogue from both Ducastel and Martineau which confirms that certain scenes are 'autobiographical' (Ducastel and Martineau 2001, 2003).
6. 'Téchiné's viewpoint is emphasized by the fact that it is read out by [the character of] François, his younger self' (Everett 1999: 53).
7. Translation by Andy Litvak (subtitles).
8. Ducastel and Martineau's *Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable*, I argue, is progressive in exploring AIDS as an issue for the larger community, compared to Collard's *Les Nuits Fauves* which is more problematic in its context of individual agency: Collard is alleged to have spread the disease knowingly through unprotected sex (this is reflected in the film) (Rollet and Williams 1998).
9. Further autobiographical evidence is suggested with this character, as he is represented as completing a Ph.D. This connects to Jacques Martineau in his real life as he is a lecturer at Universitaire Paris X-Nanterre. Also worth noting in autobiographical terms is that the central character with AIDS is given Ducastel's first name, Olivier.
10. Ducastel and Martineau tell us that this occurred as 'the lady who runs the port authority told them there [are] no HIV positive people in Dieppe' (Ducastel and Martineau 2001) and, consequently, objected to their ideas.
11. This is an imaginary title for a real soap opera which Jacques Martineau suggests he is fond of (Ducastel and Martineau 2001).
12. Ducastel and Martineau suggest the filming incident in the classroom was intended to stimulate a response from Laurent, which it did, leading to Etienne getting into trouble at school. This ultimately enables Laurent to meet Etienne's mother, and they become involved as a relationship (Ducastel and Martineau 2003).
13. Translation by Heidi Wood (subtitles).
14. Jonathan Harvey has developed his career in the arena of television, extending possibilities for gay identity. However, I argue he has not progressed the discursive potential of *Beautiful Thing,* which supports the idea of romantic coupling between gay males (for example, his extremely successful TV series *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!* (BBC 1999–2001, UK) hinged its diegetic on the exploits of a 'stereotypical' gay male in the tradition of farce/comedy).

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Part Two: Queer Aesthetics

4

The Body Picturesque: The Films of Bavo Defurne

Michael Williams

Bavo Defurne's trademark visual motifs of whimsical, cloud-dotted skies, and natural environments rendered strangely exotic in their magnified excess, approach the kitsch in their picturesque valorization of beauty. This includes the hauntingly statuesque visages of the impossibly good-looking young men that he casts as protagonists, framed within a visual world that self-consciously blends high-art aesthetics with what he calls the 'language of propaganda and commercials' (Copestake 2002: 23). This paper will discuss the strategies deployed by Defurne and explore the ways in which his complex cultural and mythic themes work to facilitate the distinctly international currency of his language of beauty and what one Dutch magazine termed his 'pure gay-aesthetic'.[1]

Defurne was born in Gent, Belgium, and studied film and video at St. Lukas Art School in Brussels. His film career began with *Atlantis* in 1990, followed by further video work with *Rohypnol* (1992), *Trailer* (1993), and his 16mm found-footage film *Ludodrome* (1993). The four short films that followed saw further experiments in both form and media and are the works with which he is most associated, thus providing the focus of this chapter, not least through the enthusiastic reception they have received from film festival audiences, garnering a series of awards.[2] These begin with *Particularly Now, In Spring* (1995; henceforth *Particularly*), with beautifully dreamy 16mm capturing the obsolescent youth of a group of athletes. The next, the haunting evocation of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, *Saint* (1996, a segment of *Rainbow Stories*), was the first produced by Defurne's production and promotional company, Laika Films.[3] Defurne's first vibrant experiment in colour followed with *Sailor* (*Matroos*, 1998). Finally, there is his highest profile film to date, *Campfire* (*Kampvuur*, 2000), the Flemish-language film that won the Film Four Short Film Prize at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.[4]

The director's interest in merging cinema with other forms of photography was consolidated in 2000 with the 'Kaspar' photoproject. The concept was based around a series of still images using actors rather than models to loosely evoke the figure of Kaspar Hauser, a mysterious youth found wandering in Nuremberg in the early nineteenth century. The subject is ideal for Defurne in focusing on the universal theme of lost innocence and weary nostalgia and as the Vlaamse Gemeenschapcommissie (Flemish Communities Commission) observed, presented a clash between a symbol of 'naïve, agricultural Europe' and the 'urban knowledge' of industrial modernity.[5] As I will argue, the enigmatic male body in the landscape is the leitmotif of Defurne's work, along with the epistemological tensions of culture, sexuality, and identity it provokes in its iconography.

Framing Desire: *Campfire*

Viewed in tandem with his other venture into colour, *Sailor*, *Campfire* evidences two key aspects to the director's unerringly picturesque desire to capture beauty in everything and a resulting gravitation towards a space that is rural and 'natural' rather than urban and constructed, and one in which the individual is connected to their environment as if in a harmonious pathetic fallacy. The Picturesque became an influential concept in art, landscape design, and architecture in England and then elsewhere from the late eighteenth century, as a description

Figure 7. The beautiful and the sublime: Bavo Defurne's *Kampvuur/Campfire* (2000). Courtesy of Bavo Defurne and Laika Films.

indicating the suitability of a scene for inclusion in a picture (deriving from Italian *pittoresco*, 'from a picture').[6] The term was refined by writers such as William Gilpin and Uvedale Price as a new grouping midway between Edmund Burke's categories of the Beautiful and the Sublime (see Ross 1897; Townsend 1997).

The Picturesque is, thus, broadly, a quality distinct from the essential idea of 'nature' itself in being somehow conducive to being reproduced or suggestive of being 'framed' or pictorial in context, emerging into what art historian David Watkin has termed the 'universal mode of vision' of the early nineteenth century (Ross 1987: 271).[7] Thus, the Picturesque must be vivid, as a supplement to Johnson's *Dictionary* attested, and strike one with the 'force of a painting' (Ross 1987: 272).[8] It is also separate from the Sublime; that is, grand and awe-inspiring presence of nature (the Alps, a storm at sea, etc.) – that elicit the emotions of passion, 'pain and danger' in the observer, and also the Beautiful, which is in nature pleasingly regular, serene, and delicately coloured (Ross 1987: 273–4).[9] In bridging this aesthetic divide the Picturesque seeks texture, irregularity, and decay (the rough with the smooth), testaments of the passage of time and a measure of distance from the balance and precision of the Classical ideal. It also bridges the gap between art and nature, as Dabney Townsend suggests: '"Nature" itself is a widely used term that is often nothing more than a tag for a personified contrast to "art" understood as the production of something artificial' (Townsend 1997: 365). A detailed exploration of the Picturesque is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what I am suggesting is that Defurne pictorializes the human subject in opposition to 'culture' in a 'lost' landscape to frame twentieth-century anxieties about modernity and the new, iconic, physiques of 1920s and 30s body culture. The body is part of and even *becomes* the landscape, an idea Defurne highlights in respect to his first film, *Atlantis*, where he anticipates the themes of his subsequent work in filming: 'the body as if it were a landscape from the mountains towards the sea, from dry to wet'.[10]

At the start of each of Defurne's films we thus begin with the sound or image of ostensibly 'natural' elements such as sky, fields, or water into which the drama is projected and to which the narrative returns at the close of the film, as in his most recent work, *Campfire*. The screen fades up at the beginning of *Campfire* to reveal a landscape of lush green crops sloping away to open fields below while a criss-cross of wooden fences leads off to the dense woodland that blankets the horizon. The dusky pink light of morning graduates into the pastel blue of the sky, while the only sound is the white noise of open space augmented by the sound of the bus that now passes behind the crops. The film's title now appears in the sky in the scrolling, hand-written font familiar to viewers of Defurne's work, and a motif that suggests the personal and homespun – the director's authorship and the intimate scale of his films – and something more distantly ethereal. It is as if this is the sky-writing of a plane that intrudes into the silence (or even a camp signature borrowed from the skies of Oz), as in the titles of *Sailor* or *Particularly*, announcing modernity as an absence, present only on the verges of the frame and in the 'reality' of the spectator that nonetheless structures and defines the idyll on screen. The twittering of birds on the soundtrack facilitates the cut to a close shot of a hedgehog on the verge of the road (the first of many 'nature' shots), moments before the wake of the bus buffets the grass around it, a delicate butterfly clinging to a flower for survival. The danger passes, however, and we next

see the occupants of the bus, a group of eighteen-year-old and uniformly good-looking Boy and Girl Scouts chattering amicably and unchaperoned as they devour their packed lunches.

Here we meet Tijl (Joram Schurmans) and his girlfriend, Ineke (Circé Lethem), although the latter is alienated by the gentle horseplay and easy camaraderie of the young men with whom Tijl sits. The film then cuts to a close-up of a ladybird climbing a blade of grass as we hear shouts in the distance, the blurred shapes in the landscape revealed in the next shot to be a game of football played in a sunny, tree-encircled clearing by a group of shirtless males, a 'natural' blending of the homosocial with the homoerotic. The camera tracks down to the right to show Tijl and Ineke lying playfully on the ground, letting a ladybird run across their fingers. However, Tijl's attention wanders to the men playing in the sunshine, a distraction becoming fully apparent as the insect is nearly knocked out of their hands by the ball. The young man that comes to retrieve it is Wout (Koen van Heule), framed by a low-angled shot against the sky, a characteristic shot that both reveres and eulogizes the male body. A breezy sing-song ensues as the Scouts hike together through the countryside, completing the sense that the sequence is a pastiche of 1930s Fascist iconography, playfully recast in luminous skin tones reminiscent of the ubiquitous Bel Ami homoerotics of the late twentieth century.[11] At the end of the hike Tijl and Wout share a tent and nature takes its course (yes, there will be owls), an event central to the film's narrative as Wout's inability to deal with the situation culminates in a fight beside the titular campfire, that mythic space of ritual, male bonding and bacchanalian excess, all brought into play as Ineke rather sportingly dares the two boys to kiss during a game of Truth or Dare.

The opening sequence is dense with images that are so artfully constructed to convey the idyllic beauty and *naturalness* of the setting, characters, and, indeed, the sheer aesthetic quality of the film itself, that the horizon of representation almost turns full circle to embrace the artificial, the self-conscious, and kitsch. Admittedly, Defurne's films lack the brazen trashiness of kitsch, but that's precisely the point. The hermeneutic universe of *Campfire*, described by Laika Films as a 'boy scout's heaven' excludes anything grotesque, ugly, or *abject*.[12] The nearest the film approaches anything so disturbing is in the cathartic wound that appears on Tijl's cheek after he exchanges blows with Wout and even this is treated paradoxically. Visceral sound effects convey the force of the punches against flesh, particularly the final one that strikes Wout, the homophobic instigator of the violence, to the ground, while dark shadows cast the men's intense gazes into graver aspects as the editing quickens in tempo. However, the imagery never more than falters from its radiant elegy to male beauty, fragmenting the men's bodies into fleeting but dramatic compositions against the firelight. One striking image of Tijl, a canted shot in which his opponent and one-time lover grips him precariously against the flames becomes, for a moment, a reference to the martyrdom of Saint Joan, the queer Maid of Orleans, one of several icons referenced in Defurne's work.

The campfire casts a nostalgic, amber glow rather than searing heat and although the crowd emits a gasp of startled delight at the young men's kiss, homophobic abuse does not surface in the way one might expect. While the desired effect may have been to construct a challenging but ultimately supportive context for this tale of coming out, it is notable that the group only turns against Tijl in the cold light of day as the Scouts board their bus (that emblem of 'culture').

The one dissonant element here compared to the opening scene, is that Tijl now wears a fitting red shirt (echoing the provocative red swimming trunks with which he attempted, and failed, to entice Wout to bathe 'the morning after') that stands out from the sea of uniforms around him worn by figures who now reject him. While the setting may be a Boy Scout's heaven, it is not utopia for Defurne if it means suppressing individuality. The point is that while Defurne's camera excludes the conventionally 'ugly' or lumpen from the landscape, by being truly *picturesque*, the very constructedness of the beautiful becomes apparent. And what are the beautiful and the natural but shifting and inexact social constructs. Constructs of political import, too, the term 'it's not natural' being one of the most well-rehearsed complaints against homosexuality.

Thus, aside from the bus that transports the Scouts to the rural locale, the film contains barely a glimpse of anything that could be described as 'civilization', neither, significantly, do we see anyone discernibly over the age of eighteen. 'Personally, I've seen too many films that deal with very urban...problems and who put gay stories in an urban atmosphere', Defurne argues, stating that he'd rather 'go to nature' and erase the distracting, and, perhaps, less aesthetically pleasing, detritus of 'all those cultural things'. Thus, he suggests, he can 'open up' the diegetic space to create 'a very concise universe in which you only see the emotions' unlike, perhaps, the gritty urban locales many associate with any film pertaining to address a social agenda, particularly in Britain.[13] 'I don't want to make the kind of sad film that has ugly actors, grim light and a grey atmosphere', he states (Copestake 2002: 23). Placing his issues, here that of coming out, into a very 'natural atmosphere' is to literally naturalize gayness and define the natural as anything that occurs in nature.[14] This is partly an attempt to universalize, but not homogenize, his work by making it temporally and spatially ambiguous and culturally uncluttered while also keeping dialogue to a minimum to break down language barriers. The international audience is clearly important to the director, not least for commercial reasons, for although he sold 10,000 copies of his DVD worldwide in less than a year, only a few hundred were sold in Flanders. As he explains to the Belgian magazine *Focus Knack*: 'The Flemish film market is definitely a minorities market for me...I get fan mail from Finland, Australia and America, but in Flanders no-one knows who I am. Luckily my work appeals very well to the international market'.[15]

Bonbonfarbenen: A *Sailor*'s Nostalgia

While it wouldn't be fair to suggest that Defurne produces export-only art, the use of *Campfire* as an educational film to explore issues of homosexuality and 'coming out' in Belgian schools doesn't contradict the sense in which he is a film-maker *sans frontiers*, who constructs an emotionality resonant sense of shared history despite, or even because, that history is far from specific, as he states himself:

> I think my films are very realistic, in a way that they are very real emotionally...because I think of my films as being replicas of memories I have, I have a tendency to let them take place in the past, in our "collective youth". And it doesn't really matter all that much if that mythic time is the fifties or thirties or nineties.[16]

All Bavo Defurne's films are concerned with the past, whether that be as fragments of memories or dreams or as a nostalgic view of a present haunted by icons and clichés. Certainly, there

is a veneration of youth across the films and a desire to linger on the moments just before the passing from innocence to adulthood, as *de Filmkrant* observed, 'There is a yearning for a more romantic age. A certain nostalgia infuses the films'.[17] As I have indicated, the beauty of nature is magnified and somehow rendered plastically excessive in these films. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in *Sailor*.

Shot in shimmering, colour-saturated digital video, *Sailor* concerns the romantic fantasies of a young dreamer (also played by Joram Schurmans) about a sailor who may represent one of these 'replica' memories or may equally be the product of his imagination. We first see Schurmans as he reclines in the bath, submerging his head underwater conveyed by a montage of repeated, overlapping shots in the fashion of Eisenstein. The sound of water, dripping, running, splashing and then ambiently oceanic as we cut to a shot of the sea announces the film's heightened sensual reality, which continues in a series of (wet?) dream-like scenarios that blur the boundaries of fantasy and reality. Aurally, we are submerged in a subjective viewpoint that now visualizes his object of desire, as we see the dreamer riding pinion on the sailor's motorbike, (obviously) superimposed against a background of green fields populated by Friesian cows. As the two men picnic on the beach, the sailor teasingly bites off the tops of bottles labelled 'pop' (what else) before they roll down a slope to land under the camera, both men now becoming the spectator's objects too. The scene is obviously studio-bound in its warm but stark lighting and a carefully arranged sand dune as a set, crowned by a fake blue sky. With the recognition of awakening desires, they roll apart and we cut to the ubiquitous shot of white fluffy clouds as the colour palette turns sepia and we hear the intrusive sound of a plane, as if it were destroying the dream.

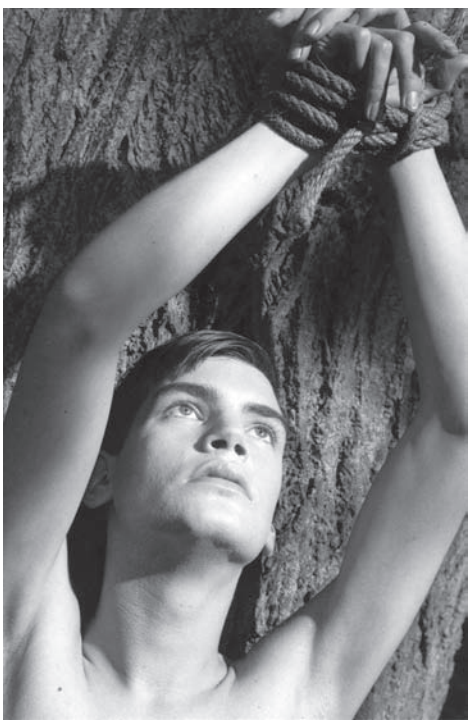
The blatantly artificial settings, camp mythic symbolism, and erotic edge are strongly reminiscent of kitsch artists Pierre and Gilles, particularly in their airbrushed hybrids of fantasy and reality, photography and painting. Even the bodies of the two men, and particularly the sailor, are 'picturesqued' in Pierre and Gilles fashion, their skin scintillating with something that could be sweat or glitter and posed theatrically as if for postcards. This is a work of emotional expressionism, extending to the red swimming trunks worn by Schurmans (strikingly revived in *Campfire*, as if Tijl were trying to re-enact the dream of the earlier film). In one scene the dreamer is seen spying over a garden fence at his silhouetted sailor collecting his uniform from his mother at the washing line, a *mise-en-scène* that could be straight out of a 1950s commercial for washing powder. The dreamer's head sits neatly upon the white rolling contours of the fence, framing his gaze and desire, and yet he too becomes an object. Defurne's films are all underscored by a theme of unattainability, and an unrequited love that means that one's lover remains an intangible object, a dream rather than a reality. Amid the heightened visual register everything takes on a hyper-real quality. As one German website observes, 'Defurne portrays wordless gay fantasies in candy-coloured images' (and there could hardly be a more eloquent expression of Defurne's images than 'bonbonfarbenen').[18] Indeed, the artificiality of most the film means that there is a genuine shock of the 'real' when we see our first actual location filming at the film's climax. Here, as Schurmans arrives to meet the sailor's ship, the relatively dreary dockside footage underscores that the fantasy is crumbling as the sailor bids an all-too-affectionate farewell to a crewmate. The two men go their separate ways and we

cut back to our protagonist in the bath as he surfaces. One US website (Cranin 2003) has noted a resemblance between Joram Schurmans and Bobby Kendall, the young star of *Pink Narcissus* (James Bidgood 1971), a text which certainly appears to have been an influence on both films starring Schurmans.[19]

Saint: Icon in the Landscape

Saint's opening title relates that Sebastian was a 'Roman soldier, tortured to death because of his convictions', that of his Christian faith, but a passion easily transposable into other, more homoerotic, scenarios, a process facilitated by historical rumours about his relationship with the Emperor Diocletian. The saint has been variously appropriated through the ages at times of suffering such as the Black Death, the First World War, and, more recently, AIDS. Anyone who has wandered around Italian galleries containing works by Renaissance artists realizes the popularity of the subject and as Defurne has noted, it was their wish to develop the 'more lifelike and anatomically correct' that made him appealing to them.[20] Moreover, it was the way the nature of Sebastian's martyrdom legitimized the display of the male nude in an ostensibly pious context that particularly appealed to artists with queerer proclivities, then and now, who could obliquely endow the saint with a hint of knowing, if rather sadomasochistic, sexuality. Defurne thus produced an 'erotic and Jarman-esque study of pain and secret pleasure' in the opinion of British gay magazine *Thud*.[21]

Figure 8. Olaf Nollen as Sebastian in *Saint* (1996). Courtesy of Bavo Defurne and Laika Films.



The bared torso of the man, who received the arrows of the firing squad with passive dignity and even apparent pleasure in these depictions, is, thus, a rare object of worship and homosexual desire within the Catholic Church, or perhaps not that rare. Defurne shares the purpose of those artists in this and other films, as he explained to the *Gay Times*: 'I try to make difficult and painful stories in a pleasant way which, for me personally and, I hope, for the viewer too, acts as a kind of consolation'. He thus attempts to 'idealise' his subjects 'without avoiding the issues, in a way that's digestible' (Copestake 2002: 23). This is an approach very much in the vein of the Nietzschean concept of Apollo and Dionysus, the sculptural beauty of the former making the dissonant, more corporeal, traumas of the latter easier to bear. Defurne elicits another classical metaphor as he articulates the way he appropriates 'clichés and icons' in his films, as he suggests that they are 'like a Trojan horse, filled with a whole arsenal of meanings'.[22]

The opening shots of *Saint* makes the degree of intertextuality and cross reference between Defurne's films apparent. Sebastian is led out into a colonnade by Roman guards and is watched by a young boy on the sidelines, a symbol of the future perhaps, and his costume, a white tunic, with a square-cut neckline, is rather reminiscent of a sailor.[23] Olaf Nollen's Sebastian is indeed placid and sculptural. Beads of sweat glisten on his face as the lighting picks out his profile as he gazes to the ground; effortlessly evoking the whole history of 'sad young men' with a mere tilt of the head and closing of long eyelashes into shadow. Shots of dark clouds rolling across the sun punctuate the horn blows the boy (now presumably Pan) sounds to alert Sebastian's friends – residents of the Picturesque, some clearly shepherds or fishermen, another lurks in the bushes bearing an armful of white lilies – to the impending execution in the woods. The sound seems to resonate louder, and further, than it should while the closeness to nature grows more apparent as bird and then owl song begins to dominate the soundtrack and the sound of nearing thunder grows. A skull rolls across the ground as the martyr reaches the site of his fate – like Guernico's c1618 painting *Et in Arcadia Ego*, in which a grotesque skull casts a melancholy glance over an Arcadian idyll (Schama 1985: 519) – he is spun round and his tunic is torn from him. Rapid cuts and close-ups display and fragment the taut musculature of Sebastian's body as the garment is rendered. A close-up finds the tatters of the saint's apparel falling next to the skull on the ground before we see his body is thrust back against a tree, an overlapping edit repeating the hard thud as his torso hits.

In one of the most striking moments in the film, the ropes that bind Sebastian are animated so as to snake and tie themselves across his body (very reminiscent of scenes in *Pink Narcissus*) as the soundtrack rattles with sounds that might suggest a lion's roar and the laboured breathing of a man or animal. The combined effect is truly uncanny, the inanimate is stirred to life, as is the icon Sebastian, however, all are somehow displaced and de-cultured, rendered unhomely. Then fingers mimic the movement of the rope to suggestively probe the crevices of the martyr's body before his hands are hoisted high above him, a close-up of his midriff dwelling on his tautening abdominal muscles. Sebastian gasps and then hangs his head. Bows are armed with arrows in a left-to-right movement that builds tensions and parallels the pointing fingers that we have just seen aimed accusingly at their victim. After a complex series of shots, the arrows find their target, puncturing the flesh in surprisingly lurid extreme close-ups. Blood flows, lightning crashes, and then drops of rain fall from above, trickling sensuously and stigmatically down Sebastian's face and chest, replacing the blood and tears as we hear a new sound, echoing drips of water. A sound that returns to the aural landscape of *Sailor* as we see ever increasing ripples on a body of water, then Sebastian, then clouds: images in a circular exchange. Indeed, this natural aesthetic was a meeting of art and serendipity, augmented, Defurne relates, by a faulty camera that produced 'dark, furry images [that] add mystery and body' and even the film stock itself, which 'felt as if it was organic' and 'unpredictable', possessing a 'tactile – almost erotic – touch'.[24] It is this kind of texturing that picturesques the broken, irregular fronds of the trees and rolling skull and blends them into juxtaposition with the Beautiful curves of the Saint's body. These sequences enunciate the shifting appropriations of history, for the picturesque is not only never 'shining and new' but evidences 'temporal change' through evident growth or decay (Townsend 1997: 367).

In *Saint*, the body thus becomes a mythic, trans-historical landscape that is inextricably connected to the natural environment. Viewed retrospectively, the 1996 film is revealed as an urtext among Defurne's work, sending aural and visual ripples that resonate at key moments across the texts. The Picturesque is also reflexively framed and constructed, possessing a demand for intertextual reference made between past 'scenes' of art and nature (Ross 1987: 276), by a cultured and visually literate spectator (Townsend 1997: 374). Sebastian has been long assimilated into the queer iconographic vocabulary, furnishing film-makers with an evocative reference point with an 'internationally' queer image. Sebastian is one of the iconographic ancestors of the figure described by Richard Dyer as the 'homosexual as a sad young man', an archetype in the world of queer pulp fiction and film between the 1940s and 60s; a realm whose heroes are 'haunted by dream images of youths in muscular poses', much like those of Defurne (Dyer 2002: 118).[25]

If *Sailor* and *Campfire* are notably lacking the ugly or abject, their compensating excesses of beauty doubly enunciating the films' sense of loss, *Saint* is perhaps the text to which it is displaced within the director's *oeuvre*. While this is an abject of the body, of bloody wounds, sweat, and tears as delineated by Julia Kristeva (1982), it is not monstrous, but rather painfully and threateningly beautiful, as Robin Baker observes:

> Few artists have managed to make the violent death of the scantily-clad St Sebastian appear quite so seductive and horrific simultaneously. Olaf Nollen's martyr is also the most beautiful Saint in cinema's reliquary, his unmoving, placid expression almost devastating and uncomfortably desirable (Baker 2002).

'Do You See How Glorious Life Can Be When You Have Dreams?'

While *Sebastian* represents the mythical apotheosis of youthful male iconography, then *Particularly* finds Defurne eulogising its more human but no less statuesque forms. The most clearly retrospective of all his films, *Particularly* bears the marks of a distinctly twentieth-century history in its treatment of a group of youths exercising in the sunlight on the verge of adulthood, yet remains typically ambiguous in space and time. The changing room and pool that provides its setting are consistent with almost any period of the last century, as are the looks of its actors. What matters is that these are images rarefied by belonging to the past, almost on a physiological level. As with *Sebastian*, the film stock, a combination of 16mm and u-matic video, is marvellously luminous, capturing the lean bodies of the cast as ephemeral beings that are a product of the ideals to which its young narrator (Olaf Nollen, Sebastian himself) aspires. As usual, the largely unprofessional actors used increases the sense of 'naturalness' not entirely assimilated into the smooth aesthetics of the films, which is matched by the poetic, English-language dialogue, spoken with an authentic hesitancy that conveys as poignant and convincing rather than clichéd.

This is not a film about unrequited desire, as such, but more about a denial of the transience of youth and both the beauty and superficiality of the body as an object. The seventeen-year-old protagonist, the director explains, 'believes he'll never leave this glorious universe, which is, in fact, his youth'.[26] Indeed, it is almost as if the dreams of this youth – of showers having a special

smell 'like the sea or a wood in the summer' – are the ones later realized in *Campfire*. Again, the film begins with 'white' aeroplane noise and white fluffy clouds, an image repeated at the end of the film. The film then indulges in a horizontal tracking shot of a changing room, which itself is 'the gay fantasy par excellence', as one of many websites have observed, in which young athletes are preparing for their exertions.[27] The lighting delineates every muscle displayed in an accentuated chiaroscuro photography in which skin tones and sport whites glow as the men undress, while the self-consciousness of the display is apparent as Nollen intones that he wants: '...to be a movie-star, I think I'm no boy anymore, I'm ready for real life'.

The dream the youth articulates is that a French film director, allegedly arriving to make a film about a 'young runner in the war or something', will spot him, and that he will become an athlete-star like Johnny Weissmüller (the film, while initially seemingly spatially and temporally displaced, is full of 1930s reference points). After a shot of the men striding boldly from the pool, he expresses an almost Nietzschean philosophy to life as he states, while doing pull-ups in close-up, that 'There's nothing you can't do that can't be done. All you need is to exercise your body'. The cut to the open-air athletic tracks as he says this invites unavoidable comparison's to Leni Riefenstahl's 1936 *Olympia* documentary, particularly part two, 'Festival of Beauty', which opens with nude male figures running, steaming, and bathing together in a matter strongly reminiscent of the opening shots of Defurne's film. As Uli Linke discusses, the body culture that developed at the end of the nineteenth century and blossomed after the First World War valorized the nude male figure in particular, especially when exercised in the sunshine and clear air of the outdoors. The nude male was, thus, to embody a certain 'nostalgia for a vividly imagined traditional, "organic" society, free from the alienation of urban forms of capitalist industrialism' (Linke 1999: 46). The body is, thus, somehow more 'authentic' when composed in such settings, arranged so as to mimic the poses of ancient Greek athletes, evoking a powerful sense of timelessness and purity, qualities readily conducive to the emergent racial strategies of National Socialism. It becomes itself a site of nostalgia. As the Sailor in Defurne's film of that name writes in his letter, 'I want to be home' – a statement which, coming from a figure of fantasy, conveys a meaning beyond the literal. Homoeroticism and other traces of sexuality were to be avoided, of course, largely through further recourse to both the natural in symbolism and a disavowal of objectification through and emphasis on 'various bodily exercises during which the semi-nude body remained abstract, very much like a sculpture' (Linke 1999: 49).[28] A strategy still deployed today.

However, Defurne argues that he wishes to invert Riefenstahl's privileging of the mass over the individual and draw out the unique rather than homogenized qualities. And it is true that even though some of Defurne's compositions – low-angled shots against the sky and the rows of runners ready to sprint – are reminiscent of Riefenstahl, his accent is on the pathos of the men's seemingly parallel bond (and, thus, the fear of being different) rather than on visual symmetry alone. Thus, when the youth proclaims that the men always sing in the showers 'just as if we all had one voice', the image we see is not of camaraderie but, for a moment, of the empty changing room in which he sits while we hear the distant sound of wordless song with melancholy effect. Moreover, the director suggests that it was the pre-war work of gay Jewish photographer Herbert List that most inspired the look of the film. List is associated with the

German New Objectivity movement that emerged in the Weimar Republic during the 1920s, an approach to photography and the arts that represented, as Richard W. McCormick argues, an 'undialectical shift' away from the 'idealistic inwardness' of Expressionism towards a 'sober' and 'somewhat forced...affirmation of the external surfaces of modernity' (McCormick 2001: 8). The ambivalent embrace and documentation of modernity in New Objectivity is ostensibly more disposed to the urban than Defurne, yet as McCormick points out, the new consumer culture that developed with its 'commodification of leisure time and youthful narcissism' also heralded a new cult of 'sports, the outdoors, and youth', which describes the universe photographed by Defurne as much as Riefenstahl's mountain films of the early 1930s (McCormick 2001: 47).

Defurne thus appreciates the way List 'used photography to explore the dreams and aspirations of the young and the fragility of the idealist. My film, too, is about the dreams that you have when you're young'.[29] The comparison is appropriate for, besides the charms of the 'gilded youths' of his photographs, particularly while in Italy in the 1930s. List attempted to transform the everyday and clichéd into something striking and sometimes bizarre, often deploying strong shadows and becoming, as Max Scheler observes, 'caught up in a world of human and sculptural eroticism, allusion and myth' (Scheler 1995: 11; 9). What advocates of the Picturesque would have appreciated, as with many other 'homoerotic' works produced in the Mediterranean, was the way List gently evoked the past in his photographs, often framing men against rough-hewn stone or decayed architecture. As Townsend suggests, one function of the Picturesque was to register social and environmental change in a scene, opposed to the new but incomplete in the past, presenting a beauty tinged by the memory of something lost or absent from the landscape (Townsend 1997: 369).

While the opening of *Particularly* is dreamily optimistic, the ending is bitter-sweet. A wide shot pictures the young man's friends against the sky, who exit the frame at the bottom to leave a largely empty screen, while the large white cloud that dominated the opening sky-shot has now drifted off left. Once more, symmetry is interrupted by the passage of time in a Picturesque of loss and longing. The youth's closing words are suitably wistful: 'at the end of the day, we say goodbye as if there's no end to it...I want to be a star...or did I tell you this once before?'. He tries, and fails, to return us to the beginning. In this sense, what Defurne's films offer us is not only a memory of youth, but a memory of cinema. These are displaced dreams from a hopeful past where modernity sounded like a Siren plane promising to carry one away from the city, or movie theatre as in the bi-planes and clouds of an old studio logo. But such noise is also the lament of leaving and something passing us by. It is the beautiful, painful sound of nostalgia.

Acknowledgements
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Notes

1. 'en pure homo-esthetiek'. Heijwegen, G. 'Bavo Defurne: Heimwee naar romantischere tijden', de FilmKrant, March 2003, nr 242, www.filmkrant.nl/av/org/filmkran/archief/fk242/bavo.html (accessed 26 August 2003).

2. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview' www.xs4all.be/~laika2/news/interviewengels.html (accessed 27 August 2003).
3. Founded in 1995, Laika Films was a consolidation of the company originated as Paard the previous year with his art school associate and experimental video artist Anouk Declercq. Paard briefly became Azimuth as Peter Vandenborre and producer/designer Yves Verbraeken joined the team, establishing Laika as it is now. See Laika Films website: www.laikafilms.com.
4. Throughout this period, Defurne contributed to the work of other film-makers, including as set decorator on Peter Greenaway's *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993) and also *De man van Staal* (1999) directed by Vincent Ball, the cinematographer for most of Defurne's films. He was also an assistant director for German experimental film-maker Matthias Müller's shorts *Alpsee* (1995) and *Pensão Globo* (1997) and has recently worked to restore René Magritte's 8mm films. At the time of writing, Defurne is working on his first feature-length project, *Secretly Inside*, a story set in Holland during the Second World War based on Hans Warren's 1975 novel, *Steen der Hulp*.
5. 'Kaspar is het verhaal van een verloren kindertijd, van de ontwikkeling vanuit het romantische, dunbevolkte en rijkbeboste, naïeve, agrarische Europa naar de industriële overbevolkte, urbane kennis- en haastmaatschappij van nu', Digital Brussel, the website of the Vlaamse Gemeenschapcommissie, http: //www.digitaalbrussel.be/webpages/thema/kunst_cultuur/beleid/laika.html.
6. 'picturesque', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*. Michael Clarke. Oxford University Press, 2001. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. 10 November 2003, http: //www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t4.001302.
7. David Watkin, *The English Vision: The Picturesque in Architecture, and Garden Design* (New York, 1982), p. vii.
8. Ross quotes from John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (eds), *The Genius of the Place: the English Garden 1620–1820* (London, Elek, 1975), p. 337.
9. Ross draws from Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Notre Dame University Press, 1968), pt. 1 sect. vii, p. 39.
10. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview' www.xs4all.be/~laika2/news/interviewengels.html (accessed 27 August 2003).
11. It is notable that the image of the bare-chested Wout was expediently chosen for the cover of the BFI's 2002 DVD release of Defurne's films.
12. www.xs4all.be/~laika2/news/campfire.html (accessed 27 August 2003).
13. Robin Baker, 'Interview with Bavo Defurne', BFI DVD 2002.
14. Ibid.
15. 'Concreet is de Vlaamse filmmarkt voor mij een minderheidsmarkt. De dvd *Korte films van Bavo Defurne* wordt wereldwijd op vijf labels verkocht. In minder dan een jaar gingen er meer dan 10.000 exemplaren over de toonbank. Daarvan is maar een paar honderd in Vlaanderen verkocht. Ik krijg fanmail uit Finland, Australië en Amerika, in Vlaanderen weet men meestal niet eens wie ik ben. Gelukkig draait mijn winkeltje op de internationale markt heel goed', 'Hoe het verder moet', *Focus Knack*, 11 June 2003 (see www.knack.be).
16. Ibid.
17. 'Het is er een over heimwee naar romantischere tijden. Een zekere nostalgie beheerst de films', Heijwegen, G., op. cit.
18. 'In bonbonfarbenen Bildern malt Defurne schwule Wunschträume wortlos auf den Bildschirm', www.gaystation.de/tv/archiv/b/bavo_defurne_kurzfilme.html.

19. Bidgood revels in combining live action with stop-motion animation techniques that propagate flickering insects to crawl and flit around a veritable Aladdin's cave of a *mise-en-scène* in a carnivalesque parade of the fake, kitsch, and deliriously grotesque (*Scorpio Rising* (Kenneth Anger 1964) meets Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), perhaps). While a heightening of the senses and sensuality is shared by the two film-makers, Bidgood's more avant-garde narrative and explicit imagery is alienating to the more mainstream (albeit art house) audience addressed by Defurne. The Belgian director's oscillation between the constructs of synthetic and natural and preference for location-shooting contrasts with the defiantly studio-bound and theatrical staging of Bidgood.
20. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview', op. cit.
21. Unattributed review, *Thud* magazine, March 1997, ibid.
22. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview', op. cit. Defurne isn't, of course, the first film-maker to raid the pop cultural vocabulary for the purposes for inspiration and subversion and to, as he puts it, 'reclaim things and tell a different story' (Copestake 2002: 23). As Defurne borrows from the 'fascist' aesthetics of 1930s Germany, Queer Spanish film-maker Pedro Almodóvar, too, for example, particularly in his early career, worked to appropriate the imagery and language of the repressive Franco era to achieve social and sexual subversion. Mark Allinson has described this as a process of subcultural, 'camp', appropriation on Almodóvar's part, purposely avoiding direct reference to Franco and re-contextualizing and camply denaturalizing the inherited emblems of Spanish culture (see Allinson 2001: 25). In Defurne's case, given the project of *Campfire* to *naturalize* homosexuality, such processes are less about problematizing than re-acculturating, reclaiming ideas as an expressive force of nature, or rather a fantasy of nature rather than culture.
23. Coincidentally, reproduces Alfred Courmes' 1934 painting *St Sebastian Sailor*, in which the saint is depicted naked but for the fetishistic vestiges of a sailor's costume (Dyer 2002: 123).
24. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview', op. cit.
25. Dyer quotes from Raymond Durgnat's description of the film *Images in the Snow* (Willard Maas 1948) in *Sexual Alienation in the Cinema*, London, Studio Vista, 1972, p. 252.
26. Ibid.
27. 'eine schwule Fantasie schlechthin', 'Bavo Defurne – Kurzfilme', unattributed article, www.gaystation.de/tv/archiv/b/bavo_defurne_kurzfilme.html (accessed 27 August 2003).
28. Linke quotes from George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Social Norms in Modern Europe*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 171.
29. 'Bavo Defurne: An Interview', op. cit.

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5

The Mechanical Reproduction of Melodrama: Matthias Müller's 'Home' Movies

Robert L. Cagle

Matthias Müller's films bear about them both an air of remarkable familiarity and an element of the strange: Their themes of love, loss, and longing are universal; their images, inspired by and drawn from popular Hollywood movies, provide a suitably recognizable and nostalgic medium for their melancholic and introspective content. However familiar Müller's films may seem, though, they remain irrevocably distanced from their source materials by a sensibility that restructures and reorganizes them – a critical distance that reveals both the workings and the limitations of the dominant representational systems that provide the raw materials for Müller's artistic transformations.

In this essay, I examine two of Müller's most important films to illustrate how the artist's work uses the Hollywood melodrama as a means of commenting upon what *is* represented (a certain type of gendered behaviour) and what is *not* represented (key social and cultural issues) in dominant media texts. I will argue, furthermore, that central to understanding Müller's works is the ability to recognize the camp sensibility that underlines their disjointed and intertextual narratives, and appeals to spectators able to occupy multiple viewing positions – able to laugh and cry simultaneously at the images on the screen.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin championed the then-new medium of film as a political tool for the proletariat, citing its destruction of what he termed the "aura" of high art – the element of authority, of authorship associated with the classical arts – as its defining revolutionary quality. Cinema, Benjamin pointed out, was the product of the technological marvel of mechanical reproduction and thus exhibited many

of the same sensational elements that characterized works of the Dadaists. What set cinema apart from the other visual arts was that this new art form offered an even greater tool to the masses than did its predecessors, given that it was more accessible (in intellectual and material terms) and was, as Benjamin's title suggests, designed for reproducibility, which both facilitated its dissemination and turned the earlier function of art on its head: "Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics." (224)

Cinema's political potential arose as a direct result of what it was capable of representing. The close-up, as Benjamin explained, can reveal otherwise imperceptible qualities and details of familiar objects. Slow motion, for example, extends and expands movement, and illustrates the hidden complexities that lie beneath even the simplest of gestures. "The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses." (237) For Benjamin, the birth of cinema represented, at least potentially, the beginning of an era in which art could be appropriated and used by the masses as a means of engaging in cultural discourse.

Fifty years later, cultural critic Umberto Eco described a process of cinematic reception that, like Benjamin's model, centred on reproduction. In his "*Casablanca*: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage" Eco outlined an active viewing practice by which the spectator deconstructs and reconstructs various filmic texts in the service of transforming a mass-marketed product into a personal cult object – a more perfect object of desire. In these situations, Eco pointed out, the viewer focuses not on reading the narrative as a cohesive whole, as might normally be expected, but rather on discovering and disengaging discreet events and images. The viewer disentangles moments of seemingly personal fascination (individualized fetish objects of a sort) from the overall master narrative and, in so doing, perversely gains pleasure not merely from the resolution offered by narrative closure – often seen as the normalizing imperative of the Hollywood film (an observation that led critic Raymond Bellour to comment that all Hollywood films end in marriage), but also by reconstructing his/her own master narrative. The film becomes, despite its status as mass-marketed ideological commodity, a personalized object imbued with particular significance – a fetish item of sorts. The act of reading, then, becomes one of perverse (re)production, as the consumer utilizes the raw materials provided by the narrative texts in the service of creating an/other object.

Although Eco's model seems, at first, to be decidedly less politically charged than Benjamin's (especially since Eco's focus is on reception and use rather than material production), it does offer the potential for challenging and provocative applications. The shift that occurs when lifting images, text, or cinematic moments from their previous contexts is undeniably significant, both in terms of the split that occurs between the film's intended message and its new recontextualized meaning, as well as in the separation that takes place within and between elements of the film's system of signification – the signs that make the meaning of the narrative. The object – in that whatever part of the whole is chosen by the viewer as being desirable is, in fact, *objectified* – is taken from its place in the service of the representational (i.e., as part of a system of signs in the service of a particular narrative) and placed into a position of the iconic (i.e., placed into a gallery of other objects of desire) that may then be recognized not only as a separate entity, invested with the historical, socio-cultural, and political significance of its source material, but

also as part of a new collection of images, constantly available to the subject in a seemingly endless present.

In perfect cultist fashion, the films of Matthias Müller borrow sounds and images from some of the director's favourite Hollywood movies, transforming treasured cinematic titbits into provocative interrogations of gender identity and sexual behaviour. These works turn the material from which they are constructed inside-out, revealing the problematic underpinnings of dominant popular cinema. Their campy excesses help drive home their serious themes and render them both accessible and enjoyable examples of political art.

Müller's films can be seen as part of a long tradition of artistic appropriations, from the early works of pioneers such as Max Ernst and Joseph Cornell to more recent projects by artists such as Bruce Conner and Abigail Child. Although these artists' objectives and techniques vary dramatically, they all make use of this process of "unhinging" (as Eco refers to it) to create projects that provide self-reflexive critiques of the politics surrounding their own production.

In such works, textual fragments are drawn from various source materials and reassembled into other, different contexts – new narrative systems. The resulting reorganization, with its polyphony of signifiers, problematizes the very notion of seamless narrative that it seems to espouse (at least in its apparent adherence to a linear narrative structure). The re-assembled object stands as a framework inside which its various components, transformed, however unstably or temporarily, from inter- to intra-texts and partially alienated but never completely removed from their historical contexts, operate within a new system of signification, one that redefines the very value of each fragment – of each component part. The individual pieces of the overall work, then, may be viewed not only as signifiers of autonomous works of art or culture, but also as elements of a larger structure, which, when read together, operate side by side within a meaning-making project, the significance of which changes as elements are added or modified.

Ken Jacobs's *Tom, Tom The Piper's Son* (1969) and Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936) offer two stunning examples of how these processes have been utilized by avant-garde film-makers. Jacobs's and Cornell's films made use of such techniques as slow motion and close-ups to transform, respectively, a 1905 short attributed to D. W. Griffith's cameraman Billy Bitzer and a 1931 feature by George Melford, *East of Borneo*, into works that revealed the workings of the representational systems of their earlier incarnations. Jacobs's film morphed a ten-minute short into a nearly two-hour mystery, using various post-production techniques (optical printing, speeding/slowing footage) to refocus audience attention on specific details surrounding the case of a purloined pig. Cornell's work, on the other hand, distilled seventy-seven minutes of jungle pot-boiler narrative into a nineteen-minute piece of pure, unadulterated cinephilia – a filmic appreciation of star Rose Hobart that foreshadowed the Hollywood-inspired creations of queer-identified cinephiles Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, and John Waters.

Anger, Smith, and Waters, especially, made extensive use of borrowed materials, visual and auditory. Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) and Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1964) subversively

paired fluffy pop-tune soundtracks with images of cavorting transvestites and pouting leather boys, while Waters's *Pink Flamingos* borrowed Little Richard's "The Girl Can't Help It", originally used to accompany shots of 50s pin-up girl Jayne Mansfield in the film of the same name, as the background music for pop icon Divine's notorious sashay through Baltimore. In so doing Smith, Anger, and later Waters fired some of the first shots, so to speak, of a revolution in film-making that eventually led not only to what has come to be known as "queer cinema", but also, for better or worse, to the music video. They blazed the aesthetic trail for the queer vision that informs and structures not only Müller's work, but also work by other queer film-makers, including Todd Haynes, John Greyson, and Bruce La Bruce. In addition to its appropriated soundtrack, *Scorpio Rising* also incorporated borrowed footage to equate, in visual terms, a narrative of the life of Christ with the misadventures of a leather-clad ne'er-do-well with a penchant for Nazi paraphernalia. Such startling juxtapositions managed to straddle the line between political subversion and unmitigated camp – it was politically charged art *and* it was entertaining.

Although Müller's films have often been compared to those of other avant-garde directors – among them most notably Anger, Conner, Jean Genet, Bruce Baillie, and Derek Jarman – the director's impressive *æuvre* is far more complex than such comparisons allow, in that it exhibits a startlingly wide spectrum of approaches to film-making that ranges from low-budget experimentation on home-processed Super-8 film to near-studio quality pictures shot on 16mm. Despite the differences that exist between them, however, Müller's films are all clearly the work of a devoted cinephile who finds in Hollywood movies both an inspiration for creating images of breathtaking beauty and a voice for articulating his own desires and experiences. His works collectively conjure up a Proustian vision, their narratives unravelling like so many *mémoires involuntaires* triggered by familiar stimuli – a snippet of conversation, a few frames of film, a fragment of a melody. They are, as critic Alice Kuzniar has pointed out, examples of cinematic mourning, brief testaments to an idealized past (both personal and cultural, but always tied to the movies) that has long since escaped from the film-maker's (and the viewer's) grasp.

Beginning with the earliest of his works still in distribution – the 1985 video, *Continental Breakfast* (co-directed with Christiane Heuwinkel) – Müller experiments with recycling dialogue and images taken from some of his favourite Hollywood melodramas:

> [T]here's an inner monologue that is put together out of film monologues – *Imitation of Life*, *Marnie*, and others. [The film's female protagonist] doesn't even have a voice of her own, even her inner voice is drawn from clichés. She says, going mad as Vera Miles in *The Wrong Man*, "We close the door. We won't let anyone in." And Tippi Hedren from *Marnie* says, "You, me, everything is so confusing." Lana Turner says, "All things go by, so what? All things go by." (Hoolboom, 92)

By Müller's own indication, the words of the film's heroine, a young woman struggling with the traumas of day-to-day domestic life, are spoken, not in her own voice, but rather through snippets of dialogue appropriated as recognizable clichés from cinematic texts – and specifically *American* texts, dubbed and distributed worldwide. The couple sharing breakfast becomes, in

Figure 9. Continental Breakfast: "struggling with the traumas of day-to-day domestic life". Courtesy of Matthias Müller.

Müller's words, a "frame" onto which a number of other texts (footage of a bombed-out Berlin at the end of World War II, headlines accompanying shocking stories in British tabloids, spoken texts drawn from Hollywood movies) may then be projected.

Thus, Müller's text not only attacks the very real social aspects of living within a frame of this nature (the relative unimportance of individuals caught in the frame of representation, the significance of individual suffering on the larger continuum of other events that serve to lessen or even negate the individual's experience, and eventually to the inability to express one's self by any means outside of recourse to already existing texts, already spoken words) but also serves to illustrate *materially* through a technique of overlapping transparencies and interwoven projections, the extent to which the articulation of subjectivity has become an intertextual operation – a multi-layered allusion, the original referent of which has become obscured or even lost. *Continental Breakfast* underscores the performative nature of behaviour in the social sphere.

By having the protagonist speak (internally even!) through scripted lines borrowed from Hollywood films, Müller distances the female character from any sort of essential notion of femininity, foregrounding the fact that the articulation of gendered identity is, in fact, a constructed and performed process that takes place within cultural and historical frameworks,

each of which brings with it a whole set of conventions and norms. The individual's presentation of himself/herself as a subject (within language, within culture) is *not* something natural, but rather something learned, repeated, and performed every day, rather like an unending soap opera in which everyone plays the part of unwitting star (or at least extra).

Even the home, the place where the characters might normally expect to be able to communicate with one another unhindered by external messages, is shown to be little more than a site for the replication and rebroadcast of mediated images and texts – a breathtakingly realistic, if somewhat imperfect, simulation of an unattainable ideal. In this sense, then, the film may be read either as a pessimistic depiction of people trapped in a *mise en abyme* of intertexts, or as an example of the wilful occupation of culturally coded-as-correct gender roles that, in its adherence to the strict rules surrounding such positions, illustrates the absurdly unnatural constructed-ness of these roles and, thus, begins to undermine, if only momentarily, the power of the dominant culture.

It is not insignificant that the character's inner monologues are drawn from the soundtracks of *Hollywood* films that have been dubbed into another language and shipped abroad as cultural commodities, narrative ambassadors of a sort, thus assuring the continued economic, stylistic, and ideological success of the classical Hollywood film and, with it, American popular culture. In the years immediately following World War II the American entertainment industry successfully dumped B-budget (and lower) productions into Germany, where the national economy had been destroyed by the war. As Thomas Elsaesser points out in his study of German cinema:

> The economics of the West German cinema have to be seen in the wider context of the United States' film industry. This is true of every Western European country since 1945, and it could be argued that the Hollywood hegemony dates back not to the end of the Second, but to the First World War. However, only in Germany after the collapse of the Nazi regime did American interests penetrate distribution and exhibition virtually without obstacle. The reason was that economic objectives complemented political goals. They reinforced each other (especially during the formative first decade between 1945 and 1955) rather more than in other countries because the newly created two German states rivalled with each other politically and ideologically. (9)

Many of the feature films to be marketed in such a way were so-called "women's pictures", post-World War II melodramas later referred to as "dramas of redomestication" in which strong female protagonists were forced into reoccupying the roles of mother and housewife after enjoying a brief respite from such domestic drudgery, their limited taste of responsibility and success coming as a direct result of the shortage of manpower that occurred during wartime. As critic Craig Owens has noted, the enemy for the post-war housewife was no longer the *Germans*, but, rather, the *germs*.

The practice of selling these narratives to defeated powers clearly compounded an already aggressive act of economic and ideological imperialism in that it problematically "feminized" (equating political and economic powerlessness with the female gender via these cultural texts and

practices) a formerly threatening presence. Müller's choice, then, to utilize the words and images of the melodrama, that most maligned genre of the dominant imperialist culture of Hollywood, in the creation of his own cinematic works manages to derail, however retroactively, the cultural project of redomestication: It effectively uses the terms of oppression as a means to respond to the oppressive culture from which they are drawn and in which the artist lives and works.

Despite the fact that he has since criticized *Continental Breakfast*, in its depiction of a heterosexual couple, as being "too far away from [his] own life" as a gay man (Müller, quoted in Hoolboom, 92), the very approach that the film-maker takes, to say nothing of the powerful manner in which he manipulates these images to illustrate the artificiality of gender constructs, undercuts, or at least reduces, any dominant cultural messages that the film-maker fears might be read into the work. Müller exposes the inner workings of the dominant system of representation – the only one available to him – and thus serves to interject a disruptive voice into this otherwise recuperative economy of signs.

Furthermore, as critic Thomas Waugh points out, the melodrama, Müller's genre of choice for source material, has long enjoyed a close association not only with female viewers, but also with gay male viewers as well:

> Melodrama is the genre that popular culture has traditionally drawn on to work out the strains of the nuclear family under patriarchy....constructed on the dynamics of hopeless passion and inevitable societal representation, undeserved suffering and impossible choices....The melodrama...has been traditionally opposed to the male genres of effective action and rationality in the outside world, from the western to the whodunit, and until the feminist renovation of the discipline of film studies, was unjustly stigmatized by film historians for this reason....[T]he melodrama has had a privileged relationship with gay men as well as women, both as audience and as producers, situated as we are, like women, if not outside patriarchal power, in ambiguous and contradictory relationship to it. (220–221)

This is nowhere more apparent than in Müller's 1990 film, *Home Stories*. *Home Stories* is composed exclusively of images taken from Hollywood films (mainly melodramas) of the 1950s and 60s reconstructed into an eerily fluid narrative. Even the soundtrack by Müller's long-time collaborator Dirk Schaefer is composed entirely of re-edited music and sounds from these very films. The film depicts a series of repeated actions that, in emphasizing repetition, reveals the limited types of activities assigned to female characters in Hollywood films. In the process, it reveals that the Hollywood narrative does not significantly differ from home movies (a similarity underscored by the fact that the film was shot on 16mm, a gauge historically associated with amateur film production in the 1950s) in that both reflect the influence of dominant standards of representation and representability and both take place, for the most part, within the domestic sphere. The intersection of the two types of productions (and by extension the two markets represented by them) underlines the claustrophobic and overpowering *mise-en-scène* in which the narrative takes place: a woman's place is, judging from these melodramas and from home movies of the same era, in the home.

The space of the home, the setting for this domestic drama, is informed and eventually controlled by classical Hollywood cinema's notions of what a "home" is. In other words, *home*, that space associated with feelings of safety and freedom, becomes somehow nightmarish – less a residence and more a set in which a scripted scenario might take place. The space through which these characters negotiate their everyday activities is now as unreal and estranged from the everyday as would be motion picture representations of it. As Freud points out in his essay "The Uncanny", the "heimilich" (the familiar, friendly – the adjective is drawn from "heim", meaning "home") becomes the "unheimlich" (eerie, threatening). (344–345)

As its title suggests, Müller's film takes place entirely within the space routinely occupied by women in mainstream texts of the time period from which the clips that make up its visual register are drawn. The activities presented range from dull, mechanical behaviour (waking and turning on lights) to full-blown hysteria (slamming doors and running down hallways). Müller's film reveals the paranoid structure – the network of looks that takes woman as "both cause and object of...aggressivity" (Rose, 141) – that underpins these narratives by exaggerating (through creative editing of the formerly separate narratives in to one) the very codes that define the classical Hollywood melodrama. Each of the women's actions is repeatedly undercut by a mirrored reaction; each attempt to investigate or flee is obstructed by another's similar attempts.

Home Stories opens with the sound of ominous music playing over darkness. A doorbell sounds as the title card – a deep, Technicolor red that visually foreshadows the plush carpeting and brilliant gladioli that appear in the sequence that follows – fades up and back into darkness. After a series of interior shots that establish the space of the narrative as a tastefully appointed bourgeois home, Lana Turner-as-Holly Anderson (the eponymous heroine of *Madame X*) is shown, lying on a bed. The room in which Turner is shown, however, differs markedly from the perfectly appointed homes of the opening shots – its furnishings are, in comparison to the splendour of the rooms in the earlier sequence, decidedly low-rent. The bed is covered by a cheap-looking chenille bedspread, its furnishings are less than spectacular. A shot of Doris Day lying in a similar pose in a darkened room follows. The image track cuts back to Turner, again in modest surroundings. She awakens from what is clearly a drunken stupor (privileged information known to fans of Lana Turner films), presumably because of some disturbance (judging from the logic implied by the insertion of a reverse shot of the closed door). A quick montage of anxious-looking women (among them other screen incarnations of Turner, Day, and Lizabeth Scott) follows, with all of the actresses exhibiting symptoms of unease and despair. The sequence ends as it began, with a shot of Turner (again from *Madame X*) that fades to black after Turner falls back onto the bed. The intercutting of these unrelated vignettes illustrates the similarity that exists between representations of what might be termed "feminine" space, and the relation of this space to the actions of the female characters within them – a relation that, as Müller's film shows, extends across boundaries of class (Turner-as-bourgeois lady/Turner-as-fallen woman). "Femininity" becomes a constant – a given – that remains firmly located at the centre of the action, but always presented within domestic spaces, and that overrides the boundaries of geographical and class distinctions. This image of femininity is thus depicted as an essential quality that extends by association with notions of passivity to

medical/psychological constructions of the "feminine" – constructions that have historically grouped homosexual men along with biological females. The works of Otto Weininger and Albert Möll, among others, for example, put forward notions of homosexuality as an inversion of sexual traits and desires; a common image of the homosexual male was that of a woman's soul trapped in a man's body.

Müller's film playfully makes a nod toward this long history of associations between women and gay men in its deconstruction of stereotypically melodramatic or emotional characterizations of the feminine; it illustrates how these tendencies – these socially learned and reinforced reactions – negate the agency of those who are subjected to their own "mechanical" (i.e., learned and repeated, *ad infinitum*) reproduction of them – a fact to which I will return later, in discussing the camp aspects of this work.

Following a series of shots that repeat the action of the opening sequence, Scott, Day, and Turner are shown again, this time along with clips of Tippi Hedren, Grace Kelly, and Kim Novak. All of the women awaken and glance warily about, as Kelly reaches and turns on a light. Turner and company rise, put on robes, and prepare to investigate. Müller cuts these actions together on movement – that is, as one character stands and pulls on her robe, another begins the same action, with the cut between the two coming, not as usual, during the pause after the completion of the action, but instead as the action is taking place, literally *on movement*, thus giving an illusion of a repeating and eternally unfinished activity. Similarly, the film's mirroring structure illustrates several views of the investigation process (with Turner, Mary Astor, and others listening at doors, peering out of windows, and walking into darkened rooms) but withholds a visual representation (in the classical sense) of the threat or the disturbance, choosing instead to represent threat through the mirroring process itself.

This is further underscored in the segment that immediately follows the one described above, in which Turner repeatedly turns on lights only to have her actions time and again undone by a host of other characters (e.g., Turner in earlier scenes from *Madame X* as well as in other film performances) or by fades to black (e.g., a close-up of Grace Kelly that dissolves into darkness). The threat within the narrative seems to arise from between the representations – that is, through the relation between discreet shots and, thus, *between texts*.

Such a structure reveals a standard cinematic formula for creating suspense and hysteria and, simultaneously, illustrates the constructed-ness of the hysterical reactions of the female characters in the classical Hollywood film. The threat, then, emanates neither from a superhuman monster nor ruthless serial killer, but rather from the limitations of the representation itself, one facet of which is the imperfect or flawed depiction of femininity – of the "feminine". Thus, it is the representational shortcomings – or, as Laura Mulvey points out in her essay on Douglas Sirk, the inability of these films to address pertinent social issues such as racial, gender, or class disparity, except as symbolically "domesticated" concerns (e.g., the subplot of passing in *Imitation of Life*) themselves that undercut the actions of the female characters who attempt to act as agents and reveal the films' otherwise invisible systems of representation. The threat, then, that finds

expression in Müller's film, remains technically repressed – that is, unspoken and unshown – and yet returns to the narrative in a different, altered form.

In his "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", Sigmund Freud points out that repressed material often finds expression by way of the very same associations through which it was repressed in the first place. These two paths (one, away from representation; the other, into representation) are mirror images of one another. Thus, what first appears to be a means of escape often leads the subject back to the very vision from which he/she is attempting to flee in the first place. In the melodrama, this forbidden material might very well be, in addition to the socio-cultural issues pointed out by Mulvey, the desire of the woman.

By focusing on the limitations of this system of representation, and at the same time, the origin of the hysteria that characterizes it, Müller's film illustrates the extent to which these films both fetishize and vilify their central female characters: the woman is forced to face herself/her desires/her own "monstrousness", as Linda Williams has pointed out. This monstrousness is implied in Müller's text through the intercutting of female characters turning to face their pursuers and finding only themselves. This pattern culminates with Lana Turner opening a door and meeting what she finds there with a look of terror. The terror, though, as the film reveals, is the woman (as representation) herself. The female agents of the narrative attempt to flee, but find no route of escape. They become literally trapped within not only the web of the spectatorial gaze, but also within a network of one another's looks and within the materialized conventions of the Hollywood narrative. What they see – what is too horrific to be depicted – is nothing more than their own selves mirrored back at them.

Again, Sigmund Freud's essay on the uncanny offers an interesting model for interpretation: In it, Freud makes mention of a startling event that occurred while he was a passenger on a train. At a certain point in the journey the door to the Freud's compartment was knocked open by a violent jolt, and when the aging psychoanalyst looked up, he noticed an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown who appeared to be walking into the compartment. As he stood to redirect the confused intruder, Freud realized that there was no stranger at all, but that he had mistakenly seen his own mirror reflection as an interloper. (371) The overall effect was, according to Freud, an uncanny one, in that what should have been intimately familiar – his own face – became suddenly different, unfamiliar, and potentially threatening.

Müller's film utilizes a reconstruction of classical Hollywood types and images in such a way as to, as Molly Haskell has described the 1960s "aging actress" horror film, "exaggerate their exaggerations".(342) The cruel cuts that link images of (and underscore the terrifying differences between) the young and beautiful Bette Davis and Joan Crawford and their aging, horrific screen alter egos "Baby Jane" and Blanche Hudson in Robert Aldrich's 1961 film *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* come immediately to mind. Crawford's near-unconscious parody of her *Mildred Pierce* persona, too, in William Castle's *Strait-Jacket*, is a perfect example of how visual attributes associated with a star's earlier, powerful persona – standards of beauty and style – can be transformed into exaggerations, and become a hideous mockery turned back onto the individual who earlier created them. It is no great surprise, then, when Crawford's

character is forced, at the end of Castle's film, to confront *an image of herself* as she fights off her own psychotic daughter, masked up to look like her mother and wielding an axe.

Müller's text, however, is not one based, as the 1960s films were, on a misogynous parody of female power. Rather, *Home Stories* speaks from and is a product of the margins: Its creator, as a gay man, occupies a problematic place with regard to patriarchal power. Its gauge, as already mentioned, is one associated with amateur or underground film production. It is distributed through non-mainstream sources and exhibited in alternative markets. It collects materials and images from what Müller refers to as a "common cultural heritage" and levels an astonishingly articulate critique at the representational and, by extension, behavioural standards that have developed out of that heritage. It likewise illustrates the extent to which this heritage fails to take into account the voices of those individuals who find themselves marginalized and, as a result, silenced and stifled by its overpowering norms. "Home", at least in its traditional representation as the privileged space of heterosexual domestic bliss, then, becomes both a place to which the outsider (in this case, the gay man) may return – a spatial entity, a nostalgic vision, an idealized memory – and at the same time a place from which he is and will remain somehow distanced, by virtue of his difference – a difference that, like the terror in *Home Stories*, finds its origins in desire.

Müller seems very well aware of this fact, and plays up this association by inserting an ironic sensibility into the meta-text he has created. This ironic distancing utilizes some of the fundamental qualities of the sensibility termed "camp". Camp, in this particular sense, is a response to the outrageous histrionics and stilted mannerisms associated with dramatic representations of a certain time period or a certain genre, perhaps best illustrated by Lana Turner's alternatively deadpan and overblown performances. Turner the camp icon was immortalized in Frank O'Hara's "Poem (Lana Turner Has Collapsed)" the final line of which ("oh Lana Turner we love you get up") appeared on postcards advertising *Home Stories*. The artist's decision to detour his voice, as a gay man, through representations of femininity stresses the fact that although gender difference is often a standard element of classical Hollywood film, *sexual* difference, on the other hand, is not. Indeed, given the historical association between gay men and women via "femininity" (an association that supposedly illustrates the pathology of the homosexual condition: neither male nor female, but something in between, incorporating the physical aspects of the first and the unstable emotional – read "hysterical" – aspects of the second) and the passivity culturally assigned to femininity, Müller's work illustrates a reclaiming and

Figure 10. Lana Turner in *Home Stories*: "one of the most challenging and entertaining works of contemporary queer cinema". Courtesy of Matthias Müller.

reformulation of those objects created within the constraints of dominant cultural modes of production.

Because of this, it seems that the ideal viewer for the film is one who is able to occupy not one, but several different spectatorial positions. In other words, the viewer who is able both to *identify* and *identify with* the clips from melodramas will be able to understand the camp subtext of the film's critique of gender. As a friend once pointed out (in reference to *Madame X*) "Camp is when you don't know whether to laugh or cry, but you want to do both." Jack Babuscio, in his "Camp and the Gay Sensibility", theorizes such a response in this way:

> [I]n order for an incongruous contrast [e.g., between youth and old age] to be ironic it must, in addition to being comic, affect one as 'painful' – though not so painful as to neutralise the humour. It is sufficient that sympathy is aroused for the person, thing, or idea that constitutes the target of an incongruous contrast. (47)

Thus, the viewer's response must incorporate both elements of sympathy/recognition and, at the same time, of denial/disavowal. The mirror image on the screen is both exaggeratedly alien and humorous, and at the same time, a little too close to the spectator himself/herself for comfort. The situation is not at all unlike Freud's uncanny encounter with his mirror image in the darkened compartment. The laughter it provokes, thus, fluctuates between denial and recognition. This vacillation of identity is further complicated by the fact that what Müller accomplishes here is to invert long-held ideas about gay men (the "woman-trapped-in-a-man's-body" theory) by, as Alexander Doty says of other similar examples, "presenting representations of 'straight women-as-gay-men'". (132)

Müller's redesigned text literally transforms the confined/confining depictions of femininity from these melodramas, and after building to an intertextual frenzy, frees the representations, both narratively (the final image of the woman running into the darkness – *out* of the confines of the home) as well as in terms of cultural usage (his film speaks from the margins and makes use of the materials he has at hand – the hand-me-downs of cultural imperialism). *Home Stories* stands as a testament, of sorts, to the very ideals presented by Walter Benjamin: it utilizes the tools of cinema and of reproduction to make strange – to "queer", if you will – and, thus, to politicize the classical Hollywood film. Its images ask the viewer to pause and reconsider years' worth of viewing experiences in a new light and, in the undeniable identificatory links they forge between women and gay men, serve to problematize notions of the camp response as uniformly misogynous. It is, of course, no small accomplishment that in this project has such wide practical ramifications – one that potentially offers so much to struggles around issues related to studies of representation, of feminism, and of queer identities, not to mention the historical colonization, in both commercial and ideological terms, of Germany in the post World War II years – and an equally wide appeal. As such, it stands as one of the most challenging and entertaining works of contemporary queer cinema.

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6

The Animated Queer

Aylish Wood

Studies of queerness in the cinema tend to focus on live-action film, but animation is equally a place where it is seen. A number of animation techniques abstract and exaggerate gesture, movement, and looking, and via a stylization of these elements can create a potential site for queering. This essay explores the work of award-winning British puppet animator Barry J. C. Purves who works primarily with stop-motion, and I argue that his adaptive staging queers the conventions of romance and heroism. As such, my purpose here is to work with Purves' animations as superb examples of stop-motion in their own right, but to also use them as a means of showing how the staging and techniques of animation are in themselves important to consider when thinking about queer cinemas.

Achilles is Purves' most explicit exploration of a queer relationship, though it is not the gay sex which makes it queer.[1] The queerness, instead, resides in the staging of the intersections between the sexual relationship and the normative practices of the surrounding social organization. This kind of intersection is a dominant aspect of Purves' diverse animations, as many revolve around a relationship, which is not necessarily sexual or even same-sex, and some kind of normative practice, both cultural and social, that exerts an influence over individuals. These include Greek heroics in *Achilles*, class-bound relationships in *Screen Play*, debauchery in *Rigoletto*, and 'speciesism' in *Hamilton Mattress*. Despite their manifest differences, the animations share the themes of masks, performance, shifting identities, and surveillance. As the staging of each both adapts and abstracts gestures, movements and looks, the animations can be seen as condensations and distillations of the cues and codes through which queerness can be recognized.

Following the work of Michel Foucault, queer readings often reveal strategies of surveillance that maintain particular social organizations as the norm. Central to such an approach is the excavation of structures ensuring the circulation of power across the continuum of practices

Figure 11. Achilles: queering the conventions of romance and heroism.

through which norms and non-norms are constituted. In Purves' work, it is as much the staging of the stop-motion animation that performs part of this process of excavation as any of the content of the stories. Visibility is fundamental to the circulation of normative power, and in the animations discussed here figures are frequently subject to surveillance by others or themselves: the central figure of *Achilles* both censures his own desire and is watched by others. The notion of the gaze has long been important in theories of cinema, having a central place in psychoanalytic approaches. The idea of a gaze, however, is just as useful for thinking about surveillance, and as a visual art cinema has a capacity to show relays of looks in action, a capacity that can be exaggerated through stylization in animation: in *Rigoletto* cutting and camera movements, in combination with figure gestures, reveal figures always over-looking the actions of other figures. The relays of looks thus establishing regimes of surveillance further rely on the visibility of the scrutinized object, and visibility brings with it the doubled potential of both censure and resistance. As *Hamilton Mattress* shows, someone who is marked out through surveillance can become a target, but equally they can form an alternative position from which resistance emerges. Visibility, however, hinges in turn on recognition, and it is the relationship between visibility and recognition that I argue emerges most strongly across Purves' apparently unrelated works.

Barry Purves is a Manchester-based director-animator, who works primarily with stop-motion puppets, though he also directs live-action theatre. Initially associated with Aardman Animations in Bristol, where he directed his first animation, *Next*, Purves runs his own production company – Bare Boards.[2] Limited staging and adaptation is a strong element of Purves' animation as he often brings together conventions from different kinds of theatre with the process of stop-motion animation. For instance, he adapts classical Greek theatre in *Achilles*, Kabuki and Shakespearean theatre in *Screen Play* and *Next*, opera in *Rigoletto* and *Gilbert and Sullivan*.[3] Through the combination of limited staging and adaptation, Purves' work draws attention to performance at several levels: bringing together diverse traditions of performance, a re-interpretation of live-action via a re-staging with stop-motion figures, and also an emphasis on performance and identity. This latter aspect particularly resonates with ideas of performativity that have been influential in queer theory.[4] That is, categories of gender, or anything else for that matter, are neither absolute nor stable; rather, they maintain stability through the reiteration of performance. Just as recognition is a key element of visibility, it is essential to the notion of performance: a performance will remain invisible if no one recognizes what is being performed. Another important point emerges from this: codes of recognition confer insider and/or outsider status on the viewer, giving them more or less cultural power. Though performativity is most frequently used to think about what is being performed, a performance often serves a double

purpose. While visibility reiterates the presence of particular identities, it also confers a viewer with status according to their access to cultural knowledge.

Next: The Infinite Variety Show features an extended play on performance, shifting identities, and the associated potential for recognition or misrecognition. Directed by Purves at Aardman Animations, *Next* is about Will Shakespeare auditioning for his place in a higher firmament by working through each of his 37 plays within the five minutes of the animation.[5] The set construction for *Next* draws on theatre: a raised stage with a proscenium arch and an auditorium for spectators. The Will figure takes the stage and with the aid of a floppy dummy enacts *King Henry VIII*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Henry IV*, and *King Richard II* within 25 seconds via a series of prop changes of headdresses, masks, and crowns. Stop-motion animation allows the exchanges between Will and the dummy to appear seamless; the manipulations of the articulated figure, the '14" Willy', give glimpses of not only characters, but also more specific moments of each play.[6] In addition, the perpetual motion of character identity, created by the shifting identifiers of continuously changing costume accessories and props, draws attention to the ways in which gestures and actions of performance, as well as conventions of dress, generate the ground for recognition. At several points in *Next* the figure is cloaked and, in one particular scene, within the timing of a single turn of the figure on the stage, he changes from a cloak designating winter to one designating spring. The association of white with winter and green with spring signals the changing identity of the figure, while the more specific props of an owl and cuckoo give clues to the particular scene: *Love's Labours Lost* act 5, scene 2. While Shakespeare's identity ultimately remains locked by his iconic appearance in the prologue and epilogue of the animation, the shifting cues to the individual plays nevertheless reveal how gestures, larger actions, and costume make something visible and give rise to cues for recognition.

The stability of Shakespeare's identity within such a mobile configuration of cues points to the problem of taking too superficial an approach to the concept of performance. As Judith Butler herself pointed out, simply acting out different genders in order to reveal their constructedness does little to disturb the social, cultural, and political structures validating or invalidating those constructions.[7] However, if the performances of the figures of *Next* are placed in the context of an audience, a different level of interaction emerges, one revealing how performance is subject to cultural power as it is consumed and judged. The on-stage framing of *Next* acts as a reminder that performance, in addition to being a representation of something, is also a visible event for someone to see. The audience of *Next* comes into play on two levels: through the figure of Saint Peter/Sir Peter Hall and the external viewers.[8] The Peter figure is the only person sitting in the auditorium and with the viewers of the animation provides the source of cultural power through which the animation operates. The Peter figure functions as a locus of power within the story-world of the animation, as he is the gatekeeper who controls Will's access to cultural status, while an external viewer provides a point of negotiation and recognition through which cultural capital emerges. While the animation can be enjoyed as a graceful stop-motion animation, where costumes seem to magically transform continuously over five minutes, it also allows the cognoscenti to trade on their ability to recognize the visual clues to the plays. Though this trading may simply take the form of a good-natured game, it also foregrounds the

process by which cultural power can accumulate within a group of consumers, as individuals demonstrate their ability to recognize and name. Two things emerge through the action of naming: a consumed object is placed within valid or invalid categories, becoming invested or divested of cultural and social power, and the namer is equally implicated by the process of naming, either condemned or condoned because of what they recognize.

The structures of surveillance and cultural power in *Next* circulate mainly around systems of knowledge. The potential for these kinds of structures to have a broader social impact surface more fully in *Achilles* and *Hamilton Mattress*, as both animations feature figures under the prohibitive gaze of other characters. In the more obviously queer animation *Achilles*, Achilles initially conforms to a gaze censoring his potential sexual relationship with another man; in *Hamilton Mattress*, the aardvark Hamilton resists the normative gaze of the bird culture of Beak City. *Achilles* draws on the story of the legendary warrior Achilles and the younger Patroclus and their deaths in the Trojan War.[9] While translations of Homer make clear the close friendship between Achilles and Patroclus, Purves' interpretation centres on their growing intimacy.[10] Indeed, the voice-over narration of the story places an emphasis on their relationship. Following the conventions of classical Greek theatre, the adaptive-staging of the animation is limited by the device of a disc on which all the action occurs. This kind of staging offers different possibilities to that seen in *Next*, where the use of a conventional raised stage with a proscenium arch places a focal emphasis on the single figure and the dummy. By contrast, in *Achilles* the more open staging on the disc ensures that the interplay between the central and more peripheral characters is given equal weight.[11] This aspect is especially important in an animation where exchanging looks establishes the power dynamic essential to the story. These looks occur between the two central figures of Patroclus and Achilles and also the Greek army. The two central figures, based on Greek statuary both in terms of their physique and stone grey colour, visibly stand out against the more peripheral figures who bear a resemblance to figures on shield paintings and friezes. In addition to the use of a central disc, the animation is bordered at the top and bottom of the screen by a stone-like effect that flattens the staging of the animation.

Within this flattened staging surveillance is visible in the ways that Achilles' censorship of Patroclus becomes entangled in the looks of the ranks of Greek soldiers, whose gazes carry the commentary of the otherwise silent chorus. Achilles censures Patroclus when the latter's acts of physical contact stray beyond the boundaries of acceptable warriorship. The animation already exaggerates the homoerotic play associated with fighting and bathing through the physique of the figures of Achilles and Patroclus, which like Greek warrior statuary are naked with well-defined musculature all wrought into the heroic dimensions of broad shoulders, narrow hips, and taut buttocks. But outside of the conventions of fighting and bathing, physical contact between the two soldiers enters into a different territory. Patroclus' explicit sexual touching, including caressing Achilles' nipples and genitals, are stopped by the latter, even though his initial but albeit brief pleasure is also visible. Such glimpses of reaction, in terms of glance and gestures, make Purves' stop-motion figures very evocative. In this instance, the shift from boisterousness to sexual play is signalled by the brief hesitant stillness of the figures as Patroclus moves his hand towards Achilles inner thigh, and also in Achilles subsequent reactions to the touch – lying

Figure 12. "physical contact between the two soldiers enters into a different territory"

beneath Patroclus, his head falls back, and his chest rises as he takes a sharp shallow intake of breath. The later sequence depicting the two men as lovers again shows off the skilled detail of the animation of the models. The intimacy of the moment is captured in the tight framing taking in the detail of their touches and kisses, along torsos, arms, legs, and buttocks. Of this sequence, a critic from *Village Voice* was moved to claim: 'More sexy than nearly all the guys in live-action flicks!'

The censure Patroclus provokes from Achilles is not simply a private matter between the two men, as it is also incorporated into the wider social organizations of army life. There are two particular instances of such incorporation. Firstly, when Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship, again reaching a moment of intimacy as Patroclus shaves Achilles, almost kissing him, is displaced into the story of Paris' seduction of Helen. Through the conventions of performance and mask-wearing, Patroclus/Paris is given leave to touch and kiss Achilles/Helen as part of the acting out of a seduction. Since these images are intercut with the gaze of the audience of soldiers, such stolen private moments became a public and doubled display of non-conforming sexuality, of Helen's adulterous affair with Paris *and* Patrolcus' desire for Achilles. Such displays of doubled desire are only allowed when the hetronormative liaison remains visible. When Patroclus/Paris begins to simulate fucking Achilles/Helen, and Achilles' mask falls to the ground, the blurred distinction between performed and actual desire is fully revealed; the sudden visibility of Patroclus' desire again provokes Achilles to censure him.

The entanglement of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship within the cross-currents of the social organization of the army camp is further revealed in another ritualized sequence – the rape of the Trojan serving woman. In this instance the power of censorship shifts to a different level. Achilles' censorship of Patroclus, while made public through the silent gazes of the soldiers, nevertheless, emerges from Achilles' own acquiescence to normative structures. But in the scene of the ritualized rape of the Trojan woman, the complex exchange of looks between Achilles and Patroclus, based on a mixture of confusion, guilt, anger, and possibly shame, is reconfigured through its intersection with that of a higher authority, King Agamemnon. Achilles' hesitation, caused by his glances towards Patroclus, as he begins the ritualized rape, results in his censorship by Agamemnon, who pushes him aside and ridicules him. Again, the glances of the

soldiers provide a silent commentary on the attempts by Patroclus to calm Achilles. Throughout the animation, the relay of looks between the potential lovers is always caught up in the cross-current of surveillance, making their desire for each other visible and subject to censorship by the other figures of the animation. It is only when Achilles and Patroclus finally become lovers that the gaze is briefly absent, as the images of the animation focus fully on the two men acting on their desire for one another. Aside from such moments of intimacy, Patroclus' death and Achilles' subsequent and brutal revenge against Hector again places their relationship within a more public domain, no more so than when they are buried side by side.

Achilles, by exploring the interplay between two lovers and also the wider social location of that relationship, places the queer desires of its central characters within a disciplining formation. The circumscribed staging in which everything is visible gives the impression that it is impossible to escape surveillance. Paul Wells suggests that *Achilles* mobilizes the structures of classical Greek theatre to explore the figure of the tragic hero: 'Achilles' private needs and yearnings for his cousin Patroclus undermine his public persona and distract him from his engagement with affecting social forces.'[12] In addition, the animation also makes visible an alternative story about structures of surveillance and desire. Not only do the figures of Achilles and Patroclus stand out distinctively, based as they are on statuary instead of shield figures, they are also unmasked, and, following the classical tradition, all the other figures of the animation are masked. Within the animation, the only time Achilles and Patroclus are masked is during their enactment of the story of Helen and Paris. *Achilles*, then, is not only concerned with Achilles' flaws as a hero, but also with unmasking and excavating the unspoken desires implicit in the mythologies of Achilles and Patroclus.

While the story of *Achilles* makes explicit the link between sexuality and surveillance, *Hamilton Mattress*, Purves' most recently released work, also plays on ideas about surveillance and identity.[13] The animation features an aardvark, Hamilton Mattress a.k.a. Sludger, who believes that there is more to life than hunting ants: 'I want to sit in a chair that goes poof. I want a drink with a cherry on top. I want to wear important trousers!' Heard drumming by the caterpillar Feldwick C. Hackenbush, a talent agent, the two set out to find fame for Hamilton and in the process develop a close friendship. Unlike *Next* and *Achilles*, the staging of *Hamilton Mattress* involves multiple locations – anthills, the streets of Beak City, a bar, a club, and a wrecker's yard – which draw on animation traditions rather than the theatrical ones of the two former animations. The absence of the distancing device of a visible arena for performance makes the staging transparent, allowing a straightforward, though comic, narration of the story of a talented figure caught up in the machinations of more jaded and powerful figures.

The regimes of power operating around the figure of Hamilton are revealed in his interactions with the inhabitants of Beak City, ones that make clear his outside status. As an aardvark Hamilton is reviled by the Beak City inhabitants, who appear as peacock-like fashion victims gasping in horror at the sight of him. The system of power operating in Beak City is not only one based on excluding difference, but also involves assimilating attractive and/or lucrative elements. The transition Hamilton undergoes from being an object of exclusion to one of assimilation reveals how controlling visibility is central to the operations of power in Beak City.

Unlike *Achilles* where the question of visibility revolved around sexuality, in *Hamilton Mattress* it revolves around perceived ugliness. Within this regime Hamilton is too ugly and so is first hidden from view, but when his drumming succeeds in drawing an audience, in order to be able to fully exploit Hamilton's music it is necessary that he becomes visible. But in order to make him visible his ugliness must be made invisible through the intervention of cosmetic development. By comically combining the elements of torture – Hamilton strapped into a dentist's chair, a chainsaw, and two 'nurses' eager to erase the evidence of his aardvarkness – with the elements of negotiation, the coercive structure at the centre of Beak City also emerges.

While Hamilton's resistance to the regime of Beak City is relatively straightforward as he refuses to be incorporated into the system, Feldwick's position is more ambivalent as he becomes the point of potential negotiation with the regime. Initially caught up in its operations, and seeing Hamilton's talent only as something that will make him rich, Feldwick relays the regime's jurisdiction over Hamilton's visibility by collaborating with the operations of the system. Like Achilles, who initially censures Patroclus, Feldwick is a focus around which power can be seen to circulate, not as an imposition from a point of obvious authority, but as a point of internalization and subsequent of re-articulation of structures of privileging the norm. Feldwick's eventual resistance is motivated by his realization that Hamilton is not simply a commodity for him to exchange with the club impresario, but has also become his friend. The importance of this friendship is underlined by a scene in a pub where Feldwick has been working his way through the vegetation on numerous cocktails. The atmosphere is established by the echoing of the music from the previous scenes in which Feldwick leaves Hamilton amongst a pile of garbage in the dripping rain – in conjunction with a high-angle shot that pulls back from the street emphasizing Hamilton's isolation, a jazz trumpet plays a *Blade Runner*-like solo. The bar scene music carries over this sense of isolation by softly echoing the tune via a piano playing in the background. The only other customer is a sailor whose activity of playing pool by himself has closed him off from connections to anyone else. Beryl, the discarded singer from the Africa Club, another victim of the regime of beauty, first chastises the weeping Feldwick and then encourages him to make up with Hamilton. Feldwick's relationship with Hamilton re-orients him within the play of power, and he too finally resists the regime of Beak City, promoting Hamilton to great success on a different music circuit. The animation closes with a set piece hip-hop performance, where Hamilton and the band (also aardvarks) are joined by Beryl as one of the backing singers. The final number acts as a celebration of refusing to be confined by Beak City, a celebration that marks sites of resistance not only as places of trouble, but also as ones where a new identity can be established.

In comparison with the other Purves animations discussed in this essay, the romance of Hamilton and Feldwick's friendship unusually reaches a happy closure. While *Achilles* ended inevitably in the deaths of its heroes, *Screen Play* and *Rigoletto* also both reach tragic conclusions for the romantic, or romantically inclined, figures. As with the other animations, both involve structures of visibility and surveillance, but in conjunction with a questioning of the conventions of romance. *Screen Play* manipulates expectations of a romantic ending by suddenly reconfiguring a story about enduring love to one of revenge. *Rigoletto* tells the story of an idealistic young woman whose belief in romance leads her to misrecognize as love the attentions of a lascivious

duke. Taken together, these two animations form a critique of the role of romantic discourse in establishing an expectation for 'happy-ever-after' endings.

Like *Achilles*, *Screen Play* involves a love that is prohibited, in this instance between the daughter of a noble man and a young male gardener. Drawing on the traditions of Japanese puppetry and Kabuki theatre, Purves makes use of limited staging to build a narrative based on surveillance and resistance.[14] The play begins with an empty stage: a boarded floor with a backdrop. Marked on the floor are two concentric circles that are revolving stages moving within and around each other. A paper screen moves from left to right, trailing bloom and revealing a figure in traditional costume placing a mask over its head. This figure is the narrator of the drama, who narrates via voice-over and British Sign Language. As the narrator sets the story in motion, two figures appear from behind him. These figures, swathed in grey, are vehicles providing a range of additional narrative devices such as props, marginal figures, and transitions. Behind these figures another screen appears depicting a male and female figure, when this divides the actual figures appear on stage. This kind of staging occurs throughout most of *Screen Play*. The framing remains static, but layers of screens draw back, or turn on the revolving stages, to reveal more elements of the story.

These mobile screens, while serving the functional purpose of enabling the progression of the story, are adapted into a location where power structures are revealed as ones engendering both surveillance and resistance. The story of the young lovers is a struggle between father and daughter. The daughter, Takoko, falls in love with the gardener, Naioki, against the wishes of the father, who wants to marry her to a more socially and financially beneficial suitor, a Samurai warrior. The motion of the screens both reveals and conceals the various moves in the lovers' courtship as well as the countermoves of the father. For example, her maid, who acts as the relay for the father's disapproval, monitors all of Takoko's movements. Concealed behind the screens, she spies on Takoko and Naioki, finally revealing the lovers to the father. The screens become material markers for the effects of opposing discourses of power mobilized by the father and daughter. As the two lovers pursue their relationship they hide behind the screens seeking to avoid hostile gazes, but are finally always revealed since the screens equally conceal the approaching threat.

There is a sense in which the screens are duplicitous elements in the story. Seeming to hide the lovers, they also hide those spying on them. They are equivalent to masks, covering and uncovering the different figures of the animation. A slippery identity also exists in the masked narrator. When he first appears, he is in the process of setting a mask on his face, and within the animation he moves between playing the narrator, the maid, and the father. All the transitions occur by sleight of hand, so the underlying face is never seen. Interestingly, at the moment when all the slippage is put to an end when the figure of an old man appears from beneath the mask, the identity of the animation itself suddenly shifts. For most of *Screen Play* the framing is via a static camera set-up, with any changes in space created by the transformations produced by the movements of screen and props. Part of the pleasure of watching the animation is the manipulation of spatial dimensions that seem to simply occur before your eyes, since the actual work of the changes is hidden by the process of stop-motion photography. For instance, when

Naioki steals Takoko away just as she is to be married to the Warrior, a screen is used to obscure her from view, and when it is removed she has gone. The static framing combines a frontal view of the stage with a slightly elevated viewing angle and creates a distance for the viewer, which is furthered by the stylization of the figures and their gestures.

This comfortable distance is suddenly shattered when the mode of narration shifts to cinematic conventions that place the viewer more fully in the space of the action. The shift is all the more shocking because the action suddenly changes from a tale about enduring love, to that of the violent revenge of the jilted Warrior. As the Warrior crashes through the paper screen to decapitate the newly revealed narrator, the obvious use of editing alters the position of the camera, placing the viewer within the space of the action, closer to events, and moved around within the space through changing points of view.[15] Instead of retaining some distance, a viewer is suddenly confronted with the effects of violence through camera placements first showing the couple clinging to each other in medium shot, and then trying to escape through the door by moving towards the camera, and so reaching towards the space also inhabited (at the level of point of view) by the viewer. This confrontation is furthered by a change in stylization. In the Kabuki-influenced sequences, blood is shown as long red ribbons. Even in the most striking image of violence, where Naioko is covered in blood ribbons following a lashing, the degree of stylization reduces its potential horror. By contrast in the final sequence, blood runs as liquid from Naioko's fatal wound of an arrow in his neck, spraying grotesquely across the white paper of the screen panels.

In the context of my argument about competing discourses of power, this confrontation of two kinds of narration can be seen as the materialization of the two conflicting discourses of romance and revenge. Just as the screens were always hiding either the lovers or the spies, the romantic ideal of enduring love flattened the potential narrative for revenge. Indeed, in the Kabuki-influenced section the Warrior was depicted as a screen painting, only becoming three-dimensional once he acts out his revenge. The effect of suddenly re-staging the animation at the moment of the romance narrative's closure re-expands the story, and gives it a tragic ending – having killed the Warrior as he attempts to rape her, Takoko commits suicide using his sword and dies next to Naioki. The deliberately distinct staging of the Warrior's return provokes a viewer into reconfiguring their responses to the story. Instead of being made comfortable by a beautifully wrought tale about love enduring against prohibition, they are challenged by an alternative reality where normative power violently reappears to destabilize the happy ending. At the level of its story *Screen Play* combines a prohibited relationship, structures of surveillance, and competing discourses, and the figures inhabit a story-world where they are caught up in conflicting circuits of power. The counterpoint staging of romance and tragedy transfers some of these elements to a viewer's experience of the animation by disrupting the pleasure of the romantic ending. Since there are no cues gesturing toward the alternative ending, its sudden emergence strikes a point of conflict in a viewer who is anticipating the happy end of the animation.

Such an incorrect anticipation of outcomes also structures Purves' version of *Rigoletto*, which forms part of the *Operavox* series of 30-minute animated adaptations of famous operas. In each

adaptation, the animation re-stages the original opera, musically performed and sung by the Welsh National Opera. *Rigoletto*, written by Giuseppe Verdi and re-worked for this production by Brian Wynne Jones, features the hunchback court jester (Rigoletto) who combines two opposing existences. Within the court of the Duke Mantua, Rigoletto is a ribald entertainer to the Duke, the latter's insatiable heterosexual appetite leads him to seduce the women around him. At home Rigoletto keeps his precious daughter under the protective eye of an older maid in order to prevent the Duke from seducing her. The stop-motion animation of *Rigoletto*, like Purves' other animations, features sets of intersecting gazes. The normative gaze in this story-world belongs to the powerful Duke, creating an unusual norm where all women will fall to his rampant predations. Cutting across this gaze are those of Rigoletto, who seeks to protect his daughter, the murderous villain Sparafucile, with whom Rigoletto makes his tragic bargain, and that of Gilda, Rigoletto's idealistic daughter.

The intersections of these gazes are especially visible in two scenes: a duet between Rigoletto and his daughter and the Duke's seduction of Gilda. As a layered construction, giving the impression of dwellings on the side of a hill joined by a series of wooden paths, the set of *Rigoletto* is particularly good for allowing different gazes to co-exist. The angularity of the space is increased as the sites of action or points of interest shift across levels and around corners. The presence of overlooking gazes is accentuated by the mobility of the camera. Combined with a series of cuts, the almost always-mobile camera glides through the space, setting aside principal figures to capture glimpses of a spy. In the duet between Gilda and Rigoletto, the camera moves into 'empty' space to show the Duke waiting for his chance. Similarly, as the Duke begins his seduction of Gilda, the camera moves downward to his cohorts and suddenly cuts into the depth of the space to reveal Sparafucile and his sister, spying on the spies.

Where *Screen Play* initially makes invisible the competing outcomes of romance or tragedy, in *Rigoletto* Gilda's mis-recognition of seduction for love, structured within the overlapping and more cynical gazes of the Duke's cohorts and Sparafucile, is fully visible to a viewer. The animation, instead of misleading a viewer towards romance, reveals the idealistic innocent caught in the debauched norm of the Duke's world. Given that Gilda's mistaken belief in the genuineness of the Duke's attentions is visible to otherwise knowing gazes, this is suggestive of both a critique of keeping someone ignorant of other possibilities, and also of a mistaken believe in the inevitable delights of romance. Rigoletto's protective regime has given Gilda access to only a discourse of romance, preventing her from becoming aware of the duplicitous and violent realities of the world surrounding her. Therefore, she does not know to be cautious, to recognize the Duke's declarations of love as a performance. Rigoletto's folly of limiting his daughter's access to knowledge is accentuated by the narrative resolution of *Rigoletto*. In the more abbreviated animated adaptation of the opera, following her abduction Rigoletto recovers Gilda from the Duke's mansion, where she has been raped and beaten. In his distress, he agrees to pay Sparafucile to murder the Duke. Sparafucile instead murders Gilda and, leaving the Duke alive, gives Rigoletto Gilda's disguised body pretending it is the Duke's. As the animation ends on an image in which Rigoletto's anguish is displaced by the smiling face of the Duke, and the latter's jaunty singing voice is heard on the soundtrack, the cynical world-view dominates. Seen as an animation about competing discourses, *Rigoletto* reflects on the dangers

of keeping someone ignorant, of not enabling their ability to recognize codes from different discourses. And far from offering a discourse of romance as a place of escape, presents it as one of dangerous delusion.

Throughout his work Barry Purves explores aspects of visibility and recognition. In his adaptive animations, *Achilles*, *Screen Play*, and *Rigoletto*, the re-staging of theatrical traditions through stop-motion animation abstracts and exaggerates movements, gestures, and looks. This kind of staging sets the ground for a queering of the stories, an outcome that is made more substantial through an emphasis on other questions of performance: fluid identities, surveillance, visibility, and recognition. Taken in such a way, Purves' work resonates strongly with queer approaches seeking to excavate how identities become entangled in systems of surveillance and recognition. Although the stories told in the animations may sometimes seem to have little to do with queerness, camera placements and staging open into view different kinds of visibility and coded cues. Not only does the multifaceted repetition of these themes make Purves' work a striking addition to queer cinema, it also draws attention to how stylization and technique in animation are as much a potential location for queering as is their more overt content.

Notes

1. Barry J. C. Purves worked as director, writer, and animator on *Next* (1989), *Screen Play* (1992), *Rigoletto* (1993), *Achilles* (1995), *Gilbert and Sullivan* (1998), and *Hamilton Mattress* (2001). His work has received numerous international awards and nominations.
2. Since working on Peter Jackson's re-make of *King Kong*, Purves is likely to extend his public profile into the more mainstream effects cinema audience.
3. I do not discuss *Gilbert and Sullivan* at any length in this essay as this animation is currently commercially unavailable. Purves has made a diary of its production history in *Here's A How de do* Diary. Barry Purves, '*Here's A How de do* Diary: March,' *Animation World Magazine*, 3 (3) June 1998.
4. Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender in *Gender Trouble*, published in 1991, remains the most influential work in this area. The unusual fact of its recent publication as a red banner 'tenth anniversary edition' points to the status of the work. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [London and New York; Routledge 1990; and with additional preface, 1999].
5. The potential thirty-eighth play, *King Edward III*, is not included in *Next*.
6. For those of us not familiar enough with Shakespeare's plays to be able to recognize the clues, a cheat to the order of the plays and the specific scenes referred to can be found at http: //www.glue.umd.edu/~andie/next.html. The website also contains some additional commentary added by Barry Purves.
7. See, for instance, Bulter's comments in the Preface of *Bodies That Matter*. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discoursive Limits of "Sex"* [London and New York: Routledge, 1993].
8. The Peter figure is a caricature of Sir Peter Hall, which also doubles within the animation as St Peter.
9. Homer tells of Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship in the *Iliad*, including Patroclus' death and Achilles' revenge killing of Hector. The story of Achilles' death from an arrow shot into his heel by Paris is told by Virgil in the *Aeneid*.

10. See, for instance, E. V. Rieu's translation of the *Aeneid*.
11. In his study of Greek theatre, David Wiles comments that the proscenium arch placed a focus on the protagonist, reducing the interplay between an actor and chorus. See David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance* [Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2000].
12. See Paul Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship* [London; Wallflower Press, 2002] pp. 52.
13. *Hamilton Mattress* was initially released as a Christmas special, and was broadcast on BBC1 on Christmas Day, December 2001.
14. See Paul Wells discussion of *Screen Play* for a commentary on the connections between this animation and Noh theatre. Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* [London; Routledge, 1998] pp. 107–109.
15. I use the word obvious in relation to editing here since stop-motion is a form of editing where an object on the screen is replaced by another, often via a seamless substitution.

Part Three: Queer Spaces

7

Bars to understanding?: Depictions of the 'Gay Bar' in Film with Specific Reference to *Coming Out*, *Les Nuits Fauves*, and *Beautiful Thing*

Steve Wharton

> The bar has a central place in gay culture. Until the 1970s, bars were the only public meeting places for homosexuals [...] It was in bars that homosexuals learned they were not the only ones. (Cruikshank: 121)
>
> In those days if you didn't find the key to the door to get on the inside you could be very lonely and very unhappy and not meet anybody. There were no gay groups, there were no clubs, there were few known bars. (Porter and Weeks: 62)
>
> That's what happens when you notice what's wrong with yourself: you go to bars, you drink, you swallow it all down. (Matthias, *Coming Out*)

Although Cruikshank speaks here of the United States, her words are perfectly apposite for the situation of lesbians and gay men in Europe at the same period (and, indeed, before and after). In the case of Britain, France, and East Germany – the countries of origin of the three films under study here – homosexuality was illegal until 1967,[1] 1982,[2] and 1968 respectively. Before and after those dates, homosexuals were, thus, prey to blackmail and threats of physical violence; Basil Dearden's *Victim* (1961) illustrates the British case clearly. Indeed, it is not until the growing confidence of the LGBT community from the 1970s onwards in western society that we see moves away from the stereotypical representation of 'the homosexual'.

The use of the terms homosexual and LGBT requires more specific definition. The 'medical' term 'homosexual' – coined by Kertbeny in the 1860s – is used here for the generic definition of lesbians and gay men; that is, someone who is sexually and emotionally attracted to another person of the same gender. The more current inclusive and arguably political (if not politicized) term LGBT – lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender – will be used elsewhere in this chapter as general nomenclature for the characters seen and discussed in the films themselves, even if they themselves self-identify as such to greater or lesser degrees.[3] The simple definitional difference between homosexual and LGBT is that the former may be seen as a generic descriptor (medically pathological) whereas the latter is a term which suggests that the individual or group using the tern has consciously chosen to self-identify as such. Thus, in simple syllogistic terms, while all LGBT people are homosexual, not all homosexuals are LGBT.

That said, everyone – whatever their sexual orientation – has a mental picture of the 'archetypal' homosexual/gay/lesbian. This question of archetype or stereotype is important. The stereotype forms a convenient shorthand, a given set of characteristics and behaviour applied to a given group which prevents logical and rational engagement with the issues under discussion. There are many examples, from the banality of the 'idle drunken student' to the more sinister use of stereotype, such as the depiction of Jews by the Nazis and other anti-Semitic groups. And, of course, particularly in this context, there is the 'classic' gay/lesbian stereotype, the "mincing gay bar loiterer" to quote a *Monty Python* sketch; in all cases, stereotype in order to provoke ridicule, ostracism, and, thus, conformity. And conformity is the requirement, for in terms of social control, as Richard Davenport-Hines says in his *Sex, Death and Punishment*:

> [It] is the process which creates deviant roles, like those attributed to the homosexual or the addict or the homeless and jobless. It erects an unmistakable and fortified frontier between the realms of permissible and impermissible conduct to stop people from drifting casually across the border into deviant behaviour [....] Stereotyping segregates the deviants or defectors, isolates their behaviour, and thereby bestows on them loyalty to a narrow group. (Davenport-Hines: 56)

Any group thus segregated and isolated – often subject to persecution – will naturally seek 'safe space' in which its members may gather, gaining, thereby, a feeling of solidarity (as indicated in the opening quotation). In the case of the persecuted homosexual, this could be the 'gay bar', itself often tucked away off the main drag of venues in towns and cities, in insalubrious areas, often on the margin (as was, indeed, its clientele). We should note in passing that the town or city itself also has an important part to play in the development of an individual's gay identity. Whilst critics of urbanization lament its undoing of the traditional ties and 'family units' which have characterized 'village life', the very anonymity of the town or city arguably gives gay people the very freedom they seek to express themselves without fear of heteronormatively judgemental response from those very 'traditional', 'family'-based networks they have fled in their home environment.[4] There is a further irony to any perception of the gay bar as venue and safe space since the traditional British construction of the bar *qua* bar is where 'real men' go to congregate; a traditionally woman-free, all-male (here heterosexual) space. So its further subversion (perversion?), as a space where 'those types' go, renders the

gay bar doubly problematic for heteronormative society. Not that it is necessarily unproblematic for its clients; as a space of sexual identity-making and hypothetical locale of coming out,[5] the very delimiting of the gay bar within a town or city or alternatively its isolation in situational/geographic terms, means that those going there are 'identifiable' as LGBT and thus may be attacked on leaving by homophobes.

We should not forget the seminal role of the gay bar – *the* gay bar – in arguably defining the start of contemporary LGBT political consciousness: New York's Stonewall Inn – 'A backstreet, unlicensed centre for blacks, "scantily-clad go-go boys", drag queens, and drug trafficking' (Edwards: 25) – was the venue of the so-called Stonewall Riots starting on 27 June 1969 following yet another police raid of the premises; the Riots are acknowledged as the moment that 'limp wrists turned into fists' (Edwards: 25) contributing to the formation of America's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) within a month.[6]

In more general terms across western democracies, as time has progressed and society became more tolerant in line with raised consciousness of LGBT rights from the 1970s to the present time, gay bars and clubs began changing, some moving from back-street, dimly-lit establishments to glass-fronted city-centre style palaces; rather than keeping prying eyes out, the time had come for the inward gaze to be invited to see what was not going to go away. In line with changing and more tolerant attitudes, what was once a venue only hinted at, a place with 'a reputation' now happily advertises itself in gay guides and directories or even on the Web; as we shall see in one of the films under discussion, those guides themselves continue to play their part in helping young LGBT people to assume their sexual identity.

As Bailey (Bailey 2001: 231) reminds us, the first studies of (homo)sexual social space were undertaken in the San Francisco gay community in the 1970s by Manual Castells, Don Lee, and Karen A. Murphy. Much has been written on the 'gay bar' as social phenomenon since then, though such studies have tended to concentrate on the socially observable and not the filmically commentative.

This chapter will investigate the depiction and role of the 'gay bar' in three films: British director Hettie MacDonald's *Beautiful Thing* (1993), East German Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989), and French director Cyril Collard's *Les Nuits Fauves* (hereafter *Savage Nights*) (1992). In the first two cases, the bars specifically target LGBT clientele; the third case is instead one of a (presumed straight) space in which a transvestite is seen and tolerated as a source of amusement, a space which later becomes the site of, arguably, homoerotically inspired violence. In the first two bars we are able to observe both stereotypical activity and behaviour, though in the case of *Coming Out* it is at times arguably both negatively judgemental on the clientele in terms of visual imagery and yet provides for criticism of the then dominant, but rapidly to disappear, régime through the narrative imagery of one of the bar's gay clients.[7] In the third, the sexuality of clients is unimportant in terms both of the film's storyline and characterization.

The three films are from three vastly different national, political, and social régimes: the traditionally sexually repressed British, the less judgemental and traditionally sexually liberated

French,[8] and the dourly socialist East German in which sex had a primarily reproductive function.[9] National boundaries *per se* may not be relevant here since, as Cruikshank argues taking Dennis Altman's interpretation, the notion of gay community depends on a gay culture since homosexuals have no common country or language to bind them. If this is the case, what then are the perceived and portrayed similarities and differences between these bars and their culture across national boundaries, brought together as they are following such reasoning, by a 'gay bar culture'? Even if this is not the sole definitional locus of any group or community? In seeking to answer these questions we shall be concentrating on key scenes from the films, drawing on their use of image and verbal and visual narration in their depiction of the gay bar and its clientele. Further, if as Tony Curtis suggests in the film of Russo's *Celluloid Closet* the cinema teaches one how to act (as Curtis was keen to point out in his case, around a woman), [how] do these films teach young gays and lesbians how they might in turn act? And what might we learn in consequence? And how does the duality of this chapter's title – physical space providing for/impediment of, understanding – serve these questions? Whilst we shall not recount every aspect of each film's storyline, certain key elements of plot shall require recounting to inform readers who have not seen the films in question.

Starting with *Beautiful Thing*: the film's principal protagonists, Ste and Jamie (the former bullied by a drug-dealing brother and beaten by him and an abusive father, the latter a quiet lad in a single-parent family bullied at school for perceived homosexuality), realize and articulate their love for each other following Ste's unexpected 'top and tail' stopovers at Jamie's as a result of parental abuse. Once the boys have begun their relationship (and Ste has used five pounds given to him by Jamie's mother to 'buy something for [his] girlfriend' – Jamie told her that Ste was in love – to buy a hat for Jamie), they discuss what they might do next. Having shown Ste the advice section of *Gay Times* and bantered over some of the lonely hearts ads, Jamie turns to the magazine's directory and suggests a visit to local gay venue The Gloucester, a short bus ride away from their Thamesmead Estate home. Within the bar the cinema-going audience sees men and women enjoying themselves (some kissing) as a drag show goes into its interval to the strains of *Hava Nagila*: "Bless our nation".[10] Ste and Jamie are then gently teased by the drag artiste as first-time visitors, the artiste emphasizing their youthfulness and attractive qualities whilst also appearing protective or maternal.[11] The boys show no sign of appearing threatened (though at the beginning Ste appears briefly shocked by such open displays of affection in the bar as kissing) and are made to feel completely at home, among their own; the sequence finishes with a cut to the two of them running through and kissing in the woods to *Make Your Own Kind of Music*; they are simply two normal lads who just happen to love each other.

This depiction of a welcoming and embracing culture in The Gloucester has parallels with that of the unnamed East German bar in Carow's *Coming Out*; here it is the film's protagonist, Philipp, who is less willing to accept his sexuality. Jolted by a visit from his girlfriend's gay friend with whom he previously had a relationship in their youth, to question the (apparent?) heterosexuality he had adopted when the relationship finished, he walks past a bar, seen to be brightly lit from within. A group of boisterous gay customers comes out and sweeps Philipp inside. All of the bar's clientele are in fancy dress (it is a costume party) save for an older man at the bar; the male bar staff exchange questions in 'sing-song', 'feminine' voices. Philipp is

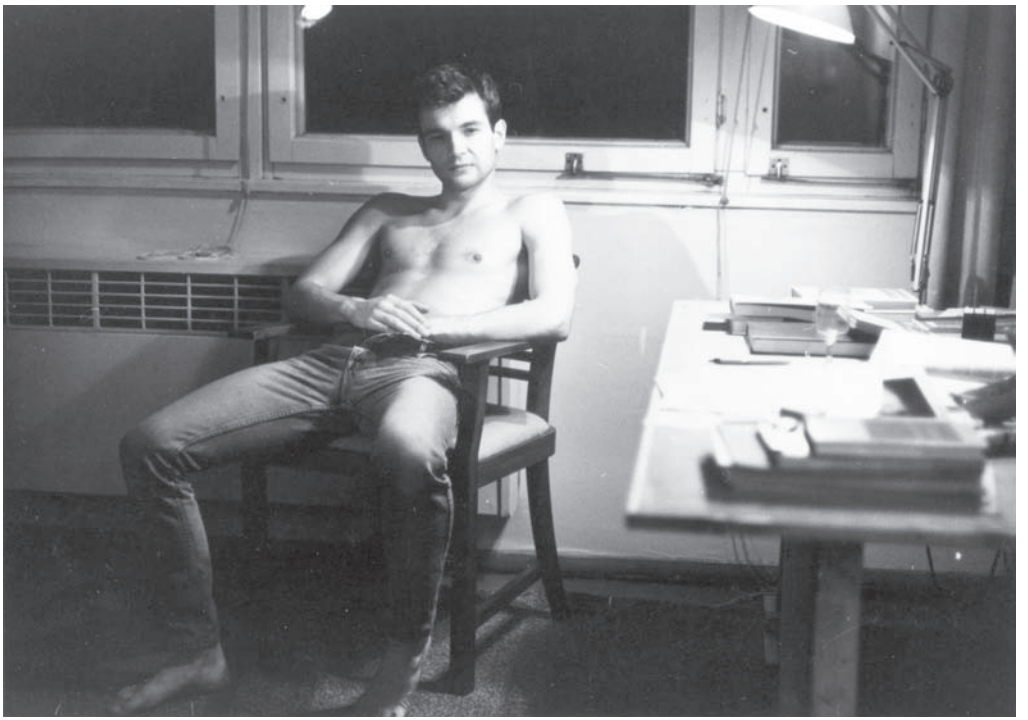

Figure 13. Matthias Freihof as Philipp in *Coming Out* (1989).

anxious to state that he has only come in for cigarettes, to be told by the barman, "Don't be afraid – everyone starts somewhere; be brave". The older man at the bar (whom we later learn is called Walter) offers him a cigarette. The camera takes Philipp's place as he observes men kissing, and a couple, one man in Lycra, the other bare-bottomed and in leather chaps. He then hears someone talking about the difficulties of working on a building site and turns to observe someone in drag. Shortly afterwards the camera once again takes Philipp's place as we observe a young man dressed as a Pierrot; their eyes meet and they exchange a smile as the lyric "You make the sun shine in your smile" plays on the bar's sound system and is heard on the soundtrack.

Philipp becomes increasingly drunk during the rest of the evening – as cinema audiences see a brief sequence of single shots of a dragged-up client having lipstick applied, an older client pestering a younger one, and a single man crying, and increasing intercutting which suggests flirting between Philipp and the party's DJ – and rebuffs a concerned dragged-up client who tells him not to drink with, "What do you want from me? I'm nothing to do with you". He then falls off his stool, insensible, and is taken home and put to bed by Walter and the young Pierrot. Waiting in the queue to get tickets for a birthday treat concert for his girlfriend, Tanja, Philipp meets the young Pierrot; they spend time together and Matthias (for that is his name) invites him to his birthday party at the bar in which they met. Leaving Tanja in bed to attend the party,

Philipp takes Matthias to his flat and the pair make love. However, his inability to face his homosexuality leads him to lose both boy and girl. He visits other bars to try and find Matthias, and when he returns to the bar to ask is told by the barman, "No-one knows anyone's name or address: everyone's alone, everyone's afraid". Philipp's mother subsequently visits him in the school in which he works and tells him how unhappy he makes her. Having subsequently gone to another bar and discovered that Matthias has moved on and found himself another boyfriend (ironically enough, one of Philipp's own pupils), he is seen returning drunk and self-indulgently self-pitying to the bar in which they first met. During the performance of a song by a drag artist, he distributes flowers and sings loudly and off-key in competition with the artiste. Walter attempts to calm him down and is rebuffed with force, Philipp shouting "Get your hands off me you filthy old man" as he pushes him to the ground. As the barman moves to eject Philipp, Walter calms the situation saying that it arose from a misunderstanding, and he and Philipp move to a corner table to drink the two cognacs ordered by Walter. Philipp then begins to weep and lament the difficulty of his position: "Do you know what that means, [being] a teacher and gay?" Walter's laconic "There's worse" as he downs his cognac, is the starting point for him calmly to tell the hard-hitting tale of his own situation. To shots of slightly anxious-looking clients sitting in pairs or by themselves – observed by the camera in passing, since they have no direct bearing on the tale he is telling – Walter asks rhetorically if Philipp knows what it is alike as an older gay man sitting in a bar, buying drinks for other (younger) people in the hope that they might at least speak to them, "Why can't we be seen [to be] as helpful and human as others?". While such a comment reflects the ageism arguably prevalent in today's gay scene, it also reinforces (to a sceptical audience) the stereotypical image of the sad old gay man waiting to pick up a younger 'victim' whilst also eliciting sympathy with a request for fair and equal treatment. Walter goes on to recount his fate and that of his lover during the 1930s and how he ended up in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. At this mention of Sachsenhausen the camera cuts to a brief shot of one of the bar's clients dressed in a leather cap, providing an imagery of camp commandant in both senses of the word and bringing together past and present. Walter tells Philipp how he joined the Communist Party (CP) while in the camp for solidarity and survival and how the CP treated everyone equally: "Who cared if the person next to you was a Jew?". However, he follows this immediately with the condemnation of the regime which will have hit home in contemporary East German cinema-going audiences: [12] "But they forgot about the homosexuals".... On this pointed comment and downing his *n*th and final drink, Walter leaves, leaving Philipp on his own in a corner; the image clearly denotates Philipp's isolation from the very 'scene' of which he has sought to be part and shows him literally to be in a corner.

During Walter's review of his trials, shots have shown a butch lesbian inveigling younger women, effeminate gay men, and sad and anxious singles and pairs/groups in the bar. Other images of gays and lesbians in the film are equally stereotypical. In one sequence, Philipp is out one evening and hears a shout of "Queer!" thinking (with apparent fear of outing) that he is the one being addressed, he observes a group of skinheads attacking a young man with dyed hair and kohled eyes and flees the scene as the youth is attacked. (This action is in stark contrast to that when out in a previous sequence with his students and seeing a black man attacked. First he, then his students pitch in and expel the thugs from the underground train.)

Figure 14. Jean (Cyril Collard) and Laura (Romane Bohringer) have one of their controversial 'quickies'.

Further stereotypical depiction comes with a sequence showing late-night cruising in the park (where Philipp goes for physical contact arguably to find another Matthias, only to find instead – to his obvious surprise and disappointment as the man leaves while he is preparing a post-coital coffee – a quickie/one-night stand).

Cruising and quickies are a recurrent theme in Collard's *Savage Nights*, as its HIV-positive bisexual protagonist, Jean, haunts the *entrepôts de Bercy* – the run-down warehouse district on the banks of the Seine in Paris – in search of sexual release with anonymous and multiple partners. As already indicated, the bar in the film is not strictly gay, more a *bar du quartier* or typical Parisian bar/café, its inclusion here arising from its role as a locus of arguably homoerotically inspired violence.

Readers may well be aware of the controversy surrounding the film or, more precisely, the polemic which developed following its being awarded four *Césars*, France's Oscar, shortly after the death from ARC of bisexual director and principal protagonist Collard (who played Jean in the film). *Savage Nights* was subsequently condemned for its *post-mortem* lionizing of a director whose film portrayed a man (Jean) able to make love to a woman (Laura) without a condom and played by someone who had himself died of a syndrome which was arguably contracted from unprotected sex. Further polemic was engendered since in the film the main character, Jean, insists that his *male* lover Samy wear a condom, without which he will not permit them to make love.

This move towards the men's lovemaking in the film is directly bound up with homoerotic violence located within a bar setting. In general terms of violence and sexual arousal, at a point in the film in which Jean has been cruising at Bercy, Samy in parallel has been to the home of Monsieur André, he being the shady sponsor of Samy's rugby team who has previously been referred to as "a tom". Samy is separated from the rest of the rugby team in their heterosexual cavortings elsewhere in the house and taken to the attic, where he finds Monsieur André virtually naked and chained in 'traditional' S&M fashion; he proceeds to beat him. He later tells Jean that he found the experience sexually arousing. Later – and of particular interest here – it is as a result of the violence experienced by Samy as he and his fellow rugby thugs attack people in the very bar in which we have seen Jean and Samy joking with a transvestite singing the 1930s hit on domestic violence made famous by Minstinguette, "My Man (Mon homme)",[13] that Samy is able to say to Jean on returning home, "Je t'aime". And subsequently, he tells Jean that he wishes to make love. Jean's reaction is an initial "You know what you're doing?" and, then, differently from that with Laura, "Fetch a condom". Samy's reply that he has none is met with the injunction to fetch one from the bathroom, and he says that he does not need one; Jean's reply is a categorical, "No fuck without a rubber". Later in the film when Samy has split from Jean and become more involved with neo-Nazi thugs, Jean finds and rescues him from this situation by seeking him out at another bar – not a gay bar – as violence is taking place; it is Jean's threat to smear his own HIV-contaminated blood on the thugs' ringleader, which ensures Samy's release from the gang. Thus, blood, normally seen as the outcome of violence, itself becomes the vehicle of violence.

The films' key depictions discussed, let us turn in conclusion to the inferences which may be drawn from them. We start with the implications of the films' titles: *Beautiful Thing* (positive and upbeat; indeed, the film starts with a rainbow – traditional symbol of the LGBT community – over the bleak modernist Thamesmead Estate and finishes with Ste and Jamie dancing together on one of the estate's esplanades, watched by a generally admiring crowd); *Coming Out* with its implications of a sometimes difficult part of the process of LGBT self-realization, starting with the stomach-pumping of an attempted suicide (Matthias) who says that he tried to kill himself because he was homosexual; and *Savage Nights*: violence and darkness – much of the film's action (especially in terms of sexual activity and the specific acts of violence cited above) takes place at night.

In the bars in all three films we can observe a male and female clientele (though females are in the minority), with same-sex flirting and kissing in *Beautiful Thing* and *Coming Out*. Although the musical sequences in this latter film are a depiction of the more boisterous and traditionally 'gay' musical elements of the bar scene as we have seen also in *Beautiful Thing*, there is also a tendency towards an arguably more downbeat, depressed depiction of some of the bar's clientele, with older, 'sadder-looking' men and women. Certainly, elements of the narrative and character dialogue have a negative side which is absent from the bar sequence in *Beautiful Thing* (though outside the bar, Ste has issues over the boys' relationship before it reaches final resolution). Joy is expressed through song and audience participation in both *Coming Out* and *Beautiful Thing*, whereas music (outside a bar context) serves as catalyst for violent outburst and

catharsis in *Savage Nights*. All three films have male principal protagonists: in *Beautiful Thing* he is young and gay, in *Coming Out* older and uncertain of his sexuality (having 'played straight' and suppressed his homosexuality until the chance encounter with a school-time old flame), in *Savage Nights*, bisexual. The different nationalities of director and protagonist do not result in different treatment of the key issues surrounding homosexuality as depicted in the narrative of the three films; they are essentially the same.

In all three cases, the bar provides a locus of self-realization: Ste and Jamie have their first proper date out together; Philipp meets Matthias in the bar and, having lost him, has his self-pity challenged with a story much more physically and emotionally trying for its narrator, Walter, than Philipp's maudlin whining; and it is after the violence in the bar that Samy tells Jean of his love for him. In all three cases the realization and articulation of the characters' homosexuality is not without problematic repercussions for them and their circle. Yet, as may be said of the coming-out process, in general, the first step is always the hardest.

The title of this chapter was deliberately chosen for its duality: the bar as a means of, and impediment to, understanding of homosexuality. We have observed how within the narrative line of the films discussed, characters achieve (self-) understanding in acknowledging aspects of their sexuality. Cinema audiences will either have their perceptions or prejudices challenged as a result of what they see or be confirmed in them; Philipp's surprise on seeing the dragged-up bricklayer in *Coming Out* arguably demonstrates how gay people themselves have preconceptions which can be challenged.

The three films discussed here demonstrate that as social space or location for participant or observer – straight or gay – the 'gay bar' develops understanding rather than impeding it.

Notes

1. Final decriminalization through equalization of the age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual acts at 16, was not achieved until 2001.
2. The Vichy government's discriminatory paragraph, introduced in 1942, was finally repealed in 1982. See Wharton (1998).
3. The gender specificity of the characters in the films discussed in this chapter excludes the female.
4. See the Jimmy Somerville song, "Smalltown Boy" (Bronski Beat, 1984).
5. Not that this comment is intended to suggest that the gay bar necessarily forms part of the coming out process of every LGBT person...
6. The British GLF began in 1970, though not with the same violent impetus.
7. The film, the first to treat homosexuality so openly in the GDR, was ironically enough first screened on 9 November 1989, the day of the fall of the Berlin Wall.
8. The French Revolution had decriminalized homosexuality, and it was only in 1942 that the collaborationist Vichy régime was to recriminalize it (as observed above, forty years were to pass before the repeal of the offending paragraphs from the Penal Code).
9. The position of LGBT people in East Germany did not necessarily improve following decriminalization; ignorance and denial of their existence continued to be the norm.

10. Is it too fanciful to see an oblique reference here to a Queer Nation? It is certainly the song of an historically oppressed people.
11. Thereby indirectly smashing the heteronormative and homophobic charge laid against homosexuals that they are out to recruit and seduce credulous young people into their perverted ways.
12. We should not forget that until it became fashionable on the left to see gays and lesbians as a persecuted minority worthy of support, communism viewed homosexuality as a bourgeois indulgence and continues to do so in less 'enlightened' régimes.
13. The lyrics in translation include, "He thumps me/He takes my money/I'm at the end of my tether/ But despite it all/What do you expect?"

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8

Queer as Turk: A Journey to Three Queer Melodramas

Barış Kılıçbay

> The question is not so much whether homosexuality
> exists throughout, but how it is there. You can see it at the cinema.
>
> Henning Bech (1997: 56)

I

In November 1997, a group of 76 people, including "gays, lesbians, transvestites, transsexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals" (Karakış 1997), went to a movie theatre in Ankara to watch a new film entitled *Hamam*. Some of them knew the storyline, but none of them were sure of what to expect. This collective film-watching proved to be a unique experience:

> Francesco started kissing Mehmet and... loud applause reverberated in the hall. To be honest, there was nothing but two guys kissing on the screen. I don't remember how many kisses I've seen on the tv, and I had never thought of applauding any. But this very kiss was a real excitement for us. We had waited for so long to see this single scene. This applause meant a lot to me: 'at last, this is what I want!'(Mustafa 1997. Translation mine.[1])

This event was organized by Kaos GL, a LGBT organization established in Ankara, and responsible for the publication of the monthly "gay and lesbian studies journal", *Kaos GL*, the first queer journal in Turkey. This event featured in the next issue of the journal, and it was commented as not only a new visibility for queer people in the public sphere (i.e. the movie theatre), but also a celebration of homosexuality in a mainstream (and Turkish) motion picture.

Hamam proved to be one of the most celebrated 'Turkish'[2] films ever made.[3] Whether Hamam may be classified as a "gay film" is not a concern of this essay. I will focus on queerness in recent Turkish cinema rather than the presumed queerness of the films. However, I will briefly discuss, in relation to gay identity politics (in Turkey), how "queer" or "gay" film as a category, is conceptualized by extra-diegetic "actors" of the films: the director, the critics, and the audience.

When *Lola + Bilidikid* won the Istanbul film festival's Audience Award in the international competition, it opened in eight theatres in Ankara and Istanbul, where, for the second time after the *Hamam* event in Ankara, queer people organized a special cinema-gathering. A member of Lambda Istanbul, another queer activist group, said that this event "made gays unify together for the first time in cinema" (The Advocate 1999). The Hamam gathering in Ankara shows that to be untrue, but given some antithetical differences between the two films, which I will try to show in the following, these two queer events could be seen and read separately.

"The gay-political meaning of watching queer films" (Erol 2003) entails more than a simple visibility of queer people in heterosexual spaces, it is rather a politics of representation, reclaiming and supporting representation of queers in films. But this is not enough: these politics seek (positive) representation of queers in movies made by queers themselves. Given the fact that there is already a bunch of Turkish films treating gays, lesbians, and transgenders "in a negative hue", what is desired is complete queerness of the whole film, including the thematic content, the characters, and the director. In 1997, Ferzan Özpetek, the director of *Hamam*, was still in the closet, but the queer activists received his film enthusiastically, since they were at last granted with a positive representation. Later on, Özpetek came out of the closet in Italy,[4] where he lived, though the interviews he had previously given to some Turkish newspapers and magazines would have sounded odd to anyone who 'suspected' that he could be gay. He was closeted in Turkey in any case, and impersonating a straight film-maker, or rather a film-maker who doesn't care about those issues, viz. identity politics. Responding to a journalist who asked how he reacted to "accusations concerning the presumed homosexuality in the film", Özpetek said: "I don't approve of such a concept as homosexuality. I think sexuality shouldn't have boundaries. I could fall in love either with a man or a woman" (Radikal, November 1997, emphasis mine), and: "I believe in sexuality as a whole, I am against clear-cut definitions of sexuality and gender" (Turkish Daily News, September 1999). In another interview, however, Özpetek refers to the homosexuality in his film as "crooked" (çarpık) (Beyazperde, October 1997). He goes on to argue that the Italian protagonist, mesmerized by both Istanbul and the wonderful hospitality of the Turkish family, could well have fallen in love with a female member of the family, like the daughter or even the mother. The same line is parroted by Mehmet Günsür, who played Mehmet, the son who seduced Francesco in the hamam (Yeni Yüzyıl, May 1998), and by Alessandro Gassman[5] (salon.com, 1999) who played Francesco. Although *Hamam* was being screened (and receiving awards) in several international gay and lesbian film festivals and hastily defined as a gay film, the director and the actors themselves constantly refused to so name it and even disavowed homosexuality (in the case of Özpetek). The most cited scene in *Hamam*, the one that generated the loud applause in November 1999, is where Francesco kisses Mehmet. Apart from this scene, there is no visual reference to homosexuality in

the film. On the contrary, the conversations Mehmet and Francesco have in the days following this event are definitely heterosexual. They talk about "chicks", Mehmet's girlfriend, and his future marriage,[6] and Mehmet reveals to Francesco the secret way to the roof of a women's hamam so that they can stare at naked female bodies. This complete denial of this presumably one-time affair[7] might lead us to the assumption that neither Mehmet, nor Francesco, is actually homosexual, but is tempted, during this isolated incident (or maybe other previous incidences), with the irresistible perverse effect of the oriental environment. As I show below, this is exactly what Özpetek wants the audience to believe. This "forbidden" eroticism is, however, trivialized by Francesco when he makes a joke about it during a conversation with Marta, who confronts him about the affair she has just witnessed, says: "I betrayed you with a man", Francesco replies calmly: "so did I". Some critics have praised the film for offering a non-essentialist concept of homosexual experience, which is "part of the human totality, an option that is open to all, should they choose to explore that avenue, and not some separate and exclusive category" (Kakmi 2000). Seen from this point, there is hardly anything gay in *Hamam*, whereas it is undoubtedly queer, since the (in)famous kiss scene challenges heteronormative roles.

A newspaper article (Hürriyet, November 1997) somewhat supported Özpetek's idea of "non-homosexuality of the film": "I think that Francesco and Mehmet don't experience homosexuality in the known general way, they rather show a bonding of intense love".[8] A comment that reproduces a classic discourse about homosexuality: obsession with sex, absence of love. Another critic stressed the originality of Özpetek's portrayal of homosexuality:

> The male bonding in the film is unique as it doesn't assert homosexuality as an antithesis to heterosexuality. Nor does it depict homosexuality as a distinctly different sexual practice as in many mainstream gay films. Homosexuality in *Hamam* is the final phase of male bonding in a sexually segregated society, in which sexes have the least chance to communicate. A longing for interaction, love and contact unravels as a homosociality, rather than a clear-cut homosexuality (Turkish Daily News, October 1997)

II

Kutlug Ataman, himself, the director of *Lola + Bilidikid*, is proud of being "the only openly gay filmmaker in Turkey" (The Advocate, December 1999; Radikal, June 1999). He argues, in another interview, that the biggest difference between his film and all the others [made in Turkey] on this topic [homosexuality], is that he is gay, and the others are not: "I nonetheless consider these films very important steps but it is about time now to make our own films" (Radikal, June 1999, emphasis mine). For Richard Dyer "it [...] matters who specifically made a film, whose performance a film is". He argues that lesbian/gay film-makers had access to lesbian/gay sign systems that would have been like foreign languages to straight film-makers (Dyer 1991: 188). On the other hand, Henning Bech argues that modern homosexuality (or "absent homosexuality", as he calls it) "is characterized by being something which is both everywhere and no place at all, something everyone wants and doesn't want, something everyone knows and knows nothing of" (Bech 1997: 39). Bech maintains that homosexuality can be present in a more or less distinct or ambiguous manner, it can be associated with individuals, speech, or actions, be present in a single scene (of a film) or from beginning to end, but "it is there – or,

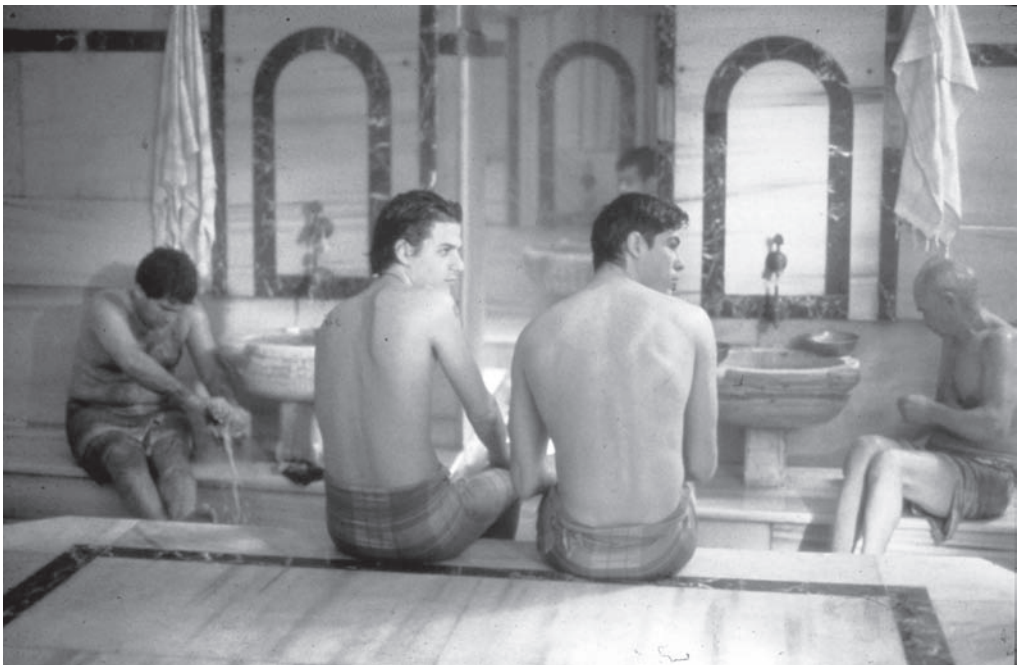

Figure 15. The "forbidden" eroticism of Ferzan Ozpetek's *Hamam/The Turkish Bath* (1997).

in any case, you never know if it is not" (65). Bech's arguments about modern homosexuality stands halfway between Dyer's theory of queer authorship, which excludes heterosexuality, and a recent recuperative tendency in queer film studies, to identify homosexuality hidden in or behind the filmic text, whether the director is known to be queer (closeted or otherwise) or not, in an attempt to uncloset authors, performers, and characters. The re-birth of the (queer) author, as theorized by Dyer, is celebrated by Ataman who declares himself the first openly gay film-maker in Turkey and thus claims legitimacy for his film, while deploring the image of the homosexual as a caricature in previous Turkish films: "[Turkish] society is not unfamiliar with stereotypes and caricatures [...] It is easier to attack and supress people reduced to caricatures" (Radikal, June 1999). Ironically, Ataman himself uses the caricaturization – which is what he criticizes in other films – with heterosexual characters in Lola: Murat's and (Lola's) raspingly homophobic and patriarchal brother, Osman, and their passive and submissive mother (without even a name) are nothing but overstated caricatures. The brother lacks humanity and the mother personality and courage.[9]

Ataman says that *Lola* is made for heterosexuals, not for homosexuals, hence, its success as a "second generation gay film" (Aktüel, June 1999). In another interview, however, he confides that Lola is not a gay film – because this is a dated category – but an "international film", and adds that homosexuality is not even the issue (Radikal, September 1999).[10] When asked why his film collected all the reactions while other Turkish films with a homosexual content didn't, Ataman says: "The characters in Lola are disturbing, because they are real and Turkish. In fact

Turkish people have been watching foreign gay films for years, but as soon as Turks make the same, they are embarrased. This is hypocrisy" (Radikal, June 1999, emphasis mine).

Binary oppositions, and victimizations of the queer diasporic subjects – whether they are drag queens or macho street hustlers – work at many levels of the narrative to create what Deniz Göktürk calls "a cinema of duty" (2001: 133). This cinema has been crafted by first-generation Turkish film-makers in Germany who were expected to make films about the problems of their people, to exhibit their "foreign culture" (137), and to "reveal" its undesirable face. For Hamid Naficy, Turkish film-makers, accepting this itinerary imposed upon them by funding agencies, "become complicit with their own self-othering, and confirmed the dominant prejudices against themselves" (Naficy 2001: 196). Although *Lola* is a recent film, it falls more easily into this category than with a cinema celebrating the "pleasures of hybridity" (Göktürk: 138). A striking difference between the first phase Turkish-German films and *Lola*, however, is the fact that the latter deals with the old trope of "being lost between two cultures" in an original way, dropping the hint that things might be working the same way back "home". Ataman says, in an interview, that he had thought, before visiting Berlin for the first time, that queer-bashers were typically neo-Nazis, but that he witnessed later on, that Turkish immigrants were greater in number in attacking and killing queers (*Aktüel*, June 1999). Sam Rohdie states that film-makers are expert in cinema, not social theory; and that film worlds are fictional: "the cinema, primarily, is not a commentary on life, but a commentary on cinema" (cited in Morris 2001: 172). However, both Ataman and Zeynep Özbatur, the co-producer, state that *Lola* is a realistic picture, if not "real". Zeynep Özbatur claims that while *Hamam* is made for tourists, Lola is "much closer to the truth" (*The Advocate*, December 1999). Thus, Ataman did not aim at creating a fictional world as Rohdie suggests, but he wanted his film to tell the "real" story of migrant queer Turks in Berlin. He said elsewhere that he made this film to fight the oppression of queer people in Turkey, to "expose his culture's brutality, macho posturing, and a sex trade where gay johns are so self-loathing that male prostitutes typically have to dress as women, as Lola's macho boyfriend demands he do" (*The Advocate*, ibid.). And thus he declared the main mission of his film: "In Turkey the only option is to change people's perceptions and educate them" (*The Advocate*, ibid.). So, *Lola* is not only a piece of entertainment, but also an educational project.

Contrary to what Ataman asserts about his film (that it is a 'second generation gay film'), some criticized *Lola* for having used rather dated tropes and discourses, such as an exaggerated conflict between homophobic heterosexuals (and the fact that one of the queer-bashers turns out to be a closet gay) or the tragic death of the queer "heroine",[11] to which Ataman responded thus: "I lived with these people on the streets. That's a very difficult life. Some of them were even killed, when I was there. All this touched me very much, and I inserted those stories in my film". For Ataman, the violence he depicts is not western, but Turkish, reflecting Turkish people's homophobia (*Aktüel*, June 1999). The critic of *Empire Online* similarly criticized the film for being a mere flashback to the German cinema of the 70s with "the odd explosion of ultra-violence as tragedy queens get beaten up in toilets" and showing all gay men self-hating and violent (April 2000).

Other critics dismissed *Lola* as obsolete in terms of representation of homosexuality and queer people.[12] Edward Guthmann notes:

> Had "Lola and Billy the Kid" been made in the United States, it would be easy to dismiss as dated and stereotypical. But judging by the homophobic reaction it triggered in Turkey, the death threats received by Ataman and the moral code, called tore, that urges families to kill gay or lesbian children, Turkish gays are decades behind in terms of acceptance and respect. Even with that in mind, "Lola and Billy the Kid" is heavy-handed and contrived (San Francisco Chronicle, January 2000).

Following the argument that identity politics is underdeveloped in Third World countries, these critics express their unease in locating *Lola*'s politics in relation to contemporaneous movements and politics and contradict Ataman's locating of his own work as a state-of-the-art and dissident gay film.

The use of language, which has been ignored as a unit of analysis in articles discussing *Lola*, is, nevertheless, an important aspect of the film. Turkish immigrants and, now, second- and third-generation Turkish-German population in Germany generally use a "bastardised language" (Senocak 1994), which consists of twisting German, Turkish, Kurdish languages and challenging syntactical and grammatical rules. This code-switching, or *Kanak Sprak*, to borrow a term coined by Feridun Zaimoglu,[13] is widely analysed and discussed by researchers writing within linguistics, diaspora studies, and literary studies. "Queer *Kanak Sprak*", as I call it, is another aspect of this code-switching. The characters in *Lola* do not simply switch between German and Turkish, but to a peculiar Turkish queer slang.[14] They feel the need to switch to Turkish slang to curse, to small talk in a sexual context, or to say something German language would be unable to express. While drag queens switch to queer slang, macho hustlers, including Bili, employ a heterosexual and slightly homophobic male slang. Iskender, the hirsute lover of the German noble Friedrich, uses *lan*[15] so frequently that it sounds like another German word. The most striking use of Turkish slang, on the other hand, is when Bili advises Murat to make money as a hustler while preserving his "manhood", i.e. without getting fucked, he says abruptly in Turkish: "*kestaneyi çizdirme, tamam mı*".[16]

III

Tour Abroad[17] is the story of a gay Turkish nightclub singer, Zeki, who has made his career in Germany, and who suddenly finds himself the guardian of an 11–year-old girl, Senay, whose father dies in an accident. In order to find her mother, Zeki takes the girl on an odyssey around Germany, and other European countries, finding gigs along the way, in friend's Turkish nightclubs. This quest finally leads them to Turkey, where they manage to find the mother, but she is unable to take care of Senay. The nostalgia of the homeland and the search for the girl's mother urge Zeki to see his own mother, who rejects him for the reason that he has been away for fifteen years, while another "hidden" reason might be his homosexuality. *Tour Abroad* is embedded with nostalgia, mostly characterized by being away from "home". But it turns out, for both Zeki and Senay, that the *homeland* is not their *home* anymore. The "homing desires" (Brah 1996: 190) of Zeki are not limited to the territorial homeland, they also include

a longing for the Turkish queer culture and for music. But homosexuality and music, for him, are not separable entities. They embody a musical culture appropriated by queers in Turkey and whose most glamorous representative is Bülent Ersoy, a male-to-female transsexual, a very famous *arabesk* singer, and a former actor, later actress, in Turkey. Zeki carries a photograph of her in his wallet, constantly plays her audiocassettes and shares his love for her with enay. Bülent Ersoy is also, according to Agah Özgüç (1994: 234), the star of the first Turkish film dealing explicitly with homosexuality. In *Beddua/Curse*, (O. F. Seden and M. Gülgen 1980), Ersoy is said to perform her own life story.

Zeki[18] represents the Turkish queer prototype, embodied in the homeland by Zeki Müren and Bülent Ersoy. He wears a mix of women's and men's clothes, make-up, is called "sister Zekiye"[19] or "girl" by his friends, makes explicitly homosexual jokes to male customers in nightclubs[20] and to some of the orchestra members, off-stage. He "succeeds" with the young qanun player but the ud player is offended and has his gang beat Zeki up after the show. Along the way, Zeki sees some of his ex-lovers, all Turkish, and they all disappoint him. As in *Lola*, he lives in the fantasy world[21] of an imaginary homeland, and the queer typology he incarnates is backward, lost somewhere in time. His homesickness is a result of a tendency to romanticize the queer experience in Turkey, whereas Bili in *Lola* romanticizes the experience of not-being-queer-anymore in Turkey.[22]

Returning home, for Bili, means becoming heterosexual. His nostalgia for the homeland is nostalgia for (lost) heterosexuality. In Zeki's case, however, homeland is a space where he cannot exist, even though he seems to embody the queer paradigm of this imaginary homeland. As Brah notes, the concept of diaspora embodies a subtext of "home" and that "people are presumed to be indigenous to a territory" (Brah: 190). For Bili this territory is Turkey, not because his "roots" are there, but he believes that this is only where he and Lola would happily live as a heterosexual married couple. Hence, his wish is to become a heterosexual indigenous rather than an ethnic one. Brah goes on to observe that "the question of home [...] is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and [...] is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" (192). Bili is alienated with his intimate relationship with Lola and, therefore, does not feel at home. Lola and Bili are not in exile in Germany, since they were born there, but in their sexuality. There is no place Lola can take refuge, not even with her lover, Bili.

IV

In this essay, I didn't prefer to summarize *Hamam* and *Lola* for the simple reason that they are widely available in various media and one can read numerous reviews on them, whereas *Tour Abroad* is not easily available yet and it is the least analysed of all. In this last subsection, I propose a comparative analysis of the three films and discuss some important issues arising from them.

Hamam is very much in line with a recent tendency in contemporary (western) queer culture(s) that are witnessing a shift from homosexuality as innate to homosexuality as a "taste". Whereas in subaltern countries (like Turkey), homosexuality still equates to a struggle for recognition,

"crooked relations", perversity, "third sex", and so on, in (north)Western European countries it has been normalized and trivialized so as to become something one may happen to experience. Homosexuality now, is not what one is, but something one does. Although it is quite doubtful that Özpetek intentionally targeted it, *Hamam* seems to illustrate this tendency in a very effective manner. One might find many reasons for this burgeoning "taste", like the director himself did: "The Italian nephew is in a complete crisis [...] and he gets rid of his stress with the Turkish family. [The reason for the "crooked" relation might be] the love the family gives him. He is also under the influence of this mystique atmosphere, maybe also of the hamam" (Beyazperde, October 1997). More or less for these reasons that Özpetek outlined in this interview, *Hamam* was accused of orientalizing Turkey, especially Istanbul, and the "Turkish way of life". This point has become so widespread in Turkey that reviewers and film critics almost forgot to accuse the film of promoting homosexuality.[23]

Moreover, one might argue that the film represents what could be called "the globalization of the queer experience", unlike *Lola + Bilidikid*, which tells the story of hybrid (diasporic) queer identities. The steam bath in *Hamam* is the site of homosexual desire,[24] like the western bathhouses, and a recognizable "universal" sign for a male homosexual, whether Oriental or Occidental. Just as a previously non-sexual practice (bathing) has been turned into a commodity (gay bathhouses) in the West, the hamam itself is turned into a commodity place by the westerner who decides to restore it. For Simon Watney, the globalization of "queer culture" is evident in the existence of easily recognizable meeting places, where one feels at home: "Few heterosexuals can imagine the sense of relief and safety which a gay man or lesbian finds in a gay bar or a dyke bar in a strange city in a foreign country. Even if one cannot speak the local language, we feel a sense of identification" (cited in Fortier 2001, emphasis mine). The hamam becomes such a safe haven for the westerner in the film, whereas oriental Turkish queer nightclubs in Lola would disorientate the travelling westerner who would expect a uniform place he could feel safe. I maintain that what makes *Hamam* an orientalistic picture, is not the quasi-touristic portrayal of an exoticized Istanbul and her inhabitants, but the emphasis on undifferentiated mobility (Fortier 2001) that appropriates the hamam as a global queer space without denuding from it all the exotic difference it connotes. This is, I argue, what Lawrence Grossberg calls "the universalisation of orientalism" (Grossberg 2000: 73). Philippe-Schmerka Blacher, director of the Urban Observatory in Istanbul between 1996 and 1999, and who conducted interviews with several Turkish gays in Istanbul, summarizes his findings:

> Turkish homosexuals are far more modern and intellectual than those of other surrounding countries. They follow the latest currents in fashion, for instance. The only difference between a German and a Turkish homosexual is the hair colour. If Turkey would be the member of the EU one day, the homosexuals would completely feel at home. The same development is evident in Turkish cinema as well. Have a look at previous Turkish films: homosexuals are caricaturised. Whereas in Hamam, the homosexual is like you and me (Aktüel, March 1999).[25]

Thus, both Istanbul in *Hamam* and Turkey as depicted by Blacher, become ambrosial paradises where lonely gay tourists would feel safe and find their peers. And the hamam is re-transformed from a previously exotic and sexual place into a global queer commodity.

As *Hamam* illustrates this new currency in western queer culture and the happy face of homosexuality, so *Lola + Bilidikid* depicts an explosive homosexuality and highlights the problems of gender norms as experienced tragically by its characters. As *Hamam* depicts the tale of a breathtakingly exotic and mesmerizing Istanbul, so *Lola* paints the screen with dark images from an underground Berlin. As in *Hamam*, two cultures do meet at the end, and not clash; so in *Lola* we constantly witness a clash, not only of Turkish and German cultures, but there is also an ongoing warfare between patriarchy and homosexuality. While the homosexuality experienced by the two protagonists in *Hamam* is globally acceptable, chic and western(ized), the homosexuality of *Lola* is considered backward, primitive, and not European enough (although it is in Berlin). The fact that the drag is not a "masquerade", but an obligation, stigmatizes the film even more and makes it an "other" in queer film-making. Binary oppositions are not only between two cultures but also between the Turkish queers themselves: the community seems to be torn between highly effeminate drag queens and macho "heterosexuals". The queer characters in *Lola* can be said to illustrate the mythical "models" suggested in one of the few existing Turkish gay ethnographies: [26] "the masculine heterosexual", "the masculine heterosexual and feminine homosexual", and "the masculine homosexual and feminine homosexual" (Tapinc 1992). However, the last model Tapinc examines is not found in *Lola* but in *Hamam*: "the masculine gay", defined by the author as a "modernizing Western connection in the emergence of gay identity, gay culture, and gay politics in Turkish society" (46). *Tour Abroad* is more easily compared to *Lola* in the sense they they both offer pictures of Turkish queers, not caught between two cultures, but between two different senses of belonging and two different times. Lola is aware that the homeland idealized by Bili is a romantic heterosexual dream, while Zeki has to be present, physically, in this homeland, to realize that it is imaginary. Bili loses Lola (first emotionally and later physically) and his heterosexual nostalgia with her. Zeki loses the hope to go back to the homeland one day, but his homosexual nostalgia stays on.

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Notes

1. All the following quotes from Turkish sources are my translations.
2. *Hamam: The Turkish Bath* (Ferzan Özpetek 1997) is a Turkish-Italian-Spanish co-production but is considered a Turkish film, because its director is Turkish (or a "Roman Turk", as he likes to call himself), most of the dialogues are in Turkish (with some exceptions in Italian), and has Istanbul as its background. *Lola + Bilidikid* (Kutluğ Ataman 1999) is a Turkish-German co-production but is generally referred to as a German film, because, presumably, the dialogues are in German, although director Kutluğ Ataman is a Turkish citizen.
3. Its popularity led *Hamam* to be mentioned as an eventual candidate for the Oscar for the best foreign film in 1997. But the Turkish selection committee, appointed by the Ministry of Culture, preferred

to submit another film for consideration (*Eşkiya*), arguing that *Hamam* "does not represent Turkish culture" (*Hürriyet*, October 1997). Had the Turkish entry to the Oscars been nominated by the Ministry of Tourism, *Hamam* would have probably been selected, since Ferzan Özpetek predicted in 1997 that (gay) tourists would rush to the hamams in Istanbul. Around the same time, however, the chair of the Hamam Owners Association in Istanbul was declaring that such deviant relations didn't exist in Turkish hamams.

4. Noted in some Turkish dailies with less fanfare.
5. In this interview, Gassman makes a rather interesting lapsus. Answering a question on the famous scene, he says: "And the kiss scene – which for me was the toughest one, because Ferzan, and me, we're both not homosexuals". He apparently confuses the director Ferzan, for his role partner, Mehmet. Or maybe Ferzan didn't tell him everything?
6. Francesco is already married to Marta, who comes from Italy, worried about of his unexpectedly long stay in Istanbul and witnesses her husband's "affair" in the hamam.
7. Marta is shown only witnessing the passionate kiss, which of course doesn't mean that the two men didn't kiss nor have sex before her arrival to Istanbul.
8. This stock phrase was repeated by some critics of *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong, 1997) who maintained that "it was a love story rather than a love story between two gay men" and the director himself shared this view: "[...] in fact, homosexual love is not any different from heterosexual love" (Chow 2000: 230, 5*n*).
9. Except at the end where she hears that Lola was murdered by Osman, she slaps him on the face and leaves home with Murat, taking off her headscarf and throwing it on the street.
10. The steering committee of Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, one of the most prestigious in Turkey, apparently didn't share Ataman's view on his *Lola*, which stirred up a big debate. The members (all male) argued that some scenes are too explicit and they "contravened general moral codes, social order and Turkish family make-up" but the film was finally accepted in the competition. Some jury members declared, afterwards, that "the scenes are far too explicit, and the film creates a false impression that each and every Turkish youngster living in Germany is homosexual. There is no way this film can be screened in several parts of Turkey, it would arouse severe reactions" (*Cumhuriyet*, September 1999). In the same line, a critic wrote: "There is this thing that disturbs the audience: isn't there a single decent Turkish youngster in Germany? Are they all caught between two cultures? And do they all end up in transsexuality?" (*Gazete Pazar*, June 1999).
11. The hero in *Hamam* dies too, but the film has never been criticized for using clichés. I argue that *Hamam* is built upon the narrative conventions of the classic Turkish melodrama and repeats some of its formulaic plot patterns such as an (eventually) impossible love between a couple of different class backgrounds, the re-education of the upper-class member by the virtue that the lower class represents and finally the death or loss of one of them so that they shall not reunite anymore.
12. The same criticism was addressed to *Fire* (Deepa Mehta, India-Canada, 1998), another Third World film with a queer content. A critic writes: "Perhaps bold and novel in India, its [...] messages seem dated by American standards" (cited in Desai 2002: 69).
13. Zaimo lu, in a novel with the same title, made use of this peculiar language and, thus, reclaimed a previously pejorative and racist epithet (*Kanak*).
14. Regrettably under-researched, Turkish queer slang is basically built on Turkish but it is lexically very rich, composed of a multitude of lexemes, derived from Gypsy, Greek, and Romanian, to name a few.

15. A very common vernacular lexeme and exclamation in Turkish, and meaning nothing in particular, *lan* is considered rude.
16. Literally: "Don't let the chestnut be scratched, ok?"
17. German title: *Auslandstournee*, a German-Turkish production by Ayşe Polat, 1999.
18. This first name also belonged to the legendary figure in Turkish music, Zeki Müren (1931–1996), whose daring and glamorous women's clothes and camp attitudes have always been enthusiastically received by generations of audiences. Müren never came out of the closet, but he didn't need to; his homosexuality was so obvious that there was a silent agreement between him and his fans. One might surmise that things would have worked differently if he had come out, but we can never know for sure. Although both Zeki Müren and Bülent Ersoy are undeniable role models for Zeki in *Tour Abroad*, Ataman maintains that the omnipresence of these two legendary queer figures makes it difficult for the young queer to come out. Talking about his own coming out process, he says: "I needed just an everyday guy, accepted, an example" (*The Advocate*).
19. Zekiye is the female version of Zeki.
20. Thus, he is not just a singer but also a cabaret performer, including the audience to his show. In between two song, he sits on the lap of a male customer and caresses him, then he suddenly jumps up and says: "close that zipper, you nutter! Put that 'thing' back in its place and release me, you wild animal". This "genre" has been popularized by drag queens in Turkish show business.
21. Ironically, Bülent Ersoy's art is sometimes referred to as "fantasy music".
22. He wants Lola to have the operation so that they can safely go back to Turkey and live as man and wife.
23. One enthusiastic critic, however, wrote: "A wonderful subject-matter. A slow, but efficient and striking narrative [...] Turkish customs and traditions are represented in every detail. Turkish hospitality, neighbour solidarity, the circumcision ceremony are so nicely depicted. However, a scene embarrassed me. The male bonding is something that spoils and discredits the beauty of the film. No such things occur in hamams. This is not a Turkish custom and it creates a false image" (*Antrakt*, 1998).
24. While several orientalist painters depicted nude women in Ottoman baths, Turkish men were never portrayed by Orientalists in a sensual context. *Hamam* is the first.
25. It is obvious that Blacher conducted the interviews with the middle-class young gays in Istanbul.
26. These "models of male homosexuality in Turkish society" are definitely sweeping generalizations and fall into the trap of thinking sexuality in clear-cut categories, without questioning sociocultural and class relations. Moreover, the author reduces male sexuality to penetration. These models replicate, on the other hand, the cliches concerning male homosexuality in so-called Mediterranean societies.

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9

Bodies without Borders? Queer Cinema and Sexuality after the Fall

Robin Griffiths

> "All forms of serious art and knowledge – in other words, all forms of truth – are suspect and dangerous": Susan Sontag (cited in the opening to *Body Without Soul/Tělo bez duše* [1996])[1]

The teen prostitution films of Polish born film-maker Wiktor Grodecki – consisting of the bleak documentaries *Not Angels But Angels/Andělé nejsou andělé* (1994), *Body Without Soul/ Tělo bez duše* (1996) and the concluding fictional drama *Mandragora* (1997) – were some of the most widely distributed contributions to the queer cinema *canon* to 'come out' of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe at the fin de siècle; and also, perhaps, some of the most problematic. Because while masquerading as "objective" and "frank" investigations into the "heart of darkness" of the gay sex trade in the Czech capital city of Prague, Grodecki alternately presents a manipulative triptych that is ideologically slippery, exploitative and yet, undoubtedly, *queer*.

At a time when occidental cineastes and homophiles were busily contemplating the significance of the radicalized New Queer Cinema 'moment' – which seemingly heralded a renaissance in what had formerly been seen as minority lesbian and gay film-making – the cinema that emerged in the newly 'liberated' former Eastern bloc was, in contrast, quite reluctant to explore the love that had for so long been left out in the cold. The historic and chain-reactive collapse of state-socialism in the region may have enabled other supposedly dissident aspects of underground society and politics to emerge "triumphantly" into the cultural mainstream but, as Andrew Stroehlein pessimistically describes, the subject of homosexuality still remained an unshakeable taboo:

> Even deeper than religious beliefs in the countries of this region is a strong cultural conservatism. These societies were not allowed to develop naturally, promote public debate and differentiate in the manner seen in Western Europe and America over the past 50 years. While the West was discussing difference over those decades, the Communist societies were generally subjected to one ideal, one model of appropriate living. Everything else was deviation and not acceptable [;] the great social revolutions seen in the West in the 1960s are still waiting to be unleashed.[2]

The fall of the Iron Curtain had, inevitably, led to a quite momentous shift in the cultural and geo-political landscape of Central and Eastern Europe. As the camply termed 'Velvet Revolutions' of 1989 produced the urge to reject many of the ideologically embedded assumptions and repressive regimes of the communist era. But in stark contrast to the positivist political rhetoric that was circulating during this period of dramatic 'transition' (viewed through the utopian lens of an allegedly inclusive 'new' Europe), the peoples of the region were far from prepared for the sudden and all-encompassing social, cultural and moral changes that were occurring. In the aftermath, a number of national, ethnic and religious conflicts re-surfaced that were not so easily resolved under the new democratic regimes. And the cautious emergence of an open and unashamed queer subculture became an unsurprising target for public dissent:

> The revolutions of 1989 were about visibility – making visible "the people" and their demands for democratic reforms, unveiling contradictions in state ideology and practice, and unmasking the instability of regimes ... [but] making things visible has often entailed opening the most hidden. (Berdahl 2000: 9)

A pervasive mood of existential instability and national disorientation thus infused many of the films produced during this period.[3] Invoking as it did a renewed impetus to tackle a number of previously suppressed sociocultural issues and debates. Yet while themes of alcoholism, domestic abuse, drug addiction and racial/ethnic disparity became cinematically *de rigeur* within the 'mainstream', the struggles of the nascent queer communities of the region were still largely ignored – unless caricatured as an invasive and insidious consequence of such unpoliced border crossings and the erasure of old barriers.[4]

In spite of this, however, some film-makers did emerge who were still determined to provide a platform – no matter how fleeting – for those marginal voices silenced under the old regimes. And to thereby reflect, more accurately, the many histories and experiences that actually comprised the post-socialist transition. The release of such landmark films as *Forbidden Love/ Zapovezená láska* (Czechoslovakia, 1991), *Hammer and Sickle/Serp i molot* (Russia, 1994) and *Marble Ass/Dupe od mramora* (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1995), for example, had to a certain extent broken new ground in the depiction of gender and sexual 'otherness' in Central and Eastern Europe. But as Andrew J. Horton (1999) and Kevin Moss (2006) point out, for all their thematic bravado these were also films that exhibited a rather limiting tendency to "use homosexuality as a metaphor for something else: politics, nationality, anything but a real analysis of real homosexuality".[5] The death of communism in such countries as the fledgling Czech Republic, for instance, offered a timely opportunity for film-makers to critically re-view

their society with an openness that hadn't been seen since the Czech New Wave films of the 1960s. But, paradoxically, in the uncharted moral terrain of this supposedly borderless new epoch, the entrenched phobias concerning sexual *deviation* still prevailed.

Any indigenous form of *gay* cinematic representation would have been inconceivable, of course, during the communist era. Because even though "a demimonde of same-sex oriented men [had] existed in Czech cities since at least the early part of the twentieth century",[6] and homosexuality itself decriminalized across Czechoslovakia in 1961 (six years before the apparently more liberal and democratic UK), compulsory heterosexuality was still, unsurprisingly, an enforced 'norm'. Regardless of its earlier history of employment as a "tool of resistance against national or political oppression",[7] the eagerly anticipated emergence of a new generation of radicalized post-communist film-making had failed to materialize.[8] As the crisis that followed the break-up of earlier structures of production, distribution and exhibition in the region, and the loss of invaluable state subsidies that came with it, saw many film-makers pressured to conform to the anodyne populist formulas of the West. Most attempts to explore subject matter that was deemed to be incompatible with these new strategic economic and ideological agendas were, thus, either immediately precluded or, typically, relegated to the apparent obscurity of the margins. Since as Andrew J. Horton rightly contends, in spite of its earlier *camp* potential the new Czech cinema of the 1990s was quite determinedly "heterosexual in its aims, its subject matter and its reception" (1999).[9] In a rather ironic turn of events, therefore, the political urgency which had been so productive for narrative film-makers throughout the communist years was by now largely redundant within such a seemingly liberated context.[10] And so the "marginal provinces" of the documentary film (see Metz), hence, became an important (and non-commercially dependent) site wherein to continue the issue-led verité preoccupations of the past: with Grodecki's trilogy – for all its inherent ambivalence and ambiguity – one of the first to provide a very real insight into the much darker undercurrent of the post-communist zeitgeist.

Czech Mating

The phenomenal events of 1989 had led to a major transformation for the former communist state of Czechoslovakia, which officially split into two separate and autonomous Czech and Slovak republics in December 1992.[11] But whereas the Velvet Revolution was at first seen to herald a new era of peace, prosperity and equality, the "dazzling explosion of every imaginable human vice"[12] that also occurred as a result soon established the central Bohemian city of Prague as *the* centre for those most quintessential products of western late capitalism: pornography, prostitution and sex tourism.

The common orientalist perception of *Eastern* men and women as essentially "wild" and "sexually uninhibited" was thus capitalized upon at the turn of the 1990s to mythologize the city internationally as a *pansexual paradise*. Implanting as it did the rather inexorable view that Czech males, in particular, were somehow queerly unconstrained by the homo/hetero binary; or as Nicholas F. Radel argues, they were forced to surrender their masculinity and sexuality as the ultimate price "for assimilation into mainstream society" (2001: 45).[13] The provocatively termed "Prague Experience" as it became known (largely by sex tourists in such bordering countries as Austria and Germany)[14] subsequently imposed a neo-colonial discursive economy

upon the city in which Slavic sexualities and bodies were persistently coded as cheap and submissive commodities, ripe for libidinous exploitation: "All Czechs are bi-sexuals... Buy them something, and they'll be sexual".[15] And in spite of his allegedly sincere intention to highlight the effects of this increasingly prevalent practice, Wiktor Grodecki's "truthful" exposé of the matter conversely played an equally "suspect" and "dangerous" (re. Sontag) role in this specularizing new economy of sociosexual conquest and western projection.

As Kevin Moss re-iterates in probably the only study of his 'teen prostitution trilogy' to emerge to date, Grodecki paints a particularly salacious picture of 1990s Prague as the polymorphous site *par excellence* wherein to find deviant "sexual experiences unavailable in [Western] Europe" (2006: 1). It was a place where apparently anything, and anyone, could be procured for the right price – irrespective of orientation – and where teenage boys in particular (of dubious consensual sexual legality) were an especially abundant commodity. For the disparities produced in the wake of the fall of communism had created a significant upsurge in the arrival of impoverished and, generally, quite naïve young men and boys from the provinces, all desperately searching for the new freedoms and opportunities that this cosmopolitan new capital promised. The evidence of the major ontological shift that had taken place was, as Daphne Berdahl describes, at first "most immediately observable in the landscape: colourful advertisements and neon billboards for Western products that replaced the bland and faded party propaganda" (2006: 6). But this 'coca-colonized' new milieu also projected particularly misleading images of socio-economic prosperity that were naturally quite seductive to a young new 'velvet generation', desperate to escape the backwards-looking cultural and economic stasis that their insular communities and 'traditional' home lives had now come to represent. And so for teenage boys media-saturated with the elusive phantasies of a western – mainly American – popular culture, the new Prague symbolized a space for social mobility, self re-invention and an unruly playground for the material excesses of the West.

However, the harsh realities that most of them actually encountered upon arrival in the city (unable to find employment or accommodation due to their young age), and the implausibility of the hyper-idealized lifestyles that they had imagined for themselves, saw many end up living on the streets. A desperate predicament where – ironically – they soon became the material objects for consumption. Teenage prostitution (of all orientations) consequently flourished as a major 'industry' for Prague by the end of the millennium; and was within the easy reach of those western sex tourists in search of their pansexually cheap commodities. But even though this burgeoning 'trade' in effect just re-affirmed neo-colonial fallacies in which these Foucauldian 'docile bodies' only exist for sexual servitude and western consumption, the reality of the situation was – as Grodecki's films all too painfully revealed – far more complex and interdependent.

"Free your mind, and your ass will follow"

The allegedly destructive effects of 'westernization' upon the historic landscape of the Czech Republic immediately confront us in the opening moments of the first part of the trilogy *Not Angels But Angels* (1994). In a setting deliberately evocative of an archetypal US ghetto, we are introduced to an 'angelic' fourteen-year-old New Yorker called Michael; who, after

sacrilegiously defacing an 'ancient' stone wall with graffiti, explains how for him "smoking cock" is but a temporary means to achieving his ultimate neo-capitalist dream of becoming a "gangster". For this is not some 'hip' portrait of urban America as we may at first presume, but is, in fact, the new face of a liberated Prague – a city now seemingly under siege from the imported anarchies and violations of the West.

This textual motif permeates all three parts of Grodecki's triptych, from the faux Americana that adorns the interiors of 'seedy' underground sex clubs, to the gaudy neon-lit videogame arcades, designer boutiques and consumer conglomerates that now indifferently dominate the city centre alongside the homeless and the poor. Contrasting the apparent artifice, inequity and corruption of the new capitalist era with a nostalgic yearning for a more authentic and innocent past which, in many ways, merely echoes that typical communist dichotomy of city (decadent, bourgeois, immoral) versus countryside (romantic, feudal, moral). Nevertheless, it is also a comparative strategy in which, at first sight, the emergent queer subculture in the city ostensibly represents all that is 'evil' about this new post-communist condition:

> Grodecki's films are both highly manipulated and manipulative in ways that serve to enforce "normal" sexuality while demonizing various "abnormal" sexual practices. At the same time they portray these practices as an import from the colonizing capitalist West. (Moss 2006: 2)

On closer analysis, however, this apparent coding of the emergent gay sex industry and subculture of Prague as a moralizing analogy for the West's corruption and exploitation of the region, is not necessarily as *straight*-forward as Moss' initial assessment implies. But it is, in actual fact, mobilized around a number of shifting and indeterminate modes that, while purporting to cater to the disapproval and inevitable prejudices of the hetero-mainstream, more covertly invoke quite 'slippery' pleasures.

As eminent film scholars such as Bill Nichols and Linda Williams have only too effectively illustrated, the documentary film "occupies a complex zone of representation" that consistently problematizes notions of impartiality and *truth* due to its "incompleteness", "uncertainty" and "subjective constructions".[16] What the medium actually presents us with, therefore, is a complex and discursively skewed view of the world – "a horizon of relative and contingent truths"[17] – that, by its very nature, acknowledges the hand of the film-maker in its construction:

> It has become an axiom of the new documentary that films cannot reveal the truth of events, but only the ideologies and consciousness that construct competing truths – the fictional master narratives by which we make sense of events. (Williams 1993: 13)

This is no more evident than with the ideologically conflicted narratives that govern Grodecki's depiction of the new queer demi-monde of 1990s Prague. Because in a series of proclaimedly 'candid' and 'truthful' interviews with a select group of largely heterosexual young men and boys from the dark underbelly of the city's sex trade, his primary objective appears – on the surface – to want to lament the great loss of 'innocence' and 'identity' that has occurred as

a result of the fall of the old barriers, both cultural and moral. But yet there is a contradictory duality to Grodecki's distinctly voyeuristic lens that, while professing to function as a relatively 'objective' critical exposé, his films seem instead to be far more interested in detailing the potentially endless sexual opportunities that exist for any visitor to this blossoming Czech queer capital. In fact, the excessive and uncompromising spectacle of naïve and submissive young "meat for sale" that actually dominates the composition of *Not Angels But Angels*, and its similarly conceived sequel *Body Without Soul*, not only results in legitimizing the erotoideological mythologies of the "Prague Experience" as outlined earlier, but both films rather curiously provide a quite exhaustive 'rough guide' to the many haunts and rituals of the teen male prostitution 'scene' in the city that seems more designed for the covert delectation of an imperialist consumer ga(y)ze.[18] To all intents and purposes, therefore, he is quite literally *preaching to the perverted* – "Prague is one big brothel" – which in truth reveals more about the film-maker's own obsessions than anything else: "It is the dramatization of Grodecki's fantasy of the boys' experience [...] with no messy testimony by [them] to get in the way of the director's interpretation of their lives." (Moss: 5)

In stark contrast then to what would be expected from such an 'ethical' undertaking, Grodecki pays scant attention to the underlying social, economic or political issues surrounding his subjects' predicament. Both documentaries appear on the other hand to be quite clearly more concerned with encouraging their allegedly passive and accommodating "boy-men" to describe – rather meticulously – exactly *what* they do, what they *like* to do, how *much* they charge and *where* they can be found should someone wish to *purchase* their services: "What did you *do* in bed?" And though the lurid detail of these solicited descriptions may, as many of the trilogy's detractors complain, "invoke the disapproval [and prejudice] of the audience" (ibid.: 3), the ambivalent and 'unknown' nature of Grodecki's underlying stance on the matter makes it difficult to apprehend, in any concrete or transparent sense, exactly what meanings he is knowingly generating or what presupposed audience is by implication being addressed: "In bed, I *liked* it... Sex is good, beautiful". For his invisible yet manipulative presence as off-screen interviewer in reality merely serves to underscore his subjects' resigned submission to western values and exploitation. Thereby reducing them to mere salacious objects for his relentless probing and, more problematically, denying them the agency to recount those individual experiences and histories which could have provided a humanizing and empathetic background to their stories.

Moreover, the suggestively *post-coital* nature of some of his later interviews – wherein a number of the boys are to be found half naked in cheap hotel rooms – not only raises certain provocative questions about the inferred extra-diegetic relationship between interviewer and interviewee (and by association the complicity of the audience in such a 'transaction'), but also mobilizes a number of conflicts both inside and out of the frame that are never really fully resolved. Because as Moss also describes, Grodecki's "camera angles and staging emphasize the boys' passivity: the camera often looks down on them, they are shot reclining languorously or even in one case relaxing in a bubble-bath. Their poses and demeanour often suggest passivity, femininity and victimhood" (5): thus, oddly inscribing a deliberately voyeuristic and homo-erotic aesthetic to what were supposed to be, at the outset, clinical and hetero-normatively

skewed moral polemics. The overall result of which consequently positions both films in a distinctly troubling "zone of representation", which re-enforces that orientalist mystique of an easily malleable Czech pansexuality and, paradoxically, implicates the objectivizing gaze of the film-maker (and his audience) in the very same practices of exploitation and neo-colonial projection that he allegedly set out to denounce in the first place. Grodecki's quite explicit engagement with visual pleasure may well satisfy the orientalist gaze, but it fails to produce any real form of socio-political critique as a necessary counterpoint. In fact, his over-reliance on such eroticism is perhaps more a calculated means of obfuscating any overt ideological dimension to his work that could limit its appeal to the increasingly diversified political orientations of the international audiences for whom the films were really designed; circumventing any closure to the potential meanings and/or interpretations that they could productively generate.

However, while this innate textual and moral ambiguity may account for the generally hostile reception that all three films received upon their native release in the Czech Republic (though primarily for their rather exclusive portrayal of the region as a place that "contained only innocent creatures for sale [to] deviant foreigners"),[19] it becomes apparent – through more 'intimate' inspection – that these at times quite enterprising young Czechs are not so clearly portrayed as the demoralized or disempowered 'victims' that a disapproving (hetero)mainstream audience would expect. And obscures the notion that, as Moss insists, Grodecki homophobically intends us to believe that these are all "poor [straight] children exploited by Gay men". Since as Timothy McCajor Hall explains in his "clinical ethnography" of the Czech male prostitution milieu that these films' depict:

> [these boys] are more than mere passive victims, either of the system or of individual aggressors. Victimhood neither reflects their understanding of themselves, their actions, nor the complex interaction of rational choices and unintended consequences (2003: 280)

Indeed, Grodecki's intrinsically opaque representational politics – which progressively downplay the harsher realities of his subjects' lives – invoke a "perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation" (Bruzzi 2000: 9) that oscillates between the stereotypically tragic depiction of the male hustler to be found in most mainstream cinematic treatments of the subject and the somewhat idealized Nietschean/Genetesque framing of him as the ultimate moral and sexual outlaw. He thus proposes a complex notion of Czech sexual subjectivity from within a post-communist context that, in its rejection of imposed behaviours, exclusions and hetero-normativities, is but a 'natural' extension of a much wider struggle against past oppressions, inequalities and restrictions that underscores the importance of conflating sexual dissidence with political dissidence. For these so-called 'straight' young men have seemingly been able to locate their own quite unique permutation of identity, that cedes the tropes of "normalcy" and allows them the – albeit contentious – agency to exploit the new opportunities afforded by a 'metrosexual' flirtation with neo-colonial queerness. It is a process whose 'sexual scripts'[20] may inevitably trouble the hetero/homo divide, but it also enables them to maintain their own individual – or 'intrapsychic' – sense of personal sexual identity, while at the same time yielding to the erotic needs of a transitory economy wherein the established boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality have become queerly re-defined.

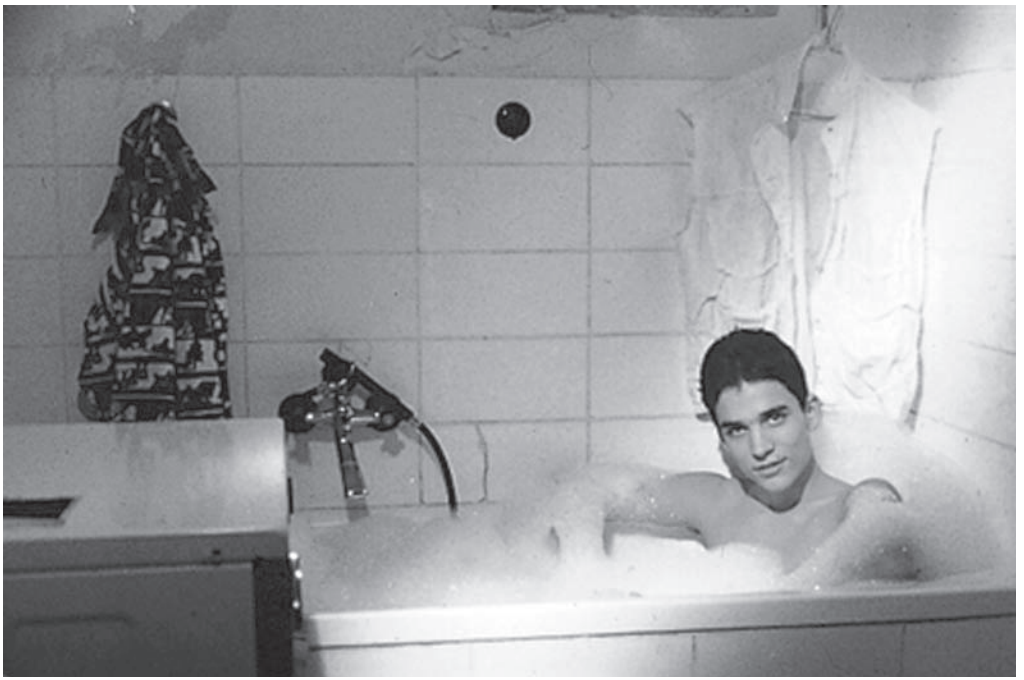

Figure 16. Reclining naked in a bubble bath, seventeen-year-old 'straight' boy Robert does his best to "meet the needs of the homosexual [or film-maker] who hires [him]" in *Not Angels But Angels/Andělé nejsou andělé* (1994).

As Eve Sedgwick has previously observed, a *queer* identity-formation proposes an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning [wherein] the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993: 8). The purportedly queer heterosexuals that these films thus envision – though unable to fit the label of 'homosexual' – have become aligned with the gay communities, cultures and politics of post-communist Prague in spite of their politically 'troubling' sexual proclivity towards the opposite sex. They are, in fact, the apparent embodiment of a knowing and radical new world of "mobility" that is situated at the intersection of many fertile boundaries, both real and illusory. An 'imagined community' that dovetails with other identity-fracturing discourses to produce a uniquely postmodern nexus for 'liminality', and a disruptive, negotiative space where sex and sexual orientation – amongst other things – have become subversive sites of transaction, role-play and fantasy: "a space for sexual experimentation and unknown pleasures" (Bunzl 2000: 85). And regardless of any superficial pathos and preaching, it is this apparently 'borderless' dimension to the neo-Czech adolescent male identity – the challenge it poses to the established demarcations and territories of hetero- and homo-normativity – which really fascinates Grodecki. That blurring of boundaries which has, as a result, opened up a whole new world of multiple possibilities: "my body is just an illusion... a game to play".

"There is no love without money"

In his analysis of the structural arrangement of *Not Angels But Angels* and *Body Without Soul*, Kevin Moss surmises that both films are "in many ways heavy-handedly manipulative and moralistic". And while it is true that Grodecki exhibits a less than subtle tendency to juxtapose most of his more 'shocking' confessional footage with a knowing cutaway to one of the numerous religious statues that omnisciently dominate the city's ancient skyline ("as if the saints were looking down in stern judgment"), these rather clichéd 'interventions' in truth do little to really detract from the somewhat matter-of-fact and uneasily erotic nature of the experiences that these 'corrupt' young men expose. Furthermore, the true exploiters presented here are not the supposedly malevolent western sex tourists that have flocked to the region, but those home-grown pimps and pornographers (all apparently 'straight' family men) who have come to realize the very lucrative potential that this new pink economy holds. As Grodecki is only too keen to emphasize, they have learned to both appropriate and subvert these mutually beneficial new structures of "Eastern supplies for Western demands" (Bunzl: 87). And are, in the end, just as quick to capitalize and profit from the misguided erotic assumptions of the "sad" and "perverted" westerners upon whom they prey: "*I* choose them". What is more, the unforeseen consensus that is gleaned from the testimonials of most of his titular fallen angels implies that their supposedly hopeless existence is, on the contrary, imbued locally with a surprising amount of opportunistic reverence and countercultural cachet: "money for nothing, I knew it was the job for me... everyone should live like this". So despite their worrying naïvety and reckless disregard for the potential dangers of their profession (especially concerning AIDS), they have acquired a certain unconventional sense of independence and homo-sociality that would have been impossible under the moral, socio-sexual and economic regimes of *hetero-communism*: "we have democracy now... I can express myself!"

In a marked departure then from any initial claims of passivity and victimhood, these generally articulate, self-aware and at times quite predatory young men are – for all its problematic implications – alternatively presented as the willing and enterprising agents of their own narcissistic exploitation. Since most arrive in Prague with the *a priori* knowledge that prostitution is their only likely option. And even Moss himself ultimately concedes that many of them actually "don't appear to be particularly ashamed or embarrassed" by their *chosen* lifestyle, seeing as they have instead become quite ambitious and self-sufficient since joining the new queer sex economy of the city: "I have money now, and I don't have problems".[21] In a similar vein, therefore, to those defiant yet complicit 'families' of sex workers, transvestites and social outcasts which had earlier populated the 'shady' demi-monde of Jennie Livingston *Paris Is Burning* (1991) – that verité 'classic' of the New Queer Cinema – Grodecki also presents a world with its own quite unique set of rules, hierarchies and desires. That in many ways provides a provocative insight into the complexities associated with the sexual politics and economics of the post-communist era.

In the concluding part of the trilogy – *Mandragora* (1997) – for example, a 'troubled' and 'misunderstood' small-town boy named Marek (Miroslav Čáslavka) sees running away to the Czech capital as the only viable means by which to escape the claustrophobia (and inferred homophobia) of his abusive home life and emotionally detached father (an obvious throwback

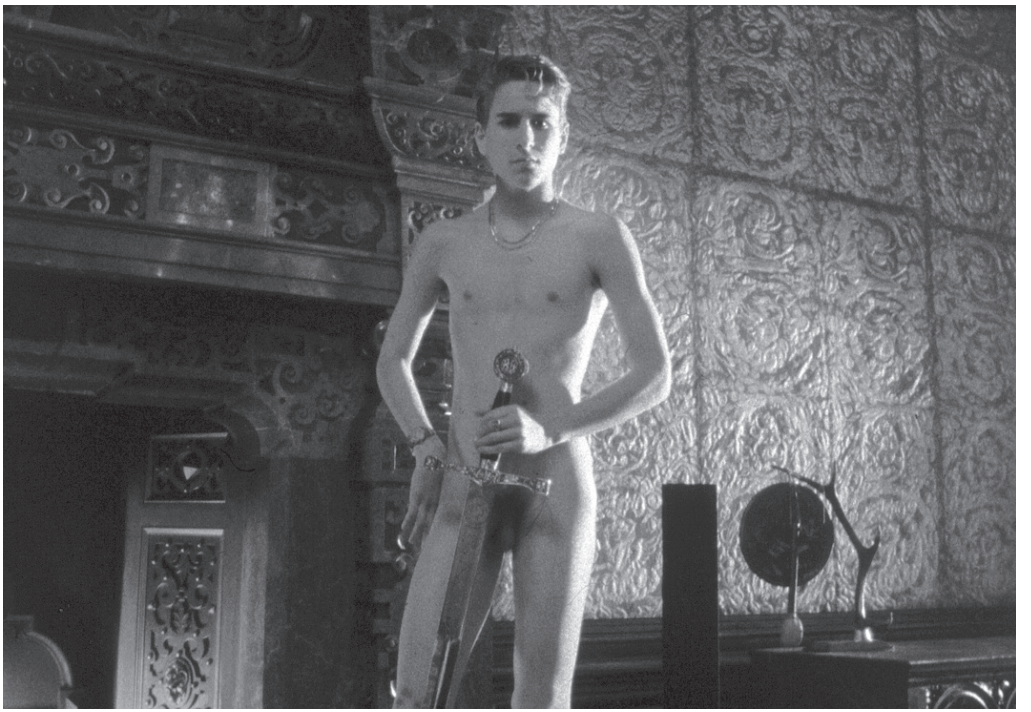

Figure 17. Miroslav Čáslavka as Marek the "little rabbit" in *Mandragora* (1997).

to the communist patriarchs of the recent past). And after stealing an expensive American-style baseball jacket from the imposing neon-lit façade of a fashionable western boutique – which functions almost like a beacon of 'hope' in the desolate grey streets of post-communist suburbia that greet us in the film's opening moments – the 'delinquent' teen arrives in the big city eager to begin his imagined new life of independence and opportunity (price tag still unknowingly yet prophetically attached to his stolen jacket). But when he loses what little money he has in an amusement arcade, and then his shoes to a group of local street thugs, he is soon forced to make a deal with the devil – in the typically demonic form of local pimp Honza – and become the latest "little rabbit" to descend into the labyrinthine bowels of the city's thriving sexual underworld.

Yet, despite being drugged and raped on his very first night in the Bohemian capital, young Marek appears relatively unperturbed about having to immerse himself in the city's gay sex trade. A place where he not only finds immediate friendship and unrequited love with a streetwise rentboy called David (played by Grodecki's co-writer and former prostitute David Švec), but also a surrogate family of brash and similarly autonomous 'Dickensian' street kids. In fact, his transformation from innocent lost boy to confident, articulate gay hustler is alarmingly swift in Grodecki's film. And the two boys' seemingly happy new life together is only cut short in the end by their own naïve and divisive self-interests which, along with the decidedly laissez-faire intervention of the authorities (who perpetually observe at the film's periphery, yet rarely

act upon the events that they witness), result in David's sudden imprisonment (and obligatory death from AIDS) and a heartbroken Marek to seek solace in hard drugs and self-harm. Not even the belated arrival in the city of his estranged father can 'recuperate' the boy by the film's end. As the older man's increasing impotence and discomfort with the 'alien' new world that confronts him – and what Marek must now have become – soon sees his hasty return empty-handed to the 'traditional' hetero-normative security of the provinces, as his abandoned queer son is left to die alone of a drug overdose in a public toilet. In this regard, the boy is more a victim, therefore, of the engrained familial conflict and intolerance that characterized the post-communist rupture between the old and new generations of Czech society than the 'hellish' environs of the gay sex trade. It is a haunting and never-ending cycle that, as *Mandragora* only too effectively and pessimistically illustrates, is set to begin all over again with the arrival of yet another naïve young runaway to take the abandoned teenager's place.

In spite of the controversy and critical derision that has dogged Grodecki's trilogy over the years, however, his politically incorrect and unapologetic determination to limn the 'abject', the criminal and the perverse in Czech society of the 1990s had much in common with his western cinematic counterparts at the time – especially when viewed through the similarly ambivalent and uncompromising lens of the New Queer Cinema 'movement'. Because as film historians such as Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin describe:

> New Queer characters are a far cry from the polite, desexualized, inoffensive homosexuals found in most Hollywood and gay and lesbian independent films of the 1980s. New Queer films and videos flaunt "negative" images in order to critique the idea that there are "correct" lesbian or gay identities and behaviours. They explode taboos, raise controversial issues, and celebrate a variety of queer sexualities. (2006: 221)

The 'New Queer' films of the 1990s were thus seen to mark a timely and unparalleled epistemic shift; that sought to 'look awry' and, as a consequence, overturn more established definitions of sexual identity and representation with the intention of "alter[ing] their social and political implications" (Davis, 2002: 26). In comparison, therefore, Grodecki was just as ground-breaking in his unwavering yet ambivalent commitment to de-stabilize and subvert the heteronormatively inclined moral narratives, imagery and subjectivities that governed the more established tropes of Czech cinema and cultural production: confronting its entrenched stereotypes, assumptions and taboos even as he problematically re-inscribed them. But, more crucially, projecting a subversive and challenging view of a world that had for so long been ignored.

The stakes were inevitably quite high for queer documentary and narrative film-makers in Central and Eastern Europe at the fin de siècle. Because at a time when queers were rendered all but invisible both on screen and off, the cinematic medium as always became a vital tool for the articulation of 'alternative' desires, sensibilites and identities that posed quite troubling questions about identity, oppression and sacrifice in the post-communist era. And so by addressing those difficult and unimaginable topics that would have been impossible before the fall of communism, Grodecki's films were an important means for both mapping and interrogating the unknown territories and experiences of the margins; thereby documenting narratives of

self-discovery, emergence and a necessary sense of identity and solidarity – in all its 'problematic' manifestations – at a time of quite sweeping moral, economic and socio-cultural transformation. The Iron Curtain may now be a construct of the past – both symbolically and ideologically – but it still remains to be seen, however, in what direction Czech culture and cinema will continue to evolve in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, Grodecki's trilogy combined narrative, testimony and cinematography to produce fairly complex texts that lent themselves quite readily to multiple readings both locally and globally. And for all its obvious flaws and contradictions, his work indelibly marked a timely first step in the emergence of a post-communist 'queer' cinema that, by resisting the oppressive regimes of the 'normal', had begun to articulate the synonymously painful yet productive pleasures of a region that was struggling to find its way in a new world order.

Notes

1. Taken from Sontag's 1967 essay "The Pornographic Imagination" published in *Styles of Radical Will*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, pp. 35–73.
2. For a fuller discussion of attitudes towards homosexuality in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, see Stroehlein's article 'A Queer Taboo' in *Central Europe Review*, vol. 1, no. 7, 9th August 1999 [online at www.ce-review.org/99/7/theissue7.html].
3. As Dina Iordanova describes in her study of the initial post-1989 films of the region to emerge: "While many of the old problems were swept away, a range of new social problems were experienced [;] Film-makers reacted by making films reflecting the difficult and often distressing events that were evolving right in front of them. The economic and social chaos sometimes led to extreme and overwhelming situations and the creation of the films that presented a dark and uncompromising picture of depressing and demoralising experiences lived by protagonists faced with the mighty sweep of historical change" (2003: 151).
4. See Kevin Moss' article "The Underground Closet: Political and Sexual Dissidence in Eastern Europe" for an interesting discussion of the typical conflation of sexual dissidence with political dissidence that occurred with most analyses of homosexuality in Eastern Europe (in Berry, ed., pp. 229–251).
5. As Moss describes, "In the former Yugoslavia, Srdjan Karanovią's *Virgina* (1992) and Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass* (1994) use sworn virgins and transvestite prostitutes to critique nationalism in Yugoslavia. In Hungary Károly Makk's *Another Way* (1982) uses lesbianism to disguise the film's portrayal of the Revolution of 1956, and István Szabó's *Colonel Redl* (1984) soft-pedals Redl's homosexuality to reveal how totalitarian regimes rewrite history. Sergei Livnev's *Hammer and Sickle* (1994) uses a sex-change operation as a metaphor for the excesses of Stalin's system while expressing contemporary anxieties about masculinity" (2).
6. McCajor Hall, 2003, p. 115.
7. For a description of the historical role of cinema as a political tool in the region, see Jiri Vorác's article "Czech Film After 1989: The Wave of the Young Newcomers" in *Kinema: A Journal for Film and Audiovisual Media*, Spring 1997. [online at: www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/vorac971.htm].
8. That is until the release of Jan Sverák's *Kolya* in 1996.
9. As Horton describes (1999), the inherent 'campness' of many of the comedies and "all singing, all Marxist" musicals of the 1960s can be open quite effectively to 'queer reclamation'.
10. Since as Iordanova reiterates, "The new freedom actually removed one of the important stimuli of the artistic creativity – the critical reflection of the social and political status quo – which had elevated the artistic act to a political act... As a result, the art and the artist have lost their specific privilege

and untouchable status, which was defined by the historical development and geopolitical conditions of existence of the Czech nation" (151).

11. In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Czechs and Slovaks took to the streets to demand political reforms in Czechoslovakia. Leading the demonstrations in Prague was dissident playwright Vaclav Havel (co-founder of the reform group Charter *77*), to whom the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia transferred rule to in what was later dubbed the "Velvet Revolution".
12. Commenting on the state of morality in the Republic after Communism, new Czech President Havel warned, "A wide range of questionable or at least morally ambiguous human tendencies, subtly encouraged over the years and, at the same time, subtly pressed to serve the daily operation of the totalitarian system, have suddenly been liberated, as it were, from their straitjacket and given freedom at last. The authoritarian regime imposed a certain order ... on these vices (and in doing so 'legitimized' them, in a sense). This order has now been shattered, but a new order that would limit rather than exploit these vices, an order based on freely accepted responsibility to and for the whole of society, has not yet been built..." (*Summer Meditations*, 1992: 1).
13. See Radel's article 'The Transnational Ga(y)ze: Constructing the East European Object of Desire in Gay Film and Pornography after the Fall of the Wall' in *Cinema Journal*, 41, no.1, Fall 2001, pp. 40–62.
14. For an enlightening discussion of gay male sex tourism and the invention of 'the Prague Experience', see Matti Bunzl's article in Berdahl, Bunzl and Lampland (eds), pp. 70–95.
15. Cited in McCajor Hall, 2003, p. 274.
16. Nichols, Bill. "Getting to Know You....Knowledge, Power, and the Body" in M. Renov (ed.), *Theorizing Documentary*, New York: Routledge, 1993: 174.
17. Williams, Linda. "Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary" in *Film Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3, Spring 1993: 14.
18. Such as the cheap sex shown to be available with the 'veteran' pimps and hustlers that frequent the city's Central Railway Station or cruise its historic Letná Park; and the naïve young boys that flaunt their bodies for peanuts – quite literally – at the city's swimming pools and amusement arcades.
19. From a review of *Mandragora* by Czech Film Critic Jaroslav Sedlá ek, cited in Moss, 2006, p. 8.
20. *Sexual Script* theorists have suggested that the formation of sexual identity is a queerly negotiative process organized around a number of narratives or 'scripts', that can commonly be examined on three distinct levels: (i) the *cultural* level – wherein scripts are constructed by specific cultural and/or social groups for the main purpose of contextualizing acceptable sexual activity; (ii) the *interpersonal* level – in which scripts govern the actual sexual interactions between individuals; and (iii) the *intra-psychic* level – in which scripts are used to organize thoughts and feelings about one's own sexual behaviours and subjective desires. This model thus became the dominant paradigm for most social constructionist investigations into human sexuality.
21. Seventeen-year-old Libor, for example, talks at length about the education he's received since becoming a male prostitute: the new languages and social skills he's acquired, the places he's travelled to, all of which would have been impossible before the Fall. And though visibly uncomfortable relating his experiences of so-called 'perverse' (i.e. anal) sex, he unexpectedly describes his encounters with his 'delicate' western 'clients' as surprisingly 'romantic' affairs, in which these apparently cultured gay men are only too eager to further his 'education'.

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10

School Is Out: The British 'Coming Out' Films of the 1990s

Santiago Fouz-Hernández

Background: Beyond the fairy tale

Both *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie MacDonald, 1996) and *Get Real* (Simon Shore, 1999) are debut films of heterosexual directors but based on plays written by openly gay men. Jonathan Harvey, who wrote *Beautiful Thing*, has declared in interview that his goal was 'to have a hopeful, happy ending story about being gay and being working class and coming out'.[1] He was partly motivated by the awareness that, whereas, 'any heterosexual teenager can turn on the television and watch the gorgeous guy taking the gorgeous girl to the prom',[2] there is still 'a lack of role models for working class gay people on the telly and on film'.[3] Thus, despite the 'drama and sadness' of the gay teenage reality, he felt that 'just as in *Beverly Hills 90210* there should be an element in *Beautiful Thing* of it all working out nicely, so that we were giving hope to gay teenagers', openly dismissing fears of being pigeon-holed as a 'gay playwright', a claim that he regards as 'internalised homophobia' in certain writers.[4] Harvey has also talked about his own experience as a gay teenager in hometown Liverpool, where he was often abused for playing with girls and being camp.[5] Much of the story of *Beautiful Thing* was based on Harvey's own memories of growing up gay.[6]

Patrick Wilde, who wrote *What's Wrong with Angry*, the play on which *Get Real* is based, had similar experiences and analogous aims:

> I wrote the play because I had something to say, I was sick of being told by people – even gay people – that it's easier to be gay now. Maybe it is easier to be gay once you're out. But I don't believe it's easier than it ever was to come out. All the pressures from your peers, from your parents, are still there, and no amount of legislation is going to change that.[7]

Director Simon Shore referred to *Get Real* as Patrick Wilde's gay story: '[he] is gay [. . .] he wrote this play, he wanted gay people to go see it obviously, but he also wanted (to draw) teenagers who might be gay, teenagers who might have friends who are gay, parents who may have kids who are gay'.[8] The director has also explained that the character of the gay teacher who was not allowed by law to help Steven was dropped because they wanted the film to make sense in countries were nothing like Section 28 exists and, also, because they hoped, in vain, that the Section 'would have been repealed by the time the film open[ed]'.[9] According to the director, a few actors turned down the script because of the subject matter.[10] Three of the four teenage actors that play the gay roles in both films are declared heterosexuals. The actors that played Jamie and Ste in *Beautiful Thing* had known each other for a long time as they were often cast as tough teenage thugs in television serials.[11] Harvey has said that, although they did not look specifically for 'gay' actors, his main concern during rehearsals was that they acted naturally and could give the impression that homosexual desire was perceived as 'perfectly natural' by these kids.[12] In the case of *Get Real*, Ben Silverstone, who plays Steven, felt that, despite his real-life heterosexuality, playing a gay character was not a major challenge, since he felt he had a lot in common with Steven in terms of teenage angst and confusion provoked by his inability to make himself heard during adolescence.[13]

Gender Representation: Getting Real?

It goes without saying that issues of gender stereotyping are crucial and sensitive in films that deal with 'teenage' representations and 'coming out' narratives, given the kids' age and the symbolic value of adolescence as a key moment in the development of one's gender and sexual identity.[14] The so-called 'coming out film' is, by its own nature, concerned with positive representations of gay people and, as Michael Bronski has argued, 'inseparable from the idea of pro-gay propaganda'.[15]

Bronski's evaluation of recent coming out films (including those examined here) seems to suggest that their representation of the 'coming out' experience is unrealistically positive and misjudges the harshness of homophobia in the real world. His point is that this type of film always ends conveniently just after the triumphant declaration of the characters' sexual orientation, without exploring its possible consequences.[16] Following a familiar queer approach,[17] Bronski warns us that the fact that many of these films do away with the usual queer stereotype in teen comedies – 'the geeky, fat, uncoordinated, foreign or even disabled minor characters' – is not necessarily positive. For him, 'their simple reconfiguration as attractive, fun, beautiful teens does not disrupt this discourse of the primacy of physical attractiveness, but simply replicates it in another *genre*',[18] adding that 'coming out films work best when they go against their first, and basic, mandate: easy affirmation and positive images'.[19] In an article that exposes the limitations of gay representations as 'uniform' and fixed identities, Richard Dyer has argued that 'lesbian/gay culture has always had for the sake of political clarity to include assertions of clear images of gay/lesbian identity'.[20] Whilst I would be inclined to agree with Bronski's argument, I would also like to emphasize that the frequent representation of heterosexual youths as beautiful and attractive could suggest a similar exclusion of those heterosexual youths that do not fall into that category. Positive representation, as I understand it, should not exclude gay people of different races, ages, and cultural or religious backgrounds but it should be aimed at counterbalancing

the negative and oppressive stereotypes presented by heterosexist media and which, as Ben Gove has explained, could have a negative effect on gay and lesbian young people.[21] He notes that suicide statistics often reiterate that 'gay and lesbian youths are particularly prone to incorporating the threats of erasure that are implicit in heterocentric cultural messages and explicit in homophobic assaults, and turning that violence against their own vulnerable sexualities'.[22] It may seem obvious to add that this violence manifests itself not only physically (resulting in suicide in some extreme cases) but also psychologically. Both *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* make a conscious effort not to show unrealistically 'positive' images of gay teenagers (as I will argue below, homophobia is present as a real and uncomfortable threat in both). The films also arguably oppose prescriptive notions of gender that are inculcated in boys and girls of this age, using icons of masculinity and femininity in a playful manner. Activities such as sport, writing, reading 'celebrity' magazines, or using cosmetics are gender-coded but, as such, they also become the locus of social destabilization. The parental home, the school, and the teenage party are disenfranchised as the symbols of heterosexual identity-formation and become the scenario of an increasingly confident gay struggle.

Most reviews of *Beautiful Thing* in the mainstream British press criticized the fairy-tale quality of the story (the script for both film and play was subtitled 'An Urban Fairytale'), and paid little attention to the gender characterization of Jamie and Ste or to the specific issues of sexual development or gender and sexual identity that, as I will explain below, are dealt with in a subtle but effective manner in MacDonald's film. Bronski's main concern is that the story's central theme (the 'coming out' process) is downplayed in relation to, and disconnected from, what he perceives as the more interesting issues of class and racial tensions in the Thamesmead estate.[23] Adam Mars-Jones also criticized the apparent 'simplicity' of the struggle, arguing that 'it's really not so simple, [. . .] positive images only go so far', and that the film 'would have more force if it didn't pretend that self-acceptance was a one-shot deal'.[24] Spencer also described the story as 'shamelessly optimistic' and criticized the idealistic settings and the absence of a queer gaze, as well as the way in which 'problems are pushed to the periphery', whilst acknowledging that having two boys under the then legal age of consent as protagonists was, however, a way of producing an 'issue' film.[25] It is interesting that, whilst the more mainstream press focused on issues of sexuality, the gay press concentrated on the representation of 'gender types'. *Gay Times* praised the way in which *Beautiful Thing* deals with the romance, and suggested that the film avoids 'over-romanticising or over-simplifying' and highlighted the 'boys next door', non-stereotypical quality of the main characters.[26] *Attitude* also emphasized the fact that the film's ending is not as sentimental or unrealistic as it might seem: 'Jamie's mum is dancing with Leah to show support for her boy, but even as she shakes her tush, her eyes are wary. She knows that the world looks less friendly when the music stops, that demons are waiting'.[27]

Harvey has made it clear in interview that one of his main concerns when writing this story was to avoid a certain stereotyping of homosexuality, especially in relation to the working classes, explaining that working-class gays are usually depicted as rent boys.[28] *Beautiful Thing* makes a conscious effort to break stereotypes, intertwining issues of gender, race, and sexuality from the opening scene, in which, instead of the usual male PE teacher, we are shown a cocky female Indian coach. The usual gender paradigm of masculine activity and female passivity

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Figure 18. "experimenting with other ways of being male" in *Beautiful Thing* (1996). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

also reversed during this opening scene as, while the female teacher stands in the middle of a football pitch giving orders to pupils and a male trainee teacher alike, he struggles to persuade Jamie (Glen Berry) to join in the game. Impatiently, she points at a net of balls that she is holding as she shouts at the male teacher: 'Balls, Mr Bennett', suggesting metaphorically that she has the male-associated stamina and confidence that he lacks. During these first scenes at the school and in the council estate, the apparent racial integration of these communities contrasts with the gender-related tension that dominates the rapport amongst the male pupils. In his refusal to join in the football game, Jamie is clearly set apart from his peers, who isolate him even further by demanding that he does not play, ('he is shit') and challenging his 'outsider' gaze ('what are *you* fucking looking at?') with insults and abuse, throwing his bag (and, indirectly, him) out of the school precinct. His inadaptability is underscored by the Mama Cass music that starts playing as he runs away from the school and serves as a bridge that links him to the feminine and to the marginal represented both by his crazed teenage neighbour, Leah (Tameka Empson), and her role model, Mama Cass.[29] Critics have explored the connections between the ritual of football and 'the social reproduction of masculinity'.[30] Whitson has explained how 'breaking from gender roles is much more than a matter of breaking with conventional thinking; it threatens interconnected structures of power that ultimately can affect men everywhere' and hence 'the effort put into the masculinising practices [. . .] and the value men have historically attached to teaching boys to be men and to the institutions where men could assume this didactic role'.[31]

His argument is that, in contemporary western culture, sport 'ritualises aggression and allows it to be linked with competitive achievement and, in turn, with masculinity'.[32] In confrontational games, he writes, 'physical strength and fighting skills are celebrated, in which male solidarity (especially solidarity amongst aggressive, dominant males) is also celebrated, and which therefore reinforce constraints on boys' experimenting with other ways of being male'.[33]

In both films, sport is clearly used in this way as a marker both of 'masculinity' and heterosexuality and also as a gender differentiator between the two boys involved. In *Beautiful Thing*, shortly after Jamie declares to his mother, Sandra (Linda Henry), 'I hate football', neighbour and schoolmate Ste (Scott Neal) comes back from school and proudly tells her about the match, as if giving Jamie a lesson. Ste's room is decorated with football posters and even an Arsenal Football Club duvet cover. He wears 'sporty' clothing and laddish shirts and his main ambition is to work at a sports centre. In contrast, Jamie's room is decorated with photos of classic Hollywood divas and cute kittens. In relation to *The Fruit Machine*, Gove has argued that Eddie uses Hollywood classics as an alternative locus of resistance.[34] Similarly, in *Beautiful Thing*, Jamie finds refuge in classic Hollywood movies which, as if forbidden, he only watches behind his mother's back. In the privacy of his room, he enjoys reading his mother's copies of *Hello* magazine and using some of her cosmetics. His cultural markers include celebrity news and Hollywood musicals (he answers the musical-related quiz questions for his mother), not football. In one of the most intimate scenes, when the two boys share the bedroom for the first time, Jamie wears reading glasses, which suggests he is more intellectual than Ste – the latter boy being more sports-oriented. Ste's brother had just beaten him up for wearing his training shoes to play football. Although Ste is portrayed as the most domestic member of his dysfunctional single-parent family (he is in charge of the laundry and the food), he cooks pre-made meals and, it is suggested, often burns dinner. Both his father, Ronnie (Garry Cooper), a tyrannical alcoholic, and his macho brother Trevor (Daniel Bowers) beat him up on a regular basis. Ronnie and Trevor are big boxing fans, which suggests that this typically male and typically violent sport reflects the equally male-chauvinistic and violent nature of Ste's family. Ironically, it is this violent atmosphere at home that facilitates the relationship between Ste and Jamie, as Ste is often forced out of the house and stays next door, sharing Jamie's bed.

For critics like José Arroyo, *Get Real* is 'a petit-bourgeois *Beautiful Thing*' and it fails to address issues in a challenging enough way.[35] Yet, according to Bronski, the script had been written 'in response to what [Patrick Wilde] saw as the fantasy of *Beautiful Thing*'.[36]

One clear difference between the two films is the setting. In contrast to the multiracial and working-class atmosphere that prevailed in MacDonald's film, *Get Real* has a particularly white, English public school middle-class feel that makes it look more like a modern-day *Maurice* than a *Beautiful Thing* contemporary. Shore's film is set on the upper-middle-class suburb of Basingstoke, an American-looking town archetypal of lower-middle-class Britain which, the official film website claims, offered 'an opportunity to move away from' what they exaggeratedly refer to as 'the gritty social realism prevalent in British films today'.[37] Thus, this film may be less optimistic in the ending of the central romance but not in the way in which the characters' and their nuclear families' uncomplicated everyday reality goes on. For Bronski, this

film's main sin is, as in *Beautiful Thing*, its lack of a serious treatment of the issues at the expense of what he calls 'the young-puppy-love aspects of the script'.[38]

The ending of *Get Real* also attracted a great deal of critical attention. Philip French criticized the predictability of 'the Hollywood-style grandstanding of the hero coming out on speech day' and Arroyo rightly denounces the portrayal of John (Brad Gorton) as a coward because of the difficulties he finds in dealing with his sexuality in contrast with Steven, who is given the moral high ground and is made into a hero after his public coming out.[39] Queer critics generally perceived the character of Steven Carter (Ben Silverstone) as positive: 'a queer boy of the '90s, his closet door always a bit ajar'.[40] Yet, *The Guardian* reviewer described him as 'a schoolboy desperate to avoid persecution at the hands of local bullies'.[41] Shore used the film's official publicity and various interviews to emphasize the 'universality' of the difficult teenage love story, arguing that they 'treated [it] exactly as [they] could have if it were a boy and a girl'.[42] It is perhaps this emphasis on the film's universal appeal that earned it the angry descriptor of 'safe for straight viewing' given by queer critic Ben Zipper.[43]

As in MacDonald's film, gender distinctions between the two boys in *Get Real* are established in relation to sport and peer group. John is the star of the school's athletics team. His masculine identity is reinforced by his peer group of *macho* wannabes (homophobes Kevin (Tim Harris) and Dave (James D. White)) and his status as the school's heart-throb (girls are always flirting with him, and he has an older girlfriend who works as a model). He admits to Steven that he started to smoke because of 'peer pressure', which suggests that the same peer pressure is forcing him to act straight and have a girlfriend. The sense of, to use Rich's term, 'compulsory heterosexuality' in such a successful sportsman is such that his two mates do not even question John's (hetero)sexuality when they catch him embracing Steven in the changing rooms.[44] John's avoidance of homosexual identification contrasts with Steven's confident declaration about his sexual identity. When Steven openly tells him about his sexual adventures, John defensively changes the subject and reassures himself by talking about his training and his soccer interests. Mark Simpson has noted that, in his autobiographical *Fever Pitch* (1990), Nick Hornby narrates how his interest in football gained him instant peer acceptance at school, despite his self-acknowledged 'unprepossessing physical attributes'.[45] Field work carried out some years later inspired Simpson to conclude that 'football to the New Lads is just a signifier of regular blokishness, a (constantly) declared passion for football helps ward off any suspicion that you might be an effete middle-class wanker'.[46]

Connell has noted that in some schools hegemonic masculinity is exalted through competitive sport and 'those who reject the hegemonic pattern have to fight or negotiate their way out', having to establish alternative claims to respect such as taking over the school newspaper.[47] In *Get Real*, the latter option is taken by Steven and his friend Mark, who are clearly outnumbered by the girls in the newspaper team. John uses sports as a defence mechanism, as the opposite of homosexuality. In one scene Steven calls John on his mobile phone while he is spending the day with his girlfriend. His excuse for not meeting Steven that day is that he is 'training'. Training is thus linked to heterosexuality, but the concept of 'training' also draws attention to issues of performativity: training to be a man, training to be a heterosexual. As mentioned

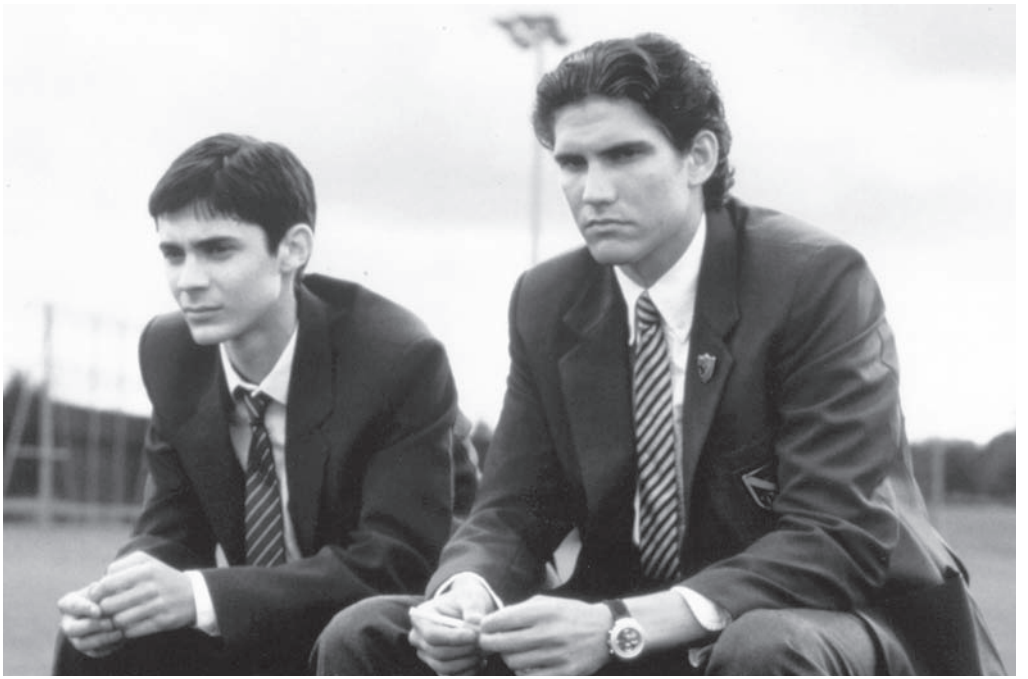

Figure 19. "I'm not gay!": 'Sad young man', John (Brad Gorton), with 'liberated queer' boyfriend, Steven (Ben Silverstone). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

above, sport (football in particular) has strong associations with hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.[48] Yet, as Simpson argues, 'football provides the boy with an answer to the problem of how to reconcile his homoerotic desire, his "feminine" love of "manliness", with his desire to be manly':

> interest in men is permitted, indeed encouraged, but it must be always expressed *through the game*. A man's love for football is a love of and for manhood, composed of a condensation of introjected [. . .] homoerotic desire. Boys discover that football places them in a masculine universe where they can enjoy the company of men and the spectacle of their bodies – as long as it is framed within competition, a struggle for dominance.[49]

In this context, the pictures of footballers that decorate Steven's bedroom may well work as a heterosexual cover for his parents (in so far as they suggest a 'male' interest in the sport), but they are also homoeroticized in a collage that makes them share the wall with famous male pin-ups and pop divas, as well as a teddy bear. Although straight-looking in appearance and manners, Steven does not try very hard to 'act' like a man. He is happy to admit that he can't smoke and that he only needs to shave once a month, he does not participate in any sports and hangs out with the girls (Kevin includes him when he refers to 'the girlies', thus setting him apart from the group of male students). Jessica (Stacy A. Hart) finds his sensitive nature attractive (in

contrast to her ex, Kevin) and makes moves to date him. Far from using her as the perfect cover, Steven tries to tell her several times that he is gay, but she is persistent and it takes her a while to find out. As I will explain below, Steven is portrayed as a liberated queer character who, unlike John, does not comply with society's rules about gender or sexual behaviour.

Despite his sexual desires, John is reluctant to adhere to homosexual identity ('I'm not gay', he protests, after Steven kisses him for the first time). In a context that is, once more, reminiscent of the Clive character in Forster's *Maurice*, class and family issues interrelate with the emphasis on sport outlined above and exert extra pressure on John to resist any identification as 'gay'. He knows that his future career prospects could be hinged and that he would ruin his father's expectations. His father, also a competitive athlete, went to Oxford and John's future seems to have been carved out by his father in advance: 'It's funny', he tells Steven, 'I can't even remember making a decision to go there. It is as if it was something marked out for my by fate ... well, by my dad'.[50] In contrast, and although Steven's father clearly wants him to do well (he sends the discarded article to the newspaper competition without Steven's knowledge), Steven is much closer to his mother, a fact that could suggest a potential (stereotypical) Oedipal narrative.[51]

Space: School Is Out

As classic examples of 'coming out' films, *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* are concerned almost by definition with binarisms such as light and darkness, public and private spaces. In both films, the school (especially the patios, where sport training takes place) and the familial home (with the exception of the bedrooms of Jamie and Steven – which, in themselves function as gay closets where the gay action takes place) are governed by the law of the heterosexual majority and thus become spaces of 'masculine' and 'heterosexual' performance. In contrast, gay space, defined by Hindle as 'the physical manifestation of the gay community',[52] is constructed in enclosed places such as a bar, a public toilet during the day or, at night, in the woods. Both films reach their climax when the distinction between these previously demarcated territories is blurred and the borderline crossed, ultimately suggesting a more or less assimilationist approach whereby homosexuality would be accepted as a lifestyle and not just as a series of isolated acts but, more importantly, where it is allowed to cross the boundaries of those spaces that, in guarding gay 'safety', also guard the state's interests of control over homosexuality.[53]

The use of indoor and outdoor spaces in *Beautiful Thing* does not relate automatically to a 'closet' structure whereby the boys are safe and queer indoors but need to act straight outdoors. However, that kind of division is suggested during the early scenes in the school and the council estate, helping to build up the final climax in which these spatial tensions are (at least, temporarily) erased. As Ste himself points out, Jamie's room is, literally, sandwiched between Ste's father's and Jamie's mother's bedrooms, making their sexual encounters tense and risky. When Liah sees Ste leave the house early in the morning after the first night the boys spend together, she looks with suspicion (and later calls Ste 'stupid queer'), reminding us of the thin wall that literally separates the two worlds. 'The Gloucester' gay bar also functions as a symbolic barrier and an alternative to the 'straight' school: when Sandra finds out about Jamie and Ste (through another phone call from Jamie's teacher), she follows them in a bus trip to the Gloucester but when they enter the bar she does not dare to follow them inside. In the gay bar

the boys find the attention and accepting atmosphere that they craved, for whilst, right outside, Sandra prepares herself to question them about their relationship. Hoffman has argued that

> walking into a gay bar is a momentous act in the life history of a homosexual, because in many cases it is the first time he publicly identifies himself as a homosexual. Of equal importance is the fact that it brings home to him the realisation that there are many other young men like himself and, thus, that he is a member of a community and not the isolate he had previously felt himself to be.[54]

Judging by the facial expressions of Jamie and Ste on entering the Gloucester pub, Hofman's claims are justified in this case. Yet, the crowd at that particular venue (their nearest gay pub) appears to be much older than them and also stereotypically predatory. The awareness of a gay community does, however, help them cope with the external social pressures that seemed to terrorize Ste earlier and, ironically, the boys only embrace and kiss once outside the pub, when they reach a dark park. Nature has a tradition of representing (homo)sexual liberation that dates back to Edward Carpenter, E. M. Forster, and Walt Whitman.[55] The background music, Barry Mann's 'Make Your Own Kind of Music', underscores the park's value as the boys' own alternative space, suggesting a 'natural' quality in their attraction that transcends the oppressive rules of so-called 'civilized' society. The idea of water as a homosexual baptism also comes from the same tradition. This concept that underlie E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice* (1971) and, to a certain extent, the 1987 Merchant-Ivory film adaptation that I mentioned above, where swimming worked as a metaphor for homosexual liberation.[56] In *Beautiful Thing*, the lake scene (also highly reminiscent of a homoerotic scene in the Merchant-Ivory adaptation of another E. M. Forster classic, *A Room with A View* (1986))[57] is a key one, in so far as it marks a change in Jamie from secluded repression to action and it also signals the beginning of a closer relationship between the two boys, which could be interpreted as a (homo)sexual baptism. In the previous scene he had been passively watching Ste and his mates play football, markedly detached from those participating in the game, only sucking a phallic iced lollypop and gazing at Ste (who timidly gazes back). As the ball (that he had provided) falls in the lake, Jamie is forced into the water by one of Ste's mates and, for the first time, takes part in a male-bonding moment. In the scene that follows, he sees Ste's bruised back for the first time (the only 'queer gaze' according to Spencer),[58] in clear anticipation of the famous back massage. Jamie tells Ste that he is 'a good swimmer' and almost straight away brings into the conversation the topic of kissing, timidly preparing the ground for their first intimate moment.

If in *Beautiful Thing* the council estate served as a perfect setting to explore and intermingle issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality, the story of *Get Real* (aptly subtitled 'The school is out, so is Steven Carter') unfolds mainly around the school setting. The topic of sex education seems a suitable one for the opening scenes of a film that deals with gay teenagers and their problems with sexual identity in a post-Thatcherite context. As if wanting to make a point about the importance of sex education at schools and the implication that the infamous Clause 28 has had in the delivery of the school curriculum, *Get Real* begins with the story of how sixteen-year-old Steven Carter learned about sex (typically from a friend). His friend had seen a porn video in which 'two women tied up a man and put ice-cream on his willy'. Steven humorously

explains that he developed an early rejection of ice cream and that, for a while, he thought that children were conceived that way. It is interesting that, in the scene that follows (set in a biology class) Steven and his mates get closer to finding out about 'the real thing' through a television documentary about hedgehog reproduction. In the clip a voice-over explains how the male and female hedgehogs meet up casually: the male hedgehog penetrates the female and then disappears as soon as the act is over. The documentary narrator goes on to explain that the male hedgehog will have no role in bringing up the family and (after a brief but solemn pause, which seems to stress that this is a rarity even within the animal kingdom) that they may never meet again. The film then cuts to Steven sitting down on a bench at a park, right outside a male public toilet and pretending to read *Romeo and Juliet* (another landmark of schools' teaching of heterosexuality).[59] Middle-aged men stare at him as they enter the lavatory, in a predatory manner. Steven finally makes out with Glen (David Elliot), a handsome man in his early thirties, who later turns out to be a married father.

This early scene is packed with symbolic visual imagery and powerful politics that will dominate the rest of the film. The lack of transition between the hedgehog documentary and the toilet cruising scene, as well as their similar 'natural' setting could suggest that gay sex is an instinctive and animalistic act that lacks the romanticism of the heterosexual story that Steven is supposedly reading. The fact that Glen turns out not only to lead a double life and have a wife and a child but also to be a customer of Steven's father's photographic studio is also revealing, as this brings the issue of family (Glen's and Steven's) into focus, suggesting that Glen does indeed live his homosexuality as a sexual act (or series of acts, as in the so-called 'Mediterranean model'),[60] whilst keeping a public profile as a member of a stable nuclear family around which he constructs his identity. Men have used public toilets as a means to establish sexual contact with other men since the late nineteenth century.[61] Male toilets are, after all, exclusively male spaces and, by definition, places where genitals are exposed and can easily be inspected by others.[62] As such, they have also been used for covert police raids (a famous case was the arrest for lewd behaviour of British singer George Michael in a gents toilet in Los Angeles in April 1998). The risk involved in this type of public contact accentuates its association with the 'masculine'.[63] Before the days of the Gay Liberation Movement and the existence of legal gay bars and meeting places, toilets were used as one of the main places for same-sex male contacts. Yet, they continued (and still continue) to serve a role for gay men in search of quick and anonymous sexual contact, in some cases out of choice,[64] but often because their social circumstances make it difficult for them to access the more institutionalized gay spaces and to have gay sex in their own homes, perhaps because, like Steven, they still live in the parental home or, like Glen, because they are married and have to limit their sexual encounters with other men to the periphery of the gay 'community'.[65] Lee Edelman has analysed how American media portrayed gay cruising in a sensationalist way that demonized homosexuality and homosexual encounters as a threat for familial cosiness and stability.[66] In this sense, as pointed out by Edwards, this oppressive discourse can be reversed and, from a gay viewpoint, cruising in public spaces can also be interpreted as a form of resistance, 'an opposition to the heterosexual monogamous and familial sexual ideology motivating state surveillance'.[67] Hocquenghem has also argued that 'instead of translating this scattering as the inability to find a centre, we could see it as a system in action, the system in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis', adding that the fact that homosexual encounters are not limited 'to

the seclusion of a domestic setting but outside, in the open air, in forests and on beaches' should be interpreted as positive.[68] Implicit to Hocquenghem's words is the idea of 'nature' and (homo) sexuality described above in relation to the lake scene in *Beautiful Thing*. In *Get Real* the 'natural' setting of the encounter between Steven and Glen could also be read as liberating in this way. Glen could also be seen as an elder version of Steven's next conquest, straight-acting sportsman and schoolmate John Dixon. A casual link is established between the two through the cameras of Steven's father (David Lumsden). He takes family pictures of Glen and then lends the camera to Steven so that he can photograph John for the Sports section of the school paper. The athletics photo session gives them a second chance to talk and become closer (after an unexpected first blind date at the men's toilet that had been marked by John's sense of (homo)sexual panic and paranoia). It also gives Steven a chance to 'own' John with a sense of fetishized queer pleasure. These photos also have a double-edged effect in *Get Real* in so far as they can be seen as a way to emphasise the act of gender/sexual performance (Glen acting like a heterosexual father, John posing as a heterosexual sportsman – emphasising the value of family and sport as two major heterosexual institutions) but also as a testimony and proof of such performance and, as such, a symbol of truth (Steven finds out about Glen's double life when he turns up for the family photo session, Steven's mother learns about her son's feelings for John when she sees the pictures under his bed and John's parents find out about the 'strange' friendship of their son and Steven when they decide to look for the excellent photographer to get some extra prints).[69]

As in *Beautiful Thing* (and many Anglo-American literary classics), diving is used in Shore's film as a symbol of (homo)sexual liberation. John had his first homosexual experience during a school trip to Cornwall. He tells Steven how one pupil from a different school dared him to jump into the sea and then seduced him. Later, Steven and John's relationship peaks when John's parents are away and he invites Steven to spend the weekend in his state. Some of the more physical scenes between the two boys take place by the pool. As a kind of sexual baptism (not dissimilar from the one in *Beautiful Thing*), John sprays Steven with a watering hose and then they jump into the pool together. Apart from the obvious phallic imagery (that seems to suggest that John would be the one penetrating Steven), their sense of happiness and confidence is highlighted in this scene by the fact that not even the sudden appearance of homophobe schoolmate Kevin, who was jogging by, seems to disturb their pleasure. John's remark that Kevin can't swim could also point to his intellectual inferiority and a coded way to describe his lack of understanding of homosexual experiences.

As Jamie did in *Beautiful Thing*, Steven fails to join in the school *macho* sports and he is abused by some bigoted schoolmates who speculate about the sexual nature of his 'difference' (and, in scenes reminiscent of MacDonald's film, the school bullies snatch his bag and play around with it). Like Jamie, he also skips classes, although, unlike him, he does not find nostalgic refuge in Hollywood classics but instead chooses to go to the park in search of action (as he later explains to his parents, he goes there when he has 'a block' and needs to 'unblock'). Thus, his sense of isolation at school is compensated by meeting gay strangers by the park's public toilet. In scenes that are also resonant of E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, Steven and John go to the woods at night seeking some sense of privacy (an apparent contradiction of public gay encounters that seems to contradict rigid structures of public and private spaces).[70] The woods are known to be

a gay cruising area and are often the focus of homophobic remarks at school and raided by the police on a regular basis.[71] Yet, the two young lovers use the wood as a meeting place where they embrace and even fantasize about their future together. This sense of peace is broken in one occasion by a police chase. In that scene, John's athletic make-up allowed him to run fast and arrive at home safely whereas Steven was caught and taken home by the police. Here, the police stand for the law as an oppressive force that interferes with queer pleasures. The uncomfortable scene where Steven is informally cautioned about the woods in front of his distressed parents is cross-cut with scenes of John arriving safely at his parental comfortable home and his father asking him to call his girlfriend back. On the surface at least, heterosexuality is presented as the easiest option, a safe haven in comparison to the risks of homosexual experiences. In one occasion he stands Steven up and instead spends the day with Christina (Louise J. Taylor), later admitting that the reason why he saw her and not him that day is because he needed to feel good about himself. Yet, by the end of the film we get quite a different impression when Steven's honesty to himself and others allows him to re-emerge as the real school hero. In the final scene it is John who stands passively on a bench, devastated and fearful, as if unable to do anything about his situation, while Steven moves on and is driven away by a triumphant Linda (Charlotte Brittain), who has finally learned to drive. Steven proudly throws the 'L' plates out of the car's window, as if suggesting that they have both learned a lesson and are ready to move on towards a freer life, as the final song (Aretha Franklin's 'Think') seems to celebrate.

Politics: Gay, Queer, or simply 'Dodgy'?

In *Beautiful Thing* homophobia is present in the school and in the council estate. At school, pupils bully Jamie for not joining in the football games. Similar suspicions are raised by Leah and other neighbours in the state. Early on he shows some concern about his mother calling him 'weird' but concern soon grows into pride and self-confidence. Sandra discovers about his homosexuality when she sees Jamie's schoolbooks scrawled with homophobic insults such as 'bum fucker' and 'queer bent bastard'. Yet, Jamie seems unaffected by these comments and instead invests his energy in finding out about gay connections (he steals a copy of *Gay Times* from his local newsagents) and in his relationship with Ste. Ste, on the other hand, is totally paranoid and extremely worried about potential homophobic abuse. For Jamie things are much simpler. When Ste asks him if he is gay, his answer is that he is 'very happy', especially when they are together. In the same way that Ste had earlier been shown as an 'example' to Jamie of how to act straight and join all the other boys, Jamie here sets an example of how to be queer and proud. Following this scene, Ste's paranoia seems to slowly fade away as his confidence in their relationship grows stronger (a fact signalled by his buying Jamie a hat with the money Sandra gave him to buy a present for his 'bird'). When the truth comes out, Jamie explains to Toni why his mother is upset, declaring, 'I am a queer, bender, puffter, knob-shitter, brown-eater, shirt-lifter', thus deflecting the tools of homophobic oppression. In the next scene, his mother cynically reveals that he unknowingly 'wore' the queer tag with pride since he was a baby in a pram marked 'queen of the road'. In the final scene, the background music ('Dream a Little Dream of Me') seems to suggest that the apparently gay friendly atmosphere in the astonished neighbourhood that gathers around the two boys dancing together in the middle of the communal patio is only temporary, like a carnival, a fantasy that is likely to last as little as the markedly queer rainbow that shines around the state at the beginning of the film.

Had we not been aware of production background of *Get Real* (the above-mentioned sexual politics of the playwright and scriptwriter), it would have been tempting to see the gay toilet-cruising narrative and its visual and temporal equation with the hedgehog sex as a tactic to demean gay sex. Yet, bearing in mind the film's queer context and the politics of public gay sex, this parallelism could be seen as having the exact opposite effect. As Glen points out, Steven is 'reading' *Romeo and Juliet* upside down. This is, of course, a mere sign of nerves but also a reference to Steven's unconscious and perhaps a metaphoric way of showing how, by seeking to fulfil his (homo)sexual needs, Steven is in fact reverting the imposed heterosexist education. The school's insistence on heterosexual coupling (not just through education but also through peer pressure) with the use of classic examples of heterosexuality such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* inhibit but do not necessarily impede the formation of alternative sexual identities during school years.[72] Steven is portrayed as bright and clever (his wit and his writing award speak by themselves) and yet he is often 'lost' during the *Romeo and Juliet* discussion seminars, often because he is engaged in his own romantic thoughts about John, who often trains on the school grounds right outside the classroom's window. Steven's witty humour could be interpreted 'as a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity'.[73] The script's insistence on the Shakespeare play could also be read in terms of the difficulties of the Romeo and Juliet relationship (due to class prejudices) and, therefore, interpreted as a parallel situation to that of John and Steven (due to their sexuality).[74] Hence, Shore's comments about the 'universal appeal' of the film in the film's official website could be interpreted not as a way of commercializing the film by making it attractive to the heterosexual majority but also a way of explaining that society's prejudices about sexualities are as illogic, as unfair, and often as tragic as those class prejudices experienced by Romeo and Juliet.[75]

References to other classic heterosexual love stories, such as Mike Newell's *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), are also displaced and deconstructed. In one of the toilet scenes (when Steven and John meet for the first time), Shore uses The Troggs's song 'Love is All Around'. The song had been a hit in Britain in the mid-1990s when re-recorded by pop band Wet Wet Wet for the soundtrack of Newell's film. By association to the film, the song bears a markedly romantic and heterosexual memory for contemporary audiences. This could be seen simply as a humorous touch (a romantic love song associated to weddings is used as soundtrack for no-strings-attached gay sex cruising). Yet, like the Romeo and Juliet story, this more contemporary reference can also be used as a way to re-emphasize the deep-down similarities between the two stories. In a similar way, Harrinson's ballad 'You Are So Beautiful' is used ambiguously at a school ball: all the couples on the dance floor are heterosexual. Yet, while Steven dances with friend Linda and John with girlfriend Christina, the two boys are staring at each other, again establishing an undercurrent homosexual narrative against the grain. Apart from the narrative strategies mentioned earlier (the use of nature, the classic Oxbridge opposition between 'the athlete' and 'the aesthete'),[76] there is a more explicit reference to Forster's gay classic *Maurice* that also contributes to place the film within a cultural-historical homosexual background. In Forster's novel, gamekeeper Scudder enters Maurice's bedroom after Maurice unconsciously screams 'come'. In *Get Real*, John also enters Steven's bedroom by surprise in one occasion and also, just before John emerges from the toilet for the first time, Steven was thinking aloud:

'come out' (the sexual connotations in the case of *Maurice* and the queer politics of Steven's words seem too obvious to comment).

John, like Glen, has a girlfriend and a 'safe' straight-acting life on the side and, at the beginning at least, he also perceives his homosexual experiences as isolated acts. Hence, his amazement at the realization that Steven had actually developed an identity as gay. At one point John asks Steven: 'You are not really dodgy... right?' Steven's answer leaves little doubt about his queer pride 'Yes, I am dodgy [. . .] don't be [sorry] because I am not'. Steven's unapologetic queer attitude is often perceived in his determination (he tries to publish an anonymous 'coming out' essay in the school's magazine, he comes out in front of the entire school during his acceptance speech at an award ceremony), his sophisticated wit and double entendres and his 'queering' of icons of heterosexuality such as *Romeo and Juliet* or football. Whilst John often uses sports as a way to reinforce his masculine identity at moments of crisis, Steven admits that the football posters that decorate his room are nothing to do with his interest in the sport (none), he enjoys the pictures because he finds footballers attractive.[77] His gayness goes clearly beyond his sexual preferences; his interest in gay rights is also implicit in his behaviour at the family wedding where everyone assumed that Linda was his girlfriend. He angrily tells Linda that if John were his girlfriend, (s)he could be attending the wedding as his partner.[78] One also gets the impression that he would have been more openly gay at school had John not put as much pressure on him not to. When he finally does come out, his speech includes references to many of the classic and contemporary points of the gay struggle: the anger at having to act straight, the fears to speak out and lose family and friends, and the need for understanding and equality.

Simon Watney has noted that one of the interesting issues raised by Section 28 is its acknowledgement that 'sexual identities are culturally grounded, and [. . .] gay identity does not follow automatically from homosexual desire or practice'.[79] His argument is that legislation like this attempts to maintain a level of marginalization and even criminalization of homosexual acts that seeks to replace the social pressure previously exerted by discarded homophobic laws:

> What is new is the tacit recognition that there is no going back to the strategy of criminalising sexual acts, and with this we witness a displaced concern with the role of *representation*, as in so many other areas of contemporary moralism. The discourse of 'promotion' therefore aims to saturate the image of 'the homosexual' with the traditional connotations of depraved sexual acts, and to prevent the cultural acceptability of gay identity, and sexual diversity rooted in the principle of sexual choice.[80]

As Edwards has noted, the increased presence of gays in British films such as those examined here (perhaps more clearly *Get Real*) are attempts to counteract the absence of positive images of homosexuality at school.[81] By having two boys of the same age engaging in a form of homosexual relationship, the film is choosing to turn its back on 'the unconscious logic [. . .] that homosexuality can only exist as a result of the seduction of minors by predatory older perverts'.[82] I would even go further and emphasize that the film questions the supposed 'perversity' of gay cruising and it is non-judgemental of these types of sexual acts, which are

represented as an efficient mediator of gay brief encounters and also of some potentially long-lasting relationships.

Both *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real* show how contemporary British society as a whole still seems to equate violence, strength, and the practice of certain sports with heterosexual masculinity and their opposites as feminine and, in men, a sign of homosexuality. Both films still emphasize the gender distinctions within the young gay couples, following the classic dyad of sport and art as masculine and feminine interests respectively (the classic athlete/aesthete opposition). Yet, this rigid social structure and the powers that encourage it are criticized. Whilst for John class pressure is strong and linked to his reluctance to assume his homosexuality (very much like *Maurice*'s Clive), *Get Real*'s Steven and *Beautiful Thing*'s Jamie are hopeful and positive symbols of a liberated younger generation of gay men brought up in the 80s and 90s. Jamie and Ste face reality as an 'out' couple in the unfavourable atmosphere of the council estate, Steven Carter was aware of his sexual inclinations since he learned to masturbate at the age of eleven. John's internal struggle becomes obvious not only in his straight-acting behaviour but also in his painful account of his first homosexual experience. In contrast, schoolmate Steven assumed his sexuality with relative ease and pride and, importantly, not in isolation but as a shared and funny experience with a class mate who, like him, argued that he 'preferred willies' to the naked bodies of women of the straight porn magazine that was being passed around. In *Beautiful Thing*, the gay relationship between the two boys is seen as a healthy alternative to the abusive male-chauvinistic relationships that go on in Ste's family and to those suffered by Jamie's mother in the past. Despite suggestions of a gendered relationship between the two boys (where Ste would play the masculine role), this seems to be a mutually beneficial partnership based on equality.

Notes

1. Phillippe Cahill, 'Two Boys in Love: It's a Beautiful Thing', *Campaign*, September 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/camp.shtml.
2. Ibid.
3. Anwar Brett, 'Love Story', *Film Review*, July 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/filmreview.shtml.
4. Cahill, op. cit.
5. Robin Hooper, 'Jonathan Harvey Talks to Robin Hooper, the Royal Court's Literary Manager', *Baby Talk*, 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/baby.shtml.
6. Brett, op. cit.
7. See the *Get Real* Paramount Classics Official Page, http: //www.paramountclassics.com/getreal.
8. Rob Blackwelder, 'Getting Real with Simon Shore', *Splicedwire*, 1999, http: //www.splicedonline.com/features/simonshore.html.
9. Ibid.
10. Shore and Silverstone, 'Chat with Director on Bensilverstone.net', 4 November 2000, http: //www.bensilverstone.net/chatsimon.asp.
11. David Jays 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', *Attitude*, June 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/att.shtml.
12. Cahill, op. cit.
13. Shore and Silverstone, op. cit.

14. For a detailed account of psychoanalytic approaches to child and adolescent sexuality, see Ben Gove, 'Framing Gay Youth', *Screen* 37.2, 1996, pp. 174–192, specially pp. 174–79.
15. Michael Bronski, 'Positive Images and the Coming Out Film: The Art and Politics of Gay and Lesbian Cinema', *Cineaste* 26.1, 2000, pp. 20–26, p. 20.
16. Ibid., p. 23.
17. See, for example, Seun Okewole, 'Tom Kalin (Interview)', *Sight and Sound*, 2.5, September 1992, pp. 36–37; Ruby Rich, 'New Queer Cinema', *Sight and Sound* 2.5, September 1992, pp. 30–34 and 'Queer and Present Danger', *Sight and Sound* 3, March 2000, pp. 22–25 or Cherry Smyth, 'Queer Questions' (compilation of short articles written by directors Derek Jarman, Pratibha Parmar, Isaac Julien, and Constantine Giannaris), *Sight and Sound* 2.5, September1992, pp. 34–35.
18. Bronski, op. cit., p. 24.
19. Ibid., p. 25.
20. Richard Dyer, 'Believing in Fairies: the Author and the Homosexual' in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 185–201, p. 200.
21. Gove, op. cit., p. 178.
22. Ibid.
23. Bronski, op. cit., p. 24.
24. Adam Mars-Jones, 'Candyfloss for Converts: *Beautiful Thing*', *The Independent*, 13 June 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/independent.shtml.
25. Liese Spencer, '*Beautiful Thing*', *Sight and Sound* 6.6, June1996, pp. 35–6, p. 36.
26. Victoria Stagg Elliot, 'You Can't Ignore (The Boy Next Door)', *Gay Times*, June 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/gt96.shtml.
27. Jays, op. cit.
28. Christopher Stocks, 'Cameos, Talent and More Talent', *Premiere*, July 1996, http: //www.beautiful-thing.com/premiere.shtml.
29. Described as 'unnatural' by Jamie's mother and despite her apparent homophobic outbursts, Leah is one of the queerest characters in the film. Camp by association with Mama Cass and her frequent and glamorous impersonations, Leah is queer also in attitude, in so far as she does not care what people think. Eventually she also turns out to have been a key player in protecting the boys' privacy by lying to Ste's brother.
30. See Joe Panepinto and Donald F. Sabo: 'Football Ritual and the Social Reproduction of Masculinity', in by M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo, eds, *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990, pp. 115–126.
31. David Whitson, 'Sport in the Social Construction of Masculinity' in M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo, eds, *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990, pp. 19–29, p. 29.
32. Ibid., pp. 28–9.
33. Ibid., p. 29.
34. Gove, op. cit., p. 182.
35. José Arroyo, '*Get Real*', *Sight and Sound* 9.5, May 1999, p. 48.
36. Bronski, op. cit., p. 24.
37. *Get Real* Paramount Classics, op. cit.
38. Bronski, op. cit., p. 24.

39. Philip French, 'School's Out: *Get Real*', *The Observer*, 16 May 1999, http: //film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Observer/0,,50587,00.html. Arroyo, op. cit. (1999, 48). Director Shore has admitted that 'the outcome of John's character was, to some extent, Patrick's [Wilde] wreaking revenge' (Shore and Silverstone 2000).
40 Gary Morris, 'Draining the Drama: Simon Shore's *Get Real*', *Brightlights Film,* November 1999, http: //www.brightlightsfilm.com/26/getreal.html.
41 Andrew Pulver, 'Get Real Reality Bites', *The Guardian*, 14 May 1999, http: //www.film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian/0,,49951,00.html.
42 Quoted in Morris, op. cit.
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51 On the issue of homosexuality and the Oedipus complex, see Joseph H. Pleck, 'The Theory of the Male Sex-Role Identity: Its Rise and Fall, 1936 to Present' in Harry Brod, ed., *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, London, Sydney and Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 21–38. Simpson, *Male Impersonators*, pp. 8–19; Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, London and New York, 1992, pp. 190–5; Jonathan Rutherford, *Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 143–72 and Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. by Daniella Dangoor, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.
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54 Quoted in Hindle, op. cit., p. 11.
55 Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality in Literature,* London: Atholone Press, 1977.
56 Santiago Fouz-Hernández, 'Water sports: nature, the male body and homoerotic voyeurism in the film adaptations of E. M. Forster's fiction', *Moenia* 6, 2001, pp. 397–410.
57 Although here the situation is much more highly coded, see Fouz-Hernández, op. cit.
58 Spencer, op. cit., p. 35.
59 One of the very few known cases about the impact of Section 28 at British schools was that of a female (supposedly lesbian) teacher who refused to discuss Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with her pupils on the grounds that the story was too heterosexual.

60 On the issue of 'Mediterranean homosexuality', as defined by Giovanni Dall'Orto, see Alberto Mira, *Para Entendernos: Diccionario de cultura homosexual, gay y lésbica*, Barcelona: Ediciones de la tempestad, pp. 486–8.

61 Paco Alcaide, Juan Vicente Aliaga, Ernesto Farraluque, Pablo Fuentes, Jesús Generelo and Mili Hernández, *En clave gay. Todo lo que deberíamos saber*, Madrid and Barcelona: Egales, 2001, pp. 64–9.

62 Tim Edwards, *Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 100.

63 See Edwards, op. cit., p. 102.

64 Edwards has pointed out that the search for immediate satisfaction in furtive encounters can be read 'as a reflection of the internalisation of industrial, capital values of efficiency and productivity in turn defined in terms of primarily male sexuality' (op. cit., pp. 94–5).

65 Marc Lewis, 'A Sociological Pub Crawl around Gay Newcastle' in Stephen Whitle, ed., *The Margins of the City: Gay Men's Urban Lives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994, pp. 85–100, p. 89.

66 Lee Edelman, 'Tearooms and Sympathy or The Epistemology of the Water Closet' in Henry Abelove et al. *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, ed. by New York and London: Routledge, 1993 (1992), pp. 553–74, pp. 557–8.

67 Edwards, op. cit., p. 94.

68 Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 131.

69 The information that Steven gives John's mother about their 'close' friendship and the weekend spent together at their house while they were away conflicts with what John had told his father in the meantime – that he really did not know Steven that well.

70 See Edwards, op. cit., p. 101.

71 Ironically, the fact that gay cruising in the wood was public knowledge and consequently used as a further marker of gay oppression, actually contributes to 'recruit' more gay users, such as Steven who found out at school (one of his friends had proposed to cover it as a sensationalist story in the local newspaper). The irony of this type of gay oppression that actually facilitates gay encounters is mentioned by Lewis in his account of a similar cruising area in Newcastle upon Tyne (op. cit., p. 89).

72 A queer version of the famous Shakespeare play was performed in London in 2001 and a queer reading of the original play was also recently published. See Richard Burt: 'No Holes Bard: Homonormativity and the Gay and Lesbian Romance with *Romeo and Juliet*' in Donald Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds, eds, *Shakespeare without Class: Misappropriations of Cultural Capital*, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 153–86. For a queer reading of Shakespeare's sonnets, see Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 28–48.

73 Jack Babuscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility' in Richard Dyer, ed., *Gays and Film*, London: BFI, p. 47.

74 See Burt, op. cit.

75 Glen's extra-marital experiences with men are also equated with those of Linda's (heterosexual and married) driving instructor and, thus, not limited to gay experience.

76 See Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*, London and New York: Cassell, 1994, pp. 131–4.

77 See Simpson, *Male Impersonators*, pp. 72–3 and *It's a Queer World*, pp. 33–8.

78 Linda is also a 'queer character' in so far as she is happy to accept Steven's sexuality and to listen to his sexual stories from the beginning and also in the way she relates to her fatness with pride.

79 Simon Watney, 'School is Out' in Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 387–401, p. 392.

80 Watney, op. cit., p. 400.

81 Edwards, op. cit., pp. 148–9.

82 Watney, op. cit., p. 392.

Part Four: Queer Performances

11

Trans-Europe Success: Dirk Bogarde's International Queer Stardom

Glyn Davis

Dirk Bogarde was born on the floor of a taxi, in Hampstead, in 1921. It is tempting to read this unpredicted arrival, somewhere in transit, as a symbolically and ontologically significant event, for throughout his life Bogarde often found himself not quite in the right place, not quite where he wanted to be – whether vocationally, geographically, or even spiritually. His (enormously commercially successful) seventeen years with Britain's Rank Organization, for instance, according to his autobiographies, were stifling, restricting, exasperating: although he worked hard, the films he appeared in were frequently of a poor or mediocre quality. Indeed, cinema critics of the 1950s and 1960s repeatedly praised Bogarde for his skilled performances in lacklustre features. This is not to say, of course, that all of the films Dirk Bogarde made during his time at Rank were execrable. Such a position would (in a somewhat elitist manner) deny the strengths and pleasures of the many popular vehicles starring Bogarde – the *Doctor* series, for instance – and neglect the complexity and significance of *Simba* (Hurst, 1955), *The Spanish Gardener* (Leacock, 1956), *Victim* (Dearden, 1961), and other titles.[1] And yet Bogarde evidently conceived of his release from his Rank contract as emancipatory, as a kind of liberation.

During his later years at Rank, it would seem that Dirk Bogarde felt more keenly the constraints imposed upon him. Between 1963 and 1967, he made four films with the director Joseph Losey, who was exiled from the United States by the McCarthy communist witch-hunts. Bogarde and Losey had previously worked together once, on 1954's *The Sleeping Tiger*, which Losey shot under the pseudonym Victor Hanbury in order to avoid detection and persecution. It was the two Bogarde/Losey films scripted by Harold Pinter – *The Servant* (1963) and *Accident* (1967) – that attained major critical plaudits, and that alerted Bogarde to the fact that, with the right script and a strong director, he could contribute to the production of artistically significant and

Figure 20. The rather "enigmatic sexuality" of Gustav von Aschenbach (Dirk Bogarde) in *Death in Venice* (1971). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

personally satisfying cinema. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Bogarde went on to star in a range of 'art' films, working with a number of notable European directors – Luchino Visconti, Liliana Cavani, Alain Resnais, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Bertrand Tavernier. This chapter will focus on the two films that Bogarde made with Visconti – *La Caduta Degli Dei/ The Damned* (1969) and *Morte a Venezia/ Death in Venice* (1971) – as decisive markers of transition between Bogarde's popular British stardom and his European 'art-house' career. Crucially, I wish to argue three major points: firstly, in Bogarde's collaborations with Visconti, it is possible to identify an attempt to model a new, somewhat unique, 'international' pan-European type of stardom; secondly, this border-crossing form of stardom was intimately bound up with Dirk's rather enigmatic sexuality, which (for reasons that will be explored shortly), I will be terming 'queer'; and thirdly, these concerns are evident and manifest in the fabric and texture of *The Damned* and *Death in Venice* themselves.

Stardom and Nationality

Dirk Bogarde's mother was English; his father's family was Belgian. Conceived in Paris, Bogarde was born in England, but he returned to live in France (near Grasse, Provence) at the start of the 1970s, staying there for almost twenty years. Despite these European connections, and his rather exotic-sounding name, Bogarde remained, for much of his life, a quintessentially English star. During his years at Rank, as Andrew Spicer notes, Bogarde was frequently cast in specifically British character roles as 'the debonair aesthete' or 'the middle-class boy-next-door';[2] although he also played spivs (*The Blue Lamp* (Dearden, 1950)), leather-panted bandits (*The Singer Not the Song* (Baker, 1961)), and so on, his prevailing "star image [was] of the passive and sensitive male – a soft, expressive masculinity."[3] Bogarde's smooth-but-clipped precise diction, his pouting, rather down-turned lips, expressive eyebrows, and tidy dress were often associated with a sense of yearning or melancholy. As Donovan Pedelty remarked, writing in *Picturegoer* in 1957, "[h]e looks romantic. His attitude suggests there is no hope of happiness in it. He *provokes* us into *wanting* that contradictory prediction to be wrong."[4] Whilst other male British film stars of the 1950s – Stanley Baker, John Mills, Kenneth More – were also, like Bogarde, "debonair, restrained and generally mature middle-class actors"[5] (the phrase is Justine Ashby's), Dirk was alone in his sensitivity and melancholy.

As the preceding paragraph highlights, assessing Dirk Bogarde's significance as a film star necessitates an understanding of the history and workings of the British star system. And yet accounts of British stardom are rather thin on the ground.[6] By and large, academic analyses of film stardom as an institution – from Richard Dyer's seminal *Stars* via Richard deCordova's *Picture Personalities* to Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing*[7] – have focused, perhaps rather unsurprisingly, on American (Hollywood) cinema. In the opening pages of *Stars*, Dyer points out that it may be possible to apply his observations on Hollywood to other national cinemas: he claims there are similarities between the star systems in operation in individual countries, but cautions that specific national differences also need to be recognized and taken into account. Or as Bruce Babington puts it, "the institutions of film stardom exhibit major constants running across different film cultures, but each national cinema produces different inflections of them."[8] Fortuitously, for our purposes, Babington goes on to identify some of the characteristics of the British star system that set it apart from that of Hollywood. As he points out, there are particular

> phenomena persisting through British film history, such as lesser specularisation..., tendencies for films to be built less as star vehicles than as ensemble pieces, more restrained publicity, and more emphasis on the 'acting' and 'picture personality' discourses than on the 'star' one..., as well as persistent remnants of the suspicion of stardom... All these lead not to an absence of stardom but certainly to a more muted version of it.[9]

Given these distinctive idiosyncrasies – which highlight the apposite nature of the title of Geoffrey Macnab's book on British cinema stardom, *Searching for Stars* – Dirk Bogarde's resounding commercial success and popularity with audiences, at its peak during the late 1950s, seems even more impressive.

If there are marked distinctions between the mechanics of the Hollywood star system and those of Britain's, differences also exist between individual European countries. France, Spain, Germany, and Italy, for instance, all have unique film cultures with their own histories. Each country's rate of indigenous film production has waxed and waned throughout the last century; each national film industry has its own star system. Of course, as Benedict Anderson has famously identified, national identities are rather fictitious 'imagined communities';[10] further, there have always been bleeds, blurring interactions, between national film cultures, a seepage that has become more noticeable in recent decades with the (financially necessary) rise of European co-productions. Yet nationality continues to be a crucial discursive factor in identifying the distinctiveness of – and, indeed, simply labeling – the cinema production of individual countries. And it remains true that for a film star from one country to attempt to cross into the cinema productions of another is a venture of some trepidation: character types with which the actor is associated may not easily transfer; accommodation (or 'fit') within the new system could be jarring, disjunctive, even impossible, and so on.

In this regard, Dirk Bogarde's later (post-Rank) career is distinctive and notable for his successful movement between the cinemas of several different nations – France, Italy, Germany. Of course, he was not the first film actor to cross national borders in order to

find work, an audience, and personal fulfilment. Many Europeans – from Ronald Colman to Marlene Dietrich – found success in America: indeed, a journey into the US firmament continues to function as the direction of passage many actors aspire towards. There has also been movement from America to Europe (Jean Seberg's appearance in *À bout de souffle/ Breathless* (Godard, 1959), for instance) and between European countries (such as Brigitte Bardot's role in the second *Doctor* film, *Doctor at Sea* (Thomas, 1955) or, more recently, Charlotte Rampling's collaborations with the French director Francois Ozon, *Sous Le Sable/ Under the Sand* (2000) and *Swimming Pool* (2003)). What marks Bogarde's international success as a star is his sheer mobility, his (seemingly effortless) ability to 'drop into' a varied range of productions for different directors, to affect a largely nationally non-specific (or pan-European) demeanour, whilst also maintaining – with some subtle shifts – his established characteristic persona. That is, while Bogarde was never able to entirely free himself from his English star persona – which was maintained, most notably, in his fictional and autobiographical writings and in television and radio interviews he provided later in life – his European film career attempted, valiantly, to construct a new star persona which was not geographically rooted or, which, at the very least, troubled at 'stable' national boundaries. This attempt, I would argue, was fundamentally tied to Bogarde's sexual orientation, and his public handling of his relationship with Tony Forwood, the manager with whom he shared his life and home for around four decades.

Opening Bogarde's Closet

A large percentage of Bogarde's adoring fan base in the 1950s and 1960s (and, of course, subsequently) was made up of straight women. Due to this, Bogarde's star image was notably heterosexual during the decades of his Rank popularity. He was linked, romantically, to Nan Baildon, with whom he shared a house in Chester Row, Belgravia, for several years, and with the French model Capucine. However, fan magazines of the time troubled Bogarde's status as heterosexual. As Andy Medhurst writes of these publications,

> There is a general tendency in the 50s for British male stars to be shown as country gentlemen, sporting tweeds and jodhpurs and living in rural comfort. Bogarde fits in with this trend, but, with hindsight, can be seen to be playing with its codes, quietly mocking its absurdities while the Richard Todds went along with them wholeheartedly. [...] even in the prime of his romantic hero phase, Bogarde's star image is at some level opposing itself to traditional masculinities.[11]

In retrospect, it is also quite astonishing how many of Bogarde's roles were – more or less explicitly – 'queer' or 'gay'. *The Singer Not the Song*, *The Spanish Gardener*, and *The Servant*, along with other titles, were all homoerotically charged; *Victim* was the very first British film to openly *name* homosexuality and to handle the topic in a non-pejorative manner; *The Damned* and *Death in Venice*, as will be explored shortly, both featured homosexuality as a fundamental thread in their tapestry. The content of the films that he made, supplemented by a variety of extra-textual representations, constructed a specific star image for Bogarde – the melancholic, 'sensitive' male described above. Richard Dyer has identified this image, Bogarde's persona, as consonant with the gay stereotype of the 'sad young man', a rather ineffable youthful figure on the cusp of manhood whose lead

characteristics (physical prettiness, sexual ambiguity, an introspective demeanour) coalesce around a markedly 'soft' masculinity.[12] But was Dirk Bogarde himself actually gay?

Bogarde's manager from the late 1940s to the 1980s was Anthony Forwood, once also an aspiring actor. Shortly after the Second World War, Forwood divorced his wife, the actress Glynis Johns; soon he was sharing a house with Bogarde, whom Forwood made his only client. Until his death in 1988, Forwood tended to Bogarde's accounts and business concerns, finding him scripts to read and proof-reading his books. Rumours and hypotheses regarding the relationship between the two men have proliferated. Bogarde always denied that they were lovers: throughout the seven volumes of autobiography that he produced, Forwood is always simply referred to as 'Forwood', surname only, a rather militaristic or aristocratic form of nomenclature. As Bogarde himself stated,

people thought my calling him "Forwood" in all my books made him sound like the gardener but he was always "Forwood" to me. People are far too obsessed nowadays with homosexuality. Ours was a totally platonic relationship; Tony was a rather puritanical figure who happened to hate the idea of homosexuality.[13]

If Bogarde *was* gay, then he might have felt the need – perhaps for reasons connected with his class identity, or due to the persistent, complex pressures associated with the closet of film stardom – to maintain silence, or to preserve a 'respectable' (that is, heterosexual) image. This could serve as explanation for a rather famous comment made by Bogarde:

> People can't understand how you can be unmarried, have an adoring family and simply wish to be on your own. I am not a homosexual, but if that's what people want to think, they'll think it. The truth is, I dread possession. No one is ever allowed to come too close and the limit is always fixed by myself. So far and no further.[14]

Even renowned interviewers such as Russell Harty and Sue Lawley failed to crack open Bogarde's enigmatic relationship with Forwood. The following exchange, for instance, took place when Bogarde appeared on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* in 1989, the year after Forwood's death:

> Sue Lawley: You've made a claim from time to time that yours and Tony Forwood's was not a homosexual relationship. Nevertheless, there will always be those who will choose to believe that it was. Do you mind? Do you resent it?
>
> Dirk Bogarde: I resented it enormously, for his family, and for my own family, of course I did. But what can you do, especially in this country, with the press we have here and the cruelty of it...?

As this exchange recognizes, and as Bogarde himself acknowledged, his denials and refutations regarding the status of his relationship with Tony Forwood did not, and still do not, prevent speculation occurring and assumptions being made. Certainly, a recent BBC *Arena*

documentary ('The Private Dirk Bogarde', 2001, directed by Adam Low), in presenting the testimonials of family members, identifying soldiers with whom Bogarde may have formed 'special bonds' during the war, and screening previously unseen 16mm home footage of Dirk and Tony together, attempted to conclusively prove Bogarde's homosexuality. However, with Bogarde and Forwood now both deceased, any final, definitive statement will always be elusive, impossible. Bogarde's sexuality remains ambiguous, enigmatic – and, indeed, that was (and remains) part of his appeal to his many fans.

Bogarde could not, and cannot, be pinned down: even though we have the testimony of seven memoirs, these reveal only as much as Bogarde wanted readers to know. The book can never be closed, the story never completed. Or as Sheridan Morley puts it, "Expecting to learn the final truth about Dirk anywhere in his own writing would be like expecting the conjurer to show us the bottom of the rabbit's hat."[15] Many aspects of Bogarde's career (specific films, fan material, interviews, memoirs) and of his life (sharing a house with another man, as a pair, for decades) suggest that he was homosexual, but without his overt admission, the manifold connotations never coalesce into denotation and closure. For this reason, he can be described as a 'queer' star, rather than a 'gay' one. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written,

> one of the things that "queer" can refer to [is] the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constitutent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically.[16]

Or as Donald Hall has suggested, to be 'queer' "is to abrade the classifications, to sit athwart conventional categories or traverse several"[17] – that is, to always resist the lure of concrete labels and definitions. 'I am not a homosexual', wrote Bogarde, but he did not claim to be *heterosexual*; indeed, if the sexuality of Bogarde's star persona can be pinned down at all, it is surely as 'non-straight'.

Bogarde's queerness – his cryptic, indeterminate identity – fundamentally enabled, I would like to suggest, his motion between a number of different European film projects. His 'queer' sexual identity was impossible to name, although always carrying a suspicious base whiff of effeminacy, possibly homosexuality. In a similar manner, Bogarde's later career, beginning with his films with Visconti, constructed an international model of geographically unlocatable stardom that, nevertheless, could not entirely eliminate or excise memory traces of Bogarde's history as a British pin-up. Bogarde managed, throughout his career, to never openly state his sexual identity, elusively evading the grasp of fans, journalists, biographers, and so on; this skill was also brought to bear on his ability to move between the national cinemas of several different European countries. As I have already suggested, it is difficult for actors to transfer their skills between movies made in varied nations, due to the idiosyncrasies of indigenous film cultures – yet Bogarde succeeded admirably. The format of Bogarde's star image began to morph upon his move to Europe: indeed, his post-Rank career, I believe, offers up a model of international, specifically *queer* stardom. The two films that Bogarde made with Visconti, *The Damned* and *Death in Venice*, were crucial turning points in Bogarde's career, and can be interpreted as

offering sophisticated meta-textual commentary on Bogarde's slippery sexual identity, as well as his ability to easily, painlessly transgress the boundaries of national cinemas.

The Damned

Set in the 1930s, *The Damned* details the implosion of the German von Essenbeck family, owners of a steelworks, under the combined destructive influences of National Socialism and the capitalist drive. Joachim (Albrecht Schönhals), the patriarchal head of the family, dies and is replaced by an outsider marrying into the family, Friedrich Bruckmann (Bogarde). Friedrich's wife-to-be, Sophie von Essenbeck (Ingrid Thulin), has a son, Martin, by her previous husband. Martin, played by Visconti's lover Helmut Berger, is a manipulative, sadistic, sexually deviant individual whose political machinations culminate, in the film's final minutes, in Friedrich and Sophie committing suicide together shortly after their marriage.

In contrast to Visconti's *Il Gattopardo/The Leopard* (1963), whose sumptuous visuals and immaculately choreographed party scenes seem to mourn the passing of an era of charismatic aristocratic leaders – 'leopards' and 'lions', contrasted by Enrico Medioli, one of the film's screenwriters, with today's 'hyenas'[18] – *The Damned* condemns the decadence and licentiousness of the upper classes corrupted by the twin evils of money and political power. Although Visconti and Bogarde have both claimed that the von Essenbecks were based on the Krupps, with the claustrophobic mansion in which much of *The Damned* takes place specifically modeled on the villa owned by the real-life family,[19] the film can also be read as a scathing indictment of Visconti's own class: the director was the direct descendant of one of Italy's wealthiest and oldest aristocratic lineages. In relation to this 'message', the form of the film deserves some critical attention, as it evinces Visconti's connections with the realms of theatre and opera. *The Damned* takes the form of a political parable, with theatrical dialogue delivered in a rather didactic, Brechtian fashion. The thrust of the narrative is a tragic one, invoking shades of Shakespeare; the emotions expressed are often operatically overplayed; and the *mise-en-scène*'s colour scheme emphasizes heightened, sickly greens and browns, redolent of decay.

Although it has lofty ambitions, combining multiple narrative threads and attempting to follow each member of a large ensemble cast, *The Damned* fails to fully cohere. This may be due in part to the film's history of production, a stop-start process with shooting constantly interrupted by irregular cash-flow problems. It may also be attributable to last-minute editing decisions: in the cutting room, according to Bogarde, Visconti hacked out almost two-thirds of Friedrich's scenes, prioritizing those starring Helmut Berger. However, *The Damned*'s ellipses and elisions provide the completed film with a fascinating, fragmented, often indecipherable form. Narrative coherence is jettisoned (along with several of the lead characters, who simply disappear), in favour of spectacular, baroque set pieces, many of which are cut through with queer – that is, sexually liminal – tensions and impulses.

Homosexuality, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has identified, is a prevalent texture in many of Visconti's films. Aside from the homoeroticism evident in films such as *Ossessione* (1943) and *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* (1960),

> there is also, below that, a sub-text formed by the recurrence of certain favoured actors and by the iconic one-off appearance of Jean Marais, the lover of Jean Cocteau, in *White Nights* [*Le notti bianche*, 1957]. It is not possible, as the older generation of Italian critics did, simply to turn a blind eye to them. At the very least there is something happening in the Visconti text, consciously willed or not, which it is impossible to ignore.[20]

In other words, Visconti's films, as a collective body of work, are riven through with a subliminal queerness. This submerged queerness sometimes breaks through the surface of the texts, manifesting itself more or less overtly. However, the political problem with the *overt* representations of homosexuality in Visconti's oeuvre is that he tended to handle them in a critical, negative fashion. As Nowell-Smith notes, "[c]ritics in the 1970s who saw Visconti as being, or having been, a progressive film-maker and who hoped he would be equally progressive in his attitudes to sexuality tended to be disappointed by what they found."[21] In *The Damned*, for instance, "a generalized homosexuality is attributed to the brutal beer-swilling SA, while in the same film Martin is made into a repository of all forms of perversion..."[22]

The Damned's depictions of homosexuality, however, are not so easily contained or rigidly codified: often, the film's macabre and ethically troubling moments are offset by the dissonance of queerly pleasurable visuals. For instance, although Martin serves as a diegetic embodiment of corruption, deception, and malice, Visconti's camera is enchanted with Berger's angular features, affording him numerous lingering close-ups, following him across palatial rooms, and presenting his body (in and out of costume) as a sexualized spectacle. This treatment *could* be interpreted as a comment on the seductive nature of evil. However, it is not just Berger who is specularized in such a fashion: Günther (Renaud Verley), Martin's cousin, is lovingly photographed, as are many of the other men in the film. This is most evident in one lengthy sequence, a recreation of the Night of the Long Knives, in which we witness the SA (or 'brown-shirts') indulging in a lengthy session of debauched drinking, involving singing, cross-dressing, and a substantial degree of partial nudity. As the SA retire to their beds, many with each other, the SS stealthily approach in a night-time raid. The impending arrival of the SS is heard by one inebriated SA soldier – blond, tall, muscular, clad only in stockings and suspenders. As he cocks his head, listening to the vehicles pulling up, the camera dwells on his smooth, well-defined chest and facial bone structure. The SS massacre the SA. One of the SA casualties is Konstantin von Essenbeck, murdered in the bed that he is sharing with another man; he is assassinated by Friedrich (Bogarde), his brother-in-law, who has been coerced into committing the murder. The subsequent brief shot of Friedrich's face is rather unreadable.

The implications of this lengthy sequence of excess, revelry, and mass murder – as with *The Damned* as a whole – are mixed, and ultimately unresolvable to one clear interpretation. Despite the brutality depicted, and the association of homosexuality with a range of different unpleasant characters, queer visual pleasures abound. The ambiguity of *The Damned*'s 'message' regarding homosexuality is, arguably, intimately connected to the film's incoherent, fractured narrative. In its impenetrability, its undecidability, this is a markedly queer film. Bogarde's appearance in the film adds an extra frisson of queerness – especially when taken in tandem with the perverse input of Visconti and Berger.

If *The Damned* manages to smoothly incorporate Bogarde's queerness within its fabric, it also – through the particularities of character – succeeds in subtly reconfiguring, and commenting on, Bogarde's status as an ex-patriate Brit. In a destabilizing smear of national identities, Bogarde, retaining his own accent, plays a German in an Italian film. Friedrich's diegetic status is as an outsider to the von Essenbeck family, who secures himself a financially lucrative and politically significant position inside the steelworks dynasty by marriage. To a significant extent, Bogarde's role can be seen as a reflection of the international transition he was effecting in his real life, as he accepted his first significant part in a film produced in another European nation's indigenous cinema, 'marrying into' an Italian movie, partly for personal gain. Friedrich had to alter his behaviour in order to lead the von Essenbeck clan (he becomes more ruthless and aggressive and has to commit murder); similarly, but obviously less violently, it was necessary for Bogarde to reconfigure his star persona for European consumption. Friedrich, of course, was not altogether successful in his endeavour, dying in the final reel. For Bogarde, however, the future looked much brighter.

Death in Venice

Bogarde took the lead role in Visconti's next feature, an adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* (first published in 1912). The tale focuses on Gustav von Aschenbach, an ailing German composer who takes up residence in Venice's Hôtel des Bains on the Lido in order to recover his health. Whilst recuperating, he espies and becomes infatuated with a young boy, Tadzio (Björn Andresen, chosen by Visconti from over 1500 auditioning children). Venice, however, is hit by an outbreak of cholera, and von Aschenbach slowly dies.

Von Aschenbach's longing voyeuristic glances at Tadzio seem brazenly erotically charged. However, both Bogarde and Visconti claimed in interviews that the film was not about homosexuality, but rather was concerned with more metaphysical ideals and concepts: beauty, death, purity, 'intellectual death', and so on. Occasionally, this is self-evident. For instance, in one scene, as von Aschenbach eats food in the dining room of the hotel, he stares at Tadzio; the aural track provides the spectator with fragments of a philosophical discussion conducted by von Aschenbach and a combative friend about the associations between beauty, nature, and culture.

Without these inserted flashbacks and reminiscences, however, the homoerotic connotations of the scenes set in Venice often approach parodic levels. To take just one sequence, Von Aschenbach sits under a tent's canopy on the beach, watching Tadzio and his friends frolic in the surf. Tadzio and his dark-haired pal Jasciu (Sergio Garfagnoli) walk up the beach away from the sea, Jasciu's arm around Tadzio's shoulder. The two boys wear similar snug figure-hugging all-in-one men's bathing suits, decorated with black and white horizontal lines; their corresponding clothing connotes closeness, possibly even narcissistic attraction. Next to each tent, large white phallic poles jut up from the ground, leaning at a marked degree from the vertical to emphasize their erection-like form and significance. All of the tents are made of fabric printed with vertical black and white lines, against which von Aschenbach's black-banded white hat stands out: this horizontal black line on his clothing connects him with the two swimsuit-wearing boys ambling past him in the sand. As Tadzio and Jasciu pass von Aschenbach, Jasciu

Figure 21. One of Von Aschenbach's "longing voyeuristic glances" at Tadzio (Bjørn Andresen). Courtesy of BFI Stills, Posters and Designs.

kisses Tadzio on the cheek. Across Bogarde's lips, a lascivious sneer worthy of Terry-Thomas slowly forms. This scene, with its over-egged *mise-en-scène* and flagrant erotics, seriously undercuts the claims made by Bogarde and Visconti for the film's higher spiritual aims.

Indeed, the two aspects of the film (metaphysical concerns, homo-charged obsession) fail to work together. The scenes in Venice – in which, on the whole, Bogarde is silent, providing the viewer with little in the way of concrete insight – grate against flashback sequences, in which ponderous philosophical discussions and fragments of von Aschenbach's life with his wife and child unspool. Swathes of Mahler's elegiac third and fifth symphonies attempt to smooth the transitions, but – as with *The Damned* – the meaning of *Death in Venice* is ultimately rather elusive. For Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, this is a serious failing on Visconti's behalf: "None of the themes raised in the film receives any coherent treatment except by reference to the consciousness of Aschenbach, which is their only possible focus. But most of the time the themes are not focused."[23] And yet, once again, as with *The Damned*, the confusing content of *Death in Venice* and its prominently displayed perverse erotics constitute the completed film as a 'queer text': that is, one with fascinating but frequently impenetrable textures, a film that

refuses easy categorization as 'gay'. Von Aschenbach's sexual orientation – like that of Dirk Bogarde himself – is not clear-cut by the time of his death, although viewers may have made their own assumptions.

And, as with *The Damned*, *Death in Venice* seems to offer commentary on Bogarde's own flight from his British homeland. *Death in Venice* opens with von Aschenbach in transit, about to arrive in Venice. He is ill, tetchy, demanding, and rude to the locals. Around halfway into the film, however, he finds himself miserable at having to leave the water-bound city. On his journey by boat to the train station, the camera focuses on his weary, drawn face, wire-rimmed spectacles askew. At the station, however, von Aschenbach loses his luggage and misses his train; smiling, realizing that he will now have to return to the Hôtel des Bains (and to Tadzio), he looks up into the face of a handsome young male station attendant, politely requesting help. On the boat journey back to the hotel, sunshine glints on his glasses, and his health and demeanour seem markedly improved. Cheekily, Visconti shoots Bogarde clambering up on the deck of the boat, affording viewers a full-frame shot of Bogarde's crotch; the returning von Aschenbach, this image implies, is also a sexualized one. Both Bogarde and Gustav von Aschenbach, ultimately, were happy to be spending time in Italy; for both, this was intimately associated with the expression of their queer identities.

Whereas Von Aschenbach abandoned Germany for matters of health, Bogarde moved to Europe in flight from the sick film system of Britain: "the British film industry was showing such distressing signs of malaise that it could only be a matter of time before a final diagnosis would prove the malady to be terminal and the only thing that I could possibly be asked to do was to attend at its funeral".[24] Bogarde moved to Europe to recuperate, to 'get some air'. Von Aschenbach contentedly plays out the last of his days in Venice, lustfully gazing at Tadzio's face and body; in his dying moments, he seems to attain, metaphysically, the elusive object of his desire. Through setting up house in France, moving away from a suffocating country of which he had tired, Bogarde – like von Aschenbach – finally managed to achieve some form of personal enlightenment that his former life had only hinted was possible.

Conclusion

Of course, Dirk Bogarde is not the only actor to have appeared in films produced in countries outside of the national system in which he first attained success: Burt Lancaster, for instance, also worked twice with Visconti, in *The Leopard* and *Conversation Piece* (1974). Nor is he the only 'queer' actor to have done so – Rupert Everett, to name just one example, has appeared in films produced in Italy (*Cronaca di una morte annunciata* (Rosi, 1987)), France (*Tolérance* (Salfati, 1989)), and Russia (*Strelyayushchiye angely* (Shteryanov, 1993)). What is distinctive regarding Bogarde's post-Rank career is the ease with which he reconfigured his dominant star identity – a queer star image, as has been argued – in order to attain trans-Europe success. Bogarde's elusive queer identity enabled his movement between the cinemas of several different European countries, bringing him into contact with a number of highly respected 'art cinema' directors. His films with Visconti, readable as commentaries on his own status as a displaced Briton, were significant projects for Bogarde: both *The Damned* and *Death in Venice*, enigmatic,

convoluted, and opaque texts, are notably queer, 'fitting' rather neatly with Bogarde's own persona and his artistic desires.

Indeed, the paradoxical outcome of Bogarde's transition into pan-European stardom was that – in contrast to his British career, when he was endlessly 'in the wrong place' – he managed to finally 'fit in', to 'feel comfortable'. Dirk Bogarde and Tony Forwood spent almost two decades together at 'Le Pigeonnier', their fifteenth-century farmhouse in Provence; according to Sheridan Morley it was "the happiest twenty years of their lives."[25]

Notes

1. On *Simba*, see Christine Geraghty, 'The Commonwealth film and the liberal dilemma', in *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 112–32; on *The Spanish Gardener*, see Andy Medhurst, '"It's as a man that you've failed": Masculinity and Forbidden Desire in *The Spanish Gardener*' in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, eds, *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), pp. 95–105; on *Victim*, see Richard Dyer, '*Victim*: hegemonic project' in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 93–110, and Andy Medhurst, '*Victim*: Text as Context', *Screen*, vol 25, no 4/5 (1984), pp. 22–35.
2. Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003, 2nd edition), pp. 32–3, pp. 88–94.
3. Andrew Spicer, 'Male Stars, Masculinity and British Cinema, 1945–1960' in Robert Murphy, ed., *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 1987), p. 150.
4. Quoted in Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men*, op. cit., p. 32.
5. Justine Ashby, ''The Angry Young Man is tired': Albert Finney and 1960s British cinema' in Bruce Babington, ed., *British Stars and Stardom, from Alma Taylor to Sean Connery* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 182.
6. Key exceptions would include Babington, ed., ibid., and Geoffrey Macnab, *Searching for Stars: Stardom and Screen Acting in British Cinema* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000).
7. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979); Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994).
8. Bruce Babington, 'Introduction: British stars and stardom', in Babington, ed., op. cit., p. 4.
9. Ibid., pp. 6–7.
10. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).
11. Andy Medhurst, 'Dirk Bogarde', in Charles Barr, ed., *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986), pp. 348–9.
12. Richard Dyer, 'Coming out as going in: the image of the homosexual as a sad young man', in *The Matter of Images*, op. cit., pp. 73–92.
13. Quoted in Sheridan Morley, *Dirk Bogarde: Rank Outsider* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999, 2nd edition), p. 22.
14. Dirk Bogarde, quoted in Morley, ibid., p. 29.
15. Morley, ibid., p. 188.

16. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 8.
17. Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 13.
18. Interview with Medioli in BBC *Arena* documentary, *The Life and Times of Count Luchino Visconti*, directed by Adam Low (2003).
19. See Dirk Bogarde's account of making *The Damned*, in *Snakes and Ladders* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), pp. 250–77.
20. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Luchino Visconti* (London: BFI, 2003, 3rd edition), p. 213.
21. Ibid., p. 212.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 165.
24. Bogarde, *Snakes and Ladders*, op. cit., pp. 256–7.
25. Morley, op. cit., p. 149.

12

Subjection and Power in Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch's *Seduction – The Cruel Woman*: An extension of the configuration of power in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's late oeuvre

Andrea Reimann

This essay investigates lesbian/queer/female subjection, desire, and power in Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch's *Seduction*: *The Cruel Woman* (1985) by reading it as an extension of the configuration of power in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's late work – especially *Querelle* (1982). I flesh out what I believe has not been attended to sufficiently in the scholarly reception of this film, namely the critical, because life-preserving potential that lies in the film's depiction of submission and dominance, using Judith Butler's analyses of subjection in *The Psychic Life of Power* as a theoretical tool.[1] Placing the film loosely in the context of the New German Cinema, I propose to read the film as a performative, post-national, response to the 're-working' of, or coming to terms with, the past that was a main driving force of the New German *auteurs* of the previous decade. *Seduction*: *The Cruel Woman* develops Fassbinder's understanding of the economy of power and desire that rejects a politically correct position and in this way departs from the paradigm of victimization – by the national past and Hollywood's "cultural colonialization" – and from the proclaimed difference from other national cinemas that still were prevalent in the discourse on the New German Cinema.[2] Like Fassbinder's late work, e.g., *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978) and *Lili Marleen* (1980), *Seduction* explores the economy of power and the commodification of desire and they, each in their own way, unearth the "realities which lay hidden behind more romantic, idealized or sanitized views of sex" (Dyer 90).

In *Seduction*: *The Cruel Woman* the co-writers/-directors, inspired by Marquis de Sade's and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's writings – especially *Venus in Furs*, *Justine* and *Juliette*, imagine an art community of consent, consisting of friends, lovers, artists, and slaves. The depiction of this queer community engages with forms of subjection in the present and past in a campy way, on the level of cultural memory, by 'dragging' German history – one of the characters, Friedericke, may be seen as a queer allusion to the Frederican dynasty and Prime Minister Friedrich Zimmermann through her name, and to Goebbels through her entitlement as 'prime minister' responsible for propaganda – and creating a collage of East European and French literary figures. [3] Self-declared tyrant Wanda (Mechthild Grossmann) is the artistic head of the ensemble.[4] She directs S&M performances in stylized *tableaux* (thus reconfiguring the modern manner of discipline and punishment that Michael Foucault describes), works as a dominatrix, and records her work, information about obsessive figures of the past, and how-to instructions for potential dominatrixes on video.[5] The film creates a masochistic aesthetics, through at times very slow, or even arrested motion, suspense of desire, and fetishization of the body that radicalizes Fassbinder's provocative masochism – at least stylistically. The story begins with the arrival of Wanda's American friend Justine (Sheila McLaughlin), once called Juliette, who troubles her relationships with her bourgeois girlfriend, Caren (Carola Regnier), and her husband and business partner, Gregor (Udo Kier). A central part of the story includes Wanda's work with German journalist Märsch, who transforms from interviewer to customer, enacting his 'perverse' desire to serve as Wanda's toilet. Wanda and Justine emerge as the winning team at the end of the film, while Gregor is fired from his job and Caren is left mourning the loss of her girlfriend.

Employing the model of "multiple authorship" – in specific determining economic and technological circumstances – "as performance", as Richard Dryer understands it, I view the film as a critical response to a society and film industry intellectually and emotionally experienced as self-contained and self-perpetuating as it is symptomized in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's oeuvre – most notably in his melodramas (188).[6] Fassbinder, known for his sympathetic, though problematic, portrayals of minorities, repeatedly depicted forms of submission and domination in amorous relationships, and of "exploitation of feelings" as a way of critiquing the morality of post-war capitalist-bourgeois (German) society and its ideology of love (qtd in Elsaesser 1997: 19). Most of Fassbinder's Sirkean melodramas in the 1970s address the audience's emotions so as to make them feel the need for an "emancipation from bourgeois values, relations of domination, and institutions" (Keller 38). Foregrounding the relationships among sexual and economic exchange, dominance and submission defines all relationships, his films consistently demonstrate that the pursuit of "true" love tightens these links in such a way that the characters can no longer move freely. Their "capacity for selfless or self-denying love lands them in deadlocks, [...] [d]ouble-binds where identity is coextensive with its own denial" (Elsaesser 1996: 56–57).[7] In some cases, the negative understanding of power is explicitly related to Nazi Germany and fascism which is in turn linked to show business – especially *Lili Marleen* (1980) and *Veronika Voss* (1982). "Seeing (the German experience of) Nazism as a thoroughly 'modern' purposively political programme that set out to organize its followers' desire, libido and leisure, [Fassbinder combines] in one narrative [*Lili Marleen*] the Second World War and the buoyant entertainment industry [...] via a female star performer and a

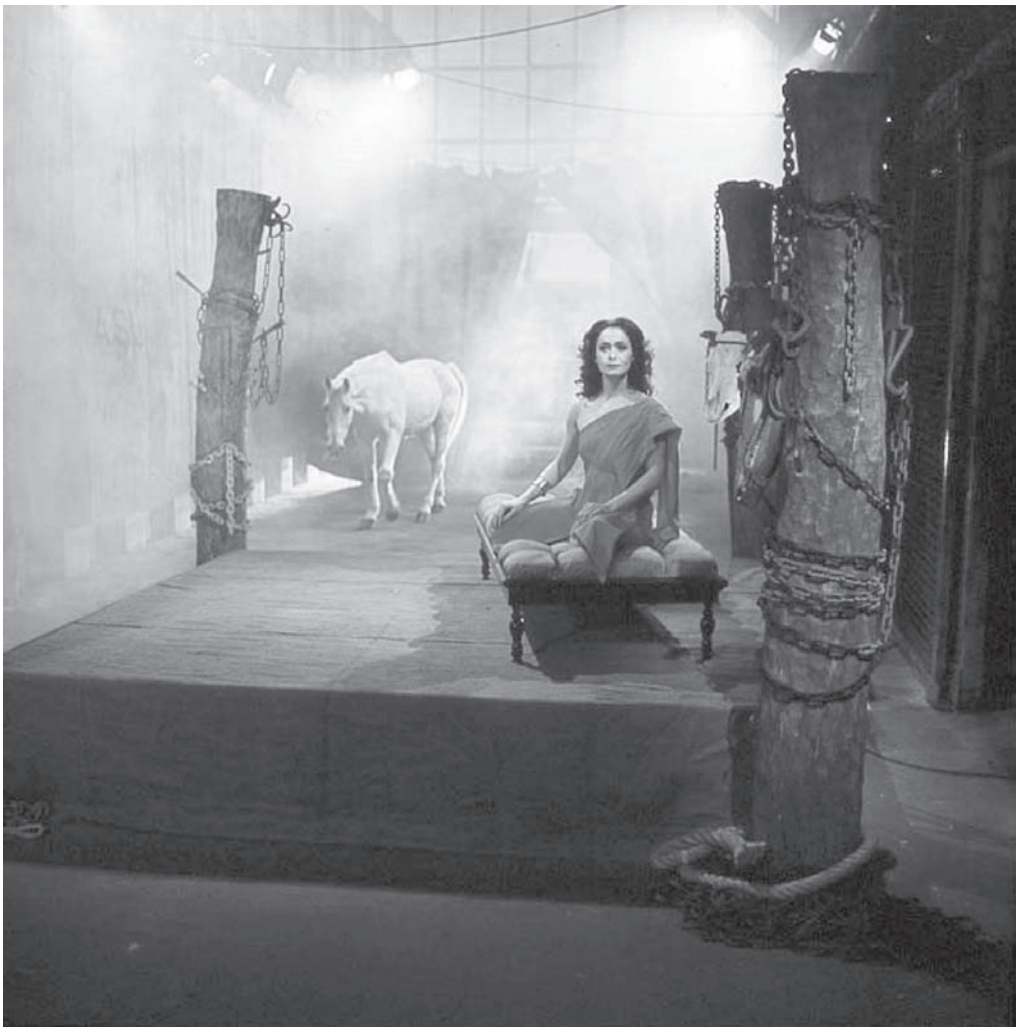

Figure 22. Mechthild Grossmann as "self-declared tyrant" Wanda. Courtesy of Monika Treut.

patriarchal oedipal melodrama," with the female star devising strategies of (more or less successful) actions that are both subversive and conservative (Elsaesser 1996: 153).

While Fassbinder's narratives re-produce the power structures that they criticize as the characters are made to participate (whether willingly, unknowingly, or against their better knowledge), they reject simple, binary notions of power and subjection, perpetrator and victim. In *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978), the protagonist cleverly uses her sexuality so as to become a powerful business woman during the years of the economic miracle. Retrospectively, however, her subjectivity and agency are questioned, if not denied, as she is shown to have functioned as a puppet in a contract between two men. Some scholars have argued that Fassbinder employs

a strategy that represents women as victims, who embody the nation and German history.[8] While it is true that the female body is represented as vulnerable, as they state, Fassbinder's women – and in particular Maria Brown – however, also embody power, and the economy of desire, which complicates the view that they, and by extension Germany, are simply victims of an external power. Even if Maria Brown appears not as the subject of power, but as a commodity that caters to male desire at the end of the film, the image of the woman who plays with her power prevails over the impression of the passive puppet.

In *Seduction*: *The Cruel Woman*, co-writers/-directors Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch devise an aesthetic and narrative way of negotiating dominance and subjection that re-negotiates Fasbinder's scenarios of power play and the economy of desire, drawing from philosophical, cultural-political and cinematic discourses of the 1980s. The opening sequence – a sailor standing at the Hamburg harbour is muttering the words if I had a wish, a long shot of underground pillars in water, a man crawling on the floor licking it, and another man crouching on the ground – initiates a discourse about the fabrication of wishes that locates masochism in the bodies on screen, i.e. assigns desire its own, verbal realm of fantasy.[9] If we read the film as the pronouncement of the wish, and the final scene as its fulfilment, then the wish come true may be described as follows: it feels like uncanny, comic relief, it looks like two women are having fun on stage – one drinking the blood from the other's wounded hand, and it means that the community that the film envisions will prosper.

Within the discourse of (perverse) desire, power and love are configured in the narrative as an effect of a performance that is premised on the assumption that "love is like work in the pit"– "with slaves," who "will not die out any time soon". This is to say that the emergence of the subject of power happens on the basis of a system which is based on "slave work" – a proposition that not only reminds us of the historical condition of the emergence of the western bourgeois subject, but also of the perverse creation and extinction of non-subjects in the Holocaust. However, as the film refuses national/historical determination, it resists closure.

Seduction: *The Cruel Woman* conceives the subject in terms of a "subjection" viewed as a source of creative power in the Foucauldian sense. Butler's account of subjection in *The Psychic Life of Power* and Baudrillard's observations on seduction are useful in showing how the film's representation of power and submission formulates a strong female minority position beyond victimization, but also reflects its conditions critically. I suggest that, informed by the writings of Michel Foucault, Treut and Mikesch's film re-introduces, and interrogates, the possibility of agency, which Foucault chose not to elaborate on, and thus foreshadows Butler's rereading of Foucault that is also concerned with the question of agency. Moreover, Treut and Mikesch's configuration of the radically bonded subject views seduction as fundamental to how it functions, thus suggesting that it "derives its strength from [an] allusive and ritual power of exchange" that refutes disclosure of the secret, which would be sexuality – and thus challenges the interpretative psychoanalytic (Oedipal) discourse – which informs Fassbinder's work – that "repress[es] seduction" (Baudrillard 162, 154).

Parts of the *mise-en-scène* and narrative evoke a pre-eighteenth-century world, in which cruelty is seen as a direct manifestation of power and justice. One of the gallery's basement rooms represents a kind of torture chamber, which serves to evoke a time when torture was still a common form of punishment in Europe. Gregor, showing newcomer Justine the chamber, states how back in those times, the agony of the victims was shared, and greatly enjoyed by others who could hear their cries.[10] The torture instruments and Gregor's comment thus relate Wanda's 'business' to an ancient perception of punishment as a solemn rite of justice that enhances life as it is staged and is unabashedly rejoiced. Wanda's performances thus gain "the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices" (Butler 1991: 19). By citing the "shameless" pre-eighteenth-century perception of cruelty as an immediate manifestation of sovereign law, Treut and Mikesch evoke a concept of power that contrasts with the mediated and hidden form of power – and the "disappearance of punishment as spectacle" – that has shaped western society since – and culminated in the Nazis' kind of slavery and extinction that was invisible, unknowable, and unthinkable for most of the world (Foucault 8).

The *tableaux vivants* in Wanda's gallery, and the video, used as a panoptical device, highlight this contrast, by making visible and audible what capitalist-bourgeois society represses on the one hand, and revealing its disciplinary structure on the other hand. Wanda's function is, in other words, to re-attach the spectacle of pain to punishment and pleasure so that the physical effect of power becomes tangible – inscribed in the body. The ceremony in the first *tableau*, i.e., the inauguration of Wanda's new gallery, culminates in a performed inscription of Friedericke's body – Wanda honours her for her dutiful service with a special award: "the permanent sign of slavery, the bleeding rose". Her body comes to function as a medium that transports "cultural values" (dutiful service), as a result of "an inscription of the body" (Butler 1990: 130). Friedericke now embodies a cultural signification that re-attaches the body as an active medium to a signification that reveals, rather than hides, the workings of power. Mikesch and Treut's formal and stylistic subversion of the "category of true sex" detaches power from the bounds of identity and re-attaches it to the subject, conceived as an effect of radical dependence (Butler 1990: 128).

The writers/directors establish and foreground the discourse of sovereign exercise of power described above so as to diegetically re-conceive subjection in productive terms, as the condition of strength and ability to act. Subjection, desire, and love are given new faces because they are embraced by a plot that understands power, following Foucault, as "not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are" (Butler 1997: 2).

In the exposition, we see the couple Wanda and Caren (Carola Regnier) getting out of bed in a room in the gallery. Caren leaves after a short, wordless quarrel. I suggest that this is where the writers'/directors' account of subjection begins – by implicating the spectators not just as receivers, but as active performers. Because Wanda and Caren are introduced as a couple, we perceive Wanda's silent argument with Caren as an "effort to oppose that subordination [that] will necessarily presuppose and reinvoke it" and that we can expect to be consequential for the narrative (Butler 1997: 12). The diegesis begins with female caller Justine, announcing

her arrival to Wanda on the answering machine. This loud announcement is an interpellation in the Althusserian sense, i.e., a "certain way of staging the call", that marks it as a sign of desire (Butler 1997: 107). As Wanda fails to return this call, the spectator is the first to react to "the demand to align oneself with the law", which makes us anticipate the moment when she, too, will turn to its voice (Butler 1997: 101). Before that happens, we see Wanda leaving the bedroom and looking at herself in the bathroom mirror, then Caren in her store, contemplating shiny shoes (her fetishes) and talking to Wanda in a sad voice, and, afterwards, Wanda, naked in a bathtub with a worried face shown alternatively with two perceptual fantasy flashbacks of her and Justine in a passionate erotic encounter near the river. Wanda's "founding submission" in the "non-narrativizable prehistory of the subject" is configured through the montage of Wanda's anxious face when she hears Justine's second phone call and the passionate moments displayed in the fantasy shots (Butler 1997: 112). This montage, connecting Wanda and Caren's psyches (configured through their gazes at the mirror and at the shoes respectively) to Wanda's physical attraction to Justine, indicates that "no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent" (Butler 1997: 7). Wanda's recognition of her passionate attachment provides the condition for her becoming a subject who is able to act, i.e., who not only submits to power, but also derives agency from this submission.

Water becomes a leitmotif indicating the interconnection between the condition of power, i.e., the triumph of desire, and the subject's closeness to dissolution, and the status of power represented by Wanda's profession. The majority of inner images that visualize the relation between desire, subjection, and power are located in, or near, the water: Wanda is lying in the bathtub when Justine calls, and she awaits the moment of role-change – where she plays the submissive role and Justine, now called Juliette, becomes the dominant partner – in the bathtub.[11] On the level of the plot, these introspective 'water scenes', mostly inter-cut with shots of the gallery, create an emotional liberation from the interior, where bodies are subjected to the powerful mistress. On the story level, however, the "disembodied consciousness" is tied precisely to the bodies of the respective characters and causally linked to the role that they come to play within the system of subordination. Thus, while the film stylistically (i.e. through *mise-en-scène* and editing) detaches desire from the 'bonds' that tie the slaves to their mistress, the narrative denies that freedom (Butler 1990: 129).[12]

While the film's style foregrounds desire, passion, and emotions, the dialogues between Wanda and her lovers in which she maintains an ironic, cool detachment, sober down. Wanda is in control of most of the dialogues that verbalize the conflicts between the characters and her judgement of the other characters' roles is authoritative. On the verbal level detachment, reason and the will – not passion, desire, or love – rule. Reason is defined in terms of obedience to the rules of seduction, which, in Baudrillard's words, demand an "unremitting obligation to respond and to outdo, governed by a fundamental rule of the game", which, however, "must never be stated" (164). Those of Wanda's partners who do not obey the rules of seduction, are literally ruled out. Gregor, who insists that he loves her and that they have a binding contract (they are married), is ultimately fired from his job as Wanda's S&M partner because he no longer accepts the "challenge" of a "highly conventional and ritualized pact" that "terminates all contracts" (164). Caren, Wanda's bourgeois girlfriend, likewise loses her partner as she forgets

the rules of seduction that she once knew. After a quarrel in Caren's store, Caren "enacts" her "weakness" and "with [this] weakness" seduces Wanda. However, she turns her weakness into "resignation", suggesting at one point that they should get married, wishing to exchange their "ritualized pact" with a legal contract (Baudrillard 165, 164).

Seduction, in this film, is closely related to creativity and business. Treut and Mikesch sharpen our senses to how Wanda initiates Justine, i.e. teaches her the rules of her business. In the decisive scene when Wanda picks up Justine in her car, Justine's erotic desire is framed in close-ups showing her face and longing gaze, and her hand touching Wanda's leg. Her excitement, however, is attenuated by Wanda's saying that she arrived just in time to start work. Later on, Justine is confronted with the "unremitting obligation" to cooperate:

> Wanda [to Justine, sitting on a bed in a cell-like room, with a spot light on her face]: You can sleep here.
> Justine [looking up at Wanda]: What is this? Don't you love me at all? [Shouting]: Wanda!
> Wanda [Looking at her]: I don't want a new love. We will work together. Time will show what role you will play. Agreed?
> Justine: I guess I have to.
> Wanda: You do not have to.
> Justine: Well I want to.
> Wanda: That sounds a lot better.

Using performative, commanding language, this dialogue replaces the bourgeois imperative to couple with seduction's imperative to cooperate, defining reason, the will, and role play, as the binding elements in the process of subjection – here to the power of seduction – to, thus, again, reject the notion of victimization. Justine's reaction may be viewed as a recognition of the fact that this power is not something imposed "against [her] will" but that she must form her own will because of her "vulnerability [...] to a power not of [her] own making" (Butler 1997: 20). Thus, the proposed model of a powerful business relation refuses the "liberal and existential model of freedom", suggesting that the relation between these two women is both "constraining and constituting the very possibility of volition" (Butler 1990: 124).

Justine's subjection to Wanda's sovereignty represents a counter-representation to the "customary model for understanding this process [that] goes as follows: power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms" as she acknowledges that she is "fundamentally dependent on those terms for [her] existence" (Butler 1997: 2). Because she accepts these terms, "a significant and potentially enabling reversal occurs when power shifts from its status as a condition of agency to the subject's 'own' agency" (ibid. 12). The reversal of roles, when Wanda plays the submissive role and Justine acts as the dominant partner, not only enables Justine to act, but it is also vital to Wanda's existence, i.e., her power to seduce "with weakness". As Robert Tobin points out, "[t]his is precisely the most characteristic pattern for masochism – the powerful use of submission and weakness to gain strength" (50). Wanda asks Justine to "carry her" down the stairs, orders her to get some S&M equipment, and awaits her in

the bathtub, where she looks at the mirror image of her face in the water. In Judith Butler's words, this scene may be viewed as an enactment of the following hypothesis: "If the subject can only assure his/her existence in terms of the law, and the law requires subjection for subjectivation, then, perversely, one may (always already) yield to the law in order to continue to assure one's own existence. The yielding to the law might then be read as the compelled consequence of a narcissistic attachment to one's continuing existence" (Butler 1997: 112). This is to say that Wanda's, as well as Justine's, obedience to the law is understood to be the precondition of the subsistence of the community that this film imagines. Thus, both Wanda and Justine "might be thought as deriving [their] agency from precisely the power [they] oppose, as awkward and embarrassing as such a formulation might be, especially for those who believe that complicity and ambivalence could be rooted out once and for all" (Butler 1997: 17).

Seduction, if read as a queer response to allegories of German fascism, reveals the mechanics of fetishization that turns a fascist threat into a reassurance. The film configures what Laura Mulvey termed "fetishistic scopophilia", by "build[ing] up the physical beauty of the object[s]" that stand in for Wanda – shiny shoes in Caren's store and a robe that Friederike hugs (804). By way of the fetishes, the tyrant is "turned into something satisfying and reassuring, rather than dangerous" and the cruel side of Wanda, which is presented through the narrative and action, becomes "the erotic instinct [. . .] focused on the look alone" (ibid.). However, a fear of castration and loss of control are detached from the male subject here as the fetishists are a lesbian and a transvestite. The symbolic placement of the phallus where it is believed to be lacking subverts the male superiority on which Nazi and other fascist organizations of power and knowledge are founded. Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter* (1973) explicitly represents sadomasochism in the context of National Socialism. As enacted by protagonists Max and Lucia in a concentration camp, and then later in Vienna during the 1950s, the dominant position also shifts from male to female. However, both Max and Lucia ultimately derive the power over each other from the masculinist Nazi power structure that is shown to be in effect even after the war. This is also the case in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen* (1980). Lili Marleen's cult status and the fetishization of her voice and body is a product of the male Nazi culture industry.

It seems to me that scholars have so far underestimated the critical, and arguably political, political potential of this film's re-negotiation of the prevalent paradigm of the 'critique of power' which lies in its simultaneous affirmation of female command and revision of the conditions and effects of authority. In her discussion of the categorization of Monika Treut's work in "The Meaning of Treut?", Julia Knight suggests that the public controversy that the film caused "has very little to do with any actual lesbian or sadomasochistic 'content' but much more to do with the film's production history and reception," i.e., the scandal it caused even before it was completed (41).[13] Mennel corrects that view, stating that the "production and reception scandals of *Seduction* are more closely related to the film's topic of sadomasochism than Knight suggests" (154). Yet, she concludes that the film's "political impact is limited" as "masochism's inherent staging of domination and submission", while subverting domination and submission in the existing system through performative foregrounding on the one hand, also allows for a

"reading of conservatism: reenactment reproduces and reinscribes the status quo" on the other hand (160).

I propose that the film may indeed be read as a re-inscription of the status quo, but a re-inscription that thoroughly undoes the binarisms upon which it depends as it perverts both biological and social hierarchies. This perversion consists in the film's "violation of the law of nature and nations" that "women who govern men ... slaves freemen [sic]" embody (Francis Bacon quoted in Silverman 185). Mennel analyzes how the framing of masochism in Treut and Mikesch's film differs substantially from traditional constructions. In Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, and in films that take up these traditional structures, a bourgeois home provides the frame for a reversal of roles in a masochistic staging. In contrast, *Seduction*'s opening quotes the formal structure of masochistic narratives while reversing margin and centre: "The image of the male masochist projected between Caren and Wanda inverts the male bonding over the woman in Sacher-Masoch's novel" (157).

While this structural device *does* invert the male bonding over the woman in traditional (heterosexual) accounts of masochism, I would argue that, however, the female bonding and the rituals of seduction that are enacted here may in addition be viewed as performative responses to the homosexual bonding and macho rituals as represented in Fassbinder's last film, *Querelle* (1982). Seen in this way, *Seduction* may be read as a film about power play between the genders that provides a counter model to romantic and idealized views of heterosexuality by drawing inspiration from the world of supermachos as envisioned in *Querelle*, where there is a radical separation between the male and female worlds – Lysiane (Jeanne Moreau) being excluded from the dynamics of power and eros that unfold between the men that surround her. *Seduction* alludes to *Querelle* through the figure of the sailor in the opening shot, through foregrounding the contrast between blue light and red (more an orange in *Querelle*) and, arguably also, through the still-like framing of Wanda's body in repose. Seen as a re-negotiation of the representation of subjection in *Querelle*, *Seduction* stages a reverse exclusion – that of men from the female world – as Gregor, the only male member, is excluded from the art community at the end and, thus, verges towards a revision of subjection and power that is based on a radical a separation of the sexes. The configuration of female homoerotic desire that, however, rejects lesbian identity politics, may then be understood as a positioning within and against a homosexual matrix of power – as much as an intervention in compulsive heterosexuality. While both films, each in their own fashion, suggest a separation of the male and female worlds, the configuration of subjection and power in these respective worlds differs in an interesting way.

The characters involved in the power dynamics in *Querelle* are marked in terms of masculinity and femininity through the "equation of fucker=male, fuckee=female" (Dyer 92). "Fucking" becomes the "direct embodiment of the means by which power is asserted or relinquished" (ibid.). Within this understanding of sexuality and power, "who fucks is powerful and who is fucked is powerless" (ibid.). *Seduction* reverses this view as Wanda mainly takes on the passive role in erotic encounters and it refutes the marking of sexual encounters in terms of masculinity/femininity as they take place exclusively between women who are equally feminine in terms of

their appearance. *Querelle* also features moments in which the active over passive hierarchy is questioned as, for instance, the scene in which Lysiane (Jeanne Moreau), caressing her lover Robert (Hanno Pöschl), who is lying on her lap, says that there are moments in which the totally relaxed body expects nothing but to give and take pleasure. But this productive notion of passivity is coded as a female fantasy, and, as stated in a voice-over, the physical embodiment of that fantasy, the woman, has no room in the male world. Moreover, Querelle embodies the possibility of a disruption of the male/female dichotomy as he enacts and enjoys both the male and female role in sexual intercourse. However, the feminine position is ultimately shown to be humiliating – not empowering – and the end of the film in fact suggests that his discovery of that part of his self will lead to his death.

Seduction may in fact be read as a performance that re-negotiates the notion of power that is configured in Fassbinder's *Querelle* as the figure Wanda enacts a similar kind of authority as the one that Lieutenant Seblon (France Nero) envisions for himself: "If I desire authority, this adorable form which arouses fear and love, then I have to awaken the feeling of this love in the hearts of the sailors. [...] I want to be their father [...] I will brand them [...] In the face of their torture I will remain untouched." By rejecting the name of the father evoked in Seblon's conception of authority, *Seduction* creates an autonomous female sphere of authority that complements *Querelle*'s phallic homosexual bonding without, however, resorting to biological symbolism. It does not, in other words, attempt to construct female power by claiming the 'name of the mother'. Moreover, the authority fantasized by Seblon represents a burden as it requires permanent control, while Wanda retires from her job as tyrant at the end of the film – without therefore seeming to lose her power.

I argue that it is precisely a conservative, in the sense of live preserving, element in *Seduction* that constitutes the film's critical force. The 'winning team', Wanda and Justine, obey the law that requires subjection for subjectivation in order to continue to assure their own existence. Because of their attachment to their own existence, they re-enact the status quo – Justine is given the job of disciplining Wanda's '"human animals". However, the film complicates precisely the question of how/whether the status quo is reproduced. "[I]n part a demonstration and perversion of power relations", the film's redeployment of power in a domain of masochism and lesbian/female desire withdraws power from the heterosexual matrix of (biological) reproduction, suggesting that sexuality is devoid of usefulness, while subjection and desire are constructive (Tobin 51). It re-enacts and re-inscribes the status quo in such a way that the sexualized economy of utility is challenged, as the team that is responsible for the subsistence of the imagined community – in which fetishes and S&M practices replace sexual intercourse – is a lesbian couple. While the leitmotiv in *Querelle* is "each man kills the thing he loves" (a line from Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* that Lysiane repeatedly sings), the message in *Seduction* – though ostensibly a film about cruelty, may be described as "some women gain life through the thing they love".

Notes

1. Kinght (1995), Mennel (1998) – see my discussion later on in this essay. I use the words 'female', 'queer', and 'lesbian' alternatively, because, as Barbara Mennel points out, the "political and

aesthetic significance of Treut [and Mikesch's] film lies in its resistance to the representation of a separate lesbian etiology, and to its [...] insistance on the political and sexual transgressiveness that results from recasting traditionally gendered spectatorial and psychological models" (1998: 154).

2. Although the New German Cinema was critical of German history and politics and relentlessly strove to create alternative images and representations, it nevertheless retrained traces of a hegemonic discourse of the nation in its representations. German film scholar John Davidson writes that Germans were "consistently presented and perceived as different" (12). The German "otherness" was supposed both to originate from, to renegotiate Germans' historical identity. The films and reviews intended to construct "the new German" created a fetishized icon of German fascism "linked to German culture and inherent in the German personality" meant to show that German identity simply could not emerge out of National Socialism (11, 12).
3. One of the most notable films preceding *Seduction*: *The Cruel Woman*, Ulrike Ottinger's *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* (1977), also addresses lesbian power relations. "The sexuality shown explores the boundaries of power within relationships, anticipating the lesbian sado-masochism" in *Seduction* (Dyer 282). Dyer points out that *Madame X*, just like *Seduction*, suggests what was then "a largely neglected aspect of lesbian culture," namely camp (282).
4. Wanda is the name that Sacher-Masoch gave his wife in his novels and novellas, in which he idealized her as a tyrant. Monika Treut wrote her dissertation, entitled *Die grausame Frau* (the cruel woman), on the image of the cruel woman in texts by Sacher-Masoch and D. A. F. Marquis de Sade.
5. Foucault defines the function and aim of the *tableaux vivants* as follows: "The first of the great operations of discipline is, therefore, the constitution of '*tableaux vivants*', which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities" (1995: 148).
6. Richard Dyer's model "hangs onto the notion of the author as a real, material person but in [...] a 'decentered' way" (188). This is to say that the "specific determining economic and technological circumstances" matter and "[w]hat is significant is the authors' material social position in relation to discourse, the access to discourses they have on account of who they are" (187–188).
7. Fassbinder's films are, as Elsaesser puts it, "didactic statements about what it means to have power over someone else's capacity for love and thus to live within mutual dependencies structured around generosity and guilt" (1997: 19). In *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972), Petra von Kant (Margrit Carstensen), a wealthy upper-class fashion designer, falls in love with young Karin (Hanna Schygulla) and makes her a famous model. As Petra's desire grows she becomes submissive to Karin, who gradually withdraws from her, leaving her desperate. The protagonist in *Fox and His Friends* (1974), young proletarian Franz Biberkopf (R. W. Fassbinder), gives all the money that he won in a lottery to the man he loves and who coldly takes advantage of Franz' naïveté. Left with neither lover nor money after a short and unhappy relationship, he kills himself out of total despair. In *Martha* (1973), we are shown a husband's sadistic treatment of his wife in the name of love.
8. Mennel (1998), von Moltke (2000).
9. "If I had a wish" are the first words of Friedrich Hollaender's popular German song of the Weimar Republic by that title. It associates the possibility to be granted a wish with embarrassment, with ambivalence over whether to wish for good or bad times, and states that the beauty of wishes lies in the impossibility of their fulfilment. The melancholy darkness of the song clearly resonates in the film as a whole, but its tenor suggests that wish-making may lead to better times and that the beauty of wishes may consist in the possibility of their suspense. Mennel states that the opening shot "conjures

up the tradition of masochistic film texts" by [c]iting Marlene Dietrich in *The Man Who Is Looking for His Murderer*" and that "to viewers familiar with German gay subculture, Georgette Dee connotes transvestism" (156). Moreover, Dee has interpreted many songs by Friedrich Hollaender, including "If I had a Wish", and conceived one of her tours in the 1990s as an homage to the songwriter.

10. Gregor's description resembles Foucault's: "The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expresses in all its force" (34).
11. Justine's definite decision to yield to Wanda's power ensues a fantasy shot where we see her embraced by a man near the river before he nails her to the ground and then shoots himself; another mental introspection shows Wanda and Justine near the river; and finally a tribadic love act between Justine and Wanda near the river is followed by a scene where they lie together happily on a raft.
12. Silence, i.e. narrative pauses, and concomitant foregrounding of the soundtrack that supplies the background for different forms of desire is another leitmotiv indicating the participation of the body in the process of subjection: light drums accompany scenes of emotionally liberating moments of love making, a melancholy sax tune evokes Caren's despair over the gradual loss of her partner, and repetitive banging noises underpin emotionally destructive manifestations of desire and subjection (i.e. the violent encounter between Justine and an unknown man). Water and the omission of words thus create an audiovisual space where desire and subjection can be reconceived outside of the fixed linguistic and material structure.
13. "A media spectacle [created by the withdrawal of promised funding] gave the film a pathetic kind of fame, even before it was finished. When the film was finally produced, expectations were very high. [...] As a result, audiences were disappointed that this film is not pornographic, shows not genital sex" (Treut quoted in Mennel 153). Julia Knight emphasized the extra-cinematic context as her study of female directors' work – notably in *Women and the New German Cinema* – mainly intends to highlight concerns in German women's film-making such as conditions of production and exhibition.

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13

Berlin Is Running: Olympic Memories and Queer Performances

Andrew Webber

Run Lolas Run

This paper follows on from a recent article constructing a queer reading, against the grain, of Tykwer's highly successful *Run Lola Run* (1998).[1] There, I briefly considered Kutlug Ataman's less well-known feature, *Lola und Bilidikid* (1999), set in the gay and transgender Turkish subculture of Berlin, as an explicitly queer alternative running of Tykwer's film.[2] In a key sequence, the iconic running figure of Tykwer's Lola is deployed in mocked-up fashion by the young Turkish protagonist, in drag and wearing a red wig, on the run from a group of queer-bashers. While Tykwer's Lola runs in an elaborate, metaphysically inclined game of chance, Ataman's version, for all its indulgence in drag performance and melodrama, is running for life or death in a more real, political sense. My intention in this essay is to offer a more developed reading of Ataman's film, focusing in particular on its exposure of strategies of performance that combine and complicate categories of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Judith Butler's reading of the film *Paris is Burning* in *Bodies that Matter* will provide the principal theoretical framework for the discussion. Butler's theorization of performativity will also serve to expose acts of remembrance and forgetting as these are played out in the filmic treatment of Berlin.

Butler's contribution to gender and sexuality studies is to furnish a sophisticated framework for revisiting the encounter between constructionist and essentialist models that has characterized debates in these fields over recent decades. While, in the wake of the pioneering *Gender Trouble*, she was often (mis)taken to be advocating a free-for-all flexibility in the performance of gender and sexual identity, she corrects this view in *Bodies that Matter*, indicating that the body and its material conditions, as organized by dominant discourses, serve to determine the ambit of such performances. The discourses which control gender and sexual performance may leave a certain room for dissident counter-performance, but they also have a way of

outmanoeuvring such dissidence by their potential for the incorporation of material difference into heteronormative bodily enactment, the sort that is considered to really matter. A figure like Tykwer's Lola may be given the ability to run in the way that women never do in film, but it is a performance which is undone by the end of the film and the restoration of her man to the requisite position of agency, and walking by her side, where he belongs, along the street.

My reading of *Run Lola Run* relied on its relationship to film memories. Lola's performance is a revision not just of conventional female roles but specifically of a key tradition of female masquerade, the Lola figure in films like von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* or Fassbinder's *Lola*. These are women who achieve degrees of agency in their destinies certainly, but always through their fixed and commodified role as stage artists. Ataman's Lola appears to revive the Berlin cabaret tradition, in a hybridized Turkish form that challenges both race laws and gender regulations. This Lola puts the figure back on the stage designed for her, but this only in order radically to question the established heterosexual model of female performer and male gaze. This also means mobilizing the generic hybridity that is indicated in the film's title. The cabaret film meets the Western, and, thus, two gendered models of spectacular performance, the one female, enclosed and static, the other male, open and dynamic, are set against each other. And out of this engagement, the binary logic of gender difference upon which they rely is put into question. While cabaret can feature in Westerns as a distraction for the male gaze within and upon the films, offering a hyperbolically feminized supplement to the hyperbolically homosocial world of the genre, feminine frills for masculine thrills, here a queered version of that gender model is established.

To make Lola run is to animate the cabaret act, turning theatre into sport, in *Lola rennt* the pursuit of a goal in a contest with the clock, in *Lola und Bilidikid*, a pursuit to the death of a figure marked as other in ethnic terms and queer in gender and sexual terms. My discussion of *Lola und Bilidikid* will consider this sporting model by particular consideration of the theatre of sport which it uses as one of the sites of the story: the Berlin Olympic Stadium. At the same time it will take into account a different genealogy from cabaret or western films. Since Riefenstahl's films of the 1936 Olympics, the stadium is an intrinsically cinematic site, a site of filmic memory and of the spectacular inauguration of the genre of the sports film. I will argue that, just as these new Lola films redefine the cabaret acts of the earlier ones, so the racing performances of their title figures redefine the logic of the Olympic site. Tykwer's Lola runs free from the historically laden sites of Berlin on a course that seems designed not to bring the city's twentieth-century past into play. The film's technologically driven synchronic layering virtually cuts out the dimension of cultural memory. In particular, Lola's Olympian feat never takes her to the heroic place and architecture designed for the display of such epic achievements; she runs her three-leg marathon largely on streets designed to stage the everyday. Neither does Ataman's Lola enter the Olympic Stadium, but the brother who comes to perform her in the film's denouement does. His Olympic experience is, however, a radical counter-performance to those established by Riefenstahl.

Before I turn to this and other key scenes in the film, let me give a brief synopsis. Lola is an m/f transvestite performer in a cabaret act, 'Die Gastarbeiterinnen', which puts the performances of

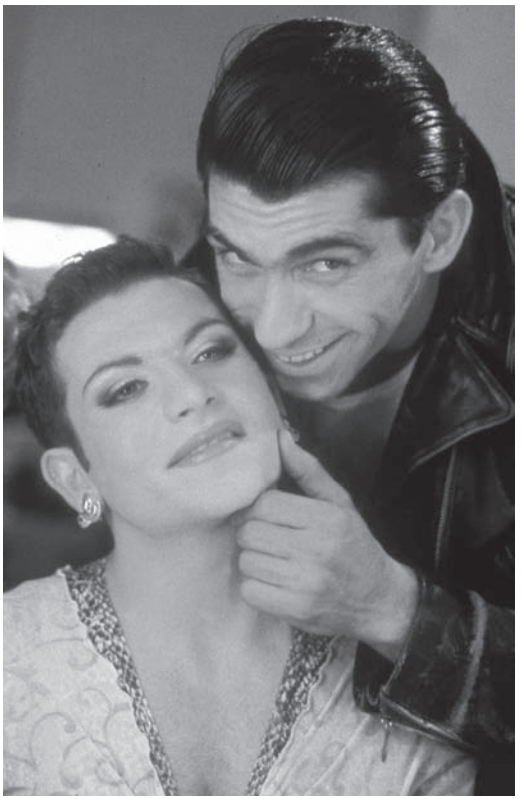

Figure 23. Crossing categories of identity: Lola (Gandi Mukli) and Bili (Erdal Yildiz). Courtesy of Millivres Multimedia.

Turkish women in Germany into drag. Lola's hustler boyfriend, Bilidikid, is a leather-clad performer of macho Turkish manhood. His dream is to return to Turkey with Lola as his wife, but Lola resists Bili's attempt to reassign him from transvestite to transsexual. Lola tries to re-establish contact with his family, but his older brother and family patriarch, Osman, keeps his younger brother Murat from him. Murat, also gay, makes contact with Lola at the club and when he runs away from home encounters Bilidikid who enlists him to give paid sex in the toilet. Lola is pursued by a group of young queer-bashers and is found dead in the Spree.[3] Bilidikid determines to entrap the supposed killers by dressing Murat up as Lola to lure the queer-bashers. He exacts violent revenge with an apparent castration of one of the queer-bashers and the knifing of another in a mock-Western showdown. It transpires that Lola was in fact killed by Osman. At the end of the film, Murat and his mother leave the family home and the authority of his older brother.

The film, then, crosses categories of identity. The binary logic that seeks to control the positions of self-same and other in the domains of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality is exposed where these become confused with each other. This is focused on an exemplary figure of dissimulation: the macho Turkish man who sleeps with Turkish men and German prostitutes, both dressed in forms of female drag, behind the back of a wife who is confined to another, domestic masquerade of femininity. In one variation of this figure, Osman can both 'play the Turk' as an act of comedy, an Orientalized demotic speaker of German, and 'play the Turk' as an act of coercion in his imposition of patriarchal authority in a culture where the role is marked as foreign, where Turkish men compensate for ethnic discrimination by reverse-discrimination against German men seen as effeminized. The film's drag performers act to expose the hypocrisy of men who want to have it both ways: the cabaret performance of feminine masquerades and of ethnic stereotypes is above all directed at their male counterparts. The stage act of the 'Gastarbeiterinnen' combines gender drag with 'ethnic drag' and shows the collusion of the two orders.[4]

The transvestite cabaret of ethnic difference in *Lola und Bilidikid* can be compared to that analysed by Butler in Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning*, which focuses on the drag balls mounted by transgender black and Latino performers in Harlem. In her reading of the film, Butler seeks to

correct the critique of bell hooks, who had seen the drag performances as a misogynist aping of heterosexist positions and the film as colluding in racial and gender subjection. Butler wants to see the drag performances rather as deeply ambivalent, at once an appropriation of heteronormative logic and working towards its subversion. This dialectic opens up for Butler a certain space for bypassing the violence of racial and sexual subjection, but it also shows how that space is repeatedly brought back to the need to pass, to conform to the interlocked norms of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The death of drag artist and prostitute Venus Xtravaganza, apparently at the hands of a client, is thus put down to her failure to achieve a total act of passing as woman. To resist the rule of subjection is to risk the vengeful violence of abjection.

The drag act of *Lola und Bilidikid* is also deeply ambivalent in Butler's sense. Ataman's understanding of identity in this film, as in other work like the video installation *Women who wear Wigs*,[5] follows the fundamental structure of performativity as construed by Butler, a form of 'speech act' which is at once subject to rigorous and injurious prescription but also open to strategies of resignification. As he puts it: 'Identity is a dress that other people put on you and make you wear – but then talking is a form of rebellion because you can work against those perceptions'.[6] What Ataman does in *Lola*, as in much of his video work, is to organize the resignification of identity through the mode of melodrama, which in its classic form, in the so-called 'women's films' of the 1950s, served to fix the suffering caused by the straightening of sexual and gender identities. Ataman's project is to resignify the generic specifications of melodrama, to transfer the women's film into a form where the women who wear wigs may or may not be biologically female, where gender is open to more mobile forms of reconstruction.

The core tension of the film's melodrama is the impossible demand at once to appropriate and to rebel against hegemonic norms. Bili thus requires the impossible of Lola, that she should actually be a woman, pass totally into the heterosexual family, rather than ostentatiously bypassing that structure in her queer performance of styles of femininity. The demand is as impossible for Lola, who wants to be a man in a gay relationship, as it is for the deluded Bili, who needs this too but desires otherwise. In the denouement of the film when Bili castrates one of the youths he takes to be responsible for Lola's death, he merely mimes the sort of violence which led to the mutilation and killing of Venus Xtravaganza. He cannot make Lola have the operation or take a knife to her himself so that she will become a woman he could never really desire, and he exacts the castration he wanted of her from her putative killer.

Yet the film is not contained by this violent double bind; it rather develops in terms of ambivalence in Butler's sense. While it certainly produces spectacles of abjection, it also opens up alternative spaces, unlikely relationships, and communities. The abject takes as its site the darkened and underground spaces of the city, deserted noir-style streets and buildings, and not least the toilet as a recurrent site of sex. In the establishing scene, we encounter Berlin under the sign of its icon, the winged angel of victory on the 'Siegessäule'. The Imperialist icon, which was appropriated by Wenders for his gentle, post-imperialist angel figures in the establishing sequences of *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*) and *In weiter Ferne so nah*

Figure 24. "Identity is a dress that other people put on you and make you wear": Baki Davrak as Murat in *Lola und Bilidikid*. Courtesy of Millivres Multimedia.

(*Far Away, So Close*), is here re-appropriated as a figure of aegis over the nocturnal cruising grounds around the column which has been counter-colonized by the Berlin gay scene.[7] A new, potentially liberating world is opened up to the young Murat, but one which is shot in the generic style of horror (with lightning flashes and looming figures) and experienced as dark, disorientating, and threatening.

The establishing shot marks this out as a Berlin film and also points towards the film's dual topography. The iconic architecture of the city's imperial memory is cross-cut with more obscure, subcultural spaces that give evidence of a persistent state of cultural imperialism and colonization. While the opening shot might seem to set the film in the genre of the postcard movie, it proceeds to deconstruct the postcard image.[8] Ataman conceives the space of the film on what he calls a double axis, split between an upper and an underworld, and the divided city Berlin is conducive to this topographic doubling. As a place of segregation, destruction, and renewal, Berlin provides the ideal split 'stage' for the film's performances of division and transformation.[9] The river performs the symbolic function of marking this separation and flux.[10] The dualism is also incorporated into the cinematic styling: 'In the underworld, the camera is all frantic, hand-held and in gritty, true colours, while the upper world is more ordered.'[11] The relation between the spaces and their respective formal signatures is, however, dialectically complicated: 'sometimes, the two worlds go into each other so that a dolly shot suddenly

becomes hand-held'.[12] The underworld level corresponds to the upper on something like the model of the Foucauldian heterotopia, defined as a counter-site in which the sites of culture are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.[13] In the film, over-ground figures, both human and topical, regularly go underground in states of inversion.

Wrestling and Showering with Riefenstahl

The scenes shot in the Olympic Stadium, a deserted master-site of memory,[14] display this heterotopian organization of city space. Ataman turns from the panoptically organized site of spectacle in Riefenstahl's marshalling of the stadium as heroic film set and goes into its underside. The stadium as site of spectacle serves as a foil of epic scale to the intimate stage of the cabaret club, both arenas for the performance of Butlerian ambivalence. Both sites of open display are shown to incorporate a more hidden form of spectacle, a version of the closet.[15] As Bili, the unfaithful 'husband', went behind the scenes at the cabaret club while Lola was performing on stage as 'Gastarbeiterin', first to be given oral sex and then to brutalize the man who fails to pay the price, so the spectacle mounted in the spectatorial void of the Olympic Stadium leads into a closet scene in the toilets which mimics the earlier one. What the two scenes show is that the prescribed spectacle, whether on the sub-cultural stage or in the super-cultural arena, contains by implication the repressive logic of the closet.

Taking the Berlin Olympic Stadium as a paradigm, Henning Eichberg has argued that stadiums are constructed according to a dual model: their dominant logic is that of the pyramid, built up towards an exalted spectatorial position, in relay with the eye of God at the apex of the pyramid. Here, this position is adopted by the tribune of the *Führer* as focal point in the axial organisation of the complex, the viewing platform for the disciplinary and consecrating gaze of what Susan Sontag calls the 'Super-Spectator'.[16] At the same time, Eichberg argues, the pyramid is constructed upon and sustained by a labyrinthine underground. The burial chamber provides the model for cryptic spaces that subtend the spectacular superstructure.

In the case of the Berlin stadium, the panoptical fantasy is staged by the use of searchlights, vaulting over the structure as a 'Lichtdom' or 'cathedral of light', and by the incorporation of the camera as a metaphorical canon, trained on every move in the first televised games.[17] The 'Reichssportfeld', designed by Werner March, with the close involvement of Hitler and his court architect, Albert Speer, was conceived within the sacralized ideological framework of the 'World Capital Germania'. It can be understood as a defining site in the cultic enactment of false state and race memory that Connerton has seen as a key feature of the Nazi regime.[18] It was a theatre for the display of the total power of the imperial state, [19] not least a ritual theatre of war, complete with a monumental parade ground and a hall consecrated to a death-cult of the fallen heroes of Germany. It thus functioned as a key site for the travesty of Olympian spectacle which Walter Benjamin in his *Work of Art* essay of 1936, sees in the specular performance of the rituals of fascism: 'Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic.'[20]

A key contribution to the aestheticization of the political under fascism was, of course, made by Riefenstahl's films. The cameras orchestrated by her made of the stadium a film theatre for a panoptical artificial eye with an unprecedented mobility, range, and control.[21] As the stadium uses hyper-modern structural technology clad in the rock of ages, so the film seeks to achieve a sense of a timeless penetration of space, a total presence, by effacing the technology that serves that effect. What it aims to achieve is the kind of pre-modern auratic effect which Benjamin sees as superseded by mass media technology: a simultaneous effect of intimate proximity and monumental distance, of specular viewing only through awestruck subjection to the total power of the spectacle.[22] In its hold on time and space, the film relays the desire to make the historical moment mythical, to raise the stadium as a one-off site of an international festival to a sacred national place of eternal return. Filmed through the lens of myth (not least through the Apollonian capture of the sun over the cauldron) the *stadium* as spatial and temporal 'stage' is sublimated into a site of spatio-temporal totality.

As the stadium is constructed as a false memorialization of the Imperial German nation as heir to the suprematist myth of the Greeks, so the film is introduced by a metamorphosis of the memorial sculpture of Greek myth into the living body of contemporary Germany. If the panoptical film seems to achieve a mythical reach, however (and thereby to install itself as something of a film myth), it is also strategically blinded in its unswerving dedication to the surface of the spectacle, its official appearance, to the exclusion of historical truths. In its blind spot are the acts of repression which enabled that spectacle: most notably the banning of Jews from German sporting institutions and the proposals to bar black competitors as the 'slave race' from this ritual co-opted by the Nordic master race from their adopted antecedents, the Ancient Greeks. In the event, the colour bar was lifted, and black athlete Jesse Owens famously became the key player in the theatrical agon of the sporting contest. While Riefenstahl's camera records the act of cultural false memory in the ideological passing of the torch from Greece to Germany, it also comes to be fascinated by the sporting mastery of the 'slave' race. While the Nazis sought to remove the evidence of the Nuremberg race laws, the public baiting of Jews, from the streets of Berlin in preparation for the Olympics, the repressed returns at the centre of the spectacle.

Parallel to this exposure of the racial double bind is a sexual one. The persecution of Jews went hand in hand with the draconian enforcement of Paragraph 175 of the penal code, outlawing homosexual acts. Yet in the run-up to the Olympics, the regime saw that part of the tourist image of Berlin that had to be reconstructed around the games was that of the notorious sexual licence of Weimar cabaret culture. The official spectacle of the new Reich required the unofficial, and not least the queer, attractions of Berlin as sideshow or counter-spectacle. Himmler ordered that several gay bars should be reopened and that 'foreign gentlemen' should not be arrested for transgression of Paragraph 175 without his express permission.[23] Implicit in this move was also an unknowing recognition of the homoerotic element in the logic of the sporting spectacle (as also in the logic of the National Socialist organization),[24] a lure at once for sports and for sex tourists. The appropriation of the Greek festival of sporting combat also involved an incorporation of the 'Greek love' that was officially anathema to the regime. The pastiche of Greek figures in the sculptures installed around the stadium complex (in particular, pairs of

heroically fashioned male figures in attitudes of sporting camaraderie) gives evidence of the queer potential involved in the homosocial embrace between Greek and German cultures. As Ben Morgan has argued, this same appeal to an iconography marked as queer in the tradition of early twentieth-century German body culture extends to the treatment of the male form in Riefenstahl's film.[25] The metamorphosis of the sculptural form into the living in the prologue of the first film is particularly potent in this respect: the chaste sculptures of goddesses introduce the same function for the naked female form in the callisthenic interludes later in the film. The two male forms featured at the end of the sequence – the lubricious, openly reclining Barberinian faun and Myron's discus thrower – are both, on the other hand, highlighted as if with body oil.[26] Their sensuality is recaptured in the scenes of swimming and showering in the prologue to the second film, where the glistening male bodies are entwined in frame, engaging in mutual massaging and beating with twigs. As the black athlete rebounds on the spectacle designed to marginalize him, so the ideological abjection of homosexuality is bound up with its return in alternative forms.

Ataman's cinematic return to the Olympic stadium can be seen against this context of the repressions which haunt the official film of the official spectacle. Riefenstahl's panoptical style, which extends to the intimate behind-the-scenes sauna and showering shots of consorting male athletes, is rejoined here by Ataman's provocatively underground take on the stadium. Murat and his classmates, amongst them the three queer-bashers, are taken on an educational outing to the stadium, accompanied by a listless commentary on National Socialist architectural politics from their apathetic teacher. The three thugs, one sporting a hairstyle slicked down in the fashion of Hitler,[27] take over the key ritual structure of the stadium, the cauldron, in a travestied performance of national supremacy at the apex of the pyramid. The sequence is shot in mock-epic style, adopting the same sort of the aerial perspectives as Riefenstahl. When Murat joins them, he is abused as a 'camel-fucking' Turk, only for him to suggest, in what Butler would call the resignification of the injurious speech act, that one of the thugs is the camel looking for a fuck. This logic of the neo-fascist as closet queer is indeed exploited in the film, and when another member of the trio enters the toilets in the labyrinthine underside of the arena, Murat follows him. The toilets are heterotopian in the proper sense, the cryptic other space of inversion to which the film repeatedly returns.[28] It is public and yet covert, a place for the encoded display of desire, its graffiti providing anti-iconic counter-texts and -images to the inscriptions and sculpted bodies which help ideologically to orchestrate the official space of the stadium. The camera is now handheld in the tight 'closet' space of the toilet, giving an intimate and tender close-up of a kiss between Murat and his classmate. As they start to have oral sex they are interrupted by the other two, who brutalize Murat. The scene closes with their closeted friend making a show of urinating over the cowering figure.

The sequence shows how the ritual space of the stadium, designed for spectacular performance under the sacrificial flame, relies on secreted scenes of both covert desire and brutal abjection. The racial and sexual others which are abjected by the Nazis return to be abjected once more by neo-Nazis in a ritual of humiliation in this key site of collective memory. While Riefenstahl's spectacle is elaborately sanitized, organized around the focal figure of the hygienic body, whether in the arena or the showers, in *Lola und Bilidikid* the golden shower is a travesty

enactment of the fascist ideology of hygiene and pollution, redolent of the grotesque interlinking of ritual cleansing and filthy brutality in the death camps.[29]

From this scene of abjection, the film moves to the recuperative domestic rite of the bathing of Murat by his mother and a release of the truth hidden in the family home. As in *Paris is Burning*, motherhood and sibling relations, both biological and adoptive, serve as a corrective to violence and exploitation between men across ethnic, sexual, class, and gender lines. The film ends with Murat's mother emancipating herself from Osman's authority, casting off her headscarf in a gesture which complements the donning of the wig by her other two sons. And in the grandiose *ancien régime* villa of the film's other mother figure,[30] an upper-class matriarch, a scene is put together which counters the abjection of the sequence in the stadium. The wealthy German son, Friedrich, and the posturing Turkish hustler with a heart of gold, Iskender, here find a space for an embrace with more utopian possibilities.

As – 'incidentally', as he says – an architect, Friedrich is participating in the post-unification reconstruction and reinvention of another key site of Berlin memory, the ideologically and architecture-historically contested area of the divided city between the Alexanderplatz and Schlossplatz. His model for the redesigning of this site is in the bedroom of the villa, and after a night of passion he and Iskender tumble over and wreak havoc upon it, bringing down another of Berlin's iconic structures, the bulbous erection of the 'Fernsehturm', in the process.[31] In model form, the oversized queer bodies take over the key civic space, enacting a domestic, alternative reclamation of the streets, their own private Christopher Street Day Parade. Their playful display of an unathletic, Turko-German form of the Olympic discipline of Graeco-Roman wrestling serves as a queer co-option of the dominant logic of sporting display and of the organization of urban space. If the scene in the stadium stages an abject version of contact and combat between the German body and the ethnically other around queerness, here a counter-version is staged in the scaled-down architectural arena of another of Berlin's hyperbolic sites of memory.[32]

Love Parade

In her essay 'Fascinating Fascism', devoted largely to Riefenstahl, Susan Sontag has noted how the fascist aesthetic has lent itself to camp treatment, suggesting a potentially dangerous accommodation.[33] In *Lola und Bilidikid* camp, as embodied by the sisterhood of drag artists on the one hand and the aristocratic self-styling of Friedrich and his mother on the other, serves as a more resistant response to the return of fascism.[34] It allows the film to finish with a recuperative return to its beginning and a renewed reclamation of the imperial topography of Berlin under the sign of performative resignification, in Butler's sense. This is, for Ataman, Berlin the transvestite, a city that is constantly reinventing and replaying itself.[35] The epilogue starts with a citation of perhaps the best-known queer book on Berlin,[36] as two of the transvestite sisters bid what appears to be a purely rhetorical goodbye to Berlin. They find the brooch discarded earlier by Friedrich's mother, a Turkish inheritance of a German heirloom enabled by the alternative family structures the film has managed to construct, and take the film back to the 'Siegessäule', in full costume and daylight, flirting with the taxi driver as they play out their own version of the Berlin Love Parade. In its performative revisiting of Berlin's topography of terror,

Lola und Bilidikid thus achieves something like *Paris is Burning* in Butler's account. It too works to show 'the simultaneous production and subjugation of subjects in a culture which appears to arrange always and in every way for the annihilation of queers, but which nevertheless produces occasional spaces in which those annihilating norms, those killing ideals of gender and race, are mimed, reworked, resignified.'[37]

Notes

1. See, Andrew Webber: 'Gender and the City: *Lola rennt*', *German as a Foreign Language*, issue 1 (2003), pp. 1–16 (http: //www.gfl-journal.de/1–2003/webber.html).
2. While there are striking parallels between the two films, Ataman has confirmed to me that he had no knowledge of Tykwer's film while he was making his own.
3. If an eye-catching part of the run of Tykwer's Lola is over the Oberbaumbrücke, the bridge is also the backdrop for the floating corpse of Ataman's Lola.
4. I borrow the term from Katrin Sieg's article 'Ethnic Drag and National Identity: Multicultural Crises, Crossings, and Interventions, in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 259–319. Sieg defines 'ethnic drag' as 'the impersonation of ethnic others by a subject that stages and conceals its dominance' (297). Taking Özdamar's *Karagöz in Alamania* as an example, she also sees that the performance can be appropriated by the 'other' for counter-acts of its own, shifted to an other, minority stage, albeit with the ambivalence of the original act still to some degree attached.
5. Ataman's video work explores issues of identity, as subject to partition or hybridity, through forms of what might be called, after Butler, excitable speech – in which the subject performs acts of resistance to the discourse which would control her. The four-channel piece *Women who wear Wigs* (1999) represents the speech acts of four Turkish women who wear wigs for different reasons, bringing political, sexual, theatrical, and medical discourses into play with and against each other. Another recent work, *It's a Vicious Circle* (2002), performs the experiences of a black man in Berlin. For an overview of Ataman's video work, see the catalogue of the 2003 Serpentine Gallery exhibition: *Kutlug Ataman: Long Streams*.
6. Ataman in interview with Nira Ratnam in *The Observer*, 29 December 2002.
7. The Berlin gay magazine *Siegessäule* cheekily appropriates the column as a communal gay erection.
8. In his interview on the DVD edition of the film, the production designer John de Minico stresses that the film resists the postcard or documentary modes of city filming.
9. As described by Ataman in the interview on the DVD. "Well, there is also this: Berlin has a history of constant destruction and reconstruction, well before WW 2, since its very beginnings. It is in constant flux. For me, it is a good setting not only as a place where Turk and German, two 'opposing forces', two divisions, a city divided by water (which is why I show bridges and as Murat crosses the lion bridge in the park Lola will tragically fall in it, etc...) face each other but also by the sheer fact of reconstructing, it is inherently artificial, hence transvestite. There is a very good book on the history of Berlin published by Pimlico, unfortunately I am in Istanbul right now and the name of the English writer escapes my mind. I strongly suggest it if you don't know it already."
10. As Ataman pointed out to me.
11. Ataman in interview: http: //www.german-cinema.de/magazine/1998/01/prodreport/4-produkt_E.html.

12. Ibid.
13. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Diacritics* (Spring, 1986), 22–27 (p. 24). Foucault's brief taxonomy of heterotopian spaces includes a range of displaced sites of enclosure. The account is twisted towards the institutions of heterosexuality (with references to brothels, honeymoon rites, and the like), closeting off the homosexual. The sorts of underground sites of inversion considered in the present essay might perhaps best be dubbed 'homo-heterotopias', spaces which are other in as far as they are the scene of the outlawed desire for the same.
14. While the stadium is not one of the sites discussed in François and Schulze's compendium of German 'lieux de mémoire', it would clearly qualify for inclusion under several of their headings. See Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (ed.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols (Munich: Beck, 2001).
15. An intermediary film here might be Szabó's *Mephisto*, after the 1936 novel by Klaus Mann, where the Gustav Gründgens figure as court player to the Nazi regime and sexual masquerader is exposed in the spotlights of the stadium. While Gründgens was a closeted gay, Mann wanted to avoid lending credence to the suggestion of an affinity between fascism and homosexuality; in both the novel and the film his transgression is cast as keeping a black mistress.
16. Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar.Straus.Giroux, 1980), pp. 73–105 (p. 87).
17. Henning Eichberg, 'Stadium, Pyramid, Labyrinth: Eye and Body on the Move', in J. Bale and O. Moen (eds), *The Stadium and the City* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995), pp. 323–47 (pp. 324–5).
18. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 41–3. The corporeal enactment of collective memory which Connerton stresses takes a particular form here; the sculptural decoration of the site is designed to project the contemporary bodily performance of heroic nationhood into a mythical domain.
19. 'The Olympic Stadium of 1936 arose in the context of the ornamental mass games of the Nazi *Thingspiel* and the Nuremberg Reichsparteitag' (Eichberg, p. 337). This context is not least a filmic one, as provided by Riefenstahl's celebration of the 1934 'Reichsparteitag' in *Triumph des Willens*.
20. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction*, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 219–53 (p. 244). It is a matter of speculation whether Benjamin is alluding here to the mock-Greek staging of the Olympics in the city that held such a powerful topography of memory for him.
21. For an account of the pioneering technical effects, including telephoto, underwater, and trick shots, see Taylor Downing, *Olympia* (London: bfi, 1992).
22. In this, Riefenstahl's film is a key example of the mass-mediated spectacle analysed by Benjamin in the *Work of Art* essay: 'Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of the masses. In big parades and monster rallies, in sports events, and in war, all of which nowadays are captured by camera and sound recording, the masses are brought face to face with themselves.' (p. 506).
23. See David Clay Large, *Berlin* (London, 2001), p. 295.
24. A contemporary piece of satirical doggerel indicates how homosexuality (as scandalously associated with the assassinated head of the SA, Ernst Röhm) was one of the elements which made a mockery of the body fascism of National Socialism: 'Wie sieht der ideale Deutsche aus?/Blond wie Hitler/groß wie Goebbels/schlank wie Göring und/keusch wie Röhm' (What does the ideal German look like?/Blond like Hitler/Tall like Goebbels/Slim like Göring and/Chaste like Röhm). Quoted in, Hilmar Hoffmann, *Mythos Olympia: Autonomie und Unterwerfung von Sport und Kultur* (Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau, 1995), p. 129.

25. Ben Morgan, 'The Masculine Body in the Films of Leni Riefenstahl', in K. Kohl and R. Robertson (eds), *Words, Texts, Images* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 175–97. Morgan traces the links between early gay erotica and Riefenstahl's treatment of the male form, via the 'Freikörperkultur' imagery propagated notably in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (*Paths to Strength and Beauty* 1925). This film, in which Riefenstahl had a bit part, sets a eugenic vision of the body Germanic against the 'decadence' of Weimar cabaret culture, the sort of sub-cultural licence which returns in *Lola und Bilidikid*.
26. The hybrid species of the faun subverts the eugenic model established by the other Classical sculptures, prefiguring the physical appeal of the black athletes later in the film.
27. In another scene he adopts this performance in an elaborate styling of his hair in the mirror, and this is mirrored in turn by Bili when he slicks down his hair in the mirror in a form of masquerade at once different and similar to that of the neo-Fascist. The mirror-scenes indicate the reflexive structuring which runs through the film. As in the film's opening sequence behind the scenes of the cabaret act and in the video work *Women Who Wear Wigs*, these function as wardrobe scenes, indicating that the performative masquerade is universal.
28. While toilets chiefly function as underground places for sex, at the end Murat and his classmate find refuge in a toilet in the deserted building where Bili is running amok.
29. Andrea Drugan (in an unpublished dissertation, University of Cambridge) has argued that the corpse of Lola found in the river is abjected as a figure of gender and sexual pollution. A child, seeing the corpse, asks whether the floating hybrid figure is a mermaid; the abjection of Lola, who had walked out on Bili having told him a fairy-tale version of their predicament, is thus given a fairy-tale ending.
30. As Paul Julian Smith notes in his review of the film (*Sight and Sound*, April 2000), 'Murat's kindly, downtrodden Turkish mother is mirrored by Friedrich's steely, aristocratic German parent; in spite of appearances, each woman seeks only the happiness of her gay child.'
31. While the tower falls between Iskender's legs, it is removed to another position in the next shot, apparently to avoid the obvious.
32. The connection between the two scenes is made by the bottle of vodka which they share.
33. Sontag, p. 97.
34. When, in a counter-form of body fascism, Iskender suggests that HIV would have no chance against his Turkish blood, Friedrich mocks him in high camp style, suggesting that the two of them can find a way of living together with the virus as well as their class and ethnic differences.
35. This is how Ataman described the city's transformations to me.
36. Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* has, of course, provided a key source for the queer cult of Berlin cabaret.
37. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 124–5.

14

Transgressive Drag Kings, Defying Dildoed Dykes: A Look at Contemporary Swedish Queer Film

Louise Wallenberg

This essay deals with three Swedish queer films, two of which are documentaries concerning gender bending and identity issues within female-to-male contexts and one which is a short feature film portraying a lesbian erotic love story. *Manhood* (Mia Engberg, 1999, 9 min.) focuses on Mason, a white transgendered man living in San Francisco; *DragKingdom of Sweden* (Åsa Ekman and Ingrid Ryberg, 2002, 50 min.) is made for television and portrays six drag kings, relying heavily on interviews with each of them; and *Selma and Sofie* (Mia Engberg 2001, 16 min.) features an awakening lesbian romance, containing explicit sexual scenes (including an [in]famous scene where a blue strap-on appears as main prop). To a Swedish audience, these three films have been, and still are, valuable. What concerns the two documentaries, it is important to accentuate that Swedish trans-persons have had to be more or less "trans-national" in their identity until very recently, due to a consistent lack of trans-representations in Swedish culture.[1] The feature film, on the other hand, has proven important due to other, yet similar, qualities: seldom have erotics between women – and *for* women – been portrayed in such an explicit manner in Swedish film.

While discussing (i) the representation of transgender in the documentary films, and (ii) the portrayal of lesbian intercourse in the feature film, the main objective of this text is to problematize (i) the androtopia of recent drag king culture, and (ii) the lesbian use of dildos. These two issues offer controversial meanings, serving to upset the "lesbian" in the lesbian culture and continuum while also challenging more conventional feminist notions. It seems as if the Swedish drag king scene (which is a very urban phenomenon) differs from other drag king scenes around Europe in its emphasis on an excessive, and indeed *exclusive*, masculinization of

the king as gender image and icon. Further, the problematization of the dildoed dyke must take centre stage: whether on stage or in bed, the dildo has come to play a central, yet problematic, role, seemingly dividing the lesbian community in two.

Trespassing the F-line?

A basic feminist concern, then, is the drag scene's obvious embracing of glorified masculinity, taking as its most unabashed expression, misogyny. It is tempting to take a postmodern approach, i.e. to read this embracing as one informed by parody, pastiche, and critique. Yet, it soon becomes evident that the parodied misogyny offered on stage is simultaneously being applauded and made desirable, and hence, a critical questioning cannot be avoided. An initial question, demanding to be asked, is "where did the lesbian go"? Enters the king and exits the traditional butch. And what about the femme? She seems to be non-existent on this scene, (if not positioned as an empty token, only there to signify fuckability). In a similar manner, the dildoed dyke (often referred to as queer dyke), now outgrowing the traditional butch, demands to be discussed. Is she reinforcing – through her "copying" – male-centred, heterosexist structures or is she – in her making the phallus hers – subverting the same through the defying act of dephallisizing the penis?

The critical questioning, aroused by the chosen films, is not all pleasurable: in questioning the conscious gender role play represented, I find myself in a position marked by the paradoxical. Buying into the playfulness and deconstruction characterizing these practices is irresistible, yet uncertainty and dwelling prove irrefutable in the feminist encounter with these performances. Unquestioningly, I am fully aware this that is exactly what they are: performances. The drag-ing takes as its foremost expression the enjoyment of playing and fooling around with normative, hegemonic, sexist masculinity, and the dildoed dyke performs and enjoys sexual pleasures and identities that are disconnected from male sexuality and experience. But there is more to these performances: the apparently derogatory re-representations of masculinity performed on stage include something else, not so derogatory. And it is spelt *desire*. On the Swedish drag king scene, sexual hierarchy and male dominion is still sexy. And concerning the dildoed dyke, I wonder whether not the recent emphasis on dildos and strap-ons in lesbian culture helps reinforce and validate the heterosexist notion that "all women need some deep dicking"? Which then corroborates the depoliticizing and desexualizing of lesbian desire even further, making heterosexuality the original foundation for all desire.

Constructing the Essential

And while finding both the glorification of masculinity and the insistence on dildoed sex troublesome, and quite sad, the performative acts *per se* impel an understanding of sexual and gendered identity as variable, as fluid. New forms for lesbianism and gender, i.e., new identities, are made possible both through the drag-ing and the dildo-ing: the conscious play with the (re)presentation of self, and the transgression of what the body *can do*, serve to liberate lesbian bodies. Desire and identities – within these public and private contexts – are presented as if in constant flux, always changing, open to transformation and alteration.

These rather newly constructed bodies and identities – especially those performed on stage – are much moulded by a strong notion of trans: the often quite young male identified lesbians

accentuate their transgender identity, implicitly separating themselves from butch lesbians of older generations. The butch seems to be losing ground within the lesbian community: suddenly many young lesbians lean towards transgressing gender, if not transcending it. As has anthropologist Anne Bolin pointed out, to transcend implies moving from one social position to another, which denotes a definitive move. Traversing, *au contraire*, implies a less determined, ultimate move.[2] Bolin suggests that to traverse is a more appropriate term for describing the movement between gendered positions that most trans people feel they engage in. Definable as "something that crosses or lies across", it implies a move without a fixed goal. Traverse also serves to describe how the very positionings that one moves between can be understood to be floating in themselves.[3] (Obviously, the early sexologist classification of a feminine soul caught in a male body, or vice versa – reading the "invert" as a straight transsexual – therefore holds little value as the transgendered subject escapes any rigid definition and classification.)[4] On today's lesbian scene in Sweden, however, an emphasis on traversing becomes slightly questionable. Emphasizing the male gender only, the transgression is, indeed, a transgression. The movement between female and male is presented as a one way ride: hence, it appears that to describe the gender bending of many young transgendered lesbians, transcendence seems to be the most accurate term.

Following what has been said above, sexual and gendered identities are referred to and presented as conscious and playful constructions that the self has sovereign control over. And since the notion of transgenderism and the creation of a transgenderist community emanate from the social constructionist theoretical arena of the 1970s, social constructionism proves pivotal to my discussion.

Edward Stein defines social constructionism as "[...] the view that there are no objective, culture-independent categories of sexual orientation – no one is, independent of a culture, a heterosexual or homosexual".[5] What is suggested, most radically, is that one must question the given or natural status of heterosexuality (which is queer theory's main impetus). Within this framing heterosexuality can no longer stabilise itself as the norm, as the natural, in relation to non-heterosexuality (which then constitute deviancy). Heterosexuality, then, constitutes "a physic economy that defines itself against the historically available category of the 'homosexual'".[6] The latter is the invention necessary to keep the always shaky construction of heterosexuality intact. The straight fantasy serves to internalize the invented sexual difference that cements heterosexual identity. In making its supposed counterpart visible, heterosexuality can rely on the invisibility that is the privilege of every norm (just like whiteness constitutes itself as non-race, thus making its others into races).

In 1976, Michel Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality* positioned constructionism as a serious challenge to traditional essentialist views on sex, gender, and sexuality.[7] Quite new on the academic scene, then, constructionism (as a counter-force to essentialism) is much "indebted" to its counterpart.[8] Like in other countries, Foucault's work constitutes the basis for theorizing sexuality within Swedish academia. Sexuality, his followers argue, is neither natural nor universal. Rather, it is, with Teresa de Lauretis's words, "completely constructed in culture according to the political aims of the society's dominant class".[9] It is a construction produced

in time, and it is therefore a temporal process, just like gender, sex, and race. And because it is produced in discourse, it is always discursive. Sexuality, then, is somewhat paradoxically produced through the very prohibitions and regulations that are said to restrict it. Sexuality can thus be seen as a technology, or as:

> a set of techniques for maximizing life' that have been developed and deployed by the bourgeoisie since the end of the eighteenth century in order to ensure its class survival and continued hegemony.[10]

While criticizing Foucault for being gender blind (in his work "sexuality is not understood as gendered, as having a male form and a female form, but is taken to be one and the same for all – *and consequently male*"), de Lauretis still finds his theory on the "technology of sex" useful.[11] Her analysis of gender depends on Foucault: gender – like sexuality – is produced through various technologies. She refers to these as "gender technologies" and argues that *film* is one such technology. Film – like all representation – articulates and produces gender, i.e., film speaks sexual difference. And "like sexuality", she writes, "we might then say, gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but 'the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations' [...]".[12]

Unquestioningly, de Lauretis precedes Judith Butler's sophisticated theories on the performative nature of gender and sex (which are also indebted to Foucault). Nevertheless, it is Butler, and not de Lauretis, nor Foucault, who has come to influence theoretically aware gender benders in Swedish society. And in *DragKingdom of Sweden*, the Butlerian heritage is expressed in redundancy, sometimes lingering to the embarrassing. In the interview sequences with each of the drag kings, they talk about their drag-ing experience and their understanding of it in a most *Gender trouble*-influenced manner (e.g. "I want to see it as a subversive body act that serves to create confusion in an otherwise rigid gender system"; "It is not only drag that is a gender masquerade – every day we construct our selves as men or women in our being"; "Drag holds a political potential, it is one step in the fight against an oppressive gender system" etc.) This can be related to the fact that queer and gender theory, as it is being taught at Swedish universities and collages, takes much of its readings from Butler. Her work constitutes a blue copy for thinking gender (and sex), as becomes more than evident in *DragKingdom*. One thing that differentiates the older drag queen scene from the newer drag king scene, then, is the theoretical awareness with which many kings and other queer dykes perform and (de)construct gendered identities. (This is not to say that all female gender benders have a university degree, just to point out that gender theory and trans practices are closely connected, informing each other constantly.)[13]

Materialization of the Trans-Sexed Body

A perception of the body as materialised through time and through the regulatory norms sustained by a specific time period, proves fruitful when looking closer at bodies that in their materiality manage to upset "the body". While both upsetting and reinforcing the sexed body, these bodies, which are neither female nor male (while being both), offer a most obvious example of how the body is constructed and how its construction is intricately linked to its materiality. The transsexual

and/or transgendered body both subvert the notion of the body as naturally sexed whilst unveiling that the "natural" body can be constructed as an artefact, indicating that it ought to be perceived as floating in its genderness and sexedness. What concerns the transsexual body, a reading of the body as both essence and artefact seems unavoidable. When it comes to the transgendered body, however, the physical body must step aside as to leave more space to the psychic formation of the embodied self. While it is important to point out that transsexual is not equal to transgender, transgenderism may include transsexuality under its wings. And depending on the individual and how s/he perceives of her- or himself, these labels may be regarded as both inclusive *and* exclusive. This has consequences for how gender, sex and sexuality are perceived by others: in the outsider's view the trans person may seem to float between positionings, incorporating all. Not being definable as one sex, as one gender, sexuality becomes sweeping and slippery too: s/he seems to be merging hetero, bi, homo into one single sexuality, namely sexuality. Yet, nineteenth-century sexologist notions of the "invert" (i.e. *anima muliebris in corpore virile conclusa*) still prove influential: transgenderism (and transsexuality) and homosexuality continue to be – within dominant, phobic culture – connected, as if presupposing one another.[14] Trans and homo tend to be read as the same thing. (And, it is not only the dominant medical, psychiatric, and social discourses of past centuries that have perpetuated such an equation: it has also been sustained by contemporary gay community in its search for a history of its own.) Consequently, it is only the queer transgressing the boundaries of gender who by dominant society is seen as "truly" queer, and, hence, who constitutes a threat. The masculine gay man and the feminine lesbian pass easily, and when read as non-straight, they are so in terms of bisexuality (as if heterosexuality were at the foundation of their desire).[15] Transgenderism and transsexualism, however, have little to do with a specific sexuality: trans people are not more or less hetero (or homo) than most people. Yet, the equation between trans and homo, merging two phobias together as one, takes as its most visible manifestation the queer-bashing of people – no matter predilection – who do not pass because of gender deviance.[16]

The claim made amongst constructionist theorists that homosexuality is a rather late phenomenon in western culture is based on the notion that there is a distinction between homosexual behaviour (which one may assume is universal) and a homosexual identity (which is historically specific). When thinking of (homo)sexuality as not an eternal, transcultural, and transhistorical category, but as a socially contingent and variant construction, it becomes, Fuss writes, obvious that it would be "pointless to investigate the root causes".[17] And defending invention theories, she argues that they are:

> Marked by an impulse to historicize and to contextualize; such studies move us out of the realm of ontology (what the homosexual *is*) and into the realm of social and discursive formations (how the homosexual role is *produced*).[18]

What about queerness, then? For queerness is not equal to homosexuality. Is queerness also a role, produced within the social and the discursive? Is it a choice even? Or is it essential to the individual, part of his or her core identity, something that is "inscribed" in biology?

Figure 25. A body "in constant transition": *Manhood's* Mason.

Essential Queerness, Constructed Bodies

In *Manhood* the fluency of sex, identity, and desire is smoothly, yet ruthlessly, exposed. The film focuses on Mason, a preoperative female-to-male transsexual living in San Francisco. Engberg chooses to film him in intimate relation with his girlfriend, Keri, and a friend, who throughout the film remains nameless. The film is shot with a hand-held camera, and the film stock used is rather grainy, emphasizing the documentary feel. Furthermore, the editing is quite rough, making the various shots stand out as wholes in themselves. Within scenes, jumpcuts are heavily relied on as are rough camera movements. This gives a certain shakiness and fragmentation to the film, which works to reinforce the subject matter inscribed in the text. Underlined by the cinematic form, then, are the instabilities of sexual identity and sexual desire depicted and explained through the social actors. These instabilities offer openness to embodied being. Mason, in leaving his female body to be(come) a male body, constitutes an overt symbol of the fluency of sex and gender within the film. His transition is made clear in a scene depicting the three friends driving across a bridge: travelling from one position to another, Mason is in constant transition, but will finally reach his final destination. What this destination offers, however, is much depending on the traveller. His transition is further underlined by the inclusion of a scene with him getting hormones injected straight into his buttock. Thus, Mason's very body brings transition to the surface in its very embodying of the transsexual.

The physical masculinity that Mason is acquiring with the help of hormones and surgery is not "natural": the masculinity of his new gender is his own fabrication. He makes himself. Masculinity, then, is not tied to a certain body, but is fluent to its being. (Yet, Mason's body is not less natural than any other male body.) Keri exhibits a different kind of fluency in her gendered belonging: though identified as a lesbian by others, her own identification is not lesbian. In fact, she views herself more as a "fag" in that she, as a boyish dyke, prefers masculine dykes. When Engberg – off frame – assumes that she is a dyke, Keri bites off and tells her that "I never said I was a dyke!" Engberg apologizes and says that since Keri is Mason's girlfriend she "presumed that you were a dyke". Keri tells her that even if she likes girls, she likes "boys' girls". Mason, on the other hand, has always perceived himself to be lesbian, even though he has always liked boys. However, with the change that he is going through, he suddenly finds his desire becoming more and more directed towards gay men. Engberg sophisticatedly visualizes this desire by letting his voice-over "confession" be accompanied by random footage of semi-naked (gay) men working out on the beach. Intercut with these images is the footage of Mason, Keri, and their friend "cruising" on the beach parade, gazing at the macho men. Mason's voice says:

> I feel like it's turning me faggot. I know that sounds really funny, but like, in a sense, I've always been really attracted to guys, especially like gay guys, like fags. But, I think since I started taking hormones like it's more there. If I wasn't with someone like Keri, who is a really masculine girl, then I would probably be with a boy.

Later, with Engberg filming the three friends back in their flat, there is a debate over who likes what kind of boys: Keri explains that she likes cute guys, and says that Mason likes fat, hairy guys. Mason, irritated, asks her not to generalize his preference, even though he says he does not like "pretty boys". Furthermore, Mason expresses no desire to undergo a phalloplastic surgery: the enlarged clitoris is fully satisfactory as a penis. However, he proudly demonstrates his vast collection of different dildos, introducing them by name, and referring to them as his "dicks". It becomes obvious that he has one dick for every occasion, for why not for every mode, depending on his state of mind.

Whereas Mason's masculinity and his object choice can be seen as fluent, his queerness is one of constancy. Queerness, like other sexual predilections, may in fact be essential and fixed, at the very core of identification, at least for some. Whether one is open to such an argument or not – and contradicting a constructionist stance – the queer subversion it offers must be welcomed. Essential queerness, steady and fixed in an otherwise floating and changing transition, exposes the weakness of the straight matrix. Not everyone wants to be straight. Yet, the emphasis on belonging to either the male or the female gender – important to the individual in order to pass as "real" – is much informed and caught within the matrix. Polymorphous sexualities, or the polysexual, to speak with Jacques Derrida, may already be a reality (at least to some), even though the philosopher's dream of polymorphous, transgressive genders still seems utopian.

Fantastic Realness: Copies and Originals

During the last ten years, the lesbian scene in Sweden has been characterized by plurality and diversity, thus coming close to embracing the polymorphous. However, with the entrance of

drag king culture, a specific group of lesbians has been promoted, making these new dykes into absolute kings. Welcomed first as a refreshing alternative to drag queen performances, a standing element in Swedish gay (and straight) culture, the drag king has offered new possibilities to performatively play around with and deconstruct gender.[19] Through the hyperbolic, masculinity is being played out as mere performance, making masculinity something disconnected from the male sex. This gender theft is carefully portrayed in *DragKingdom of Sweden*, with an emphasis on the six kings' own words. There is no guiding voice-over, no explicatory outsider's voice: the kings are given full control over what is being said. The film cannot but be positioned in dialogue with Butler's analysis of drag (as unveiling gender as performance, and thereby exposing all gender as drag), just as the documentary *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1999) has been connected to her work in various academic texts. Seemingly leaning on Butler's theoretical approach, *DragKingdom* uncovers – in a similar manner – gender as an imitation, repeatedly trying to produce the very ideal it attempts to approximate. Gender is demonstrated to be a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex, as essence and as psychic gender core (i.e. producing itself through gestures, moves and gait, giving the illusion of an inner depth). Yet, where there is self-aware irony, distance, and parody in the performances in *DragKingdom*, there is real oppression (both racial and sexual), real exclusion, and real pain in the performances in *Paris*.

Addressing a specific drag culture that centres on the repetitious act of presenting the gendered "self", the film unveils the performance of gender that all subjects engage in. This unveiling is carried out through the very awareness with which the kings perform their "dream man". The kings express, over and over, that drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed. Closely following Butler, they argue that there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but, rather, that gender in itself is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.[20] Heterosexuality, with its basis in sexual difference, is therefore always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself. This makes heterosexuality – and heterosexual gender – a copy, just like homosexuality. For "To claim that all gender is like drag", Butler writes, "is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender". And it is to claim that "hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealisations".[21]

The kings overtly expose gender as always already floating and unfixed in its constant struggle to present itself as fixed and normative according to the prevailing norms fostered in the straight matrix. In addition, the film exposes how gender can be appropriated and performed by the "wrong" sex, thus disconnecting a certain gender from a certain sex. *Masculinity* is displayed as a social construction as women are shown to be "better" men than are "real" men. Masculinity and manhood are explicitly detached as the film displays how there is nothing natural with *being* masculine (or feminine): the "realness" performed, no matter how successful in making the "I" pass, is nothing but a phantasmatic copy of an ideal that is always deferred. Realness, then, is nothing but a fantasy.

Figure 26. Unveiling the performance of gender: Åsa Ekman and Ingrid Ryberg's *DragKingdom of Sweden*. (2002).

Excessive Masquerading

Following what just has been said, it comes clear that the very excessiveness with which the kings represent themselves can be seen as a deconstructive weapon. Overlooking the painful misogyny, there is no question that their act is indeed serving a feminist purpose for there can perhaps be no better, more playful, or more mimetic, response to the excessive parody of gender masquerade than that of excessive excess. As recent work on camp, transsexualism, butch-femme roles and practices, hermaphrodism (i.e. intersexualism) and transvestism has powerfully demonstrated, to be excessively excessive, to flaunt one's *performance as performance*, is to unmask all identity as drag. Luce Irigaray's distinction between masquerade (the unconscious assumption of gender, sex, sexuality) and mimicry (the deliberate and playful performance of the same) here proves helpful. The critical difference between them – between the straight imitation of a role and the parodic hyperbolization of the same – depends on the degree and readability of its excess. As has been argued by Fuss, mimicry works to undo masquerade by overdoing it. Consequently, it is excess that all holds the two apart: for to fail in mimesis is usually to fail in being excessive enough.

An excessive supermasculinity, when embodied by a gay subject, helps invalidate and undermine the supposed masculine "naturalness" of any straight man: if a homo passes as hetero, as a real man being more "real" than any straight man, how can we then be sure that straight men are really straight?[22] Richard Dyer, among others, points out how the macho, by making excessive that which is understood to be male, makes the straight man an unstable category.[23] Using masculine excesses – i.e. specific "male" props that are turned into gay signs or codes – the gay macho constitutes a travesty on the heterosexual cultural construction of "Man". Being subversive in his power to challenge straight men about their supposedly sovereign possession of masculinity, and undermining the old notion of gay men as essentially and inherently effeminate, the gay macho helps unsettle rigid "truths" about (homo)sexuality, sex, and gender. By flaunting his performance as performance he unmasks all identity as drag. But the macho – no matter his biological sex – is also problematic when seen from a pro-feminist position: his play with gender may be subversive in favour of deconstructing masculinity as natural for straight men, but this gender play is highly ambivalent insofar as he simultaneously serves to *re-institutionalize* (straight) masculinity as supreme. Possessing a position at the top of the gay hierarchy, the macho is in fact also reinforcing the same misogyny and (hetero)sexism that is prevalent in straight society.[24] Hence, excessiveness can be understood both to undermine gender assumptions about sexual and gendered identity as self-evident and natural and to reinforce (i) the very notion of gender as something natural and (ii) the prevalent (hetero)sexual hierarchical structure.

In this sense, drag is subversive while also being a highly ambivalent practice (and in *DragKingdom*, it certainly is). It is simultaneously subversive *and* rigid. On the one hand it may challenge gender constructions and the heterosexual matrix, but on the other, it works to fortify this system. It can be used both as a tool in the name of de-naturalization and as a tool in the name of re-idealization. In the film, this ambivalence becomes most obvious in the "dinner sequence": the six kings gather to have dinner together, being served by a (supposedly) straight woman dressed in a short, décolleté dress. The kings start harassing her verbally, saying that she should be "lying on the table when she comes", hence, embodying stereotypical sexist chauvinism. This scene makes me wonder whether "parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms"?[25] Here, the parodic loses its deconstructive, critical edge as the kings chose to incorporate misogyny and sexism by reinforcing it, as if incapable of twisting it. The male chauvinist becomes an icon, an idol, and there is an affluent "power to the penis" inscribed in their representation of the male self. Phallocentrism is not only being fortified and presented as highly desirable: it is being presented as only option, as if masculinity (and male sexuality) equates sexism and chauvinism.

Dildoed Dykes: De-Phallisizing Practices?

An opening up of the rigid correlation between male sexuality and penetration may lead to an unsettlement of the structures of the sexist and genderist laws that govern sexual encounters between (two) individuals. To consciously transgress these unwritten laws, to make the male "unmale" and the female "unfemale" in their respective positions – i.e. to make these positions floating – implies an ungendering of this encounter. It is only in such a process, with sexuality clearly being queered, that the sexes can be freed from the cultural constructions of sexually specific positions and also, that sexuality can be freed from its genderization.[26] Within the drag scene, as represented in *DragKingdom*, this is not done. Rather the opposite: sexuality is still being genderized after male parameters. Yet, with three of the six kings performing gay masculinities (the rapper, the S&M clone, George Michael), there is a certain twist to these parameters. Whereas one may assume, following an Irigarayan line of thought, that misogyny and homophobia always walk hand in hand in patriarchal society, these queer kings obviously refuse to embody these two phobic stances. Actualized in their gay performances, then, is a "homo-ness" that refuses homophobia. Surely, it excludes women from the scene of sexual encounter, yet it embraces femininity to a certain extent: two of the three queer kings are rather effeminate, hence, favouring the flamboyant fag over the clone in their gender performance. There is no misogyny inscribed in the exclusion of "real" women. Instead, it is the explicit heterosexism of the straight kings' performances that is unquestioningly misogynist (and overtly homophobic).

Psychoanalytical theorist Leo Bersani has argued that a universal recognition of homo-ness would eliminate the fear of difference that nourishes misogyny and homophobia.[27] His belief, however, openly manifests itself as androcentric: Bersani dreams of all men being gay, leaving little room for women. Emphasizing the specific erotic zones of the male body, he singles out the anus as the most important one, finding how anal sex between men is *the* subversive act, powerful enough to homonize all men. Although excluding women from the scene, this has a controversial

consequence: by placing the anus as the most important erotic zone, Bersani also, per definition, disqualifies the penis as *the* erotic zone. This means that male phallomorphism – the one and single form, to speak with Irigaray – is disrupted because of certain decisive implications for the phallus and the Symbolic. With the entry of the anus as an erotic zone, phallic authority is rendered secondary, and the phallic is deconstructed into becoming a body part (among many) to be shared between men as a sign of their homo-ness. With the phallus destructed and emptied of its power, the Symbolic is also changed and re-written. To de-phallisize and de-authorize the penis and to open up for other possible erotic zones in the male is of great political importance as it works to motivate a political alliance between gay men. More importantly, though, such a de-phallization may also work to create an alliance of equality and non-hierarchization in the intimacy between men and women. Unfortunately, this is of no interest to Bersani: he chooses to leave the female body and the female subject out of his discussion. He thereby reinforces the outside position of women, refusing to give them entrance to the subversive practice of crossing boundaries. To Bersani, the crossed social barriers and the overcome phallocentric fear of castration, both enacted in anal sex, is men's business only. Bersani is trapped in the misogynist stance which positions the female body – and her supposed sexual passivity – as abject. For Bersani, men are masculine men, whether penetrators or penetrated. Femininity has no room in his world, and still, he argues that anal penetration may subvert the categories of man and woman – but that this is only possible within an all-male setting. It is only men who can subvert these categories; women seem forever fixed in their biological and social position. Because of their obvious "lack", they are forever passive bodies denied any entrance into the Symbolic. So, while trying to redefine male desire (which Bersani does by proving that desire does not have to do with desiring what is lacking), he ascribes women to the realm of eternal lack and objecthood. The Bersanian subversion, after all, proves to be rather lame.

What about the woman who penetrates, then? In my view, it is she who comes closest to subvert the Symbolic through the crossing of social and sexual boundaries. Indeed, she *subverts* the symbolic domain in a most devastating and emancipating way by crushing the fantasy of the phallus (as an inherently male possession). And by so doing, she destroys the notion of woman as forever placed outside the Symbolic.[28] Within this encounter, the Symbolic can no longer be because the ideal paradigms of "man" and "woman", which make sexual difference a difference, are emptied of meaning and content via their refusal to desire that which the "I" lacks. Yet, there is a difference between lesbian dildoed penetration and straight dildoed penetration. Both are subversive as they dismantle the phallus and the phallic power ascribed to the "real" penis: with dildoed women, the phallus becomes transferable and, hence, power becomes mobile. However, I would argue that penetration of a male by a female holds more subversion as it forcefully dephallisizes the male.

This leads me over to *Selma and Sofie*, in which a strap-on plays a central role in the final sex scene. The film is a fiction, yet it holds a few documentary qualities that manage to upset the border between fiction and non-fiction: the two women starring are not real actors, and further, they are a love couple in real life. Also, there is no dialogue, only the voice-over of one of the women (who is in a relation with a man) as she longs for and desires the other woman. Accompanying her desiring words are images that depict her sexual fantasies. The end scene,

then, is their first real sexual encounter. This scene is five minutes long and portrays the two making love in bed, using little editing so as to portray their loving somewhat in real time (hence, recalling Chantal Ackerman's *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* from 1974). The blue strap-on appears quite early on in the scene and is used as main prop in reaching orgasm. The dildo is not referred to earlier, it appears without any warning and leaves the spectator wondering whether both women are really keen on using it When the film opened in Sweden, there were lots of discussions about (i) the film's portrayal of lesbian sexuality and (ii) its pornographic or erotic qualities (what makes a film pornographic?; can one portray sex without turning it into pornography?; what is the difference between the erotic and the pornographic?). Especially, the blue dildo, and the way it was used in the film, as central prop, soon created pro- and contra-groupings: older lesbians seemed to question the necessity of a dildo ("what's wrong with tongues and fingers?"; and "power to the pussy!")[29] whereas younger dykes applauded the use, arguing that dildos are great fun and have nothing to do with substituting a penis. The controversy, then, is tied to the issue of substitution and, hence, to whether lesbian sex should read as separate from, or closely tied to, heterosexual penetrative sex. At the core here is a discussion of lesbian sex as realness or imitation. The dildo, the pro-side argues, is not a substitute, rather, it *is*, or *becomes*, the real thing in the lesbian encounter (excluding the penis from the frame of thought, the use of dildos may in fact refuse the straight mind). Hence, a de-thinking of lesbianism from heterosexuality makes the issue of substitution pointless. A dildo must not be thought of as a penis, but as an erotic instrument, as a kind of prosthesis, that fills different functions and holds different meanings within different contexts. For as long as lesbianism, and homosexuality, continues to be thought of as copy, then all queers remain (closeted) straight.

De-Phallisizing Women

The phallic woman, whether dildoed dyke or straight dominatrix, is powerful in her capacity to upset sexual difference and the bodily imagos that uphold the straight matrix. As has been argued by Catherine Waldby, she incites cultural fantasies about the receptive erotic potentials of the male (straight) body.[30] Via the phallic woman, one may start to rethink these sexually different bodily imagos, i.e. to rethink sexual intercourse beyond the notion of man penetrating woman as an active agent entering his passive other.[31] The bodily imago of men, then, is a phallocentric imago that presents men as powerful just because they possess the phallus. And Waldby soundly claims that in order to make woman an equally active agent, it is crucial to think of her as embracing or grasping the man's penis with her vagina, thus ascribing equal power to the pussy. Consequently, it is important to stress the necessity to rethink bodies and their capacity. For the emancipation of pleasures (as well as for the upheaval of the "acceptance" of rape of women) it is necessary to rethink what the body *can do*. The female body is not a body without boundaries, it is not all penetrable, at least no more than a male body. Moreover, a man is not impenetrable. He can also be penetrated and, important for my discussion, he can be *penetrated* because he desires to be. He is not hard and she is not soft. Both bodies are equally soft and hard. His penis has a shape, a visible form, but this does not mean that her vagina is a shapeless, invisible nothing.

Following Waldby, I find the phallic woman crucial for such a rethinking: the increase of the image of her within popular culture leads to a development of a new imaginary. Within this

imagery, the phallus is demonstrated to be a transferable property, and through this new floating, non-fixed position, fixed hegemonic bodily imagos are made open to reworkings. The phallic woman proves that the phallus can "attach to a variety of organs, and that the efficacious disjoining of phallus from penis constitutes both a narcissistic wound to phallomorphism and the production of an anti-heterosexist sexual imaginary".[32]

The 1990s saw an increase of the visibility of the dominatrix within some corners of culture: within pornography (straight and queer), on the fetish scene and in S&M cultures, as well as within certain fields of prostitution. However, these "shadowy" areas walk hand in hand with the more mainstream. The dominatrix as titillating image is today found within popular advertisement, in film and television and in cartoon series for kids. This means that she as sign serves, or at least may serve, to make (sado)masochism and role-playing more visible to mainstream society. Not everyone is happy about this development, though. By making sadomasochism more visible it risks being turned into "vanilla". The actual meanings of it, it is argued, are extracted from the fashionable container within which it is presented. Lynda Hart states that

> Despite the fact that s/m appears to have become modified and therefore a spectacle for consumption for the masses who do not participate in this particular form of consciousness-raising, we still must make a distinction between the ones who are watching and those ones who are participating and watching themselves. Of course, the latter are also watching themselves being watched, and this affects the internal dynamics of the s/m subculture, but that does not mean that the subculture has become what its spectators see when they look at it from the outside.[33]

And there are other concerns regarding the new visibility. In an article written in 1995, Sue-Ellen Case finds that lesbian S&M has become chic and fashionable to the extent that it is only the dildoed leather dyke that is presented as alluring and attractive, whereas the "dowdy" dyke (with whom she obviously identifies) no longer has any value. The old-fashioned dyke stands outside of that which makes the leather dyke attractive. She has no sex toys and she does not engage in sexual power plays. Also, this non-fashionable lesbian, she argues, is often connected to essentialism and feminism whereas the new dyke is associated with a conscious play with male gayness.[34] Two years later, Case argues along the same line that the new queer dyke – now obviously identifying with male gayness – has pushed the old feminist lesbian aside, slamming the door in her very face and excluding her from the scene: "The women are looking strong. Slim. Young. I look down at my own ageing, overweight, academic body. They've cleared us out."[35] Her critique of the assimilation of young depoliticized queer dykes with male gay culture is explicit in both articles. She feels that feminism and sisterhood have left the scene to be replaced by the privileging and valorizing of male culture and gay male practices.

Though her alarming and yet disappointed voice is understandable – where did the feminist in the lesbian go or, rather, where did *the lesbian* go? – her critique, just like my own, risks reifying sexual difference as absolute. Whereas I both agree with Case *and* doubt her critique, Hart finds Case's analysis indisputably troublesome. She blames her for repeating the old (lesbophobic?) argument that "accuses the lesbian of 'male-identification' if she performs any acts whatsoever that do not

conform to the expectation that she represent the 'real thing' in the feminist imaginary".[36] The accusation of the new queer dyke for being male-identified is by Hart read as the unquestionable fortifying of sexual difference. If women cannot play with gender and appropriate masculinity, Hart argues, "then the binary terms of sexual difference and the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy have no fantasy space, not to mention any possibilities of new forms of sexual pleasures".[37] Such an absolute stance in relation to sexual difference takes for granted that there is a "real" lesbian and a "real" woman who must represent the likewise real thing in feminist imaginary. Moreover, it assumes that there is no space for fantasy or for playing with roles and realness by subverting those roles. Hart claims that Case's critique of the lesbian leather scene and the dildoed S&M dyke is unfair because the images she is attacking do not present the real thing at all: rather, they are mainstream representations of the sexy phallic woman (who is created to appeal to heterosexual male culture, or more specifically, to the male masochist).[38] The "real" thing, then, is only to be found within the actual lesbian s/m culture itself, one that Hart argues Case has been avoiding, as if standing on the outside and looking in.

What does the dildo signify within lesbian practices, then? (For, it is obviously the *dildo* that constitutes the real problem for Case in her analysis, not the sadomasochism or the queerness of the new lesbian.) While understanding Case's questioning of the sudden need of a dildo within the new lesbian scene, I would like to suggest that what seems like a phallization may in fact be a de-phallization. There is no real connection between the rubber dildo and the fleshy penis. Lesbian dick is the phallus as floating signifier with no ground on which it rests. It does not originate from the male body and it does not refer to it: it defies it. In lesbian imaginary, the phallus is not where it appears to be. And it is not *what* it appears to be.

Phallocentrism without the Phallus

However, lesbian imaginary and lesbian butch/femme role playing are not the only contexts within which the phallus as symbol and signifier becomes problematic. Male masochism and male gayness makes the connection between maleness, penis, and phallus questionable in that it deconstructs the Oedipal structure organizing the sexes.[39] The erotic drive inscribed in masochism – which I, following Gilles Deleuze, prefer to detach from sadism – has to do with a surrender to, rather than a conquering of, the other. Surrender should not be understood as a passive act. Rather, to surrender means – in short – a disavowal of phallic power. As Félix Guattari writes, "A man who detaches himself from the promised phallic profits inherent in all power formations undertakes [...] a becoming-woman". Woman here does not mean a biologically sexed woman, or an effeminate man, but is instead connected to the Kristevian "feminine" in the way that it unsettles the dominant order of sexual difference and its rigid binary oppositions. The masochistic as well as the queer man, then, breaks with this order by occupying a different ("feminine") site of subjectivity and desire. In the words of Guattari, "Every 'dissident' organization of the libido must therefore be directly linked to a becoming-feminine body".[40]

However, to rely on masochism as a way to reach de-phallization, is not entirely unproblematic. Masochism, both as a "perversion" and as a narrative and aesthetic form, is just as inherently heteronormative as sadism. In the analysis carried out by Freud and his disciples, by Deleuze, and later by Gaylyn Studlar, there is little, if any, reference to queer masochism. Yet, I find

masochism – especially as a narrative form – to be less heteronormative than its counterpart. Whereas sadism requires a performance of sexual difference the masochistic scene and narrative try hard to overcome sexual difference. And in doing so, any emphasis on the phallic dominant is rendered unjustifiable. Moreover, following Studlar's emphasis on the mother and her body as a safe haven for the child/spectator, phallocentrism is rendered superfluous within the masochistic setting. Studlar writes: "In masochism, as in the infantile stage of dependence, pleasure does not involve mastery of the female but submission to her body and her gaze."[41] And as Kaja Silverman has argued, "what provokes the crisis is not so much horror at the mother's 'lack' as an *identification* with her".[42] Identification is twofold: it implies wanting to be like the other while also wanting to have that other. And "having" the other, within a masochistic scenario, is not about owning and conquering the other. Rather, having the other is about giving the self up for the other, to surrender to her or him; to reach a reciprocal destruction; to lose one's Self which implies an annihilation that works "towards a more profound kind of ego destruction".[43]

While seeing male masochism and male gayness as de-phallisizing areas and practices, I realise that the question of phallocentrism needs further exploration. Seen from another angle, male gay relations, practices and narrations can, of course, be understood to portray a phallocentrism *par excellence*. In a context where everyone possesses a penis, where the penis (and masculinity) is desired and sought after, it is easy to assume that phallocentrism would be total. Yet, I believe that such a scenario opens up for the opposite: with penises in redundancy, the phallus loses the enigmatic and powerful position ascribed to it. The gay scenario creates troubles in itself because of sameness and excess: given that within this scenario, there is no bodily "other" and no "lack" to accentuate the penis as phallus, the phallus loses its power. It is not a question of – with Case's words – "'penis, penis, who's got the penis?'". Indeed, such a question would be ridiculous given that there are at least two referents in sight.[44] Since the whole idea of the phallus is based upon a belief in sexual difference as absolute, it can no longer be within a same-sex scenario.

Conclusion

The recent (de)glorification of masculinities and the lesbian use of dildos asks to be seen in relation to the butch/femme culture and the controversy that this culture has caused at various points in history. It is important to point out that when lesbian communities were first developing, without yet having formed political groups, butch and femme roles were the key structure of organizing against heterosexual dominance. They were the central pre-political form of resistance and independence. From this view these roles cannot be seen simply as imitations of heterosexual, heterosexist roles. Although derived from heterosexual models, they also transformed those models and created an authentic lesbian lifestyle. To stress that butch and femme were/are only copies of the original, thus implying that any homosexual formation of identity is only a copy of the heterosexual model as origin, is to resist seeing the potentials that these roles held at a time (and still holds) when lesbianism painfully went from invisibility and non-existence into actual being. And on a more personal and direct level, for many women, from abjecthood to subjecthood. Also, such a heterosexist view indicates blindness before the straight ideal as copy of a copy. Likewise, to argue that the glorification of gay masculinities and

the use of dildos in lesbian sex are expressions of heterosexual copying, would be to indicate blindness: the masculinity performed is performed as a way to deconstruct the male as ideal, or, rather, a certain male as ideal, and the dildoed dyke is all but a wanna-be male. Her dick has nothing to do with the fleshy penis: rather, it is an erotic object, a fetish that takes on other connotations within the lesbian setting.

The lesbian duo using a dildo holds political subversion in that they undress sex and gender as natural categories, proving, for example, that the phallus is transferable in that the butch can be as manly as the biological male. In addition, as has been argued by Case, the two lesbian roles of butch and femme are important feminist expressions and positions: they constitute sites open to the creation of a truly feminist subject positioning. This positioning, Case argues, is one that stands outside of heterosexual ideology and, therefore, one that may be capable of ideological change. Things are not always what they appear to be, and just like the infamous lesbian duo holds political meaning and possible subversion, so may the excessive drag king on scene and the defying dildoed dyke in bed prove to do. Maybe, they are the ones who in their transgression carve and make possible new feminist positionings, reaching forward to that which one may assume is a state tinted by the polymorphous.

In concluding this essay – much composed by a constant dwelling – I turn to Elizabeth Grosz and, through her words, give credit to the three troublesome films and their power to upset and make difficult any absolute, clear-cut reading of lesbianism and lesbian sexuality and identity:

> I don't want to talk about lesbian psychologies, about the psychical genesis of lesbian desire ... I am much less interested in where lesbian desire comes from, how it emerges, and the ways in which it develops than where it is going to, its possibilities, its open-ended future.[45]

Notes

1. Of course, cinematic representation is not all: with the enormous popularity of queer theory (inside as well as outside of Swedish academia) and with a national queer awareness – much due to Stockholm Pride (taking place every summer) – transgender(s) has become more visible.
2. See Ann Bolin, "Traversing Gender: Cultural Context and gender practices", in ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 22.
3. Indeed, most transgendered people experience that they are constantly moving between social and gendered positions, as if sliding on a gendered scale, and this contributes to making these positions floating in themselves. Thus, the transgendered subject – often seeing herself as androgynous – may be more or less masculine one day, or during one period, and more or less feminine the next day or in a following period. Alternatively s/he may be androgynous with a varying degree.
4. It should be mentioned that the notion of the invert served a "humane" purpose: while homosexuality and gender deviancies were classified and hunted down as perversions – most often perceived as immoral *vices* – the idea of the invert offered a more "accepting" (though still *pathologizing*) perspective. She or he was not to blame: it was Nature that had failed.

5. Edward Stein, "Conclusion: The Essentials of Constructionism and the Construction of Essentialism", in ed. Edward Stein, *Forms of Desire: Sexual orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 340.
6. Lee Edelman, *Homographies: Essays in Gay Literature and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 39.
7. Already in 1968 did Mary McIntosh argue for homosexuality as socially constructed, however. See McIntosh, "The Homosexual Role", in *Social Problems* 16 (1968), reprinted in ed. Kenneth Plummer, *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1981).
8. And, as Diana Fuss has argued, it is so indebted that essentialism is indeed *essential* to constructionism. See Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (orig. 1989), (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.
9. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana, 1987), 12.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 14 (my emphasis).
12. Ibid., 3.
13. Not surprisingly, non-Swedish "famous" queer theorists with or without a more performative twist have been invited to speak and partake in lesbian happenings in Sweden during recent years, connecting the larger audience to the academia. For example, in 2002, American professor Judith Halberstam was one of the international academic "stars" appearing at Stockholm Pride.
14. This merging has implications for queers who pass as straight, for as American historians Elizabeth Laponsky Kennedy and Madelaine Davies argue, it was only the masculine woman in a lesbian couple who was the homosexual, both according to the early theories on lesbianism and to the more mainstream popular mind. "Her partner", they write, "who followed appropriate gender guidelines in appearance and behavior and was attracted to the masculine if not to the male, was thought to transcend the boundaries of normalcy, and consequently received little medical attention". See Laponsky Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 324.
15. The butch is understood to be more "true" in her lesbianism, whereas the femme often proves problematic: femininity is seen as closely connected to "true" womanhood, and therefore also connected to heterosexuality. So, whereas the femme is understood to be bisexual, the butch is seen to be true to her lesbianism. This belief in gender belonging as significant for sexual preference follows the rigid equation made between a certain biological sex, a certain gender and a certain (hetero)sexuality. Informing this belief is a vivid heterosexism that in itself is underlined by the supposed importance of sexual difference: masculinity desires femininity and vice versa.
16. When not presenting the self as "properly" gendered, one's very humanness comes into question, for, as Butler writes: "Indeed the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means." Despite the abjecting of certain bodies (whether non-straight, intersexual or gender deviant), they can never be totally excluded from the realm of humanness. Butler writes that the excluded, i.e. the excluded sites wherein non-human bodies dwell, "come to bound the human as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation." See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, pp. 8, 10. But not only are the boundaries unstable and open to disruption: the outside *per se* constitutes a disruptive force. Although the outside may be thought of as surrounding the inside, it must also be understood as an outside that is traceable – if not intrinsic – to every

subject, i.e. to the inside. It is as if the outside is taking place within whilst being constantly excluded through the repetitious act of "selfing".

17. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 107.
18. Ibid., 109.
19. The famous drag queen group *After Dark* started its career in the mid-1970s and has become an important institution in Swedish entertainment culture. Since the 1980s, drag queen Babsan has acquired a most respectable position in Swedish cultural life, lately appearing in non-drag (but still relying on his Babsan character to a large extent) as presenter of various television shows.
20. Butler writes: "It is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect." See Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", in ed. Fuss, *inside/out*: *Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 21.
21. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 125.
22. The question is, of course, whether the gay macho really wants to pass as straight. Seldom does the clone overdress as if satirizing the straight style he has seemingly adopted. The "disguise" – to an initiated eye – serves to advertise his gayness.
23. Dyer, "Getting over the Rainbow: Identity and Pleasure in Gay Cultural Politics", in eds George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt, *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981).
24. Martin Humphries writes: "By creating amongst ourselves apparently masculine men who desire other men we are refuting the idea that we are really feminine souls in male bodies. Gay men can be diverse models of sexual desirability and it is for us to explore and expand that diversity. What we need to be aware of is that the creation of masculine images, whilst subverting heterosexism, is not a radical redefinition of masculinity or a radical attack on the mores of patriarchy. It does hack away at the monolithic facade of patriarchal culture but it cannot end there." See Humphries, "Gay Machismo", in eds Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries, *The Sexuality of Men* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 84.
25. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 125.
26. Informing this belief, and contrary to what certain feminist theorists argue, is the notion of heterosexual intercourse and female motherhood and reproduction as the base of gender inequality and cultural misogyny. This was predominantly stressed by the early radical feminists who advocated separatism during the 1970s and 1980s. At the centre of this radicalism was the elimination of the biological family – which was understood to be purely tyrannical for women. Shulamith Firestone, for instance, stated that the end goal of the feminist movement must be not just "the elimination of male *privilege* but of sex *distinction* itself", meaning an elimination of "natural" reproduction within the traditional family unit. See Firestone, *The Dialectics of Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).
27. See Leo Bersani, *Homos* (London: Harvard U.P., 1995).
28. The penetrated man is placed outside the Symbolic. The anus marks the site of rejection of sociality as it signifies that which must be rejected and expelled, and constitutes that which cannot figure in the Symbolic. It is only the phallus (according to Lacanian thought) which has access to the Symbolic. It is only via the possession of the phallus that man can be socially recognised as "Man". By possessing

the phallus in penetrating a man, woman *destroys* it, and in doing so, she destroys the very notion of there being a Symbolic.

29. See, for example, Ulrica Stjernquist, "Mera Fitta!", in *Kom ut!*, vol. 6, (Stockholm: RFSL, 2002).
30. Catherine Waldby, "Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body", in eds Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
31. These traditional bodily imagos uphold men as penetrators and as hard bodies and women as soft, penetrable bodies without boundaries, which help blur the difference between sexual intercourse and rape. They become the same, and rape – within this hegemonic understanding – is not seen as violence: "If these [bodily] imagos of sexual difference are treated as though they exercise complete control over the field of representation then they also render the choreography of normal heterosexual sex, that is intercourse, politically problematic. [...] Intercourse appears as just another example of the monotonous insistence on the male body as naturally penetrative and on women's bodies as naturally penetrable. In other words on this model no real distinction can be maintained between sex and sexual violence. They simply collapse into each other." See Waldby, "Destruction", 269.
32. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 262.
33. Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1998), 120.
34. Sue-Ellen Case, "The Student and the Strap: Authority and Seduction in the Class(room)", in eds George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman, *Professions of Desire* (New York. The Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 39–46.
35. Case, "Toward a Butch-Feminist Retro-Future" (orig. 1997), in eds J. A. Boone et al., *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 29.
36. Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, 120.
37. Ibid., 121.
38. Case and Hart both agree that mainstream media and its appropriation of lesbian S&M culture has made it into a fashion subculture, but Hart argues that Case fails to see that this is not an accurate representation of the leather culture and that the leap from the heterosexist appropriation to the "real" of the subculture is a gross oversimplification. To prove her point she adds: "While Case and others are claiming that the leather scene is the ultimate in commodification and male-identification, lesbian magazines that dare to depict 'kinky' sex acts between women are struggling to stay in existence." Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh*, 121.
39. Queer narratives, portraying marginalized masculinities that have as their object choice other marginalized masculinities, may in fact be understood to refuse the dominant phallocentric pattern of most cinematic narration. Queer films, then, offer another line of narration: the phallocentrism is twisted, deconstructed, and, quite often, made unnecessary. Within the narrative scenarios that centre on desire between and among men, the phallus in fact becomes superfluous. Sameness, not difference, dictates this scenario, and it is sameness that makes the phallus lose its specificity. And if one, following Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, chooses to read all narration as dependent on desire, then the phallus definitely has no place within most male queer films. The erogenous zone dictating the drive, and hence, the narration, is located elsewhere, making the male body occupy an Irigarayan "female" position in that it is given multiple erotic and sensual sites. One such erotic

site, then, is of course the anus. But there are others. The sensuousness and the sensitivity of the *skin* play a central part as an erotic site. Having mentioned the anus and the skin as non-phallic sites for eroticism, I feel bound to argue that the entire male body with most queer narratives is presented as erotic, and, hence, the emphasis on the body as a whole serves to de-phallisize the male body and male eroticism. And in de-phallisizing it, in breaking free from the supposed male morphology – "the one single form" – the male body is allowed to be plurally erotic and sensuous.

40. Félix Guattari, "Becoming-Woman", in *Semio-text* 4 (1981), 86–88.
41. Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 30–31.
42. Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity", in *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory 7* (1988), 5–6.
43. Waldby, "Destruction", 266.
44. Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (orig. 1989), in ed. Fabio Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 193.
45. Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire", in ed. Laura Doan, *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 68–69.

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Queer Cinema in Europe
Edited by Robin Griffiths

The emergence of a noticeably 'queer' voice in European film-making over the past two decades has created an exciting new area for academic analysis and debate. This landmark anthology offers the first comprehensive account of an intriguing contemporary genre.

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